

# Italy, Spain suffer record virus deaths; 10 new cases in Kuwait

Infection rate surges • US cases skyrocket • British PM, health minister test positive

## S&P lowers Kuwait rating to AA-, but outlook stable

**KUWAIT:** Standard and Poor's lowered Kuwait's rating to AA- from AA due to low oil prices, given the country's high reliance on hydrocarbon exports and slow reform progress, but projected a stable economic outlook. "The oil price drop is happening alongside Kuwait's slow reform momentum, which has generally lagged that of other regional countries in recent years," S&P said in a statement obtained by KUNA. Therefore, it noted, it lowered long-term foreign and local-currency sovereign credit ratings on Kuwait from AA to AA-.

However, S&P said the "outlook is stable because we believe Kuwait's sizable fiscal and balance-of-payment buffers provide the government with headroom for policy measures over the next two years". The stable outlook reflects balance between risks from Kuwait's high reliance on hydrocarbons sector and delays to structural reforms, against the country's sizable accumulated fiscal and balance-of-payments buffers, which

Continued on Page 16

**KUWAIT/ROME:** Italy has logged a shocking spike in its already staggering coronavirus death toll, with officials warning the peak of the crisis was still days away, as the global infection rate surges relentlessly upwards. With more than 300,000 people infected in Europe alone, the disease shows few signs of slowing, and has already cast the world into a recession, economists say.

Kuwait confirmed 10 new coronavirus cases during the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 235, the health ministry said yesterday. In a statement to KUNA, the ministry's spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said seven cases are of Kuwaiti nationals related to travel to the US, UK, Saudi Arabia, UAE and France, and one of a resident related to travel to Canada. One case was in contact with infected people, and one case of an Indian resident is under investigation. Sanad revealed that out of the 235 cases, 64 have recovered and 171 are still receiving treatment. He indicated that 11 cases are in the ICU. Some 910 individuals have completed the quarantine period, he affirmed.

In the US, which now has more than 104,000 COVID-19 patients, President Donald Trump invoked wartime powers Friday to force a private company to make medical equipment, as the country's overburdened healthcare system struggles to cope. "Today's action will help ensure the quick production of ventilators that will save American lives," Trump said as he issued the order to auto giant General Motors. With 60 percent of the country in lockdown, and infections skyrocketing, Trump



**KUWAIT:** Health ministry workers, wearing protective outfits, wait on the tarmac of the airport to receive Kuwaitis returning from Frankfurt on March 26, 2020, to be taken to a hospital for coronavirus checkups. — AFP (See Page 5)

also signed the largest stimulus package in US history, worth \$2 trillion.

It came as Italy recorded almost 1,000 deaths from the virus on Friday - the worst one-day toll anywhere since the pandemic began. One coronavirus sufferer, a cardiologist from Rome who has

since recovered, recalled his hellish experience at a hospital in the capital. "The treatment for the oxygen therapy is painful, looking for the radial artery is difficult. Desperate other patients were crying out, 'enough, enough'," he told AFP.

Continued on Page 16

# V O L V O

# STAY SAFE STAY HOME



## Local

# Some workers in Kuwait will no longer get salary by April

## Tenants look for various innovative ways to get free flat rentals

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** April will be another challenging month for many workers in Kuwait, as some companies have informed their employees that they are no longer capable of paying salaries to them next month. One company "regretted" the decision, but urged its workers for their utmost cooperation and understanding as they all want to survive this crisis.

"We do not know how April and May will look for us if this lockdown continues. We are in a state of fear and panic, as we cannot do anything or get extra income by other means, so I don't know how we will be able to survive," an anxious worker told Kuwait Times. "I have some money in the bank, but it can only last a few days - I need to eat and feed my kids too, so we

are worried about the coming months. I hope God helps us and has pity on us in these trying times," said Rico, who asked that his full name be withheld.

The workers were asked to sign a form agreeing to the decision of the management. "I signed it as I don't want to lose the job. We are all praying for a miracle to happen so that we can get back to normal the soonest," said Rico, who works in the service industry. But he said he received some good news from his building's landlord. "Yesterday I got a memo from the owner informing us that next month (April) we will be spared from paying rent. This is a relief for all of us tenants. But my concern is what if the situation remains the same in May."

Bea, a salon worker, received a notice from her Kuwaiti employer informing her that salaries of em-

ployees will be cut in half, since there was no business the entire month of March. "This is illegal according to the labor law in Kuwait, but to whom shall we file complaints," asked Bea. "This is not our fault. It seems our employer is not prepared to provide our salaries from her pocket," she said.

"Not only that, our boss told us if the situation persists until April, she can no longer provide a salary for that month," said Bea. "With regards to house rent, maybe I can pay by the end of March, but not in April. I don't know how I will pay, since I don't even know where I will get money for food next month," she said.

Matthew, an Indian tenant in a building in Salmiya, has been visiting flats in the building to ask tenants to sign a paper requesting the owner to spare them rent

for the month of March, April and May. "If we are not going to do this together, we will all end up paying," he told a tenant. "We should act as one so we can demand free rental for at least three months. If he doesn't agree, we can pay the rent of three months spread over the entire year - we just need a reprieve. We don't know what will happen next month, or the month after. We badly need cash in hand, so I hope our building owner will understand our plight," he said.

An Arab English teacher from a bilingual school in Kuwait is now preparing to head back to her country for vacation. But she is afraid she will not get paid for April and May. "We have the March salary, but for April and May, it is questionable. I hope they pay it. But now, I just want to go home once the lockdown is over and flights resume," she said.

Curfew Diaries

## Weekend Edition: Prisoner's dilemma



By Jamie Etheridge

etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

I learned about the prisoner's dilemma in college. The story explains a paradox of decision making. It goes like this: Two men commit a bank robbery. They are caught and interrogated by the police. Beforehand, they both agreed to remain silent and never admit to the crime. The police offer both the same deal: Admit the crime, rat on your accomplice and you get a lesser sentence. The men are in separate rooms. If both remain silent, the police do not have the evidence to convict either. But if either one breaks, then they both go to jail. Hence the paradox. If each chooses the 'incentive' (lesser jail time) and admits the crime, he is doing what seems best for himself. But now both prisoners are worse off (one gets the entire sentence, the one who talked a lesser sentence).

In Kuwait, we are now facing a prisoner's dilemma of epic proportions. At grocery stores and co-ops around the country, people are doing what is best for themselves without thinking about the larger, greater good. If we all continue to shop sensibly, buy what we need for a few days and not hoard, there will be plenty and no one will panic. But if people hoard, then shoppers start to feel like there is less food to go around and panic, and when they panic, others panic and start rushing to buy more and more.

We saw this two weeks ago when the government closed the airport to commercial flights and declared an extension of the public holiday. The measures aimed to protect us all by encouraging more people to stay at home and prevent people who are infected from entering the country at will. But a few people panicked, rushing to the markets, and this triggered more panic and more people rushing to the markets until all of a sudden every shop in Kuwait was packed, shelves were depleted and people freaked out. The next day, of course, the government ensured that all shelves were restocked and life returned to the new normal.

Think about all the fresh veggies and fruit that will go to waste now because people overbought and cannot consume it all in the time before it rots. I won't even mention the simple fact that most of us could do with skipping a few meals here and there and even trying to reduce how much we eat during this staying at home period so as not to pick up significant extra weight.

But the anxiety of the unknown - of not knowing what will happen in the future and more importantly, of what other people will do - lurks just beneath the surface of the current situation. So every time the government institutes a new decision, people start acting like the prisoner in the story...choosing the best option for themselves and making everyone (including themselves) worse off in the long run.

It is not easy to go against the flow. In any situation - whether it's a global pandemic or even the latest trend - humans naturally follow each other. We are social beings and as such, we are easily influenced by each other. When a large group of people are stopped on the side of the road, looking at something in the distance, we too will stop and look, even if we are in a hurry, even if we are late for an appointment. This is a fundamental part of human nature. So when people start panic buying and hoarding, we think to ourselves, oh I better start buying more than I need too.

No one knows the future but as the situation in China has shown, the crisis will pass and life will return to normal. What is between now and then is not fully in our hands but there are many ways we can shape and influence this situation. By staying at home and #flatteningthecurve, for instance, to reduce the burden on our healthcare system and by not acting like a fidgety prisoner making bad decisions. If we all stay calm and buy only what we need, we will all be better off in the long run.

## Co-ops open only for area residents

**KUWAIT:** Co-operative societies are only allowed to sell for customers living in the their respective areas of operation, according to a new decision Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) released on Friday. As a result, customers will not be allowed to shop in co-op branches outside of their areas of residence until further notice, and can only go to branches in areas relevant to the address mentioned in their civil IDs, according to the new direc-



**KUWAIT:** Volunteers note down customers' information outside a Hawally and Roudha Co-operative Society branch on Friday. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

tive. The new decision also stipulates that this condition is applied on both citizens and expatriates alike. This measure is taken in accordance with the Cabinet and

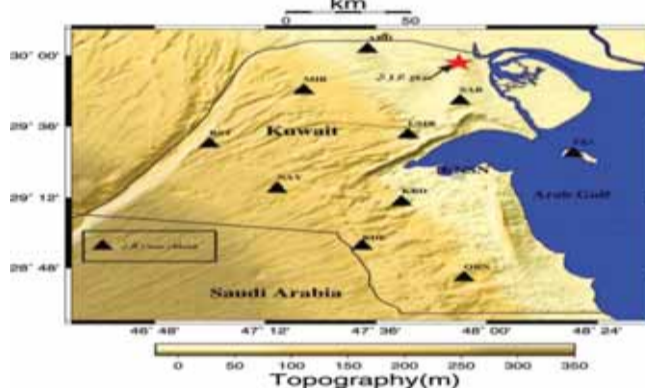
health authorities' instructions as part of efforts to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the ministry said in a statement. — KUNA



**Customers lined up outside a Hawally and Roudha Co-operative Society branch on Friday.**

## Earthquake jolts northern Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** A 3.2-magnitude earthquake jolted the northern area of Al-Adbeli during midnight Thursday, the national seismological network, an affiliate of Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) reported Friday. The epicenter of the quake was felt at five-kilometers deep underground, and land farmers felt it too, the network's supervisor Abdullah Al-Enzi said. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** The epicenter (red star) shown on Kuwait's map. — KUNA

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has so far recorded 235 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). With the exception of eleven cases in critical condition, all cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while 910 have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 64 people have recovered completely after previously been infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 171 people receiving treatment and hundreds quarantined as of yesterday. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested thousands of people. Meanwhile, Kuwait requires all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center at Hall 6 to test people for possible infection.

### Curfew

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew as of Sunday from 5:00 pm to 4:00 am until further notice. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed restaurants to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there

are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people.

### Operating businesses

The following activities are allowed to operate outside of the curfew period between 5:00 am and 4:00 pm:

- 1- Various types of foodstuff and supplies stores and markets.
  - 2- Laundromats.
  - 3- Various type of repair shops.
  - 4- Automobile repair, maintenance and spare parts.
  - 5- Money exchangers.
  - 6- Pharmacies.
  - 7- Various types of restaurants.
  - 8- Optical shops.
  - 9- Administrative offices.
  - 10- Cooking gas branches.
  - 11- Co-ops' family needs branches.
  - 12- Feed shops.
- Meanwhile, the following industrial and craft activities, which are licensed by the Public Authority for Industry (PAI), are allowed to open:
- 1- Food.
  - 2- Petrochemicals.
  - 3- Gases.
  - 4- Plastic.
  - 5- Cardboard and paper.

### Precautions

All arrivals to Kuwait from all countries are to be placed under compulsory institutional quarantine for 14 days, during which the person is monitored, and prescribed health procedures are applied, the health ministry said. Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice. Authorities also announced a public hol-

iday in the country from March 12 to April 9, with work resuming on April 12, while entities providing vital services will remain open.

State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs); first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions.

### Hotlines

- The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.
- The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

In My View

## Common sense

By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com



After COVID-19 declared war against humanity, I started to think what's next?! I spoke to some friends about this epidemic - some of whom are highly experienced doctors - who assured each other that as China is taking action, this virus will dry out and go to rest as quickly as it appeared. To tell the truth, I personally was pessimistic and thought otherwise, because China is a country that is economically well-established, and many people from all over the world are doing business there. They became panicked, which made me believe that an exodus will take place, and some people actually left, before things got clear.

Nothing was done elsewhere about quarantining and how contagious this disease was and how fast it spread, and this is where the virus' attack became a pandemic. We can take an example in South Korea, where a woman who took things very lightly caused the infection of around 8,000 people. According to reports, she went to a basketball game, attended a mass in church and joined a party.

Another example was in Jordan, where a wedding party contributed to spreading the coronavirus in a city that is now under total lockdown, where even those with permits can no longer leave. Although the initial cases in Jordan were from Canada and Spain, it is really a global crisis. We must understand that the danger is real and not exaggerated, as I still see a good number of people taking this matter very lightly, with great regret.

I passed by a Kuwait Flour Mills Company outlet where I saw something really very scary - a line of people at least 150 yards long, with people standing next to each other so close they almost touched, despite being advised by healthcare professionals to keep a distance between one another. I could not keep silent and I told some of them this is wrong and they must maintain a distance, but almost all said "we are not in danger; we are fine and will not get sick!" I told myself "Oh my God, can this be true? Are there people still in denial? Are there people still ignorant?" Of course I drove away as fast as I could.

When authorities stepped in and took action to gain some control over the situation, a small number of people liked it, but many did not, which is an "attitude" that should be adjusted. The teams that are fighting COVID-19 are now taking matters into their hands and measures are becoming tougher, so people come to their senses and become compliant. Please, take advice, and follow instructions. May God bless us all.

Local

# Amir directs KD 10 million allocation for Kuwait's anti-COVID-19 efforts

Sheikh Sabah, Tunisian president discuss coronavirus



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has instructed Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) to allocate KD 10 million (\$30.3 million) for an emergency response program to mitigate coronavirus fallout, KFAS said Thursday. The move is meant to back up the great efforts of the government to rein in the spread of the novel coronavirus, known as (COVID-19) worldwide, KFAS said in a press statement. The emergency response program against the globally spreading disease encompasses the realms of public health and education, it added. The anti-COVID-19 endeavor aims at supporting the KFAS-affiliated Desman Diabetes Institute's technique to sequence the

genome of the coronavirus, study receptors for high risks of infections with the virus and design highly precise diagnoses, it elaborated. It is also intended to offer relevant training courses to doctors and health care providers directly connected with buttressing field effectiveness and response to contagious diseases, according to the statement. As for education, the aforementioned program mainly targets a tentative online education initiative purposed to continue learning during the class suspension period, it added.

**Global coordination**

Separately, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Friday a telephone call from Tunisian President Qais Saied discussing the solid bilateral ties between the two countries and repercussions of the coronavirus. His Highness the Amir and the Tunisian president noted during the phone conversation that all international stakeholders should join hands to contain the pandemic and prevent it from spreading. The Tunisian president wished His Highness the Amir lifelong wellness. In turn, His Highness the Amir expressed appreciation for the brotherly communication that depicted deep-rooted bilateral relations, wishing the president lasting good health.



**Cabinet directs covering all food needs**

**New package**

In other news, the Kuwaiti Cabinet on Thursday adopted a fresh package asking the Kuwait Supply Company to answer all food needs. The Cabinet also directed paying one month's salary to all students overseas. The remarks were given by Government Spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem during a press conference at Seif Palace following an extraordinary Cabinet meeting on state response to novel coronavirus. As per the latest edicts, the Kuwait Supply Company would provide the local market with all food staples to be determined by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, while countryside taxi services would be suspended, Mezrem noted. In addition, all overseas students, whether they have state scholarships or not, would be given one month's salary, the spokesman said. This move in particular is intended to ease out the difficult conditions of Kuwaiti students abroad and to mitigate the reflections of the novel coronavirus, he added. Finally, the cabinet decided to halt attendance for all press conferences and briefings but to use the video-conferencing system instead in order to observe rules on social distancing to curb the outbreak. — KUNA

**Driver's license renewal, reissuance procedures explained**

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Due to the exceptional situation in Kuwait these days with the suspension of the public sector, people have concerns on how to renew their driver's license, vehicle registration and other documents. The ministry of interior reminded last week that renewal of driving licenses can be done online through its official website [www.moi.gov.kw](http://www.moi.gov.kw). The ministry also announced that no fines will be imposed on people whose driving licenses or vehicle registrations expire during the shutdown.



But many people still have inquiries and questions about this matter, so the ministry issued the following reminder: Those whose driving licenses have expired or got lost during the shutdown period can either wait until work resumes at the traffic department, or they can apply for the renewal or reissuance of lost or damaged driving licenses online. They should then wait until the department reopens to receive their licenses. New applications can only be made after work restarts at the department.

Driving tests will also resume after the department reopens. Appointments will be made according to the previous schedule, so earlier appointments that were canceled will be rescheduled first. Regarding vehicle registration, people should renew their car insurance to avoid facing problems in case of accidents. The technical checking can be made after the traffic department starts working again. No fines will be imposed during this period for any kind of document expiry, and people will be given a grace period of one week to process their documents after work resumes at the traffic department.

**Top Interior Ministry official inspects quarantine sites**



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Nahham toured Friday the Aquamarine Hotel and Resort which was turned into a quarantine site for Kuwaitis repatriated

back home, in order to inspect security and precautionary measures and preparations. Lt Gen Nahham also carried out a similar inspection tour at the quarantine sites in Khairan. Senior Interior Ministry officials accompanied Lt Gen Nahham in the tours.



Ready for the Beach ??

**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961

Subscribe or renew your subscription & get K.D 50

**1 Coupon FREE**

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait | Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7  
Fax: 24835620 - 24835621 | E: info@kuwaittimes.net

## Local



KUWAIT: A combination of photos highlighting volunteers' work to organize and help clients at Salmiya Co-operative Society. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

**Kuwait Times**  
ESTABLISHED 1961  
THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

STAY CONNECTED

- Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**
- Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**
- Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait  
Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621  
E: info@kuwaittimes.net

## Kuwait Social Affairs Ministry launches donation campaign

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Social Affairs on Friday approved launching a campaign to raise donations on Saturday for fighting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Up to 41 Kuwaiti charities will partake in the campaign, proceeds of which would be shifted to the cabinet-affiliated fund for contributions for combating spread of COVID-19, said the ministry undersecretary Abdulaziz Shuaib in a statement. The campaign will be launched via a main website, linked up with those of each society. The ministry will follow up on collecting the donations online. Disbursement of the allotted funds would be according to set criteria, with approval of the ministry. —KUNA

## Minister underlines media fight against rumors

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Information Mohammad Al-Jabri stressed the significant role of mass media in rebuffing rumors over the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) situation. Speaking to KUNA and Kuwait TV while visiting KUNA headquarters on Thursday, Jabri, who doubles as Minister of State for Youth Affairs, said that amid the exceptional circumstances in the country, mass media has a crucial part to play in speedily covering relevant state decisions and precautions, as well as fighting rumors purposed to sow panic among people.

Jabri spoke highly of the effort of the official media in delivering real and reliable information to citizens and residents thanks to their news credibility and public trust. He added that he is very proud of KUNA's great work for covering all government decisions and moves to mitigate the fallout of the novel coronavirus, while strictly abiding by utter credibility and transparency. The minister also voiced much appreciation to KUNA Board Chairman and Director-General Sheikh Mubarak Al-Duaij Al-Ibrahim Al-Sabah and Deputy Director-General for Administrative, Financial and Communication Sector and Editor-in-Chief Abdulhameed Malak for their fervent efforts and for KUNA's distinguished performance under the current critical circumstances.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Duaij thanked Minister Jabri for his unremitting backing to the country's official news agency. He underscored KUNA's eagerness to play its due national media part in providing people with true and reliable news and information, and in throwing much weight behind the government's endeavor to keep the wellbeing and safety of people. —KUNA

Legalese

## Thank you teachers



By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

**T**all teachers and educators, a big thank you for all you have done this year and for trying to help out students virtually at this time. I have seen so many teachers providing resources on social media and tips for children at home. It is very inspiring and humbling. Thank you.

As you may have heard, Kuwait, like many other countries, has postponed this academic year. Kuwait has also suspended all commercial flights from the airport and there has not been a lot of movement in and out of Kuwait. Therefore, I can only assume this is a confusing time for everyone, so I am not surprised that I am getting a lot of questions from teachers.

### Leaving Kuwait

**Question:** As a teacher, I know I have no work until August. Am I allowed to leave Kuwait, since there is no school until August?

**Fajer:** Yes. The Kuwaiti government has stated that it will provide teachers with exit permits, but since the airport is closed right now, this might be confusing. If you want to go, you should call your embassy and ask them to help you get out of Kuwait, as they are allowing some flights to leave.

### Getting paid

**Question:** Will I get paid for these months until August?  
**Fajer:** Yes, you should be if your contract is not ending. If your contract ends before August, then discuss it with your school if you can renew it, and if not, you should get paid till the end of your contract. This includes your summer salary if your contract allows you to come back next year. If your agreement started last June, for instance, and ends this June, then you will only get paid until this June, assuming you took a 30-day holiday at least. I know this is confusing as most teachers in Kuwait in the private sector have agreements from August/September until June, with a three-month holiday.

### Employment case

**Question:** I would like to leave but file an employment case against my school. How can I do this?

**Fajer:** First of all, instead of filing a case, I urge you to first speak to your school and try to negotiate things - please understand this is a tough time for everyone. Secondly, I would consider speaking to a lawyer who can assist you with providing them with a POA (power of attorney), so that they can file the case on your behalf later. With many public and private institutes, organizations and companies closed right now, it is best to speak to a lawyer virtually, so that if you leave Kuwait, you can still provide a POA from abroad. I am hoping to see more governmental procedures get online, such as filing an employment complaint at the shuon (manpower authority) or obtaining a POA, like other countries in the GCC.

Also, please keep in mind that the Kuwaiti government has done everything in its power and more, exceeding everyone's expectations to keep us all safe. Soon, when the situation in Kuwait is stable, I wouldn't be surprised if there are new regulations on how to deal with situations like these. So stay safe, keep an open mind and heart, and let's be patient. I hope you get back to your families soon, safe and sound.

For questions or queries, please email at info@tl-legal.com.

Local

# Kuwaiti repatriates' planes return home: Civil Aviation

Kuwaitis arriving from Europe, Middle East since Wednesday



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaitis returning from Frankfurt on Thursday, leave an aircraft that landed at the Kuwait International Airport, before being taken by health ministry workers to a hospital for novel coronavirus checkups. —AFP, KUNA and Kuwait Defense Ministry photos

**This photo released by Kuwait's Defense Ministry shows a Kuwait Air force plane shortly after its arrival to Kuwait from Rome, carrying Kuwaitis repatriated from Italy, while buses wait nearby to carry the passengers for medical checkups.**

**KUWAIT:** A plane, carrying Kuwaiti repatriates, arrived Friday evening to Kuwait from Rome, said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The flight was part of the repatriation plan launched by the government amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic, DGCA posted on its official Twitter account. Kuwait's embassy in Italy had supervised the repatriation of Kuwaitis. Kuwaiti Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah said that the process was a success due to the strong cooperation be-

tween the Foreign Ministry and the embassy's staff. Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah also thanked the Italian authorities for facilitating his nationals' return to Kuwait. Also on Friday, another plane carrying Kuwaiti repatriates arrived from London, while two other flights brought back nationals from Spain. On Thursday, three flights landed in Kuwait as part of the repatriation process which began on Wednesday and is set to conclude today. The three flights carried

Kuwaitis from Frankfurt, London and Abu Dhabi, and landed one day after the arrival of three flights from Beirut, Cairo and Bahrain. The repatriation process is carried out within guidelines set by the World Health Organization (WHO) and health authorities in Kuwait. In other news, the Kuwaiti embassy in Bahrain said that a visit to the Kingdom requires prior permission issued by the concerned authorities. In a press statement, the embassy stressed that the issuance of the

prior permission to be done by the concerned authorities in Bahrain only and not by them. The embassy called on citizens to follow the instructions of the official authorities in Bahrain and to abide by their guidelines in order to ensure their safety, urging the citizens to call the following number in case of any emergency or inquiry: 0097332200300. On Wednesday, the Bahraini Gulf Air Company announced that the entry to Bahrain International Airport is limited to Bahraini citizens and residents in the Kingdom. —KUNA



**Kuwaitis returning from Frankfurt leave an aircraft before being taken to a hospital for novel coronavirus checkups.**



**Health ministry workers, wearing protective outfits, wait on the tarmac of the Kuwait International Airport to receive Kuwaitis returning from Frankfurt on Wednesday, to be taken to a hospital for novel coronavirus checkups.**



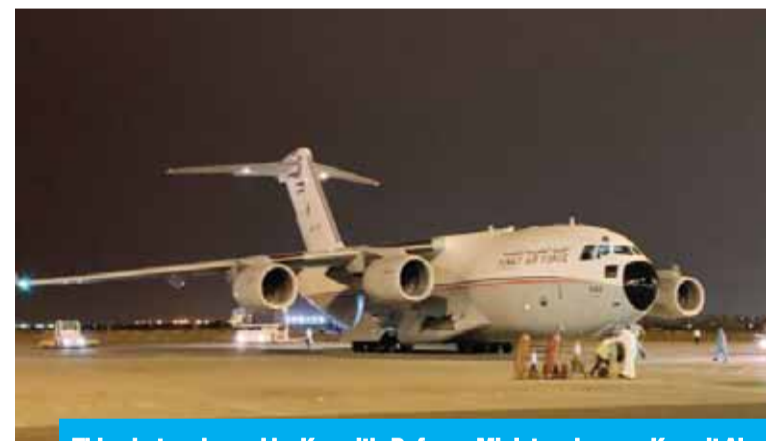
**Kuwait Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah supervises Kuwaitis' repatriation.**



**Kuwaitis returning from Italy leave a Kuwait Air Force plane before being taken for medical checkups.**



**A bus carrying Kuwaitis returning from Italy leaves to take the passengers for medical checkups.**



**This photo released by Kuwait's Defense Ministry shows a Kuwait Air force plane shortly after its arrival to Kuwait from Rome, carrying Kuwaitis repatriated from Italy.**

## Al-Sayer volunteers spread the message of 'Kuwait is Fine'

**KUWAIT:** Admiring great efforts and execution undertaken by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, and other all key ministerial departments under State of Kuwait, 'Al-Sayer Always with You' volunteers joined for a two-day campaign at Kuwait International Fairgrounds in Mishref to distribute refreshments and water for the people who came for screening sessions to test for the coronavirus. The humanitarian efforts were supported by team of volunteers from 'Nahtam' (Kuwait Voluntary Work Center), Kuwait Support and Rescue Team and the Americana Group to set an example of social awakening and contributions at the time of crucial difficulties. "Such efforts are part of initiatives by Al-Sayer and Partners to endure the essential requirements during the current exceptional situation, and seek the help of youth volunteers towards empowering them to rise up to the situation and manage any unintended critical situations now and in the future," commented

Nehad Al-Haj Ali, General Manager, Corporate Excellence. "Given the scale and urgency of the situation, we need to come together across businesses, civil society and government to rapidly co-create solutions and share best-practice," added Nehad. From Al-Sayer Holding we request Kuwait communities to adhere and cooperate with the extreme precautionary measures taken by government authorities and stay at home to avoid social gathering as much as possible to restrict the spreading of this global disease. Also, we urge people not to give in to panic and fear about this deadly virus, but effectively protect themselves and their families with personal hygiene and sanitization, washing hands regularly, wearing protective gear when needed and maintaining social distancing. Al-Sayer wishes all residents of Kuwait and the global community a fast recovery from this pandemic and return to a normal life.



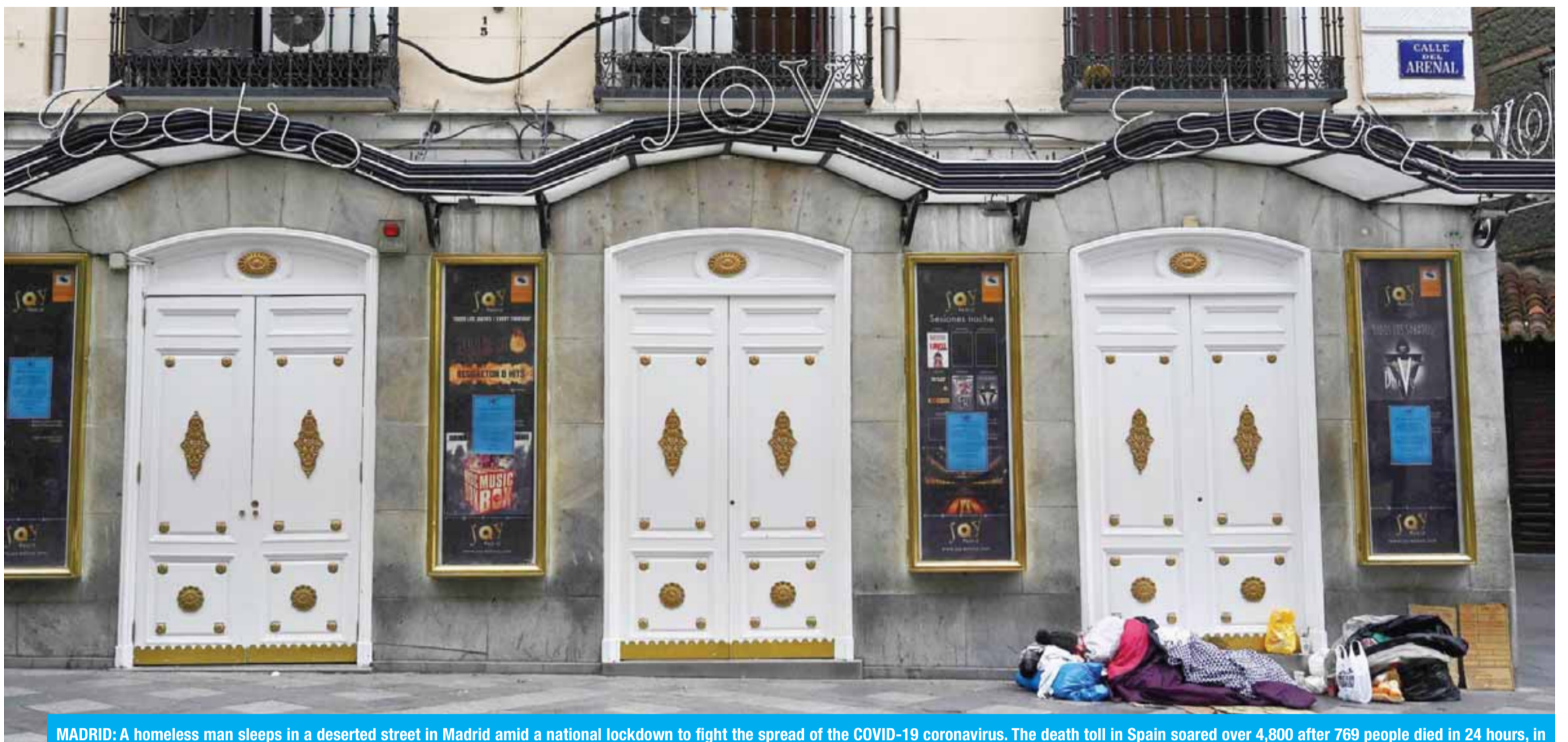


US virus cases exceed 100,000; doctors warn

## India's coronavirus heroes come under attack

Page 8

Page 8



MADRID: A homeless man sleeps in a deserted street in Madrid amid a national lockdown to fight the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. The death toll in Spain soared over 4,800 after 769 people died in 24 hours, in what was a record one-day figure for fatalities in the country. — AFP

# COVID-19 plan revives old disputes

## Italian newspapers decry 'ugly Europe'

BRUSSELS: An EU summit to conceive an economic plan against the coronavirus impact instead unearthed the union's deep and historic divisions, with Spain and Italy hurt by Dutch insensitivity. The bloc's 27 leaders met for six hours by videoconference on Thursday, with Rome and Madrid pleading their partners to do everything possible to deal with the crisis.

In Europe, more than 10,000 people have died from the COVID-19 virus, with Italy and Spain each counting more deaths than China, where the outbreak began. To slow the spread, Europe's economy has been put into something like a coma, with restaurants closed, tourism dead and millions of workers teleworking while children are stuck at home from school. The state of affairs is especially dire for Italy, a country saddled with two trillion euros in debt, a teetering banking system and where anti-EU populists are a constant threat to stable government.

Italy's request is simple: to keep market speculators at bay, the country wants to pool its own borrowing with that of its euro-zone partners through a newly designed instrument it calls "corona bonds". This would ease the burden of crisis spending by spreading the hit across the 19 members of the single currency in an unprecedented act of European solidarity. Ahead

of the summit, nine of the EU's 27 members backed the idea, including France, Ireland and Portugal.

### 'Completely unconscious'

But it was not to be, with northern countries, led by the Netherlands, refusing to consider it and thus reviving bitter quarrels dating back to the debt crisis between the EU's richer and poorer members. Leaders agreed only that finance ministers would meet again in two weeks to discuss options, leaving Rome and its allies fuming.

"This type of response is completely ignorant and this recurring pettiness completely undermines what makes up the spirit of the European Union," said Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa, pointing to the Netherlands. It "represents a threat to the future of the European Union," he said. Italian newspapers decried an "ugly Europe" with politicians wondering if the EU project had lost all sense of purpose. "A cowardly Europe, like the one we saw yesterday, will be overwhelmed by the coronavirus," said Antonio Tajani, the Italian former head of the European Parliament.



Virus kills more than 10,000 in Europe

Analyst Eric Maurice of the Schuman foundation said the summit debacle "saw the return of a Europe divided into two camps, the North against the South, but this time with the added dimension of literal life and death." In other words, a battle between the historically rich countries with sound finances that are able to withstand a crisis, and the EU states deemed to be more lax about public spending such as Italy and Spain, which are more vulnerable.

### 'Catastrophe'

As far as southern Europe is concerned, the bad guy in the story is Wopke Hoekstra, the Netherlands' blunt talking finance minister who often criticizes Italy for economic mismanagement. Hoekstra is understood to also be speaking for Germany's CDU, the party of

German Chancellor Angela Merkel which is stuck in a tense coalition with left-leaning social-democrats and unable to openly criticise debtor nations.

Hoekstra and his allies insists that any aid to Italy and Spain would have to take place via a bailout, which comes after a crash on the debt markets and with the strict condition that countries reform. "Are the countries now advocating corona bonds willing to relinquish sovereignty?" asked conservative Belgian MEP Johan Van Overtveldt, a former Belgian finance minister. "Only if the answer to this question is unambiguously 'yes' does this discussion make any sense," he said.

But backers of sharing the burden insist that the coronavirus affects everyone and that demands for labor reform or pension cuts are grossly off topic when thousands are dying and hospitals overwhelmed. "This is a time for European solidarity. If the continent does not stand together now, the European project might never recover," said historian Adam Tooze and economist Moritz Schularick in an op-ed piece in the Guardian. "The writing is on the wall... Italy will not be able to respond to the crisis in the same way that other countries can. It is at risk of an economic depression on top of a humanitarian catastrophe," they wrote. — AFP

## Nightfall brings nightmares, fear of death in Rome

CASAL PALOCCO: Doctors and nurses at the Casalpallocco hospital on Rome's outskirts mill silently around coronavirus patients lying motionless on their beds surrounded by machines monitoring their vital signs. Medical staff adhere to strict security protocols. Each is clad from head to foot in a hooded white protective suit, hands ensconced in latex gloves while a mask and wrap around goggles protect the face. Nurses regularly clean their gloves with disinfectant gel. One at a time, they head out for a gasp of fresh air - yet even the bird-song cannot make them forget their patients for a moment. Some try to relax with a nervous drag on a cigarette.

Clad in a white overall, hospital director Antonino Marchese paints a difficult picture. He tells AFP: "The number of infected patients is certainly higher than that given out every evening in the published official tally because many patients placed themselves in isolation without being tested. They are at home and getting slowly better. Other patients have probably been infected and not even realised it and have recovered," says Marchese, a shock of white hair framing a face half covered by a mask. "The number of people infected is higher than they say," he concludes.

Though a semblance of calm is in evidence in the intensive care unit, Marchese acknowledges the problems of shortages. "Unfortunately, we were not well prepared," he says, adding that a sudden and mass consumption spree of some staple products which followed the first cases had been a problem and "it is only now that factories are reconverting (production) to supply us



SERIATE, Italy: Pallbearers bring the coffin of deceased person to be stored into the church of San Giuseppe in Seriate, near Bergamo, Lombardy during the country's lockdown following the COVID-19 new coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

One coronavirus sufferer who recovered is Fabio Biferali, a 65-year-old cardiologist from Rome who spent eight days "isolated from the world" in intensive care at Rome's Policlinico Umberto I.

### Creeping fears of death

"I had strange pains. Being a doctor I said it was pneumonia. It was like having a marmoset on your back," Biferali recalled. "I can't talk about this experience without crying. Tears come easily to me. Being a doctor helped me come through the pain. The treatment for the oxygen therapy is painful, looking for the radial artery is difficult. Desperate other patients were crying out, 'enough, enough'," he said. "The worst thing was nighttime. I couldn't sleep, anxiety flooded the room. During the day, the doctors, maintenance staff came by, people distributing the food.

"At night, the nightmares came, death

lurked. "As I was not sleeping I was counting the breaths of the guy in the next bed with my telephone's stopwatch. I made it my job to pay attention to him. That way, I forgot about myself," he added. He recalled that the medical staff "were completely covered, their feet, hands, head. I could only see their eyes - affectionate eyes - behind their glass mask. I could only hear their voices. Many were young, frontline doctors. It was a moment of hope."

Asked what he had missed during those days, Biferali said his relatives. "I was afraid I would never see them again, of dying without being able to hold them by the hand. I was letting desperation flood through me..." He says he has learnt one lesson from his experience: "From now on I shall fight for public health. You can't treat it as a bean counting exercise and leave it in the hands of the politicians. "We have to defend one of the world's best health systems." — AFP

## 'Corona criminals' prey on Europe's virus fears

THE HAGUE: From trafficking dodgy surgical masks to peddling counterfeit medicines and running internet scams, criminals are finding ways to profit from the coronavirus crisis, European police warn. With billions of people under lockdown in their homes and borders shut, police chiefs say criminals are finding it hard to make money out of "traditional" activities like burglary and drug smuggling. Instead they are preying on people's fears of the COVID-19 pandemic to sell them substandard protective goods or trick people out of their cash online, warned Europe's police agency Europol.

"Criminals are just interested in one question: 'how can I make more money?'" Europol director Catherine De Bolle told AFP in an interview. "This is why they are now abusing the pandemic to change their way of working." Police around the world seized 34,000 counterfeit surgical masks in one major operation targeting so-called "corona criminals" earlier this month, Europol said in a report Friday. "Fraudsters have been very quick to adapt well-known fraud schemes to capitalize on the anxieties and fears of victims throughout the crisis," the report added.

### 'Decrease in break-ins'

In many European countries, police have reported a dramatic drop in common criminal behavior. Spanish police said there had been a roughly 50 per-



STUTTGART: An information board reading 'Corona Protection - Please follow the rules absolutely!' stands at a federal highway in Stuttgart, southern Germany as public life has been limited to combat the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

cent drop in criminal offences compared to a year earlier since the country was put on a near total lockdown on March 14. "There is no doubt that confinement makes crime more difficult," said the deputy director of Spain's Guardia Civil police force, Laurentino Cena. Sweden too said it had seen burglaries drop since people were asked to work at home. Sales of street drugs have also dropped sharply in many countries since the outbreak as authorities shut borders and restrict the movement of people. — AFP

## International

# Fears of domestic violence rise as millions confined over virus

## Europe overtakes China to become the epicenter of the pandemic

**BERLIN:** With families across Europe confined to their homes to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, fears are rising of a surge in domestic violence. From Berlin to Paris, Madrid, Rome and Bratislava, associations that help victims of domestic violence have sounded the alarm after Europe overtook China to become the epicentre of the pandemic. "For many people, their home is already not a safe place," says the German federal association of women's counseling centers and helplines (BFF).

But the stress caused by social isolation is exacerbating tensions and increasing "the risk of domestic and sexual violence against women and children", the association warns. And the risks are not limited to homes where violence was already a problem before. On top of the stress caused by confinement,

fears around job security and financial difficulties are also increasing the likelihood of conflicts. "It's putting a lot of pressure on households," says Florence Claudepierre, head of the FCPE parents' federation in the Upper Rhine, a region hit hard by the pandemic in France.

She said she is hearing stories of "parents who are cracking, who can't carry on" in families that have not previously had any problems. In China, which is slowly emerging from several weeks of total lockdown, the women's rights organization Weiping has reported a threefold increase in reports of violence

against women. In Spain, which has the second-worst outbreak in Europe after Italy, a 35-year-old mother of two was murdered by her partner last week.

### 'Where can I go?'

Elsewhere, help centers have noted a drop in calls for help - which is not necessarily seen as a good sign either. For children, young people and women who are victims of domestic violence - mental or physical - the current situation means "being constantly available" for abuse by the perpetrator, the German federation stresses.

Decisions to shut down schools, sports clubs and youth centres are important to curb the spread of the virus and prevent hospitals from being overrun, acknowledges Rainer Rettinger, who heads a German child protection association. But "who is seeing and hearing abused children today?" he asks. "Now violence, too, has been confined. That's what we're afraid of," says Martine Brousse, head of Parisian organisation La Voix de l'Enfant (The Child's Voice).

As governments pour billions into their economies and health services, they should "not lose sight of the importance of equality and fundamental human rights," Beatrice Fresko-Rolfo, the general rapporteur on violence against women for the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, pointed out recently. Domestic violence associations are facing a

### Stress caused by social isolation is exacerbating tensions



**BERLIN:** An Apartment building is pictured in Berlin. With families across Europe confined to their homes to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, fears are rising of a surge in domestic violence. —AFP

double-edged sword: With many social workers having to work from home, they are unable to reach victims; and when people need to be brought to safety, there are often not enough places in the refuges.

"Women have called us and told us they are experiencing violence at home. They are asking: Where can I go?" says Canan Gullu, from Turkey's federation of women's organizations. In Germany, families minister Franziska Giffey has called on municipalities to organize alternative reception facilities if necessary, while neighboring Austria provides guaranteed places in women's refuges or the removal of violent

family members from quarantined households.

In the countries with the strictest lockdowns, such as Italy, victims are exempt from some of the rules — such as the requirement to carry a document justifying why they are leaving their home — if they need to visit a refuge centre. "The current situation is unprecedented," says Adriana Havasova, a psychologist from Bratislava. She hopes the confinement will be limited to two or three weeks. If it goes on for several months, "I can't imagine how much more domestic violence could increase," she warns. —AFP

## Coronavirus: A huge surge of hate speech toward the Chinese

**LOS ANGELES:** The coronavirus outbreak has led to a 900 percent uptick in hate speech toward China and Chinese people on Twitter, according to a report by a tech startup. "People are spending more and more time on social networks, communication apps, chat rooms and gaming services, and the problems endemic to these platforms—hate, abuse, toxicity and bullying—have become accentuated," the Israel-based company Light said in its report.

"According to our data, much of this hate and abuse is being directed towards China and its population, as well as individuals of Asian origin in other parts of the world," added the startup that uses artificial intelligence to detect harmful content in social networks. It said although there are some

uplifting stories being shared online as people confined because of the pandemic first detected in China turn to the Internet, there is also plenty of hate being shared.

"Toxic tweets are using explicit language to accuse Asians of carrying the coronavirus and blaming people of Asian origin as a collective for spreading the virus," the study found. It said that a lot of people are using racist hashtags such as #Kungflu, #chinesevirus and #communistvirus as they tweet about the pandemic. Internet traffic to prominent hate sites has also increased 200 percent, the report said, as have posts against Asians.

It said that certain media outlets have also encouraged backlash against Asians, pointing to a video on Sky news Australia titled "China willfully inflicted coronavirus upon the world." "The video now has over 5k comments, the majority of them toxic and hateful," the report said. The findings come as numerous US rights groups, activists and politicians have sounded the alarm about a surge in the number of racist incidents directed at Asian Americans. Critics say US President Donald

## Mosques in Pakistan remain open despite coronavirus threats

**ISLAMABAD:** Worshippers crowded into mosques in Pakistan on Friday, defying warnings about the fast-spreading coronavirus and fuelling fears of a public health crisis in the impoverished country. In contrast to many other Muslim countries, Pakistani clerics and government officials have refused to close mosques attended by millions each week, where hugs and handshakes are common. The country's leading religious scholars have only advised that the old and sick avoid prayers and instructed clerics to keep sermons brief.

"We don't believe in coronavirus, we believe in Allah. Whatever happens, it happens from Allah," said Altaf Khan, as worshippers wearing masks arrived for Friday prayers in the capital Islamabad. TikTok videos garnering hundreds of thousands of likes on social media in Pakistan have called for Muslims to attend mosques despite public health warnings. "Most of the people are terrified," said Islamabad resident Syed Ashfaq Ahmed after visiting a mosque this week.

"They went to the mosque to seek help from Allah." Pakistan has so far declared 1,235 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and nine deaths but there are fears that limited testing is understating the true scale

of the outbreak which has infected more than 530,000 people globally. The majority of its early cases have been directly linked to pilgrims returning from Iran, where for weeks authorities refused to close its shrines as the virus spread, exposing possibly tens of thousands of people.

### 'Packed churches'

In many parts of the Muslim world, countries are taking action. Saudi Arabia has halted pilgrimages and closed mosques, while scholars in Egypt have issued a fatwa permitting the banning of public prayers to help contain the virus outbreak. Turkey has shut mosques to mass gatherings while Muslim organizations in Indonesia called for Friday prayers to be carried out at home — though many ignored the advice. Muslims turned out as normal in Afghanistan's capital Kabul, however, where mosques were packed and prayer leaders called on their congregations to be brave.

"Allah will protect Muslims from disasters from the coronavirus," a prayer leader told a crowded mosque in the city. There has also been a mixed response in some predominantly Christian countries.

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro — who was elected in 2018 with the backing of the country's burgeoning evangelical Christian community — declared churches exempt from virus containment measures. Most places of worship in Brazil have already suspended services because of the outbreak, often broadcasting them online instead, but some prominent religious leaders have refused. And US President Donald

## Belgium's homeless struggling under the virus lockdown

**BRUSSELS:** Stay home to avoid coronavirus: simple advice but impossible for those who live on the streets. In Brussels, local support group Samusocial is trying to help them and has set up a crisis centre for those tested positive with COVID-19. "Ah yes hold on, I forgot to ask you for a little bottle of disinfectant," says Nelly, a 72-year-old homeless woman as she turns to Roberto, a social SAMU nurse looking for people to help with his colleague Edwige. Wrapped up in a coat and huge scarf, Nelly has set up in a pedestrian tunnel under the tracks of one of the city's main railway stations, where she is sheltered from the rain but not the wind.

"We always try not to go where there are too many people, I avoid it," she explains. A way of living that she is following even more closely during

the pandemic. "There's less risk in being outside than in confined spaces," says Nelly, who does not like homeless shelters. "I do everything on foot, I avoid approaching people, you do what you can to get by." The order to stay at home except for essential trips, imposed by many countries including Belgium, is particularly challenging for the homeless, says Sebastien Roy, the head of Samusocial.

"It's not adapted to the kind of situation we look after — night shelters and the homeless world," he told AFP. Later on their round, Edwige and Roberto go to Marolles, a gritty district of the city known for its flea market, after getting a call about a man on crutches having difficulties. "These people are alone, with no contact — I think they are suffering more in the current situation than those of us who just have to stay at home," said Katia, the woman who alerted Samusocial to the man in trouble.

### Tensions

Three men approach the Samusocial van — regulars who ask for socks, warm clothes and food. "Now we're at the level of survival," Edwige says. "We see them getting hungrier and hungrier. It's



**CHENNAI:** Police inspector Rajesh Babu (center) wearing coronavirus-themed helmet speaks to a motorist at a checkpoint during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus in Chennai yesterday. —AFP

Trump's repeated references to the COVID-19 virus as the "Chinese virus," has also resulted in xenophobia. —AFP



**ISLAMABAD:** A man distributes plastic gloves to worshippers before entering a mosque to attend Friday prayers during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Islamabad. —AFP

Trump said Tuesday he looked forward to "packed churches" over Easter, just three weeks away, when he hoped the virus would be under control.

Pakistan has a long history of failing to contain infectious diseases such as polio, tuberculosis and hepatitis due to decades of underinvestment in its health sector that has left hospitals with few basic supplies and vital technology needed to face any crisis. But Prime Minister Imran Khan has repeatedly refused to interfere in the issue of shutting mosques or even order a country-wide lockdown, citing the economic damage that could be unleashed. —AFP

okay for the moment but we only have tins of tuna left. They ask for water a lot but we haven't got any." As for hygiene, the situation is "catastrophic", she says.

A lot of support groups that offered free showers have had to close — because staff have been told to stay at home or because the people using them are old and seen as vulnerable. Samusocial is recruiting to try to cope, in particular medical staff. It has set up a centre to receive homeless people suspected of having coronavirus and is asking for tests for everyone staying in shelters.

"Through our rounds, the feedback that we get, we see tensions are growing because people are seeing their system of resistance or resilience declining," Roy says. "Less begging is possible, access to food is more difficult, a lot of day centers are closed and so the tension is palpable among homeless people and migrants in transit as well." What is more, he said, police enforcing strict lockdown rules mean homeless people cannot even sit on street benches or rest in parks. "All these factors make them feel more threatened and so under more tension than before," he says. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Customer leaves \$10,000 tip

**MIAMI:** A customer left a \$10,000 tip to be divided among the employees of a Florida restaurant, a day before it was forced to close because of the coronavirus outbreak, the owner said. Ross Edlund, the owner of Skillet's in Naples, Florida, said on the restaurant's Facebook page on Thursday that the gesture shows there are still "truly fantastic people in the world." "We have an amazing Skillet's family that extends to our guests as well," Edlund said. "We couldn't be happier to be a part of a community where this type of generosity exists." Edlund told the local newspaper, the Naples Daily News, that the customer handed \$10,000 in cash to the manager of the restaurant last week, a day before the state's governor ordered the closure. "We don't know who he was yet," he said. "I'm trying to figure it out. It's funny because we have regulars who have been coming in forever, and they're our friends but we don't always know their names," he said. —AFP

#### Algeria arrests journalist

**ALGIERS:** An Algerian journalist was arrested on Friday, press freedom group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said, accusing the country's government of using the coronavirus crisis to crack down on independent media. Khaled Drareni, who serves as RSF's Algerian correspondent, has been arrested several times for covering "Hirak" anti-government protests that had been held in the capital Algiers every Friday since February 2019 until they were suspended last week. "This evening Algeria arrested our correspondent Khaled Drareni," said RSF's North Africa Twitter account on Friday. It went on to denounce the "the shameless use of COVID-19 by the Algerian regime to settle scores with free and independent journalism". The CNLD prisoners' rights group said Drareni had been taken to a police station and faced indictment. He was arrested on March 7 while covering a Hirak protest, accused of "inciting an unarmed gathering and damaging national integrity". He was then released on March 10. —AFP

#### Assad's phone conversation

**DAMASCUS:** President Bashar Al-Assad and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan spoke by phone Friday, state media reported, in the first such call since Syria's war began in 2011. Citing Syria's presidency, state news agency SANA reported "a phone conversation between President Assad and the crown prince of Abu Dhabi... based on the consequences of the spread of coronavirus". The crown prince assured Assad of the "UAE's support for the Syrian people during these exceptional circumstances", SANA said. Abu Dhabi's official news agency also reported the two men had held a conversation. "I have discussed with the Syrian president... updates on the coronavirus. I assured him of the support of the UAE and its willingness to help the Syrian people," Prince Mohammed said on Twitter. "Humanitarian solidarity during trying times supersedes all matters, and Syria and her people will not stand alone," he added. —AFP

#### China eases travel restrictions

**WUHAN:** The Chinese city of 11 million people that was Ground Zero for what became the global coronavirus pandemic partly reopened yesterday after more than two months of almost total isolation. Wuhan was placed under lockdown in January with residents forbidden to leave, roadblocks ring-fencing the city's outskirts and drastic restrictions on daily life. But the major transport and industrial hub has now signaled the end of its long isolation, with state media showing the first officially sanctioned passenger train arriving back into the city just after midnight. People are now allowed to enter but not leave, and many trains had been fully booked days in advance. —AFP

## International

# As US virus cases cross 100,000, docs decry scarcity of drugs and equipment

## US emerges virus hotspot as Trump invokes Defense Production Act

**NEW YORK:** Doctors and nurses on the front lines of the US coronavirus crisis pleaded on Friday for more protective gear and equipment to treat waves of patients expected to overwhelm hospitals as the sum of known US infections climbed well past 100,000, with more than 1,600 dead.

Physicians have called particular attention to a desperate need for additional ventilators, machines that help patients breathe and are widely needed for those suffering from COVID-19, the respiratory ailment caused by the highly contagious novel coronavirus.

Hospitals in New York City, New Orleans, Detroit and other virus hot spots have also sounded the alarm about scarcities of drugs, medical supplies and trained staff while the number of confirmed US cases rose by about 18,000 on Friday, the highest jump in a single day, to more than 103,000.

That tally kept the United States as the world leader in the number of known infections, having surpassed China and Italy on Thursday. "We are scared," said Dr. Arabia Mollette of Brookdale University Hospital and Medical Center in Brooklyn. "We're trying to fight for everyone else's life, but we also fight for our lives as well, because we're also at the highest risk of exposure."

The United States ranked sixth in death toll among the hardest hit countries, with at least 1,632 lives lost as of Friday night, a record daily increase of 370 according to a Reuters tabulation of official data. Worldwide, confirmed cases rose above 593,000 with 27,198

deaths, the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center reported.

Even as hospital patient numbers steadily climbed, shortages of key medical supplies abounded. One emergency room doctor in Michigan, an emerging epicenter of the pandemic, said he was using one paper face mask for an entire shift due to a shortage and that hospitals in the Detroit area would soon run out of ventilators.

"We have hospital systems here in the Detroit area in Michigan who are getting to the end of their supply of ventilators and have to start telling families that they can't save their loved ones because they don't have enough equipment," the physician, Dr. Rob Davidson, said in a video posted on Twitter.

**Death toll exceeds 1,600**

### Emergency powers

US President Donald Trump on Friday invoked emergency powers to require General Motors Co to start building ventilators after he accused the largest US automaker of "wasting time" during negotiations. He had previously resisted mounting calls for him to invoke the Defense Production Act, a Korean War-era statute that gives the president broad procurement powers in national emergencies, instead seeking to exert pressure on manufacturers to act voluntarily.

Sophia Thomas, a nurse practitioner at DePaul Community Health Center in New Orleans, where Mardi Gras celebrations late last month fueled an outbreak in Louisiana's largest city, said the numbers of coronavirus patients "have been staggering."

### Emergency powers

US President Donald



**WASHINGTON, DC:** US President Donald Trump gestures as he speaks during the daily briefing on the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, in the Brady Briefing Room at the White House on Friday. — AFP

"We are truly a hotbed of COVID-19 here in New Orleans," she said, adding that her hospital was trying to cope in part by shifting some patients to "telehealth" services that allow them to be evaluated from home.

New York-area doctors say they have had to recycle some protective gear, or resort to the black market. Dr. Alexander Salerno of Salerno Medical Associates, a general medical practice with offices in northern New Jersey, described going through a "broker" to pay \$17,000 for masks and other protective equipment that should have cost about \$2,500, and picking

them up at an abandoned warehouse.

"You don't get any names. You get just phone numbers to text," Salerno said. "And so you agree to a term. You wire the money to a bank account. They give you a time and an address to come to."

Nurses at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York said they were locking away or hiding N-95 respirator masks, surgical masks and other supplies that are prone to pilfering if left unattended. "Masks disappear," nurse Diana Torres said. "We hide it all in drawers in front of the nurses' station." — Reuters

## India's virus heroes come under attack

**NEW DELHI:** They have been hailed as India's coronavirus "heroes", but doctors, nurses, delivery drivers and other frontline workers have been attacked and in some cases evicted from their homes by panicked residents. Some e-commerce giants have even halted deliveries partly due to the harassment of staff, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi said abuse of hospital workers had become a "huge issue". Reports of attacks and abuse have come from across India, increasing with the imposition this week of a 21-day nationwide lockdown. In at least one case, police were accused of beating a delivery driver carrying medicines.

Sanjibani Panigrahi, a doctor in the western city of Surat, described how she was accosted as she returned home from a long day at a hospital that is treating COVID-19 patients. She said neighbors blocked her at the entrance to her apartment building and threatened "consequences" if she continued to work. "These are the same people who have happily interacted with me (in the past). Whenever they've faced a problem, I've helped them out," the 36-year-old told AFP. "There is a sense of fear among people. I do understand.

But it's like I suddenly became an untouchable."

This week, doctors at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences appealed to the government for help after health workers were forced out of their homes by panicked landlords and housing societies. "Many doctors are stranded on the roads with all their luggage, nowhere to go, across the country," the letter said. Modi called on Indians to stop treating medical workers as pariahs, describing those fighting the virus as "god-like". "Today they are the people who are saving us from dying, putting their lives in danger."

### Fake news and paranoia

Health workers are not the only ones facing the brunt of the frightened population in an environment where misinformation and rumors are thriving. Airline and airport staff, who are still being called on for evacuations of Indians stuck overseas and management of key cargo deliveries, have also been threatened.

Indigo and Air India have condemned threats made against their staff. An Air India flight attendant told AFP her neighbours threatened to evict her from her apartment while she was heading to the United States, saying she would "infect everyone". "I couldn't sleep that night," she said, afraid to reveal her name over fear of further stigmatisation. "I was scared that even if I did go home, would someone break open the door or call people to kick me out?" Her husband had to ask the police for help. — AFP

Saturday, and the Australian embassy said it was trying to negotiate a special flight. Other countries, including the United States, were trying to secure joint flights. Nepal's government estimates that about 10,000 people—from Europe, Australia, South Korea, the United States and India—are in far-flung places across the Himalayan nation, which halted all international flights last weekend.

About 200 trekkers were waiting at Everest base camp. The Nepal Tourism Board said 137 people were brought from high-altitude trekking trails on Thursday and taken to Kathmandu.

"I think people are starting to get a bit worried for the last few days with the lockdown and the news," said Elka Wallraf, a 30-year-old Belgian who had trekked to Everest base camp.

"We don't have information about a flight back to Belgium yet," added the teacher, who was stuck in the village of Phakding in the Khumbu region near Everest. "Our plans keep changing every minute because we don't know what is the best thing to do."

Wallraf said he hoped to get to Kathmandu to get on one of the evacuation planes. France and other governments organized local flights to get their nationals from remote towns to the Nepalese capital. Some hotels have given free rooms and meals to the stranded tourists. France and Germany are also negotiating charter flights to get their nationals out of India. — AFP

## Chinese asked to stay vigilant as virus cases slow

**SHANGHAI:** China's official media told people to stay on guard against the coronavirus yesterday, and restrictions on foreigners entering went into effect, as the country reported no new locally transmitted infections and a small drop in imported cases.

"At this time, we must be extremely vigilant and cautious, and we must prevent the post-epidemic relaxation from coming too soon, leading to the loss of all our achievements," the Communist Party's official People's Daily newspaper said in a front-page editorial.

The authorities also reversed planned reopenings of movie theatres, the state-owned China Securities Journal reported, citing sources. Reuters could not verify the existence of the National Film Administration's order to extend cinema closures, but a man answering the phone at a Wanda Cinemas theatre in Shanghai confirmed it had been ordered to close again.

Theatres in major cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing, remained closed, searches on an online ticketing platform showed. Most signs of official concern remain focused on the risk posed by so-called imported virus cases after widespread lockdowns within China helped to sharply reduce domestic transmissions. Effective Saturday, China has suspended the entry of foreign nationals with valid Chinese visas and residence permits.

Beijing has also ordered airlines to sharply



**WUHAN:** A woman wearing a face mask is seen at the railway station in Wuhan, China's central Hubei province yesterday after travelling restrictions into the city were eased following two months of lockdown due to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

cut international flights from Sunday.

### Death toll 3,295

China's National Health Commission said on Saturday that 54 new coronavirus cases were reported on the mainland on Friday, all involving so-called imported cases. There were 55 new cases a day earlier, one of which was transmitted locally. The total number of infections for mainland China now stands at 81,394, with the death toll rising by three to 3,295, the commission said.

Hubei province reported no new cases, and three new deaths. The province of 60 million, where the virus was first detected, has recorded 67,801 coronavirus cases and 3,177 deaths.

Shanghai reported the highest number of new cases, with 17. An additional 11 cases were reported in Guangdong, six in Fujian province, five in Tianjin, four in Zhejiang,

three each in Beijing and Liaoning, two each in Inner Mongolia and Jilin, and one in Shandong. Chinese President Xi Jinping told US President Donald Trump on Friday that China would support US efforts to fight the coronavirus. The number of confirmed cases of coronavirus in the United States rose by at least 16,000 on Friday to nearly 102,000, the most of any country.

In an interview with the journal Science published on Friday evening, George Gao, the director-general of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, urged people to wear masks to control the virus's spread overseas. "The big mistake in the US and Europe, in my opinion, is that people aren't wearing masks," Gao said. "Many people have asymptomatic or presymptomatic infections. If they are wearing face masks, it can prevent droplets that carry the virus from escaping and infecting others." — Reuters

## Emergency flights for stranded by virus in S Asia

**KATHMANDU:** Foreign governments on Friday stepped up operations to evacuate tens of thousands of tourists stranded by the coronavirus pandemic in remote locations across South Asia, from Everest base camp to beach hotels in Sri Lanka.

A plane chartered by Berlin took 304 people out of Kathmandu in the first of a series of flights aiming to ferry some 10,000 people from Nepal. Almost 17,000 tourists are stuck in Sri Lanka while tens of thousands of travellers and expatriates are in India, according to authorities in the two countries.

All have cut or virtually halted international flights over the past week in a bid to halt the spread of the deadly novel coronavirus. The plane that left Kathmandu on Friday was carrying Germans and other European nationals, Rajan Pokhrel, director general of Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority, told AFP. "Other countries are consulting us about evacuating their citizens," he added.

A second German flight was to leave

## In India, migrant workers walking home dial for help

**NEW DELHI:** The phone line in New Delhi cracked with the voice of Ravinder Singh, an Indian migrant worker desperately seeking help as a nationwide coronavirus lockdown leaves him and millions like him without food, shelter or transport.

With no way to earn a living and all public transport halted, India's army of migrant workers has been left stranded, with no choice but to undertake long journeys across the country to their homes on foot.

"Nobody thought of people like us, with small children, no money, no food and no way to get home," said Singh to Saajha Manch, a hotline migrant workers can call for advice.

"The disease is already killing people but we will die of hunger. How will we survive?" Tens of thousands of migrants are seeking help from hotlines like Saajha Manch, which is run by the social enterprise Gram Vani Community Media, even as they undertake the long, arduous journey back to their villages on foot. Callers leave a message that is picked up by staff who call them back with tailored advice.

Content manager Shweta Sharma said



**AMRITSAR:** Member of Parliament (MP) Gurjeet Singh Aujla (center right) and Amritsar Improvement Trust Chairman Dinesh Bassi (center left) clean a street during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, outside Amritsar Improvement Trust in Amritsar on Friday. — AFP

there had been a five-fold increase in the number of calls to the line, which is continuously putting out information on coronavirus. "We have also asked our regular callers to tell us exactly where they are stranded and what help they need," she said. "We are identifying the most urgent needs of the people, doing surveys and coordinating with the government."

India's prime minister announced a nationwide lockdown on Tuesday, seeking to curb the spread of the coronavirus in the country of 1.3 billion people, which has so far reported more than 700 confirmed cases and 13 deaths. Officials say the shut-

down of all but essential services is necessary to beat coronavirus in the densely populated country, whose health infrastructure can ill-afford a widespread outbreak.

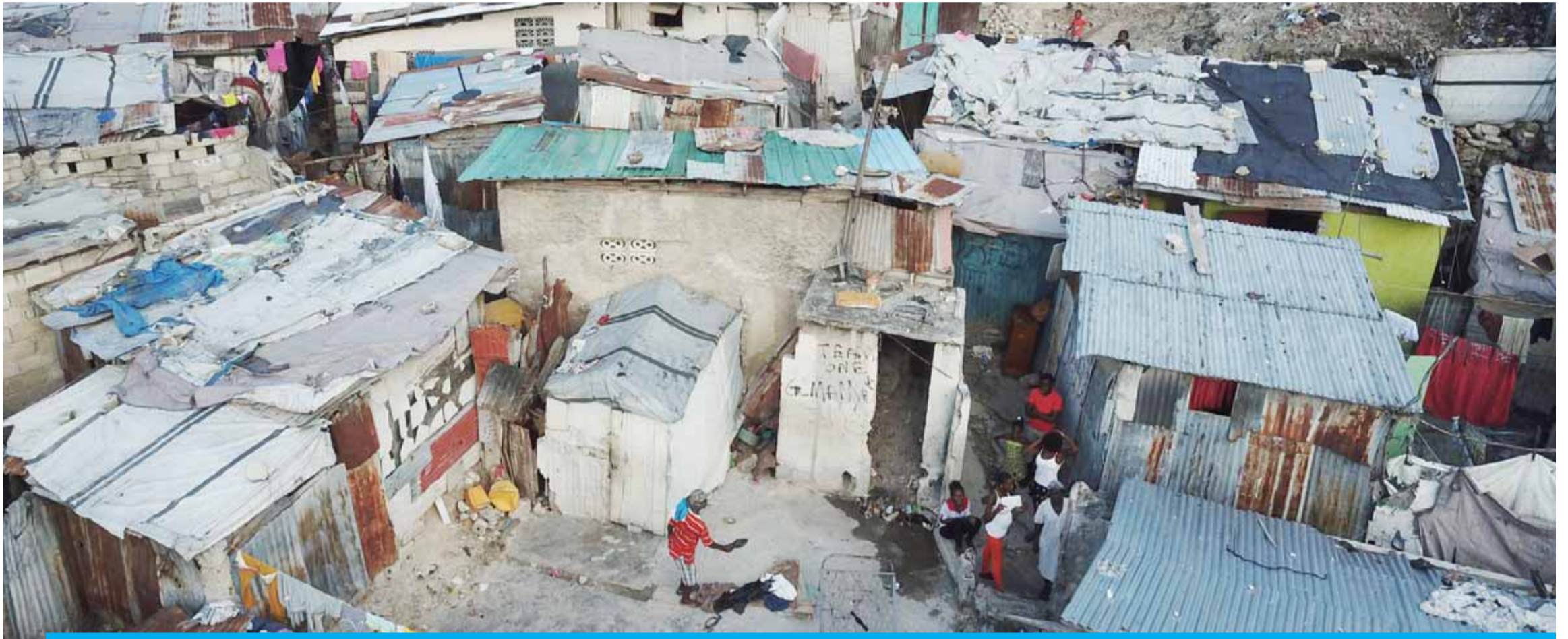
A \$22.6 billion economic stimulus plan provides for direct cash transfers and food security measures.

But many of India's estimated 120 million migrants simply cannot wait for the government to start rolling out those benefits. "In the absence of any assurance on wages, shelter or food, migrant workers had no choice but to hit the road," said Gayatri Menon, a sociology professor at the Azim Premji University in Bangalore. — Reuters



## Business

SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 2020

**10** Canada bolsters Main Street with wage subsidy amid virus outbreak**11** Huawei workers return after virus outbreak, but CEO sees financial hit**11** Small businesses become endangered in virus-hit NY

**PORT-AU-PRINCE:** This file aerial photo shows a view of the houses in the neighborhood of Fort National in Port-au-Prince. The coronavirus pandemic has driven the global economy into a downturn that will require massive funding to help developing nations, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said Friday. — AFP

# Clear we have entered recession: IMF

## World Bank, IMF urge debt relief for poorer countries hit by coronavirus

**WASHINGTON:** The coronavirus has already driven the global economy into recession and countries must respond with "very massive" spending to avoid a cascade of bankruptcies and emerging market debt defaults, the head of the International Monetary Fund warned on Friday.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said emerging market countries will need at least \$2.5 trillion in financial resources to get through the crisis, and their own internal reserves and market borrowing capacity will fall short of meeting this need.

"It is now clear that we have entered a recession as bad or worse than in 2009," Georgieva told a news conference, adding later that it will be "quite deep." But unlike the slow recovery from the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, she said there may be a "sizeable rebound" in 2021, "but only if we succeed with containing the virus everywhere and prevent liquidity problems from becoming a solvency issue."

The worst is yet to come for many emerging market countries, which she said have not yet been hit hard directly by the virus, but are suffering from capital outflows, reduced demand for their exports and a steep drop in commodity prices. The heads of the

World Bank and International Monetary Fund on Friday underscored the need to provide debt relief to poorer countries hit by the coronavirus pandemic, and said official bilateral creditors would have to play a major role.

The IMF and the World Bank have both launched emergency programs to offer grants and loans to member countries, with a heavy focus on developing countries and emerging markets, some of which are already in debt distress. They have also called on official bilateral creditors to provide immediate debt relief to the world's poorest countries.

"Poorer countries will take the hardest hit, especially ones that were already heavily indebted before the crisis," the World Bank's president, David Malpass, told the International Monetary and Financial Committee, the steering committee of the IMF.

"Many countries will need debt relief. This is the only way they can concentrate any new resources on fighting the pandemic and its economic and social consequences," he said, according to a text of his remarks.

Malpass said the bank had emergency operations under way in 60 countries, and its board was consid-

ering the first 25 projects valued at nearly \$2 billion under a \$14 billion fast-track facility to help fund immediate health-care needs.

The World Bank was also working with 35 countries to redirect existing resources to the pandemic, with almost \$1 billion of those projects already approved. Overall, the bank plans to spend \$160 billion over the next 15 months, he said.

So far, 81 countries have requested or inquired about emergency financing from the IMF, including 50 low-income countries and 31 middle-income countries, including Pakistan, Ghana, Iran and Kyrgyzstan, which was granted the first aid under the program late on Thursday.

Heavily-indebted Lebanon expressed interest in such financing, but has not made a formal request for funds, IMF officials said on Friday.

### Fast steps

Georgieva told Reuters in an interview that IMF member countries had encouraged the Fund to focus its efforts on steps that could be done quickly, including a doubling of emergency financing to \$100 billion and creation of a new short-term liquidity facility.

Asked whether the global economy needs more than the \$5 trillion in new rescue spending pledged by G20 countries on Thursday, Georgieva said: "Our advice is go big."

"This is a very big crisis and it's not going to be sorted out without a very massive deployment of resources," she said, noting that low interest rates made it easier for countries to provide significant fiscal support. The G20's \$5 trillion pledge is equal to what was spent in 2009 during the global financial crisis, although economists say this crisis could be far worse because it involves essentially large portions of the global economy.

### Crisis fund contribution

Georgieva welcomed a \$2.2 trillion aid package signed into law by President Donald Trump on Friday to cushion the blow to consumers and businesses—nearly triple the \$831 billion the United States spent on stimulus in 2009. The bill includes a \$38.5 billion contribution to a doubling of the IMF's crisis lending fund to \$500 billion. The expansion of the New Arrangements to Borrow was agreed by member countries last year. — Reuters

## Trump signs \$2 trillion recovery plan

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump signed into law Friday the \$2 trillion rescue plan to salvage a US economy crippled by the novel coronavirus, on a day the nation's total count of COVID-19 cases surpassed 100,000. Trump's signature brings an end to a dramatic, weeklong legislative saga on Capitol Hill and triggers the distribution of millions of relief checks of up to \$3,400 for an average American family of four.

Hours earlier lawmakers in the House of Representatives united to green-light the mega-plan as the number of recorded deaths from the virus hit 1,693. "I want to thank Democrats and Republicans for coming together and putting America first," Trump said.

"This will deliver urgently needed relief to our nation's families, workers and businesses. That's what this is all about," Trump signed a separate order late Friday allowing the Pentagon to bring former troops and members of the National Guard back to active duty to help the military combat the virus, the Washington Post said, citing a Pentagon spokesman.

The president also took the long-called-for step of invoking the Defense Production Act to compel auto giant General Motors to quickly



**WASHINGTON, DC:** (Left to right) US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, Vice President Mike Pence and Rep Kevin Brady applaud US President Donald Trump during a bill signing ceremony in the Oval Office of the White House on Friday in Washington, DC. — AFP

honor its commitment to making ventilators, machines crucial to keeping critically ill coronavirus patients alive but which are in short supply in hospitals.

"GM was wasting time," the president said. Nationwide the number of coronavirus cases surpassed 104,000. The need for medical supplies is acute in New York state, the US hotbed of the epidemic where 44,635 infections have been confirmed. The death toll there increased Friday to 519 — up from 385 the previous day—but Governor Andrew Cuomo expressed optimism that the

increase in the hospitalization rate has slowed.

Cuomo announced the creation of temporary hospitals at large facilities in each borough of New York City—including at a horse racing track in Queens—modeled on an already-constructed space in Manhattan's Javits Center. The national rescue bill pumps \$100 billion into hospitals and health facilities in critical need of medical gear like personal protective equipment and intensive care beds, creates a \$500 billion loan reserve for large corporations including airlines, and provides \$377 billion in grants to small businesses. —AFP

## Fitch downgrades UK debt to AA-, outlook negative

**WASHINGTON:** Fitch Ratings on Friday downgraded Britain's debt a notch and lowered the outlook to negative, citing the "significant weakening" of public finances and damage to the economy from the coronavirus pandemic.

"The coronavirus outbreak has inflicted an unprecedented shock on financial markets and economic activity, with policymakers struggling to avert a longer-lasting downturn," Fitch said in a statement.

In addition, lingering uncertainty over Brexit and the "uncertainty around the future trade relationship with the EU could constrain the strength of the post-crisis economic recovery." Fitch estimated the British economy could contract by four percent this year due to the nationwide shutdowns implemented to halt the spread of the virus, followed by a sharp recovery in 2021.

However, that forecast is subject to "material downside risk" and depends on the duration of the lockdowns. Even before the virus hit, the nation's finances were already set to weaken and "they are now set to deteriorate more rapidly," Fitch said. The outlook for the country's debt rating was dropped due to the view that the British government will not see it as "a political priority" to tighten up its finances after this year. —AFP

## Business

# Canada bolsters Main Street with wage subsidy amid virus outbreak

## Govt allows C\$95 billion for small, medium businesses

TORONTO/OTTAWA: Canada said on Friday it will cover 75 percent of wages for small businesses and the central bank cut its key interest rate to the lowest level in a decade, as officials sought to limit layoffs and bolster an economy hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

The support for small and medium businesses - C\$95 billion in direct support and deferred taxes - is aimed at stemming job losses across the country. The government plans other measures to support the ailing energy, airline and tourism industries. "Our govern-

The wage subsidy, raised from 10 percent, is retroactive to March 15. Trudeau said he hoped businesses would hire back workers previously laid off. More than half a million Canadians applied for jobless benefits last week alone. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce said the new wage subsidy was "a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of small businesses and millions of employees."

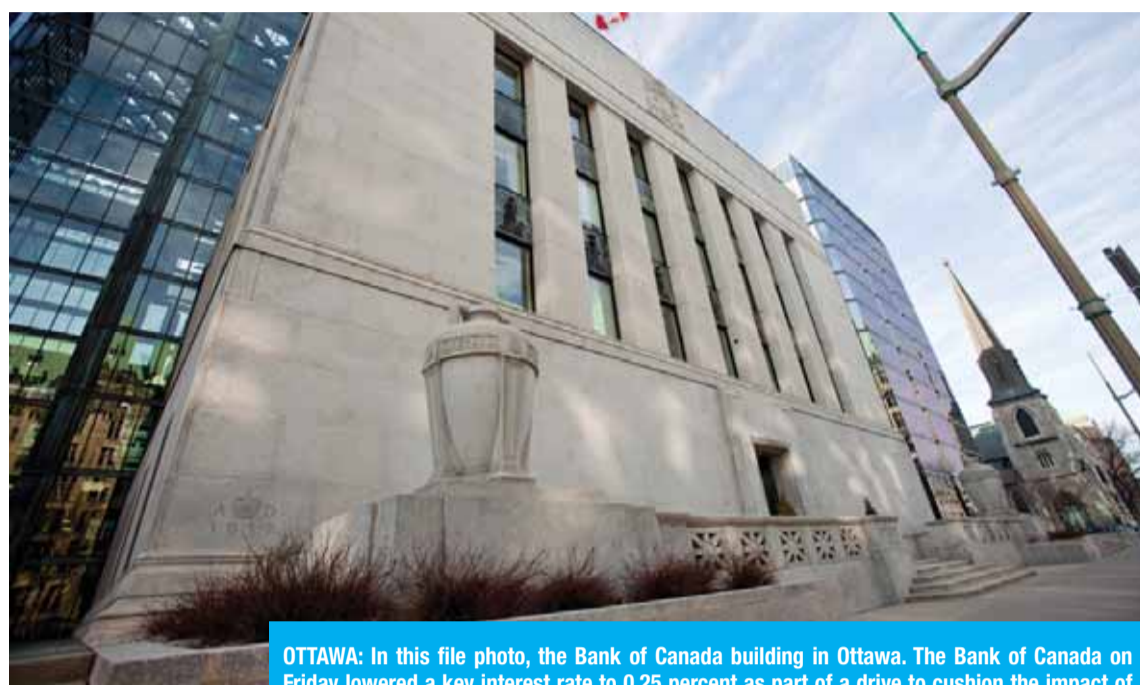
Canada reported 4,689 coronavirus cases and 53 deaths. Earlier, the Bank of Canada unexpectedly cut its overnight interest rate by 50 basis points to 0.25 percent, its lowest level since June 2010. It was the third cut in March. The central bank launched what observers called its first-ever quantitative easing program, saying it would buy government and commercial debt.

"A firefighter has never been criticized for using too much water," Bank of Canada Governor Stephen Poloz said after the rate cut was announced. Separately, Canada's financial regulator eased its capital and liquidity requirements for banks, changed credit loss provisioning and allowed more loans to be securitized.

### "Full plunge"

Canada's parliament this week approved a C\$52 billion (\$37 billion) financial package to support the economy and Canadians left without work. While Poloz said the bank stands ready to "take further action as required," he said it does not believe it would be sensible for interest rates to go lower.

The Canadian dollar strengthened to a 10-day high. Canada's main stock market resumed its slide after a three-day winning run, and domestic bond yields plunged as investors grew more nervous about the



OTTAWA: In this file photo, the Bank of Canada building in Ottawa. The Bank of Canada on Friday lowered a key interest rate to 0.25 percent as part of a drive to cushion the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

spread of the coronavirus. Poloz, who is set to retire in June, said the asset purchase program is aimed at improving the "functionality" of financial markets. He said negative interest rates are an available tool, but he did not think they were suitable.

The central bank launched the Commercial Paper Purchase Program to help alleviate strains in short-

term funding markets. It will begin with purchases of C\$5 billion of Government of Canada securities per week, across the yield curve.

The quantitative easing "was sorely needed and we expect that we will see probably more QE announced within the next quarter," said Andrew Kelvin, senior rates strategist at TD Securities. — Reuters



### Central bank cuts rates

ment knows you're really feeling the impacts of this pandemic especially with the end of the month coming up," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in his daily address. "So here's what we're going to do to take some of that pressure off."

Measures include one-year, interest-free loans, an additional \$12.5 billion in funding via the country's business and export development banks, and delays in duties and tax payments to help boost cash liquidity.



The price of a pound of orange juice soared by more than a fifth to strike a one-year peak of 122 cents on Thursday in New York, where the commodity is traded, before paring some of its gains. — AFP

## Virus squeezes pips out of orange juice market

LONDON: Coronavirus is squeezing the pips out of the orange juice market, with prices surging this week as consumers hope the vitamin C-rich drink will help fight the disease, analysts say.

The price of a pound of orange juice soared by more than a fifth to strike a one-year peak of 122 cents on Thursday in New York, where the commodity is traded, before paring some of its gains.

"Both demand and supply factors are contributing to the upward squeeze on orange juice markets," AxiCorp analyst Stephen Innes told AFP. "Orange juice has been in huge demand due to its immune enhancing properties to ward off the 'flu.' But this demand bounce has been compounded by two supply constraints."

Innes added that the global shutdown in world aviation, as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, had imposed supply constraints on the market. At the same time, virus-linked lockdowns around the world and changing labor practices meant that there were fewer fruit pickers available to pick oranges.

"Due to the airline shutdown there are few available cargo tankers to bring oranges and pulp to markets, while social distancing practices in orange

groves around the world see fewer pickers taking to the field," Innes said. "There's been a surge in spot prices that are now funneling their way through futures markets this week. The more prolonged the lockdown scenario, the more beneficial to orange juice prices, presumably."

Francois Sonnevile, commodity analyst at Rabobank, added that OJ demand traditionally spikes when there is a bad outbreak of influenza. "This is not an uncommon reaction during outbreaks of 'flu as the demand side is impacted by consumers selecting healthier drink," Sonnevile told AFP.

"There is a lot of debate whether orange juice is healthy of course, driven by its high amount of natural sugars, but vitamin C has been shown to strengthen the immune system.

"Of course, COVID-19 is different from other 'flu outbreaks, but we too have a bottle of orange juice in our fridge—we are not medics in our household, but extra vitamin C cannot hurt," Sonnevile also noted that most orange juice trade flows into Europe and the rest of the world come from Brazil, but some premium products originate from elsewhere—including Spain. — AFP

ensure the quick production of ventilators that will save American lives." At a later White House press conference he added that the decision "should demonstrate clearly that we will not hesitate to use the full authority of the federal government to combat this crisis."

He also announced that Peter Navarro, a top White House advisor formerly at the forefront of Washington's trade dispute with China, will now coordinate further initiatives under the DPA.

### Tweet pressure

Earlier in the day Trump demanded in a tweet that both GM and rival Ford move quickly on fabricating ventilators, essential to help seriously ill coronavirus patients breathe.



## Trump orders GM to produce ventilators

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump issued a federal order Friday to force auto giant General Motors to manufacture ventilators, as supplies of the crucial hospital equipment grow short and coronavirus infections mount across the country. Trump invoked the rarely-used Defense Production Act (DPA) to order GM to speed up its commitment to make ventilators in one of its auto plants after delays in negotiations.

The act, designed for use in wartime to commandeer private business to manufacture for defense needs, will allow the White House to require that GM "accept, perform, and prioritize federal contracts for ventilators," Trump said in a statement. Negotiations had been "productive," he said, "but our fight against the virus is too urgent to allow the give-and-take of the contracting process to continue to run its normal course."

"GM was wasting time. Today's action will help

## Apple factories are running amid demand worries

BEIJING: As China reopens its economy after months of lockdown, Apple Inc's iPhone factories are largely up and running. But with the coronavirus pandemic spreading across the world, the urgent question for the company is how many buyers there will be both for current models and the new slate of phones expected in the fall.

A senior official at one of Apple's major contract assemblers said Apple's orders for the quarter ending in March are likely to drop 18 percent compared with the previous year. The production ramp-up for new phones that work with next-generation 5G networks has been postponed, this person said, though it is still possible the 5G phones could launch as scheduled in the fall.

"No one is talking about manpower or material shortage (in China) anymore. Now everyone is looking at whether demand from US and Europe could keep up," said the person, who has direct knowledge of the matter. "The focus now is the demand from consumers in the US and Europe."

One of Apple's key display suppliers is preparing for a similar level of contraction, according to a person familiar

the matter. The company had anticipated shipping 70 million iPhone displays this year, but is now considering lowering that target by more than 17 percent to 58 million units.

The company is also planning to reduce the workforce at its Apple-designated production lines in its Vietnam factory, where displays are assembled before heading to China to be put into phones, this person said.

Apple declined to comment for this story. Earlier this month, the company closed retail stores around the world even as it began to reopen outlets in China. With much of Europe and the United States on lockdown and unemployment soaring globally, there is little clarity on when demand might return. The company could also yet face further supply chain problems as countries including Malaysia and Vietnam impose new restrictions to combat the coronavirus. "Things are changing on a day by day basis due to supply chain disruptions, so it is difficult to craft any meaningful comment at the moment about both supply and demand," said an official at one supplier in Malaysia. — Reuters



NEW YORK: A view of the Apple store on Fifth Avenue as the coronavirus continues to spread across the United States on Friday in New York City. — AFP

GM quickly answered back that it had a deal with medical equipment maker Ventec Life Systems to build the critical care equipment in its Kokomo, Indiana, auto plant, and would likely be able to begin shipping next month. But the White House was apparently dissatisfied with the company's response and moved to invoke the DPA about four hours later.

GM said in a statement after Trump's announcement that they were already taking action.

"Ventec, GM and our supply base have been working around the clock for over a week to meet this urgent need," the company said. "Our commitment to build Ventec's high-quality critical care ventilator, VOCSN, has never wavered."

According to The New York Times, the White House had planned earlier this week to announce the GM-Ventec deal, but it reportedly ran into problems because of a projected \$1 billion cost for retooling an auto plant for production. With no deal to announce, Trump then lashed out against GM and Ford on Twitter Friday morning. "General Motors MUST immediately open their stupidly abandoned Lordstown plant in Ohio, or some other plant, and START MAKING VENTILATORS, NOW!!!!!!!" Trump tweeted. — AFP

## Hedge funds are pouncing on companies

NEW YORK: Hedge funds have lost billions of dollars as coronavirus has stalled the economy and sent Wall Street into a tailspin. But the financial institutions favored by the world's richest investors are plotting a recovery by betting on the markets' slump.

US-based hedge funds are aiming to persuade clients that the current economic crisis and the uncertainties in fact present a unique investment opportunity, according to letters sent to clients viewed by AFP. In their discussions with current investors and potential new clients, some of these funds are emphasizing that stocks, corporate bonds and commodities have not been as cheap since the 2008 global financial crisis, according to sources close to the institutions.

"We only take new capital when we see opportunity on the markets," a source at The Baupost Group hedge fund said in an interview, speaking on condition of anonymity.

For the first time since 2011, Baupost is asking clients for more money to buy aggressively, and recently put \$1.5 billion into depressed assets. A spokesperson for the fund declined to comment.

### High risk

Hedge funds are eyeing both publicly traded firms and unlisted companies short on cash, with the assumption that massive government stimulus packages, like the \$2.2 trillion approved Friday, will revive markets and the economy at large. King Street Capital said in its pitch that it is looking for "high-quality companies that have seen their bonds or loans caught up in the sell-off."

Billionaire Kenneth Griffin was one of the first to warn of the COVID-19 outbreak's dangers, and his hedge fund Citadel has gone so far as to create a specific investment vehicle for assets battered by the virus fallout. Named the Citadel Relative Value Fixed Income Fund, the vehicle is positioned to allow Citadel to take advantage of the current volatility, according to a stock market filing, a change from the financial crisis in 2008 when the fund's flagship investments posted losses of 55 percent.

"It's not a Chinese health crisis; it is a global health crisis," Griffin said of the new coronavirus in an early February speech to The Economic Club of New York.

The virus, he warned, is "probably the most concrete short-run risk we see in the financial markets globally."

### Big gains

Economists now expect the pandemic, which has killed upwards of 25,000 people worldwide, to lead to a global recession. In fact the International Monetary Fund said it is already happening. Some of the most vital sectors of the economy are now in dire straits: airlines are on their knees and will get a bailout, though perhaps not as large as they wanted, while hotels and restaurants have laid off workers in droves and shale oil companies are in agony. The S&P Global Ratings agency now expects the rate of defaults among US companies in financial difficulty to more than triple in the next 12 months to 10 percent from 3.1 percent last December. Saba Capital Management views this as a welcome development. — AFP

## Business

# Huawei workers return after virus outbreak, but CEO sees financial hit

## Zhengfei says company will likely meet new financial goals

BEIJING: Most employees at Huawei Technologies Co are back at work following the coronavirus outbreak, though the pandemic is likely to hit the Chinese telecom giant's financial results this year, the company's chief executive said.

Ren Zhengfei, who is also Huawei's founder, also told The Wall Street Journal in an interview Wednesday that the company plans to boost its research and development budget this year by \$5.8 billion to more than \$20 billion. Huawei, like all global companies, is coping with the fallout of the coronavirus outbreak, which is curbing economic activity around the world. Ren said Shenzhen-based Huawei resumed some operations beginning Feb. 3,

carry on business. He added that the company has been helping hard-hit suppliers, including with medical supplies.

"For a large number of international contracts, you don't need to send people into the field," he said. "Even in light of the current situation we can still manage to grow our revenue from our businesses."

The outbreak has also caused the company to lower its financial targets for the year, Mr. Ren said, though the specifics won't be clear until next month. Already, smartphone sales are falling outside of China, he said, although the decline has been offset by strong domestic sales. Globally, Huawei is selling about 22 million units a month, a slight rise over last year's pace.

China is slowly returning to work after nationwide closures following the novel coronavirus outbreak, which began late December. The pandemic is just the latest obstacle for Huawei, the world's largest maker of telecom equipment and No 2 smartphone vendor, which has been fighting an avalanche of attacks from the Trump administration. US officials have pressured allies not to buy the Chinese company's 5G equipment. Last month, US prosecutors unveiled new charges against the company, including racketeering and technology theft, which the company is contesting.

"We certainly will defend our position against the US charges," Ren said. "It's simply not a fact that whatever they say counts." The renewed R&D push will likely help Huawei cut its dependence on US technology, after the Trump administration blocked its access to some key suppliers,



Huawei CEO Ren Zhengfei

such as Alphabet Inc.'s Google, which had supplied crucial software no longer available on Huawei phones. Washington argues Huawei's telecom gear can be used by the Chinese government for eavesdropping or disrupting telecom networks. Huawei says it would never spy on behalf of any government.

Ren said he was confident Huawei would reach its new, downwardly adjusted financial goals for this year, despite the US campaign and the coronavirus that is prompting a seize-up in global economic activity. The company previously said its revenue last year rose about 18 percent to \$122 billion. Ren Wednesday said Huawei also saw a jump in net profits. The company is due to report audited financial results for 2019 by the end of the month.

"That simply proves the trust the kind of trust that our customers place in Huawei—the kind of trust that has not been affected by the US campaign

against Huawei," he said. One area of trouble is the company's smartphone business. Though they are virtually unavailable in the US, Huawei handsets are top sellers in places like Europe, China and the Middle East, surpassing Apple Inc. in shipments globally and trailing only Samsung Electronics Co.

Huawei's US blacklisting means that the company's latest smartphones are locked out of Google's mobile software, depriving the devices the day-to-day apps and services that handset users outside of China rely on. The company is working to plug the hole by building its stable of apps, though Ren acknowledged that smartphone sales are declining in markets outside of China.

"In markets outside of China, we don't see significant growth," he said. "We are taking measures to address that."

Despite the restart of most of its business, some locations where Huawei operates remain on lockdown. One Huawei office in Wuhan, the center of the coronavirus outbreak, employs about 8,000 people, mostly in R&D functions. It remains largely closed even though Chinese authorities have begun lifting movement restrictions on residents in Wuhan's province.

However, Ren said he is optimistic that the outbreak could lead to increased demand for information-technology products amid a boost in network usage, as more people work and meet remotely. "After this pandemic is over, I think people would even more obviously see the value" of Huawei products, he said. "There is a possibility of accelerated demand in the network rollout, so it is a concern that we might not have enough capacity to supply."



R&D budget this year to be more than \$20 billion

losing little production time and in line with a government ruling that allowed some critical industries to restart early despite a broader work stoppage.

More than 90 percent of its approximate 150,000 China-based workforce is now back to work, though workers have cut overseas travel and increased their reliance on remote conferencing to



## Ooredoo Kuwait gifts Mothers at Jaber Hospital

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait: the first to launch innovative digital services in Kuwait gifted all mothers under health quarantine and the medical staff treating them at Sheikh Jaber Hospital on the occasion of Mother's Day. This stems from the company's Corporate Social Responsibility and a continuation of its efforts during the COVID-19 situation and its commitment to supporting the Government and its entities.

Commenting on this initiative, Ooredoo Kuwait's Corporate Communications Senior Director Mijbil Al-Ayoub noted that this initiative is in alignment with the Company's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy to support the society at all times throughout the year, and across all sectors. This has been Ooredoo Kuwait's strategy since day one, and the company is committed to provide society and the nation with all the support needed under any circumstances.

Al-Ayoub added "We provided our hardworking



Mijbil Al-Ayoub

brothers and sisters who worked in the frontlines during this difficult situation free internet valid for one month since the beginning of March. And today, we join together to continue this journey as we are keen to celebrate Mother's Day with our daughters, sisters, and mothers who are working day and night to care for the patients infected with COVID-19, especially at Jaber Hospital. This is a humble gesture compared to the great roles they are playing to protect and serve our beloved Kuwait, and we are proud of each and every one of them.

The two companies are emblematic of the small and medium-sized businesses that are considered most at risk as officials in New York City and other jurisdictions shutter economic activity in an effort to try to limit the deadly contagion.

### Too late for relief?

The crisis has fundamentally transformed business conditions for just about every US company, darkening Apple's stores, halting auto production at General Motors factories and fueling massive demand for grocers, e-commerce delivery services and companies that manufacture toilet paper and hand sanitizer. But non-public companies are viewed as an especially vulnerable node in the American economy because they typically lack the access to capital of bigger outfits.

The \$2 trillion relief bill signed into law Friday boosts unemployment compensation and provides \$350 billion in forgivable loans to cover small business payroll and overhead, including the rehiring of laid-off workers. Officials from the Trump administration have said the money will be available immediately, but experts are skeptical that banks have enough staff to process the loans quickly, or that the Small Business Administration will be able to ramp up fast enough in a country of 330 million people.

## Small businesses are endangered in virus-hit NY

NEW YORK: As New York becomes the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States, even die-hard businesses are shutting down in the so-called "city that never sleeps." The losses add to the economic toll from the crisis in the US, which is fighting the largest coronavirus outbreak anywhere, causing a record spike in unemployment claims and posing special risks for small businesses.

Biscuits & Bath, a dog daycare and boarding company, announced Friday that it will temporarily shut down and lay off most of its remaining employees.

"We believe this is the best and only way to keep everyone safe," Biscuits & Bath owner Scott Smith said in a letter to clients. Gaetano Arnone, executive chef at Otto Enoteca, briefly revamped the restaurant into a delivery-only operation before pulling the plug.

"Last night we did \$400," Arnone said by telephone Friday. "It's just not enough to keep everyone employed and safe."



Khaled Saleh Al-Assoussi

## KOTC to ensure remote working solutions

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) yesterday announced that it will implement remote working solutions by leveraging modern and secure platforms such as Microsoft 365 including Microsoft Teams. The move will enable KOTC to continue running its mission critical operations while ensuring the health and safety of its workforce.

"We are taking all the required measures to ensure health and safety of our employees while fostering an environment to ensure business continuity in serving our customers during these challenging times," said Khaled Saleh Al-Assoussi, Deputy CEO Financial Affairs & Administration, KOTC. "We believe technology plays a major role in this effort. By implementing remote working solutions and leveraging platforms like Microsoft Teams, we are taking a leap forward in not only ensuring the well-being of our workforce, but also creating the future workplace that keeps our people and processes sustained together."

KOTC will leverage Microsoft Teams, a collaboration & productivity tool that will empower its employees to chat, meet, call, and collaborate seamlessly in one place. Cloud-based identity and access management solutions such as Azure Active Directory will enable secure sign-in and protect users from evolving threats while delivering a complete and intelligent workplace.

"The health and safety of employees, customers, partners and communities is a top priority for us at Microsoft, and we will continue our efforts to enable them with solutions to collaborate from anywhere at any time," said Alaeddine Karim, Country Manager, Microsoft Kuwait. "As companies like KOTC are moving to remote work environment, we are committed to empower their workforce with tools to stay connected and become a true modern workplace that can achieve more."

"Small business needed assistance not today, not yesterday, they needed it two weeks ago," said Adam Levitin, a Georgetown Law School professor specializing in bankruptcy.

"Until we have some sense of when the virus will be contained, there will be too much disruption for small businesses to really get back on their feet and operate normally."

### Adjustments

In New York, the coronavirus hit to the economy has been like a boulder that gets bigger as it rolls ever-faster downhill, leveling more of the city's stores and services.

Biscuits & Bath marketing and sales manager David Maher said the company was committed to providing service. It had been categorized by New York State as an "essential business" because it was caring for dogs of hospital workers and first responders, as well as coronavirus patients under quarantine who need their dogs walked.

"If I'm a doctor or nurse and... I'm cleaning up pee and poop and a mess, that's going to add to my stress and make me less effective at my job," Maher said, as a persistent basset hound led a yapping chorus behind him. But Maher also said the company was calculating daily costs and revenues in New York's

## stc keeps all channels available 24/7

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that to ensure the health and safety of both customers and employees, the Company has activated its precautionary measures as part of its business continuity plan to maintain and assure key operations and customer support channels. In compliance with the Kuwaiti government's rigorous and effective plan to battle the current conditions, stc has adjusted its operations in accordance with social distancing, encouraging customers to stay at home and fulfill their telecom needs online or by phone.

Utilizing its digital transformation framework, stc's highly secured systems allow employees to work remotely while maintaining all existing communication channels with customers to meet and exceed their expectations. The Company has also expanded its network capabilities, allowing a seamless and interruption-free experience, catering to the current situation. To ensure the highest safety standards, customers are encouraged to take advantage of stc's digital channels, online resources and innovative platforms during this challenging time.

For online assistance, customers can visit stc's website (www.stc.com.kw) which includes a live chat option with agents on standby to answer any customer queries. Customers are offered certain attractive offers only available via stc digital platforms and are also able to purchase the latest smartphones and other electronic devices through stc's E-Store which now offers a 3-hour door-to-door delivery service. stc's mobile application "mystc", available on the App store (for IOS devices) and Google Play store (for Android devices), offers a variety of services that customers can utilize during this time, which include viewing and paying bills, SIMs delivery, recharge and balance transfer, special offers for prepaid customers and access to detailed voice and data usage statistics. stc's call center will continue to provide customers with 24/7 assistance during this period through the 102 customer service hotline.

deteriorating conditions. By Friday, they realized they couldn't go on. "We had no other choice," Maher said. He and his colleagues had begun offering clients alternative lodging. The company had already trimmed headcount in half to about 110, but the latest move will leave staff at 37, Maher said.

Otto, part of celebrity restaurateur Joe Bastianich's empire, had in recent weeks seen a steep drop-off in reservations even before New York City shut restaurants for dining but permitted takeout.

"You saw reservations dropping and dropping and dropping... It's like watching the stock market," Arnone said this week from the quiet restaurant. Arnone's wife lost her job with a Manhattan hotel-another hard-hit industry. The couple had been on his wife's company healthcare plan, a typical arrangement in the US. Having already laid off most of its 45 staff, Arnone pared the menu at the Washington Square spot down to hearty pastas and pizzas, "comfort food" for a stressed-out moment.

But after three days, Arnone concluded the plan was unworkable.

"I just can't sustain it," he said Friday, adding that his immediate plans include filing for unemployment benefits, staying home with his wife and joining volunteer motorcyclists ferrying medical equipment to hospitals. —AFP

# Shortages hamper virus testing goals

**PARIS:** "Test, test, test". The World Health Organization's prescription for success in wrestling the new coronavirus pandemic under control may seem simple. So why are so few countries able to follow it?

While nations like South Korea have been praised for their decisive efforts to control the spread of the virus with mass screening, experts say many other countries have been unable to emulate their approach. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus acknowledged this on Monday, saying that the organization recognized that "some countries are struggling with the capacity to carry out these offensive measures".

But his message remains the same: "To win, we need to attack the virus with aggressive and targeted tactics—testing every suspected case, isolating and caring for every confirmed case, and tracing and quarantining every close contact."

Existing tests, called RT-PCR, are designed to detect the virus in respiratory specimens from nasal or oral swabs, based on genetic analysis. The results can be ready within hours. But testing levels have diverged widely across the world.

"It all depends on the level of development of the countries," Antoine Flahault, a specialist in public health and epidemiology at the University of Geneva, told AFP. South Korea at one point was the country hardest-hit by the virus outside China.

It responded with a massive screening campaign, carrying out around 300,000 tests. Authorities quarantined infected people and combined that with an ambitious tracing program that tracked down people they had been in contact with using video surveillance, bank card usage and via smartphone.

As a result of these efforts, new cases have fallen below 100 a day. This aggressive testing strategy has also paid off in Singapore, although the city-state this week announced a month-long shutdown of bars and banned mass gatherings. Both countries have largely avoided the large-scale lockdown measures currently in place in many other countries, with related concerns over economic and social consequences.

## Shortages

European countries have not tested to the same extent as South Korea, often focusing on people admitted to hospital with severe symptoms. Flahault said the issue was less a lack of will to test, and more a shortage of the materials needed.

"For countries like France and Switzerland, the problem in recent days has been more that of the availability of reagents (substances used in chemical testing process) than machines or human resources," he said. Why haven't South Korea and Singapore encountered the same difficulties? French virologist Anne Goffard said they had drawn on their experience facing other epidemics caused by different coronaviruses—namely SARS, which emerged in 2002, and MERS a decade later.

## Better equipped

This has enabled them to be better prepared and equipped, she told AFP, adding that many European countries would have to assess their manufacturing capacity in the future. Germany, which has the capacity to carry out some 160,000 tests per week "appears to be more autonomous", she added. In poorer nations, the barrier to testing is even higher.

In the Philippines, infectious disease specialist Edsel Salvana has said testing potentially diverts scant resources away from other vital expenditure, like personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers. In comments on Twitter on Tuesday, he was scathing about the focus on testing—"WHO this is CRIMINAL"—and urged a more nuanced approach for resource-stretched nations.

"I admire what South Korea did and I would do that if we had as much money and resources. But we don't, and my colleagues are wearing trash bags for PPE," he said.

## Must 'vastly expand' testing

After it failed to test extensively at the beginning of its outbreak, France now plans to carry out mass screening at the end of the tough confinement measures it has implemented to try and halt the



Existing tests, called RT-PCR, are designed to detect the virus in respiratory specimens from nasal or oral swabs, based on genetic analysis. — AFP

spread of the virus. This could be facilitated by new kinds of tests, known as serological screening.

This process tests blood samples for the presence of antibodies associated with certain viruses or bacteria. It is used to find out if a person's immune system has reacted to a virus and has potentially built up immunity. Several teams around the world are developing serology tests for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 and French health minister Olivier Veran has said he hopes they will be available within weeks.

## So which approach is the best?

In an analysis published by the Washington Post, US epidemiologist Marc Lipsitch said: "The best strategy depends critically on which stage of the outbreak you are in and how much testing is available." He added that countries like the US had passed the point of being able to trace individual cases. But he said even when tough lockdown measures would be needed to wrestle the epidemic under control, "we must vastly expand our testing capacity". — AFP

CLINIC  
PAGE

248 33 199

### OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY

These services include, but are not limited to, the below:

- Advanced Laparoscopic surgery
- Gynecological Plastic Surgery
- Advanced Hysteroscopic surgery
- Screening of cervical cancer (Pap smear test)
- Genital tract infections
- Treatment of menopause symptoms
- Diagnosis and treatment of infertility
- Various contraceptives
- Treatment of polycystic ovaries
- Urinary problems
- Pregnancy antenatal care
- All normal and caesarean deliveries

1808088 taibahospital.com  
@taibahospital

### OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY

Dr. Maged Gohar  
Specialist of Obstetrics & Gynecology

Dr. Ibrahim Aboelmaged  
Specialist of Obstetrics & Gynecology

Dr. Fatimah Al-Hadhoud  
Specialist of Obstetrics & Gynecology

Dr. Haya Ahmad Alkhdher  
Specialist of Obstetrics & Gynecology

Dr. Jonajane Qutain  
Obstetrics & Gynecology Doctor

Dr. Nermin Geigis  
Obstetrics & Gynecology Doctor

1808088 taibahospital.com  
@taibahospital

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @hadclinckw

Tel: 1828282  
Whatsapp Us  
+965-6000 2184

Dr. Rany Essam Mitwally  
Senior Registrar

Dr. Ahmed Hosni Abd Elhamid  
Consultant

Dr. Abeer Khattab  
Specialist

Ophthalmology Services

Cataract Surgery

Glaucoma

Retina

General Ophthalmology

Follow-Up All Treatments

To advertise on this Page

Call: 24833199 ext:101,102

To advertise on this Page

Call: 24833199 ext:101,102 or Direct line: 24835616 / 24835617  
or email: ads@kuwaittimes.com

WELCOME

Dr Tammam Abou Ali

Consultant ENT, Head & Neck, Facial Plastic Surgeon.

Fellowship of the royal college of surgeons in UK and Ireland.  
15 years work experience in Eilat Hospital, Eilat, Israel.  
Ex Head of ENT department in Farwaniya Hospital, MOH Kuwait  
10 years work experience in UK and Ireland.

- Endoscopic Sinus Surgery
- Septoplasty and turbinate reduction surgery by laser or RF
- Snoring and OSAP Surgery
- Rhinoplasty with open and closed techniques
- Microscopic Middle Ear Surgery and Tympanoplasty
- Salivary gland and parotid surgery
- Thyroid and parathyroid surgery
- Micro laryngeal surgery

1 888 883

www.qmc-kuwait.com

qmckuwait

Our Doctors Provide care For the entire Family

Book your appointments today!

Dr. Kiran Turaka  
Ophthalmologist

Dr. Zareena Zahir  
Ophthalmologist

Dr. Hasan Khan  
Senior Cardiologist

Dr. P. Seshendra Nath  
Orthopedic Consultant (AUSTRIA)  
Specialised in Neck, Shoulder Hip and Knee

50721507  
24551555

EXIR MEDICAL SUBSPECIALITIES CENTER

Block No.4 Jahra - Kuwait

WE ACCEPT ALL MAJOR INSURANCES

Tel : 24568857 / 24568859 info@exircenterkw.com www.exircenterkw.com

# CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times  
248 33 199

**DR. MOHAMMAD AL HAJRY**  
Canadian Board of Otolaryngology  
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics.  
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada  
A rare Subspecialty in Microscopic Ear Surgery, Cochlear implant & Ear diseases

- Diagnosis/Treatment of General Ears, Nose, and Throat conditions in adults & pediatric
- Minimally Invasive Endoscopic sinus surgery including Balloon sinuplasty
- Minimally Invasive Microscopic & Endoscopic Ear surgery
- Diagnosis & treatment of Otolaryngology (Hearing loss, Tinnitus & balance disorders)
- Facial Plastic and reconstructive surgeries (Rhinoplasty, Otoplasty, Fillers & Botox injections)
- Diagnosis & treatment of snoring & obstructive sleep apnea in clinic without surgery
- Diagnosis & Treatment of voice and swallowing disorders.
- Diagnosis & Treatment of Head and Neck benign & malignant tumors.

**Salmiya, Belajat Street, Tel: 1881122**

@Malhajry

**DR. FAHAD S BUHAIMED**  
Consultant Cosmetic Dermatologist & Hair Transplant, NY

**ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:**

- Dermatology board certified.
- Fellowship training program in cosmetic dermatology and hair transplant, New York, USA.
- Member of American cosmetic dermatology society.
- Referee reviewer of International journal of Dermatology.

**SPECIALIZED IN:**

- Dermatology & Cosmetic Treatments.
- Laser Treatments.
- Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- Body & Face Contouring.
- Injectable Fillers & Botox.

SHARQ, Ahmad Alalber st., Building 04, Floor 13.  
Tel.: (+965) 22060777  
@Drbuhaimed, @Renovebb, @dardonabb  
Email: drbuhaimed@beautybeyond.com.kw  
www.beautybeyond.com.kw

Renova  
BEAUTY & BEYOND

**To advertise on this Page**

**Call: 24833199 ext:101,102**  
**or Direct line: 24835616 / 24835617**  
**or email: ads@kuwaittimes.com**

**Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine**  
Head of Cardiology departmenta at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

مستشفى دار الشفاء  
Dar Al Shifa Hospital  
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa

**DR KHALED ALMERRI**  
Consultant Interventional Cardiology  
Department: Heart & Vascular Center

**Specialized in:**

- 1-Diagnostic and therapeutic cardiac catheterization (Angiography and Angioplasty). Aortic valve implantation.
- 2- Diagnosis and treatment of coronary artery diseases
- 3- Diagnosis and treatment of heart failure, cardiomyopathies and valvular diseases.
- 4-Diagnosis and treatment of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- 5- Diagnosis and treatment of syncope, palpitations and cardiac arrhythmias.
- 6- Non-invasive diagnostic procedures echocardiography, exercise stress test, and 24 hour blood pressure and Holter monitoring

alsalam.int.hospital

**Dr. Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj**  
ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

- Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
- Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck surgery.
- Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
- Member of the British Laryngological Association.
- Member of the European Laryngological Society.
- Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.

**Experienced In:**

- Management of benign and malignant vocal cord lesions.
- Vocal cord augmentation.
- Diagnosis and treatment of spasmodic dysphonia.
- Adenotonsillectomy using latest techniques.
- Myringotomy and ventilation tube insertion.
- Surgery for the deviated nasal septum.
- Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- Diagnosis and treatment of allergic rhinitis.
- Tympanoplasty.
- Diagnosis and treatment of vertigo.
- Thyroid surgery
- Diagnosis and treatment of snoring.

2536 0000  
www.royalehayat.com

مستشفى زوال الحياة  
ROYALE HAYAT HOSPITAL

**IC INTERNATIONAL CLINIC**

**American Board Certified in General Surgery**  
**Member of the Society of American Gastrointestinal & Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)**  
**Higher specialization in Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgery & Organ Transplantation**  
**Member of many prestigious surgical societies.**

- Day case surgeries
- Diagnosis, treatment and follow up of all surgical emergencies
- Surgery for morbid obesity (sleeve, gastric bypass)
- Hernia repair
- Surgery for reflux disease
- Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- Breast surgeries
- Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries

**Dr. Hani Haider**  
General Surgery Consultant

http://www.international-clinic.com **Tel: 1886677**

**Scope of Clinical Practice:**

- General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- Single Port Surgery
- Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
- Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fitzaloscope)
- Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- Stomach Balloon insertion and removal
- Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery
- Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
- Laparoscopic mini bypass
- Transanal minimally invasive surgery

**Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:**

- American Board of General Surgery
- Fellow of American College of Surgery
- Canadian Board of General Surgery
- Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- American Board of Colo - Rectal Surgery
- American Board of Surgical Critical Care

**Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad**  
Surgery Department  
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo - Rectal Surgeon

مستشفى دار الشفاء  
Dar Al Shifa Hospital  
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa  
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

**DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM**  
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

**Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368**

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

**DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED**  
Consultant of General Surgery  
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

**Academic Certificates - Training**

- Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- (IFSO) member .
- Faculty member of (BEST).
- Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

**Scope of clinical Practice.**

- Bariatric surgeries.
- Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- G.I. surgeries.
- Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com **Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228** Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

## Lifestyle | Gossip

## Liam Payne donates 360,000 meals to food banks

The 26-year-old star is working with the Trussell Trust to provide meals for those in need in the UK and he has urged his fans to donate to the cause. Liam wrote on Instagram: "No one should have to worry about where their next meal is coming from: not now, not ever. I am donating to @trusselltrust and if you can help too then please do... Take care, stay at home and look after one another. Link in bio to donate." He added in a statement: "It's not right that anyone in our country is unable to afford food. Food banks do incredible work to help the people most in need of support. As this crisis unfolds, joining forces with the Trussell Trust, I will be supporting over 100 food banks in the Midlands and other UK cities so that they can continue to provide their essential community service for those in crisis, providing more than 360,000 meals over the next three months. "I'm also donating because of The Trussell



Trust's mission to work towards a future where no one needs a food bank. When we're out the other side of this, we need to look at why there are people in our country who don't have enough money for food. Long term, I want to play my part in finding a solution to ensure people have enough money to buy their own food - and end the need for food banks."

## Jurnee Smollett and Josiah Bell split after almost 10 years

According to Us Weekly, the 'Birds of Prey' actress has filed divorce papers to end her marriage to the 37-year-old musician, with whom she shares son Hunter, three. The publication reports that Jurnee's attorney dropped off the paperwork sometime last week. Jurnee, 33, previously revealed she and Josiah were "best friends" before they ever started dating and she attributed their strong relationship to their friendship. She said in 2013: "We were best friends before we started even dating, so we had this really great foundation. I think one of the challenging things about any lasting relationship is that you have to be

so vulnerable. I think as human beings we try to hide our flaws and try to present this perfect person, this person we wish we were to our spouse when that causes so many troubles." Jurnee and Josiah have not made a public appearance together since 2018 and they last posted about each other on social media six months ago. Josiah gushed on Jurnee's birthday in October 2019: "In honor of my QUEEN'S special day, I'm going to let a clip from my upcoming EP #psistillloveyou speak for me. @jurneebell 'You're my goddess / From a touch of heaven's chosen....' I love you my baby. Happy Birthday! (sic)"



## Dua Lipa 'conflicted' about releasing new album during COVID-19



The 24-year-old singer has just released her latest record 'Future Nostalgia' and while she was initially unsure if it was the right time, she hopes it will help to distract people from the current health crisis. Speaking on 'New Music Daily' with Zane Lowe' on Apple Music, she explained: "I felt very confident going into this record and I feel like I really found my lyrical language and what I wanted to say and I'm really proud of it. Of

course during this time, I have felt very conflicted and I was very confused and I wasn't sure whether we needed to be putting music out at this time because a lot of people are suffering and there's a lot going on in the world and you never really know when the right time is. "But also saying that I made this album to get away from any anxiety, stress, opinion of others, and pressures of even making a second record. And I made it with love and I just wanted to have fun and I made it

with my friends. It was about getting away from that. And I feel like maybe now more than ever, that's why this album has to come out. You know? If anything, I hope it takes people away from what's going on at the moment and gives them a moment to just dance and let loose and forget about the outside world."

## Kathy Griffin sent home after virus isolation

The 59-year-old comedian revealed this week she was battling "unbearably painful symptoms" associated with the respiratory illness - also known as COVID-19 - and said she had been taken to a specific isolation ward for sufferers of the virus, although she was unable to be tested. And now, she has confirmed to the Los Angeles Times she's back home after being diagnosed with an abdominal infection that is being

treated with medication. During an interview with the publication, Kathy detailed her experience at the isolation ward, which she was taken to after feeling ill following a trip to Mexico with her husband Randy Bick. She said: "We were both nervous because we were still in the incubation period after returning from Mexico, but also we had not left the house in days. We'd been hearing about a 14-day incubation period [for the coronavirus]. So for me to get what felt like food poisoning after six days, I thought, OK, is this a coincidence or what?" Kathy praised the "heroes" who treated her at the hospital, but said the facility was not set up how she'd imagined, and there were no coronavirus tests available.



## Jo Wood has confirmed her brother died from coronavirus

The 65-year-old former model - who was previously married to Rolling Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood - mourned the loss of Paul Karslake when he suddenly passed away on Sunday (22.03.20) after suffering with breathing difficulties, and has now revealed he had tested positive for the respiratory illness. She took to Twitter on Friday (27.03.20) to share a post of her beloved brother, and wrote: "So it was COVID that took my brother's life on Monday" Jo also claimed the virus - which started in Wuhan, China, and is believed to have come from a wet market - originated in a lab before infecting across the globe. She continued: "a deadly virus that escaped from a lab and it's affected the whole world .. this can't happen again it's messed up !!! #bantthisshit #timeforchange (sic)" Before receiving

test results, the 'Strictly Come Dancing' star and her family believed Paul had contracted coronavirus as his decline was "incredibly sudden", and the 61-year-old artist hadn't been ill prior to his death. After a few days, the family finally got their answer as it was previously unclear what caused his death. A statement posted on Paul's Instagram page on Monday (23.03.20) said: "It is with deep sorrow that we have to announce Paul's sad passing this morning.



## Duchess Camilla sends a message of support to domestic abuse victims

The Duchess of Cornwall used her and Prince Charles' Clarence House Instagram account to reach out to those in lockdown with abusive partners or family members and shared the numbers for helplines for victims. She wrote: "This is a hard time for everyone, as we are all asked to stay at home to stay safe. But for some of you it is even harder, because home is not a safe place. "I can only imagine that being asked to stay there could feel very isolating and frightening for you and your family. It may mean spending more time with the person who is harming you. "If this is your situation, or you are worried about someone else, I want you to know that you are not alone. Even if you cannot leave your home, you can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline or contact one of the domestic abuse charities. Please stay safe and get

help." Following her statement, Camilla advised those in immediate danger to "call 999 and ask for the police" and she also shared the numbers for some 24 hour helplines for those not in immediate danger. Camilla, 72, is a passionate advocate for ending domestic violence and previously revealed that some of her own friends have been victims.



## Maren Morris had an emergency Caesarean section

The 29-year-old singer and her husband Ryan Hurd, 33, welcomed son Hayes Andrew Hurd earlier this week but Maren admitted that her labour was an intense ordeal. Sharing a picture of the tot on Instagram, she wrote: "30 hours of labor ended with an emergency c-section... not what we planned but I learned pretty quickly that night that having a plan for bringing a human into the world is a fool's errand. All that mattered was that he got here safely. Having him in the

middle of a global health crisis was also not in the baby prep books, but here we are. Holding him and healing my body in a maternity ward that's eerily quiet from us not being allowed visitors or family at this time, but strangely serene. All we hear are monitors beeping and the coos of our infant son. Maybe the sound of the 100th episode of The Office @ryanhurd and I have binged while in here (sic)." She also shared how grateful she and her husband are for the medical staff who helped deliver their son.



## Tom Hanks and wife Rita returns US after battling coronavirus

The 63-year-old actor and his wife, also 63, were both diagnosed with the virus earlier this month while in Australia but they have now both returned to their Los Angeles home after recovering. They spent weeks in isolation in Australia before flying back to LA via private jet and PageSix reports Tom was spotted doing a celebratory dance at the airport after landing. Tom and Rita were in Australia for pre-production of Biz Lurhmann's Elvis Presley biopic, in which Tom will play Colonel Tom Parker, Presley manager, when they discovered they had tested positive for the virus. Earlier

this month, Tom confirmed he and Rita were COVID-19 positive when he took to Instagram to explain their symptoms. The 'Saving Mr Banks' actor wrote at the time: "Hello, folks. Rita and I are down here in Australia. We felt a bit tired, like we had colds, and some body aches. Rita had some chills that came and went. Slight fevers too. To play things right, as is needed in the world right now, we were tested for the coronavirus, and were found to be positive." And the following day, Tom gave his fans an update on his health.



## Simon Cowell donates £1.3 million to charities amid pandemic

The music mogul has revealed that he and his team at Syco are giving £800,000 to be split between Feeding Britain and Feeding America and he is also taking on £500,000 of the deficit faced by Shooting Star Children's Hospices, after fundraising was impacted by the coronavirus. And Simon, 60, - who has son Eric, six, with partner Lauren Silverman, 42, is urging other business leaders to donate too. In a guest column for The Sun newspaper, Simon wrote: "I don't like celebrities telling people what to do, and I know this is a hugely difficult time for so many - worries about family, health, jobs, paying the mortgage and feeding their family are at the forefront of people's minds. "But there are still other people in business and in entertainment with resources available. So today it's those people I'm urging to rise to this enormous challenge. "The wealthy donors and corporations I'm talking about. I hope that if any good can come from this awful crisis it might be that people everywhere start to see the world a little differently. "Whether it be for urgent support for key workers, the health charities or those with front-line needs, or for smaller charities such as Shooting Star Children's Hospices who are also badly suffering as a result of this crisis - all of these good causes have rarely needed our help more than they do today."



Lifestyle | Features



Julio Mis, the executive sous chef at Sociale, prepares dinners for delivery and curbside pickup in the kitchen with a reduced staff on March 27, 2020 in San Francisco, California.



A couple sits on the terrace of a restaurant as bars remain closed at Plaza Fiesta in Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico.



Gaetano Arnone, executive chef at Otto Enoteca stands in the closed restaurant on March 25, 2020 in New York City. One by one, small businesses, the pride of New York City, are drawing their curtain, unable to survive the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP photos

## US restaurants on the edge of failure over coronavirus

It was supposed to be a happy time for Will, a musician in the Washington area. He was planning a wedding reception at a local restaurant. Instead, he had to cancel the party due to the coronavirus crisis. And, despite a few misgivings, he's also decided to ask the restaurant for a complete refund right away in case the pandemic forces the eatery to shut its doors forever. "My original plan was just to save the money to credit and to have a big party there in the future," the 47-year-old told AFP, who asked that his last name not be used.

But then, he lost his job at a music store. And of course, he can no longer perform in restaurants and bars, because they are all closed for the foreseeable future. "We're just too worried about them shutting down the business and not getting the money back," he said. The restaurant industry has been one of the hardest-hit since local governments across the United States started ordering residents to stay at home as much as possible to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Many Americans have launched appeals to help their local restaurants, which are either closed or only offering takeout while the country rides out the crisis.

Such help could come in the form of buying gift cards, which are a "much-needed revenue source during the pandemic disruption," according to the National Restaurant Association. "In the best of times, restaurants operate on razor-thin margins, typically three to six percent, and 90 percent are small businesses with less than 50 employees," the association's executive vice president of public affairs, Sean Kennedy, told AFP.

### A key US sector

Of course, a few gift cards are not going to save the sector, a vital one in the world's largest economy. It is the country's second-biggest employer, only behind the health care sector. There are more than one million bars, restaurants and fast food outlets across the United States. Before the coronavirus crisis took hold, the National Restaurant Association had said it was expecting sales of nearly \$900 billion this year. Now, it says the industry could lose at least \$225 billion and five to seven million jobs over the next three months. There are no guarantees those jobs would be restored after the crisis.

So far, 40 of the 50 US states have ordered restau-

rants to shut their doors or severely curtail their activities. For many, their very survival is on the line. A survey carried out by the restaurant association among 4,000 places of business and released Wednesday showed that three percent were forced to close for good. Another 11 percent said they would have to do so in the next month. Restaurant owners have asked for \$455 billion in government aid, including a \$100 billion emergency fund, \$130 billion to pay unemployment benefits and \$45 billion in loans.

### 'No nest egg'

Since last week, two petitions have been circulating-and gaining hundreds of thousands of signatures-to ask local authorities for relief, including waived payroll taxes and rent abatement. "Just as many individuals live from paycheck to paycheck, so too do restaurants and bars. There's no nest egg," says the "Save America's Restaurants" petition signed by more than 320,000, including a number of celebrity chefs, as of Thursday. "We are on the brink of extinction," it warns. Kennedy says while takeout and delivery meals have kept some restaurants going, it is no substitute for regular service.

"That is just a lifeline, and is not sustainable," he told AFP. Kennedy, who has been lobbying national leaders for more help, hailed the Senate's passage of a \$2 trillion economic rescue plan, which the House of Representatives will consider on Friday. "This measure is an important first step to help restaurants weather the storm, take care of our employees, and prepare for when we are given the signal to open our doors once again," he said. But he warned of the "challenges that remain." Restaurant owners say they hope the emergency funds will come quickly-and not get tied up in bureaucratic red tape.

Alain Roussel, who owns La Ferme in Maryland, is supposed to celebrate 35 years in business in November. In recent days, he was forced to lay off his 38 employees. "I am lucky-I own the place and I don't have any debt. But I can only hold on for a couple of months," Roussel said. As for whether he can eventually rehire his staff, he said that would depend on his customers, and how quickly they come back. "After the global financial crisis, business was slow to pick up again," he recalled.— AFP



German resident of an 'artists' colony' Ingrid Ihnen-Haas performs a song by Edith Piaf in her flat in south-west Berlin as part of a collective effort to help entertain a country confined to their homes by the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## Berlin artists' colony finds creative answer to shutdown

In her sun-soaked Berlin living room, Ingrid Ihnen-Haas belted out Edith Piaf songs into a microphone-part of a collective effort to help entertain a country confined to their homes by the coronavirus pandemic. "Especially for elderly people who have to stay at home, the concept of 'concerts in your living room' is brilliant," said Ihnen-Haas, 71.

With concert halls, restaurants and most shops shut, public life in Germany has ground to a halt as the population is urged to stay home to help contain the spread of the virus. Ihnen-Haas and fellow residents of an "artists' colony" in southwest Berlin have joined voices to record albums, audiobooks or readings to share online. The former social worker who sings regularly in small venues across the capital has now turned her living room into a recording studio.

Outside in a common area, comedian Cornelia Schoenwald is sitting on a bench, reading aloud from a short story by Erich Kästner, a classic of German children's literature. Her reading, accompanied by the chirping of sparrows, is being filmed by Christian Sekula, one of the leaders of the association that manages cultural life in the colony. He will later edit the recording and put it up on the website of the association, which usually stages plays and other cultural activities.

"Right now I don't have any bookings," said Schoenwald, whose calendar quickly emptied as Berlin's cultural life came to a standstill over the past few weeks.

But far from lamenting her fate, she's convinced there are benefits to this time when everyone is being forced to take their foot off the pedal. It's "enriching because it allows us to focus on what's

really important," she said. "Perhaps, as artists, we have a different relationship with the highs and lows of existence. We are more used to them," she added, referring to the precarious nature of work as an artist.

### 'Social crisis'

The artists' colony in Wilmersdorf was founded in 1927 when two artists' associations bought three buildings and turned them into affordable accommodation for the city's musicians, actors and writers. Back then, the arts were thriving in Berlin, with theatres and nightclubs buzzing with scenes like those from the musical "Cabaret." The cluster of 80 homes comprises inner courtyards where bright yellow daffodils add a splash of color to the 1920s architecture.

Nobel Prize winning German author Guenther Grass lived not far from here, as did philosopher Hannah Arendt, before she was expelled by the Nazis. The homes are still reserved for artists and intellectuals, active or retired, with a modest income. For jobbing actors and musicians or for painters who have seen their exhibitions postponed or cancelled, the COVID-19 crisis is an existential one. "Those who work only two or three days a week have no financial reserves. A social crisis is brewing," Sekula said.

Despite their own worries, the residents of the complex will continue to support each other and provide the small services that make up the fabric of community life. "The last guy who moved in went out to get me some drinks," said Gerda Schulz, an 82-year-old retired flamenco dancer who is currently only going out once a day for an early-morning walk. Meanwhile, Ihnen-Haas continues to belt out songs from her living room, blue glasses and dishevelled hair completing her look. There may be no live performances, no club nights and no can-can girls in Berlin today. But in Wilmersdorf, at least, life is still a cabaret.— AFP

## African stars join the fight against virus with donations and songs

Footballers and musicians have been on the frontline of the fight against coronavirus in Africa, reaching not just for social media to spread awareness of the dangers of the virus but also for the cheque book. Among the first to step up was Senegalese winger Sadio Mane - a key player in Liverpool's push for the English Premier League title this year - who donated 30 million CFA francs (\$50,000) to his country's National Medical Commission to fight the deadly microbe.

In Ivory Coast, former Chelsea striker Didier Drogba gave masks to the cathedral of Abidjan, with the warning: "My sisters, my brothers, I ask you to take the matter very seriously... we tend to be too light about our reactions to the situation." Another great African striker, the Cameroonian Samuel Eto'o, also now retired, was quick to urge African communities to adhere strictly to precautionary measures.

"My African brothers and sisters! Corona Virus has taken over our lives. With malice, arrogance and without notice," Eto'o wrote. "It knows neither race, religion nor political parties. It kills the rich and the poor. Even in countries where research is done well, the consequences are disastrous. Unpredictable. Eto'o spent most of his playing career in Spain. "For all these reasons my brothers, sisters, dear parents, I ask you to respect the instructions given by the authorities of our countries and the World Health Organization."

Affected after Asia and Europe, sub-Saharan Africa has recorded only 1,642 cases and around 20 deaths, according to an AFP count at 1100 GMT Thursday from officially declared cases. The continent, however, fears a lightning-like spread that would overwhelm its already fragile health structures. In South Africa, the most affected country on the continent, Springbok rugby captain Siya Kolisi released a couple of videos online showing himself at home with his children, adhering to the isolation regulations laid down by President Cyril Ramaphosa. "Stay safe, stay strong, let's fight this together," he says.

### Musicians give support

African musicians are also stepping up as the continent faces one of its bleakest hours. Youssou N'Dour, described by Rolling Stone magazine in 2004 as "the most famous singer alive" in Senegal and

Africa, handed over a batch of medical equipment to the health ministry in Dakar in mid-March. Fellow Senegalese rappers collective "Y en a marre" ("Had enough") set aside their usual antipathy towards corruption and current politics to release a song called "Fagaru Ci Corona" which warns of the dangers of the virus and advises on washing hands and wearing masks.

They are among other artists who have temporarily laid down their protests against governments to join forces and rally around messages being put out by the authorities. In Uganda, singer Bobi Wine, a member of parliament who was arrested in early January for his opposition to President Yoweri Museveni, has asked his fans to "watch the social distancing and quarantine", in a video on Twitter.

### 'We want to live!'

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, rumba star Fally Ipupa stepped away from romance for once to post a video on Twitter called "Fally in confinement mode, the kisses stop", an improvised melody on an acoustic guitar. "Stay at home, respect the instructions given by the authorities and the WHO," Kinshasa crooner said. The authorities of DRC have not imposed confinement yet but they have closed borders, public places, and put the capital Kinshasa in lockdown. His compatriot Koffi Olomide, a soukous singer, a modern version of Congolese rumba, warned fellow countrymen against the "Kuluna-virus", deftly weaving in the term "kuluna" which indicates armed gangs of Kinshasa, one of the urban legends and terrors of the capital.

In Ivory Coast, the singer DJ Kerozen also alluded to the virus in a new song: "There's a corona, let's respect the hygiene instructions, the deal is serious, oh... Even Mbengue (slang for France), over there, it's spoiled... we want to live! " The Cameroonian saxophonist Manu Dibango, who had become a reference for just about every musician in Africa, died in France this week at the age of 86 as a result of the coronavirus. The composer of "Soul Makoss" was the first world celebrity to succumb to the virus. Congolese singer Aurlus Mabele, a figure in soukous, also died a week ago in Paris from the virus. — AFP



In this file photo taken on March 07, 2020 Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex arrive to attend The Mountbatten Festival of Music at the Royal Albert Hall in London. — AFP

## Meghan to begin new life by narrating Disney elephant film

Prince Harry's wife Meghan will make an instant start to life away from Britain's royal frontline by narrating a new film about a family of African elephants, Disney announced on Thursday. The documentary will follow the family of elephants as they cross Africa's Kalahari Desert. Its broadcast date is just three days after she and Harry will officially step down as senior royals. "Disneynature's Elephant, an Original Movie narrated by Meghan, The Duchess of Sussex, starts streaming April 3," the channel said on its Twitter account. The couple stunned the family in January by announcing their plans to quit the royal frontline and move to North America.

Harry, the youngest son of heir-to-the-throne Prince Charles and the late Diana, Princess of Wales, was heard mentioning former actress Meghan's voiceover abilities to Disney boss Bob Iger. "You know she does voiceovers?" he told Iger at the London premiere of "The Lion King" in July last year. "She's really interested." Iger was heard to reply: "Sure. We'd love to try." Both Harry and Meghan are dedicated to environmental causes and are looking to develop their charitable foundation as part of a "progressive new role". They will now formally be known as "Harry, The Duke of Sussex" and "Meghan, The Duchess of Sussex". — AFP

# As world hunkers down, Trump moves full-speed against US foes

WASHINGTON: The coronavirus pandemic is shaking up the world, but not US foreign policy. As billions hunker down to halt the spread of the virus, President Donald Trump has only ramped up sanctions and other pressure against frequent targets such as Iran and Venezuela. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has led calls for an "immediate global ceasefire" to refocus on fighting COVID-19 and on Friday appealed for the "waiving of sanctions that can undermine countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic."

The appeals have fallen on deaf ears in Washington. The Trump administration has kept sweeping sanctions on Iran, one of the countries worst hit by the pandemic, and in recent weeks has blacklisted more Iranians including over the clerical regime's heavy involvement in neighboring Iraq. On Venezuela, which like Iran has appealed for IMF help to cope with the health crisis, the Justice Department on Thursday unveiled criminal charges on drug-trafficking against President Nicolas Maduro, with a \$15 million reward for his arrest.

The indictment treated the leftist leader like a common criminal as Washington steps up its more than one-year campaign to oust Maduro, who presides over a crumbling economy. The Trump administration, which has faced criticism at home for its handling of the crisis, has also launched a rhetorical campaign over the pandemic. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has accused China of responsibility for spreading the "Wuhan virus" by not stopping it quickly when it first emerged in the metropolis late last year. He has also sharply criticized the coronavirus response of Iran, which kept flights going to China, its vital economic partner in the face of US sanctions.

## 'Almost like a bad joke'

Pompeo, in a recent interview, said Iran would use any economic relief to pursue nuclear weapons and back Iraqi Shiite militias who have increasingly fought a proxy war with US forces. "You see the way... the regime is treating their people in this time of enormous crisis. You see the way that they continue to spend money," Pompeo told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt. Many experts agree that

Iran, among other countries, made crucial missteps in trying to stem the coronavirus.

But some voiced exasperation that the administration would seek to distract or even topple regimes as a deadly illness infects the globe. "It's almost like a bad joke. What's worse than a pandemic appearing in a country where there is no government? That is really the last thing that you want," said Max Abrahms, a professor at Northeastern University and fellow at the Quincy Institute, a Washington think tank that advocates military restraint.

"We need to rethink our understanding of US national security. It seems particularly absurd for the United States to invest so heavily in remaking foreign countries at a time when our own nurses in New York City are literally wearing trash bags," he said. Abrahms said Pompeo and other hawkish US officials were stuck in a mindset of trying to remove adversarial regimes rather than seeing a greater US interest in protecting public health. "Even countries that we do not like live in the same universe. And we need to work with them to address mutual problems," he said.

Senator Robert Menendez, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, questioned the action against Maduro, saying that while his "depravity is undisputed", the charges alone "will not restore democracy in Venezuela nor address the unprecedented humanitarian crisis".

## Whose fault?

Pompeo quickly points out that the United States has not restricted sales of medicine and other humanitarian goods to Iran - and that the United States has offered, in general terms, to help. But many Iranians say humanitarian imports have effectively been blocked as few foreign banks are willing to deal with Iran due to US sanctions, leading to shortages of vital supplies such as masks.

Ali Vaez, an Iran expert at the International Crisis Group, which studies peaceful solutions to global problems, said the Trump administration likely believes that any aid would only throw a lifeline to a regime it sees on the brink of falling. "US indifference to the suffering of an entire nation is



CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro speaks during a press conference on March 12, 2020. — AFP

bound to have long-term consequences, giving credence to arguments of the Iranian hardliners that Washington's enmity is not just aimed at the leadership," Vaez said.

But Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, which promotes a hawkish line on Iran, said that blaming US sanctions for the health crisis "misses

the forest for the trees". He said the United States should promote humanitarian exports to help ordinary people but ensure that no money goes to the government. "The only reason American sanctions on Iran persist, and in fact have grown in scale and scope, is because Iranian bad behavior has grown, even during the coronavirus pandemic," he said. — AFP

## What is chloroquine and could it cure the coronavirus?



MARSEILLE: In this photo taken on Feb 26, 2020, medical staff show at the IHU Mediterranee Infection Institute packets of Nivaquine tablets containing chloroquine, and Plaquenil tablets containing hydroxychloroquine, drugs that have shown signs of effectiveness against coronavirus. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Could a pair of decades-old, relatively inexpensive drugs be the solution to the novel coronavirus pandemic? Around the world, countries are expanding access to hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and chloroquine (CQ), related compounds that are synthetic forms of quinine, which comes from cinchona trees and has been used for centuries to treat malaria. HQ which is the less toxic of the two, is also used as an anti-inflammatory to treat conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, purposes it is primarily known for outside the tropics.

The medicines have shown early promise against the COVID-19 illness in early studies in France and China, which led US President Donald Trump this week to call them a "gift from God" - even as experts urge caution until bigger trials validate their effectiveness. Here is what you need to know.

### Why they might work

China used CQ on a trial of 134 patients in February, finding it was effective in reducing the severity of the illness, according to officials. But these results haven't yet been published. Chinese respiratory expert Zhong Nanshan, who leads a government task force in response to the epidemic, said in a press conference last week that the data would be widely shared soon.

In France, a team led by Didier Raoult of the IHU-Mediterranee Infection, Marseille reported last week they had carried out a study on 36 COVID-19 patients, finding that HCQ drastically reduced the viral load in a group which received the drug. The effects were especially pronounced when it was used with azithromycin, a common antibiotic used to sweep out secondary bacterial infections. What's more, HCQ and CQ drugs have been proven to act against the SARS-CoV-2 virus in lab settings, and a paper published by a Chinese team last week in Cell Discovery offered a potential mode of action.

Karine Le Roch, a professor of cell biology at the University of California, Riverside, explained that both HCQ and CQ are weak bases that elevate the pH of parts of human cells called organelles - which are analogous to organs in animals - and which are normally acidic. This in turn interferes with the virus' ability to enter the cells - and also seems to block them from replicating once they are already inside.

But, she added: "While it worked in vitro, I am still waiting to see published results of large blind clinical trials demonstrating the efficacy of HCQ in vivo," she told AFP.

Promise doesn't mean proof, and the small studies carried out so far amount to "anecdotal" evidence, according to Anthony Fauci, head of infectious diseases at the US National Institutes of Health. What's more, a small Chinese study on 30 patients that was also published this month found HCQ was no better than standard care - meaning treating the symptoms via bed rest, fluids and so on - adding a note of caution to the discourse.

The only way to know for sure is to carry out randomized clinical trials, scientists say. Such experiments are considered the gold standard in the field but last months or years and involve thousands of patients, often from around the world. Patients are assigned at random to either receive the drug under investigation or a placebo, and the studies are "blinded" meaning the participants and their doctors are unaware which group they are in, to further reduce bias.

Overhyping medicine can have several unintended effects, warn experts. "One of the unintended consequences are drug shortages of chloroquine, for people that need to manage their rheumatoid arthritis, for example," Peter Pitts, a former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration told AFP. A few countries are taking a cautious approach. Spain, for example, announced Monday said that "until further notice" these arthritis and lupus patients would be given priority access to the drug.

French Health Minister Olivier Veran meanwhile said the compounds can be used only to treat the most severe cases of COVID-19. Another problem is that people may try to self-medicate. A US man from Arizona died this week after ingesting a form of chloroquine intended to fight aquatic parasites.

Several countries have now embarked on clinical trials, including the United States, where one began in New York this week. Italy is carrying out a trial on 2,000 people, while scientists are also awaiting the results from bigger trials in China. But while the drugs are being rolled out for compassionate use, it is critical to bear in mind safety precautions. — AFP

## S&P lowers Kuwait rating to AA-, but...

Continued from Page 1

provide the authorities policy space to maneuver over the short to medium term, it said.

S&P also affirmed its A-1+ short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings. The rating agency said it could raise the ratings if wide-ranging political and economic reforms enhanced institutional effectiveness and improved long-term economic diversification, "although we think such a scenario is unlikely over our forecast horizon 2020-23". It mentioned oil prices and said they plummeted after the OPEC+ failure to agree on further production cuts during meetings on March 6.

It expected Kuwait to increase output to above budgeted levels of 2.8 million barrels per day (bpd), which should provide some short-term economic sup-

port. S&P said around 80 percent of Kuwait's exports are destined for Asia, where several countries have already been substantially affected by the coronavirus outbreak, leading to a contraction in oil demand.

S&P said the outbreak forced businesses to shut down for four weeks, alongside a partial curfew; thus it projected GDP per capita at just under \$22,000 for 2020, down from \$29,000 previously. It said Kuwait has also yet to pass a revised debt law authorizing the government to borrow, raising questions about how future central government deficits will be financed.

"We forecast that, in line with lower oil prices, Kuwait's general government balance will be in deficit exceeding 10 percent of GDP in 2020 before gradually returning to surpluses over the medium term," it said. Importantly, S&P said its ratings on Kuwait remain supported by the country's substantial amounts of accumulated fiscal and external buffers, which "we project will average close to 500 percent of GDP over the next four years and afford the authorities room for a policy response". — KUNA

## Italy, Spain suffer record virus...

Continued from Page 1

In one bright spot, infection rates in Italy continued their recent downward trend. But the head of the national health institute Silvio Brusaferro said the country was not out of the woods yet, predicting "we could peak in the next few days". Spain too said its rate of new infections appeared to be slowing - despite also reporting its deadliest day. Europe has suffered the brunt of the coronavirus crisis in recent weeks, with millions across the continent on lockdown and the streets of Paris, Rome and Madrid eerily empty.

In Britain, the two men leading the country's fight against the coronavirus - Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his Health Secretary Matt Hancock - both announced Friday they had tested positive for COVID-19. "I am now self-isolating, but I will continue to lead the government's response via video-conference as we fight this virus," Johnson, who had initially resisted calls for a nationwide lockdown before changing course, wrote on Twitter.

Meanwhile, other countries across the world were bracing for the virus's full impact, with AFP tallies showing more than 26,000 deaths globally. The World Health Organization's regional director for Africa warned the continent faced a "dramatic evolution" of the pandemic, as South Africa also began life under lockdown and reported its first virus death. In a sign of how difficult the stay-at-home order could be to enforce, police came up against hundreds of shoppers trying to force their way into a supermarket in Johannesburg on Friday, while the streets of a nearby township buzzed with people and traffic.

However, two months of almost total isolation appeared to have paid off in China's Wuhan, as the Chinese city of 11 million people where the virus first emerged partially reopened. Since January, residents have been forbidden to leave, with roadblocks installed and millions subjected to dramatic restrictions on their daily life. But yesterday people were allowed to enter the city, and most of the subway network restarted. Some shopping centers will open their doors next week.

In the United States, known infections jumped past 104,000, the world's highest figure, with 1,711 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University. In New York City, the US epicenter of the crisis, health workers battled a surging toll - including an increasing number of younger patients - while struggling with a severe shortage of protective equipment. "Now it's 50-year-olds, 40-year-olds, 30-year-olds," said one respiratory therapist.

To ease the strain on virus-swamped emergency rooms in Los Angeles, a giant US naval hospital ship docked there to take patients with other conditions. In New Orleans, famed for its jazz and nightlife, health experts believe the month-long Mardi Gras in February could be largely responsible for its severe outbreak. "This is going to be the disaster that defines our generation," said Collin Arnold, director of the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness for New Orleans.

As well as the trillion-dollar recovery plan, Trump signed a separate order late Friday allowing the Pentagon to bring former troops and members of the National Guard back to active duty to help the military combat the virus, the Washington Post said, citing a Pentagon spokesman. But as Europe and the United States struggle to contain the pandemic, aid groups have warned the death toll could be in the millions in low-income countries and war zones such as Syria and Yemen, where hygiene conditions are already dire and healthcare systems are in tatters. "Refugees, families displaced from their homes, and those living in crisis will be hit the hardest by this outbreak," said the International Rescue Committee.

More than 80 countries have already requested emergency aid from the International Monetary Fund. IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said on Friday, warning massive spending will be needed to help developing nations. "It is clear that we have entered a recession" that will be worse than in 2009 following the global financial crisis, she said.

Meanwhile in Latin America, Sao Paulo has been hit harder by the disease than anywhere else in the region, with 68 of the 92 deaths registered in Brazil. However the country's president Jair Bolsonaro - who has compared the virus to a "little flu" - declared he did not believe his own government's statistics on the toll, saying he suspected they had been inflated to serve "political interests". — Agencies



Stars

**Daily SuDoku**

3		8				1		
				2				
	4	1	5			8	3	
	2			1				
8	5		4	3		1	7	
			7				2	
	8	5		9	7	4		
			1					
9				7				6


medium

**Friday's Solution**


9	5	4	6	7	8	2	3	1
3	7	1	2	4	9	6	8	5
8	2	6	3	5	1	4	7	9
6	9	7	4	1	2	8	5	3
2	8	5	9	3	6	7	1	4
1	4	3	5	8	7	9	2	6
4	3	9	7	2	5	1	6	8
5	1	2	8	6	4	3	9	7
7	6	8	1	9	3	5	4	2

hard


STAR TRACK

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**  
 Are things really going this beautifully for you, Aries? This is a question you might ask yourself now. All looks perfect as career, romance, education, and spiritual matters seem to crystallize into a wonderful life. Don't waste time worrying if this is all too good to be true! You're concerned about the future, but right now, live in the moment. You're creating some great memories, if nothing else. Enjoy!

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**  
 Something wonderful could happen to you today at home, Libra. A lover could declare eternal devotion, spiritual revelations could come thick and fast, or great news regarding career or money matters could be just over the horizon. Whatever comes is apt to bring happiness for all concerned. You may pinch yourself to make sure you're awake! Relax and enjoy it.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**  
 Expanding your horizons is definitely on the agenda today, Taurus. Travel, education, creativity - they're all coming to the forefront of your concerns. Romance should also be going well. A friend could introduce you to a new interest, and children might also be a source of joy. Happiness reigns as you're able to spend more time pursuing the concerns that mean the most to you.


**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**  
 Developments over the past few days could have you feeling very excited and particularly optimistic about your love life, Scorpio. Communications with your beloved could take the form of romantic songs or poetry. If you want to give your friend a gift, by all means do, but confine it to something nonthreatening like a book. Everything seems great now, but too much emotional expression and material generosity could overwhelm your friend.


**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**  
 Are you working at home now or perhaps considering it, Gemini? If so, remember that you'll probably enjoy the comfort and freedom it provides. Being in your own territory among your books and pets and wearing your old clothes will feel good. However, in no way will working on your own compromise your work ethic. If anything, you'll get more done than ever.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**  
 If you're involved in the arts, Sagittarius, expect today to hear about an opportunity to exhibit your work publicly. There should be a very positive reaction to it, so you can expect a lot of compliments and ego-boots. An opportunity to earn some money from your work could also come along. Don't turn it down out of shyness or insecurity. Go for the gold.


**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**  
 A social event in your neighborhood could connect you with people who share your spiritual and intellectual inclinations, Cancer. As a result, you'll probably make some new friends and spend a lot of time on the phone with them over the next few days. If you're single, one could be a potential love partner. If you're a writer or artist, expect oodles of inspiration to hit you as a result of all this.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**  
 Incredible feelings of enthusiasm, optimism, and sheer joy could fill your heart and mind today, Capricorn. Your life is changing in a positive way, and even though it may not be readily apparent, you're sensing it intuitively. Romance with someone from far away could be in the offing. If you're a writer, publishing is right around the corner.

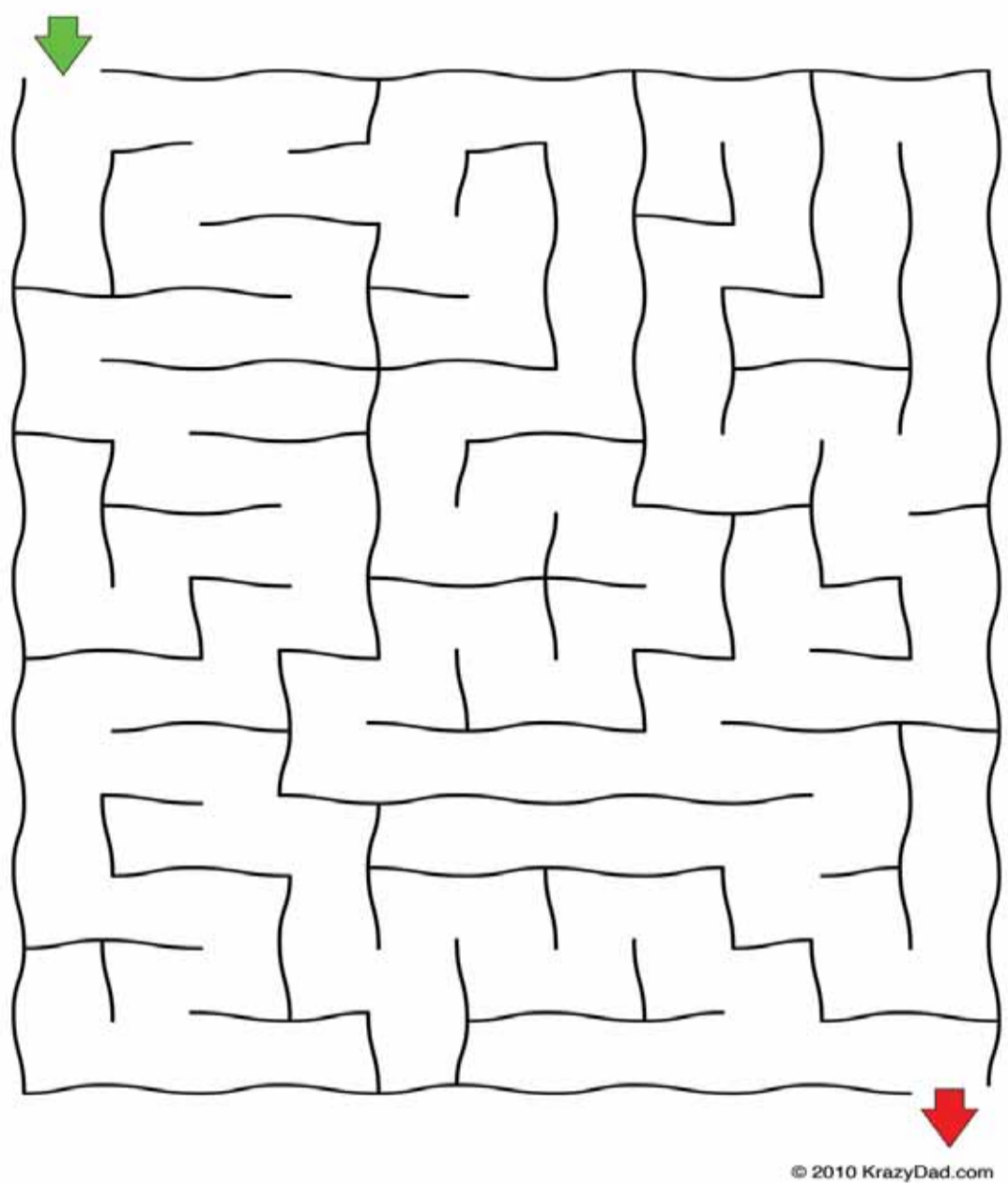
**Leo (July 23-August 22)**  
 A project that you're working on, perhaps job related, perhaps personal, is likely to require more creative skill than you usually need, Leo. Writing, drawing, or computer graphics could be involved. You might have some doubts about your abilities, but you're more likely to be surprised by the results. You're apt to enjoy working this way, and you may hope to continue.

**Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**  
 Some beautiful dreams or visions, perhaps involving angels, spirit guides, or other such beings, could come today, Aquarius. Listen carefully to the messages they bring. Whether they involve matters in your material life, intellectual or spiritual concerns, or future events, they can shed light on a lot of facts about you of which you might not be aware. Write them down as soon as you can. You'll be glad you did.

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**  
 If you're artistic by nature, Virgo, expect a rush of inspiration to hit today, along with an irresistible compulsion to start a new project and work until you can see at least some results. If you've never been artistic before, you may suddenly feel like giving it a try, perhaps using computer technology. No matter what, you're likely to derive a lot of pleasure from it, so go to it. Have fun!

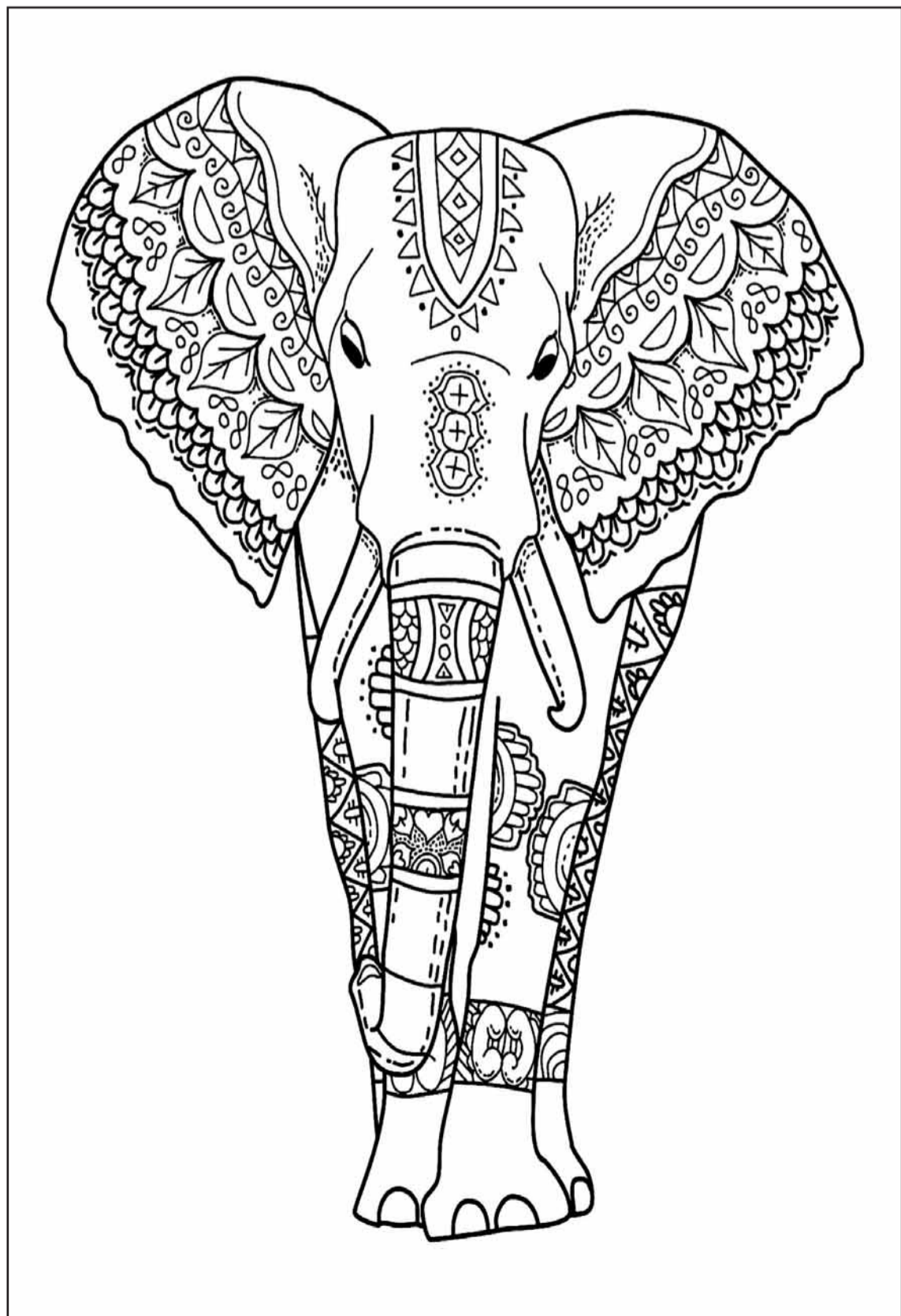
**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**  
 Love and romance continue to blossom, Pisces. Social events could find you and your beloved among both old and new friends, perhaps letting some of them know for the first time that you're actually an item. Someone close to both of you could be planning a wedding and invite you to come. Don't be surprised if it gives your partner ideas! Let yourself dream a little today.

Find the way



© 2010 KrazyDad.com

Color It



Crossword



Geometric Shapes



O H Q R E C T A N G L E P  
 D V Q I M H E S Q W R A K  
 I C A V U L Q N T H R K O  
 O P X L Q U O R O A I N N  
 Z N P P A G I M L C H Y O  
 E R U R A A B L H R E D G  
 P Y E T N U E Z E F X S A  
 A I C G S L C D E H A P T  
 R O L P O I N Y B E G H N  
 T E L G R I P H U I O E E  
 S U R C L A T Y C O N R P  
 G A L Y L M E C R J A E K  
 M E C Z H F D I M A R Y P

- CIRCLE
- CONE
- CUBE
- CYLINDER
- HEXAGON
- OCTAGON
- OVAL
- PARALLELOGRAM

- PENTAGON
- PYRAMID
- RECTANGLE
- RHOMBUS
- SPHERE
- SQUARE
- TRAPEZOID
- TRIANGLE





## Sports

# Spain's female football referees on frontline of coronavirus fight

## Clubs offer first-class facilities to ease the strain

MADRID: "I'm just doing my bit," says Iratzte Fernandez, the part-time referee turned full-time nurse who has swapped the whistle for a face-mask in the hope of helping Spain combat the deadly coronavirus. The 26-year-old, who officiates matches in La Liga Iberdrola, the top tier of the women's game, and Segunda B, the third tier of the men's, has been practising as a nurse for five years at the Rekalde Health Centre in Bilbao.

But as the relentless spread of the virus has stretched Spain's hospitals to breaking point, Iratzte Fernandez has made her medical role full-time to help manage the rush of patients. "When someone arrives with a cough and a fever, my job is to analyse their symptoms, while wearing full protective equipment," she told AFP.

"The risk of us transmitting the disease is high because we are constantly living next to it. That's a very stressful experience because you're always fighting against something you can't see. You're always playing at a disadvantage."

Spain now has the second most deaths of any country in the world, behind only Italy, with more than 4,000 lives taken by the pandemic, according to the latest figures on Thursday.

Football has stepped forward, as coaches, players and fans have raised millions to boost the effort while clubs have offered up their first-class facilities in a bid to ease the strain.

Yet Iratzte Fernandez is among the few from the sport to take her place on the fight's frontline.

"I'm not Superwoman or anything like that," Iratzte Fernandez says. "I'm just doing my bit, like everyone else."

Spain is now 11 days into official lockdown, with another two weeks at least to come, after the state of alarm was extended earlier this week.

With people concerned, frightened and frustrated, Iratzte Fernandez says her encounters in hospital can turn ugly, something she admits she is accustomed to from her work on the football field.

"Maybe in football, we talk about it more," she says. "But as a nurse, I have to take a lot of abuse as well from people who maybe don't want to queue or who won't be examined first because they think their situation is more serious than the person next to them."

Yet Spain has shown solidarity too since the population went into collective confinement. Every night at 8pm, residents all over the country step out onto their balconies and applaud to salute the work of those in the health industry, like Iratzte Fernandez. "All that applause every night, it's incredible," she says. "I've been working in the same medical centre for two years and to be honest, no one has ever said thank you until now. It's really heart-warming to see our work is being recognised."

Spanish football has been suspended until further notice and she misses not only the game but the distraction from a job that is now all-encompassing.

"Playing sports is usually my escape. At work, we live with the coronavirus, we rub shoulders with it. I



BILBAO: A combo of handout pictures made on March 23, 2020 shows Spanish nurse and semiprofessional football referee Iratzte Fernandez officiating a match (L), at a hospital desk (C) and at a hospital in Bilbao during the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

come home, I turn on the TV and now we only talk about that," she said.

"The only thing to really disconnect is sport. It helps me forget everything."

Iratzte Fernandez is not the only one, with Judit Romano, an assistant referee in Segunda, the second tier of men's football, now working as an anesthesiologist in the resuscitation department of Oviedo's Central University Hospital of Asturias.

Elena Pelaez, a referee in La Liga Iberdrola, is working as a midwife at the Rio Carrion Hospital in Palencia. But despite their strenuous timetables, Ira-

garte Fernandez said the Spanish Football Federation are keen to ensure they all stay as sharp as possible.

"They send us videos and tests with decisions to make," she said. "We also have physical exams to pass, with suggestions according to the equipment we have at home, like if we don't have elastic bands or exercise bikes. We adapt."

And she is looking forward to blowing the whistle to start her first game back. "When I think about football in the little free time I have left, I miss it," she said. "I miss matches, I miss the competition and of course most of all, refereeing. I miss all of it." —AFP

## English football chiefs set for 'difficult' coronavirus decisions

LONDON: England's Premier League, Professional Footballers' Association and Football League are steady themselves for some "difficult decisions" amid the coronavirus outbreak as they try to see if there is a way of restarting the season.

The three organisations all met on Friday to examine the financial impact of suspending the season, with Britain as a whole in a state of lockdown. "The Premier League, EFL and PFA met today and discussed the growing seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic," they said in a joint statement.

"It was stressed that the thoughts of all three organisations continue to be with everyone affected by the virus. The Premier League, EFL and PFA agreed that difficult decisions will have to be taken in order to mitigate the economic impact of the current suspension of professional football in England and agreed to work together to arrive at shared solutions."

Some clubs have asked players to defer up to half their wages, while players at Championship leaders Leeds, pushing for promotion to the lucrative Premier League, have volunteered for a wage deferral. The governing bodies are set for more talks next week as they try to draw up a unified plan.

Last week saw the projected restart of the season pushed back until April 30, and that date has not moved. "The leagues will not recommence until April 30 at the earliest. They will only do so when it is safe and conditions allow," added the statement.

"Further meetings will take place next week with a view to formulating a joint plan to deal with the difficult circumstances facing the leagues, their clubs, players, staff and fans."

Meanwhile a spokesperson for the Football Association insisted they had no regrets about their announcement earlier this week that saw a host of lower division leagues declared null and void because of the coronavirus outbreak.

"The decision taken to end the 2019/20 season across Steps 3-7 of the National League System, the women's football pyramid and the wider grassroots game was made by committee representatives of the respective leagues, and was supported by the FA Board and the FA Women's Board," the spokesperson said. "It will now go to the FA Council for ratification. We fully support the decision they came to during these challenging and unprecedented circumstances for English football." — AFP

## Former La Liga winger dons white coat

CORUNA: Journeyman footballer Toni Dovale put his football boots to one side and slipped into a pharmacist's white coat in the front line struggle against coronavirus in Spain. The 29-year-old pharmacy graduate and former top-level sportsman had been playing football for a Thai club, but was visiting his family in Spain when the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

So he decided to pitch in his 'grain of sand' against the virus using the studies which he had yet to put into practice due to his passion for football. "I really was packing my bags to go back when things got complicated," Dovale told AFP.

Travel restrictions trapped Dovale in his native La Coruna in the Atlantic coast region of Galicia, where he started his football career with nearby Celta Vigo.

Although Dovale also completed his university studies in pharmacy four years ago, he had never actually worked in the field. Now with the world of sport in limbo the footballer realised the time was ripe to use his studies to help his homeland.

"I was playing in Asia then; pharmacy is different there and I was never in Spain long enough to work," he says. "With football stopped and travel banned I said to myself 'get some practical experience and do your bit'."

The coronavirus is ravaging Spain with a death toll of over 4,800 and some 64,000 registered cases of infection. There is hope of course with around 10,000



CORUNA: Thai football league's Navy FC player Toni Dovale poses with a ball at his family's pharmacy where he is working at the moment in Coruna, northwestern Spain. Football globetrotter Toni Dovale has changed his cleats and the ball for the white coat in a pharmacy to contribute his bit in the fight against the novel coronavirus pandemic that is ravaging Spain and the world. — AFP

people already cured of the virus in Spain.

"We're in a really frightening situation. Those of us working with the public are afraid, and the people who come to us for advice are afraid too," says Dovale, who is working in a pharmacy run by his family.

He has gloves but no mask, and does not appear ready to lose his smile any time soon. "We all know we are exposed, that this is a pandemic and a complicated situation," he says. "But we all know too that

our behaviour in complicated situations defines who we are, and for me I need to put fears for my own safety to one side and help in any way that I can.

"There are shortages of many things and we are struggling to get enough of the simple things like thermometers, paracetamol, gloves and hand gels." Dovale has played football for Spanish top flight clubs Leganes and Rayo Vallecano, Sporting Kansas City in the United States and also Bengaluru in the Indian Super League before moving to Thailand.—AFP

world, you want to play a full regular season and whoever gets in, gets in. But I don't think realistically we're going to have that time.

"You can't eliminate teams that are in on points percentage. I think you go 12 (playoff teams in each conference). More teams get in this year. Maybe a couple byes at the top, and play it out."

Vancouver Canucks center Bo Horvat said of his playoff preference, "Either go by points percentage or play some more regular-season games. "Obviously, to make it completely fair, you'd want to play more regular-season games and have more games to get in. But if we're going to start playoffs right away, definitely by percentage, that would put (the Canucks) in. But it's tough to make that call."

Regardless of the playoff format, Edmonton Oilers center Connor McDavid said he does not want action to resume with the start of the postseason. "We want a fair season, and a fair season is a full season," McDavid said. "If we can go do that, that's what we would obviously prefer. I don't think we can just step into playoffs and Game 1, Calgary

come to Edmonton and guys are just running around killing each other and we haven't played a game in two months. It would end up the Stockton Heat against the Bakersfield Condors, if that's the case.

"We want to keep guys healthy, and we want to make sure that everyone is up and ready for playoff hockey. ... If we can get back to playing, I think it could be some of the best playoffs we've ever seen." Arizona Coyotes defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson also favors a resumption of the regular season.

"I think it's fair to start where we left off here," Ekman-Larsson said. "It would be good for the playoffs, too, to get those games going again. It would benefit all of us." The current Pacific Division standings have the Vegas Golden Knights in first place with 86 points in 71 games played (.606 point percentage), followed by the Oilers (83, 71, .585), the Flames (79, 70, .564), the Canucks (78, 69, .565), the Coyotes (74, 70, .529), the Anaheim Ducks (67, 71, .472), the Los Angeles Kings (64, 70, .457) and the San Jose Sharks (63, 70, .450).—Reuters

## Play likely to resume without fans

LAS VEGAS: If the NBA regular season resumes, it is almost "100 percent" the games will be played without fans present, ESPN's Brian Windhorst reported Friday. Windhorst said the NBA very likely will mimic the plan being used in China for a potential end to the current hiatus, which began March 12.

In China, ground zero for the coronavirus in recent months, the plan for professional basketball to resume includes keeping players in a centralized, isolated location or shared hotel to limit the chance they come in contact with any infected person.

Ideas being floated include playing all the games at a neutral site, such as Las Vegas, the Bahamas or even a college campus in the Midwest where the outbreak, to this point, has been mild, according to the report. The idea would be to refit a casino or grand ballroom of a resort into made-for-TV events.

—ESPN broadcaster Doris Burke tested positive for COVID-19, but she said she is now symptom-free.

Burke shared the information on "The Woj Pod" with ESPN.com's Adrian Wojnarowski. Burke said it took eight days for her test results to come back.

She began feeling symptoms associated with the coronavirus on March 11. Burke was broadcasting a game in Dallas that night when news broke that the Utah Jazz's Rudy Gobert tested positive for the coronavirus, which triggered a suspension of the NBA season that kicked in after the Mavericks beat the visiting Denver Nuggets 113-97.

—Utah Jazz players and staff have been cleared of the coronavirus, the team said. "The Utah Department of Health has determined that all Jazz players and staff, regardless of prior testing status, no longer pose a risk of infection to others," the team said in a statement.

The NBA suspended play after Gobert tested positive for COVID-19 on March 11. His teammate, fellow All-Star Donovan Mitchell, also tested positive for the coronavirus.

—Point guard Killian Hayes, who is playing for Ratiopharm Ulm in Germany, is entering the 2020 NBA Draft.

Hayes, No. 10 in ESPN's NBA prospect rankings, told the network via email he submitted paperwork to the league and will be part of the draft, whenever it might take place.

Measured at 6-foot-5, Hayes is a pass-first guard and is also known as a stellar defender. The 18-year-old son of former Penn State player Deron Hayes, Killian Hayes was born in Florida and raised in France, for whom he played on the U17 FIBA team last year.

—USA Basketball is weighing alternative roster options in the event of a potential conflict between the delayed Tokyo Olympics and the NBA season.

If the postponed Games are moved from a July 2020 start to March or April of 2021, NBA players would not be eligible to participate. The NBA regular season typically ends in mid-April, when the playoffs begin. There is no set timetable for the Olympics after the International Olympic Committee announced this week the games would not start as scheduled on July 24 due to the coronavirus pandemic.—Reuters

## NHL players discuss playoff formats

LOS ANGELES: With the NHL season on an indefinite hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, players have plenty of time to ponder the potential return of the sport. With it looking increasingly likely that a full 82-game regular season won't be completed, attention is turning to how the playoffs might look.

In a Friday conference call involving players from four Pacific Division teams, several potential playoff formats were floated. At the moment, teams have played between 68 and 71 games, calling into question whether total points could be used as the deciding criteria or if the percentage of points amassed should be utilized.

Calgary Flames defenseman Mark Giordano suggested an even more dramatic departure. "I've thought a lot about this," he said. "In a perfect

**18** Olympic qualification process and late season being studied: Coe



**19** Spain's female football referees on frontline of coronavirus fight



**19** Former La Liga winger dons white coat



## Australians face weekend sporting void



**SYDNEY:** File photo shows Australian Olympic Committee chief executive Matt Carroll speaks at a press conference at Circular Quay in Sydney on March 25, 2020, the morning after the historic decision to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. — AFP

**SYDNEY:** As Australians embarked on the unprecedented novelty of a weekend without sport yesterday, negotiations continued between professional leagues and players over wage cuts to ensure they survive the coronavirus shutdown.

Top flight soccer, Australian Rules and rugby league action continued behind closed doors up until last Sunday when government measures to control the pandemic forced them to suspend their seasons indefinitely.

After containment steps were ramped up over the week, the fields and beaches around the country usually packed with children and adults taking part in community sports were all but empty yesterday.

As of early yesterday, there were 3,378 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Australia, with 14 deaths linked to the virus. The desperate efforts by the professional leagues to fulfil their broadcasting contracts and keep the revenue flowing underscored the parlous state of their finances without it.

The pay cuts and payoffs that have followed further highlighted the challenges of carrying on for the

rest of the year. Even the wealthiest and best-attended of the professional sports, the Australian Football League (AFL), has been forced to agree pay cuts with the players who would usually be playing in front of huge crowds at this stage of the Australian autumn.

In a deal struck with the union on Friday, the Australian rules players, whose season was stopped after only one round of matches, have agreed to a 50 to 70 percent reduction in payments depending on how long the suspension continues.

"The players always understood the gravity of the situation and have agreed to take significant pay cuts to ensure we can keep the industry going," said AFL Gillon McLachlan.

And yesterday, netball players in the Super Netball league agreed to a two-week holiday from Monday followed by active rest for three weeks at a 70 percent reduction in pay. The National Rugby League

(NRL), the dominant professional code in Australia's eastern states, is still negotiating with the union representing their players but savage cuts in wages of up to 87 percent are expected.

Local media reported that the NRL on Monday will present a revised deal to the players and clubs, who have been forced to reduce their workforce temporarily. Melbourne Storm said coach Craig Bellamy, chief executive Dave Donaghy and some other staff will take 50% pay cuts as they try to wade through the financial stress. Australia's soccer federation laid off 70 percent of its staff

### Pros take pay cuts and payoffs

on Friday and Perth Glory, A-League runners-up last season, stood down all their players and staff on Saturday, prompting a threat of legal action from the players' union.

The sport suffered a further jolt with Newcastle Jets confirming that a player in their A-League squad

has returned a positive test for the virus.

"The player and his family are in good health, and currently in quarantine in accordance with NSW Health protocols," the Jets said, adding that the squad was being closely monitored. Rugby union, widely accepted as the football code with the biggest financial challenge, suspended talks with the Rugby Union Players Association on Friday pending Rugby Australia's annual general meeting on Monday, local media reported.

The situation was similar across the Tasman Sea in New Zealand, where even the coaching staff of the famed All Blacks, who claim to be the most successful national team in any sport in the world, have agreed to reduced wages.

"It's a dire state when you can't play a game," Ian Foster, the head coach of the team that sets the standard in rugby union, told Radio Sport yesterday. "We're obviously in a high-cost, high-revenue industry, and when the revenue dies, you're left with high costs. So it's a no-brainer. There's going to be some pain." — Reuters

## Coronavirus will not be opportunity for drug cheats: WADA

**TOKYO:** World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) chief Witold Banka had a message on Friday for any athlete thinking they could take advantage of the gap in drug-testing created by the coronavirus outbreak — "we will catch you" and "eliminate you".

WADA acknowledged last week that the coronavirus pandemic had created challenges for drug-testers with countries closing borders, cancelling flights, enforcing mandatory quarantines or isolations and the shutdown of the sporting calendar.

For unscrupulous athletes this represents a huge

opportunity. Out of reach of the anti-doping authorities, perhaps in some cases for months, some athletes may feel emboldened to boost their medal chances with the help of performance-enhancing drugs, with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics postponed for a year. If they do Banka insisted they will be caught. "They are not athletes, if you are a cheat we will catch you, for sure we... will ...catch you," the WADA president told Reuters in a phone interview. "If you want to use this situation to cheat us we will catch you and we will eliminate you from sport."

### OTHER WEAPONS

The coronavirus means, however, that testing is certainly in slumber and WADA conceded that it has been reduced in certain parts of the world although no figures are available. In the absence of testing, WADA will have to rely on other weapons in its anti-doping arsenal including the athlete biological passport, long-term analysis and investigations.

"The world stops, this is a new and challenging situation for all of us but we have a lot of tools we are using and I hope we will return to full power very quickly," said Banka. "Anti-doping never sleeps, that is the message I would like to give to my fellow athletes. Testing is not the one weapon we have which we can use against cheats.

"It is important to know athletes remain subject to testing and they must provide whereabouts information. To the athletes and my colleagues we will do everything to maintain the integrity of the system and hope we return full power very quickly."

Knowing where athletes are is one thing, getting to them during an epidemic is another, with entire cities and regions quarantined or locked down.

But the International Olympic Committee's decision to delay the 2020 Games for a year has also bought WADA some time to plan and ramp up testing when it is safe to do so.

"This is a difficult situation, a huge problem, but

we are doing our best to monitor the situation," said Banka. "The decision to postpone the Olympic Games was a helpful decision. I need to say it was a victory for commonsense and I think everyone agrees it was the right call.

"For our anti-doping program it was good." While testing is down, WADA has made no cuts and is not planning any layoffs, said Banka adding: "Our financial situation, taking into account current situations, is very stable".

Banka, who helped Poland win a bronze medal in the 4x400 metres relay at the 2007 world championships, said WADA will use every resource available to ensure a level playing field in Tokyo.

"I am coming from an athletic environment and I will do everything to convince the athletes I am working with them and I am listening and I will do everything to create a fair environment for them," he said. "I will use a lot of tools to do this. We will use all the weapons which we have." — Reuters