

**Cricketer Stokes to test his F1 skills in virtual GP**

England cricketer Ben Stokes will test his driving skills against five Formula One drivers, including Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, in the sport's second virtual grand prix this weekend.

P11

**Emirates to resume limited passenger flights**

THE DAILY **tribune**

COVID-19: Taylor Swift helps vintage record store stay afloat

**Global virus cases near million**

**Medicines home delivery service to begin Sunday**

TDT | Manama

Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC) announced yesterday a new home delivery service for prescribed medicines.

The service, which will be activated from Sunday, is a part of precautionary measures implemented by the Kingdom to curb the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), and to ensure the health, safety and comfort of patients.

SMC management indicated that those wishing to benefit from the e-service shall provide the patients' required information through the link on the Health Ministry's website moh.gov.bh/eServices/pharmacy. They will then get their medicines within 48 hours of receiving the order.

This service will not include controlled medications and medicines dispensed from health centres, SMC said, noting that it will cover the remaining public health facilities soon.

**Face mask prices fixed**

TDT | Manama

Industry and Commerce Minister Zayed R. Al Zayani issued yesterday an edict fixing the price of face masks and ensuring their availability amid soaring demand as the country battles the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The surgical and N95 types of face masks will be 140 fils and BD1.4, respectively, as a maximum selling price for the consumer per piece for a period of three months from the date of implementation of the provisions of this edict.

Also under the edict, it is prohibited to export all kinds of medical face masks for a period of three months, unless permitted by the Ministry. Violators of these provisions shall be punished.



02 Fruits, vegetables prices down 30%

03 Leading the charge!

04 Google boosts support for checking coronavirus facts

210 fils (includes VAT)



**Health Ministry reports 66 new COVID-19 cases from expat labour workers**

● **Infected moved to quarantine centre yesterday following a positive case at their residence, where they were self-isolating**

● **Fourth chartered flight of evacuated Bahraini citizens from Iran arrives**

TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Health announced yesterday 66 new active cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19), following tests on expatriate labour workers in Salmabad.

The workers were moved to a



quarantine centre yesterday following a positive case registered at their place of residence, where they were self-isolating.

After confirming the positive results, as part of ongoing testing for individuals in quarantine, the new active cases were moved to treatment facilities immediately.

The Ministry has taken comprehensive preventative measures, including testing all indi-

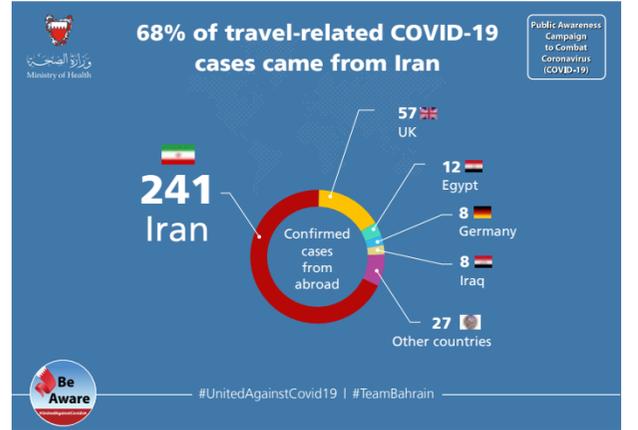
viduals known to have been in contact with positive cases to ensure their safety.

Contacts of the new active cases have had their quarantine period extended for an additional two weeks, in line with preventative protocols.

The foreign workers did not leave quarantine while self-isolating at their place of residence. All were moved into designated quarantine centres as a precaution. There has been no community spread of the virus amongst foreign labourers.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry has recorded that, of the 353 COVID-19 cases with a history of travel to countries with high infection rates, 68 per cent were detected among travellers returning from Iran.

To date, a total of 241 confirmed cases have been detected amongst travellers returning



Infographic of confirmed cases by country

from Iran, followed by 57 travellers returning from the UK, 12 returning from Egypt, eight from Iraq and 27 from other countries with high infection rates.

Bahrain, with its high recovery rate, is being recognised as a model for mitigating the spread of COVID-19. As of last night, the Kingdom has recorded 381 recov-

eries, far exceeding total active cases, which was 258, of which all but three are stable. The total tested has reached 36,506.

The Health Ministry also announced yesterday the arrival of a fourth flight of evacuated Bahraini citizens from Iran. They were received by officials and proper procedures were taken.

**LMRA terminates fees**

Move is in line with directives of HRH the Crown Prince to support the private sector amidst COVID-19 fight

● **Monthly work fees and fees for issuing and renewing work permits for a period of three months terminated, starting from April**

● **Grace period launched for expatriate workers needing to legalise their stay until end of year**

TDT | Manama

The Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) announced yesterday the termination of monthly work fees and fees for issuing and renewing work permits for a period of three months, starting from April.

This move is in line with the directives of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First

Deputy Prime Minister, to support the private sector as the main engine of growth.

It also follows the government's recent announcement of a comprehensive economic stimulus package to support the economy amidst the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The LMRA highlighted its continued support for national efforts to counter the effects of the global spread of COVID-19, underlining its commitment to assisting the Kingdom's small and medium-sized enterprises.

Meanwhile, the LMRA also announced the launch of a grace period for expatriate workers who are illegally staying in the Kingdom to rectify their status.

During this time, they are being called to legalise their stay, in line with the country's laws of employment.

The LMRA confirmed that coordination has been made with all the concerned authorities in the country in relation to this grace period, which will continue until

**HRH the Crown Prince chairs remote meeting**



His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister yesterday chaired the Coordinating Committee meeting 309. It was held remotely, as part of measures being taken in the fight against the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. During the meeting, HRH the Crown Prince discussed with other top officials participating the latest developments in dealing with COVID-19. Above, HRH the Crown Prince during the remote meeting.

the end of the current year 2020.

The LMRA called on all illegal workers to take advantage of this initiative, which is also for their

own benefit.

The LMRA stressed that it will spare no effort in implementing the decisions that contribute to

supporting the national economy and its growth, while also taking into account the humanitarian conditions of migrant workers.

LEARNING GOES ON

**Education Ministry gives go-ahead for teachers to work from home**

TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Education gave the green light yesterday for all teachers to work from home, as from Sunday.

The measure follows the directives of the Executive Committee, chaired by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister.

It is also in line with the Civil Service Bureau's (CSB) directive to allow ministries, entities and government departments to increase the rate of distance work to 70 per cent as a maximum.

Teachers are required to continue assuming their duties and prepare lessons, enrichment material, and discussion sessions online, in addition to assessing students' work during the normal hours.

PUBLIC AND MEDIA RELATIONS DIRECTORATE

"The Ministry of Education has thus achieved the required 70 per cent cap of its overall human resources," said the Public

and Media Relations Directorate.

Meanwhile, administrative and technical staff will continue performing their work at schools, in addition to other ministry personnel.

Husbands whose wives assume vital duties at the front line of the fight against COVID-19 will also be allowed to work from home.

The ministry will continue assigning some teachers to carry out lessons online during this period as the country continues its battle to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

"All teachers are required to continue assuming their duties and prepare lessons, en-

richment material, and discussion sessions online, in addition to assessing and mark students' work and activities during the normal working hours," said the directorate.

Administrative and technical staff will follow up teachers' work in coordination with the ministry's concerned directorate. Schools will be required to submit regular reports updating the ministry on the ongoing work-from-home procedure, as per the CSB circular.

Under CSB instructions, employees may be required to perform their duties alternately from their homes and work places, whenever necessary and subject to the authorities' review.

## International Day of Conscience to be observed Sunday

TDT | Manama

The first edition of the International Day of Conscience will be observed on Sunday.

The occasion was approved by the United Nations in response to an initiative by His Royal Highness the Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa to motivate the international community to promote peace, tolerance, cooperation, security and stability.

The initiative embodies the keenness of the Kingdom of Bahrain, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, to contribute effectively to fostering global peace and stability.

In a statement marking the occasion, the UN affirmed that the International Day of Conscience is an opportunity to mobilize the international community's efforts to bolster peace, tolerance, integration and understanding so as to build a world based on solidarity and co-existence.

It called on the member states as well as international and regional organizations, the private sector, the civil society institutions and individuals to promote a culture of peace and tolerance.



## BDF Commander-in-Chief conducts inspection visit



Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) Commander-in-Chief Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa paid an inspection visit yesterday to a BDF unit. The Commander-in-Chief reviewed the unit's administrative and combat readiness, as well as its military preparations and work progress. He was briefed about the military preparations, the work progress, and development in the unit. Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa stressed that BDF keeps moving forward with its military development at various levels, thanks to the constant care of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the Supreme Commander. He urged BDF staff to continue giving all their energy and dedication to achieve the set goals and keep abreast all developments in various modern military areas. Above, Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa, left, during his inspection visit.

## Public Security chief hails measures to combat spread of COVID-19



Public Security chief Lt-General Tariq Al Hassan hailed the decisions of the Executive Committee, chaired by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister, and its steps to prevent the spreading of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Lt-General Al Hassan also hailed the role of the medical team in their dealing with cases. Chairing a virtual meeting with directors affiliated with the Public Security Presidency, he commended the decision taken by the Interior Minister to ban gatherings of more than five people. The meeting also reviewed various security developments and cases. Lt. General Al Hassan expressed thanks and appreciation to all concerned authorities for their efforts to protect public security and safety. He stressed the importance of carrying duties as part of the national campaign to combat the spread of COVID-19. Above, Lt-General Al Hassan during the virtual meeting.

## Online appointments required for traffic services that need personal attendance

TDT | Manama

The General Directorate of Traffic announced yesterday that the services that require personal attendance would be processed after booking appointments through the Skiplino smart-phone application.

This is being done to help avoid overcrowding at the service halls, including the headquarters, Driving Learning Directorates, and Security Complex in Muharraq, as part of precautionary measures against the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

The directorate called upon the public to process their services through the e-traffic application and the government portal, bahrain.bh, which are available 24 hours.

Services that require the attendance of the applicants include: transferring the ownership of number plates and vehicles, replacement of driving learning licences, owning number plates, issuance of certificates for cancellation of driving learning licences or new vehicles, and renewing driving licences for certain groups such as the elderly who require eye tests.

## Information Minister hails social media activists for patriotic role

TDT | Manama

Information Minister Ali bin Mohammed Al Romaihi conveyed a message of respect and appreciation to social media activists. In a video circulated on social media websites, he thanked them for their patriotic efforts to boost national unity and social awareness in these exceptional circumstances.

Al Romaihi described them as the unidentified soldiers who are playing a key role in promoting awareness and fighting rumours and disinformation.

The Information Minister underlined complementarity between the official media and the social media networks in light of the exceptional circumstance going on in the world.

He paid tribute to His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khaifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Premier, for betting on social awareness, describing the role of the social media activists as essential in fighting rumours and disclosing trusted and official information.

## Distance work for up to 70% of staff allowed in public offices

TDT | Manama

Ministries, entities and government departments have been allowed to increase the rate of distance work to 70 per cent as a maximum.

This was announced yesterday by Civil Service Bureau (CSB) president Ahmed bin Zayed Al Zayed.

He said that the move is in line with the directives of the Government Executive Committee,

chaired by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister, to encourage work from home for public institutions whenever possible.

The CSB instructions will be implemented from Sunday, and continue until further notice. It will be applied according to work requirements, and provided that the services delivered to citizens

and residents will not be affected. The CSB president noted that the decision aims to reduce the number of employees at the work place, as part of the precautionary and preventive measures taken by the Kingdom to contain and prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Al Zayed indicated that government departments will determine the employees to be covered by teleworking, provided

that the staff will carry out their duties alternately from home or by reporting to the work place as the competent authorities deem necessary.

He added that vital professions that will be exempted from this decision will be determined in coordination between CSB and the respective government departments, in accordance with the requirements of public interests.

# Fruits, vegetables prices down 30%

Inspection Directorate at Industry Ministry oversees sale of first batch of seized products

TDT | Manama

The Inspection Directorate at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, yesterday oversaw the sale of the first batch of seized fruits and vegetables.

The directorate's team also monitored the prices of fruits and vegetables at various outlets across the Kingdom's directorates, and said that

their prices fell by about 30 per cent.

Industry, Commerce and Tourism Minister Zayed R. Al Zayani, said that the sale of the seized products will continue on a daily basis, commensurate with market needs.

He noted that the Inspection Directorate will continue its campaign to ensure the flow of basic products and stability of their prices.

He pledged zero-tolerance against whoever tampers with prices or obstructs the provision of basic food products.

Earlier this week, the zero-tolerance policy was announced against anyone who illegally and unethically takes advantage of the current circumstances to compromise Bahrain's food security or to manipulate the markets and hike prices.



Inspection teams from the Ministry check on seized fruits and vegetables

Those who seek to influence the prices of products in any way would be referred to criminal courts, where they would face prison terms of up to five years and fines of at least BD5,000, in addition to the confiscation of their products.

Meanwhile, Minister Al Zayani had also previously stressed that the ministry is in constant coordination with relevant authorities to ensure

that goods and products are continually available in Bahrain's markets.

He said that these commodities remain abundant in the Kingdom, and noted that there is no need to purchase large quantities of goods other than what is needed.

The minister further assured that maintaining the supply of food and medicine remains a top priority.

## Warmer, less-humid March in Kingdom

TDT | Manama

The month of March was warmer than normal, with below-average relative humidities and wind speed, the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications' Meteorological Directorate announced yesterday.

The mean temperature of the month was 22.1degrees Celsius, which is 1.1degrees C above the long-term normal for March, the directorate said in its monthly weather summary.

The mean maximum temperature of the month was 26.2degrees C, which is 1.5degrees C

above the long-term normal.

The highest temperature recorded during the month was 31.2degrees C, which occurred on March 15 at Bahrain International Airport (BIA), but recorded 32.1degrees C on March 18 at Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) and on March 29 at Durrat Al Bahrain.

The mean minimum temperature of the month was 19.2 degrees C, which is 1.4degrees C above the long-term normal.

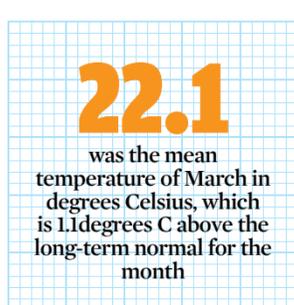
The lowest temperature recorded was 15.6degrees C set on March 6 at BIA, but recorded 12.4degrees C the same night in

Durrat.

A total of 6.4mm of precipitation was reported in March at BIA. Trace amounts were recorded on March 14, 18 and 28.

The long-term average total precipitation for March was 14.0mm. The highest monthly total precipitation ever recorded during March at BIA was 139.2mm in 1995.

Thundery showers were reported at BIA on March 21 accumulating daily total precipitation of 6.4mm and the visibility dropped to 1,000meters. Moderate thundery showers with hail were reported in some areas



around Bahrain.

Light rain was reported in some areas on March 15.

The total precipitation recorded for March at BIC was

16.0mm, whereas the total precipitation at Durrat was 14.8mm, at King Fahd Causeway was 7.2mm and at Sitra Island was 2.4mm.

The mean relative humidity for March was 62 per cent whereas the mean maximum relative humidity was 79 per cent, and the mean minimum relative humidity was 40 per cent.

It was the third sunniest March since the sunshine records began in 1968, whereby the monthly total hours of sunshine recorded was 287.4hours, exceeded only by March 2018

with a record of 324.3hours and March 2013 with a record of 291.3hours.

The Northwesterly winds accounted 25 per cent with gusts reaching 48knots on March 21 at Durrat. Southeasterly winds accounted 16 per cent of the observation with gusts reaching 37knots on March 14 at BIA.

Fog affected the Kingdom on March 11 and it reduced the visibility to 100meters at BIA. This phenomenon had not occurred in March since the year 2002, when fog patches reported on March 11 reduced the visibility to 800meters at the airport.

● **WHO director general: HRH the Premier has played an important role in a unified international community trying to overcome a virus that knows no geographical or political borders**

TDT | Manama

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has expressed its appreciation of the efforts of the government, led by His Royal Highness the Prime Minister, to reduce the scope and impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In a letter to HRH Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the Prime Minister, WHO director general Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus expressed the organisation's pride in the support of HRH the Prime Minister in creating an urgent and widespread community momentum to end the pandemic as soon as possible.

HRH the Premier's role in promoting solidarity between peoples is crucial to the success of the national and international responses to tackle the coronavirus, Dr. Ghebreyesus said.

He noted the importance of HRH the Prime Minister's role in a unified international community that is trying to overcome the virus that knows no geographical or political borders.

The WHO director general praised the political leadership of HRH the Prime Minister, stressing its indispensability to harness domestic and international efforts to confront the pandemic.

The WHO official informed the Prime Minister of his meetings with international diplomatic missions in Geneva to brief them on the latest developments re-



HRH the Prime Minister



Dr. Ghebreyesus

garding the coronavirus and the strategic plan to combat the disease. The gathering was held in order to help direct international efforts, according to the special situation of each country.

HRH the Prime Minister stressed that the government, as soon as the virus was announced, had put in place rapid prevention plans to deal with the pandemic and that the Cabinet has succeeded in limiting its spread.

Everyone in Bahrain, each according to their capacity, are soldiers who protect their country and society from the enemy, HRH the Prime Minister added.

The government's actions were not based on reactions or

on dealing with the issue according to the development of the situation, HRH the Premier said. To the contrary, the government was proactive in taking preventive and precautionary measures. These included mobilisation, media education, stimulation of the sense of responsibility and promotion of a culture that every citizen is responsible for protecting the country and society from the global health crisis, and the adherence to directives and instructions of the government, he said.

HRH the Premier praised WHO's great efforts in sharpening and uniting international efforts in the face of the corona-

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Everyone in Bahrain, each according to their capacity, are soldiers who protect their country and society from the enemy.

HRH THE PRIME MINISTER

virus and stressed that the competent government agencies in Bahrain have been directed to be in constant coordination with the WHO, to keep it abreast of the latest developments in the Kingdom and the measures adopted to combat the pandemic.

HRH the Prime Minister said that the government, under the guidance of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, took all measures to combat the disease on the health, economic and commercial levels, including activating emergency protocols, confronting disasters and developing a national plan to tackle the disease.

He lauded the successful efforts of HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister, in this regard.

# Leading the charge!

WHO commends HRH the Prime Minister's efforts in COVID-19 fight

## Bahrain officials take part in WHO regional virtual meeting



The Bahrain officials during the virtual meeting

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean regional director Dr. Ahmed bin Salem Al Munthari yesterday held a virtual meeting to discuss the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Health Minister Faeqa bint Said Al Saleh delegated Public Health assistant undersecretary and National Taskforce for Combating Covid-19 member Dr. Mariam Al Hajeri to take part in the meeting. Public Health Director Dr. Najat Abul Fateh, Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC) Consultant of Infectious and Internal Dis-

eases Dr. Jameela Al-Salman, and the Health Ministry's Medical Equipment Chief Mansour Ali Mansour also participated. Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office Director of Emergency Operations Dr. Richard Brennan gave an update on developments, highlighting precautionary measures, curbs and challenges to combat the pandemic. The participants approved a number of measures as part of a strategy aimed to step up collective coordination, stressing the importance of being prepared to deal with developments.

## Asian duo jailed for human trafficking

TDT | Manama

The First High Criminal Court sentenced a man and a woman to three years' imprisonment and fined them BD2,000 each for human trafficking, after forcing two women into the flesh trade.

According to the victims' statements in court, they applied for jobs in Bahrain from their home country but once they reached here they were detained by the female defendant, who also confiscated their passports.

They further told prosecutors that the female defendant informed them that they would be working as prostitutes, but when they refused, the woman, with the help of her accomplice, threatened to inform their families about their work in the vice trade and that they would be jailed here for nine years.

The victims said they agreed and the male defendant then took them to an apartment where they

would have sexual intercourse with different customers for money, which the male defendant collected. They added that they were forced to do so until they escaped the apartment and reported the matter to the police. “We came here believing that we would be employed as domestic workers for a monthly salary of BD200, but when we reached Bahrain, we were shocked when she (the female defendant) confiscated our passports and informed us that we must work as prostitutes so we can pay her a big amount of money before she sets us free,” the victims said in their testimonies.

Both defendants were convicted of human trafficking, restricting the victims' freedom and depending on vice as a source of income. In addition to the fine and the prison sentence, they were both ordered to bear the expenses of the victims' repatriation and were also blacklisted from re-entering the Kingdom after they finish serving their jail terms.

## Company refutes allegations of forcing employees to take leave

TDT | Manama

Claims that Bahraini employees were forced to take their annual leaves were refuted by a renowned national company.

This came following rumours that were widely circulated online and after an MP alleged that Bahrain Airport Services (BAS) “employees were obligated to take their leaves and sit at home”.

The rumours hinted that the move came within the aftermath of the losses caused by the ongoing crisis of the coronavirus (Covid19) pandemic and its negative economic impact.

In its response, BAS strongly denied the allegations, without naming the MP, and stated that “the company's management asserts that the above is not true”.

BAS clarified in a press statement issued: “BAS, whose commercial activity extends for about 42 years, has, for decades, taken an interest in the human factor, especially national cadres. During the current coronavirus crisis, the company provided all



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I recently received a call informing me that the company, through its managers and executives, requested some of the employees to sign blank papers that, until now, no one knows what they are for. Some employees signed some of these papers.

MP MOHAMMED BUHAMMOOD

necessary precautions to its employees.”

In the statement, BAS affirmed that it has requested its employees to take their pending leaves but did not force them to take their annual leave.

“In accordance with the Labour Law and the company's internal regulations, employees were asked to settle their accumulated leave balance from previous years without prejudice to their future leaves,” BAS men-

tioned in its statement, while at the same time calling upon the public to “seek facts from official sources”.

This came one day after MP Mohammed Buhammood made the claims in the weekly meeting of the Council of Representatives on Tuesday. His statements came during the discussion of an urgent draft-law to withdraw BD-215million from the unemployment fund to pay for the salaries of Bahrainis in the private sector

for three months (from April to June). Several MPs, including MP Buhammood, questioned some private establishments' worthiness of the package, claiming that they are taking arbitrary measures against their Bahraini employees amidst the current extraordinary circumstances. MP Buhammood's statements came during the discussion and in the presence of Labour and Social Development Minister Jameel bin Ali Humaidan, along with Finance and National Economy Minister Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa.

“I recently received a call informing me that the company (BAS), through its managers and executives, requested some of the employees to sign blank papers that until now no one knows what they are for. Some employees signed some of these papers,” the lawmaker said before adding that “some of these companies have begun as if it is gnawing the bodies of citizens in such a tough situation”.

## NPRA launches online services

TDT | Manama

The Nationality, Passports and Residence Affairs (NPRA) has announced the launch of a host of online services for the public through a communi-

cation system on its website www.npra.gov.bh.

The facility aims to speed up the processing of applications within the required quality.

A contact centre was also allocated to answer inquiries and

provide back-up for the e-services. It highlighted that, from Sunday, the system would be operational, while applicants will not be received at the headquarters or other services centres for their health and safety.

The system includes essential services related to issuing, extending and cancelling visas, local transfer, issuing and cancelling resident permits, self-sponsorship licences and the grace period. The resident permit sticker would

be fixed while travelling via the airport.

The system also includes the issuing of Bahraini passports for the first time and replacement of lost or damaged passports. Passports can be received through the Isa

Town Services Centre.

The NPRA called upon clients to learn about the conditions and required documents to process their applications before submitting them through its website or by calling 17399764.

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# business

## Emirates to resume limited passenger flights

AFP | Dubai

Emirates Airline said yesterday it is to resume a limited number of out-bound passenger flights from April 6, less than two weeks after its coronavirus-enforced stoppage.

"Emirates has received approval from UAE authorities to restart flying a limited number of passenger flights," its chairman, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, said on *Twitter*.

"From April 6, these flights will initially carry travellers outbound from UAE," he said, adding that details would be announced soon.

Dubai-owned carrier Emir-



Emirates aircraft grounded at Dubai International Airport after the UAE suspended all passenger operations due to the coronavirus pandemic

ates, the largest in the Middle East with 271 wide-body aircraft, grounded passenger operations last week as the UAE halted all passenger flights to fight the spread of coronavirus.

The UAE, which groups seven emirates including Dubai, has declared 814 coronavirus cases along with eight deaths.

It has imposed a sweeping crackdown, including the flight ban and closure of borders.

Sheikh Ahmed said Emirates, which owns the world's largest fleet of Airbus A-380 superjumbos with 113 in its ranks, was looking to gradually resume passenger services.

"Over the time, Emirates looks forward to the gradual resump-

tion of passenger services in line with lifting of travel and operational restrictions, including assurance of health measures to safeguard our people and customers," he said.

When Emirates suspended flights, it cut between 25 per cent and 50pc of the basic salary of its 100,000-strong staff for three months, saying it wanted to avert layoffs.

Dubai's crown prince, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum said Tuesday that Dubai will support the airline by injecting new capital.

Tourism, aviation, hotels and entertainment are key contributors to Dubai's mostly non-oil economy.

## KPMG fined for failing to challenge client

● KPMG's fine was discounted from 700,000 pounds (\$868,840.00) to 455,000 pounds for early settlement

Reuters | London

Britain's accounting watchdog fined KPMG and a senior partner yesterday for failing to challenge what a client was telling them about certain complex supplier arrangements.

The Financial Reporting Council, which did not name the company being audited, said KPMG's fine was discounted from 700,000 pounds (\$868,840.00) to 455,000 pounds for early settlement. Senior partner Nicola Quayle was fined 45,000 pounds, reduced to 29,250 pounds for early settlement.

KPMG and the other big accounting firms are facing major reforms to improve standards



KPMG and the other big accounting firms are facing major reforms to improve standards

after company collapses at British builder Carillion and retailer BHS.

Policymakers also want to put an end to what they consider cosy relationships between auditing firms and their clients and bring in more competition.

KPMG, one of the world's top four accounting firms, in 2018 was put under "increased scrutiny" by the FRC for poor auditing.

In the latest case, the watch-

dog said KPMG failed to obtain and document sufficient audit evidence in relation to supplier-funded rebates. Auditors should have been on alert to pay particular attention to "these types of complex supplier arrangements."

"Professional scepticism remains at the core of an auditor's duty and the FRC will take appropriate action where it has been lacking, as in this case," said Claudia Mortimore,

the FRC's deputy executive counsel.

But the FRC said the breaches were limited in nature and did not call into question the truth or fairness of the company's financial statements.

KPMG said it regretted that specific aspects of its audit of the company in question for the 2015/16 financial year did not meet the required standards and has updated procedures.

"As the FRC makes clear, there is no question as to the truth and fairness of the financial statements," KPMG said in a statement.

The FRC said KPMG was also required to undertake a quality performance review of three audits for which Quayle is the auditor and report the results to the watchdog.

Quayle, an auditor for 23 years and a former non-executive board member of KPMG UK, will also be required to "undertake appropriate training, in a format to be agreed with the FRC", the watchdog said.

## British Airways could suspend 36,000 employees - BBC

Reuters

IAG-owned British Airways is expected to announce a suspension of about 36,000 of its employees, BBC News reported on Wednesday.

The airline has reached a broad deal with Unite union that will include suspension of 80% of BA's cabin crew, ground staff, engineers and those working at head office,

the news agency reports, adding that no staff were expected to be made redundant.

Talks with the union are still ongoing, British Airways said in a brief statement to Reuters.

British Airways had said on Tuesday it was temporarily suspending flights from Gatwick Airport, Britain's second-busiest airport, as the aviation sector reels under the coronavirus crisis.

## Boeing announces voluntary layoff plan

AFP | New York

Boeing unveiled a voluntary worker layoff programme yesterday, telling employees that it hoped to avoid "other workforce actions" as the aviation industry reels from the coronavirus crisis.

The initiative was announced by Boeing Chief Executive David Calhoun, who

said such belt-tightening was needed amid the hit to the industry caused by the pandemic.

"It's important that we start adjusting to our new reality now," he said.

Boeing's financial picture was already a bit cloudy prior to the coronavirus outbreak because of the crisis surrounding the 737 MAX.

## Google boosts support for checking coronavirus facts

AFP | San Francisco

Google yesterday said it is pumping \$6.5 million into fact-checkers and nonprofits as it ramps up its battle against coronavirus misinformation.

Fact-checking organizations, which often operate on relatively small budgets, are seeing a surge in demand for their work as mistaken or maliciously false information about the pandemic spreads, according to Alexios Mantzarlis of the Google News Lab.

"Uncertainty and fear make

Google is conducting a test in India and Africa to explore how to use trends in what people are asking or searching for online to let fact-checkers know where a lack of reliable answers may invite misinformation.



us all more susceptible to inaccurate information, so we're supporting fact-checkers as they address heightened demand for their work," Mantzarlis said.

A Poynter Institute report last year on the state of fact-checking indicated that more than a fifth of fact-checking organizations operated with annual budgets of less than \$20,000.

"We are supporting fact checking projects around the world with a concentration on parts hardest hit by the pandemic," Mantzarlis told said.

"This can be a noticeable infusion of additional support at a time of stress."

Google is also looking to use its products and "ecosystem" to bolster the battle against COVID-19 misinformation.

The Google News Initiative is increasing its support for nonprofit First Draft, which provides a resource hub, training and crisis simulations for journalists covering news during times of crisis, according to Mantzarlis.

Google is also supporting the



Uncertainty and fear make us all more susceptible to inaccurate information, so we're supporting fact-checkers as they address heightened demand for their work

ALEXIOS MANTZARLIS  
GOOGLE NEWS LAB

creation of a public health resource database for reporters. "We also want to do more to

surface fact-checks that address potentially harmful health misinformation more prominently to our users," Mantzarlis said.

"We're experimenting with how to best include a dedicated fact-check section in the COVID-19 Google News experience."

Google is conducting a test in India and Africa to explore how to use trends in what people are asking or searching for online to let fact-checkers know where a lack of reliable answers may invite misinformation.

"Unanswered user questions -- such as 'what temperature kills coronavirus?' -- can provide useful insights to fact-checkers and health authorities about content they may want to produce," Mantzarlis said.

That test compliments an effort to train 1,000 journalists across India and Nigeria to spot health misinformation, according to the California-based internet titan.

"There is definitely an appe-



Facebook has also supported fact-checking operations with AFP and other media companies, including Reuters and the Associated Press, under which content rated false is downgraded in news feeds so that fewer people see it.

tite for this stuff," Mantzarlis said.

"We grasp for certainty, a glimmer of something we can do to protect ourselves and those we care about. It makes us more vulnerable to this kind of misinformation."

# Russia-Saudi oil deal soon: Trump

Reuters | Washington

U.S. President Donald Trump said he has invited US oil executives to the White House to discuss ways to help the industry "ravaged" by slumping energy demand.

Trump also said he had talked recently with the leaders of both Russia and Saudi Arabia and believed the two countries would make a deal to end their price war within a "few days" - lowering production and bringing prices back up.

"I'm going to meet with the oil producers today. I'm going to meet with independent oil producers also on Friday or Saturday. Maybe Sunday. We're going to have a lot of meetings on it," Trump told reporters at a media conference.

"Worldwide, the oil industry has been ravaged," he said. "Its very bad for Russia, its very bad for Saudi Arabia. I mean, its very bad for both. I think they're going to make a deal."

Global oil prices have fallen by roughly two-thirds this year as the coronavirus has slammed global economies at the same



U.S. President Donald Trump addresses the daily coronavirus response briefing at the White House in Washington, U.S.

time major producers Saudi Arabia and Russia have started to flood the market with oil.

Speaking yesterday, a senior Gulf source familiar with Saudi thinking said the Kingdom supports cooperation between oil producers to stabilise prices but Russia's opposition to a proposal last month to deepen supply cuts has caused market turmoil.

The collapse in prices has threatened the once-booming US drilling industry with bankruptcies and massive layoffs, and Washington has scrambled for ways to protect the sector.

In the coming meetings with oil executives, Trump is expected to discuss a range of options to help the industry, including the possibility of tariffs on oil imports from Saudi Arabia, according to the Wall Street Journal, which was first to report the planned meetings.

Major drillers expected to participate in the initial meeting include Exxon Mobil Corp, Chevron Corp, Occidental Petroleum Corp, and Continental Resources, according to the Journal. Occidental said it had no comment, while officials at

the other companies did not respond to requests for comment.

A source familiar with the plan said that oil refiners and small producers would also be represented and the issue of potential waivers for royalties on existing federal offshore and on-shore leases would be discussed.

The American Petroleum Institute, which represents the US oil and gas industry, said its president Mike Sommers would attend the initial meeting, but added: "We are not seeking any government subsidies or industry-specific intervention to address the recent market downturn at this time."

The API, many of whose members operate globally, has said in the past it opposes trade tariffs because it can complicate projects and business relationships in other countries.

The Trump administration said it is also planning to send a special envoy to Riyadh to push for lower output.

Saudi Arabia's crude supply rose on Wednesday to a record of more than 12 million barrels per day, two industry sources said.

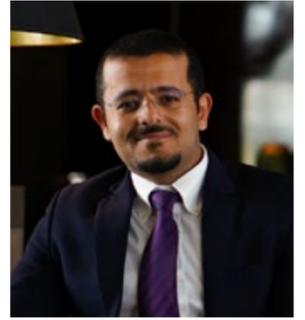
## GBM names Feras Al Majed as VP of Human Resources

TDT | Dubai

Gulf Business Machines (GBM) announced naming Feras Al Majed as the Vice President of Human Resources (VP of HR) for the company's regional operations.

A longtime member of the organisation's HR team, Al Majed joined GBM in 2013, and as the new VP of HR, he will handle all HR related activities across the organisation. He replaces Shawki Hussain, who has successfully led the people agenda of GBM from its infancy in 1990 to date and been a driving force in ensuring the organization is an employer of choice.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank Shawki on



Feras Al Majed

behalf of all the GBM board members and employees for his stellar contribution and loyalty over the past 30 years, and wish him all the best in his future endeavours," said Jalal Mohammed Jalal, Honorary Chairman, GBM.

## Mecca, Medina get 24-hour curfew; Gulf migrant worker districts locked down

Reuters | Riyadh

Saudi Arabia imposed a 24-hour curfew yesterday in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, extending measures to combat coronavirus, while other Gulf Arab states locked down districts with large migrant worker populations.

The Saudi interior ministry stipulated exceptions, including for essential workers and to allow residents to buy food and access medical care. Cars may only carry one passenger.

Saudi Arabia has recorded 1,885 infections and 21 deaths, the most in the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council. It has already halted international flights, suspended the year-round umrah pilgrimage, closed most public places, and heavily restricted internal movement.

The eastern oil-producing province of Qatif, where the kingdom's first coronavirus cases were reported among Shi'ite Muslim pilgrims returning from Iran, has been on lockdown for nearly four weeks.

Entry and exit to Riyadh, Mecca, Medina and Jeddah is limited. Some neighbourhoods in Mecca and Medina were already under full lockdown, but in the rest of those cities the curfew was previously from 3 p.m. to 6 a.m.

In other Gulf Arab states, lockdowns targeted neighbourhoods with large numbers of low-wage foreign labourers. Kuwait's health minister

**The Saudi interior ministry stipulated exceptions, including for essential workers and to allow residents to buy food and access medical care. Cars may only carry one passenger**

said authorities were considering sealing off some areas after Qatar announced late on Wednesday it was extending a lockdown on an industrial area and Oman closed off Muttrah, home to one of the sultanate's oldest markets.

Dubai in the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday sealed off Al Ras, an area famous for its gold and spice souqs and where many migrant workers reside.

Millions of migrant workers, mainly from Asian countries like Nepal, India and the Philippines, are among the large expatriate population in the six Gulf states, where confirmed infections have risen to above 4,700, with 36 deaths.

Oman's health minister said the coastal commercial district of Muttrah was sealed off due to the discovery of a community spread of the virus. "Such decisions are not easily taken ... but it is for the public good," state media quoted him as saying.

Saudi Arabia said on Wednesday it was working to enable foreign residents to return home even as passenger flights remain suspended.

## NBB appoints Amin Al Arrayed new board member

TDT | Manama

The National Bank of Bahrain (NBB) named Amin Al Arrayed as its newest Board Member. He replaces Khalid Al Rumaihi who has requested to depart the Board due to his new role and bigger responsibilities.

Khalid Al Rumaihi was appointed as a non-executive member to NBB's Board of Directors in 2014 and served as a valuable member bringing to the table extensive experience and knowledge.

Commenting on the new appointment, Farouk Yousif Almoayyed, Chairman of NBB



Amin Al Arrayed

stated, "On behalf of the NBB Board of Directors, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Khalid Al Rumaihi for his commitment and service to the NBB Board the last six years. He has played an instrumental role in guiding the Bank's ongoing business success and we wish him all the best in his future endeavours. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Amin Al Arrayed as our newest Board Member, and I am confident that with his wealth of expertise, he will be an invaluable addition to our team."

Currently the CEO of Edamah, Amin Al Arrayed boasts 20 years

of experience in the banking, real estate investment and real estate development sectors. A prominent leader in the real estate industry, Al Arrayed's career includes diverse experience across industries having held several leadership positions including CEO of First Bahrain real estate development company, Head of Retail and Placement of Reef Real Estate Finance and Regional Head of Retail Banking at Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait (BBK). In addition to working at the Central Bank of Bahrain, Al Arrayed also gained extensive knowledge from his experience at the International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC.

## Stock market rebound cut short by 'terrible' US jobless claims

Another 6.65 million US workers filed for unemployment benefits last week

AFP | London

A tentative rebound in global equities came to an abrupt end yesterday when US jobless data fuelled fears that no amount of government efforts can shield the economy from coronavirus, analysts said.

Another 6.65 million US workers filed for unemployment benefits last week, the most ever recorded and nearly twice as many as market economists had forecast, according to Factset consensus data. "The economy is in bad shape," said analyst Edward Moya at OANDA, calling the reading "whopping".

"It is unfortunate how bad these numbers are getting, and no one will be surprised if we see a few more terrible readings over the next few weeks," he said.

**'Not enough'**

Fears were growing "that the

### Key figures around 1335 GMT

|                          |                                         |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| London - FTSE 100:       | ▼ 0.2 pc at 5,444.27 points             |
| Frankfurt - DAX 30:      | ▼ 1.4 pc at 9,427.37                    |
| Paris - CAC 40:          | ▼ 0.7 pc at 4,179.32                    |
| EURO STOXX 50:           | ▼ 1.2 pc at 2,649.16                    |
| New York - Dow:          | ▼ 0.7 pc at 20,789.83                   |
| Tokyo - Nikkei 225:      | ▼ 1.4 pc at 17,818.72 (close)           |
| Hong Kong - Hang Seng:   | ▲ 0.8 pc at 23,280.06 (close)           |
| Shanghai - Composite:    | ▲ 1.7 pc at 2,780.64 (close)            |
| Brent North Sea crude:   | ▲ 7.0 pc at \$26.48 per barrel          |
| West Texas Intermediate: | ▲ 7.9 pc at \$21.92                     |
| Euro/dollar:             | ▼ at \$1.0864 from \$1.0964 at 2100 GMT |
| Dollar/yen:              | ▲ at 107.27 yen from 107.17             |
| Pound/dollar:            | ▼ at \$1.2374 from \$1.2406             |
| Euro/pound:              | ▼ at 87.79 pence from 89.07             |

recent fiscal rescue package to help businesses might not be enough to keep people on their payroll", Moya said.

European stock markets, which had earlier in the session managed to rebound from their coronavirus-fuelled losses, turned brutally lower after the US figures.

On Wall Street, where futures had earlier pointed to a stronger start, the Dow Jones index was also down at the opening bell, although by less than its Euro-

pean peers.

The price of oil, which had rallied on hopes of an end to a Saudi-Russia price war and resurgent Chinese energy demand, came off its best levels -- but was still solidly up.

"We do appear to be seeing some gains ... on a couple of headlines that China will start topping up its state reserves, and that Saudi Arabia is supporting co-operation amongst oil producers to stabilise oil markets," said CMC Markets

analyst Michael Hewson.

The deadly coronavirus is keeping traders on edge as it sweeps the planet, with infections approaching one million and countries forced to tighten already strict lockdown.

**'Bundle of nerves'**

Equities were gripped Wednesday by a global rout as the human and economic toll from the coronavirus rose.

After two weeks of much-needed gains fuelled by trillions of dollars in stimulus and widespread monetary easing, focus has returned to the devastation wrought on populations and the long-term impact of the pandemic.

Asia earlier saw a mixed session, with Tokyo down 1.4 per cent, while Sydney and Kuala Lumpur shed two pc apiece and Singapore dropped 0.2 pc. There were also losses in Wellington and Manila.

But Hong Kong rose 0.8 pc and Shanghai rallied 1.7 pc, with Seoul and Bangkok up more than two pc. Jakarta put on more than one pc.

Investors are now a "bundle of nerves", said AxiCorp's Stephen Innes.

## Planemakers brace for sharp cuts in wide-body output: sources

Reuters | Washington/Paris

Planemakers are looking at drastic cuts in wide-body production amid a slump in demand for the industry's largest jetliners, manufacturing and supplier sources said yesterday.

Deliveries of long-range jets like the Boeing 777 or 787 and Airbus A350 or A330 have been particularly badly hit as airlines seek deferrals and many withhold progress payments.

"At a minimum, the (Boe-

ing) rate could fall by at least half," one industry source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Airbus also faces likely cuts in wide-body jet production, but no decision has been taken, the sources said.

Both planemakers declined comment.

UK-based consultancy Ascend by Cirium has forecast a total surplus of some 5,000 commercial aircraft of all sizes once the dust settles from the industry's worst ever crisis.

## Pop-culture highlights from a

Regional artists deliver a family-focused documentary, a bre



Lea Makhoul is a French-Lebanese singer.

**Mahmoud Kaabour**

**'Champ Of The Camp' and 'Grandma, A Thousand Times'**

The Lebanese filmmaker has made two of his documentaries available to watch online (for free). "Wonderful how my fellow filmmakers and producers are availing their films in these times, so it's my turn," Kaabour wrote on Facebook. "Here are my two last ones, which are part of my spirit and flesh."

2010's "Grandma, a Thousand Times" is an award-winning 50-minute documentary that Kaabour made about his 85-year-old grandmother (or 'Teta' as he calls her), Fatima. It's a sweet and touching film — but never cloying — in which Fatima, mostly from her home or her balcony, looks back on her busy life, particularly her children, grandchildren, and music — her late husband, and (and to whom he bears a striking resemblance), was a violinist.

As well as winning \$100,000 at the Doha Tribeca film festival, the film was featured in the New York Times, where the reviewer wrote that Kaabour "flash-freezes a reality that holds his family together... Teta commands the respect of her section."

"Champ Of The Camp," released in 2013, was the first feature film story of a Bollywood singing competition, in which laborers competed to win a prize. Kaabour's knowledge of Bollywood movies. Kaabour described it to Screen Daily as well as the lives of people who have built (the UAE)."

Both movies are now available to screen on Vimeo.



**Aiko B**



**To The Long Lost'**

The Lebanese singer-songwriter (real name Salim Naf-fah) — now based in New York — just released this video for this mellow, reverb-drenched instrumental from his 2019 album "Dreaming Is Not For Two." The black-and-white film features dancer Lynne Sakr in some sun-soaked woods and is a perfect accompaniment to the dreamy, slightly off-kilter, music.

**Hasan Hujairi**



**'Requite'**

The Bahraini sound artist, writer and composer released this atmospheric and unsettling instrumental track at the end of March, describing it as "music for another day at home." Like much of Hujairi's work, it's not really a song but more of a soundscape, hinting at the alternating waves of panic and calm acceptance that many of us are doubtless experiencing at the moment.

**'fill the heart'**

Vancouver-based synth-pop artist (Mroue) released this track from their new album "Present" which resembles a central character, but some of the attention is on the funny-but-serious track's

**DESIGN**

## An Armenia-based design firm honours farmers with th

The firm Backbone created high-density, sackcloth fabric and



**BINDU GOPAL RAO**

Rice is a staple food across countries and continents—it is also a crop that needs much attention and care to grow. Inarguably, the ones who harvest rice are quite the unsung heroes. This is why Armenia-based branding agency Backbone decided to pay an ode to these farmers through their sustainable, innovative packaging; the project aptly christened Riceman. Minimal Yet Creative

**Minimal Yet Creative**

The project was commissioned by a small, local company; for the packaging, the agency decided to work with farmers. Local calligraphers and artists completed

the character work and illustrations for the packaging. The goal was to create a design that is simple, minimal and one that perfectly represents the grain. "Visually, we wanted to portray the human laborers of the rice harvesting process. The goal was to use only one amount of black graphic in order to capture the expressions of the rice farmers by portraying their emotional states. The goal was to depict a range of emotions: self-confidence and pride, satisfaction, empathy and tiredness. Also, when the products are played next to each other on a shelf, they reflect a range of feelings and a scene shared by farmers communicating with one another. We made su

1948

**Cold War:** U.S. President **Harry S. Truman** signs the Marshall Plan, authorizing \$5 billion in aid for 16 countries.

1948

In **Jeju Province**, South Korea, a civil-war-like period of violence and human rights abuses begins, known as the Jeju uprising.

1956

**Hudsonville**–Standale tornado: The western half of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan is struck by a deadly F5 tornado.



1968

**Martin Luther King Jr.** delivers his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech. He was assassinated the next day.

ATURE

# around the Arab world

akup track, elegiac synth-pop, and more



ose name the filmmaker shares  
n was a ‘Critic’s Pick’ in the New  
silent, no-nonsense personality  
on of old Beirut.”  
hot in UAE labor camps. It’s the  
o show off their vocal skills and  
as “both a tribute to Bollywood

Lea Makhoul

‘I’ll Be Fine’

According to Universal MENA, the French-Lebanese singer said “this would be her year, and she always delivers.” Her latest single is an upbeat pop number in which Makhoul encourages her audience to be “strong enough to walk away from an unhealthy relationship and still be good on your own — a breakup should be seen as a breakthrough.” Makhoul reportedly choreographed the video’s dance routine herself with the intention of highlighting the track’s “raw element.” “It is both feminist and feminine,” the press release says. “The artist empowers all to take the independent road.”



Monteath

‘Juliet’



The UAE-based four-piece, named after frontman Josh Monteath, released their first official single late last month from their upcoming album “Moonlight,” set for release in May. On their Facebook page, the band (Monteath, drummer Andrei Ramos, bassist Alex Tombrink, and guitarist Jerome Deligero), cite Kings of Leon and John Mayer among their main influences and “Juliet” lends credence to that claim (particularly the later, poppier Kings of Leon singles) with its melodic pop-rock vibe.

Funny Death

black hole in my

uver-based Lebanese  
-pop artist (real name Jad  
eleased a video for this  
n his 2018 album “Half  
ast month. The clip re-  
n arthouse short, with a  
character constantly waving  
mehow failing to attract  
ion of, the camera. It’s a  
-sad motif that captures  
yearning quality perfectly.



Mark Shakedown

‘Midnight’

Lebanese DJ-producer Mark Shakedown’s new “future-house” release boasts “a smooth versatile beat to calm you down or lift you up depending on your mood,” according to the press release. The 32-year-old has been a fixture on the region’s mainstream electronic-music scene for years now, and his experience shows on this catchy, polished pop track.



## is innovative, sustainable packaging

actually worked with farmers to create the design

our design conveyed an emotional, human message,” says Grace Jerejian, PR Manager, Backbone Branding.

### The Making

Needless to say, the packaging does just that. “We believe that packaging has the true power of influence; this is why we always try to convey a positive message through our projects. However, we can’t forgo the functional aspect of packaging. Before anything else, it should be practical and fulfil its role of protecting the product within. Therefore, it is a must to choose the adequate materials,” says Jerejian. The team decided to opt for a high-density, sackcloth fabric because of its long-lasting and

strong quality. After research, the team also found that it was a very efficient way to store rice and since the key consideration was to go with a sustainable choice, this was the material chosen. “With all the different rice packaging out there, we needed to have a design that was unique, different and stood out on a store shelf. Also, we wanted our project to be deeper than just a beautiful design. Our work needed to pay tribute to the people behind the product, and not only to embellish the product itself,” adds Jerejian.

“We receive emails and messages from people asking us where they can get their hands on Rice-man, and if it is available in their country. Honestly, this makes us beyond happy and proud,” shares Jerejian.



TOP  
4  
TWEETS

01



Just spoke to my friend MBS (Crown Prince) of Saudi Arabia, who spoke with President Putin of Russia, & I expect & hope that they will be cutting back approximately 10 Million Barrels, and maybe substantially more which, if it happens, will be GREAT for the oil & gas industry!  
@realDonaldTrump

02



The economic damage from this public health crisis is both rising and deepening at an alarming rate. It is putting working families and the American middle class through unimaginable financial pain — and they need to be made whole as fast as possible.  
@JoeBiden

03



Dr. Fauci on NBC: “I’ve chosen this life. I know what it is. There are things about it that sometimes are disturbing. But you just focus on the job you have to do... We have a really, really, very, very difficult situation ahead of us. All of that other stuff is secondary.”  
@kylegriffin1

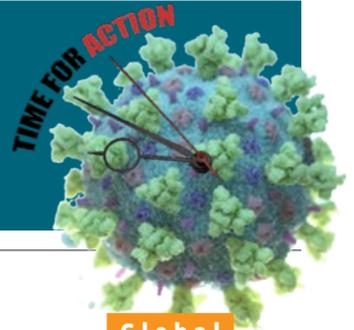
04



JUST IN: Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation today with Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany. Two leaders discussed ongoing #COVID19 pandemic, situation in their respective countries, and importance of international collaboration to fight the health crisis.  
@AdityaRajKaul

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

world



# Global virus cases near million

Global

Covid-19 Cases:

999,806

Deaths

51,338

Recovered:

210,191

Active cases

738,277

Closed cases

261,529

Countries worst affected

| Country     | Total cases | New deaths | Total Deaths |
|-------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| USA         | 226,378     | +502       | 5,604        |
| Italy       | 115,242     | +760       | 13,915       |
| Spain       | 110,238     | +709       | 10,096       |
| Germany     | 81,728      | +66        | 997          |
| China       | 81,589      | +6         | 3,318        |
| France      | 56,989      |            | 4,032        |
| Iran        | 50,468      | +124       | 3,160        |
| UK          | 33,718      | +569       | 2,921        |
| Switzerland | 18,475      | +34        | 522          |
| Turkey      | 15,679      |            | 277          |
| Belgium     | 15,348      | +183       | 1,011        |
| Netherlands | 14,697      | +166       | 1,339        |
| Austria     | 10,996      | +12        | 158          |
| S. Korea    | 9,976       | +4         | 169          |
| Canada      | 10,132      | +17        | 131          |
| Portugal    | 9,034       | +22        | 209          |
| Brazil      | 7,022       | +10        | 252          |
| Israel      | 6,360       | +7         | 33           |
| Sweden      | 5,466       | +43        | 282          |
| Australia   | 5,137       | +2         | 25           |
| Norway      | 5,119       | +3         | 47           |
| Russia      | 3,548       | +6         | 30           |
| Denmark     | 3,355       | +19        | 123          |
| Malaysia    | 3,116       | +5         | 50           |
| Philippines | 2,633       | +11        | 107          |
| Pakistan    | 2,386       | +5         | 32           |
| India       | 2,341       | +10        | 68           |
| Thailand    | 1,875       | +3         | 15           |
| Indonesia   | 1,790       | +13        | 170          |
| Mexico      | 1,378       | +8         | 37           |
| Estonia     | 858         | +6         | 11           |
| Honduras    | 219         | +4         | 14           |

Figures as of closing

A six-week-old baby in US becomes one of the youngest known victims

AFP | New York

Confirmed coronavirus infections around the world approached one million yesterday as the pandemic spread at a "near-exponential" rate, with a six-week-old baby becoming one of the youngest known victims.

Half the planet is under some form of lockdown as governments struggle to tamp down a virus that has killed tens of thousands of people.

Those restrictions -- while necessary for health -- risk causing global food shortages, experts have warned, as supply chains gum up and panic buying sparks export controls.

The United States, which now accounts for almost a quarter of reported global infections, logged its 5,000th death overnight, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

And, said President Donald Trump, things were going to get worse.

"We're going to have a couple of weeks, starting pretty much now, but especially a few days from now, that are going to be horrific," he said.

"But even in the most challenging of times, Americans do not despair. We do not give in to fear."

Among the latest US fatalities was a six-week-old baby who was taken to a Connecticut hospital late last week.

"Testing confirmed last night that the newborn was COVID-19 positive," the state's Governor Ned Lamont tweeted. "This is absolutely heartbreaking."

The new coronavirus has chiefly affected the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions, but a number of recent cases have highlighted that it can affect people from all walks of life.

The dead have included a 13-year-old in France, a 12-year-old in Belgium and 13-year-old Ismail Mohamed Abdullah in Britain, whose family said the "gentle and kind" boy had no underlying health issues.

India searches for 9,000 exposed to Delhi cluster



Men wearing protective masks sit inside a bus that will take them to a quarantine facility in Nizamuddin area of New Delhi

Reuters | New Delhi

India reported its biggest single day increase in coronavirus cases as officials yesterday raced to track down some 9,000 people exposed to the country's biggest infection cluster during a Muslim missionary group's gathering in the capital last month.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has placed the world's second most populous nation under a three-week lockdown until mid-April, and so far the number of coronavirus cases lags hard hit countries like the United States, Italy and Spain.

A government official said about 9,000 people linked to the Delhi cluster were unaccounted for, of which 2,000 were identified as officials of the Tablighi and the rest were described as primary contacts.

"This has emerged as a critical node in our fight against the coronavirus, we need these people to come forward, so we can quarantine them," the official leading the operation to trace potential virus carriers told Reuters, though he spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

The Tablighi, is one of the world's largest proselytising groups, drawing followers from the South Asian Deobandi branch of Sunni Islam.

Its leader Maulana Saad Kandhalvi issued an audio message to his followers asking them to cooperate with the government in the fight against the disease.

"We have to take precautions, follow the guidance of the doctors and give full support to the government such as not crowding into places," he said. "This is not against the principles of Islam."

About 2,300 people, including Bangladeshis, Indonesians and Malaysians, who had been staying at the Tablighi's cramped dormitories in Delhi, were transferred to quarantine centres in the city during the past few days.

World Health Organization head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the disease's rapid spread was alarming.

"Over the past five weeks, we have witnessed a near exponential growth in the number of new cases, reaching almost every country," he said.

"The number of deaths has

more than doubled in the past week. In the next few days we will reach one million confirmed cases and 50,000 deaths."

Britain and France both reported their highest daily death tolls from COVID-19 on Wednesday, although there were signs the epidemic could be peaking in Europe.



A Russian military plane carrying medical supplies arrived in the United States on Wednesday, the Russian mission to the UN said, as the Kremlin flexes its soft power during the coronavirus pandemic. The Antonov-124, landed at JFK Airport in New York -- the epicenter of America's coronavirus outbreak -- pictures and video posted on the mission's Twitter page showed.

Duterte tells Philippine police to shoot lockdown troublemakers



About half the Philippines' roughly 110 million people are currently under quarantine

Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has told security forces they should shoot dead anyone causing "trouble" in areas locked down due to the coronavirus pandemic.

About half the country's roughly 110 million people are currently under quarantine -- including millions in deep poverty, left jobless by tough restrictions on movement. Hours before Duterte gave the order in a speech late Wednesday, nearly two dozen people from a slum community in the capital Manila were arrested for holding a protest that accused the government of failing to provide food aid to the poor.

"My orders are to the police and military, also village officials, that if there is trouble or the situation arises that people fight and your lives are on the line, shoot them dead," Duterte said. "Instead of causing trouble, I'll send you to the grave," he said, adding that the outbreak is getting worse more than two weeks into the lockdown. Philippine National Police Chief Archie Gamboa said on Thursday that officers would not begin shooting troublemakers dead. "Probably the president just overemphasised on implementing the law in this time of crisis," he added. The quarantine, which affects Manila's 12 million people, has shuttered most businesses and brought nearly all social, religious and business activity to a halt.

Trump warns Iran of 'heavy price' in case of attack on US troops

AFP | Washington

President Donald Trump warned Iran on Wednesday of a "heavy price" if it or its allies in Iraq attack US troops stationed there.

"We don't want hostility, but if they are hostile to us, they're going to regret it like they've never regretted anything before," he said of Iran at a White House press briefing on the coronavirus pandemic.

"If this happens, Iran will pay a very heavy price, indeed!" Trump tweeted earlier in the day.

The US president also wrote: "Upon information and belief, Iran or its proxies are planning a sneak attack



US President Donald Trump, pictured here at a press briefing, is warning Iran against attacks on US troops in Iraq

on US troops and/or assets in Iraq."

It was not clear whether Trump meant Washington actually has intelligence of such a plan.

Some 7,500 foreign troops are in

Iraq as part of the US-led coalition helping local troops fight jihadist groups, but those numbers are being significantly drawn down this month.

The alliance is temporarily bringing some trainers home as a precautionary measure against the coronavirus pandemic and is also leaving some Iraqi bases altogether.

Those bases and foreign embassies, particularly the American mission, have been targeted in more than two dozen rocket strikes since late October.

The attacks, which the US has blamed on an Iran-backed armed group, have prompted fears of a proxy war on Iraqi soil.

Middle East

| Country      | Total cases | new cases | Total deaths | New Deaths | Total recovered | Active cases | Serious, Critical | Tot cases/1m pop |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Bahrain      | 635         | +66       | 4            |            | 341             | 290          | 3                 | 373              |
| Saudi Arabia | 1,885       | +165      | 21           | +5         | 328             | 1,536        | 31                | 54               |
| UAE          | 814         |           | 8            |            | 61              | 745          | 2                 | 82               |
| Kuwait       | 342         | +25       |              |            | 81              | 261          | 15                | 80               |
| Oman         | 231         | +21       | 1            |            | 57              | 173          | 3                 | 45               |
| Jordan       | 278         |           | 5            |            | 36              | 237          | 5                 | 27               |
| Iraq         | 772         | +44       | 54           | +2         | 202             | 516          |                   | 19               |
| Egypt        | 779         |           | 52           |            | 179             | 548          |                   | 8                |

## US Navy evacuates virus-struck aircraft carrier Roosevelt



Coronavirus is spreading uncontrollably through the crew of the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier, its captain said

Washington

The US Navy is evacuating thousands of sailors from the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt in Guam after its captain warned a coronavirus outbreak was threatening the lives of the crew.

There have been 93 COVID-19 cases discovered among the 4,800-strong Roosevelt crew so far, according to the US Navy.

Speaking in Washington, Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said that almost 1,000 of the crew had been removed, and that that number would rise to 2,700 within a couple days, and more after that.

But they need to retain around 1,000 on board just to maintain the vessel, as it undergoes a thorough sterilization.

"We cannot and will not remove all the sailors from the ship," Modly said.

"This ship has weapons on it, it has munitions on it, it has expensive aircraft, and has a nuclear power plant," he said.

## What doctors are learning about COVID-19 'on the fly'

ADP | Washington

Doctor Daniel Brenner has had a busy week in the emergency department of Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, seeing dozens of presumed COVID-19 patients.

As Maryland and other parts of the United States brace for the kind of surges seen in New York and Louisiana, we spoke to the fourth-year resident to gain insight into what medical professionals are learning about the disease in real time.

### Hard choices

Maryland has thus far seen two dozen deaths and around 2,000 cases -- capacity isn't yet stretched, but could soon be.

With hundreds of cases now coming in, Brenner said it becomes "very tricky to tease out who needs to be in the hospital, the people who are at high risk for developing severe symptoms and needing supplemental oxygen" versus those who can recover from home.

Making the right call is crucial, but the problem is compounded by a lack of data to help rationalize choices.

"Is it older people? Is it people with medical conditions?" asked Brenner, adding that doctors were desperately trying to keep up with the latest medical literature as it gets published to stay better informed.

Different physicians have different views, "and there's really no consensus across the country or the medical community which approach is right yet because this disease has only

been studied for two months," he said. "We're all trying to learn it on the fly."

### The prone position

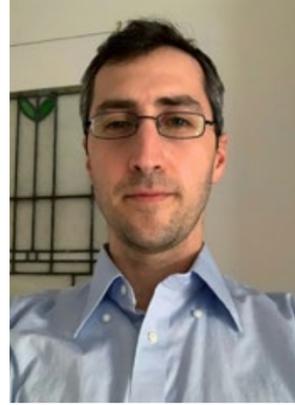
The most significant complication for coronavirus patients is Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) in which the lungs stiffen and become inflamed and the body is starved of oxygen.

Doctors have found placing patients on the stomach in the "prone" position helps prevent fluid from building up in the relatively more healthy area in the back of the lung, said Brenner. The technique is commonly used on preterm babies requiring ventilators, but for adults it is labor intensive and requires constant monitoring to make sure the breathing tube isn't displaced.

COVID patients also seem to require higher levels of air pressure on their ventilators than people who have developed ARDS by other means, added Brenner.

There's really no consensus across the country or the medical community which approach is right yet. We're all trying to learn it on the fly

DOCTOR DANIEL BRENNER  
JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND



### Infection control

While hospitals in overwhelmed regions such as New York are in dire lack of personal protective gear, such shortages haven't yet hit other parts of the country.

In the US, assisted breathing machines called Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAPs) and Bilevel Positive Airway Pressure (BiPAPs) are not being used out of concern that they "might make a giant field of virus" by spraying droplets out of the patient's mouth and nose under pressure, said Brenner.

Ventilators, which place tubes down a patient's air passage, don't have the same problem because the exhaled air is sealed. But this creates its own issues -- BiPAP was typically used for heart failure patients in the emergency room, but now these patients must go on ventilators. This requires making them unconscious and giving them drugs to temporarily paralyze the body.

## Toaster-sized ventilator from India helps hospitals in virus fight

New Delhi

Originally created by a robot scientist and a neurosurgeon to help India's poor, a toaster-sized ventilator is offering hope in the country's fight against the coronavirus pandemic and demand is booming.

The virus at its most lethal attacks the lungs, making ventilators -- which pump breathable air into a patient -- critical for hospitals around the world as they are swamped with COVID-19 cases.

With the toll rising in India, where a nationwide lockdown is in force, production of AgVa's portable ventilator has shot up from 500 a month to 20,000.

"There was no way we could have foreseen something as big as this," said neurosurgeon Deepak Agrawal, who co-developed the device with robot scientist Diwakar Vaish.

Priced at around \$2,000, the AgVa ventilator is a fraction of the price of conventional ventilators, which go for more than \$10,000.

To boost preparedness for a surge in cases, the Indian government has banned the export of coronavirus-linked medical exports, including ventilators.

The AgVa plant near the capital New Delhi has been given permission to work flat out to make what could be a key weapon when India has to fully confront the pandemic.



AgVa says it has avoided imported parts in its ventilator design to keep cost low

The makers say the AgVa -- which weighs just 3.5 kilos (7.7 pounds) -- will help move less critical patients back to their homes as their machine is easy to transport and install, and needs low power.

"In case you want to convert a hotel into an ICU, you can simply put this device and start working as it doesn't require other infrastructure," said Vaish.

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest passenger car maker, has pledged to help AgVa ramp up production after the government called on all auto firms to contribute to the anti-coronavirus effort.

Plug and breathe  
Seeing people queue for life-support equipment at the

All India Institute for Medical Science in Delhi in 2016 convinced Vaish and Agrawal that there was an acute need for a cheap and portable ventilator.

"ICU care is very expensive. In the private sector, even the richest of rich can't afford it for a long time," said Vaish.

They avoided expensive imported parts to keep the cost low, Agrawal added.

India has only around 40,000 ventilators, and experts who have seen the coronavirus crisis explode in Europe have warned this could become a catastrophic shortage for India.

R.V. Asokan, secretary general of the Indian Medical Associ-

ation, said the AgVa portable ventilator was the kind of innovation needed to fill health gaps.

"It is a basic model which will serve in the current scenario as it is a straightforward oxygenation device," said Asokan, who added that it would help COVID-19 patients but not those who have had transplants and other major surgeries.

Sunita Sharma, whose son was hospitalized for five



years with a crippling nerve condition, was given one of the machines for free.

"My husband and I had to take turns to stay with him at the hospital and that affected our lives," Sharma said.

"I was devastated when the doctors told me my son would have to spend the rest of his life on a ventilator bed.

"At least now I can stay home to take care of him and the rest of the household."

## Latest developments

The Philippines' ambassador to Lebanon died of coronavirus yesterday, a statement said, one of only 16 recorded deaths in the country since the start of the pandemic. The Philippines' department of foreign affairs expressed its "deep sadness" at the passing of Bernardita Catala, which it said was the result of "complications arising from Covid 19".



Israeli Health Minister Yaakov Litzman, a leading member of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, has tested positive for COVID-19, forcing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to re-enter precautionary quarantine, officials said. Netanyahu's previous quarantine, imposed earlier this week after one of his staffers tested positive for the novel coronavirus, had ended Wednesday night, his office said.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Britain would "massively increase testing" amid a growing wave of criticism on Thursday about his government's failure to provide widespread coronavirus screening.

Meanwhile, More than a half of Britons think Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government was too slow to order a lockdown to slow the spread of coronavirus, according an opinion poll published yesterday.

President Donald Trump cast doubt on the accuracy of official Chinese figures on its coronavirus outbreak after US lawmakers, citing an intelligence report, accused Beijing of a cover up. "How do we know" if they are accurate, Trump asked at a press conference. "Their numbers seem to be a little bit on the light side."



Pakistan has converted train carriages into a temporary quarantine facility as a preventative measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, as the number of cases continues to rise in the country.

Cyprus has extended a ban on all commercial flights for another two weeks until April 17 to curb the spread of the coronavirus, the transport minister said yesterday. After "evaluating the situation... "we (decided to) extend the decree" introduced for two weeks on March 21 by another 14 days, Yiannis Karousos tweeted.

North Korea remains totally free of the coronavirus, a senior health official in Pyongyang has insisted, despite mounting scepticism overseas as confirmed global infections near one million.

A pledge by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to send two reusable cloth face masks to every household as the country battles the coronavirus outbreak has been met online with derision and humour. Within hours of the announcement, the hashtag "Abenomasks", a play on the prime minister's signature "Abenomics" economic policy, was trending on Japanese Twitter.



Jazz great Ellis Marsalis died Wednesday at the age of 85 after contracting the coronavirus, his son Branford said. The acclaimed American pianist and teacher -- who featured on dozens of records over a musical career spanning several decades -- was the father of trumpeter Wynton and saxophonist Branford.

Australian police and military will soon begin helicoptering doctors to several cruise ships stranded near Sydney to assess nearly 9,000 crew for COVID-19, officials said yesterday. The military-style operation, due to begin by the weekend, is aimed at resolving a standoff between cruise line operators and authorities who fear a wave of new imported coronavirus cases would overwhelm local hospitals.

A Pakistani court yesterday overturned the death sentence for British-born militant Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, who was convicted 18 years ago in the kidnapping and beheading of American journalist Daniel Pearl. Pearl's brutal murder sparked revulsion and an international outcry in early 2002, putting pressure on Pakistan's military government just as it was trying to remake its image following years of backing for the hardline Islamist Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan.



Iran yesterday reported 124 new deaths from the coronavirus, raising its total to 3,160, as President Rouhani warned that the country may still battle the pandemic for another year. Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour announced the latest toll in a news conference and confirmed 3,111 new infections over the past 24 hours, bringing Iran's total to 50,468.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen expressed concern over a coronavirus emergency law in Hungary that has given nationalist premier Viktor Orban sweeping powers. Hungary's parliament, dominated by Orban's ruling party, handed the prime minister the power from Tuesday to rule by decree until his government decides the virus crisis is over. The emergency law also threatens journalists with prison if they publish what it deems "falsehoods" about the virus or the government's actions to slow it.



Then-and-now images show the effect of quarantine measures on the Philippines capital Manila, clearing its notorious traffic congestion and forcing churchgoers to stop attending religious services. The main island of Luzon, where Manila is located, is under quarantine and tens of millions of residents have been ordered to stay home as the number of coronavirus cases in the country tops 2,000.

Kristen Bell



**Kristen Bell was told she wasn't pretty enough at auditions**  
Los Angeles

Hollywood star Kristen Bell says people told her she wasn't "pretty enough" at the start of her career, which made her think if she would make it as an actress in the industry.

"I remember early on, getting feedback, that I wasn't enough in either category. I would get feedback from an audition: 'Well, you're not pretty enough to play the pretty girl, but you're not quirky enough or weird enough to play the weird girl,'" Bell told Vanity Fair in an interview for their YouTube channel, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The "Frozen 2" actress tried her best not to let the criticism get to her.

"I was like, 'Okay, does that just mean I can't be an actor? What does that mean.' That's what I was getting feedback on, on every audition," she said.

Bell is ecstatic to see the industry beginning to change now, as she praised the inclusion of "dimensional" roles that don't just stick to one type.

celebs

Rita Ora



**Age doesn't matter for Rita Ora**  
Los Angeles

Singer Rita Ora, 29, does not like the idea of bringing age in everything.

In an interview with NME.com, the "Poison" hitmaker spoke about how irrelevant it is to get insecure of your increasing age, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

"The problem is that insecurity gets put onto you through comments that you read over the years. You start to think, 'I'm not as young as I used to be. I'm not the fresh girl on the scene I once was'."

"I can proudly say, 'Yeah - I use my looks because I'm very comfortable in my skin and I like my body', but that gives people an opportunity to say, 'Oh, well - you're getting older,'" Rita said.

She also spoke about Jennifer Lopez, mentioning how she rose to fame in her thirties.

**Jennifer Lopez, Alex Rodriguez get VIP access to gym closed to public**  
Miami

Singer-actress Jennifer Lopez and fiance Alex Rodriguez were spotted at their regular gym here, even though it is closed to the public amid the coronavirus lockdown.

The couple were seen leaving from the backdoor, having apparently got a special dispensation, reports dailymail.co.uk.

"THIS GYM IS NOT OPEN STAY HOME STAY SAFE," read the sign on backdoor of the venue, which Lopez and Rodriguez were frequently seen visiting pre-lockdown.

Lopez wore a scarlet sports bra that showed off her toned figure. She teamed the top with a high-waisted leggings and accessorised with aviator sunglasses.

She also carried her usual sparkly monogrammed water bottle.

Alex Rodriguez and Jennifer Lopez



**Rajinikanth's TV debut on 'Into The Wild' is a TV rating topper**  
New Delhi

Superstar Rajinikanth's television debut on the Discovery channel show "Into The Wild with Bear Grylls" has not surprisingly turned out a superhit affair.

The premiere on Discovery Network - across 12 Discovery channels - delivered the highest rated TV show in the genre this year, and the second-highest ratings in history of the genre, delivering an impressive four million impressions.

The cumulative reach of the March 23 premiere across the network was 12.4 million, which is 86 per cent higher than the previous four weeks. The premiere helped the network garner 89 per cent share in the infotainment genre. The slot viewership grew five times as compared to the previous four weeks.

The simultaneous premiere of the show on the regional entertainment brand DTamil grew the slot by 20 times, and helped DTamil nudge ahead of leading regional channels including Colors Tamil, Jaya and Raj TV during the slot. The information is as per the finding by BARC India.



Rajinikanth

**Anushka Sharma: Everybody is unique**  
Mumbai

Actress Anushka Sharma on Thursday conducted an interactive session with her fans. She asked her followers to share one habit which they all have developed in themselves amidst the coronavirus lockdown.

When one social media user said that he/she is good at nothing, the "Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi" actress gave the follower a meaningful advice.

"Everybody is unique and good for something (lots of things). Don't compare yourself and ruin your peace," Anushka said.

Anushka also shared how important is to learn lessons from the ongoing health crises.

"We gotta learn... warna aur phatke padenge!," she added.

Before wrapping

the session, Anushka thanked her followers to "share the thoughts" with her.

"I am happy to know so many are making the most of this and being strong. Happiest knowing you all are connecting with yourselves on a deeper level. Let's stay home, stay safe and stay strong," she concluded.



Anushka Sharma

**COVID-19: Taylor Swift helps vintage record store stay afloat**  
Los Angeles

Amid the ongoing coronavirus crisis and lockdown, pop superstar Taylor Swift has stepped in to pay salary and healthcare for employees at a vintage record store near her home in Nashville.

The superstar's publicist contacted Music with an offer to pay the salaries and healthcare costs for staff during the next three months. It happened when the store got shut when the city's mayor issued a state at home order.

"We were very surprised, and I would have to say amazed, that Taylor Swift reached out to us through her publicist to offer some relief during the COVID-19 pandemic," according to the reports.

"I didn't even know we were on her radar, but she really stepped up to help after the recent tornadoes that struck Nashville and middle Tennessee, and now she's trying to help a beloved small business in her city," Davis added.

He continued: "Taylor generously offered some direct relief to my staff and to cover three months of our health care costs for our group-insurance plan. It's a huge deal to us, and now I have some peace of mind as we apply for (Small Business Administration) loans to pay rent, vendors, and other expenses. This assistance from Ms. Swift helps give us a real shot at coming back on the other side of this."

"It's incredibly heartening and totally surreal that Taylor Swift has offered to help us out in such a significant way," Grimey's buyer Will Orman said, adding: "With so much uncertainty about what lies ahead, we're deeply grateful to be able to look forward to returning to the store and continuing to share music and connect with our community, thanks to Taylor's generous support."



Taylor Swift

**Shah Rukh's appeal: "India and Indians are one family"**  
Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan has tweeted to state that this is the time when all Indians must be united as "one family" and "do our little bit to look after each other."

In a social media post he sent out on Thursday evening, on his Twitter handle @iamsrk, the actor wrote: "In these times it's imp to make everyone around you working tirelessly for you.. not related to u.. to feel they are not alone and by themselves. Let's just make sure we will do our little bit to look after each other. India and all Indians are One Family."

Earlier, on @RedChilliesEnt, the Twitter handle of his production house Red Chillies Entertainment, the actor gave out a lengthy statement announcing his contributions to the current fight against COVID-19 through his group companies - Kolkata Knight Riders, Red Chillies Entertainment, Meer Foundation and Red Chillies VFX. He also lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the government's efforts in fighting the COVID-19 war.



Shah Rukh

SUDOKU

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

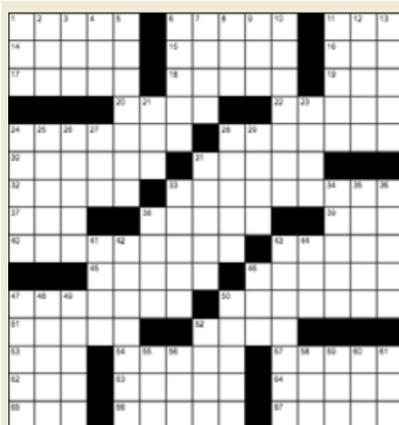
Yesterday's solution

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

How to play

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

CROSSWORD



Across

1- The Little Mermaid; 6- Tough wood; 9- Eight singers; 14- Artist Rousseau; 15- Sault Marie; 16- Boite; 17- Moving stairway; 19- Kind of kitchen; 20- 1959 Kingston Trio hit; 21- State of midwestern USA; 22- Cruise stops; 23- Coarse file, angry tone of voice; 25- Elects; 26- Illegible handwriting; 29- Single entity; 31- Fit for cultivation; 32- East African nation; 36- Actress Gilpin; 37- Sympathetic attention; 38- Table scraps; 40- Marriage; 43- Strangled; 45- Nose out; 46- Setbacks; 47- Capital of Yemen; 50- Having a sound mind; 51- Bitterly pungent; 52- Wet septet; 54- Distress call; 57- High-toned; 58- Terrifying dream; 61- Truman veep Barkley; 62- Man-mouse connector; 63- Art supporter; 64- Facial hair; 65- Bentley of "American Beauty"; 66- Disinfectant brand;

Down

1- Excuse me; 2- Breather; 3- Member of a great Peruvian people; 4- Period of history; 5- Like Abner; 6- Put to (halt); 7- Pack away; 8- Jealous wife of myth; 9- The tiniest bit; 10- Seashore; 11- Name; 12- Great Lakes tribesmen; 13- Addition column; 18- Grocery lane; 23- Violently intense; 24- Hole-punching tool; 25- Vitality; 26- Dupe; 27- Ship's company; 28- Steak order; 29- Grammarian's concern; 30- Hide-hair link; 33- Unfettered; 34- Bothers; 35- To (perfectly); 37- Chang's twin; 39- Radical '60s grp.; 41- Blind alley; 42- Highest mountain in Crete; 43- Don't match; 44- Darlin'; 47- Fish covering; 48- Island off Venezuela; 49- Fertilizer ingredient; 50- Long stories; 51- Gregory Peck role of 1956; 52- Chilly powder; 53- Hibernia; 54- Disrespectful back talk; 55- Black-and-white cookie; 56- Offer; 59- Aviv; 60- Spring month;

Yesterday's solution

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | L | E | D | C | O | P | A | M | I | G |
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| O | L | I | O | R | A | Z | E | S | A | G |
| W | A | R | R | I | O | R | A | S | O | C |
| B | O | N | E | E | R | R |   |   |   |   |
| R | E | T | I | N | A | N | A | R | C | O |
| A | O | R | T | A | T | A | C | T | N | A |
| I | S | A | N | A | P | E | S | R | A | N |
| S | I | C | K | A | L | P | S | M | A | R |
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## SPORTS

# Cricketer Stokes to test his F1 skills in virtual GP

Ben Stokes and Charles Leclerc join lineup for second virtual race

Reuters | London

England cricketer Ben Stokes will test his driving skills against five Formula One drivers, including Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, in the sport's second virtual grand prix this weekend.

The World Cup winning all-rounder will team up with Thai racer Alexander Albon in the Red Bull lineup for his first esports competition.

McLaren's Lando Norris and the Williams pairing of George Russell and Nicholas Latifi will also be competing along with retired British grand prix winner and TV pundit Johnny Herbert.

The virtual race is the second in a new series organised by Formula One to provide some light entertainment in the absence of any real life action due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Norris and Latifi were the only current F1 drivers to compete in the first race.

Formula One's March 15 Australian season-opener was cancelled, along with May's Monaco showcase, with six other



England cricketer Ben Stokes jumps to take a catch during a match (file photo)

rounds postponed to date.

The sport hopes to start a reduced season of 15-18 races from the European summer, although any timetable remains provisional.

Sunday's 28 lap race, with the 20 drivers joining remotely from their homes, will be staged on a virtual version of Melbourne's Albert Park on a weekend originally reserved for the inaugural Vietnam Grand Prix.

The Hanoi street circuit is not yet available on the 2019 official

F1 video game.

The first race of the new series was held two weeks ago on a virtual Bahrain circuit and was won by Renault's Chinese test driver Guanyu Zhou.

Stokes is sponsored by Red Bull, who fielded Britain's six times cycling Olympic gold medallist Chris Hoy in the first race along with Austrian touring car driver Philipp Eng.

Russell, who has installed a gaming rig at his parent's house, said he was looking forward to

the challenge.

"I've never been into esports if I'm being honest, because there was so much simulator stuff when I was at Mercedes as test and reserve driver," he told a Sky Sports television 'vodcast'.

"They were crazy long days. And the last thing I wanted to do was come home and jump on a simulator again. Now I am definitely tempted.

"I'm still pretty rubbish at the moment but definitely tempted and I might have a dabble here and there."

“Three days of practice so now going to do my first custom GP with five races in Australia. This is incredibly hard btw, so need a little assistance

BEN STOKES

# McLaren to put staff on furlough, F1 drivers take pay cut



A McLaren Formula One car is seen during testing (file photo)

Reuters | London

McLaren became the first Formula One team to furlough staff because of the coronavirus on Wednesday, with drivers Lando Norris and Carlos Sainz joining senior management in taking a pay cut.

The sportscar maker said in a statement the temporary three-month wage reduction was part of wider cost-cutting measures due to the impact of the pandemic on its business.

"These measures are focused on protecting jobs in the short-term to ensure our employees return to full-time work as the economy recovers," McLaren added.

A team spokesman emphasised that 100-150 staff from across the group who were working on a "VentilatorChallengeUK" project were not included in the measure.

The group, including the luxury carmaker and applied technology arm, employs some 3,700 people with around 850 working for the F1 team.

McLaren is part of a consortium of leading aerospace, engineering and Formula One racing companies who have joined forces to ramp up production of

a ventilator made by Smiths Group which supports those with complications from the virus.

Britain has ordered 10,000 of the breathing machines.

The majority of the Formula One team, who are currently on a three-week factory shutdown brought forward from August due to the season being on hold, will be furloughed from next week with McLaren making up some of the difference.

Those not furloughed, from McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown downwards, will work on reduced pay.

The team spokesman said British 20-year-old Norris and Spaniard Sainz were adamant they too wanted to play their part.

With racing unlikely to start until the European summer at the earliest, F1 sources have said the teams -- a majority based in Britain -- are discussing extending the shutdown.

Non-essential businesses are shuttered in Britain because of the virus and the authorities have asked everyone to stay at home.

British finance minister Rishi Sunak announced last month that furloughed workers can claim 80% of their wages up to 2,500 pounds (\$3,100) per month.

# Spurs' Son set for military training during virus shutdown

AFP | Seoul

Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean striker Son Heung-min will report to a marines boot camp later this month to fulfil military service duties, a report said yesterday.

All able-bodied South Korean men are obliged to serve in the military for nearly two years, making up the bulk of Seoul's 600,000-strong forces -- who face off against North Korea's

army of 1.3 million.

But Son was spared a career-threatening stint as a conscript when South Korea took gold at the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, earning the team an exemption.

The Spurs star broke down in tears of joy after the 2-1 extra-time win over Japan, which meant he could fulfil his obligations with just three weeks' basic training and around 500 hours of community service.

The 27-year-old's Premier League season ended even before the coronavirus outbreak spread to Europe when he broke his arm against Aston Villa on February 16, and Spurs said he returned to South Korea for "personal reasons".

Son will report to a marines boot camp on the island of Jeju on April 20 for his basic training, an industry source told the South's Yonhap news agency.

He posted images online

Wednesday of himself exercising on what appeared to be a large balcony, skipping and stretching.

The Premier League is postponed until at least April 30 because of the pandemic and is likely to be delayed even longer when the English game's stakeholders meet on Friday.

Son Heung-min



# Sport on TV can lift spirits during coronavirus lockdown: Morgan

Reuters | London

England's limited-overs captain Eoin Morgan says giving fans the chance to watch live cricket on television, even if the matches took place without spectators, would help boost morale during the coronavirus pandemic.

The England and Wales Cricket Board has suspended all professional cricket until May 28 but is looking at the possibility of playing internationals behind closed doors.

"If medical experts advised us it was OK to play behind closed doors and it was on TV, I think that would be a huge step forward for the game," the World Cup winning captain



Eoin Morgan celebrates with the ICC World Cup trophy (file photo)

told reporters in a conference call.

"Sport ... could play a huge role in uplifting the world and people's perspective on things.

"Isolation encourages idle minds and I think sport can create that theatre and level of expectation around what it's like to be outside again and be active."

England have home test series against West Indies and Pakistan and limited overs matches against Australia from June to August but changes to the schedule look likely due to the coronavirus lockdown.

The ECB this week announced a 61 million pounds (\$75.49 million) aid package to help the game withstand the financial impact from the coronavirus crisis.

# Moody's downgrades F1's outlook to negative

Reuters | London

Credit rating agency Moody's changed Formula One's outlook to negative from positive to reflect the impact of the coronavirus crisis on a sport yet to race in 2020.

Liberty Media-owned Formula One cancelled its March 15 season-opener in Australia, with May's showcase Monaco Grand Prix also axed, and has postponed six other races so far as countries go into lockdown.

Formula One bosses have said they hope to fire up the engines some time in the European summer with a reduced schedule of 15-18 races, but Moody's said a full cancellation could not be ruled out.



Formula One cars in action during a race at BIC (file photo)

"Formula One has strong liquidity and a sufficiently flexible cost base to manage through a severely curtailed 2020 season, which Moody's consider would likely be able to support a full cancellation," it added.

# Premier League clubs threatened with extra tax on players' wages

AFP | London

Premier League clubs that use government money for the salaries of non-playing staff, while continuing to pay players their full wage could be hit by a new tax.

Julian Knight, who chairs the British government's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, expressed his "dismay" at clubs using the government's furlough scheme which will guarantee 80 percent of salary for staff members up to a maximum of £2,500 (\$3,000) a month.

# Fighters unite to support BRAVE CF's campaign

MENA Fighters have united to support the campaign against coronavirus initiated by HH Shaikh Khalid and BRAVE CF

TDI | Manama

As events across the globe have been postponed due to spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19), BRAVE CF was also proactive in postponing their upcoming events,

well ahead of time, making sure the promotion followed the protocols set by worldwide health organizations as well as local government bodies in the countries it visits.

With the pandemic growing and spreading, so did misinformation; resulting in fear and confusion, and it was then that the visionary leadership of BRAVE CF initiated a global awareness campaign to minimize the spread of the COVID-19.

As the fastest-growing MMA organization in the world, BRAVE CF used its platform, fighters and the BRAVE network to quickly spread a positive message on how to reduce the spread of the virus.

Together with the KHK Heroes Foundation, BRAVE CF initiated a successful and engaging social media campaign focusing on



Hamza Kooheji speaks during a press meet (file photo)

raising awareness of the danger and what we all must do to protect ourselves. Thus, BRAVE CF has become the first MMA promotion to launch such a global movement.

Founder of the KHK Heroes, HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa has called for fighters around the globe to raise their

voice - it is time to put the rivalries aside and unite in raising the awareness of Coronavirus. In this hard moment, it is a fighter's duty to use their influence and help the fans and people around the world.

All BRAVE CF fighters answered the call and were more than happy to take the ambas-

sador role. Without delay, fighters set things moving by using social media and the BRAVE CF platform to share empathy and educate the fans, to remind people of the dangers and how to protect against the pandemic. We are all fighters now.

Many Middle Eastern fighters have come together to support



Many BRAVE CF fighters have joined the "BRAVE CF Lockdown Workouts" campaign, and posted videos of themselves training in isolation; encouraging people to stay productive, active and healthy while being at home

KHK Heroes foundation and HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa in their mission; aware of their influence, importance of their voice and sharing a message with the fans.

Champions and fighters like Jarrah Al-Selawe and Hamza Kooheji are carrying this role seriously. Through many videos, the famous Middle Eastern fighters are following HH Shai-

kh Khalid's example in giving the support and hope to their followers.

Bahrain's star and BRAVE CF Bantamweight fighter Hamza Kooheji points out the importance of following the guidance of government institutions. In his social media video, Hamza suggests to follow the official guidelines of the World Health Organization and motivates people to stay strong and care for each other.

Further, many other BRAVE CF fighters have joined the "BRAVE CF Lockdown Workouts" campaign. Anas Siraj Mounir, Mohamed Said Maalem and Amin Ayoub posted videos of themselves training in isolation; encouraging people to stay productive, active and healthy while being at home.

#BRAVECombatsCovid19 campaign has quickly gained a following around the world. Many mainstream media houses like Fox Sports Asia are praising the BRAVE CF for being first in the sports combat industry to stand against Coronavirus.

## Donations show togetherness against virus: Rashford

AFP | London

The public response in donating to charity to help feed deprived children after an appeal by Marcus Rashford has impressed the Manchester United forward.

The 22-year-old England international teamed up with FareShare, a food distribution charity, after schools in the Manchester area were closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Donations as of Wednesday totalled £134,000 (\$167,000) surpassing his initial target of £100,000.

The latter amount -- which Rashford said

was a "massive figure" -- would feed around 400,000 children.

FareShare distributes food to 10,943 charities including schools, community centres and breakfast clubs.

Rashford wanted to ensure children now restricted to their homes have access to the free meals they would have received at school.

"The number of people not being fed is ridiculous," he told The Times. "It was close to one million children (924,325) who were helped every

week by FareShare.

"The donations coming in so quickly showed the togetherness of people."

Rashford, whose own donation is the largest the charity received in a year, has been researching the logistics of distributing food by reading business books.

"Getting the meals together is one thing, but distribution is just as important as otherwise it is impossible to get the food out to people," he said.

As well as his charity work, Rashford is spending time on

It was close to one million children (924,325) who were helped every week by FareShare

MARCUS RASHFORD

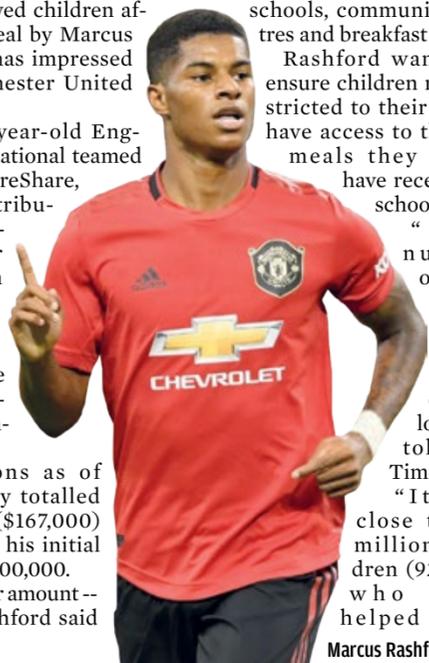
more relaxed pursuits such as judging a poetry competition and learning sign language.

He has also engaged in a debate on social media with England football legend Gary Lineker over who is the most graceful player of all time.

Lineker chose Frenchman Zinedine Zidane. Rashford, who until a back injury in January had been a shining light for United in the club's topsy turvy season scoring 19 times in 31 appearances, opted for Diego Maradona.

The Argentinian might not be music to Lineker's ears as he was in the England team who lost 2-1 in the 1986 World Cup quarter-final remembered for Maradona's 'Hand of God' goal.

Maradona did, though, add a second sublime individual goal. "The stuff he (Maradona) used to do on the pitch in that era, it was really only him doing it... Maradona's mind was so advanced for his time, and his creativity."



Marcus Rashford

## Mata trolls Matic over training regime during lockdown



Manchester United's Juan Mata (L) celebrates with Nemanja Matic after scoring a free kick (file photo)

AFP | London

Juan Mata has trolled his Manchester United teammate Nemanja Matic by jokingly saying the Serbia midfielder is only claiming to be doing his training regime during the coronavirus lockdown.

With the Premier League suspended until at least April 30 and Britain effectively shuttered by the pandemic, United's players have been forced to keep in shape from home after their training ground was closed.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's team have been given personalised regimes to keep fit in case the season resumes.

Matic has made a series of Instagram posts showing his training routine.

"Every day is a gym day," read the caption on one of Matic's latest posts.

Spanish midfielder Mata responded by poking fun at Matic's posts by claiming the former Chelsea star is only pretending to work.

"Get dressed and go to the gym to take the photo then all day in the sofa. Old trick Nema", Mata wrote with a laughing emoji.

Marcus Rashford replied to Mata's comment, calling him an "Insta bully" before Matic wrote: "True, we don't need to train, we are the maestros."

## Potential bidders for 2027 Asian Cup get more time

Reuters | Kuala Lumpur

Nations considering bids to host the 2027 Asian Cup have been given an extra three months to lodge expressions of interest due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said yesterday.

The AFC had hoped to announce the tournament hosts as soon as possible to give them more time to prepare for the quadrennial continental championship, which was expanded to 24 teams for the 2019 edition in the United Arab Emirates.

In the light of the coronavirus pandemic, however, the AFC has decided to extend the deadline for expressions of interest from March 31 to June 30.

"The decision was taken in light of the current COVID-19



The AFC Asian Cup trophy is pictured during the 2019 AFC Asian Cup final (file photo)

pandemic to allow member associations, many of whom have been affected by the global outbreak, sufficient time to meet their internal processes

and timelines," the AFC said in a statement.

Saudi Arabia, who have won the continental title three times but never hosted the tourna-

ment, are the only nation to have publicly announced their intention to launch a bid for 2027.

The next Asian Cup in 2023 will be staged in 10 cities in China, the second time the East Asian nation has hosted the tournament after 2004.



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## Infantino says football will be totally different after coronavirus

Reuters | Rome

Football will be totally different when it eventually resumes after the coronavirus outbreak, the head of global soccer body FIFA Gianni Infantino said yesterday.

"Football will come back, and when it does, we'll celebrate coming out of a nightmare together," he told the Italian news agency ANSA in an interview.

"There is one lesson, however, that both you and me must have understood: the football that will come after the virus will be totally differ-

ent...(more) inclusive, more social and more supportive, connected to the individual countries and at the same time more global, less arrogant and more welcoming."

He added: "We will be better, more human and more attentive to true values."

Last week, Infantino told Gazzetta dello Sport that it was the right time to take a step back and reform a sport where fixture lists have become overloaded and financial resources increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few elite clubs.