Venezuela produce market at center of COVID-19 outbreak

The open-air bazaar, where people pay little heed to social distancing though most wear masks, upsets President Nicolas Maduro's government's efforts to stop an accelerating number of coronavirus cases from overloading Venezuela's dilapidated health

system Reuters | Caracas

'enezuela capital Caracas' largest produce market is at the center of a worsening COVID-19 outbreak, but cash-strapped merchants refuse to stop hawking food there for the city's 5 million residents, many of whom are starving.

Three days a week - down from six before the pandemic - some 10,000 people, including retailers and consumers, pack into the state-run Coche Wholesale Market. The prosupermarkets, providing a lifeline amid Venezuela's six-year economic crisis.

"Caracas depends on this market," its administrator Walter Rivera said in an interview, insufficient. adding that about 17,000 tonnes

But the open-air bazaar, between dawn and 2 p.m. where people pay little heed to number of coronavirus cases do, said in an interview.





Customers walk at the Coche wholesale market amid coronavirus (COVID-19) disease outbreak in Caracas



A child pulls a cart at the Coche wholesale market amid coronavirus (COVID-19) disease outbreak in Caracas

duce is trucked out to the city's from overloading Venezuela's though the opposition and med-

On July 29, authorities limited of goods are sold there each the opening hours of wholesale you don't eat," said Moises Romarkets across the capital to

Coche is a "potential site of social distancing though most high contagion" due to its lack 3,500 workers, said on pre-panwear masks, upsets President of social distancing, Jose Maefforts to stop an accelerating to opposition leader Juan Guai- Now, he may sell only 5 kilos.

Maduro ordered harsh lockdilapidated health system. So down measures in March which far authorities have confirmed slowed the virus' spread, but infected, but they were more 20,206 cases and 174 deaths, basic goods shortages forced many merchants to return to ical NGOs warn that testing is wholesale markets to make a

> "If you don't go out every day jas, 23, who sells carrots, potatoes and onions in Coche.

> Rojas, one of the market's

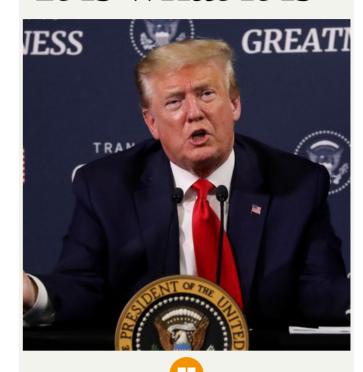
Some traders lugging sacks he said.

and pushing carts around the market said they feared getting afraid the government would stop them working.

"It would get ugly for us," said Angel Serrano, who has spent 32 of his 44 years selling there. "This supports all of us

Coche administrator Rivera said in the last few weeks they carried out 4,500 rapid antibody demic days he could sell three tests there, with only one posi-Nicolas Maduro's government's nuel Olivares, a health advisor 45-kilogram sacks of carrots. tive result. "We're working so that they don't shut the market,"

Trump says coronavirus outbreak under control 'It is what it is'



They are dying, that's true. It is what it is. But that doesn't mean we aren't doing everything we can. It's under control as much as you can control it. This is a horrible

> plague DONALD TRUMP

Reuters | Washington

President Donald Trump said the coronavirus outbreak is as under control as it can get in the United States, where at least 155,000 people have died amid a patchy response to the public health crisis that has failed to stem a rise in cases.

The Republican president continued to press for US schools to reopen in an overnight Twitter post, and defended his administration's response to the virus in an interview with the Axios news website released late on Monday.

"They are dying, that's true," he said. "It is what it is. But that doesn't mean we aren't doing everything we can. It's under control as much as you can control it. This is a horrible plague."

Coronavirus cases continue to surge in the country and dozens of US states have had to pause or roll back their reopening plans. The White House coronavirus task force coordinator, Dr Deborah Birx, said on Sunday the virus was "extraordinarily widespread" in rural areas as well as cities.

With US deaths reaching a record 1,000 a day, Trump pressed the view of deaths in proportion to the number of cases instead of as a proportion of the population, in which the United States fares worse than other Western nations.

In the Axios interview, Trump again insisted that increased diagnostic testing in the United States accounted for the increase in cases, an assertion disputed by health experts who say expanded testing accounts for some, but not all, of the growth in cases.

Health experts also call it a key tool in fighting the spread of the disease, which had been detected in at least 4.6 million people across the United States as of Saturday.

Thai PM asks student protesters 'not to create chaos'

Reuters | Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister yesterday asked increasingly bold student-led protesters "not to create chaos" after some broke longstanding taboos by openly calling for reform of the constitutional monarchy.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chanocha, a former army chief who staged a coup six years ago and has led military-backed governments ever since, also promised that parliament would consider protesters' demands to amend the constitution.

"I beg people not to create chaos at this time. We are solving these problems together," Prayuth told reporters after a cabinet meeting.

He said he was "worried" about the young protesters who have been gathering in small groups in different parts of the country calling for the dissoelections.



Harry Porter-themed pro-democracy protest in Bangkok

been formed in parliament to this month. lution of parliament and new military auspices and a mech- was virtually assured of staying needed and I am not in conflict," anism to gauge the views of on a prime minister after a dis- he said.

discuss possible changes to a Opposition activists say that Senate. 2017 constitution drafted under under the constitution, Prayuth

Prayuth said a committee has young people would be set up puted 2019 general election by the creation of a junta-appointed

"I support changes that are

He did not say what changes would be considered in parlia- on Tuesday said they had no ment, where his ruling coalition comment when asked about the holds a comfortable majority protest demands. after a main opposition party was dissolved in February.

Future Forward Party sparked able by up to 15 years in prison campus demonstrations and under "lese majeste" laws. student protesters took to the streets last month with some in 2016, the palace required re-2,500 rallying at Bangkok's De- visions to the new constitution mocracy Monument. Since then, that gave him greater emergency protests have spread.

the monarchy, which is illegal tens of billions of dollars. in Thailand, though he said King that people no longer be prosecuted under that law.

On Monday night, student calling for changes in laws "that to follow the law," he said. expand the power of the monarch and that could impinge on law, but they have to respect the democracy where the king is the law and rules. I am not threatenhead of state".

Officials at the Royal Palace

The constitution says the king is to be "revered" and insulting A court ban of the opposition the monarchy is a crime punish-

After the king took the throne powers. He has since taken per-Prayuth has previously sonal control over some army warned protesters not to insult units and palace assets worth

Asked about the protesters Maha Vajiralongkorn had asked openly discussing the king, Prayuth said it was a matter of law enforcement.

"I won't stop it from happenprotesters issued a statement ing. This issue is for authorities

> "Protests are a right under the ing, but I am worried."