

FIFA chief warns against re-starting football too early

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has warned against re-starting football too early amid the coronavirus pandemic | **P12**

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WHO warns about lifting of COVID-19 restrictions



Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
 AFP | Geneva/Zurich

The World Health Organisation (WHO) warned countries yesterday to be cautious about lifting restrictions introduced to curb the spread of the new coronavirus.

The WHO would like to see an easing, but at the same time "lifting restrictions could lead to a deadly resurgence," Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference.

He said there had been a "welcome slowing" of epidemics in some European countries - Italy, Germany, Spain and France - but there had been an "alarming acceleration" in other countries including community transmission in 16 countries of Africa.

Apple, Google to create contact tracing technology
 Reuters

Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google said yesterday that they will work together to create contact tracing technology that aims to slow the spread of the coronavirus by allowing users to opt into a system that catalogs other phones they have been near.

100,000
Coronavirus passes another grim milestone

Worldwide death toll from the novel Coronavirus surpasses 100,000 mark amid 1.6 million cases and more than 368,000 recoveries

83
 It took 83 days for the first 50,000 COVID-19 deaths to be recorded

8
 In eight more days the toll climbed to 100,000

Spanish flu, which began in 1918 is estimated to have killed more than 20 million people by the time it petered out in 1920

Washington

The number of deaths linked to the novel coronavirus reached 100,000 yesterday, as the tally of cases passed 1.6 million, according to the latest report.

The first death came in the central Chinese city of Wuhan on Jan. 9.

It took 83 days for the first 50,000 deaths to be recorded and just eight more for the toll to climb to 100,000.

The toll has been accelerating at a daily rate of between 6 per cent and 10pc over the past week, and there were almost 7,300 deaths globally reported on Thursday.

The death toll now compares with that of London's Great Plague in the mid-1660s, which killed an estimated 100,000 people,



This photo taken through a glass window at a maternity ward shows a newborn baby wearing a face shield, in an effort to halt the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, at Praram 9 Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand. - AFP (story on page 9)

about a third of the city's population at the time.

But it is still far short of the so-called Spanish flu, which began in 1918 and is estimated to have killed more than 20 million people by the time it petered out in 1920.

The novel coronavirus is believed to have emerged in a Wuhan market where wild animals were sold late last year. It

quickly spread through China and around the world.

Much remains to be determined about it, including just how lethal it is. Estimates vary widely.

Yesterday's figures - 100,000 deaths of out 1.6 million cases - would suggest a fatality rate of 6.25 per cent but many experts believe the actual rate is lower given that many mild and

US coronavirus deaths top 18,000

US deaths due to the coronavirus topped 18,000 yesterday, although there are signs that Americans staying home was curbing new infections.

US officials warned Americans to expect alarming numbers of coronavirus deaths this week, even as there was evidence that the number of new infections was flattening in

New York state, the epicenter of the US outbreak.

With many Americans celebrating the Easter holiday tomorrow, the top US infectious disease expert warned yesterday that it is too early to relax restrictions on Americans.

"Now is no time to back off," Dr Anthony Fauci said.

asymptomatic cases, when infected people don't show symptoms, are not included in case totals.

Some countries, including Italy, France, Algeria, the Netherlands, Spain and Britain are reporting that more than 10pc of all confirmed cases have been fatal.

One of the largest studies of the fatality of the disease, involving 44,000 patients in China, put the rate at about 2.9pc.

The same study reported that 93pc of recorded fatalities were people over the age of 50, and more than half were over 70.

Despite that, there are grow-

ing numbers of young adults and teenagers included in the global toll.

While North America now accounts for more than 30pc of cases, Europe has reported a disproportionate number of fatalities, as countries with older populations like Spain and Italy have been severely affected.

Southern Europe alone accounts for more than a third of global deaths, despite recording just 20pc of cases.

In many countries, official data includes only deaths reported in hospitals, not those in homes or nursing homes.

(See pages 3, 8, 9)

Weight warning

Virus appears to strike men, overweight people harder

French emergency rooms have seen "a very large proportion of overweight or obese patients"

Patients who are overweight or have previous health problems are at higher risk

AFP | Paris

In the emergency rooms of virus hotspots around the world, medical staff are seeing a greater number of men than women suffering severe symptoms of COVID-19, with



Patterns are emerging in patients presenting with severe COVID-19 symptoms

obesity emerging as another potentially aggravating factor. But experts are still unsure why.

What first began to appear as a pattern in China, where the

virus emerged at the end of last year, has echoed through hospitals in Europe and the United States as the pandemic spreads.

"More men than women have

serious problems, and patients who are overweight or have previous health problems are at higher risk," said Derek Hill, Professor of Medical Imaging



According to preliminary data of outcomes for those patients who had either recovered or died of COVID-19, obese patients are less likely to recover

Science at University College London.

Early statistics from Britain's independent Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre on people treated in intensive care for the virus confirm this phenomenon: 73 per cent are men and 73.4 pc are classed as overweight.

According to preliminary data of outcomes for those patients who had either recovered or died of COVID-19 in the period before April 3, obese patients were also less likely to recover after receiving critical care.

Some 42.4 pc of people with a body mass index (BMI) over 30 were able to go home after successful treatment, compared with 56.4 pc of patients with a BMI of less than 25.

(Continues on page 2)



Tamkeen to launch biz continuity support programme

TDT | Manama

Tamkeen yesterday announced launching a Business Continuity Support Programme on Sunday aimed at cushioning enterprises here from the economic pain of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

All affected small and micro enterprises in the Kingdom with an active CR or a valid licence are eligible to receive the financial grants to help continue their operations as part of a stimulus package announced earlier by the government.

The programme will start accepting applications starting Sunday, said Shaikh Mohammed



Tamkeen will strengthen its efforts to support the private sector while giving priority to adversely affected enterprises. Tamkeen is working to ensure that their needs are directly addressed. We invite affected enterprises in the private sector to take advantage of the Business Continuity Support Programme as it will help them continue their operations amidst the current crises

SHAIKH MOHAMMED BIN ESSA AL KHALIFA, THE CHAIRMAN OF LABOUR FUND TAMKEEN

bin Essa Al Khalifa, the Chairman of Labour Fund Tamkeen.

Evaluation of applications will occur in two-weeks time.

Sunday's launch forms part of His Majesty King Hamad bin

Isa Al Khalifa's Royal Directives to unite national efforts to combat the Coronavirus outbreak while continuing the country's programmes and sustainable development goals.

Besides, the stimulus follows a government's decisions led by Prime Minister HRH Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and supported by HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister.

The package also falls in line with Tamkeen's ongoing national efforts to support the private sector, alongside other Ministries and Public Authorities.

Tamkeen, Shaikh Mohammed

Interested enterprises can apply through the website www.tamkeen.bh or by contacting call center: 17383333 or email: support@tamkeen.bh.

will strengthen efforts to support the private sector and especially the adversely affected enterprises will be given priority.

Foreign Minister holds phone call with Saudi counterpart



Dr Abdullah bin Rashid Al-Zayani



Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al-Saud

TDT | Manama

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Abdullah bin Rashid Al-Zayani, yesterday held a telephonic discussion with his Saudi counterpart, His Highness Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al-Saud on developing joint efforts to battle the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The ministers also reviewed

brotherly relations between the two Kingdoms and latest political and security developments in the region.

They also highlighted the role of the Kingdoms in preserving regional peace and security.

The Ministers stressed keenness to further develop bilateral cooperation and coordination in all fields.

Face masks are crucial now in COVID-19 battle: Dr Al Qahtani

TDT | Manama

Wearing face masks or face coverings in public places where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain is critical to combating the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19), a top health official has said.

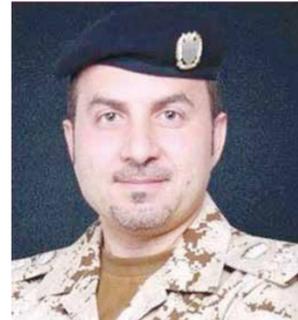
"In addition to wearing face masks, other health guidelines, including continuous hand washing and social distancing, are equally important," added Lieutenant-Colonel Dr Manaf Al Qahtani.

Dr Al Qahtani is the Infectious Diseases Consultant and Microbiologist at the BDF Hospital and Member of the National Taskforce for Combating Coronavirus (COVID-19).

As per a new guideline, it's mandatory in Bahrain for all citizens and residents to wear a face mask or an appropriate

In addition to wearing face masks, other health guidelines, including continuous hand washing and social distancing, are equally important

DR MANAF AL QAHTANI



face-covering whenever they are out in public, starting Thursday. Home-made masks are allowed, but they should fit comfortably against the side of the face, as outlined on the Ministry of Health's website.

Explaining the decision, Dr Al Qahtani said the move aims at ensuring freedom of movement in light of new findings.

Recent studies have found that a significant portion of in-

dividuals with coronavirus lack symptoms (asymptomatic) and that even those who eventually develop symptoms (pre-symptomatic) can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity—for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing—even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms.

"The new precautionary

measures are to fight the coronavirus as it evolves," said Dr Al Qahtani, adding that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has now advised wearing masks at public places.

"The virus is evolving and has transformed into a pandemic, which requires the entire world to face it."

Bahrain, Dr Al Qahtani stressed, is implementing all precautionary and preventive measures required by WHO for the best interests of everyone.

In an earlier statement, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the United States has said that the cloth face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders.

But why are so many men affected?

(Continued from page 1)

French emergency rooms have seen "a very large proportion of overweight or obese patients," ICU doctor Matthieu Schmidt at the Pitie-Salpetriere hospital in Paris told broadcaster France 2, adding that "three quarters" of all patients were men.

In New York there is a similar picture emerging.

"I'm in the emergency room, and it's remarkable -- I'd estimate that 80 per cent of the patients being brought in are men," Hani Sbitany, a reconstructive surgeon at Mount Sinai Health System who has been treating COVID-19 patients in Brooklyn.

"It's four out of five patients," he told the New York Times.

But why are so many men affected? Just months after the new coronavirus appeared, experts say it is too early to tell for certain.

The high incidence of men presenting with more severe symptoms is for now "an observation," said Jean-Francois Delfraissy, who leads the coronavirus science council advising the French government.

While he said there was "no clear explanation", he raised the theory that men had a higher frequency of multiple pathologies.

"I am very humble vis-a-vis this virus. I did not know it three and

"I'm in the emergency room, and it's remarkable -- I'd estimate that 80 per cent of the patients being brought in are men," Hani Sbitany, a reconstructive surgeon at Mount Sinai Health System who has been treating COVID-19 patients in Brooklyn.

DR MANAF AL QAHTANI

a half months ago. There are lots of question marks," he told France Info radio.

Biology and behaviour

Some experts say that it might not be men's vulnerability that makes the difference, but women's immune strength.

"Innate immunity is better in women, especially before menopause," said Pierre Delobel, head

of the infectious diseases department at the Toulouse University Hospital.

James Gill, a locum doctor and honorary clinical lecturer at Warwick Medical School, said one idea was that women "may have a more aggressive immune system, meaning a greater resilience to infections".

Another, he said was that "the assumption that simply men don't look after their bodies as well, with higher levels of smoking, alcohol use, obesity", adding that the answer may be a mixture of both biology and environmental factors.

Obesity adds to health risks in general, with an increase in the incidence of diabetes and hypertension -- both identified as aggravating factors of COVID-19 in Italian and Chinese studies, along with age and to a lesser extent heart cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease.

This raises a particular concern for the United States, where some 42pc of adults are obese, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has warned people with a BMI over 40 could be at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

"We are worried about our American friends. They will probably have more problems because of obesity," said Delfraissy.

Arab league holds remote meeting with Chinese COVID-19 experts, Bahrain takes part



Participating from Bahraini side were consultant in infectious diseases, Geriatrics and internal medicine at Salmaniya Medical Complex, Dr Jameela Al-Salman, and Chief of the Disease Control Section at the Health Ministry's Public Health Directorate, Dr Adel Al-Sayyad

TDT | Manama

Top Bahraini experts yesterday took part in a remote meeting held by the Arab League's Secretariat-General with Chinese experts on the COVID-19 outbreak.

The meeting was devoted to discussing the outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) at the global and regional levels, and measures to prevent its

spread.

Participating from Bahraini side were consultant in infectious diseases, Geriatrics and internal medicine at Salmaniya Medical Complex, Dr Jameela Al-Salman, and Chief of the Disease Control Section at the Health Ministry's Public Health Directorate, Dr Adel Al-Sayyad.

During the meeting, Chinese experts shed light on several health aspects related to COVID-19, such as pre-

cautionary and preventive measures, clinical symptoms, tests, and treatments proven effective in dealing with this virus.

The experts also answered questions on ways to confront Coronavirus.

Dr Jameela Al-Salman highlighted the success of the treatment protocol in place in Bahrain, which, she said, "has proven effective in the recovery of many existing cases."

BIG STORY

big story

63-year-old man is Bahrain's latest Covid-19 casualty

● The man believed to have contracted the virus while in Iran

● Health ministry confirmed the death in its latest count

● Bahrain's total toll from disease increases to six

TDT | Manama

A Bahraini man has died from the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), the Ministry of Health announced yesterday, bringing the total number of deaths from the diseases in the Kingdom to six.

The 63-year-old man, a registered active case of Coronavirus (COVID-19), had pre-existing medical conditions, the ministry said in a statement.

The deceased patient, who had returned from Iran, was in isolation and under extensive 24-hour care of a specialised medical team.

The Health ministry further confirmed that, excluding three cases, all other active COVID-19 cases are stable.

"All patients continue to receive treatment from a specialised medical team following guidelines provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO)," the ministry statement said.

The Ministry of Health expressed its heartfelt condolences to the individual's family at this difficult time.

Bahrain has so far tested 57681 patients in the Kingdom with a total of 923 people testing positive to the virus. Conditions of 377 people, according to the ministry, are stable, with 3 people staying as critical. Six people had lost their lives in the fight against the virus.

Most of the people infected have been people returning from Iran, where the death toll from the new coronavirus outbreak rose to 4,232 yesterday with 122 lives lost in the past 24 hours.

In Iran, the total number of people diagnosed with the disease increased by 1,972 in the past 24 hours to a total of 68,192, a spokesman, Kianoush Jahanpur, said on state TV, adding that 3,969 people were in critical condition. It has recorded a total of 35,465 recoveries from the COVID-19 respiratory disease.

100 days of lockdown

With Thursday marking 100 days since the World Health Organisation (WHO) was first notified about what is now officially known as COVID-19, the agency's chief said the virus has already infected more than 1.3 million people worldwide.

Estimated to be 10 times more lethal than influenza, COVID-19 has contained people in around 210 countries and territories in their home - maybe for months.

The virus has overwhelmed health systems, disrupted the economy and led to widespread social disruption in nations all



Chairman of the Supreme Council of Health receives Professor John Ashton, Independent public health consultant. (file)

The Ministry of Health expressed heartfelt condolences to the individual's family at this difficult time

Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari on the @WHOEMRO Twitter handle.

'War Room' strategy

Following which, responding to UK's handling of coronavirus, a frustrated John Ashton, who was Britain's former faculty of Public Health Chief, drew comparisons between UK's response to that of Bahrain led by HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister.

"What's frustrating to me is that we've wasted three weeks," Professor John Ashton said, while Bahrain set up a "war room" over a month ago and are carrying out "extensive testing".

"I want to know why we are not testing, why we haven't tested those people coming back from Italy and who are now amongst us. We've got a recipe for a community spread here," he said.

The former director told Boris Johnson that he should have been sharing "information fully with the public in a transparent way, which is what they've been doing in Bahrain."

Ashton, who reportedly is advising Bahrain's team to fight coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, also described Bahrain's strategy as 'very systematic, very proactive, and very thorough'.

Making Bahrain's COVID-19 fight effective was the methods it employed, including the effective tracking and tracing of cases. As of now, Bahrain is also one of the countries that have the lowest rate of contact transmission, where only six people in the first 100 cases were infected locally.

"I'm impressed that after I identified some of the weak links in the chain of control for them, they immediately responded to deal with them," Prof Ashton told in a statement to the national.

He told the publication: "The main challenge Bahrain faced was the number of religious tourists who travelled to Iran to visit holy sites."

Meanwhile, on the other end, Qatar reported the highest number of local contact transmissions in its first 100 cases in the

GCC.

GCC tightens response

Saudi's first case was also reported to be travellers returning from Iran and Iraq with most of the cases concentrated in the Qatif Province.

As of yesterday, Saudi has over 3,600 confirmed COVID-19 cases with the Kingdom already imposing strong measures including indefinite suspension of international passenger flights and a bar on workplace attendance in both public and private sectors.

Most of the Gulf nations have shut down cinemas and other entertainment centres, with some even closing gyms and spas to contain the threat.

Kuwait has taken the strictest measures in the GCC by largely locking down the country. It has also halted all commercial flights until further notice from March 13.

In Oman, reportedly 20 of the first 100 cases were travellers from Iran.

Oman suspended all internal and international flights as of March 29, according to state TV.

Qatar banned all inbound flights to Doha, with the exception of cargo and transit flights, starting from March 18.

Second Preparedness and Response Plan

However, in going forward, as WHO chief has said, "We must quarantine politicising this virus at national and global levels."

"Our singular focus is on working to serve all people to save lives and stop the pandemic."

WHO is also about to launch its Second Preparedness and Response Plan in the coming days which will estimate the resources needed to implement national and international strategies during the next phase of the response.

It is built on five key objectives, namely mobilising all sectors and communities, controlling sporadic cases and clusters and preventing community transmission, suppressing community transmission where it occurs, reducing mortality through appropriate care, and developing safe and effective vaccines and therapeutics.

Timeline

February 2020

- 21 February:** Bahrain confirms first COVID-19 case
- 24 February:** Confirms second case. Suspends flights from Dubai and Sharjah Airport for 48 hours. Places travel ban on Iran.
- 25 February:** Nine new cases, raising the total count to 17. Suspends all schools, nurseries and universities for two weeks. CBSE exams postponed.
- 26 February:** Total count hits 26.
- Civil Aviation Affairs announced that suspension of flights to and from Dubai International Airport was extended for an additional 48 hours. Flights to and from Iraq and Lebanon were suspended until further notice. The Health Ministry announced compulsory health check-ups for all citizens and residents who travelled to Iran.
- 27 February:** Confirmed seven new cases, raising the total count to 33 cases
- 28 February:** Confirmed two new cases. Now there are 38 confirmed cases



The National Taskforce for Combating the Coronavirus (COVID-19) highlights measures taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (file)

March 2020

- 8 March:** Reports 94 confirmed cases, 14 recovered cases
- 12 March:** Releases hundreds of prisoners
- 16 March:** A 65-year-old Bahraini woman died of coronavirus. On the same day, the national coronavirus task force launched an appeal for volunteers. The Civil Aviation Authority announces a significant reduction of incoming flights to Bahrain
- 17 March:** Government unveils an \$11.39 billion stimulus package also covering water and electricity bills over the next 3 months
- 22 March:** A 51-year-old Bahraini female reportedly died from coronavirus. Bans public gatherings of more than 5 individuals. Participates in the World Health Organisation's SOLIDARITY trial for coronavirus
- 23 March:** Bahrain International Exhibition & Convention Centre becomes the main testing centre for COVID-19
- 24 March:** A 65-year-old Bahraini male with chronic illnesses died of the coronavirus. Bans export of hand sanitizers and detergents for 3 months. The Central Bank of Bahrain ordered currency exchange companies to sterilise local and international currencies. Urgent proposal for a partial curfew from 6 pm to 5 am
- 25 March:** A 78-year-old Bahraini male with chronic illnesses reportedly died of the coronavirus. 61 Bahraini pilgrims evacuated from Iran, 30pc of whom tested positive for COVID-19
- Closes all non-essential commercial enterprises from March 26 onward till April 9. Exceptions included supermarkets, banks, bakeries, and healthcare facilities. All businesses will be allowed to re-open from April 9 to April 23
- 28 March:** Asymptomatic patients allowed to seek private healthcare treatment at the three Hotels which would be staffed by healthcare professionals from the Middle East Hospital. Additionally, another Hotel is also manned by medical staff from the Bahrain Specialist Hospital
- 30 March:** Sets up COVID-19 sampling stations in Manama, Durrat Al Bahrain and Budaiya. Began 3-D printing of face visors for healthcare staff at the Bahrain Defence Force Hospital and Awali Cardiac Centre
- 31 March:** Releases BeAware Bahrain application to alert users about nearby active cases of COVID-19 or locations visited by positive cases of the disease

April 2020

- 1 April:** Over 316 patients with COVID-19 recovers. More than 34,159 people tested for the virus
- 6 April:** iGA distributes electronic waterproof wristbands with location-tracking to monitor individuals under home quarantine. Violators are liable to imprisonment for 3 months and a fine of 1000-10000 Bahraini dinars. A Bangladeshi man tested positive for COVID-19. All 15 of his neighbours in the same building also tested positive
- 7 April:** 55 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the total active cases to 349. A total of 50,127 individuals tested for the virus. Fifth death due to COVID-19. Repatriates 1,200 Bahrainis worldwide since the start of the pandemic in January. Announces a continuation of restrictions on public gatherings but permitted the opening of commercial enterprises from April 9 to April 23. Makes wearing face masks mandatory while in public.
- 8 April:** To spend US \$570 million to pay for the salaries of all Bahraini employees (an estimated 100,000) working in the private sector from April to June 2020
- 9 April:** Launches a drive-through COVID-19 testing centre at the Bahrain International Exhibition and Convention Centre. iGA adds a new feature to 'BeAware Bahrain'. Civil Service Bureau makes face masks mandatory. Health Minister suspends BD7 medical consultation fee

business

Canada looks to reinstate Saudi arms sales agreement

Ottawa

The Canadian government said Thursday that it had renegotiated the terms of a \$14 billion light armored vehicles contract with Saudi Arabia, paving the way for exports to recommence.

The move marks a shift for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who had indicated in December 2018 that he was looking to end the agreement.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Francois-Philippe Champagne, however, said in a statement that Canada had "been able to secure significant improvements to the contract."

Canceling the deal "could have resulted in billions of dollars in damages to the government of Canada, with potential damages amounting to the full value of the contract," he said.

The move would have put thousands of Canadian jobs at risk, not only in "southwest-



Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Francois-Philippe Champagne is seen in March 2020

ern Ontario but also across the entire defence industry supply chain, which includes hundreds of small and medium enterprises," he added.

The vehicles are made in Canada by a subsidiary of American contractor General Dynamics.

Among the "improvements" Champagne noted were financial protections for Canada if it chooses to delay or deny export permits in the event the vehicles are not used for their stated purposes.

Mexico says reached deal with Trump to cut crude output

● The announcement came hours after OPEC revealed that major oil producers around the world -- except Mexico -- had agreed to cut output by 10 per cent.

AFP | Mexico City

The president of Mexico -- the lone holdout in an OPEC deal to cut crude production and shore up prices -- said yesterday he has reached a deal with President Donald Trump to reduce oil output.

Mexico will cut production by 100,000 barrels per day (bpd), President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said, adding that it was Trump who reached out to him. "Trump communicated with us," he told a news conference.

The announcement came hours after OPEC revealed that major oil producers around the world -- except Mexico -- had agreed to cut output by 10 per cent.

Oil prices have been wallowing near two-decade lows due to the coronavirus pandemic and a price war between key players Saudi Arabia and Russia.

The agreement would see output between May and June cut by 10 million bpd and another eight million from July to December, but it depends on Mexico's consent to take effect.

Under the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries deal, Mexico would have had to cut its output by 400,000 bpd.

But Mexico resisted, and wanted the reduction limited to 100,000. Lopez Obrador said on Friday that Trump agreed to



Mexico President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (center) has come under fire for his handling of the coronavirus outbreak due to his reluctance to take measures that would hurt the country's economy

cut US production by an extra 250,000 bpd "as compensation" for Mexico.

"They asked us for a reduction like that of Saudi Arabia, like that of Russia, of around 23 pc of production," said Lopez Obrador. "We resisted to the end because it cost us a lot of effort to raise production."

Under a war-time emergency law, Trump could in fact order US oil companies to modify production levels but normally this would be for them to churn out more crude, not less.

In February, Mexico's state oil company Pemex reported losses of 346 billion pesos (\$18.3 billion) for 2019, a 92 pc increase on the previous year's deficit.

Production has fallen by 50 percent since 2004 when it was 3.4 million bpd.

Leftist Lopez Obrador, who came to power in late 2018, said

Mexican oil production fell for 14 years due to the energy reform policies of the previous government that opened up the sector to private enterprise.

"They estimated that the energy reform would attract foreign investment. They gave out contracts and estimated that we would produce three million barrels a day but the truth is we have a production of 1.7 million barrels," said the president.

The Lopez Obrador government has already invested \$10 billion in Pemex in a bid to prop up the finances of a company considered a bulwark of national sovereignty.

While the government hasn't canceled the privatisation initiative of the previous administration, it has stopped issuing new exploration contracts.

Meanwhile, Lopez Obrador also said he'd also asked Trump

to sell Mexico equipment to treat people suffering from the new coronavirus.

He said he asked Trump to "sell us 10,000 ventilators and 10,000 monitors," adding that the US president said he would give him a reply on Friday afternoon at the latest.

Medical professionals in Mexico have complained about a lack of basic protective equipment needed to treat COVID-19 patients.

There are also worried about the ability of Mexico's health care system to cope with a spike in coronavirus numbers.

The country has already started buying supplies from China and this week received a cargo of face masks, gloves and ventilators.

It has recorded more than 3,000 cases and 174 deaths from virus.

Millions filed for US unemployment - many are still waiting for the cash

Reuters | Tokyo/Beijing

A shocking 16.8 million people filed for U.S. unemployment benefits in the last three weeks as the country shut down to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, overwhelming state labor departments and creating a large backlog of pending applications.

A month after the virus was declared a pandemic, many newly jobless Americans are still waiting desperately for their unemployment checks.

After going weeks without a paycheck, they are falling behind on their bills and drastically ratcheting back spending. The delays come as other federal stimulus, including a small business lending program, also experience hiccups.



People who lost their jobs wait in line to file for unemployment

The North Carolina Department of Commerce says people typically receive payment within 14 days of filing their initial claim.

The \$2.3 trillion stimulus act signed March 27 includes a \$600 a week across-the-board unemployment payout. Some states have started issuing the benefits, but it could take until May in some states for this money to filter through creaky federal and state bureaucracies into the bank accounts of Americans.

Amazon moves to create own lab for employee COVID-19 tests

● Amazon is believed to have had COVID-19 cases in a number of its warehouses

Washington

Amazon is moving to create its own lab to test employees for coronavirus as the e-commerce giant struggles with safety issues amid the pandemic.

The online retail leader, which began the year with some 750,000 employees and is growing, said it had begun "building incremental testing capacity" for the virus.

"A team of Amazonians with a variety of skills -- from research scientists and program managers to procurement specialists and software engineers -- have moved from their normal day jobs onto a dedicated team to work on this initiative," the



Angela, a delivery worker for Amazon Prime, wears a mask and gloves on her route in Los Angeles on April 8

company said in a blog post late Thursday.

"We have begun assembling

the equipment we need to build our first lab and hope to start testing small numbers of our

front line employees soon."

Amazon said it was making the move because of a shortage



Last month, the Seattle-based internet giant set a goal of hiring 100,000 people and investing \$350 million to support employees and partners during the pandemic, which has thrust the company into the spotlight due to its extensive infrastructure and logistics.

of tests that can confirm infections and concerns that even people without symptoms may be spreading the disease.

"We are not sure how far we will get in the relevant timeframe, but we think it's worth

trying, and we stand ready to share anything we learn with others," the company said.

"If every person, including people with no symptoms, could be tested regularly, it would make a huge difference in how we are all fighting this virus. Those who test positive could be quarantined and cared for, and everyone who tests negative could re-enter the economy with confidence."

Amazon is believed to have had COVID-19 cases in a number of its warehouses, and has seen employee protests and walkouts in several of them to press for safety improvements.

Last week, Amazon began temperature checks and distribution of masks for employees, part of a ramped up safety effort.

Temperature checks were to be rolled out across Amazon's operations networks in the US and Europe, including Whole Foods Market grocery operations.

Videoconferencing skyrockets on Microsoft's Teams software

San Francisco

The number of calls made using Microsoft's Teams videoconferencing software surged 1,000 percent in March as people collaborated online due to the coronavirus pandemic, the company said Thursday. It also said a new record of 2.7 billion "meeting minutes" in a single day had been reached on the platform.

"We've been inspired by the ways our customers are connecting during meetings in Microsoft Teams," Jared Spataro, Microsoft 365 corporate vice president, said in a post.

Videoconferencing has become de rigueur for work and social life as people around the world hunker down at home to avoid spreading the deadly coronavirus.

Teams competes with online video and meeting services hosted by competitors including Google, Cisco, Facebook and Zoom.

Airbus shelve plan to add new A321 assembly line

Reuters | Paris/Toulouse

Airbus has shelved plans to create a new assembly line in Toulouse, France, for its A321 airliner as the company wrestles with the coronavirus crisis.

Airbus announced plans for the line in January when its problem was how to meet record demand for the jet from its site in Hamburg, Germany, which has struggled to accommodate the extra hours and complexity involved in making Airbus's most ambitious single-aisle jet.

Although the plan to convert the company's A380 production plant in Toulouse, which is winding down, remains on the table, the urgency to go ahead with it has disappeared with the financial pressures of the coronavirus crisis, industry sources said.

Coronavirus-hit airlines in push for divisive route subsidies

Route subsidies feature on a list of financial support requests circulated among airline members

Reuters | Paris

Major airlines are seeking operating subsidies for key routes once coronavirus restrictions are lifted, a leaked lobbying document shows, stoking tensions with some low-cost carriers that are less likely to benefit from the additional funds.

Route subsidies feature on a list of financial support requests circulated among airline members of the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

"Airlines will need support to maintain their networks, which play a critical role in driving the world's economy," Geneva-based IATA states in the 12-page digest of "key messages" for airline public affairs executives to take to governments.

The support can be offered "either through a rebate on landing charges per flight or via a direct subsidy per available seat kilometre until markets have been stabilised", it adds.

IATA spokesman Chris Goater confirmed the authenticity of the document, which was first reported by Unearthed, an environmental news service funded by campaign group Greenpeace. "It's a private document for our members," Goater said.

Operating subsidies would add to tax breaks, charge defer-



Passengers board a Ryanair flight in Gdansk, Poland

Airlines will need support to maintain their networks, which play a critical role in driving the world's economy

GENEVA-BASED IATA STATES

als, loan guarantees and other forms of government support given to airlines crippled by an unprecedented near-total shutdown of air travel in the face of the global pandemic.

But they may also strain industry efforts to present a united front amid growing dissent over aid and its effects on competition. Ryanair's Lauda unit publicly urged Vienna on Thursday to withhold financial support from Lufthansa-owned

Austrian Airlines.

"Not all airlines (are) in support of this initiative," the IATA document states, noting a "high risk of discrimination if only applied in certain markets". It did not identify carriers seeking or opposing route support.

British Airways parent IAG and Air France-KLM declined to comment on the proposal. Germany's Lufthansa did not respond to requests for comment.

Subsidies have long existed on low-traffic routes offering economic lifelines to regions with few other transport links.

But IATA, which represents 290 airlines, wants support to help to restore services on some of the bigger international connections during what may be a slow and difficult recovery.

Even after restrictions end, airlines could face further losses, hit by weak demand, intense fare competition and limits to passenger numbers designed to keep the coronavirus at bay.

"It's only core routes that a government would probably consider supporting at this stage," IATA's Goater said. "They're not going to be looking at marginal tourism routes."

The emphasis on economically important connections favours so-called flag carriers over budget rivals such as Ryanair, which fly more leisure passengers to and from secondary airports.

"Under EU law, any grant of state aid must respect the principle of equal treatment," a Ryanair spokeswoman said when asked about the call for route subsidies.

"We are in contact with the European Commission to ensure that it remains vigilant and blocks any aid measures that favour 'national' airlines."

EasyJet, which operates no-frills flights from major airports, said that route subsidies "may be needed to encourage faster restarts" when its services resume.

"But we must ensure there is a level playing field, so any support should be equally applied and should not distort market competition," a company spokeswoman said.

The coronavirus fallout could make some flights financially unviable long after they are allowed to resume, IATA says.

"If a government wants a particular route to be running because it's strategically important, then temporary funds or support may be required," Goater said.

"It's part of our ask to governments, but it's not our number one ask."

EU ministers agree half a trillion euro coronavirus rescue plan



A man wearing a face mask walks past the European Commission headquarters as the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues in Brussels, Belgium

Reuters | Brussels

European Union finance ministers agreed on Thursday on half-a-trillion euros worth of support for their coronavirus-battered economies but left open the question of how to finance recovery in the bloc headed for a steep recession.

The agreement was reached after EU powerhouse Germany, as well as France, put their feet down to end opposition from the Netherlands over attaching economic conditions to emergency credit for governments weathering the impacts of the pandemic, and offered Italy assurances that the bloc would show solidarity.

But the deal does not mention using joint debt to finance recovery - something Italy, France and Spain pushed strongly for but which is a red line for Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Austria.

It only defers to the bloc's 27 national leaders whether "innovative financial instruments" should be applied, meaning many more fraught discussions on the matter were still ahead.

"Europe has shown that it can rise to the occasion of this crisis," said French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire, praising what he said was the most important economic plan in EU history.

Earlier on Thursday, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte warned that the EU's very existence would be under threat if it could not come together to combat the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus.

G20 to propose task force on next steps to help oil market: India

Reuters | New Delhi

G20 energy ministers in their joint statement will propose setting up a task force to advise ministers on the steps needed to stabilise the oil markets amid the coronavirus pandemic, India's oil ministry said in a statement yesterday.

Although India's fuel demand has slumped drastically due to a nation-wide lockdown to stem the spread of coronavirus, India will continue to be a global ener-



India's Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan speaks at a road show organised by the Directorate General of Hydrocarbon (DGH) in Mumbai, India

gy demand centre, Oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan told the meeting.

India, the world's third biggest oil importer, urged producers to aim for "affordable" prices for a consumption-led demand recovery.

The minister also expressed appreciation for the efforts of OPEC and OPEC+ oil-producing countries to balance the market which is imperative for long-term sustainability.

Singapore teachers drop Zoom after online class gatecrashed

AFP | Singapore

Singapore's teachers have stopped using controversial video-conferencing app Zoom for remote education during the coronavirus lockdown, officials said Friday, after intruders reportedly made lewd comments in a virtual class.

The city-state's schools were closed this week as part of tough curbs to tackle a worsening virus outbreak, but students are still being taught via so-called "home-based learning".

During a geography lesson involving teenage girls conducted on Zoom, two men intruded into the livestream, showed obscene images and made lewd remarks, Singapore's Straits Times newspaper reported.



Zoom has exploded in popularity as governments worldwide order people to stay home to fight the spread of the virus

Zoom has exploded in popularity as governments worldwide order people to stay home

to fight the spread of the virus, but it faces growing security and privacy concerns.

Singapore's education ministry is investigating the "very serious incidents" and teachers have suspended use of the app while security issues are ironed out, said Aaron Loh, from the ministry's educational technology division.

"We are already working with Zoom to enhance its security settings and make these security measures clear and easy to follow," he said in a statement.

Home-based learning will continue despite the app's suspension, he added.

Zoom said in a statement that it "strongly condemns" such behaviour, adding it was "committed to providing educators with the tools and resources they need on a safe and secure

Zoom said in a statement that it "strongly condemns" such behaviour, adding it was "committed to providing educators with the tools and resources they need on a safe and secure platform"

platform".

The app has become a go-to service for everything from remote education, to exercise classes and happy hour celebrations as more and more people are stuck at home.

But it has been scrambling to make improvements as security concerns mount, and earlier this week announced an update to its features.

This included adding an icon called "Security" to its meeting controls.

This provides easy access for hosts to features allowing them to lock a meeting; remove participants; and restrict participants' ability to do things including share their screens and chat in a meeting.

After initially keeping its virus outbreak in check, Singapore has seen a surge in cases this month. On Thursday, it reported its biggest daily increase in infections, 287, and now has a total of 1,910 cases and six deaths.

SOCIETY



Education Minister Dr. Majid Al-Nuaimi (left) with Abdullatif Al-Sahhaf, Khalid Maseeh and Khalid Al-Nuaimi (right) during a meeting at the Ministry of Education. The meeting was held to discuss the school which is expected to open at the end of the year. Al-Nuaimi highlighted the ministry's development in the education sector. The meeting was attended by Assistant Ministers of Education, the Director General of the Ministry of Education and the Director General of the Ministry of Health.



Industry, Commerce and Tourism Minister Zayed bin Rashid Al-Zayani during a field inspection visit to a number of factories manufacturing sterile materials and antiseptics, as part of the government's support for all industrial projects in the Kingdom of Bahrain

Staff from Ministry of Interior distribute food baskets for the needy. A total of 4200 food baskets have been distributed to support the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)



Members from the General Directorate of Traffic during a law enforcement campaign, along with directing some youth drivers to fix the loud sounds in their vehicles that disturb people in the neighbourhoods. The campaigns were held after receiving frequent complaints about wrong traffic practices, in which legal proceedings were taken against violators



Members of The Rotary Club of Salmaniya during its third virtual meeting on Wednesday via Zoom. Joining the meeting from Turkey, the club had 27 participants at one point and each one sent their selfie as a form of appreciation for the club's efforts in keeping touch with members during the pandemic.

Society



During a meeting with a delegation from the American School of Bahrain, comprising Khalid Ahmed Mustapha. The delegation briefed the minister on the multi-phased of the beginning of the new academic year, outlining the measures taken so far. Dr. Al-Ment programmes, stressing keenness on the importance of investments in the private sector. Undersecretary for Private and Continuous Education Jaffer Al-Sheikh



The Northern Governor, Ali bin Al Shaikh Abdulhussain Al Asfoor during his visit to Hamad Town Civil Defence Centre to learn about the training progress of volunteers. He was accompanied by the Director-General of Northern Governorate Police, Brigadier Khalid bin Rabea Sinan



Food baskets and meals to needy citizens and residents in the Capital Governorate. distributed as part of a charity campaign amid precautionary measures to combat the



Dr. Turkey was guest speaker Fuge Demirok who spoke about "Art & Mindfulness". The meeting was held with their members in such trying times



Volunteers of "Smile", an initiative of Bahrain Future Society for Youth which provides psycho social support to children with cancer and their parents in the Kingdom of Bahrain, provides coronavirus protection kits to sick children and their families who are affiliated with the project. The tools included an integrated package of masks, gloves and sterilizers

world

In Jerusalem, Christians mark a sombre Easter

AFP | Jerusalem

Eggs on the table and a toy rabbit on the dresser -- with a few decorations, Palestinian Christian Sawsan Bitar attempts to salvage some normality from an Easter overshadowed by coronavirus.

In the Christian quarter of Jerusalem's Old City that Bitar calls home, roads are deserted and most shops have been closed for two weeks.

All cultural sites in the Holy Land are shuttered, regardless of their religious affiliation, as authorities seek to forestall the spread of the deadly respiratory disease.

Christians will be prevented from congregating for the Easter service, whether this coming Sunday -- as in the case of Bitar and fellow Catholics -- or a week later on April 19 in the case of the Orthodox.

Despite wars and uprisings, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where most Christians believe Jesus was crucified and resurrected, has not been closed over Easter for at least a century, according to Palestinian historian Johnny Mansour.

The Sepulchre is considered the holiest site in Christianity, but Friday's morning mass was celebrated behind closed doors.

Usually thousands mark Jesus's crucifixion on Good Friday with a procession marking the 14 Stations of the Cross, the route Christians believe Jesus walked while carrying his cross before being put to death.

But this year, only four faithful retraced his footsteps under the watchful eye of Israeli police, with the narrow cobbled streets of the old City largely deserted.

Police were out in large numbers monitoring and enforcing the country's strict social distancing rules.

Officers handed out a fine to one journalist who was not respecting the



A worshipper prays in front of the closed door of the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem's Old City amid movement restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic

Usually thousands mark Jesus's crucifixion on Good Friday with a procession marking the 14 Stations of the Cross, the route Christians believe Jesus walked while carrying his cross before being put to death.

two-metre distancing rule, AFP journalists at the scene said.

Bitar, who is in her sixties, finds it "depressing" she will not be able to celebrate Easter in church.

Israel -- which occupied east Jerusalem in the Six-Day War of 1967 and later annexed it in a move never recognised by the international community -- has confirmed more than 10,000 coronavirus infections, with 92 dead.

On the Palestinian side, more than 250 cases have been confirmed, with

one death.

Jerusalem is usually the vibrant heart of world Easter celebrations.

Last year, more than 25,000 people gathered near the Holy Sepulchre to attend Palm Sunday mass, which marks the start of Easter week.

Online mass

"But despite the difficult circumstances, there can be positives," said Ibrahim Shomali, spokesman for the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

This Sunday, Easter mass will be broadcast on television and on social networks.

Only six monks will be present in the church, Shomali said.

Watching the mass online will be the only way Francis Gharfah will celebrate Easter this year.

A Palestinian from east Jerusalem, he left his usual decorations in their boxes and chose not to prepare traditional pastries.

"The situation is dramatic," he told AFP, saying he fears for his job at an NGO due to the virus.

He was "very touched" by the images of Pope Francis celebrating Palm Sunday in an empty Saint Peter's Basilica, accompanied only by a few religious men and women -- each of them perched on separate benches.

"People are thirsty for spirituality," said Shomali, who finds great solace in a "return of faith" in this dark time.

Bitar attempts to remain upbeat. "Everything happens for a reason. I

hope that we will be different people, that we will appreciate things differently" once the coronavirus crisis ends.

To mark this Easter, Bitar laid out a cloth printed with small yellow chicks and multi-coloured eggs at the entrance to her home.

Her family has created an improvised photo studio, her daughter and grandchildren squeezing into pictures surrounded by a rabbit and flowers.

But all the photos in the world will not be the same as attending church for Easter.

"We live five minutes from the Holy Sepulchre and we cannot go there," she said sadly.

"It breaks my heart."

Global

Covid-19 Cases:

1,687,857

Deaths

102,198

Recovered:

375,221

Active cases

1,205,144

Closed cases

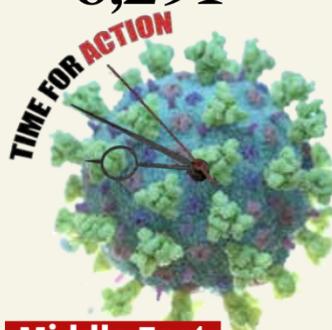
477,076

New cases

+78,568

New deaths

+6,291



Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	New deaths	Total Deaths
USA	495,750	+1,739	18,430
Spain	157,053	+523	15,970
Italy	147,577	+570	18,849
France	124,869	+987	13,197
Germany	121,045	+121	2,728
China	81,907	+1	3,336
UK	73,758	+980	8,958
Iran	68,192	+122	4,232
Turkey	47,029	+98	1,006
Belgium	26,667	+496	3,019
Switzerland	24,551	+53	1,001
Netherlands	23,097	+115	2,511
Canada	22,046	+47	556
Brazil	18,397	+20	974
Portugal	15,472	+26	435
Austria	13,551	+24	319
Russia	11,917	+18	94
S. Korea	10,450	+4	208
Israel	10,095	+9	95
Sweden	9,685	+77	870
India	7,598	+19	246
Ecuador	7,161	+25	297
Ireland	7,054	+24	287
Chile	6,501	+8	65
Norway	6,298	+5	113
Australia	6,203	+2	53
Poland	5,955	+7	181
Peru	5,897	+31	169
Denmark	5,819	+10	247
Czechia	5,674	+7	119
Japan	5,530		99

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases	Serious, Critical	Tot cases/1m pop
Bahrain	913	+26	6	+1	530	377	3	537
Saudi Arabia	3,651	+364	47	+3	685	2,919	57	105
UAE	3,360	+370	16	+2	418	2,926	1	340
Kuwait	993	+83	1		123	869	26	233
Oman	484	+27	3		109	372	3	95
Jordan	372		7		170	195	5	36
Iraq	1,279	+47	70	+1	550	659		32
Egypt	1,794	+95	135	+17	384	1,275		18

Boris Johnson back on hospital ward with UK in Easter lockdown

AFP | London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson was recovering in a hospital ward yesterday after ending three days in intensive care for COVID-19, as his government urged Britons to stay at home over Easter.

The 55-year-old leader left intensive care at London's St Thomas' Hospital on Thursday evening and will now be monitored closely during what Downing Street called "the early phase of his recovery".

"He is in extremely good spirits," a No. 10 spokesman said.

Johnson has been able to walk short distances as part of the care he is receiving to aid his recovery.

Johnson's improving condition came as the government continues to impose an unprecedented nationwide lockdown to try to stem the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

"We are beginning to see the benefits of this social distancing," said Stephen Powis, medical director of England's state-run National Health Service (NHS).

"We do believe the virus is spreading less," he told the BBC.

But Powis stressed it was "critical" that people keep obeying the social



Johnson is the most high-profile world leader to suffer from the coronavirus

distancing measures over the long Easter weekend, when fine weather in forecast.

"It's still too early to really be confident that we are turning the corner," he added.

"We need to completely and utterly make sure that we all comply with the instructions we have been given."

US President Donald Trump called Johnson's release from intensive

care "a very positive development".

His father Stanley Johnson said on Saturday he must now "rest up", after last week trying to keep working during his self-isolation.

"He has to take time," the elder Johnson told BBC radio.

"I cannot believe you can walk away from this and get straight back to Downing Street and pick up the reins without a period of readjustment."

Fears in Belarus over strongman's defiant virus response

● **Wedged between Russia and the European Union, Belarus reported coronavirus cases had risen above 1,400**

● **The number of cases has been roughly doubling every three days over the past week**

AFP | Minsk

As most people in Europe are confined to their homes, life goes on as usual in Belarus where even football is continuing -- though fears are growing over the leader's contentious response to COVID-19.

"When you read the news every day, it's shocking, but we don't have quarantine," said 45-year-old Minsk resident Anzhela.

"From Monday kids will go to school again and we'll keep living in fear."

Wedged between Russia and the European Union, Belarus reported coronavirus cases had risen to 1,486 on Thursday for its population of 9.5 million, 16 of whom have died.

The country's long-serving President Alexander Lukashenko has from the beginning made eccentric statements about the coronavirus, including calling on people to fight off the illness



Belarus has drawn attention to its defiant stance by continuing to stage football matches

by working in the fields and describing fears over the virus as "psychosis".

Belarus has drawn attention to its defiant stance by continuing to stage football matches -- the only country in Europe to do so.

On Wednesday, several hundred spectators watched a national cup semi-final and this weekend half a dozen matches are planned.

Belarusian authorities say such unusual measures are justified because all those who fall sick are strictly isolated.

Testing is restricted to those with symptoms and people they had contact with. Belarus has said it can do around 4,000 tests per day.

On Thursday, Lukashenko said in a meeting with the

emergencies minister that the country's economy should be the priority.

"All of this (coronavirus) will pass, you can see in Europe it's already passing. But the economy will be around forever," he said.

He previously said Belarus couldn't afford a lockdown.

"What are we going to eat then?" he said earlier this week, commenting on quarantine suggestions.

'Everybody can choose'

Residents of Minsk however were divided over the lack of containment orders.

"The number of infections is growing," said 62-year-old Yelena, sporting a homemade face mask made of gauze. "Masks won't save us, only self-isola-

tion."

Still, masks are hard to find in pharmacies, residents said, even though some places require visitors to wear them.

A pharmacist at the city's Pharmacy No. 3, Olga Orlova, said she gets deliveries of 200-300 masks every morning, but "they are gone by midday."

Some Belarusian media questioned why the government won't even limit mass gatherings and plans for military parade rehearsals ahead of the 75th anniversary on May 9 of Soviet victory in World War II.

Popular news website Tut.By on Thursday said Lukashenko may be resisting restrictive measures to avoid showing "weakness" after dismissing the pandemic.

World Health Organization representative in the country Batyr Berdyklychev on Thursday called on lawmakers in parliament to introduce stricter measures, saying the country is far from reaching its peak of coronavirus cases.

The number of cases has been roughly doubling every three days over the past week.

Some in Minsk however said they enjoyed having more freedom than people in neighbouring countries.

"Everyone can choose whether to take their child to school, whether to go to work," said 30-year-old Inna.

"If it gets to be like in Europe, we won't have any freedom of choice, only fear."

War-torn Yemen reports first coronavirus case

Dubai

War-torn Yemen reported its first case of coronavirus yesterday in a southern province under the control of the government, raising fears of an outbreak in a country with few resources left to respond.

The announcement comes on the second day of a unilateral two-week ceasefire announced by the Saudi-led coalition supporting the government in what



Millions have been displaced and diseases including cholera are widespread due to the scarcity of clean water

it said was a move to help fight the pandemic.

"The first confirmed case of coronavirus has been reported in Hadramawt province," Yemen's supreme national emergency committee for COVID-19 said on Twitter.

The committee, run by the internationally recognised government of President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi, said the infected patient was in stable condition and receiving care.

It said medical teams and concerned authorities had taken all necessary precautions and promised to release further details later Friday.

Aid groups have warned that when the coronavirus does hit the country's broken healthcare system, the impact is likely to be catastrophic.

Coalition-backed government forces control the coastal towns but parts of the interior remain in the hands of Al-Qaeda.

Newborn babies in Thailand given face shields to protect them from COVID-19

AFP | Bangkok

Newborn babies at a hospital in Thailand are being given face shields in an effort to protect them from the coronavirus.

Pictures from Praram 9 Hospital in the capital Bangkok show them wearing the shields in the maternity ward.

Thailand has reported a total of 2,473 cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

A total of 33 people have died after contracting the virus, while 1,013 patients have recovered.

Fifty new cases were reported yesterday, as well as the death of a 43-year-old woman.

Twenty-seven of them are linked to previous cases and



A newborn baby wearing a face shield, in an effort to halt the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, at Praram 9 Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand

eight are waiting for investigation into how they caught the disease.

Latest developments



Soldiers and police hit the streets of Indonesia's capital Jakarta to enforce its toughest social-distancing rules yet as coronavirus infections surge and critics warn of a looming public-health disaster. Violators face heavy fines and up to a year in jail for breaking the new rules, which include

a ban on gatherings of more than five people, limiting restaurants to online delivery orders and reducing public transport.

Singapore's teachers have stopped using controversial video-conferencing app Zoom for remote education during the city-state's coronavirus lockdown, officials said, after intruders reportedly made lewd comments in a virtual class.

During a geography lesson involving teenage girls conducted via Zoom, two men intruded into the livestream, showed obscene images and made lewd remarks, Singapore's Straits Times newspaper reported.

Malaysia will extend tough restrictions aimed at fighting the spread of the virus until April 28, the prime minister said. The lockdown had originally been due to end on April 14.

Uber said Thursday it planned to give out "tens of millions" of masks to drivers worldwide as part of its efforts to boost safety amid the coronavirus pandemic. The global ridesharing giant said it shipped its first order of masks to drivers in New York City, which is the current US epicenter of the outbreak, and expects another half-million that will go to other US cities.

Dubai opens drive through Covid-19 testing centres in the city



with capacities of up to 250 tests a day at each centre.

The Philippines has stopped doctors, nurses, medics and other healthcare workers from going abroad while it needs their skills to meet the threat of the coronavirus spreading at home, a foreign affairs official said. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration issued the order on April 2, though it was only made public yesterday.

China's Wuhan city, where the global coronavirus pandemic began, is still testing residents regularly despite relaxing its tough two-month lockdown.



India is set to begin shipping the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine to the United States where President Donald Trump has touted it as a potential weapon against the coronavirus. "The first shipments should start next week," said Sudarshan Jain, secretary general of Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA).

India is stocking at least four months' supply and has agreed to export to at least 30 countries, according to export body Pharmedil's estimates.

A member of the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in Kosovo has tested positive with the new coronavirus, the mission said in a statement on Friday, adding that it would not have any impact on its work.

A case of Ebola has been detected in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, more than six weeks after the last case, the government said in a

South Korean officials yesterday reported 91 patients thought cleared of the new coronavirus had tested positive again. Jeong Eun-kyeong, director of the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC), told a briefing that the virus may have been "reactivated" rather than the patients being re-

infected. South Korean health officials said it remains unclear what is behind the trend, with epidemiological investigations still under way. still under way.

The British government urged people to stay at home over the Easter holidays, concerned that the pull of wanting to see family and friends could undermine efforts to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

Moscow's mayor Sergei Sobyanin said yesterday that the city would begin to gradually introduce a system of passes next week to monitor and regulate residents' movements during a partial lockdown aimed at stopping the spread of the coronavirus.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro took to the streets of Brasilia on Friday, drawing crowds and greeting followers in his latest public attack on social isolation measures to fight the coronavirus outbreak. Bolsonaro, 65, a far-right former army captain, says the isolation measures mandated by state governors and his own public health officials are an unnecessary drag on the economy.



celebs

Dion changes hit song's lyrics to suit crisis

Fox | London

Celine Dion took to Twitter on Thursday to share a light-hearted rewrite of one of her most famous songs to encourage her followers to practice social distancing amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The 52-year-old singer took to Twitter on Thursday where she shared a gif image of herself from the music video to her 1997 hit song "My Heart Will Go On." Along with the image, she shared rewritten lyrics.

"Near, far wherever you are... make sure you're practicing social distancing! // Near, far,

wherever you are... assurez-vous de pratiquer la distanciation sociale! - Team Céline," the tweet reads.

The singer joins the likes of singer JoJo, who previously rewrote the lyrics to her own popular hit "Leave (Get Out)" to have lyrics relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dion has clearly embraced her most recognizable song over the years but recently confessed she almost never recorded it in the first place.

The song, which provided the score for the 1997 hit film, "Titanic," thrust the already-famous star's career to new heights. However, Dion admitted to Andy Cohen on a

recent episode of "Watch What Happens Live" that her initial reaction was to turn down the song.

"There was one song that I didn't want to record, and I'm glad they didn't listen to me," she said in response to a fan question. "My Heart Will Go On."

"It is true," she added after the audience gasped.

"It didn't appeal to me. I was probably very tired that day — very tired," Dion continued. "My husband [the late René Angélil] said, 'Let's hold on.' He talked to the writer and he said, 'Let's try to make it, like, a little demo.'"

Reluctantly, she agreed to

sing the song as a demo. Due to her tepid interest in singing it, though, composer James Horner and writer Will Jennings constructed the film's score around Dion's original recording, which she admitted became the final version.

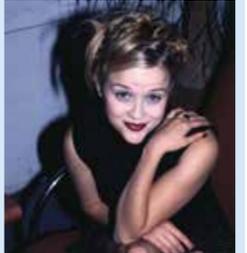
"I sang the song once and they built the orchestra around it. I never re-sang it for the recording. So the demo is the actual recording," she recalled, joking, "but after that, I've sang it about 3 gazillion times."

The song went on to debut at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in 1998 and made the film's soundtrack a No. 1 for a massive 16-week run.



Celine Dion

Witherspoon shares '90s throwback photo



The image Reese Witherspoon shared

Fox | Los Angeles

The 44-year-old actress took to Instagram on Thursday to share a photo of herself, which was taken at an afterparty for the New York City premiere of her 1991 film "Freeway," according to People magazine.

In the snapshot, Witherspoon is seen rocking an all-black outfit complete with a twisted updo and brown lipstick, a beauty trend that she made sure to mention in her caption.

Pink details asthma attack amid coronavirus battle

Fox | Los Angeles

Pink is one of several celebrities who has shared details of her battle with the coronavirus, and in a new interview, the singer nearly breaks down in tears as she details an asthma attack she suffered at the peak of her symptoms.

Speaking with Ellen DeGeneres from her California home, Pink shared she's suffered from asthma all her life but hasn't relied on her inhaler for three decades until contracting COVID-19.

"It was terrifying at one point," Pink said. "I've had bad asthma to the point where sometimes I end up in the hospital. I woke up in the middle of the night and I couldn't breathe. I needed my nebulizer for the first time in 30 years."



Kate Middleton

Kate Middleton reveals the 'best famous person' she's ever met

Fox | London

Kate Middleton has revealed her favourite person she's ever met and her answer might surprise many.

The Duchess of Cambridge, 38, spilled the beans in a video chat with Casterton Primary Academy in Northern England on Wednesday while still making her royal rounds in quarantine with husband Prince William amid the coronavirus.

The particular school is where many children of essential workers in the area attend, and when able to ask the royal couple some questions of their own, the students didn't hold back.

"The kids also asked them what the best famous person was that they had met — something I bet they don't get asked very often!" said Anita Ghidoti, chief executive of the Pendle Trust,

via Hello! magazine. "The Duchess said that George has been watching lots of David Attenborough, 'Blue Planet' and the like, so that would probably be hers."

Attenborough, 93, and Middleton share a pretty extensive history. The local broadcaster has collaborated with the royal family on several occasions — most recently, in September 2019 when the United Kingdom named its new polar research ship after the English historian, dubbing the vessel the RRS Sir David Attenborough.

In January 2019, William also interviewed the longtime "Blue Planet" narrator at the World Economic Forum, and Attenborough was later accompanied by Prince Charles, 71, William, 37, and Harry, 35, for the London premiere of the Netflix series "Our Planet" at the local natural history museum.

The couple praised the students and staffers at the school in Burnley, Lancashire and empathized with the parents of students who simply want a structure for their children while working on the front lines battling the pandemic head-on.

Paris Hilton reflects on her celebrity

Fox | Los Angeles

Paris Hilton is aware she's one of the most successful celebrities of her generation.

The hotel heiress told the new issue of Rollacoaster magazine that she created a "whole new genre of celebrity back in the '90s."

"I was always ahead of my

time and just being an innovator, setting the precedent and creating a whole new genre of celebrity — I think that was the beginning of all that," said the 39-year-old.

"So many things I used to wear back then nobody was wearing," she continued. "I had no stylist, I did that all by myself."

Hilton shared she had an emo-goth phase back in the day and "loved Marilyn Manson." The reality TV star she is friends with the shock rocker, 51, today.

As for her days on "The Simple Life," Hilton noted she would love to do a reunion with Nicole Richie but fans shouldn't expect a special anytime soon.

Lady Gaga looking forward to kids, marriage

ANI | Los Angeles

It seems like American singer-songwriter Lady Gaga is envisioning a family-filled future for herself, complete with a wedding and children.

According to Us Weekly, the 34-year-old singer told 'InStyle' in her May 2020 cover story published on Wednesday (local time), "I will say I am very excited to have kids. I look forward to being a mom. Isn't it incredible what we can do? We can hold a human inside and grow it. Then it comes out, and it's our job to keep it alive."

The Grammy winner shared her family timeline to YouTube star Nikkie de Jager in December 2019, "I wanna have more babies [in the next decade]."

The 'Stupid Love' crooner told the out-

let on Wednesday that some of her other goals include "marriage" and more "music." The 'Poker Face' singer said, "More movies, more charity with the Born This Way Foundation. I want to do way more philanthropy. I want to help fund more research about fibromyalgia and neuropathic and chronic pain by putting a team of doctors together. I have a lot of dreams and hopes."

Gaga, although has "no idea" what she will end up accomplishing from her checklist and said, "I know that I'll be doing it with the people I love."

The 'American Horror Story' actor is currently dating Parker Foundation executive director Michael Polansky. She was previously engaged to American actor Taylor Kinney from 2015 to 2016 and talent agent Christian Carino from 2018 to 2019. She later dated her audio engineer, Dan Horton, for three months.



Lady Gaga

SUDOKU

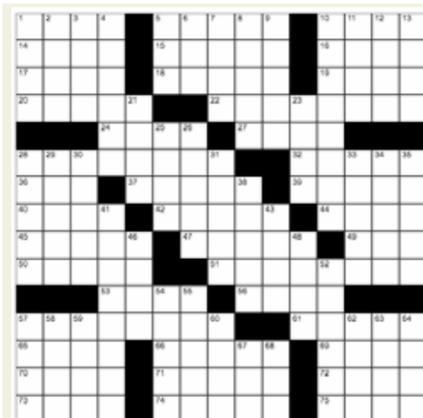
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Yesterday's solution

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

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- Biting; 5- Deputised group; 10- Type of school or cook; 14- City on Norton Sound; 15- Light; 16- Actress Turner; 17- Word of comparison; 18- Rocker Bob; 19- Indigo; 20- Ancient region of Asia Minor; 22- Evening; 24- Like the Sahara; 27- Whirlpool; 28- Terrestrial; 32- Expeditiously; 36- Nest egg letters; 37- Ark; 39- Praise; 40- Movable barrier; 42- Ascend; 44- Patches things up; 45- One of the Allens; 47- Prophets; 49- Meadow; 50- Martin's partner; 51- Insincere praise; 53- Creamy-beige color; 56- Shred; 57- Pervade; 61- Of the kidneys; 65- Overdue; 66- Frasier's brother; 69- First-class; 70- Baking chamber; 71- Stare angrily; 72- Sounds of disapproval; 73- Student's hurdle; 74- Conger catcher; 75- Wet septic;

Down

1- Word that can precede war, biotic and climax; 2- Silver salmon; 3- Model married to David Bowie; 4- Disavowal; 5- Ballet step; 6- Sweet suffix; 7- Saltimbocca seasoning; 8- Sift; 9- Made a mistake; 10- Monotreme; 11- Wife of a rajah; 12- Geraint's lady; 13- "Rider" starred Clint Eastwood; 21- Make for it; 23- Mont. neighbor; 25- Camaro model; 26- Clock faces; 28- Large cat; 29- Sister of Thalia; 30- Wood strips; 31- Tribe ruler; 33- Designer Simpson; 34- Crouch in fear; 35- Short literary composition; 38- Silvery fish; 41- Convenience; 43- Highland hillside; 46- Pleasing; 48- Toronto paper; 52- Picks up the check; 54- Scope; 55- Functional; 57- Scheme; 58- Gutter location; 59- Hwys; 60- Airline to Tel Aviv; 62- It smells; 63- "Puppy Love" singer; 64- To a smaller extent; 67- Poet's preposition; 68- Sun. talk;

Yesterday's solution

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

SPORTS

Milan rivals to play first 'virtual derby'

AC Milan and Inter Milan to play first ever virtual Milan derby on Pro Evolution Soccer 2020

Reuters | Milan

AC Milan and Inter have teamed up with digital sports broadcaster DAZN to stage the first ever virtual Derby della Madonnina on Pro Evolution Soccer, with the one-off event set to kick off today.

With the football season currently on hiatus due to the coronavirus pandemic, two of the biggest clubs in Italy have come up with a new way to engage with fans who are likely to be missing the weekly buzz of top-flight Serie A action.

Milan have organised the upcoming virtual derby as part of a series of initiatives to unite all fans during the ongoing fight against Covid-19, which has caused 18,279 deaths in Italy to date.

The Rossoneri have invited the public to contribute to their ongoing fundraising campaign in partnership with the Fondazione Milan, which has already raised over 600,000 for those working on the frontlines to treat those affected by the illness.

The game will be staged on



A general view inside the San Siro Stadium, the home of both AC Milan and Inter Milan

April 11 at 11:30am BST (6:30am ET) with Portuguese striker Rafael Leao set to be on the controls for Milan against his Inter counterpart Sebastiano Esposito.

20-year-old Rossoneri front-

man Leao said ahead of the matchup: "We can't physically be on a football pitch right now, so it will be quite fun to represent my team and play against Sebastiano [Esposito] on PES.

"This is a derby after all and I

“This is a derby after all and I want to win, but most importantly this is a way to be a little closer to our fans in these difficult times**”**

RAFAEL LEAO

want to win, but most importantly this is a way to be a little closer to our fans in these difficult times."

DAZN commentator Stefano Borghi will be providing expert commentary on the match, while sports reporter Diletta Leotta will be serving as host and covering interviews with the two players after the final whistle.

Fans will be able to tune in to watch the match on AC Milan's official app, or via the Club's Facebook and YouTube channels, with the option to access the content through TV subscription-based channel Milan TV also available.

Cummins preparing for IPL in empty stadiums



Australia's Pat Cummins celebrates a wicket (file photo)

Reuters | Sydney

Australian pace bowler Pat Cummins is "super hopeful" that the Indian Premier League (IPL) will go ahead this year despite the COVID-19 pandemic, even if it means matches are initially played in empty stadiums.

The start of the Twenty20 tournament, originally scheduled for March 29, has been deferred to April 15 and another postponement looks inevitable as India locks down to prevent the spread of the virus.

Cummins has good reason to want the IPL to get underway having attracted a bid of \$2.18 million from the Kolkata Knight Riders in the competition's annual auction, a record for a non-Indian player.

The ICC test player of the year, however, says getting the league underway would also be an important illustration of the world returning to normal after the pandemic.

"The first priority is safety but the second one is getting back to normality, finding that balance," the 26-year-old, named one of Wisden's five cricketers of the year on Wednesday, told the BBC.

"If that unfortunately means no crowds for a while, then that is that, but hopefully people can watch at home on TV."

Cummins said playing the IPL behind closed doors would have a "totally different feel about it".

"When people ask about the difference between playing cricket in India the first thing is the crowd," he added.

"They scream every single ball whether it's a six or a wicket - it's the same noise every ball - so that atmosphere is something that we love about playing in India.

"It will be missed in the short term if it can't happen, but I have no doubt it will be a great event even if it has to be played without crowds."

England playing different formats on consecutive days 'feasible' - Giles

Reuters | London

England could field separate test and limited-overs teams to play matches on consecutive days as part of a compressed home season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, says the ECB's director of cricket Ashley Giles.

England have suspended professional cricket until at least May 28 due to the outbreak and uncertainty also

looms over their home series against West Indies, Pakistan, Australia and Ireland.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler has said England could field two different teams on the same day at separate venues to maximise the amount of cricket in a truncated summer.

"Technically it's feasible," former spinner Giles said. "You could put two different groups together. We haven't really looked at that, like that, yet."

Bayern coach Flick signs permanent deal until 2023

Reuters | Berlin

Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick has agreed a contract extension to 2023, making his position permanent after he took over in an interim role earlier this season, the club said.

"Bayern are very satisfied with Hansi Flick's work," said club CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge in a statement.

"The team has had a very good development under him, plays attractive football which is re-



Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick throws a ball during a match (file photo)

flected in results. We are the only club still competing in all three competitions."

Bayern lead the Bundesliga and are also in the German Cup semi-finals and the Champions League last 16.

The 55-year-old Flick took over in November, replacing Nico Kovac, and after some initial wobbles re-established Bayern's domestic dominance, putting them firmly back in the running for a record-extending eighth straight league title.

The softly-spoken Flick is a former Bayern player who was assistant coach with Joachim Loew's Germany team from 2006-2014 before becoming the national federation's sports director.

He quickly managed to transform Bayern within just a few weeks after the club had dropped down the pecking order under Kovac earlier this season and risked missing out on the title they have dominated for much of the past 10 years.

ITF to furlough staff, 900 tournaments postponed

Reuters | London

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) said 900 tournaments across all its circuits had been postponed so far because of the coronavirus pandemic and that it was furloughing half its staff.

In a statement, tennis's governing body said it was implementing a range of measures to "safeguard jobs and protect the long-term health of our organisation and our sport" with president David Haggerty voluntarily taking a 30% salary cut for the rest of the year.

"The situation we are facing



Fed Cup trophy is seen during a draw ceremony in February (file photo)

represents a fundamental challenge to our organisation and our sport," Haggerty, who was re-elected for another term last

year, said in a statement. "Our purpose is to ensure the long-term growth and sustainability of our sport in collab-

oration with our 210 member nations, which is why we are making difficult decisions in the short term so that we can continue to deliver tennis for future generations across the globe."

The London-based governing body said half its staff would be placed on the UK government's job retention scheme.

Under the scheme, employers can claim for 80% of furloughed employees' monthly wages, capped at 2,500 pounds (\$3,085) per month.

The ITF will top up those payments to ensure all furloughed staff receive 80% of their full salary.

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Back to training, Coman hopes to complete season

Reuters | Munich

Bundesliga clubs returned to training earlier this week after almost a month off due to the COVID-19 outbreak and while the players are still being kept at a safe distance from each other Bayern Munich forward Kingsley Coman is just happy to be back.

Squads have been split into small groups or even pairs under strict measures to contain the spread of the new coronavirus, which has infected over 110,000 and killed more than 2,000 people in Germany.

"We had not touched a ball on a football pitch for almost a month and even if we're split in small groups it's a pleasure to play again



Kingsley Coman

and step onto a field that has goals," the France international told Eurosport yesterday.

"We're doing technical work, at a safe distance from each other. It's a bit like the end of the close season when you resume training individually."

Despite the resumption of training the German Football League (DFL) made it clear last week it was not known if or when the season would resume.

The season has been suspended until at least April 30 with the DFL due to meet next Friday to decide the next step.

Coman said he hoped all the effort the players had put in would not go to waste.

"We work, we work, and I hope we can finish the season otherwise all that work will have been for nothing," he said.

FIFA chief warns against re-starting football too early

Reuters | Bern

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has warned against re-starting football too early amid the coronavirus pandemic, telling FIFA's 211 member associations yesterday that such behaviour would be irresponsible.

Soccer around the world has come to a standstill with domestic leagues on hold and major tournaments such as Euro 2020 and the Copa America postponed for one year.

"Our first priority, our principle, the one we will use for our competitions and encourage everyone to follow is that health comes first," Infantino said in a statement yesterday which FIFA said was specially aimed at its members.

"I cannot stress this enough. No match, no competition, no league is worth risking a sin-



FIFA President Gianni Infantino presents the winner's trophy to Liverpool's Jordan Henderson following the 2019 FIFA Club World Cup Final football match (file photo)

gle human life. Everyone in the world should have this very clear in their mind."

Meanwhile, discussions are being held around the world over when and how to re-start

the season while in some countries there are disagreements over whether players should face pay cuts.

"It would be more than irresponsible to force competitions

to resume if things are not 100 per cent safe," Infantino said.

"If we have to wait a little longer we must do so. It's better to wait a little bit longer than to take any risks."

Infantino reiterated that FIFA was assessing the financial impact of the stoppage so it could prepare the right response.

"You have to know that we will be there and we will find solutions together," he said. "You will never be alone... (and) the world will know where the money goes and, equally important, why the money goes there."

"If football manages to have a discussion where everyone contributes positively, and keeps in mind the global interest over the individual one, I am convinced our future can be better than our past, and we will be better prepared for the times ahead," Infantino added.

Man United's Maguire offers food packages to elderly

AFP | London

Manchester United captain Harry Maguire has agreed to supply a food package of everyday essentials to the elderly during the coronavirus lockdown.

Maguire and his father approached Herrings Top Shop in Mosborough, his hometown near Sheffield in the north of England, about the idea of giving the parcels to those aged 70 and over or their carers in the area.

"I am very proud of my Mosborough roots - it's where I grew up and where my family still live. I come back to visit everyone as much as I can," Maguire said yesterday.

"There's always been a real sense of community in the area which is more important than ever at the moment. In times like these you think a lot about your loved ones and those that are more elderly."



Harry Maguire

"My family and I hope that this provides a small comfort to people who might be struggling."

England defender Maguire has been at the forefront of football's bid to help with the pandemic.

He coordinated United's response to the PlayersTogether initiative, with Premier League stars joining forces to help generate funds for NHS charities during the

Covid-19 crisis.

The Premier League is suspended for the foreseeable future, but the 27-year-old remains in contact with his United team-mates and is adhering to a regime his club have sent him.

"Like everyone, I'm keeping to the government advice and trying to make the best of the situation," Maguire said.

"My daughter is too young to understand what's going on right now, but she'll read about these times in the years to come."

"I'm also keeping active and following the training programme that United have given me within the confines of my back garden!"

"It's not quite Old Trafford but I still take pride in keeping the grass in good nick. I also keep in touch with all my team-mates and have found that contact to be really important, as well as family of course."

More chaos at Barca as six directors quit

Reuters | Barcelona

Spanish La Liga champions Barcelona were in turmoil yesterday after six board directors resigned criticising the club's handling of a social media scandal and the financial implications of the coronavirus crisis.

Two of the club's four vice presidents, Emili Rousaud and Enrique Tombas, were among those to quit, joined by directors Silvio Elias, Josep Pont, Jordi Calsamiglia and Maria Texidor.

In a letter to fans, the directors pointed a finger at president Josep Maria Bartomeu and expressed doubts about the board's ability to handle the implications of the pandemic, which has slashed income and led to a 70% players' pay cut. [XXN2BJ00S]

They asked Bartomeu to call presidential elections as soon as possible and criticised the club for hiring a third party, I3 Ventures, earlier this year to monitor social media coverage of Barca.

Bartomeu has denied accusations the company created



General view as flags are put on seats before a match (file photo)

social media accounts to smear future presidential candidates, and former and current players, but he anyway rescinded the club's contract with the firm.

"We have arrived at this point because we cannot reverse the way the club is managed in the face of important challenges in the future, especially in the post-pandemic era," said the letter, which appeared in Spanish media yesterday.

"We also want to show our displeasure over the unfortu-

nate episode about the social media accounts, known as 'Barcagate', which we learned about through the press.

"As our last act of service to the club, we recommend that elections are called as soon as circumstances permit so that the club can be managed in the best way possible and deal with the important challenges of the immediate future."

There was no immediate reaction from Barcelona or Bartomeu.

Real Madrid players agree to 10-20 per cent wage cut

Reuters | Madrid

Real Madrid's playing and coaching staff have voluntarily agreed to take a wage cut of between 10 and 20 per cent this year to help the club deal with the stoppage caused by the coronavirus outbreak, the La Liga side said in a statement on Wednesday.

The club said the exact amount would "depend on the circumstances that may affect the closing of the current 2019/20 sports season." Club directors have also agreed to a wage cut as have members of its basketball team, it

said.

The club said the move followed negotiations between the team captains - Sergio Ramos for the senior soccer side - and club directors. It said the decision would save having to cut the wages of other employees.

Spain has been badly hit by the coronavirus outbreak with a death toll of 14,555. La Liga, as with most football around the world, is currently suspended and it is not known when, or even if, the season will re-start.

"This decision, taken by players, coaches and employees,



Real Madrid players during a training session (file photo)

avoids traumatic measures that affect the rest of the workers," said the statement.

It said it would also help deal with "the reduction in income that the club is suffering these months as a result of the suspension of competitions and the paralysis of a large part of its commercial activities."

The players at Barcelona and Atletico Madrid have also taken pay cuts and La Liga has asked other clubs to follow suit.

The Spanish sports daily Marca said that a 10 per cent cut would save the club around 50 million euros.