

India likely to unveil \$20 billion-plus package to tackle virus downturn

5 BUSINESS

WORLD 8 One third of world under lockdown

Evacuees brought back home

Second batch of citizens repatriated from Iran arrives as Bahrain records fourth COVID-19 death

Crown Prince underlines strategies in COVID-19 fight



HRH the Crown Prince

Bahrain's Crown Prince said yesterday that the Kingdom's strategy of preventing the spread of Covid-19 will continue to be focussed on reducing gatherings to five people or fewer.

See page 3 for full report

210 fils (includes VAT)



Deceased Bahraini national, 78, was suffering from underlying and chronic health problems

TDT | Manama

The second batch of Bahraini citizens evacuated from the Islamic Republic of Iran due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak arrived late last night, on a day that Bahrain announced its fourth death related to the pandemic.

The Ministry of Health announced on social media that the chartered flight carrying the repatriated Bahrainis touched down in the Kingdom after being delayed for nearly two nights. It was originally scheduled to



MOH officials receive the evacuated citizens upon their arrival on a chartered flight

reach Bahrain late on Monday night but its departure was put off due to logistical reasons.

It is understood that a total of 61 evacuees were on the plane.

Following their arrival, the ministry administered tests under the supervision of a specialised medical team. Based on these results, they will be transferred either to a precautionary quarantine centre or to isolation

and treatment centres, according to the guidelines and standards approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The Health Ministry's evacuation procedures are in full accordance with medical and internationally approved measures, and are a part of the ministry's plans in order to safeguard the well-being of its arriving citizens and their families.

Earlier this month, the first group of repatriated Bahrainis numbering 165 in all returned to the Kingdom. From that group, a total of 77 tested positive for the coronavirus.

The ministry is continuing its efforts towards intensifying all precautionary and preventive measures to contain and prevent the further spread of COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the ministry an-

nounced yesterday the death of a 78-year-old Bahraini national who was a registered active case of the coronavirus.

The deceased male was suffering from underlying and chronic health problems. He had contracted the virus after being in contact with another active COVID-19 case, after which he was placed in isolation and received extensive 24-hour treatment from a specialised medical team.

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

The ministry also highlighted that, except for one case, all other 224 active COVID-19 cases remain stable and all patients continue to receive around-the-clock treatment from a specialised medical team following guidelines provided by the WHO.



MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

Precautionary measures taken to contain the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Public Awareness Campaign to Combat Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Allowed

- ✓ Leaving the house for work, buying medication or necessities, or visiting a hospital.
- ✓ Individuals exercising outdoors in public spaces are obliged to do so alone or in a pair of two, keeping a distance between one another. Individuals are also advised to not bring along any children or minors.
- ✓ During family social gatherings, such as weddings and funerals, individuals are obliged to follow all preventative measures outlined. Funeral ceremonies are to be limited to close family members only.
- ✓ During queuing in supermarkets, service areas, or work pick up and drop off points, individuals are obliged to follow social distancing measures, and keep a distance of not less than a meter between one another.
- ✓ Restaurants and food and beverage outlets are also permitted to operate through take away services and home delivery services.

Not allowed

- ⊘ Gatherings outside houses and in public areas are to be limited to 5 individuals only.
- ⊘ Gatherings in public parks and public beaches are prohibited.



Laws will be enforced on any violators of the decisions

Deputy PM receives Foreign Affairs Minister



Deputy Prime Minister Jawad bin Salem Al Arrayed received Foreign Affairs Minister Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani yesterday. The Deputy Premier congratulated Al Zayani on the royal confidence and his appointment as Foreign Affairs Minister, wishing him success in his new post. Al Zayani affirmed his keenness on fulfilling his duty to serve Bahrain under the leadership of His Majesty the King, the constant care of HRH the Prime Minister, and the support of HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister.

Congratulatory cables sent

TDT | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa has sent a cable of congratulations to the Bangladesh President Mohammad Abdul Hamid on his country's Independence Day.

HRH the Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa also sent a cable of congratulations to President Abdul Hamid, as well as to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister, sent a cable of congratulations to both President Abdul Hamid and to Prime Minister Hasina.

Al Ayam and Tribune take action in COVID-19 fight

TDT | Manama

In compliance with the strict guidelines implemented by the government for all kinds of business, Al Ayam Newspaper and The Daily Tribune are taking important proactive actions to

help fight the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Bahrain.

Employees handling the printed editions of both papers are well equipped with protective gear, as are those who circulate the copies across the Kingdom.



Al Ayam printing press staff at work

Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemns terrorist attack in Nigeria

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain condemned the terrorist attack that targeted buses carrying soldiers of the Nigerian Army, which resulted in the death and injury of many soldiers, stressing the Kingdom of Bahrain's solidarity with the Federal Republic of Nigeria in its efforts to combat terrorism.

The Foreign Ministry extends its sincere condolences to the Nigerian government and families of the victims, and its wishes of speedy recovery to the injured. It also reiterates the Kingdom's firm stance against all forms of violence, extremism and terrorism, calling for joining efforts to eliminate this scourge that threatens international peace and security.

Airport arrivals restricted

Gulf Air declares entry of passengers limited to Bahraini citizens and residents

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's national carrier announced yesterday that it will restrict the entry of passengers through Bahrain International Airport to Bahraini

citizens and residents only.

This was confirmed by the airline on its official page on Twitter.

The statement read: "All passengers including transit passengers into Bahrain International Airport have been restricted to

citizens and residents of Bahrain and passengers with a valid Prior Permission Granted letter."

However, no statements were available from the Civil Aviation Affairs in the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunica-

tions if the same will be applied to other airlines.

This comes while many countries, including fellow GCC countries, announced this week a complete ban on travelling and halting the issuance of residency

visas until further notice.

The move comes as part of measures taken by governments around the world to contain and combat the global spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Lulu Group airlifts food consignment on Gulf Air

TDT | Manama

In keeping with food security amidst the global outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19), Lulu Hypermarket has airlifted a special food consignment on a chartered Gulf Air flagship Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner from India yesterday in an initiative spearheaded by #TeamBahrain.

Lulu Group, the largest retail group in the Kingdom, received a special consignment of food produce from India and chose to partner with Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, to



Officials receive the special consignment upon arrival in Bahrain

execute a common shared goal to serve the people of the Kingdom.

Gulf Air's line professionalism and cooperation in executing this airlift in the interests of national food security was praised by the hypermarket management and has assured customers that similar airlifts shall continue as long as required.

Present at the arrival were Gulf Air Deputy CEO Captain Waleed Abdulhameed Al Alawi, Ministry of Industry and Commerce Asst. undersecretary of foreign trade Eman Al Doseri and Lulu Group director Juzer Rupawala.

Housing Ministry to receive applications electronically

TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Housing has announced that, effective from today, it will only receive all types of applications for housing services electronically

Citizens therefore need not report to the ministry's Customer Service Centre.

The move is within the Housing Ministry's policy to provide e-services for citizens to save their time and effort.

It is also in accordance with the provisions of the Public Awareness Campaign to Combat Coronavirus (COVID-19), the ministry said.

BDF Chief-of-Staff chairs defence and security meeting

TDT | Manama

Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) Chief-of-Staff Lieutenant-General Theyab bin Saqr Al Nuaimi chaired a Defence and National Security Committee meeting yesterday.

The meeting discussed ways to develop cooperation that would strengthen coordination between the military and se-

curity services in the Kingdom and enhance joint military to preserve the gains and capabilities in Bahrain.

Also present were Public Security Chief Major-General Tariq Hassan Al Hassan; National Guard Staff Director Major General Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Saud Al Khalifa; Major General Ghanim Ibrahim Al Fudhala; Assistant Chief-of-Staff for Operations, Royal Navy Forces



Officials at the meeting

Commander Commodore Mohammed Yousef Al Asam; and a

number of senior officers.

Meanwhile, Al Nuaimi also at-

tended a specialised officers military session's graduation cer-

emony at one of the BDF units.

The Chief-of-Staff was briefed on the most important theoretical and practical programmes, after which the graduates presented an infantry field military show and practical applications.

He delivered the graduation certificates to the graduates and prizes to high achievers, praising their efforts in achieving the requirements of the session successfully.



HRH the Crown Prince

Crown Prince underlines strategy of social distancing and free movement

HRH the Crown Prince: These measures in combatting coronavirus have proven effective to ensure that family life and economic productivity can continue

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's Crown Prince said yesterday that the Kingdom's strategy of preventing the spread of Covid-19 will continue to be focussed on reducing gatherings to five people or fewer.

It has remained the most effective proven strategy in combatting the virus as well as en-

suring family life and economic productivity can continue within a managed framework of free movement.

HRH Prince Salman congratulated the Bahraini people on their self-discipline and civic responsibility in adhering to the measures already adopted, and said continuing to abide by instructions from Bahrain's

key government ministries was critical.

The Crown Prince went on to thank Bahrain's coordinating and response ministries for their enormous efforts to date and reiterated that it was only through the essential partnership between the government and its citizens that this approach continues to succeed.

The Crown Prince said Bahrain's commitment to overcoming the virus was absolute and no government capability would be held back in maintaining the health and safety of its people.

HRH Prince Salman reminded citizens that everyone has a vital, on-going role to play and that, together, Bahrain would emerge stronger.

Nationalism and unity are key: Interior Minister

TDT | Manama

The values of nationalism and unity were stressed yesterday by a top government official, especially in light of the current situation in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Interior Minister General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa delivered this message in a speech marking the first anniversary of the launch of the National Plan to Promote the Spirit of Belonging to the Nation and Reinforce the Values of Nationalism (Bahrainouna).

"The 26th of March marks the first anniversary of the launch of the National Plan to Promote the Spirit of Belonging to the Na-

tion and Reinforce the Values of Nationalism 'Bahrainouna,'" the minister said in his speech.

Shaikh Rashid is also the follow-up committee head for the implementation of the plan, which was unveiled on March 26 last year.

"On this occasion, I express sincere thanks and appreciation to HM the King, His Royal Highness Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the Prime Minister, HRH the Crown Prince and all nationalist and loyal Bahrainis who are involved in the current

situation that requires unity and a positive response to all precautionary measures to ensure safety," he added.

"Out of the dedication to promote the sense of nationalism and national unity and asserting love and loyalty to the leadership of HM the King, we and the upcoming generations, especially in such circumstances, need to continue working on translating our love to the nation in responsible behaviour and social awareness, linked to the Arab and Islamic legacy and the values of our religion that calls for tolerance, moderation and the promotion of positive citizenship.

"The nation isn't only a geographical space we live in, but it comprises the history, roots, culture, identity and existence of the citizen.

"The promotion of the belonging to the nation and national values isn't just about feelings and

emotions, but it fundamentally guarantees to achieve national stability.

"The reinforcement of belonging, national values and the security responsibility towards our society force us to implement community partnership to promote security and safety."

Shaikh Rashid noted that of the plan's 105 initiatives, 82 have been implemented since its endorsement by the cabinet and the formation of a follow-up committee.

The plan has taken steady steps from the phase of being an idea to the execution stage, within the goals and objectives determined in its founding year.

"Under the patronage and direction of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (may God protect him), the national plan values and goals come as part of the enlightened royal vision and thought of creating a modern state, based on

equality and justice and backed by the foundation of the reinforcement of loyalty, belonging, and the strengthening of its cornerstones to be the first protection front of society."

The Interior Minister further thanked all those who have contributed to the implementation of the measures approved by the government in the fight against the coro-



navirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

"We express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the national stand of all members of Bahraini society for volunteering as part of the National Campaign to Combat Coronavirus," he said.

Fruit and vegetable prices increase drastically

Cost of certain products such as onions and potatoes go up by as high as 120 per cent

TDT | Manama

A drastic increase in prices for certain fruits and vegetables was reported yesterday in local markets.

The cost of some vegetables such as onions and potatoes went up by as high as 120 per cent.

Traders attributed the rise to two main factors: the first being the steady increase in people's demand for such products, which resulted in a lack of supply; and the delay in the arrival of some shipments, such as those coming from Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The delays were due to the precautionary measures at the border in combat-

ting the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Merchants at Jidhafs Central Market said that, over the past four days, there has been a heavy demand from people buying large quantities of fruits and vegetables, which has caused their stocks to run out before any new quantities arrived.

These new shipments are expected to reach the markets today or tomorrow.

Elsewhere, the price of tomatoes went from BD5 to BD6, while the price of lemon cartons increased from BD12.5 to BD15.5.

The price of onions increased by 120 per cent to more than BD7 in the market, while the price of potatoes increased by 100 per cent to BD3.5. Also, there were price

increases for bananas and oranges.

The merchants called on the concerned authorities to allow for the speedy movement of goods so that prices would return to normal as soon as possible.

Bahrain capable of meeting surge of COVID-19 cases

TDT | Manama

Hospital beds in Bahrain remain available to meet a surge of cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a top health official said yesterday.

Supreme Council of Health chairman and National Taskforce for Combating the Coronavirus (COVID-19) head Lt. Gen. Dr. Shaikh Mohamed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa yesterday issued a notice on Bahrain's current health care system capacity.

Shaikh Mohamed confirmed that the Kingdom has increased its capacity to identify and treat COVID-19 as part of its comprehensive approach to containing the virus and preventing

its spread.

Shaikh Mohamed noted that the leadership of HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister in national efforts fighting the coronavirus continues to minimise its impact and safeguard the wellbeing of citizens and residents.

The health chief highlighted that the current capacity for treatment centres stands at 1,667

beds, of which 225 beds are occupied. The capacity for quarantine centres stands at 2,504 beds, of which 172 beds are occupied.

Additionally, the compartmentalised structure of quarantine centres allows for quick conversion to treatment centres, if required.

On this note, Shaikh Mohamed added that Bahrain has conducted over 28,000 tests for COVID-19, and contact tracing activities are underway to reduce COVID-19 transmission by identification, isolation and treatment.



Learning continues despite class suspensions

TDT | Manama

Educational services continue despite the suspension of classes at schools across Bahrain. This was affirmed yesterday by Education Minister Dr. Majid bin Ali Al Nuaimi. To achieve this goal, the Education Ministry has focused on e-learning, which is based on solid foundations established through the King Hamad Schools of the Future Project that has contributed, through the existing digital potentials, to enhancing communication between teachers,

students and their parents, he said.

Speaking during a field tour where he was informed of schools' efforts to activate e-learning, Dr. Al Nuaimi said that the ministry has overcome the current extraordinary circumstances through the provision of three means of remote education, namely the digital content provided by the educational portal, enriched recently by a 45-member specialised team and the teachers; the airing of televised lessons by Bahrain Sports Channels 2; and the allocation of 14 YouTube educational channels for all classes - technical and vocational education - as well as special education.

Dr. Al Nuaimi was informed about a number of distinguished experiences to provide educational services to students, commending the efforts exerted by the concerned sides at the Education Ministry and schools.

He pledged that the Ministry of Education will carry on its efforts aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the educational process for all levels, through providing multiple learning options and reaching the greatest number of students.

A united commitment to social distancing is a positive response to implementing measures in the fight against the spread of COVID-19

business

Bahrain Kuwait Insurance Company names Dr Abdulla Salah Sultan CEO

TDT | Manama

Bahrain Kuwait Insurance Company (gig Bahrain) named Dr Abdulla Salah Sultan as its Chief Executive Officer, effective 1 April 2020.

Dr Sultan replaces Ebrahim Alrayes who is retiring on the same day.

Prior to joining Bahrain Kuwait Insurance Company (gig Bahrain), Dr Sultan held several senior management positions. Most recently, he was in the role of Group Chief Operating Officer (COO) at Doha Insurance Group. He has also spent ample time in the Reinsurance sector with Arab Insurance Group (Ariq).



Dr Abdulla Salah Sultan

Dr Sultan also served on several Boards of Directors in his previous roles. At present, Dr Abdulla continues on the Board of United Insurance Company as well as the Bahrain Insurance Association in Bahrain.

Dr Abdulla is a Chartered Insurer and holds 'FCII' (Fellowship of the Chartered Insurance Institute) designation from the United Kingdom. He also successfully pursued acquiring the Certified Catastrophe Modeler (CCM), USA and the Associate Risk Management (ARM), USA, qualifications. He also obtained his Doctor's degree from the Swiss Business School after completing an MBA from the University of Strathclyde in

Glasgow.

On this occasion, BKIC's Chairman, Murad Ali Murad commented: "His expertise as an accomplished result-oriented Bahraini executive management professional makes him uniquely qualified to lead BKIC into the future. His proven track record has strengthened the Board's belief that under Dr Abdulla's leadership, BKIC would deliver on the future goals and strategies."

"Lastly, we would like to thank Ebrahim Alrayes for his service and dedication to BKIC. We also seize this opportunity to wish Dr Abdulla much success in his new role, duties, and future endeavours."

UK to support self-employed in 'next couple of days'

Reuters | London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday the government would set out "in the next couple of days" what support it would be giving self-employed workers to help them through the coronavirus outbreak.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak said on Tuesday the government was working on measures to help self-employed people, many of whom have lost their income due to the outbreak, but that there were issues with the practicality and fairness of doing so.

Johnson also said the government would lift nationwide lockdown measures at the earliest opportunity, when it knew it was safe to do so.

Batelco AGM approves BD 45.7 million cash dividends

TDT | Manama

The shareholders of Batelco, a leading digital solutions provider, yesterday approved the distribution of a full-year cash dividend of BD45.7M (US\$121.2M), at a value of 27.5 fils per share. 10 fils per share was already paid during the third quarter of 2019 with the remaining 17.5 fils to be paid in the coming weeks.

The Annual General Meeting held at Hamala headquarters also approved the appointments and elections of Board Members for the next three-year term 2020-2023.

Mumtalakat Holding Company appointed four members: Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Raed Abdulla Fakhri, Abdulla Abdulhameed Alhamadi, and Fatema Ghazi Al-Arayedh - to the Board.

Amber Holdings named Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa and will announce the name of the other representatives at a later time. The Social Insurance Organisation (SIO) appointed Khalid Hussain Taqi and Abdulla Abdulrazak Bokhwa. Shareholders during the AGM named



Batelco Chairman Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, CEO Mikkel Vinterw with CFO during the Annual General Meeting held at Hamala headquarters

Jean Christophe Durand and Ahmed Abdulwahed Abdulrahman.

In his comments, Batelco Chairman Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al Khalifa told shareholders that the company's revenues for the full year 2019 were BD401.5M (US\$1,065.0M), and revenues in the home market of Bahrain have increased by 5 per cent year-over-year boosted by revenues from fixed broadband, data communications and mo-

bile services. "2019 saw EBITDA decreased by 1pc in comparison to 2018, impacted by BD11.1M (US\$29.4M) voluntary employee retirement programme cost. Adjusted EBITDA for the year without the voluntary employee retirement cost is 7pc higher year-on-year, driven by the 5pc YoY reduction in operating expenses."

"I am pleased to welcome the new Board for the next three-year term and look forward to

working with them and utilising their expertise and knowledge in helping consolidate Batelco's position," he added.

Batelco CEO Mikkel Vinter said this year Bateco plan to "further increase the areas of 5G coverage around the Kingdom."

"We will be investing in adjacent businesses in Bahrain and the MEA region, focusing on specific clusters of FinTech, B2B solutions, e-government and e-commerce," he added.



Batelco AGM 2020: Presentation



Batelco AGM 2020: Attendees watch by video conferencing

Ansar Gallery opens daily from 8 am to 12 am

● Floor markings placed to guide customers on 1-meter distance queuing

TDT | Manama

Ansar Gallery Hypermarket will remain open daily from 8 am until 12 midnight in line with the government notification, its management said in a statement.

To provide a safe and secure environment, Ansar Gallery said, it's taking all "preventive measures to avoid transmission of Coronavirus (COVID-19)."



Ansar Gallery Hypermarket will remain open, daily from 8am to 12 midnight, to provide essential services to customers across Bahrain

Precautionary measures taken include floor markings to guide customers on 1-meter distance queuing, sanitising shopping trollies before and after every usage as well as recording workers body temperature before the start of each shift.

Hand sanitisers are made available at entrances and service counters.

Currency Exchange is open and restaurants on takeaway and delivery basis.

BFC open for business 'as usual'

Manama

Bahrain Financing Company said it will run its business "as usual" for its remittance and bill payment customers in the Kingdom.

In a statement, Arnab Bhat-

tacharya, Senior Marketing Executive BFC, expressed confidence that the "government is taking sufficient measures to control the outbreak and bring things to normal at the earliest" despite virus outbreak is having its impact on businesses across the Kingdom.

WB, IMF urge debt relief for poorest countries

Reuters | Washington

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund yesterday urged official bilateral creditors to provide immediate debt relief to the world's poorest

countries.

In a joint statement, the institutions called on official bilateral creditors to immediately suspend debt payments from International Development Association (IDA) countries, if requested.

'KHCB' to issue \$200 million AT1 sukuk



The meetings were chaired by Member of KHCB's Board of Directors and Board Representative Hisham Ahmed Alrayes, in the presence of KHCB's CEO Sattam Sulaiman Algozaibi and several Executive Management members, shareholders, and representatives of the Shari'a Supervisory Board, auditors, and regulatory bodies.

● **Shareholders approved writing off accumulated losses**

● **Appointed market maker, extended board term by six-months**

● **To delist bank's shares on Dubai Financial Market**

TDI | Manama

Khaleeji Commercial Bank (KHCB), one of the leading Islamic Banks in Bahrain, yesterday received shareholders' approval to issue Sukuk as Additional Tier 1 (AT1) Capital of up to \$200 million to support the capital base.

Shareholders also approved to write-off accumulated losses worth BD15,788,052, subject to CBB approval. The approval allows the bank to reduce

its issued and paid capital to BD89,211,948 distributed into 892,119,480 shares with a par value of 100 fils per share from BD105,000,000 distributed into 1,050,000,000 shares with a par value of 100 fils per share.

The decisions were taken during the bank's Ordinary and Extraordinary General Meetings held yesterday through visual communication with a quorum of 77.23 per cent.

Moving on, the shareholders approved extending the term of the existing board of directors to six months, appointing a market maker and agreed to delist the bank's shares on Dubai Financial Market (DFM).

The Ordinary General Meeting also agreed to delist the bank's shares on Dubai Financial Market (DFM), appoint a Market Maker for the Bank and to utilize no more than 3 per cent of the bank's total shares issued for the purpose.

Looking ahead, Chairman, Alrayes, said the approval to raise capital will have a positive

impact on the bank's operations and operational performance.

On the Coronavirus situation, CEO Algozaibi said the bank launched a package to ensure that its clients are not affected by this crisis.

"This package includes postponing finance instalments to all citizens for six months with no charges and profits, raising the limits on credit cards, as well as supporting companies and SMEs by providing special facilities," Algozaibi explained.

Commenting further on the bank's strategy ahead, Algozaibi said KHCB is working to launch a set of specially designed products and services for individuals and will be opening new branches after completing the re-evaluation of current branch network and electronic distribution channels.

The bank, he added, will continue to invest in electronic banking systems to improve the quality of services "as this will benefit the bank's financial position".

Zoho Corp offers three months free service for SMEs

TDI | Manama

Zoho Corporation announced launching their Small Business Emergency Subscription Assistance Programme (ESAP) to help customers worldwide weather the global crisis.

Zoho said it has waived the cost of every single application they currently use, for up to three months, for up to 20 000 qualified paying customers with 25 employees or less.

"Certain industries have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and we strongly encourage our customers in

these industries to please apply for this Small Business Emergency Subscription Assistance Programme," Hyther Nizam, President Middle East and Africa, Zoho Corp, said. "While we want to provide relief for as many small business customers as possible, we will prioritise those who are most in need and hope that others who are adapting to market conditions, will help us by allowing programme availability to those struggling to stay afloat."

Earlier this month, Zoho, a global company that offers a comprehensive suite of business software applications in the industry, launched Remote-

ly, a virtual productivity platform of 11 collaboration applications, which was provided to businesses of all sizes around the world for free, so that companies could effectively make the transition to remote work. Since its release two weeks ago, more than 5 000 new companies are running on the platform. Zoho has seen an average of 500% growth in usage of its collaboration apps and 1000% growth in daily new users of Zoho Meeting.

Zoho is a 24-year-old, bootstrapped, privately held company with more than 50-million users located in over 180 countries.

India likely to unveil \$20 billion-plus package to tackle virus downturn

Reuters | New Delhi

India is likely to agree an economic stimulus package of more than 1.5 trillion rupees (\$19.6 billion) to fight a downturn in the country that is currently locked down to stem the spread of coronavirus, two sources familiar with the matter said.

The Indian government has not yet finalised the package and discussions are ongoing between Prime Minister Nar-

The Indian government has not yet finalised the package and discussions are ongoing between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office, the finance ministry, and Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

endra Modi's office, the finance ministry, and Reserve Bank of India (RBI), said both the sources, who asked not to be named as the matter was still under discussion.

One of the sources, a senior government official, said the stimulus plan could be as large as 2.3 trillion rupees, but final numbers were still in discussion.

The package could be announced by the end of the week, both sources added.

Alba expresses solidarity with Bahrain to combat COVID-19

TDI | Manama

Aluminium Bahrain (Alba) expressed solidarity with Bahrain's efforts to combat the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) with the company introducing numerous Safety initiatives across the plant and various departments as early as January 2020.

Alba said it is holding COVID-19 awareness sessions for employees and contractors by Alba Health Care team regularly via video-messaging and online platforms.

Other key measures include sanitisation of different departments and shop-floor areas, social distance markings, distribution of protective kits comprising gloves and masks as well as hand sanitizers, increasing hand sanitiser dispenser units across the Company, providing only take-away or delivery service from its canteens and sharing the government's directives and news regularly via different channels. Alba, on 23 March 2020, announced remote working for all employees, in particular women and senior staff. Employees and contractors were also invited to join Al-



Alba said it is holding COVID-19 awareness sessions for employees and contractors

ba's volunteering team, which is part of TEAM Bahrain, to help fight the spread of COVID-19. Alba has over 500 volunteers to-date.

Commenting, Alba's Chief Executive Officer, Ali Al Baqali said: "The health and safety of our human assets, employees

and contractors, are paramount to Alba. We will go above and beyond for the Safety of our people to maintain smooth operations. We also remain committed to ensuring the sustainable supply of our raw materials along with delivering our products to clients across the globe."

BAHRAIN TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY (BATELCO) B.S.C.



Final Dividend Distribution for the year 2019

Following the Annual General Meeting of the shareholders of Bahrain Telecommunications Company B.S.C held on the 25th of March 2020, we are pleased to inform the shareholders that the distribution of final dividends for the year ended 2019 will be as follows:

Cum-Dividend	26 March 2020
Ex-Dividend Date	29 March 2020
Record Date	30 March 2020
Payment Date	12 April 2020

Eligible shareholders shall contact the registrar Karvy Fintech:

Karvy Fintech (Bahrain) W.L.L

Office No 74, 7th Floor, AlZamil Tower

Tel: 17215080 Fax: 17212055

Email: Bahrain.helpdesk@karvy.com

QUOTE OF THE DAY

NONVIOLENCE IS A POWERFUL AND JUST WEAPON, WHICH CUTS WITHOUT WOUNDING AND ENNOBLES THE MAN WHO WIELDS IT. IT IS A SWORD THAT HEALS.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Virus offers warring parties a ladder to climb down

ALISTAIR BURT

The UK woke up on Tuesday reeling from the announcement of a series of measures not just unthinkable in peacetime, but barely imaginable even last week. And we are far from alone — maybe even slightly late to lockdown. Although it remains too early to estimate the full effect of the coronavirus outbreak, it is not too early to realize that the world is going through another defining moment, which will divide our lives into the “before” and “after,” like the Second World War or 9/11.

What do we know so far? We know that the virus is no respecter of regime, rhetoric or region, or of unevidenced conspiracy theories. Democratic, authoritarian, or anything in between — all are regarded the same by this silent murderer.

We know we need greater preparedness and collegiality. States mostly put off until tomorrow the dreadful consequences of cost and alarm for events like pandemics, which are predictable but uncertainly timed. We are going to have to work more closely together, noting who has handled things more effectively than others, and learn from them, with humility and accountability, but without blame — otherwise things will remain hidden.

We know that, by and large, humanity responds positively. Lockdowns seem to be working because people are responding to them; though exceptions still tend to prove the rule. And some-



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

times humanity responds in a breathtaking fashion, which suggests why we ultimately survive: From the heroics of medical staff risking their lives, and dying, in fighting the disease to those who refuse to let isolation equate to being alone, and sing their hearts out together from the balconies

and rooftops of the world. As of now, we do not know the extent of the economic recession to come, but it is likely to be historically unrivalled since the Industrial Revolution. We do not know if states will recognize the urgent and growing demand for a coordinated international

response. The G20 could and should step up by the Riyadh meeting in November.

We do not yet know the impact on domestic politics around the world, such as if the US presidential race will be determined solely by this crisis. We do not know if authoritarian regimes will use the

In It Together: Protecting the Health of Africa's People

KAREN ONGLEY AND ABEBE AEMRO SELASSIE

The growing presence of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa threatens the same human costs as elsewhere in the world. The economic costs could be just as devastating.

Sweeping measures

For their part, countries in sub-Saharan Africa are acting decisively, taking sweeping measures to halt the advance of the virus, with limits on public gatherings, public safety campaigns, and similar measures.

But we also know that for society's most vulnerable in the region, “social distancing” is not realistic. The notion of working from home is only possible for the few. So, difficult decisions to close borders (to people, but not essential goods) are even more important. All the more so if we are to minimize added strain on already fragile health systems.

From health crisis to global economic crisis

What began as a health crisis is now a major global economic crisis. We fear African countries will be swept up in that.

A decade ago, the region was spared the brunt of the global financial crisis. Lower debt levels meant most countries had room to increase spending and they were able to implement counter-cyclical policies. Countries were also less integrated with global financial markets and that meant being cut off from financ-



ing was harmful for only a handful of countries.

Neither of those conditions apply today. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have limited room in their budgets to increase spending. They also rely more on global capital markets.

This time will be different

The pandemic will have a substantial economic impact on sub-Saharan Africa, in three ways.

One: the very measures that are crucial to slowing the spread of the virus will have a direct cost on local economies. The disruption to people's daily lives means less paid work, less income, less spending,

and fewer jobs. And, with borders closed, travel and tourism are quickly drying up, and shipping and trade are suffering.

Two, global hardships will spill over to the region. The slowdown in major economies will see global demand fall. Disruptions to production and world supply chains will weigh more on trade. Tighter global financial conditions will limit access to finance. Countries are likely to also see delays in getting investment or development projects off the ground.

Three: the sharp decline in commodity prices will hit oil exporters hard, compounding the first two effects. The price of oil has tumbled to levels not seen in decades. We don't yet know where they will settle, but with oil prices already down by more

than 50 percent since the start of the year, the impact will be substantial. We estimate that each 10 percent decline in oil prices will, on average, lower growth in oil exporters by 0.6 percent and increase overall fiscal deficits by 0.8 percent of GDP.

Lower forecasts likely

Across the region, growth will be hit hard. Precisely how hard is still difficult to say. But it is clear that our growth forecast in April's regional outlook will be significantly lower.

The slowdown will mean revenues take a hit, just as countries face additional public spending needs.

Yet, now is no time for half measures. Without exception, people's health is the priority and countries

should boost health spending accordingly.

Countries will also need to combat the economic fallout. The right policy prescription will depend on each country's circumstances—the channel through which it is most exposed and the depth of the connections.

While the likely duration of disruption remains unclear, Farr's Law of Epidemics—showing the rise and fall of infections as roughly bell-shaped—gives us some reassurance the shock will pass.

Fiscal first

Fiscal policy will have to play a leading role in mitigating the shock, with fiscal positions reverting to medium-term paths consistent with

1971

East Pakistan declares its independence from Pakistan to form Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Liberation War begins.

1975

The Biological Weapons Convention comes into force.

1979

Anwar al-Sadat, Menachem Begin and Jimmy Carter sign the Egypt–Israel Peace Treaty in Washington, D.C.



1981

Social Democratic Party (UK) is founded as a party.



As of now, we do not know the extent of the economic recession to come, but it is likely to be historically unrivalled since the Industrial Revolution.

will be for the poorest of the world; but we can be sure we are going to find out. From refugees to those living daily with weak health systems, they fear that, when the infection catches them, there will be few places to hide.

What chance, then, of any success for the clear call of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres this week for a worldwide cease-fire? He articulated the fears of those in areas of conflict of the impact of the disease on the vulnerable, the displaced, on women and children. But he also recognized the ability of a common fight against the disease to “open doors” for diplomacy. He is absolutely right to do so. Many politicians know the phrase “a ladder to climb down” when a point of stalemate has been reached, and when a party dare not budge for fear of appearing “weak.”

At this point, when everyone

knows that a conflict has become even less understandable than when it started, it is impossible for either side to “win,” or has gone on so long that every avenue to settlement has become discredited, a diplomatic search is mounted for such a ladder to climb down so that progress can be made and face saved.

If you truly want to end a conflict, now is the chance — and the virus is your ladder.

People all over the world will be urging “take it.” In Libya, recover the humanitarian truce. Stop the onslaught in Syria. In Yemen, no one can win on the back of a broken people. Israelis and Palestinians have been brought closer in dealing with the coronavirus. A checkpoint is no deterrent, so they could take the chance to move beyond the Washington announcement to something more inclusive. And perhaps the US and Iran could both take steps, instead of trading unending accusations and claims against one another. If US sanctions are to be eased, it would be essential for some genuine, verified response from Iran to allow progress. Both steps should be taken, as their respective populations fear tomorrow more than each other. The political differences in the region are real, and not to be minimized, but perhaps they could be put to one side as increasing numbers of families grieve, from Texas to Tehran and virtually all points in between.

It’s time to heed and act upon the secretary-general’s call.

crisis to undermine freedoms still further — citing health security as an excuse for the currently necessary tracking and surveillance — or if they will be mellowed by the disaster and realize that transparency and freedom are better protections for the future.

Nor do we know how bad this

and their Economies



Fiscal policy will have to play a leading role in mitigating the shock, with fiscal positions reverting to medium-term paths consistent with debt sustainability once the crisis has passed. Targeted cash transfers could also be considered to help individuals and households under strain.

regimes, the exchange rate should be allowed act as a shock absorber.

Protecting lives and livelihoods

Importantly, countries in sub-Saharan Africa shouldn’t have to ‘go it alone’.

Too often, financing limits recourse to supportive policies when major shocks hit. The international community needs to do its utmost to help ease these constraints and ensure that peoples’ lives and livelihoods are not destroyed.

While the priority is on protecting life, the IMF is helping where it can, by supporting livelihoods.

The Fund is making \$50 billion available via rapid-disbursing emergency facilities, including \$10 billion on highly concessional terms for low-income countries.

With this, we are accelerating efforts to back countries in the region. So far, we’ve received requests for emergency financing from close to 20 countries, with requests from another 10 or more countries likely soon.

Our member countries need us more than ever. Discussions between IMF teams and country officials are advancing quickly, and we expect the first wave of this support to be delivered in early April.

For countries facing difficult debt situations, the priority—people’s health—is the same. Here, the international community can step up. Immediate debt relief through the Fund’s Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust can help free up resources for much needed health spending. These countries should also reach out to donors to secure grant and concessional financing.

International response

In the same vein, the Fund is working closely with our partners—the World Bank, World Health Organization, African Development Bank and African Union—to respond to this crisis. The speed and strength of the international community’s response will be paramount.

To paraphrase Gabriel Garcia-Marquez: humanity, like armies in the field, advances at the speed of the most vulnerable.

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa can be assured they have the full force, and full speed, of the IMF behind them.



TOP
4
TWEETS

01



Iran’s confirmed corona cases is now 27,017 with 2,077 deaths. In the last 24 hours there have been 2,206 new cases and 143 deaths. In total 43 doctors and nurses have died from corona.

@thekarami

02



Spoke with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud regarding the #coronavirus and we agreed all countries need to work together to contain the pandemic and stabilize energy markets. Thankful for #SaudiArabia’s partnership in the face of the threats posed by #Iran’s regime.

@SecPompeo

03



HE Interior Minister: We appreciate the efforts and support of all in activating the initiatives of the national plan, along with the official and civic bodies for their cooperation and national sense to move forward in the implementation of the national plan.

@moi_bahrain

04



We are marking these festivals at a time when our nation is battling the COVID-19 menace. The celebrations will not be like they are usually but they will strengthen our resolve to overcome our circumstances. May we keep working to fight COVID-19 together.

@narendramodi

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

Letter from China



DAVID CULVER, CNN CORRESPONDENT

It’s a bit strange to think how quickly we normalize the abnormal. I would have never thought I’d have a preferred type of face mask. I like the ones that sit securely over my nose and mouth yet simultaneously allow for some air to circulate so I don’t feel my own breath clinging to my skin all day; I also prefer the straps that go around my head rather than tug at my ears. For some reason the latter gives me a headache after a few hours. Nor would I have realized the value of an average body temperature reading. Mine was 36.7 C at last check, which was a few hours ago when I reentered my hotel lobby. Too high a reading and it could mean getting denied access to a hotel, shopping mall, restaurant or even a city here in China. And in some cases, it’ll get you reported to police. This however is the reality of life as the extreme government lockdown attempts to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus in China.

On January 22nd I reported from Wuhan, the ‘epicenter’ of the virus outbreak. Already the vast majority of the people there were wearing face masks and starting to limit their exposure outside. At the time we really could not imagine how big this would get.

Other Chinese cities have since followed suit; in Shanghai — a normally bustling metropolis of some 25 million people — it took us half a dozen phone calls to find a sit-down restaurant that was open. Eating out during this “special time”, which is how many locals have referred to life in China amid this coronavirus outbreak, has been a particularly bizarre and depressing experience.

When we pulled up to the restaurant, we found most of the entries closed and at the only open entrance there was a security guard taking the temperature readings of all the guests. We also had to provide them with our name, ID or passport number, and phone number. You’re then strongly encouraged to use hand sanitizer provided in a pump-action bottle.

As we were being seated, we quickly realized that we were the only ones there. Immediately after placing the menus in front of us, the server provided a further sampling of hand sanitizer. He offered two different types in case we had a preference. We handled the menu with purified hands and sanitized again immediately after paging through the selections.

As our dinner went on, a few more customers arrived. The host deliberately sat them at opposite ends of the restaurant, leaving several empty tables to serve as a safety buffer between the diners. The server explained that their restaurant policy was only to serve three tables at one time, assuming there was even that much demand.

When we finished our meal and asked for the check, the server tried to entice us with ordering dessert. We politely refused. But he insisted on at least bringing us a cake. Within seconds a chocolate heart cake was placed in front of us. As we left the host thanked us repeatedly for coming and apologized for the inconveniences of his city. “This is a ‘special time’,” he told us. “Please wish China well so we can get through this.”

Scenes like this are now commonplace in China, and with the continued spread of the virus internationally, other countries are beginning to adopt similar measures.

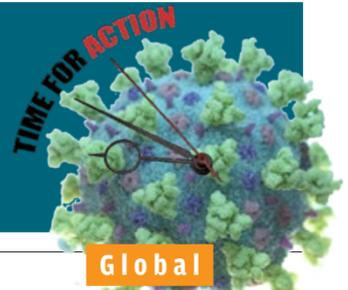
What we’re seeing is a new normal created around the world where cultural norms are shifting so as to limit or eliminate human-to-human contact, where governments are being tested on how they navigate a crisis that they’re still struggling to understand and where businesses are facing mounting levels of economic impact.

This “special time” is no longer isolated to China; the global community is now trying to cope with the uncertainties ahead.

This “special time” is no longer isolated to China; the global community is now trying to cope with the uncertainties ahead.



WORLD



Global

Britain's Prince Charles tests positive for coronavirus



Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, has tested positive for coronavirus, a spokeswoman said. Charles is 71 years old.

Three US sailors test positive

Washington
Three US sailors from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt have been diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, the first cases reported on a US Navy ship currently on deployment, officials said Tuesday. The three have been evacuated and all those they had come into contact with on the vessel, which has more than 5,000 personnel on board, have been quarantined, Acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly told reporters. The ship was last in port in Vietnam 15 days ago but Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Mike Gilday said it was difficult to connect the cases to a particular port visit.

Libya reports first coronavirus case

Tripoli
Libyan health minister of the UN-recognised GNA late Tuesday reported "a first contamination with the coronavirus in Libya," without giving details of the case. "The necessary measures have been taken to treat" the patient, the minister, Ehmed Ben Omar, said.

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases	Serious, Critical	Tot cases/1m pop
Bahrain	416	+27	3		190	226	2	246
Saudi Arabia	900	+133	1		29	869		26
UAE	333	+85	2		52	279	2	34
Kuwait	195	+4			43	152	6	46
Oman	99	+15			17	82		19
Jordan	154				1	153		15
Iraq	346	+30	29	+2	103	214		9
Egypt	442	+40	21	+1	93	328		4

One third of world under lockdown



Deserted roads in New Delhi

New Delhi

India's billion-plus population went into a three-week lockdown on Wednesday, with a third of the world now under orders to stay indoors, as US politicians agreed to spend \$2 trillion to counter the economic damage of the coronavirus pandemic.

Financial markets soared as the Senate and the White House thrashed out a stimulus package worth roughly 10 percent of the entire US economy, an injection Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said represented a "wartime level of investment".

President Donald Trump has voiced hope that the United States will be "raring to go" by mid-April, but his optimism appeared to stand almost alone among world leaders, who were ratcheting up the movement restrictions in a bid to stifle the spread of the disease.

India ordered its 1.3 billion people -- the world's second-biggest population -- to stay at home for three weeks.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "total lockdown" call doubled the number of people around the globe under some form of movement restriction to more than 2.6 billion people.

"To save India, to save its every citizen, you, your family... every street, every neighbourhood is being put under lockdown," Modi said in a televised address.

Saudi tightens coronavirus

Expo 2020 Dubai staff member contracts coronavirus

Reuters | Dubai

Organisers of the Expo 2020 Dubai world fair, scheduled to start in October, have confirmed one coronavirus case among staff. A spokesman confirmed the case and said Expo

2020 Dubai would "continue". "All those in contact or in touch with the individual are following the protocols, including testing, quarantine, and self-isolation measures," the spokesman said.



Trump declares coronavirus fight close to end

curfew; travellers stranded in UAE

Saudi Arabia reported its second coronavirus death and tightened a nationwide curfew, barring entry to and exit from the capital Riyadh and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina as well as movement between all provinces from yesterday.

The orders, approved by King Salman and published by state media, also brought forward the start of curfew in the three cities to 3pm from 7pm starting today.

Saudi Arabia introduced the 21-day curfew on Monday after registering a jump in infections. Its second fatality was a 46-year-old foreign resident in Mecca, among 133 new cases taking the total to 900.

Across the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council the tally rose to 2,472 with seven deaths, as the United Arab Emirates registered 85 new infections, Oman 15 and Kuwait four.

In the UAE, the region's tourism, business and transit hub, hundreds of Europeans were stranded after airports halted passenger flights earlier than expected.

Saudi Arabia has taken rigorous steps to contain the outbreak, also including halting international flights as well as suspending the Umrah year-round pilgrimage and closing mosques, schools, malls and restaurants.

An Interior Ministry spokesman on Wednesday reported high compliance so far.



Beds for COVID-19 patients are set up inside the Republica de los Ninos amusement park in La Plata, Argentina

Dubai directed private sector companies to implement remote working systems for 80 per cent of staff from now until April 9, the authority regulating business in the emirate, Dubai Economy, said on Twitter on Wednesday. Pharmacies, grocery stores, supermarkets and cooperative societies were excluded from the worder.

UAE authorities have urged people to stay home but not announced an official curfew or suspended work. On Wednesday, they directed food retail outlets to remain open 24 hours a day but not exceed 30pc capacity to ensure physical distance of 2 meters (6 ft) between shoppers.

Elsewhere Ireland ordered non-essential businesses shut, Britain planned a 4,000-bed emergency hospital in London and Spain called for practical support from the NATO military alliance.

And nearly 130 million Americans, or 40 percent of the population, are under or will soon come under some lockdown order, including in the largest state of California.

Many governments are listening to health experts who warn the only way to slow the epidemic -- and save the lives of the elderly and vulnerable -- is by imposing "social isolation" measures.

But Trump is not convinced the move is worth the enormous economic cost.



Gun stores in the US have seen an uptick in business as a result of the spreading coronavirus pandemic



Members of the Syrian Civil Defence (White Helmets) disinfect a mosque in the Syrian city of al-Bab



Customers queue outside a super store in Soweto as South Africa enters a 21-day national lockdown



Medical staff dressed in protective gear prepare to test people for COVID-19 at a drive-through centre at Vibhavadi Hospital in Bangkok



India ordered its 1.3 billion people to stay at home for three weeks

Virus-stricken Diamond Princess leaves Yokohama



Yokohama | Japan

The Diamond Princess, a coronavirus-hit cruise ship off Japan that saw 712 passengers and crew contracting the disease with 10 deaths, left its moorings in Yokohama yesterday, a city official said.

"Disinfection work has been finished. Quarantine confirmed that the work has been finished," a Yokohama city official said.

"It is leaving the pier" around 0500 GMT, he said, without revealing where it was heading or how many crew members were on-board.

Chinese father builds 'baby pod' to protect infant from virus



Reuters | Shanghai

The father of a two-month-old infant in Shanghai has created a custom-built pod complete with an air purification system to keep his baby safe from the coronavirus outbreak.

Cao Junjie, 30, refashioned a cat carrier to make the sealable pod that includes an air-quality monitor displaying the concentration of carbon dioxide inside.

"Because of the epidemic, I spent a month making this baby safety pod for my kid ... It can provide a safe and comfortable environment for the baby," Cao told Reuters on Wednesday. Cao's wife, Fang Lulu, said she initially wasn't sure how comfortable the baby would be inside the pod.

"I think the baby pod he made is pretty safe. We have tried it several times, so I feel relieved," said Fang.

Coronavirus Cases:

446,563

Deaths

19,803

Recovered:

112,050

Active cases

314,710

Closed cases

131,853

Country	Total cases	Total Deaths
China	81,218	3,281
Italy	69,176	6,820
USA	60,539	816
Spain	47,610	3,434
Germany	35,740	186
Iran	27,017	2,077
France	22,304	1,100
Switzerland	10,171	149
SKorea	9,137	126
UK	8,227	433
Canada	2,892	28
Turkey	1,872	44
Russia	658	1
India	606	10
B'desh	39	5
Pakistan	1,022	8
Thailand	934	4
Indonesia	790	58
Philippines	636	38

160-year-old Vatican newspaper succumbs to coronavirus



A woman reads a copy of the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano

Reuters | Vatican City

The Vatican daily L'Osservatore Romano, which Pope Francis has jokingly called "the party newspaper", suspended printing for only the third time in nearly 160 years yesterday due to the coronavirus.

The paper, which was founded in 1861, will continue publishing online and most of its staff of about 60, including 20 journalists, will work from home, editor Andrea Monda said.

Wednesday evening's edition will be the last for the time being.

Why are malaria pills being used against coronavirus?

Reuters

Older malaria drugs are being studied, and in some cases used, to treat or try to prevent infection with the new coronavirus, even though there is no firm evidence to show they are effective.

Studies are underway in a number of countries, including China, France and the United States, to see whether the pills - chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine - may have a role to play in the rapidly spreading pandemic. US President Donald Trump has touted the malaria drugs as "a game changer." But the



Food

and Drug Administration and other health experts said trials must first ensure the medicines are effective and safe for use in this patient population.

Why are malaria drugs under consideration?

There are currently no vaccines or US-approved treatments for the highly contagious COVID-19 respiratory illness that has killed more than 19,000 worldwide, so even the most severely ill patients largely receive only supportive care such as breathing assistance.

On its website, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says some US clinicians have reported anecdotal use of hydroxychloroquine at different doses.

Chloroquine was first synthesized in the 1930s. A version called hydroxychloroquine, in use since the 1950s, is considered to be less toxic, according to studies.

Both drugs can cause serious side effects, including vision loss, heart problems or even death, if used incorrectly.

The drugs are used to combat malaria, which is caused by a parasite spread through mosquito bites, because they



Firefighters wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) walk away after responding to a medical call amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Seattle, Washington

interrupt its ability to digest a host's blood cells.

Scientists have detailed biochemical properties of chloroquine that indicate it could be used against some viral infections. These include direct antiviral effects, such as blocking steps needed by certain viruses to replicate, and its ability to suppress production and release of proteins involved in inflammatory complications of several viral diseases.

In addition to malaria, hydroxychloroquine is also used to treat lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.

What does the data say?

Data has begun to emerge from some coronavirus trials, but most information so far is preliminary.

A French team last week said initial results from a 24-patient trial of hydroxychloroquine

showed that 25 per cent of patients given the drug still carried the coronavirus after six days, compared with 90pc of patients given a placebo. But the trial



Chloroquine is a synthetic form of quinine, which is found on the bark of the cinchona plant. It has been used for hundreds of years in South America to treat fever

The drugs are used to combat malaria, which is caused by a parasite spread through mosquito bites, because they interrupt its ability to digest a host's blood cells.

Health officials caution that no one should be taking these drugs to treat or prevent coronavirus infection without medical supervision and a prescription

people.

Other trials of the malaria drugs are ongoing or set to start in the United Kingdom, Norway and Thailand.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, whose state is the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak with more than 25,000 cases, on Sunday said it had acquired hundreds of thousands of doses of the malaria drugs to use in a clinical trial.

Is there enough to go around?

In the United States, prescriptions for chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine have already spiked and are in short supply, according to pharmacists.

Several makers of the generic medicines said they are increasing production of chloroquine pills. Teva Pharmaceuticals Industries Ltd, Mylan NV and Bayer AG have donated large quantities of the drugs to health authorities.

Prescription only!

Health officials caution that no one should be taking these drugs to treat or prevent coronavirus infection without medical supervision and a prescription.

In Arizona, a man died and his wife was hospitalized after taking a nonmedical form of chloroquine used to fight parasites in aquariums. "Given the uncertainty around COVID-19, we understand that people are trying to find new ways to prevent or treat this virus, but self-medicating is not the way to do so," said Dr. Daniel Brooks, medical director of the poison and drug information center at Arizona-based Banner Health.

Sudan defence minister dies at Juba peace talks



Sudanese Defence Minister Jamal al-Din Omar

Khartoum

Sudanese Defence Minister Lieutenant General Jamal al-Din Omar died of an unspecified illness Wednesday while in neighbouring South Sudan for peace talks with his country's main rebel groups, the military announced.

Omar had "suffered from a number of chronic illnesses," armed forces spokesman Amer Mohamed al-Hassan said without elaborating.

The government delegation in the South Sudanese capital Juba said Omar died at 2:30 am (2330 GMT Tuesday) "after a sudden heart attack during the performance of his sacred duty".

Born in 1960, Omar was named defence minister after the armed forces toppled veteran president Omar Bashir in a palace coup last April following months of nationwide protests.

At least 25 dead in attack on Sikh-Hindu temple in Kabul

AFP | Kabul

At least 25 people were killed Wednesday in an attack on a Sikh-Hindu temple in Afghanistan's capital where worshippers were offering morning prayers, the latest brutal assault claimed by the Islamic State group.

The incident highlights the country's ongoing security crisis and comes as the impoverished nation reels from a massive cut in US aid and struggles with a raging insurgency, political deadlock, and rising coronavirus cases.

Witness Raju Singh Sonny said that a man dressed in a police uniform burst into the temple in central Kabul, shot a guard and started attacking worshippers in the main hall.

"Several other attackers also entered the building and they were going from room to room shooting people," Sonny said.

Only a few thousand Sikhs and Hindus are estimated to reside in what is an overwhelmingly Muslim nation.

Interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian said the assault started around 7:45 am (0315 GMT). There were conflicting accounts about how many gunmen were involved, with security sources giving differing numbers between one and four.

At least one attacker was subsequently killed by security forces in an hours-long clearing operation.



An Afghan Sikh woman mourns for there relatives near the site of the attack in Kabul, Afghanistan



NATO soldiers inspect near the site of the attack in Kabul, Afghanistan

The Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility, according to the SITE intelligence group. The Taliban denied any involvement.

Anarkali Kaur Honaryar, a Sikh member of the Afghan parliament, told AFP about 150 people had been inside the temple, where several families also live and worshippers gather for

morning prayers.

"Some people inside the temple are hiding and their phones are off," Honaryar said while the attack was ongoing.

Arian said 25 civilians had been killed and eight others wounded, while 80 people had been rescued from the temple. Graphic images posted online showed several bodies as well as terrified people who appeared to be Sikhs running from the scene.

"Such cowardly attacks on the places of religious worship of the minority community, especially at this time of (the coronavirus) pandemic, is reflective of the diabolical mindset of the perpetrators and their backers," the Indian foreign ministry said in a statement. Sikhism and Hinduism are rooted in India.

White House, Senate agree on \$2 trn coronavirus rescue plan

Washington

The White House and Senate have reached agreement on a \$2 trillion stimulus package for the US economy and millions of Americans ravaged by the coronavirus crisis, top lawmakers said early yesterday.

"At last, we have a deal," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said, hailing the massive "wartime level of investment into our nation" reached after five days of arduous and tense negotiations.

"We have a bipartisan agreement on the largest rescue package in American history," top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said shortly after McConnell spoke.

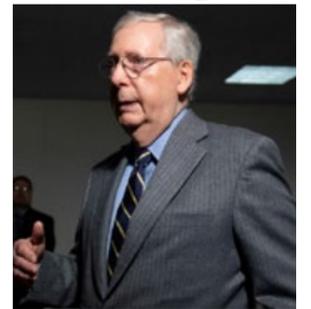
"So many people are being put out of work through no fault of their own. They don't know what their future is going to be like, how are they going to pay the bills," Schumer added.

"Well, we come to their rescue."

The Senate and House of Representatives still need to pass the legislation before sending it to President Donald Trump for his signature.

The deal aims to buttress the teetering economy by giving roughly \$2 trillion to health facilities, businesses and ordinary Americans buckling under the strain of the coronavirus pandemic.

It will put cash directly into the hands of Americans hard hit by the crisis, provide grants



Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell hailed the massive 'wartime level of investment into our nation'

to small businesses and hundreds of billions of dollars in loans for larger corporations including airlines.

It also proposes the injection of around \$130 billion into what Schumer calls "a Marshall Plan for hospitals" and health care infrastructure, referring to the huge American aid program to rebuild Europe after World War II.

Democrats rejected the original package, arguing that it put corporations ahead of workers, including health professionals on the front lines of the battle against a pandemic that has infected 55,000 and killed nearly 800 in the US alone.

As the hours ticked away Tuesday, several lawmakers voiced their anxiety.

"Pass the damn bill. Stop negotiating. Enough is enough," a visibly angry Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said on the floor, after accusing Democrats of "nickel and diming at a time people are dying."

CELEBRITIES



Kristen Bell and Dax Shepard



Meghan Markle

Heidi Klum does not have coronavirus

Heidi Klum

Los Angeles

German-American model and Hollywood celebrity Heidi Klum has confirmed that she doesn't have coronavirus, 10 days after taking the test.

"Day 14 of staying home #covid_19negative," the 46-year-old wrote on Instagram.

"(I'm) much better thank you. I just have a bad cold and am trying to get over it. Sending love out to you and everyone," she added.

Klum was self-quarantined in her Bel-Air mansion since falling ill on March 7, which effectively shut down production on the third season of "America's Got Talent: The Champions", reports [dailymail.co.uk](#).



Kristen Bell, Dax Shepard give tenants a rent-free April

Los Angeles

Hollywood stars Kristen Bell and Dax Shepard are giving tenants in their Los Angeles properties one month rent-free accommodation amid the coronavirus lockdown.

According to TMZ, the married couple decided to forgo rent collection for April due to the coronavirus pandemic, during which many of their tenants are without jobs as California is under a "stay at home" order, reports [aceshowbiz.com](#).

A manager at Pringus Property LLC -- Kristen and Dax's company -- which owns at least two residential buildings, reportedly emailed tenants to share the good news, expressing empathy and encouragement, and promising to work with residents going forward as best as possible.

As officials from the World Health Organisation (WHO) are advising people to practice social distancing and stay at home in a bid to prevent the spread of Covid-19, many landlords are giving tenants a pass while the outbreak continues.

Tom Cruise trying to get Meghan Markle back on big screen

Los Angeles

Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise is trying to get Duchess of Sussex back on the big screen in his future film.



Tom Cruise

Following her decision to step down from royal duties, the Internet rumour mill was rife with speculation that about Meghan Markle could be all set for a comeback in showbiz.

Cruise wants to sign her up for one of his next movies, reports [aceshowbiz.com](#).

A source quoted in various reports says: "If anyone can get Meghan back on a film set, it's Tom. And what better way to get back on the big screen than starring opposite one of Hollywood's biggest stars."

Although the source said Cruise wants to cast Meghan in "one of his next films", no details are yet available on a possible project.

Miley Cyrus has 'reunion of the decade' with Emily Osment

Los Angeles

Pop singer Miley Cyrus and her former "Hannah Montana" co-star Emily Osment enjoyed a virtual "reunion of the decade" on the singer's Instagram Live show "Bright Minded".

The 27-year-old singer has been welcoming numerous stars on her screen for the series, which airs daily on her social media page. And on Monday, Cyrus teased fans that they

were going to be "shooketh" by who she had in store for them that morning, reports [aceshowbiz.com](#).

"This is the reunion of the decade! My BFF that shared the screen with me for the last 15 years. On and off screen she's a badass best friend... Whether for Hannah or Miley, she's always there for her," she said.

Cyrus added that she wanted to speak to Osment on the show because the screen star is also an animal lover, and Cyrus is keen to encourage people to foster animals during the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's a really great time for those in situations that are able to provide. It's a good time to adopt or foster -- but it's really important to talk about financial responsibility and the strain a pet can cause on a family during this financially challenging time. The best way to draw attention to man's best friend is to bring in the best friend duo that always encouraged people to do what's best and do what's right," she said.



Miley Cyrus



Katrina Kaif

Lockdown diaries: Katrina's brooming session turns into cricket game!

Mumbai

Katrina Kaif is emerging as Bollywood's Lockdown Star. After her videos of dishwashing, working out, and strumming the guitar trended over the past few days, the actress has now taken to brooming to stay occupied at home.

A video that Katrina posted on Wednesday shows the actress brooming the floors of her home. What's more, once the chore got done, Katrina had other imaginative ideas to put the broom to good use. She is seen using the broom as a bat, to polish her cricketing skills!

"Day 21 lockdown-One day at a time guys..... we all gotta do our part..... I am apparently @isakaif part is to give commentary and pro tips while seated .. Gotta mix it up this is seriously good exercise btw #stayhome #helpoutathome," she captioned the video, shot by her sister Isabelle.

Shawn Mendes donates \$175,000 to combat coronavirus

Los Angeles

Singer Shawn Mendes donated \$175,000 to help pediatric care in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier this week, the Shawn Mendes Foundation



Shawn Mendes

made a donation to the SickKids Foundation. The money will assist in the purchase of equipment and supplies for coronavirus preparedness for the community at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Ontario, reports [variety.com](#).

COVID-19 effect: Hrithik, Sussanne temporarily live together to take care of sons



Hrithik, Sussanne

Mumbai

Hrithik Roshan became emotional after his former wife Sussanne Khan temporarily moved back with him to take care of their sons together, amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Taking to his social media, Hrithik penned a lengthy "thank you" note for Sussanne.

"It is unimaginable for me, as a parent, to think of having to be separated from my children at a time when the country is practicing lockdowns.

"It is heartwarming to see the world come together as one in this time of deep uncertainty and possibility of months of social distancing and potential lockdowns for several weeks perhaps."

SUDOKU

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

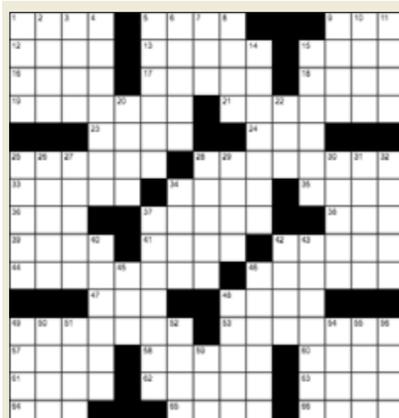
Yesterday's solution

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

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- Composition in verse; 5- Mamie's predecessor; 9- Georgia, once: Abbr.; 12- "The Time Machine" race; 13- "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" musical; 15- Boy or man; 16- Outer covering; 17- Where the Styx flows; 18- Make ___ for it; 19- As an alternative; 21- Danced at Oktoberfest, perhaps; 23- Gutter site; 24- Bee follower; 25- Disinclined; 28- Novel; 33- Infected; 34- Bailiwick; 35- Duration; 36- ___ fix; 37- Pertaining to punishment; 38- Rice or Curry; 39- Overdue; 41- Coil; 42- Freight; 44- Articulate; 46- Large terrestrial monkey; 47- Born in the ___; 48- Member of the Conservative Party; 49- Kind or sort; 53- "Old Ironsides" was one; 57- Baking chamber; 58- Conger catfish; 60- Kind of wrestling; 61- Carry; 62- Old hat; 63- Sigher's word; 64- Chemical ending; 65- Fast fliers; 66- Like some excuses;

Down

1- Gilpin of "Frasier"; 2- Actress Lena; 3- Seemingly forever; 4- Partway through period; 5- Act properly; 6- Elude; 7- Caesar of comedy; 8- Pace; 9- Poet Teasdale; 10- Swerve sharply; 11- Rip apart; 14- Reclusive; 15- Succeed; 20- New Orleans is The Big ___; 22- Human limb, section of a journey; 25- Like a ballerina; 26- Corruptible; 27- Sister of Thalia; 28- Ready ___; 29- Get as a result; 30- Part of TNT; 31- Uruguayan friend; 32- Yellowish citrus fruit; 34- Long time; 37- Plicate; 40- Resembling a horse; 42- "The Alienist" author; 43- Between the bathyal and hadal zones; 45- Application; 46- Planks; 48- Chirp; 49- Cast a ballot; 50- Calling company?; 51- Network of nerves; 52- Some votes; 54- Dance that tells a story; 55- Mosque leader; 56- Prepare to be shot; 59- Mil. officers;

Yesterday's solution

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

SPORTS

Ighalo set for Man United stay as Martins prepares to join Shanghai



Odion Ighalo in action during a match (file photo)

Reuters | Hong Kong

Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins is on the verge of a return to Shanghai Shenhua, Chinese media have reported, increasing the likelihood Odion Ighalo will make his stay at Manchester United a permanent one this summer.

Ighalo has made an impressive start to life at United, scoring four times in eight games since signing on loan until May 31 from the Chinese Super League club.

Martins, who was previously contracted to Shenhua from

2016 until the end of the 2018 season, was reported by Titan Sports to have arrived in China on Tuesday and was being lined up to replace Ighalo ahead of the Chinese Super League season.

China's domestic league has yet to start the 2020 season after kick off was delayed indefinitely due to the coronavirus outbreak but speculation is mounting that the campaign will begin in late April or early May.

England's Premier League has been suspended due to the pandemic and will not resume before April 30.

Messi, Guardiola donate one million euros to battle virus

Reuters | London

Barcelona forward Lionel Messi and Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola have each donated one million euros (\$1.08 million) towards the fight against coronavirus.

Argentina international Messi's donation will be split between Hospital Clinic in Barcelona and another medical centre in his home country, according to a report in Marca.

"Leo Messi made a donation to the clinic to fight the coronavirus," Hospital Clinic wrote on Twitter. "Thank you very much, Leo, for your commitment and your support."

Former Barcelona player and manager Guardiola made his contribution to a campaign launched by the Angel Soler Daniel Foundation and Medical College of Barcelona.

"Pep Guardiola has made a donation of one million euros to the Angel Soler Daniel Foundation for the acquisition and supply of health equipment to



Manchester City manager Josep Guardiola watches Lionel Messi of FC Barcelona during a match (file photo)

deal with the Covid-19 pandemic," said a statement from the College.

"The donation campaign promoted by the Medical College of Barcelona and managed through the Angel Soler Daniel Foundation aims to collect medical materials and financial contributions from collegiate

doctors and the general population, for the purchase of medical equipment and equipment that is currently lacking in health centres in Catalonia.

"It will also help finance the alternative production, through 3D printing and other methods, of respirators and personal protection equipment for health-

care staff."

Before Guardiola made his donation, the campaign had raised 33,000 euros in three days.

Spain is the country worst affected by the disease in Europe outside of Italy, with 2,696 deaths and almost 40,000 positive cases.

Bayern Munich, other Bundesliga clubs, take pay cut

AFP | Berlin

Footballers at Germany's top teams including Bayern Munich have agreed to take pay cuts to help clubs survive the economic impact of the coronavirus, media reports said on Tuesday.

Newspaper Bild said players and club officials at champions Bayern, top of the Bundesliga when the season was halted on March 13, have accepted a 20 per cent cut in their salaries.

Like all top European leagues, the German top flight is losing income from broadcasting, sponsorships and ticket sales during the Covid-19 pandemic, with matches in Germany sus-

pending until at least April 2.

Bayern have a massive wage bill which reached 336 million euros (\$525.7 million) last year, almost half of club turnover.

Players at Borussia Mönchengladbach were the first in the Bundesliga to propose a pay cut, followed by others at Werder Bremen, Schalke 04 and Borussia Dortmund. Bayer Leverkusen players are in talks over pay cut proposals with management.

Second-placed Dortmund said their squad members had already taken a salary reduction to show solidarity with the club's 850 employees.

Coach Lucien Favre and club directors have also made a personal offer to take a pay cut.



Bayern Munich players celebrate after a match

Ferdinand urges United to stay out of Coutinho transfer chase

The Independent | London

Manchester United have been linked with a transfer bid for Barcelona attacking midfielder Philippe Coutinho, but former defender Rio Ferdinand does not think he fits the bill.

The Old Trafford club are expected to continue their rebuild with a couple of big-name additions to the squad in the summer—or whenever a moved transfer window allows—and Coutinho has been regularly linked with a move back to the Premier League.

Having starred for Liverpool for several years before moving to Barcelona, it's easy to see why he would have admirers on these shores, but Ferdinand has listed multiple reasons why United should steer clear. "At Liverpool he was an



Philippe Coutinho runs with the ball during a match (file photo)

amazing player, but since he left Liverpool he hasn't really done it yet," Ferdinand said on Instagram.

"He struggled at Barcelona, struggled to fit in there and then he hasn't done amazingly well at Bayern.

"I would have said Man United before Bruno Fernandes turned up, but not now."

Rooney admits Liverpool 'deserve' Premier League title

Goal | London

Wayne Rooney believes Liverpool deserve to win the Premier League title and insists the campaign needs to be completed to decide promotion, relegation and European qualification.

The Premier League season has been thrown into doubt by the coronavirus pandemic with the campaign postponed until at least May 2 because of the global health crisis.

With Liverpool only needing six points to claim their first league title in 30 years, the former Manchester United and Everton star feels the Reds have earned the honour and it should not be taken away by a season cancellation.



Everton's English striker Wayne Rooney (L) slides in to tackle Liverpool's English midfielder James Milner (R) during a match (file photo)

The Derby County skipper will eventually be completed once the Covid-19 saga relents

and it could compromise next campaign.

"Liverpool will win the Premier League. [They] have been fantastic. They have put so much work in. They deserve this title. Can you imagine waiting 30 years and then having it taken away like this? The right decision has been made," Rooney said in his weekly column in The Times.

"It's also right in terms of promotion and relegation and Champions League places. These issues are so big for the clubs involved that I imagine there would be a lot of legal fights if the season was just abandoned. The fair thing is to finish 2019-20 — even if we have to lose next season in the process.

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McLaren will be allowed to make chassis changes for 2021



McLaren's Carlos Sainz Jr. in action during testing

Reuters | London

McLaren will be allowed to make chassis changes in 2021 to accommodate the switch from Renault engines to Mercedes even though the sport has decided to keep this year's cars for another season.

The Woking-based team are the only ones undergoing a change of engine provider at the end of 2020.

Formula One announced this month that it was postponing until 2022 planned major rules changes for 2021 "due to the currently volatile financial situation" caused by the coronavirus.

Teams will therefore continue to use their 2020 cars in 2021 as a cost saving measure.

"This decision does not impact our change to Mercedes power units in 2021, and we will be allowed to make the necessary changes to our car to accommodate this," McLaren team principal Andreas Seidl said.

The coronavirus pandemic has so far forced the sport to cancel this month's Australian season-opener and Monaco showcase while six other races have been postponed.

Rescheduled Games may come before summer 2021: Bach

Reuters | Athens

The head of the global Olympic movement said yesterday the rescheduled Tokyo Games faced "thousands" of logistical and financial problems but could go ahead before summer 2021.

Though most people have assumed the Games will be held around roughly the same July-August timetable as they were planned for this year, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach said earlier dates in 2021 were possible.

"The agreement is that we want to organize these Games at the latest in the summer 2021," he told a conference call.

"This is not restricted just to the summer months. All the options are on the table including the summer 2021."

The IOC agreed with Japan on Tuesday to the first postponement in the Olympics' 124-year history due to risks from the coronavirus impact.

It was the last major international sporting event of 2020 to be canceled, with many questioning why a seemingly inevitable decision took so long to make as the coronavirus epidemic raged around the world.

Athletes were sad but largely relieved, given disruption to their training. The decision was a huge blow to Japan, which has invested \$12 billion in the run-up, and presents a massive



A woman walks beneath a Tokyo 2020 Olympics banner in Tokyo

headache to reorganize logistics, funding and sponsorship.

Bach said he could not guarantee all elements of the Games would remain as initially planned. For example, he did not know what would happen with the athletes' village, where apartments were set to be sold after the Games this year.

"This is one of the many thousands of questions this task force will have to address. We hope and we will do whatever we can so that there is an Olympic village, the village is where the heart of the Games beat,"

he said.

Bach also warned the \$12 billion price tag for the Games would rise further, with additional costs for everyone involved.

"Wonderful games" promised

"Our mission is to organize Games and make dreams of athletes come true," he added. "We have no blueprint but we are confident we can put a beautiful jigsaw puzzle together and in the end have wonderful Olympic Games."

Bach, a 66-year-old German

lawyer and former Olympic fencing champion, also said outright cancellation was discussed, even though the IOC had long insisted that was not an option.

"Of course cancellation was discussed and considered like all options on the table, but it was very clear from the beginning that cancellation should not be something the IOC would in any way favor," Bach said.

The IOC has come under heavy criticism in recent weeks from athletes and teams calling for the Games to be postponed

Our mission is to organize Games and make dreams of athletes come true. We have no blueprint but we are confident we can put a beautiful jigsaw puzzle together and in the end have wonderful Olympic Games

THOMAS BACH

and unhappy with the slow decision-making compared to other sports events.

Asked by a German reporter whether he considered resigning over his organization's handling of the issue, Bach said "No".

In talks with athletes' representatives and national Olympic committees last week, no-one opposed the IOC's stance, he added. After repeatedly insisting the Games were on as scheduled, the IOC at the weekend announced a month of consultations over possible postponement, before seemingly bowing to global pressure for a faster judgment.

The body is due to start talks from Thursday with other global sporting bodies as moving the gigantic Olympics event has a knock-on effect for many other competitions.

Federer donates one million Swiss Francs to vulnerable families



Roger Federer reacts after a match (file photo)

Reuters | London

Roger Federer has joined the list of sports stars helping out the needy during the coronavirus pandemic, with the former world number one and his wife donating one million Swiss Francs (\$1.02 million) to vulnerable families in his native Switzerland.

Barcelona forward Lionel Messi and Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola had each donated one million euros (\$1.08 million) to help clinics and medical centers fight the outbreak.

Portugal and Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo and his agent Jorge Mendes also came together to donate life-saving equipment to Portu-

guese hospitals.

"These are challenging times for everyone and nobody should be left behind," Federer wrote in a statement posted on Twitter yesterday.

"Mirka and I have personally decided to donate one million Swiss Francs for the most vulnerable families in Switzerland."

Globally, more than 420,700 people have been infected by the novel coronavirus and 18,820 have died, according to a Reuters tally. Switzerland has nearly 9,900 confirmed cases with 122 deaths.

"Our contribution is just a start," Federer added. "We hope that others might join in supporting more families in need. Together we can overcome this crisis."

Kane 'will be off' if Spurs don't win trophies, warns Shearer

AFP | London

Tottenham forward Harry Kane will leave the club next year if they fail to win a trophy in that time, Premier League all-time top-scorer Alan Shearer

Harry Kane



has warned. Kane is yet to lift silverware in his career despite an eye-catching goalscoring record for both club and country.

The England captain has not played since January due to a serious hamstring injury and was on the losing side as Tottenham lost to Liverpool in last season's Champions League final.

That is the closest the 26-year-old has come to major honours and Shearer feels it may be time to move on if that does not change in the coming months.

"My guess is, if he doesn't win

anything in the next 12 months then he has to leave," Shearer told the Match of the Day: Top 10 podcast.

"He'll do another year, I think, and if nothing comes in terms of trophies, then he'll be off."

Shearer sits at the top of the Premier League scoring charts with 260 goals.

Asked if Kane, currently on 136 goals, could one day overtake his tally, the former Blackburn and Newcastle striker said: "It depends on his fitness, where he is and what success he's had at whatever club he's

at -- whether that's at Spurs or somewhere else.

"It's going to be hard for him. He's on 136 and there's a lot of 'ifs' being asked -- if he stays fit or if he stays in the Premier League. It's going to be tough, but it's going to go one day."

Kane has said he is on track to be fit when the Premier League returns, urging people to "stay safe" during the coronavirus crisis.

He has been sidelined since suffering a torn hamstring tendon in Tottenham's New Year's Day defeat at Southampton.

Australia says qualified athletes assured of Tokyo spots

Reuters | Melbourne

The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) has said athletes who have already qualified for the Tokyo Games are assured of their spots when the global sporting showpiece takes place in 2021.

The 2020 Olympics were pushed back by a year on Tuesday due to the coronavirus pandemic which has disrupted qualifying for thousands of Tokyo hopefuls in a slew of sports.

Almost 60% of the 11,000-odd athletes set for Tokyo had already qualified but the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has yet to clarify publicly whether their 2021 berths are assured.

AOC chief executive Matt Car-

roll said qualified athletes were guaranteed their 2021 spots, however.

"That is our understanding at this time," Carroll told reporters in Sydney yesterday.

"Athletes may change their minds between now and 2021. But let's cover that off."

"Today the most important thing is that athletes have certainty for those who have been selected and certainty for those who are yet to qualify."

Carroll said he had spoken to the chief of Australia's national institute of sport and the heads of the sports federations about ensuring qualified athletes would be in peak form to compete in 2021.

"Therein does lie a challenge for the high performance struc-



A woman wears a face mask as she sits at a bus stop advertising the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics in Bangkok

tures at the AIS (Australian Institute of Sports) and our sports to work with our athletes to meet those challenges," he said. "If you're talking about the

athletes who have been selected or the ones who are coming through, I am sure all selected athletes will work hard to be at the Tokyo 2020 Games in 2021.