



**BUSINESS | 01**  
**IMF: Global economy will suffer worst year since depression**

**PENMAG | 06**  
**Classifieds and Services section included**

**SPORT | 12**  
**Xavi to share health and fitness tips**

SHOP ONLINE  
**Jumbosouq.com**  
FREE DELIVERY WITHIN **24** HOURS  
Contact No: +974 666-58626

**Transfer up to QR 3,500 home daily with Ooredoo Money, Basic Wallet**

\*Daily Limits, Terms & Conditions Apply.

## Minister of Public Health visits HMC's CDC and QRI

**H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari also inspected the new clinic at the CDC that has been established to collect blood plasma from COVID-19 recovered patients which is then transfused into coronavirus positive patients currently undergoing treatment.**

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Minister of Public Health H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari yesterday visited HMC's Communicable Disease Center and Qatar Rehabilitation Institute amid ongoing COVID-19 measures.

H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari visited two Hamad Medical Corporation hospitals and met with senior officials leading the delivery of COVID-19 services.

H E Dr. Al Kuwari was accompanied by Dr. Muna Al Maslamani, Medical Director of the Communicable

Disease Center (CDC) on her visit to specialist infectious disease hospital.

H E the Minister was briefed on the Center's ongoing treatment of patients with COVID-19 and met with infection control teams to discuss patient care protocols specifically designed to manage COVID-19 patients and their symptoms.

H E Dr. Al Kuwari also inspected the new clinic at the CDC that has been established to collect blood plasma from patients who have recovered from COVID-19. This advanced

service enables plasma to be collected from the recovered patients and then transfused into a COVID-19 positive patient currently undergoing treatment.

The antibodies built up in the recovered patient's plasma can help patients undergoing treatment to strengthen their resistance to the virus. During the visit to the new clinic, the Minister met with a recovered patient who donated his plasma and discussed his experience with him.

Following her visit to the CDC, H E Dr. Al Kuwari moved on to the Qatar Rehabilitation Institute (QRI), where she inspected two key services being led by Dr. Hanadi Al Hamad, Medical Director of Rumailah Hospital and the QRI.

H E the Minister first visited one of the hospital's inpatient gyms to observe an exercise class being run for a small number of elderly inpatients.



Minister of Public Health H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari during her visit to Qatar Rehabilitation Institute (QRI), yesterday.

These classes are being run regularly to ensure patients are kept active during this challenging time.

H E Dr. Al Kuwari then joined Dr. Al Hamad to take part in one of the Department of Geriatric's regular

telemedicine consultations. This new service has been launched to enable elderly patients to receive consultations in the comfort of their own home, without the need to come into the hospital.

For the final visit of the

day, H E Dr. Al Kuwari joined the daily meeting of the System Wide Incident Command Committee, chaired by Dr. Saad Al Kaabi, to discuss the latest COVID-19 updates and plan the ongoing healthcare response.

## F-15 fighter jets for Amiri Air Force make first test flight

QNA — DOHA

F-15 fighter jets, which have been developed for the Amiri Air Force, have successfully completed their first test flight.

This version is the most advanced of its kind ever, as it demonstrated its ability to maneuver while taking off in the airspace of the United States of America. Commenting on the occasion, Commander of the F-15



One of the F-15 fighter jets after its successful test flight.

QA Wing Colonel Pilot Ahmed Jadae Al Mansouri expressed pride for the achievement, and looked forward to continuous successes for this program. Colonel Pilot Al

Mansouri said that this successful first flight is an important closer step towards flying this amazing aircraft over the skies of Qatar. Qatar's Ministry of Defense

singed an agreement with the US Defense Department in June 2017 to purchase a number of F-15 fighter jets to be delivered next year.

## Moody's assigns Aa3 rating to Qatar with Stable Outlook

SATISH KANADY  
THE PENINSULA

Moody's Investors Service has rated Qatar Aa3 with a Stable Outlook reaffirming the resilience of Qatari economy in the face of crisis.

Qatar's credit profile reflects the government's strong balance sheet, vast hydrocarbon reserves and exceptionally high per capita income. These factors provide significant shock-absorption capacity and mitigate the vulnerability of government revenue to temporary declines in oil prices, such as the one caused by the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the economic and financial risks arising from Qatar's exposure to regional geopolitical tensions, the global rating agency noted yesterday in its updated forecast on Qatar.

"Given the current market conditions, this is a very good rating as other markets in the region have been downgraded. This reaffirms Qatar's economic resilience", a market expert told *The Peninsula* "The stable outlook reflects our assessment that Qatar's credit metrics are likely to remain consistent with the Aa3 rating, even as oil prices remain subdued due to depressed global oil demand caused by the coronavirus pandemic," Moody's said.

The stable outlook balances fiscal and economic risks stemming from the decline in oil prices with Qatar's very large fiscal and foreign currency reserve buffers in the form of sovereign wealth fund assets. The stable outlook also takes into account risks associated with the ongoing regional geopolitical tensions, including the diplomatic, economic and financial blockade by some neighbouring nations.

The Moody's said that a sustained and material reduction in external vulnerabilities through a decrease in external debt and a rebuilding of foreign-exchange reserves would likely prompt a further upgrade of the rating of Qatar. →P3

## MoPH reports 39 more recoveries; 197 new cases

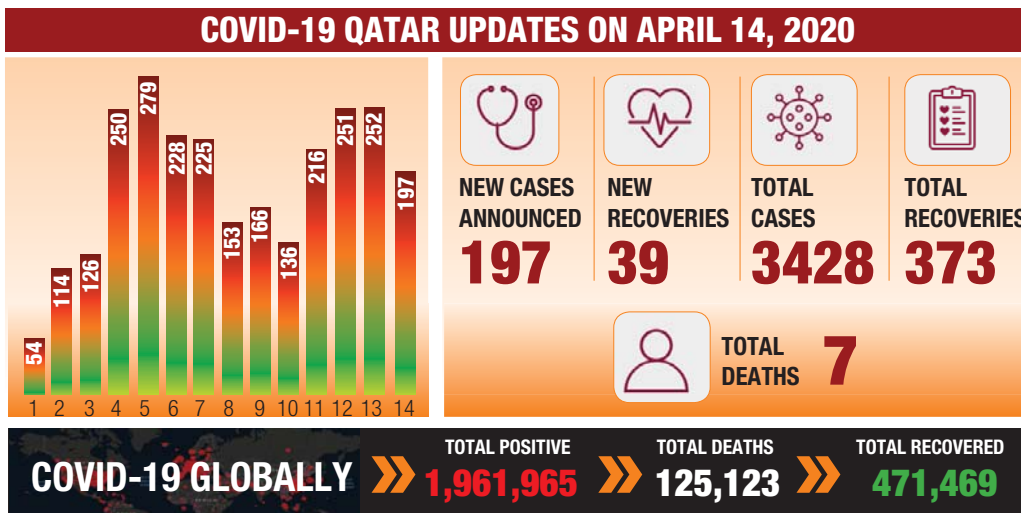
THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) yesterday announced 197 new confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the recovery of 39 cases of the disease, bringing the total recovery cases in the State of Qatar to 373 cases.

The new cases are due to people having been in contact with positive cases among citizens and residents. The new infected cases have been placed under complete isolation and they are receiving necessary medical care.

As many as 39 cases of recovery were registered, bringing the total cases of corona virus in the State of Qatar to 373.

The Ministry of Public Health has requested all members of society to cooperate fully and adhere to all health guidelines and preventive measures to reduce the risk of infection, including sticking to social and physical distancing guidelines.



The Ministry has also recommended that you regularly visit the MoPH website for the most up-to-date guidance on how to stay safe.

**EXCLUSIVE**  
● **Qatar will succeed in its fight to curb spread of coronavirus**  
Ratnasingam Kohularangan, Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Qatar →P8

● **Qatar's preventive measures have instilled confidence among expatriates**  
Dr. Narad Nath Bharadwaj, Ambassador of Nepal to the State of Qatar →P9

## HMC's Ambulance Service effectively manages COVID-19 situation

FAZEENA SALEEM  
THE PENINSULA

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC)'s Ambulance Service is providing the safe and most effective service regarding transportation of patients during the spread of COVID-19.

"In Qatar, the paramedics are well trained to

deal with the present situation. With the COVID-19, we took information from the Minister of Public Health and the Communicable Disease Center and have set guidelines for the Ambulance Service," Ali Darwish, Assistant Executive Director, Ambulance Service at HMC, told *The Peninsula*.

→ Full report on page 2

## Qatar Airways, Standard Chartered sign \$850m aircraft financing agreement

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar Airways and Standard Chartered have successfully signed a \$850m financing in respect of seven Boeing 787-9 aircraft. This transaction demonstrates the confidence that the banking market has in Qatar Airways and also highlights the strong relationship between Qatar Airways and Standard Chartered.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, H E Akbar Al Baker stated: "I am grateful to

Standard Chartered for their continued support to Qatar Airways. The bank has been a close partner of Qatar Airways for many years and have proven their support for the airline by closing this transaction during difficult times resulting from COVID-19. Qatar Airways focus remains on finding solutions to get as many people back to their homes to be with their families and loved ones during these difficult times and this is made possible by the support we have from so many

people including our close partners such as Standard Chartered."

Standard Chartered Chief Executive, Bill Winters stated: "We value our partnership with Qatar Airways and are very pleased to close this landmark deal at this difficult time. At Standard Chartered we continue to support our clients and communities despite the ongoing challenges with COVID-19 and are proud to have been able to provide Qatar Airways with this financing."

# Minister of Public Health visits CDC and QRI



The Minister of Public Health, H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari, during a visit to HMC's Communicable Disease Center and Qatar Rehabilitation Institute, yesterday.



## GAC participates in Customs Union Authority of GCC States meeting

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

The General Authority of Customs (GAC) participated in the 23rd meeting of the Customs Union Authority of the GCC States. The meeting was held via visual communication to discuss the current situation of the public health.

The Chairman of General Authority of Customs, Ahmed bin Abdullah Al Jamal, and a

number of officials of the Authority attended the meeting.

The meeting discussed several issues, among them the follow-up to the implementation of the decision of Their Excellencies Ministers of Trade of the GCC countries in their extraordinary meeting held on April 2, on the economic repercussions of coronavirus, and ways to facilitate the movement of goods between the GCC

countries during the coming period, in addition to the completion of the requirements of the customs union.

During the meeting, they agreed to study the amendments submitted by the State of Qatar related to the existing customs law. They also discussed the results and recommendations of the committees' meetings related to a number of customs issues, including

customs procedures and computers, transfer of customs fees, the coordinated system, in addition of discussing some international customs agreements emanating from the World Customs Organization, and other topics on the agenda.

The meeting comes within the periodic meetings with the participation of the Gulf customs authorities, which were held for the first time

remotely due to health precautions to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Such meetings are important in increasing cooperation between the GCC countries in all customs areas and in relation to import and export mechanisms and other topics and projects related to international trade and joint regulatory procedures between the Gulf countries.

## Firm penalised for not abiding by precautionary requirements

QNA – DOHA

An inspection by the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs (MADLSA) has found a contracting company in Al Waab area violating the policies issued by the Ministry to avoid the spread of the coronavirus in workplaces.

The company was found to be disregarding precautionary measures and procedures. It was found not reducing the number of workers transported by buses to half the capacity of the bus.

In coordination with the security authorities, the necessary measures were taken against the company's manager and the engineer in charge of the site and they were sent to investigation.

The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs had, previously, adopted and published a policy of the measures that companies must follow in the workplace and housing to protect workers and prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs has established a dedicated hotline: 40280660 to receive reports of any work place or accommodation violations.

## NHRC inspects measures in penal institutions, places of detention

QNA – DOHA

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) started a series of field visits to a number of penal institutions and places of detention to inspect their commitment to the precautionary measures used to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and to meet the human rights standards set forth in international laws and covenants during periods of crisis, in light of the exceptional circumstances in the world due to the spread of the epidemic.

The committee's field visits team visited the men and women sections of the central prison to monitor the humanitarian conditions of inmates, conducted a general tour of the prison, and held private interviews with detainees chosen by the team to obtain the necessary information and data in relation to the measures taken by penal institutions department to protect inmates.

In a statement, Dr. Mohammed Saif Al Kuwari, Deputy Chairman of NHRC and

head of the visits and monitoring committee, said that the field visit of the teams of the NHRC comes within the framework of exercising its competence related to monitoring what is raised about the human rights situation in the State, and coordination with the authorities concerned to respond to them, as well as preparing reports related to human rights situation and submitting them to the Council of Ministers along with its views in line with the paragraphs 5 and 6 of the text of Article 3 of Decree Law No. 17 of 2010 organizing the NHRC.

He said that the NHRC aims, through its field visits, to promote and protect human rights, especially for the inmate and detainees category, and respond to reports in accordance with paragraphs 6 of Article 3 of the above-mentioned law, which provides for monitoring what may be raised about the human rights situation in the country and coordinating with the authorities concerned to respond to them.



The officials of National Human Rights Committee during a visit to an institution to inspect their commitment to the precautionary measures used to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

He noted that field visits to penal institutions and places of detention also come in response to the reports of various international organizations and United Nations human rights mechanisms that require national human rights institutions to submit reports on the

nature of the measures taken by countries to confront the Corona pandemic and their compatibility with international standards.

Dr. Al Kuwari added that the NHRC team will prepare, at the end of its field visits, a report to be submitted to the official

authorities in the State and international human rights organizations, including its observations and recommendations on the precautionary measures followed by the State of Qatar to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the penal institutions.

## HMC's Ambulance Service effectively manages COVID-19 situation

FAZEENA SALEEM  
THE PENINSULA

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC)'s Ambulance Service is providing the safe and most effective service regarding transportation of patients during the spread of COVID-19.

The Ambulance Service with experience in dealing with infectious diseases has introduced some new protective measures due to the nature of COVID-19, said Ali Darwish (pictured), Assistant Executive Director, Ambulance Service at HMC.

"We understand that the nature of COVID-19 is slightly different from the other communicable disease like MERS or SARS. But in Qatar the paramedics are well trained to deal with the present situation. With the COVID-19, we took information from the Minister of Public Health and the Communicable Disease Center and have set guidelines for the Ambulance Service," Ali Darwish told *The Peninsula*.

One of the major steps taken by the Ambulance Service related to COVID-19 was to protect the paramedics and patients by providing personal protective equipment, following decontamination measures and set a schedule for smooth transportation of patients.

"The first step we took was to split the field operation from the office operation for safety of the staff. We have also formed a virtual office and we hold meetings with the help of technology. So it doesn't affect regular operations and we keep everyone updated about day-to-day activity. This has helped us to remain the flow of usual business and cope with COVID-19 situation," said Ali Darwish.

The Ambulance Service has seen



an increase of 30 percent in daily activities. On average the Ambulance Service would receive 700 to 800 calls but now the number has increased to 1200. "We distribute the work across the ambulance service. Everyone has a task. We have a robust structure to ensure smooth operations," said Darwish.

The Ambulance Service has also educated the paramedics and provided them with some minor training to deal with COVID-19 while handling, lifting movement and treatment of patients.

"We established a chain of communication where from the CEO to the paramedics are informed about every development. Separately, we have a System Wide Incident Command Center (SWICC), which doesn't exist in normal situation. It is activated by the Minister of Public Health whenever we have a crisis situation. In SWICC we have a representative from every speciality in the health sector. They are connected 24 hours and help each other," said Darwish.

"This helps transportation of COVID-19 patients across Qatar to the suitable and available healthcare facility depending on their condition, gender, age etc.," he said.

Darwish also emphasized on the service provided at the Hamad International Airport as it is a very important place to transport people by the Ambulance Service.

"Hamad International Airport is a very important point of entry to the country. We have a good clinic and it is supervised by our mobile doctor service. We screen any person coming into Qatar, depending on the condition of the person, we decide either to transfer him/her to a health center, hospital or quarantine centre," said Darwish. He also pointed out that Ambulance Service has designated service in the Industrial Area, which is under lockdown.

The Ambulance Service also transport people from and to quarantine facilities as well as to healthcare facilities.

"Even if a person is suspected to have COVID-19, we follow all precautionary and preventive measures same as we do for a COVID-19 patient. This we do for the safety of the public and paramedics," said Darwish.

The Ambulance Service has also introduced a drive through facility at some HMC hospitals, some health centers and deployed mobile vehicles to screen people suspected to have COVID-19 or contact with a patient.

"The person will be sitting in the car and we do a quick registration and initial screening. This reduces people entering a health care facility," said Darwish.

According to Darwish, 20 ambulances were assigned exclusively to transport COVID-19 patients and people suspected to have the disease. Also some buses are deployed to transport high number of people to quarantine and healthcare facilities.

"But due to the increase in

demand, we still have our regular operation ambulance has been dispatched to transfer COVID-19 positive patients. But the message Ambulance Service would like to send to the community is that all ambulances are disinfected and safe to travel," he added.

"Every ambulance which transports a COVID-19 patient undergoes a deep cleaning as instructed by the Communicable Disease Centre. All paramedics use a disposable personal protective equipment. After dis-

patching the patients, the paramedics will dispose the kits as medical waste," he added. Darwish also said that all ambulances in Qatar are in high standards and equipped as well as suitable to transport patients with infectious disease.

"All ambulances in Qatar by design have the necessary standard to transport COVID-19 patients. And we have to only follow some safety

guidelines provided by the Communicable Disease Centre," he added.

Darwish also said that all COVID-19 patients and those suspected to have the disease or while transporting people to transport, the Ambulance Service provides the best patient care.

"Nothing has changed in patient care. The only thing we have added is personal protective equipment for the paramedics," he said.

According to Darwish, the Ambu-



The staff of Hamad Medical Corporation's Ambulance Service.

lance Service also has the responsibility of decontaminating quarantine facilities. He also emphasized on the dedication of the Ambulance Service paramedics and other staff.

"All staffers at the Ambulance Service have the self-motivation to serve the country and people in this situation by being available to work at any given time and cancelling their leave," he added.

# Ashghal completes first phase of 'Odour Management Programme'

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has completed the first phase of the 'Odour Management Programme' for drainage assets to offer a healthy and safe environment for the people in Qatar.

The Odour Management Programme for drainage includes an advanced technology for detecting, monitoring and treating foul odours. It aims to enhance customer satisfaction and improve quality of services, through proactive plans in dealing with customers' complaints in the known hotspot locations.

Nasser Al Yami, Assistant Manager of Drainage Operation and Maintenance Department (DNO&M), clarified this initiative, saying: "At Ashghal, we believe in our commitment to provide long-lasting solutions that would contribute to the improvement of quality of life in Qatar. This is in line with one of the four pillars of the Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030 represented in environmental development through provision of environment friendly solutions to the problems related to foul odours."

He added, "This plan, which was launched in 2018, is

**The Odour Management Programme for drainage includes an advanced technology for detecting, monitoring and treating foul odours. It aims to enhance customer satisfaction and improve quality of services.**

divided into three phases covering a period of five to seven years. The first phase is completed, where the number of customer complaints got reduced by 34% in key districts of Doha such as Ain Khaled, Hazm Al Markhiya and Dahl Al Hamam. The odour management system is expected to give long-lasting results in the affected areas and in the community at large."

The rolled-out real-time odour monitoring system is a valuable component in Ashghal's Drainage Network Management Centre (DNMC), helping Ashghal succeed in resolving customer complaints within the first phase in locations where foul odours exist.

The programme will also support Qatar in its preparation to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and in meeting the requirements of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy.

Al Yami further explained that Ashghal has succeeded in moving towards improving and enhancing the services provided to its customers by adopting a new work mechanism to monitor and respond to potential foul odours proactively, and using a system of odour control to monitor the safety of networks and pumping stations, and take necessary measures.

Worth to be mentioned that Ashghal's integrated 'Odour Management Programme' is considered as the first-of-its-kind, eco-friendly and cost saving mechanisms as it does not need periodical maintenance. It encompasses odour abatement and monitoring in parallel with streams of work.

This approach adopted by Ashghal has been showcased internationally and received commendable applaud from industry specialists in Europe and the UK.

## Ashghal's Odour Management Programme



The Minister of Education and Higher Education, H E Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulwahed Al Hammadi, during a visit to Rabaa Al Adawiya Secondary Girls School to assess educational process.

# Al Hammadi visits schools to review progress of educational system

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

The Minister of Education and Higher Education, H E Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulwahed Al Hammadi, yesterday made inspection visits to Rabaa Al Adawiya Secondary Girls School, and Ali bin Abi Talib Preparatory School for Boys.

The Minister met the school administrations, work teams in schools and reviewed the

progress of the educational process including the availability of necessities of distance learning system for teachers, students, and their parents.

He also reviewed calculating mechanism of the attendances of students and teachers, indicators of parents' support for their children, mechanisms for enhancing communication with them, answering their questions and inquiries, and

other topics of interest to the educational sector.

At the end of the visit, H E the Minister of Education and Higher Education instructed the officials to employ all possible means to deliver educational services to students with the quality required and to reduce the impact of the coronavirus by maintaining students' enthusiasm, passion and motivation to learn.

# Dental services at HMC limited to emergency care for adults

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

In compliance with the directive of the Ministry of Public Health to reduce the spread of COVID-19, all routine appointments at Hamad Dental Center are cancelled.

The services in the department are limited to urgent and emergency visits only during this period of the pandemic, said Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), yesterday. To be seen at a clinic in Hamad Dental Center, patient must

have one or more of conditions including, severe toothache pain (not just a twinge), swelling of gums, face, or neck, bleeding in mouth that does not stop, infection or a substantial risk of it or trauma (such as a broken tooth). A patient with the conditions are advised to call 16000 to arrange to be seen by a dentist. "If you feel sick before coming to the clinic (if you have symptoms of respiratory illness you must call the COVID-19 hotline #16000 first for advice on how to proceed," HMC said.

# Moody's assigns Aa3 rating to Qatar with Stable Outlook

FROM PAGE 1

Qatar's score for economic strength is set at "a1," above the initial score of "a3," to reflect the country's exceptionally high per capita income and very large hydrocarbon reserves. Moody's scores Qatar's institutions and governance strength at "a2," taking into account the country's strong institutional framework and effectiveness.

Qatar's Worldwide Governance Indicators scores are in line with the Aa-rated median and stronger than those of other GCC countries. The government's responses to the blockade imposed in June 2017 demonstrate policy effectiveness and coordination within public-sector entities, as well as a strong institutional capacity to manage crisis.

Qatar's "a1" fiscal strength is above the initial score of "a3", taking into account several considerations. First, the relatively high government debt and a relatively high share of foreign-currency debt is mitigated by a credible currency peg to the dollar, backed by the government's large external assets and the central bank's foreign reserves.

Moody's assessment of Qatar's fiscal strength is also based on the government's prudent budgeting, which has yielded persistent fiscal surpluses in the past while also softening the negative fiscal impact during the periods of oil price declines. Until recently, hydrocarbon production increases were limited by the self-imposed moratorium on the development of new natural gas projects in the North Field.

Moody's expects Qatar to increase its LNG production capacity by 40 percent-60 percent during 2023-27, with first output from the new LNG trains coming on stream in 2025.

# Traffic Dept distributes masks and gloves, raises public awareness

SIDI MOHAMED THE PENINSULA

To limit the spread of coronavirus, the General Directorate of Traffic yesterday distributed masks and gloves to motorists and made them aware of the recommendations of the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management.

The initiative was launched from the Corniche in cooperation with a Kidzmondo Doha, Aura Entertainment and Palma Hospitality, with a goal to provide security and safety and enhance its concept among the citizen, and give drivers some advice and guidance that should be followed at this time.

"The Department has marked awareness points in several areas. Each area has six to four points to educate drivers about the need to take care and be careful and not go out except in case of urgency," said First Lieutenant, Fahad Shraideh, officer at the Awareness Department.

The aim of the campaign is to foster a community partnership where responsibility rests with

everyone, and we hope other companies to take similar initiatives until we reach satisfactory results in short time, he said.

For his part, Lieutenant Abdul Mohsen Al Ruwaili, officer at the Awareness Department, said that the aim of this initiative is to deliver an awareness message to drivers and their companions about the need to cooperate and implement precautionary measures recommended by the Crisis Committee to prevent the outbreak of the coronavirus.

He added that the campaign includes all areas to spread awareness. Traffic patrols are everywhere to educate drivers about the danger of the virus and the need to take precautionary measures.

Through the campaign, he said, "We have witnessed a great response from the motorists and their understanding of the measures taken by the Department, adding that traffic has reduced significantly in the evening and this is a good thing."

Regarding the demand for traffic services through Metrash2



Traffic Department officials and volunteers distributing masks and gloves to motorists.

and others, he said that there is a great demand for traffic services through Metrash2, as the Department provides about 40 traffic services through Metrash2.

Regarding the technical inspection procedures for vehicles, he pointed out that it includes all vehicles, even those who didn't renew their Istimara since more than one year as all vehicles are exempted from technical inspection at Fahes centre for renewal of their Istimara

(registration) from March 22, 2020, until further notice.

Captain Abdel Wahed Gharib Al Enazi, Traffic Awareness Officer, explained that the Traffic Department has intensified its awareness efforts through various communication media to confront the spread of this virus and alert drivers of its danger. He also talked about the role played by the Patrol and Traffic Investigation Department to ensure the smooth flow of traffic in all roads, as well

as providing the necessary support to all relevant departments of the Ministry of Interior.

Al Enazi called for adherence to the decisions issued by the state that prohibit gatherings in public places, in order to preserve public safety and also urged the public to take advantage of electronic services provided by the Department through Metrash 2 and the Ministry of Interior's website, without the need to visit the departments.

# People find creative ways to beat COVID-19 gloom

RAYNALD C RIVERA THE PENINSULA

As the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic, people are finding ways to cope with anxiety and stress which have been virtually inevitable during a long period of self-isolation.

While many people take advantage of the time to watch movies they have missed, some play online games and others turn to music to relax and free themselves from worries brought about by the uncertain situation.

Recently, a group of DJs in Doha started organising "We Love Qatar Online Sofa Party" every Friday via Facebook

Live. Its very first virtual music event was held on Friday featuring 12 DJs doing one-hour music sessions each from their homes.

The different segments offered complete musical experience to netizens, as the DJs took the audience on a journey to different musical styles and genres from the the 60s, 70s and 80s classics to old school and reggaeton to Afrobeat, techno and house music.

"For next Friday, we already have some musicians who will be doing live solo singing and some will be on instruments. We have had a lot of international artists who also want to take part in our

Online Sofa Party," said organisers on the event's Facebook page.

The weekly online event has been conceptualized to "keep busy and support this beautiful country that has allowed us to perform at various venues," they said. "Let's show our appreciation for the men and women in white and let's also show a big appreciation to all the Qatari authorities that are working around the clock so hard during this time. Let us show them our appreciation by staying home and promoting #stayhome to everyone out there," they added. The organisers have urged DJs, singers and musicians to share a

positive spirit with everyone at home every Friday through their participation in the online event.

"Let us all come together and promote social distancing and bring the party for the people to their home right on their sofa," they said.

Around the world artistes have been staging online concerts and performances not only to entertain people while in their homes but more importantly to encourage them to stay indoors and promote social distancing to prevent further spread of the pandemic which infected nearly two million and claimed the lives of over 100,000 people globally.



Benz playing music from the 60s, 70s and 80s at the "We Love Qatar Online Sofa Party".



Workers disinfecting an area in front of a shopping complex.

## MME responds to 4,443 requests for pest and rodent control

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME), represented by the Department of Services Affairs in the municipalities, conducted intensive campaigns to control insects and rodents in the past two weeks.

The vital areas and public facilities were also sterilised and disinfected across municipalities during the campaign.

The campaigns were carried out in the municipalities of Al Khor, Al Dhakira, Al Sheehaniya, Al Rayyan, Umm Salal, Al Wakrah, Al Shamal, Doha and Al Daayen.

This is part of the precautionary and preventive measures taken by the state to limit the spread of coronavirus.

As many as 4,443 requests for pest and rodent control were handled during two weeks. The Services

Department responded to 908 requests in Doha Municipality; 1,185 requests in Al Rayyan Municipality; 700 requests in Al Wakrah Municipality; 456 requests in Al Daayen Municipality; 1,121 requests in Umm Salal Municipality and 73 requests in Al Shamal Municipality.

As many as 13,834 containers for household waste were disinfected across the municipalities.

A total of 86,000 litres of spraying and sterilisation materials used in the control operations.

There were also integrated teams of workers, drivers, engineers, and supervisors to cover work in all municipalities during that period.

The Ministry called on people to cooperate with the competent authorities in order to protect themselves and others from the infection of COVID-19.

## National Center for Educational Development launches new educational campaign 'AWEN'

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

In continuation of the initiative "SANID" launched by the National Center for Educational Development at Qatar University to support parents and students and teachers and support them in distance learning operations, the Center announced a new national educational initiative entitled "AWEN".

Dr. Abdullah Abu-Tineh, Director of The National Center for Educational Development, affirmed that the initiative is represented by the participation of parents, students and teachers in the production of various educational videos aiming the following topics: topics in scientific content or how to teach it to all levels of study, educational topics for students with disabilities or talented students, educational topics for preparing for exams and overcoming their concerns.

Design educational videos

**Dr. Abdullah Abu-Tineh affirmed that the initiative is represented by the participation of parents, students and teachers in the production of various educational videos aiming the following topics: topics in scientific content or how to teach it to all levels of study.**

on the topics identified only. The video should not exceed 3 minutes (1-3 minutes). The videos should have quality of content, design and production in accordance with language and scientific standards, artistic direction and identification of the sources that have been



Dr. Abdullah Abu-Tineh, Director of the National Center for Educational Development.

relied upon. To be designed by parents, students, teachers, or together.

Commenting on the goals of the initiative, Dr. Abu-Tineh said, "This initiative aims to spread a culture of producing targeted resources for distance learning, and to encourage parents, students and teachers to invest their time

in meaningful and beneficial educational work. This also aims to enhance friendly relation between members of the same family, and to transfer concepts of leadership, creativity, innovation and social responsibility into real-life."

"The center will implement a series of training workshops on how to produce educational videos across its multiple platforms," he added.

Those wishing to participate in this initiative send the link of the produced videos and their personal data to the e-mail: ncedqu20@gmail.com. A specialized committee reviews videos in terms of content quality, design and production. The videos authorised by the committee will be published on the various centres of the Center and those of the College of Education and Qatar University.

The owners of high-quality videos will be invited to honor in a special ceremony held by the center in the fall semester.

## Mirqab Mall launches its virtual mall

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

As the coronavirus pandemic shuts down commerce around the world, Mirqab Mall has created a new online platform for Mirqab Mall retailers to continue to trade on.

Doha residents can order a variety of different products from their favourite brands from beauty and health products to sport goods and fashion pieces, in addition to a vast Food & Beverage offering

including Caffe Concerto, Sultan Chef, Abd El Wahab and Busaba Eathai, all via WhatsApp, Instagram Direct Message, Website and direct telephone ordering with delivery straight to their homes by visiting www.Mirqabmall.com

"The Mirqab Virtual Mall", an initiative of Al Mana Malls, is free for tenants to join and will be promoted by the group through a variety of platforms in order to publicize it to all of Doha's residents

"In such critical times, we need to innovate and create new platforms to serve both our clientele and retailers that will help promoting Mirqab Mall businesses in the city," Rony Mourani, General Manager of Al Mana Malls, said in a statement.

"The launch of the Virtual Mall will definitely increase the operations of our retailers, serve the needs of our customers and work with home deliveries towards supporting the government instructions to



stay home. This is another platform that will strengthen the local economy, local businesses and help fighting the Pandemic."

## Staying at home made fun by 6thstreet.com



THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Stay at home movement means different things to different people. While some people look at this phase as an opportunity to completely slowdown from their manic Mondays, and some look at it as a blessing in disguise to have quality family time, there is a huge community that still misses the plethora of brands that malls have to offer.

Apparel Group's online shopping portal 6thstreet.com poses itself as a panacea for every kind of consumer who is at home now!

Launching its newest campaign that makes Staying at home a lot more fun, 6thstreet.com celebrates the spirit of staying at home with its great collection of lounge wear, casual shoes kitchen accessories, kids wear, games and activity sets.

Stay home and chill: an assortment of casualwear from



la Vie en Rose, Birkenstock and Ardene. Stay home and cook: an array of interesting kitchen accessories from Lakeland. Stay home and rejuvenate: all your beauty and skincare needs from Inglot and Rituals. Stay home and Get active: Active wear to keep you geared up for home work-outs from Skechers, Athlete's Co, Crocs and many more fun brands like Adidas, Nike, Puma & Reebok.

So many categories worth exploring from the comfort of your home. These special Stay home edits are available across Qatar.

The e-commerce fashion destination from Apparel Group, 6th Street has brought out a whole new collection with interesting edits and customers can shop from over 200 International fashion brands such as ALDO, Birkenstock, BHPC, Dune London, Charles & Keith, Tommy Hilfiger, Lakeland, Rituals and plenty more.

You can shop the #Stayhome edit on 6th Street website and mobile app. Available on both iOS and Android. <https://en-qa.6thstreet.com/women.html>

## beIN launches new cinema service offering latest movies

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

In yet another move to bring joy and entertainment to households across the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) during these difficult times, beIN has announced a ground-breaking cooperation with film distributors so that it can provide the latest movies straight to subscribers before they are seen in the cinema.

With cinemas unfortunately closed across the region due to the coronavirus pandemic, this new collaboration has been launched so that new movies can be kept alive and offered immediately to families and households across MENA.

The new cinema replacement service, launched yesterday, offers incredible value for families. For the price of one cinema ticket (\$10) per movie, the whole household can watch,



enjoy, and share the entertainment that has never been seen before and wasn't due to be released to cinemas until later next month.

The new service also offers vital support to film distributors, who can now make their movies available to families across the region during this challenging period. More than 20 new movies will be released and available on beIN On Demand under Cinema category in April and May.

First up this month are some

of the most eagerly anticipated international films of 2020 that have never been released, including The Song of Names (starring Catherine McCormack, Tim Roth & Clive Owen), Into the Labyrinth (starring Dustin Hoffman), Hope Gap (starring Bill Nighy & Annette Bening).

To watch these films and discover a new world of entertainment from beIN for just \$10, simply visit beIN On Demand on your beIN box and look for CINEMA.

## MoCI recalls Audi Q7 and Q8 models of 2019

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in cooperation with Q-Auto, dealer of Audi in Qatar, announced the recall of Q7 and Q8, models of 2019, due to the steering shaft bolt is improperly tightened.

The recall campaign comes

within the framework of the Ministry's continuous efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The Ministry said that it will coordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works and will

communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

The Ministry urged all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, inquires and suggestions.

## Kia Telluride wins big at 2020 World Car Awards

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Kia Motors Corporation has won big at the 2020 World Car Awards with the Telluride SUV being named 'World Car of the Year' and the Soul EV 'World Urban Car'.

The Kia Telluride was rewarded by the judging panel for its distinctive design and impressive practicality. The World Car of the Year title represents another accolade for a vehicle that has garnered more than 70 awards since its introduction in 2019. The SUV has already been crowned North American Utility Vehicle of the Year and MotorTrend SUV of the Year, among others.

"Everyone at Kia is truly honored to receive not just one, but two awards from

**"Everyone at Kia is truly honored to receive not just one, but two awards from the World Car of the Year judging panel," said Thomas Schemera, Executive Vice President and Head of Product Division at Kia Motors Corporation.**

World Car of the Year judging panel," said Thomas Schemera, Executive Vice President and Head of Product Division at Kia Motors Corporation. "This is one of the hardest-fought competitions in the global automotive industry, proving that the Telluride and Soul EV are both truly outstanding vehicles. These accolades are testament to the talents and efforts of a worldwide team, who all strive to create

desirable, high-quality and practical cars that drivers love."

The winners of the World Car Awards are decided by an independent international jury comprising 86 experienced and well-respected automotive journalists from 24 countries around the world.

"For Kia to be recognised with two World Car Awards this year is a remarkable achievement," added Yaser

Shabsogh, Chief Operating Officer, Regional HQs, Middle East & Africa at Kia Motors Corporation. "This latest success signifies that the Kia brand is excelling and innovating in a rapidly changing automotive industry to produce models with enduring appeal for the modern motorist. From all at the Kia Motors MEA team, we congratulate our dedicated and hard-working colleagues on this success and look forward to sharing many more great moments together," he added.

Available for the past year in Qatar and in many of Kia's global markets, the Kia Telluride merges a strong exterior design presence with a spacious, practical and high-quality cabin which can seat



The World Car of the Year title represents another accolade for a vehicle that has garnered more than 70 awards since its introduction in 2019.

up to eight passengers. Equipped with an array of advanced technologies, all-wheel drive, and

driver-assistance systems, the Telluride is ideal for family adventures on and off the beaten track.

# QRCS launches fundraising drive to support coronavirus control efforts

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has launched a fundraising campaign to combat coronavirus, protect the medical and other professionals fighting the virus, and help the vulnerable families financially affected by the stay-at-home policy.

QRCS targets to raise QR11.3m to implement a handful of projects towards the country's goal of zero coronavirus infection. The two-month campaign is estimated to benefit more than 8,000 persons.

Ali bin Hassan Al Hammadi, Secretary-General of QRCS, commented: "Over the past couple of months, we worked hard to curb the spread of the deadly virus. Our volunteers and medical personnel stood heroically in the face of risks. Working 24/7, they showed unrivaled dedication to their



Ali bin Hassan Al Hammadi

national and professional responsibility".

"To build on the work already

**QRCS targets to raise QR11.3m to implement a handful of projects towards the country's goal of zero coronavirus infection. The two-month campaign is estimated to benefit more than 8,000 persons.**

done, it is necessary to engage the community in supporting the brave organizations and persons as they deal with the pandemic," said Al-Hammadi. "Both the nationals and residents are called upon to return the favor and stand by our beloved country. We are confident that the people of Qatar are up to it. Giving generously, they always

prove the fact that Qatar is the land of security and prosperity, caring for every life".

He described the campaign as a "perfectly national initiative" to protect Qatar against Coronavirus outbreak. It conforms to the principles of humanitarian advocacy and international epidemic control standards.

"QRCS adopts a strategy to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly 'Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages'," he added.

Under approval No. 1038/2020 from the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA), several projects will be executed in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), and Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC).

These include: Control of Coronavirus by providing health and psychological services for those at risk of infection at quarantine locations and by raising awareness of workers at health centers, companies and factories; provision of health care and personal supplies for inmates and workers at quarantine locations (mattresses, blankets, clothes, and hygiene kits); provision of psychological support for the quarantined persons to boost their morale throughout the isolation period; provision of health protective supplies such as masks and sanitizers to ensure Coronavirus protection; provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) for the volunteers and staff working at facilities or districts at risk of infection; and provision of food meals for the workers and other vulnerable groups affected by stop of work and home quarantine.

# QF graduates show how film can be a bridge as the world battles coronavirus

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Filmmakers from Qatar, who recently showcased their work at France's Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival as part of the Qatar-France Year of Culture 2020, say cinema has an important role in connecting people — and cultures.

The 2020 has been an important year for France and Qatar. As part of Qatar Museum's annual cultural exchange program, the Qatar-France Year of Culture has focused on the growing relationship between the two nations, with a series of exhibitions, festivals and other events planned throughout the year to convey all that Qatar has to offer to the world.

But as both France and Qatar battle the coronavirus pandemic — like most countries in the world — many Year of Culture events have been cancelled or postponed. However, one event that went ahead before the pandemic took hold showed the importance of culture, and especially film, in keeping people connected — a message that resonates even louder now, as communities are increasingly asked to adhere to

social distancing guidelines.

The Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival showcased the best of short films from around the world. Among the guests at this year's event were a series of films from the Doha Film Institute, with several filmmakers from Qatar Foundation (QF) exhibiting their work and contributing to broadening cultural understanding between France and Qatar.

In Alessandra El Chanti's Revive the Lira's Glory, 22-year-old Ibrahim Sultani paints portraits of Lebanese legends on banknotes in the hope of helping to compensate for some of the currency's lost financial value, by giving it emotional value instead.

El Chanti, who is a graduate of QF partner university Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) and has worked for QF in its ability-friendly sports programs, says her film — and film in general — can help change narratives about different cultures, nationalities and people from around the world.

"It is a medium that can take us to places we have never been to, and enable us to learn about people and cultures that we have never met or experi-

enced," said El Chanti.

"Having films created by Qatari citizens and residents being showcased at the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival is remarkable because, while the French and Qatari cultures are very different, it is a way for audiences to get a glimpse of the type of storytelling that exists in our part of the world."

While the festival was an opportunity to showcase Qatari cinema talent to France, the event was also an honour for many filmmakers who have been longtime admirers of France's famous cinema tradition. Dhabya Al Muhannadi, a graduate of NU-Q, says she has been enamored with French cinema since she first saw the film Cléo de 5 à 7 in school.

"It was the first time I had encountered such content and it was beautifully shot — show don't tell," said Al Muhannadi, whose short film Maha'mel explores Doha's shipping industry. "French cinema has its own style that is different from Italian or Hollywood cinema. It's very artsy, avant garde, and bohemian."

Shortly after the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival,



Alessandra El Chanti

France went into lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. It has put even more importance on the role of cinema in connecting communities both near and far.

Director Nada Bedair, also an NU-Q graduate, says the current pandemic — and subsequent lockdowns — have had an impact on her desire to work in film.

"Most of us graduates love film and want to be filmmakers, but the more I look at the average day of people [in lockdown], there is an increased demand for quality content," says Bedair, whose film Paper Kite follows two young girls from a strict Catholic school on an illicit kite-making mission. "This is especially true for content coming from Arab regions, which are not as well represented."

Bedair says that film can bridge the gaps in understanding, especially at a time when travel restrictions and social distancing mean that people can't learn about one



Dhabya Al Muhannadi

another in the same way.

"With film's visual language, people don't need to speak the same language," says Bedair. "Film can bridge cultures and bring people together that wouldn't be able to be physically together. [The coronavirus pandemic] just increased the value of the craft."

For director Al Muhannadi, film has the ability to awaken the senses — not just through visuals — and has the power to transport people and allow them to experience another world. It's especially relevant now when many people are looking for an escape from current affairs.

"I want everyone [watching my film] to enjoy the colors, sounds and details of this universe," says Al Muhannadi, whose film uses the whirring of saws and heavy machinery to pull viewers into the world of boat construction. "Even if you close your eyes and just listened, you would feel like you're looking at the scenes."



Nada Bedair

As the Qatar-France Year of Culture continues in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, virtual events and artistic mediums will become increasingly important. Current events have only made the three filmmakers more determined to develop their craft.

Bedair has applied to an MFA program to further enhance her skills, while Al Muhannadi is working on a script about the evolving Qatari folklore tradition. Meanwhile, El Chanti is enrolled in an MFA program in documentary media while promoting a documentary she made about a Palestinian American music composer who directs the Middle Eastern Music Ensemble at the University of Chicago.

"Cinema is one of the most powerful tools that exist in our time that help alter perceptions and misconceptions," says El Chanti. "The universal is found in the specific and there is no language more universal than the language of film."



Widely described as the Oscars of the design industry, the Red Dot Award is one of the world's largest and well-respected product design competitions and judges the best products of the year from across the world.

## Sony wins big at prestigious Red Dot Award 2020

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Sony announced that its Bravia 8K LED TV and Bluetooth noise-cancelling headphones have been awarded the prestigious Red Dot Award: Product Design 2020.

Widely described as the Oscars of the design industry, the Red Dot Award is one of the world's largest and well-respected product design competitions and judges the best products of the year from across the world.

The Bravia Z8H 8K LED Series received the exceptional Red Dot: Best of the Best. Other winners of the Red Dot include the WF-1000XM3 truly wireless headphones, the WH-H910N h.ear on 3 wireless noise-cancelling headphones and the DualShock 4 Back Button Attachment.

The Red Dot Design Award is administered by Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen in Germany.

The product design entries are judged by the Red Dot Jury, which comprises some 40 international experts, on nine criteria that are constantly adapted to new technical,

social and ecological requirements.

Winning products tick all the boxes: for innovation, formal quality, ergonomics, functionality, durability, product periphery, self-explanatory quality, ecological compatibility, and symbolic and emotional content.

Announced at CES 2020, the Bravia Z8H 8K LED comes power packed with the most immersive experience realised yet through enhanced picture quality, slim design and Sound-from-Picture Reality with Sony's new Frame Tweeter technology.

Delivering Sony's super high 8K detail and life-like picture quality, the Z8H utilises Picture Processor X1 Ultimate to provide crisp, high contrast, together with a full array LED to bring more realistic peaks of brightness, more accurate shadow detail and deeper blacks than standard LED TVs.

Moving into the new decade, Sony Design endeavours to continue pursuing ideals of what a TV can be: A platform for stirring, inspiring visual experiences, the

possibilities limitless. #

Launched in July 2019, the WF-1000XM3 truly brings a new generation truly wireless headphones with Sony's Industry-leading Noise Cancellation.

With further improved HD Noise Cancelling Processor QN1e chip and Dual Noise Sensor Technology, the WF-1000XM3 delivers exceptional noise cancelling performance, so users can hear just the music and nothing else.

Launched in September 2019, the WH-H910N comes in five trendy colour combinations teamed with high quality sound to excite fashion lovers.

The WH-H910N comes with Dual Noise Sensor technology to effectively cancel ambient noise, improving the listening experience.

It has Adaptive Sound Control to automatically change the noise cancellation settings anytime, anywhere. Paired with Quick Attention mode, it has never been easier to reduce music volume and temporarily listen to announcements without removing the headphones — stylish.

# QICC donates cables to help build field hospital to fight COVID-19 pandemic

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

QICC (Qatar International Cables Company), a joint venture between Al Mirqab Capital and Nexans, directs the donation of power cables to a Qatar government project with the objective of helping on fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

The project is being conducted by Ashghal and aims to build a field hospital with 150 fully equipped beds and the construction of a shaded space with a capacity for 8,000 beds. QICC readily made itself available for donation through the community services committee of entrepreneurs and contractors, organised by Ashghal.

QICC has been committed since the beginning of the pandemic, acting preventively in the care of its employees, not only keeping in home office those who have scope of work conditions for this as also implementing security measures such as cleaning routine reinforcement at the plant and offices, change the organization at the plant to

avoid contact between operators and distribute health kit with masks, gloves and sanitizer items in order to maintain the operation of its factory, which is considered of essential continuity as it serves major state projects, of which notably construction of hospitals and health care centers.

"We are globally aware of

our active role in the community which we are part of: this is part of our corporate social responsibility. That is why we took this step in response to the call for help from Ashghal. In addition, safety and health are corporate and non-negotiable values with regards to our teams and our partners," said Max-André Delannoy, General Manager of QICC.



A truck delivering QICC cables manufactured in its Messaied plant to Ashghal's site for the new COVID-19 Hospital in Umm Salal.

# MME continues protection of endangered turtle species

QNA — DOHA

The Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME), represented by the Environmental Protection Reserves and Wildlife Department, affirmed Tuesday that the project of protecting the endangered hawksbill turtle continues to the current season amid taking all precautions that guarantee the safety of the project's team.

The project of sea turtle

protection is being implemented under the supervision of the Ministry of Municipality and Environment and funded by Qatar Petroleum and the Environmental Science Center at Qatar University in cooperation with a team from the Environmental Protection Reserves and Wildlife Department.

The Ministry explained that the field work in the project is witnessing an acceleration in the nesting operations, as 12

nests were moved to the protected nests site in Fuwairit beach, and necessary measurements were taken for turtles, as cleaning them from snails and treating some of their wounds.

The Ministry attaches great importance in its strategy to protect endangered species, including searching and protecting endangered wild and marine species, as it represents national wealth for the State and for future generations.

# Turkey passes bill to free thousands from prison to stem spread of virus

REUTERS — ISTANBUL

Turkey's parliament yesterday passed a law that will allow the release of tens of thousands of prisoners to ease overcrowding in jails and protect detainees from the coronavirus, but which critics slam for excluding those jailed on terrorism charges.

President Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party and nationalist MHP allies supported the bill, which was accepted with 279 votes for and 51 votes against, deputy parliament speaker Sureyya Sadi Bilgic said.

The law will open the way for the temporary release of around 45,000 prisoners to stem the spread of the coronavirus. Those eligible will be released under judicial control until the end of May and the Justice Ministry will be able to extend the period three times by a maximum of two months each time, according to the law.

A similar number would be released permanently under a separate part of the legislation aimed at reducing prison overcrowding.

**The law will open the way for the temporary release of around 45,000 prisoners to stem the spread of the coronavirus. Those eligible will be released under judicial control until the end of May.**

Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul said on Monday there were 17 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among prisoners, including three deaths, and 79 prison personnel had also tested positive.

The law has been criticised by opposition parties and activists for excluding those jailed on terrorism charges, which include journalists and politicians swept up in a crackdown following a coup attempt in 2016.

Opposition members say the release of criminals

including thieves, racketeers and those involved in bribery could lead to a rise in crime.

Violations of Turkey's intelligence law are not eligible for earlier release, which opposition members said aimed to exclude journalists imprisoned earlier this year for reporting the death of Turkish intelligence members in Libya's conflict.

Turkey has arrested thousands of academics, lawyers, journalists, civil servants and members of the military it says were supporters of US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, who it blames for the coup attempt. Gulen denies any involvement.

Many Kurdish activists and politicians the state says have links to the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) are also in jail.

Engin Ozkoc, parliamentarian from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), said the party would challenge the new law in the Constitutional Court, Turkey's highest.

Amnesty International welcomed the steps to reduce overcrowding in prisons but said the law failed to cover others who



A drone photo shows empty Sultanahmet Square and its surroundings after authorities urged people to stay home as part of coronavirus precautions, in Istanbul yesterday.

should be considered for release.

"Those convicted in unfair trials under Turkey's overly broad anti-terrorism laws are also now condemned to face the prospect of infection from this deadly disease," Amnesty campaigner Milena Buyum said.

"Turkey's government must do the right thing and immediately release those who are imprisoned solely for expressing their peaceful views," she said. Critics of Turkey's judiciary say court rulings are influenced by

politicians.

Erdogan and his AK Party say the judges make decisions independently.

Under the crackdown since 2016, the number of prisoners has risen to nearly 300,000 - the second-largest prison population in Europe and the most overcrowded prison system as of January 2019, according to data from the Council of Europe.

Around 50,000 people convicted or jailed pending trial on terrorism charges, including

members of the PKK and Gulen's network, are excluded from the new law, according to an opposition parliamentarian.

CHP parliamentarian Turan Aydogan said the law should have been designed to protect freedom of thought.

"You lock up whoever criticises," he said, addressing AKP and MHP members in parliament. Another CHP member said all 210 amendments to the law proposed by opposition parties were rejected.

## Turkey completes first phase of coronavirus vaccine efforts

ANATOLIA — IZMIR

Scientists in western Turkey commenced the lab tests yesterday of an antigen they designed for a vaccine against the novel coronavirus.

Research is ongoing with the collaboration of the Ege University Drug Development and Pharmacokinetic Research Application Center (ARGEFAR) in Izmir province and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK).

A total of 32 scientists specialising in different branches came together to conduct the studies.

Dr. Mert Doskaya said that the design of the antigen, which is the first phase of the vaccine effort, was completed in a week.

The Vaccine Research and Development Group of the university will test the antigen and move on to the second phase, said Doskaya.

Citing the World Health Organization (WHO), Doskaya said that more than 50 research centers around the world have been trying to develop a vaccine against the coronavirus.

"In fact, studies in Turkey are at a similar stage with them.

"Five of these are in the clinical stage, meaning the first human experimentations have begun, and the rest are preparing for animal experiments," said Doskaya.

## As rebel-held Syria fears virus, just one machine for test

REUTERS — IDLIB

A single machine at Mohamad Shahim Makki's medical centre in Idlib province, part of Syria's last rebel stronghold, is the only alarm that will sound when the coronavirus strikes a population of millions of the world's most vulnerable people.

Makki's Epidemiological Surveillance Laboratory has the only device in areas outside of Syrian government control equipped to run a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test to detect the virus. As of a few days ago, just 120 tests had been

carried out on just 300 samples.

While all have been negative so far, doctors and relief agencies fear that crowded camps for displaced people, and medical facilities ravaged by years of war, would make any contagion rapid and lethal.

Samples have begun to come into the lab faster, with 5,000 received in the last two days, though it is not yet clear how many of them can be processed or how quickly.

The machine "is not sufficient to serve all these people, so there is pressure on the device. And since it is the only

one, strict criteria are being used to select samples," said Makki.

Northwest Syria is the last part of the country still held by fighters trying to overthrow president Bashar Al Assad. It is home to more than three million people, most of whom fled other parts of Syria in a civil war that began nine years ago.

"If corona spreads in the northwest it will be a catastrophe. The number of deaths will be very big and infections will be huge, in the hundreds of thousands," Ahmad Al Dbis of the US-based medical charity

UOSSM, which operates in opposition territory, said last month.

Plans to equip other centres with PCR test devices have been slowed by their high cost and the training needed to run them.

"In the liberated areas we have major weaknesses in the health sector because of the war and because of the systematic targeting of hospitals and health centres," said Makki.

The government, backed by Russia and Iran, launched a push earlier this year to capture Idlib, sending hundreds of thousands of residents fleeing, many

of them people who were already displaced.

In recent days thousands of Syrians have begun to leave camps near the Turkish border, some wary of the virus reaching tightly packed quarters, choosing instead to return to Idlib after a ceasefire struck last month that has restored calm.

In the rest of Syria, Damascus has reported 25 coronavirus cases and two deaths in government-held areas. It has shut businesses, halted flights, and imposed a curfew to curb the spread of the virus.



### Virus test amid celebration

An Iraqi man, part of a wedding procession, has his temperature tested at a drive through testing centre for coronavirus in Iraq's central city of Hilla.

## Kuwait reports 55 new COVID-19 cases, one death

QNA — KUWAIT

The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health yesterday reported 55 new coronavirus (COVID-19) infections and one fatality in the last 24 hours, bringing the total of infections to 1,355 and deaths to three.

At a press briefing yesterday, Kuwaiti Health Ministry spokesperson Dr. Abdullah Al Sanad said that 26 patients were in intensive care nine of them are in critical condition and 17 stable. He added that the death cases reached three after confirming the death of a Kuwaiti female (79 years) in the last 24 hours, noting that she was in the intensive care unit.

Those currently receiving treatment at hospitals reached 1,176 patients said the spokesperson, adding that 146 individuals have completed quarantine in the last 24 hours. Al Sanad pointed out that the total recovery cases stood at 176 after Minister of Health Sheikh Basel Al Sabah announced the recovery of 26 new patients in the last 24 hours.

He reiterated the need that everyone take all means of personal protection and follow the instructions and recommendations issued by the ministry and the official authorities in the State of Kuwait related to containing the spread of the virus.

## Turkish politician dies due to virus infection

ANATOLIA — TRABZON

A Turkish politician lost his life yesterday after contracting the novel coronavirus. He was 73. Haydar Bas, leader of the Independent Turkey Party (BTP), was in intensive care in a state hospital in the Black Sea province of Trabzon.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan offered condolences to Bas' family. "I am deeply saddened by the death of Independent Turkey Party leader Haydar Bas, who died due to COVID-19," Erdogan said on Twitter. "I offer condolences to his family and supporters. I wish God's Mercy on all citizens who died due to the same disease," he added.

On Monday, Turkey confirmed 98 new deaths from coronavirus, bringing the country's death toll to 1,296. The total number of registered coronavirus cases surged to 61,049.

## Virus deaths in Iran drop below 100 for first time in one month

AFP — TEHRAN

Iran said yesterday that the number of lives lost in the country to the novel coronavirus dropped to double figures for the first time in one month. Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said 98 deaths from the COVID-19 disease were recorded in the past 24 hours, bringing the overall toll to 4,683.

"Unfortunately, we lost 98 of our compatriots infected with the disease... but after a month of waiting, this is the first day that the death toll has been double figures," he told a televised news conference. "We hope that this path will continue with your ongoing cooperation" in observing health guidelines aimed at stopping the spread of the virus, he added.

## Israel rivals resume unity talks with two-day deadline

AFP — JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main rival Benny Gantz held new talks on forming an emergency unity government yesterday, with a deadline less than two days away.

A deal would give Israel its first fully functioning government since December 2018, stability that could prove crucial as it confronts the coronavirus pandemic.

The two men had been negotiating prior to a deadline that expired at midnight Monday night, but jointly asked President Reuven Rivlin for a two-day extension to finalise details.

They met in Jerusalem on Tuesday morning, after releasing a joint statement late Monday hailing "significant progress".

There have been repeated claims of progress in coalition talks since an inconclusive

March 2 election, Israel's third poll in less than a year, but a deal has remained elusive.

Tuesday's talks ended without a breakthrough but the two men committed to meet again after the Jewish passover holiday ends at sunset today, with a view to reaching a deal by a midnight that evening.

As Israel's unprecedented political deadlock has persisted, there have been widespread calls for an interim national unity government to combat the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 11,500 Israelis and killed 117.

Gantz, a centrist ex-military chief, has squared off against the veteran right-wing prime minister in three elections since April last year.

Neither has earned enough support from voters and potential coalition partners to form a government.

'Moment of truth' In the March 2 election, Netanyahu's

Likud emerged as the largest party but Gantz's Blue and White won the backing of most of the country's 120 MPs. Gantz was therefore given a 28-day mandate to try and form a government.

But deep divisions within the anti-Netanyahu camp meant his chances of forging a stable coalition were always remote.

In a surprise move last month, Gantz was elected speaker of parliament and effectively stopped seeking to form a coalition with himself as prime minister.

He called for an alliance led by Netanyahu for a defined period, allowing Israeli politics a rare moment of unity as it stares down an unprecedented health crisis.

In the process, Gantz broke his political party in two, with more than half his allies in parliament leaving to join the opposition rather than ally with the deeply divisive Netanyahu.

Since then talks have stalled over a number of key issues.

# Rockets rain on Tripoli after Haftar loses key towns

AFP — TRIPOLI

The forces of Libyan eastern warlord Khalifa Haftar rained rockets on Tripoli yesterday after being ousted by government loyalists from a string of strategic towns west of the capital.

The capture on Monday of the coastal towns of Sorman and Sabratha and smaller settlements further south was seen as a major blow to Haftar, who in April last year launched an offensive to seize Tripoli.

Sorman and Sabratha lie respectively 60 and 70km west of the Libyan capital, about half-way to the Tunisian border.

The oil-rich but poverty-stricken North African country has suffered almost a decade of conflict since longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi was toppled and killed in a 2011 uprising backed by several Western powers.

The UN says hundreds have been killed and more than 200,000 displaced since Haftar launched his battle for Tripoli last year, which then quickly ground to a bloody stalemate.

Late on Monday, salvo after salvo of rockets began raining down on Tripoli, the city where the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) is based, and loud explosions could still be heard yesterday morning, a correspondent said.



Fayez Al Sarraj, Prime Minister of Libya's National Accord, speaks during a press conference in Tripoli on Monday.

Several homes were hit around Mitiga airbase in the eastern suburbs, the capital's sole and only intermittently functioning airport.

One person was wounded, rescuers said late Monday. Since then there have been no casualty updates.

The latest escalation comes as concern runs high over the spread of the coronavirus

pandemic in Libya, where 25 cases and one death have been officially confirmed.

The UN has warned that health services in the country are already fragile and that many hospitals near fighting zones south of Tripoli have been damaged or closed.

Fighting also raged Tuesday south of the capital, a GNA military source said.

The GNA accused pro-Haftar forces of pounding Tripoli, saying they were taking revenge against the civilian population following Monday's losses.

"The criminal militia and mercenaries have taken out their anger on residential neighbourhoods of Tripoli to avenge their defeat, firing dozens of rockets and missiles on the capital indiscriminately,"

**"The criminal militia and mercenaries have taken out their anger on residential neighbourhoods of Tripoli to avenge their defeat, firing dozens of rockets and missiles on the capital indiscriminately," GNA spokesman Mohamad Gnnu said.**

spokesman Mohamad Gnnu said.

The commander of pro-GNA forces, Oussama Al Jwili, late on Monday said the operation to capture Sabratha and Sorman was launched after he received information that Haftar fighters were moving west.

The strongman's forces were planning to advance on the city of Zouara near the Tunisian frontier in an attempt to seize it and then push further towards the Ras Jedir border post.

GNA forces were now also surrounding the key Al Watiya airbase southwest of Tripoli, a rear base for Haftar forces and

launchpad for the aircraft they use to bombard the capital.

Fighting was also raging between the rival forces east of Tripoli, between the cities of Misrata and Sirte.

Misrata is the hometown of many GNA loyalists while the strategic coastal city of Sirte was captured in early January by Haftar forces.

Fighting was also reported in the region of Abu Grein, southeast of Tripoli and halfway between Misrata and Sirte.

The seizure of Sorman and Sabratha was the GNA's most significant victory since June last year, when its forces retook the town of Gharyan, the main supply base for Haftar's forces southwest of the capital.

Jalal Harchaoui, a Libya analyst at The Hague-based Clingendael Institute, said Monday's setback meant Haftar had lost the entire coast west of Tripoli.

According to Harchaoui, the Turkish-backed GNA forces have in recent week been more "aggressive... on multiple fronts, often successfully".

"High-precision artillery on the ground, Turkish drones and better coordination" were proving a "formidable" combination against Haftar forces, he said.

Advanced drones supplied by the United Arab Emirates have given Haftar, who also relies on backing from Russia, an advantage in the skies.

## Algerian author wins top Arab fiction prize for 'Spartan Court'

AFP — ABU DHABI

Algerian author Abdelouahab Aissaoui yesterday won a prestigious prize for Arabic fiction with his novel *The Spartan Court*.

Backed by the UK's Booker Prize Foundation, the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) is financed by Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism.

Aissaoui will receive \$50,000 and funds will be provided to translate the book into English, the organisers said on their website.

Published by Dar Mim, *The Spartan Court* is a historical novel that relates the power struggle between Ottoman and French colonial powers in Algeria at the start of the 19th century.

Born in the northern Algerian city of Djelfa in 1985, Aissaoui graduated in electro-mechanical engineering before devoting himself to writing, penning several books and receiving many awards.

*The Spartan Court* "invites the reader to gain a greater understanding of live under occupation and the different forms of resistance that grow against it," said Muhsin Al Musawi, chair of the prize's five-member judging panel.

"With its deep, historical narrative structure, the novel does not live in the past, but rather it challenges the reader to question present reality," he added, in remarks published on the IPAF website.

*The Spartan Court* was chosen from a shortlist of six novels. The five other authors, from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria will each receive \$10,000, the organisers said.

## Virus cases in South Africa rise to 2,415, China donates aid

REUTERS — JOHANNESBURG

South Africa's health minister yesterday reported a rise in coronavirus cases of 143 over the past day, taking the total to 2,415.

Health Minister Zwelini Mkhize provided no update on the number of deaths, which a day earlier stood at 27. The total number of tests conducted so far was 87,022.

"We still have a long way to go," he told a news conference

at Johannesburg airport. "This is not a sprint, this is a marathon."

He added that a donation of equipment from China that had just landed would help South Africa "in fighting this invisible enemy called COVID-19".

These included 10,000 N95 masks and disposable gloves, 50,000 surgical disposable masks — enough for about 6-8 weeks — as well as 2,000 medical protective

gowns and goggles.

At the same news conference, foreign minister Naledi Pandor said she was aware of complaints of allegedly racist treatment of South Africans in China, and that "we believe we can accept the commitment of... China to address these concerns".

Several African countries have demanded that China address their concerns that Africans, in particular in the southern city of Guangzhou, are

being mistreated and harassed.

Cases of COVID-19 — the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus — in South Africa are creeping up, but not at the explosive rate that was initially feared.

The rate of new infections has slowed significantly since President Cyril Ramaphosa ordered a nationwide lockdown on March 27 and extended it to the end of April.

Africa's most industrialised nation still has the most confirmed coronavirus cases on the continent, which has registered a total of 5,741 so far.

In a bid to counteract the economic fallout from the lockdown, South Africa's central bank slashed its main lending rate by another 100 basis points yesterday, to a record-low 4.25 percent, after moving forward its monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting scheduled for May.

## Ethiopia opens aid transport hub to fight COVID-19

AFP — ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopia and the United Nations yesterday opened a humanitarian transport hub at Addis Ababa airport to move supplies and aid workers across Africa to fight coronavirus.

The arrangement, which relies on cargo services provided by Ethiopian Airlines, could also partially offset heavy losses Africa's largest carrier is sustaining because of the pandemic.

An initial shipment of 3,000 cubic metres (106,000 cubic feet) of supplies — most of it personal protective equipment for health workers — will be distributed within the next week, said Steven Were Omamo, Ethiopia country director for the World Food Programme (WFP).

"This is a really important platform in the response to COVID-19, because what it does is it allows us to move with speed and efficiency to respond to the needs as they are unfolding," Omamo said,

referring to the disease caused by the coronavirus.

The Addis gateway is one of eight global humanitarian hubs set up to facilitate movement of aid to fight COVID-19, according to WFP.

In Africa, there are also hubs in Ghana and South Africa.

The continent has so far not been hit by the coronavirus as hard as other regions, but experts worry that weak health systems could quickly become overwhelmed by an influx of cases.

As of yesterday there were 15,249 COVID-19 cases across the continent resulting in 816 deaths, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

African leaders are also worried about the economic toll on the continent.

An African Union study published last week warned that 20 million jobs in the formal and informal sectors were at risk.

The state-run Ethiopian Airlines announced last week that



Fitsum Abade, Managing Director of Ethiopian Cargo and Logistics Services; Boureima H Sambo, World Health Organisation Representative to Ethiopia; Steven Were Omamo, WFP's Country Director in Ethiopia, and Ahmed Ogwel Ouma, Deputy Director of African CDC, attend the launch of the United Nations Airport Hub for humanitarian shipments to combat the COVID-19, at Ethiopian Airlines' cargo facility at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, yesterday.

it was already bracing for revenue losses of \$550m between January and April.

The airline is turning to cargo, maintenance and charter operations to help soften the blow.

Ethiopian Airlines plans to play "a major role" in Africa's

fight against COVID-19, and the humanitarian transportation hub inaugurated Tuesday will be operational at least through the end of May, said Fitsum Abadi, the company's managing director of cargo and logistics services.

But Fitsum acknowledged that cargo operations would

never make up for the loss of most of the airline's passenger traffic.

"This division or this business unit is the second largest revenue-generating business unit, but it cannot offset the entire loss that the airline is facing," he said.

## Unrest fears rise as Buhari extends lockdown in Lagos

AFP — LAGOS

Bus driver Christian did not sleep at all last night after Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari ordered an extension to the lockdown in his sprawling home city Lagos to halt the coronavirus.

A few hours before the announcement on Monday evening, word spread that over a hundred youths from a criminal gang were swarming through his neighbourhood of Alimosho on a robbing spree.

"Everybody was scattering for their lives. We ran away and

I locked myself inside the house," he said, refusing to give his surname.

"When it was calmer, with the men on my street, we organised ourselves. We didn't sleep all night. We prepared weapons, collected knives, what we could find." The authorities insist that extending the shutdown in Africa's biggest city to one month is vital to stop a virus that has so far caused 343 confirmed infections and 10 deaths in Nigeria.

But residents in the usually frenetic economic hub of 20 million, where more than half

rely on daily earnings to survive, complain they have been left facing crippling economic hardship and rising crime.

In recent days, inhabitants in a string of districts across Lagos and neighbouring Ogun state have reported a surge in gang attacks.

"The criminals have been taking undue advantage of the lockdown to dispossess people of their valuables," community leader Mufu Gbadamosi said.

He has organised people in his Agbado area of Lagos into groups to man checkpoints and screen people coming into their

neighbourhood after dark.

"We shall continue to hold the night vigil until the end of the restriction," he told.

Local resident Dotun Alabi said it was the hunger and desperation caused by the lockdown that appeared to be pushing people into crime.

"When we arrested two boys, they told us that they took to robbery in order to find something to eat," he said.

Inhabitants in the overcrowded neighbourhoods of Lagos' poor — where millions live squeezed together — are no strangers to gang violence as

criminals frequently fight for upper hand.

But Chioma Okoro, who has bunkered down in her home in the Agege district, said insecurity had grown in the past two weeks and ratcheted up dramatically over the weekend.

"Now it's three times, 10 times worse," she said.

She had tried to go out with her husband to get supplies but dashed back when she saw a group of young men brandishing iron bars, machetes, and homemade firearms.

"I was hearing gunshots

yesterday evening. I was so scared," she said.

Nigeria's police says it has dispatched extra forces to deal with the trouble and arrested some 200 suspects.

"A special police squad headed by a deputy inspector general has deployed to ensure security of lives and properties in the affected communities," spokesman Bala Elkana said.

But residents complain that there are not enough officers to protect them — and insist the government needs to do more to support people financially.

**The Peninsula**  
Local focus, Global vision  
Established in 1996

CHAIRMAN  
**SHEIKH DR. KHALID BIN THANI AL THANI**

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
**DR. KHALID BIN MUBARAK AL-SHAFI**  
editorinchief@pen.com.qa

ACTING MANAGING EDITOR  
**MOHAMMED SALIM MOHAMED**  
m.salim@pen.com.qa

DEPUTY MANAGING EDITOR  
**MOHAMMED OSMAN ALI**  
osman@pen.com.qa

## EDITORIAL

### Equality in times of pandemic

**THE** whole world is still struggling with the unchecked scourge of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), as the virus is spreading like a wildfire across the world. Countries find that their healthcare system huffing and puffing under the heavy weight of the first-of-its-kind pandemic. Several countries are realising that their hospital beds fall too short and essential support equipment like ventilators are hard to come by. Same is the case with essential medical supplies such as face masks, personal protective equipment, sanitizers etc. And of course, complaints are galore, the worst among which is the alleged discrimination against own citizens, mainly seniors and the disabled who are left to fend for themselves.

The case is not much different in the Middle East and our neighbouring countries. For the last few days there were several media reports about some governments discriminating against their migrant labour force. After the governments declared lockdowns and some placed even curfews, the workers were struggling to access food and basic personal hygiene products. Some countries even warned the labour exporting countries to take their people back or face consequences.

In these trying times also the State of Qatar stands tall and apart. When the leadership of this country says that the migrant workers are their valuable guests it means it. Workers are treated as guests, providing them with every facility and amenity that are available in the country.

For the last few days several ambassadors expressed their gratitude to the government for the support and care being given to their compatriots. The ambassadors were very vociferous in thanking Qatar through columns they wrote in The Peninsula newspaper.

Right from the day when some areas of the country were locked down and people were quarantined, the social media platforms were carrying pictures and messages from these people thanking the Government of Qatar for the best treatment and services they were getting. People even posted pictures of the daily food packets they were getting with emotional captions.

On Monday, the Spokesperson of the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management categorically reiterated that there is no discrimination in Qatar, adding that everybody will get equally good treatment even if they don't possess a health card or valid resident permit. The country has addressed every concern of its expatriates whether it is expired visa, food supply, healthcare, salary payment, job security or access to daily needs.

Yes, there is no doubt that the State of Qatar is leading the world by example as in every situation. The country is ensuring that nobody is left out unprotected in this relentless war against COVID-19 and it is sure that Qatar will win this war.

**The Peninsula**  
Local focus, Global vision

D-RING ROAD, POST BOX: 3488, DOHA - QATAR  
EMAIL: editor@pen.com.qa

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OFFICE: TEL: 4455 7741 / 767  
FAX: +974 4455 7758

MANAGING EDITOR: TEL: 4462 7505

DEPUTY MANAGING EDITOR: TEL: 4455 7769

LOCAL NEWS SECTION: TEL: 4455 7743

BUSINESS NEWS SECTION: TEL: 4462 7535

SPORT NEWS SECTION: TEL: 4455 7745

ONLINE SECTION: TEL: 4462 7501  
email: INFO@PEN.COM.QA

PUBLIC RELATIONS: TEL: 4455 7613  
email: PR@PEN.COM.QA

ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT: TEL: 4455 7837 / 780  
FAX: 4455 7870, email: adv@pen.com.qa

CLASSIFIED DEPARTMENT: TEL: 4455 7857  
email: adv@pen.com.qa

SUBSCRIPTION & DISTRIBUTION: TEL: 4455 7809 / 839  
FAX: 44557819, email: info@tawseelqatar.com

[www.thepeninsula.qa](http://www.thepeninsula.qa)

 /PeninsulaQatar

 /ThePeninsulaQatar

 /Peninsula\_Qatar

 /ThePeninsulaNewspaper

 +974 6698 6188



To limit the spread of coronavirus, the General Directorate of Traffic distributes masks and gloves to motorists and made them aware of the recommendations of the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management.

## Qatar will succeed in its fight to curb spread of coronavirus

**W**e all are witnesses that Qatar is endeavouring in an effective and highly-coordinated manner to curb the spread of the virus disease and providing higher standard of medical and healthcare facilities to all including its citizens and residents who have been infected by the virus and under quarantine.

I am very confident that Qatar will succeed in its fight to control the spread of the virus soon.

Qatar continues progress in its ongoing battle against the COVID-19 through adopting a full transparency approach in its measures and engaging the society in confronting this crisis.

The televised press conferences by Supreme Committee

**The Embassy is thankful to the Government of Qatar for providing food, medicine and other essential to the Sri Lankan expatriates who are under quarantine, and stranded in lockdown areas.**



**RATNASINGAM KOHULARANGAN**  
CHARGE D'AFFAIRES OF THE  
EMBASSY OF SRI LANKA IN QATAR

for Crisis Management and information shared by the Ministry of Public Health and Government Information Office are an innovative method of conveying information to the public. This contributes to confronting the spread of false information, withholding the public from panic, and promoting the community awareness about COVID-19 and how to prevent it.

The precautionary and proactive measures undertaken by the county with its various institutions against the outbreak of the coronavirus will result in great success, and Qatar will get out of this critical stage stronger and more faithful in its capabilities, people and

institutions.

Qatar is keen on providing the highest levels of medical services for free not only to citizens but to expatriates. It is ensuring the continued flow of food supplies and consumer goods to the local market in sufficient quantities and at reasonable prices and with high quality. The rapid response of citizens and residents to the volunteer campaign to support the efforts of the state is also remarkable. This affirmed that everyone has felt the responsibility.

The Embassy is thankful to the Government of Qatar for providing food, medicine and other essential to the Sri Lankan expatriates who are under quarantine, and stranded in lockdown areas.

I request all Sri Lankan expatriates to cooperate with the Qatar authorities at their efforts to curb the spread of the virus.

The Qatar Charity has provided 300 dry food rations to provide to the needy people. The well-wishers of the Sri Lankan expatriates and the Sri Lankan Associations also donated dry food items to the Embassy. The Embassy distributes the food items to the needy Sri Lankan expatriates.

The Embassy in coordination with the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs of Qatar is attending labour related issues. There are

approximately 120,000 Sri Lankan expatriates living and working in Qatar. Sri Lankan Associations are closely working with the Embassy in the wake of COVID - 19.

The Embassy is connected with Sri Lankan expatriates through social media platforms and embassy website and updating them with regard to the information receiving from the Government authorities in Sri Lanka and State of Qatar. The Sri Lankan Associations are also disseminating the information to the people and bring to the notice of the Embassy with regard to the issues being faced by the Sri Lankan expatriates to the Embassy.

The Mission has provided three telephone numbers to the expatriate especially for labour related matters and one number 24/7 for other inquiries. The Embassy has appointed a person with medical background and shared his number among the expatriates to give necessary health advice and guidance to the Sri Lankans related to the COVID -19.

The Embassy appreciates the decision of the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs for introducing online platform to receive the labour complaints and to pay the full salaries and other benefits without any deduction to all quarantined employees, including expatriates.

## Telco shares are surprise losers as lockdown drives Internet boom

**TOM WESTBROOK & DOUGLAS BUSVINE** - REUTERS

As lockdowns worldwide drive a surge in internet use, boosting online sales for businesses as varied as gaming and food delivery, the stocks of internet providers are an unlikely laggard on global markets.

In Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, a combination of high fixed costs, debt and market disruption has left telcos significantly underperforming the data-hungry businesses their networks carry.

"It's a bit of a surprise," said Kasper Elmgreen, equities head at Europe's biggest fund manager, Amundi Asset Management.

"The traditional defensive sectors have played defensive,

but telecoms have not really been defensive," he said, pointing to price drops more or less in line with European markets.

Globally, a 13% drop in the MSCI world telecommunications services index pales in comparison to healthcare, down 6%, technology, down 8%, or consumer staples, down 10%.

The poor showing illustrates the difficult dynamics facing carriers, even when their services are more essential than ever. Around the world, millions of people are confined to their homes and businesses closed as governments restrict movement to halt the spread of the coronavirus which has led to over 113,000 deaths.

That has driven business

and entertainment online, but left telcos spending to service surging demand, and, with fixed pricing structures, no quick way to monetise the investment.

At the same time, roaming revenue has dried up as people travel less, and telcos are bracing for a slump in new contracts accompanying a wave of unemployment as businesses shut.

"Because of flat-rate deals, we hardly get any extra revenue if people spend more time surfing or talking on the phone," Ralph Dommermuth, chief executive of German telco I&T Drillisch AG, said.

"I can't yet say whether more time being spent in the home office will compensate for revenue losses that will arise because many companies

or private individuals have to put off renewing their contracts or can't pay their bills."

The outlook has driven stock drops as investors fret about dividends that have been under pressure for years. Companies such as AT&T Inc, which is down 21% this year, Telefonica SA, down 30%, and MTN Group Ltd have either matched or outstripped benchmark declines.

Vodafone Group PLC, the world's second-biggest mobile operator, last month said data traffic had surged 50%, yet its stock is down 23% - the same as the benchmark index.

"Not only do (telcos) have capex for 5G, but they also have debt payments," said Tariq Dennison, managing director at GFM Asset Management in Hong Kong.



### Quote of the day

**Turkey is the main source of aid and the pandemic is making efforts more difficult in Syria. We are concerned that this might trigger another wave of refugees to Turkey due to international community's failure.**

**Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkish Foreign Minister**



# Qatar's preventive measures have instilled confidence among expatriates

**The State of Qatar has pledged that it will provide equal treatment to all the residents of Qatar irrespective of their nationality, residential status, religion and ethnicity. This has instilled a confidence among the expatriate community.**



In its onward journey, human civilization has faced adversities, set up tragic milestones and carried with it memories of suffering from diseases, natural calamities and war. It has faced the menace of bubonic plague, Smallpox, Spanish Flu and world wars in previous centuries. Now it is facing the scourge of coronavirus (COVID-19), which is spreading across the world posing an existential threat to human race once again.

The whole world is in a state of war with this disease and all of us living in the State of Qatar have also found ourselves locked in the battle against it. This disease, which has now assumed the form of global pandemic, is terrorizing the whole world with its virulence and morbidity. It is very infectious even while remaining asymptomatic. That is why it is very dangerous also.

It is a new virus, against

which humanity does not yet have an antidote, has no immunization, no vaccines and antibodies. This has made the fight against this disease more challenging and complicated.

Now, the whole world is practicing self-isolation, quarantine and lockdown. They have proved to be three magical weapons which we have at our disposal to protect ourselves from getting infected with the disease.

On the basis of the available knowledge and insight into this disease, the State of Qatar, too, has been managing the spreading infection smartly and efficiently under the wise and enlightened leadership of His Highness Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. In a short span of time the health authorities of this country have tested more than 52,622 people as of today, provided quarantine facility to the infected people and given



**DR. NARAD NATH BHARADWAJ,**  
AMBASSADOR OF NEPAL TO THE STATE OF QATAR

access to highest standard of health care to seriously sick people. This has kept the rate of mortality very low and many infected people have had the opportunity to go back to work after being cured of the disease.

The State of Qatar has pledged that it will provide

equal treatment to all the residents of Qatar irrespective of their nationality, residential status, religion and ethnicity. This has instilled a confidence among the expatriate community.

The government of Qatar has provided foods and salary for expatriate workers who were furloughed by their companies and private employers for region of the adverse impact of the coronavirus on their enterprises. This reveals a high degree of empathy of the Qatari government towards the expatriate workers including the Nepali workers.

The Nepali community living in Doha is aware that the leaders of Qatar have acknowledged and appreciated their contribution and other expatriate communities to the development efforts and modernization of Qatar. In return, the Nepali people working in Qatar have obeyed the government authorities of Qatar, complied with directives and abode law.

In this context, the Embassy of Nepal has also organized various awareness raising activities targeting Nepali workers and educated them about the culture, religion and social etiquettes and behavioral codes of the Qatari society so that they do not end up committing acts that may be offensive to Arab culture. As a result, respectful and harmonious relation has been maintained among the native and expatriate communities.

Now the Nepali people are fighting against the Corona virus together with the native population. We have adequately explained that they need to maintain distance from one another, wash hands repeatedly with soap and water and use face masks while going out to malls and

**We Nepali people living in Qatar have the full confidence in the competence of the Qatari government in handling the situation. With the state-of-the-art health facilities, qualified medical professionals and the mature and enlightened leadership of His Highness the Amir, the people of Qatar will surely get over the crisis and march forward taking the disruption caused by the coronavirus in their strides.**



other public places. Most of the Nepali in Qatar are in home isolation. Some of them are still working in construction sites but they are made aware of the precautionary measures.

We Nepali people living in Qatar have the full confidence in the competence of the Qatari government in handling the situation. With the state-of-the-art health facilities, qualified medical professionals and the mature and enlightened leadership of His Highness the Amir, the people of Qatar will surely get over the crisis and march forward taking the disruption caused by the coronavirus in their strides.



Vehicles of the Ministry of Culture and Sports installed with loudspeakers during the COVID-19 awareness drive at a labour camp in Umm Salal. PIC: ABDUL BASIT / THE PENINSULA

# Africa does not need saving during this pandemic



**ROBTTEL NEAJAI PAILEY**  
AL JAZEERA

It was inevitable that racism would rear its ugly head.

Having previously documented the long and shameful history of unethical drug testing on communities of colour across the globe, I was not surprised earlier this month when two French doctors proclaimed on national television that Africa would be the most appropriate location for a coronavirus vaccine trial. Never mind that this continent has the lowest recorded number of cases regionally.

For bigots who operate under the appalling assumption that black, brown, and other non-white bodies are easily expendable during times of crisis, COVID-19 presents the perfect storm. Yet, instead of expending energy on denouncing the doctors' asinine comments, as so many have already done, we should be reflecting on what Africa and other regions of the so-called Global South have to teach the world in this collective moment of reckoning.

Call me naive in the heyday of apocalyptic projections about infections and deaths to come, but I prefer to focus on the silver lining. This is in some ways why I have been rolling my eyes at countless doomsday commentaries published by Western media outlets in which so-called Global North "experts" have argued that Africa, a continent of 54

diverse countries rumoured to be the final frontier of coronavirus, desperately needs saving. My response? Puh-lease!

Ordinary Africans, and their counterparts in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, are not navel-gazing or waiting around for the "mighty" Global North - itself in the bullseye of the virus - to come to the rescue. Even in the midst of constraints unheard of in Europe and North America, Global South folks are exemplifying the kind of ingenuity, generosity, solidarity, empathy and civility from which we all must learn. We should be borrowing from this playbook, not casting it aside.

Let's start with my own country, Liberia, once destabilised by a 14-year intermittent armed conflict in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. During the deadliest ever Ebola outbreak of 2014-2016, which killed more than 11,000 in West Africa alone, 22-year-old Liberian student nurse Fatu Kekula single-handedly treated three family members at home when they fell ill. She transformed rubbish bags into aprons, gloves and masks which became her very own retro-fitted personal protective equipment (PPE) - a technique that resource-strapped healthcare workers in Europe and North America are now replicating.

Indeed, the Global South has both exported innovation and disseminated much needed "staff, stuff and systems". While critiques abound, Cuba's late March deployment of 52 medical workers to Italy was a stark and important exemplar of "South to North" medical humanitarianism. Once vilified for its socialist leadership and harshly

sanctioned by the West, this island nation has a long history of dispatching health missions in times of calamity and tranquility.

In keeping with Cuba's efforts in Italy, Somalia followed suit by sending 20 doctors to aid the southern European country. Lest we forget, this Horn of Africa nation is recovering from protracted warfare, including current threats from al-Shabab armed fighters, which makes its intervention all the more admirable.

Though the United States has tightened sanctions against conflict-affected Iran and slammed crisis-prone Venezuela with narcoterrorism charges, countries across the Southern hemisphere have extended olive branches of support while the pandemic nears its peak.

Having faced virulent forms of Sinophobia as the initial epicentre of coronavirus, China has begun a global campaign to distribute medical supplies and expertise to African countries such as Algeria and Nigeria, with plans to deploy personnel to Europe, the Middle East and the Gulf in due course. Although not without controversy, such is the beauty of "South-South" cooperation.

Whereas others parroted early on the racist edict that COVID-19 was exclusively a Wuhan epidemic, Chinese philanthropist Jack Ma, of tech giant Alibaba fame, was one of the first billionaires to spring into action when he pledged \$14m in late January to develop a vaccine to tame the virus. Regional heavyweight South Korea also proved its mettle by getting ahead of the curve with nation-wide testing and quarantining, earning international plaudits in the

process.

In the likeness of South Korea's proactive approach to virus prevention, Zimbabwe's universities have shown that necessity is the mother of all inventions. As the country battles a chronic economic recession, including hyperinflation, with healthcare workers striking across the country, universities are manufacturing gloves, masks and hand sanitizers amidst a 21-day lockdown. Farther east, a factory in Kenya now produces 30,000 surgical masks a day to meet heightened national demand.

South Africa also has important lessons to impart. Because of the country's experience researching and testing for HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases, it has started developing locally-made COVID-19 tests and will embark shortly on a clinical trial for a vaccine.

It has been said a disease transported by upwardly mobile jet-setters - who have the wherewithal to huddle at homes and the resources to practice physical distancing when necessary - is now killing the poor and sedentary, who do not.

Yet, Global South traders in the so-called "informal sector" have defiantly dictated that one-size-fits-all coronavirus prevention measures will not work everywhere, that they hurt vulnerable populations in low-income countries, and that "top-down", militarised lockdowns cannot be imposed on poor people without advanced warning or social protection schemes.

While some leaders in the Global South have unleashed physical brutality against their citizens under the guise of battling COVID-19, or

blindly borrowed protocols from the North without understanding that context must drive policymaking, others, like Nigeria's senators or senior members of Rwanda's executive branch of government, have donated portions of their salaries for relief to poor households.

As Global North leaders jockey for power, undercutting each other in a bidding war over respirators, the Global South is unassuming in its instructions about the necessity of civility. Because whether rich or poor, black, brown, or white, young or old, man or woman, we are all in this existential catastrophe together. And while some of us may be more equipped than others to tackle it, the virus' visa-free obliteration of borders and orders proves that no one is exempt from its ferocity.

Africa and other regions of the Global South have already demonstrated that they are far from passive centres for medical experimentation. Rather, they are the sites of home-grown solutions which should be transmitted globally.

As the celebrated Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy reminds us, coronavirus has not only exposed nature's wrath against the crudeness of capitalism, but also forced us to imagine a better world beyond flattened curves, and, might I add, racist vitriol.

Editor's note: An earlier version of this article incorrectly claimed that 11,000 were infected during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. It has been updated to clarify that 11,000 was the death toll from the outbreak.

*Robtel Neajai Pailey is a Liberian academic, activist and author of two anti-corruption children's books.*



**Ordinary Africans, and their counterparts in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, are not navel-gazing or waiting around for the "mighty" Global North - itself in the bullseye of the virus - to come to the rescue. Even in the midst of constraints unheard of in Europe and North America, Global South folks are exemplifying the kind of ingenuity, generosity, solidarity, empathy and civility from which we all must learn.**

# India extends virus lockdown until May 3

AFP — NEW DELHI

India's nationwide coronavirus lockdown, the biggest in the world covering 1.3 billion people, will be extended until May 3, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday.

The move comes despite complaints from millions of poor, a vast underclass who have been left almost completely without support as jobs have vanished and incomes dried up.

"From the economic angle, we have paid a big price," Modi said. "But the lives of the people of India are far more valuable." "From the experiences of the last few days it is clear that the path we have chosen is correct." India's three-week-old lockdown, in force since March 25, was scheduled to end at midnight yesterday.

Modi said there would be "limited relaxations" from April 20 for districts with no cases, and new guidelines for industry and agriculture would be released today.

The announcement comes as debate rages around the world on how to lift restrictions so the economic carnage of the pandemic can be eased without a new spike in infections.

Official figures suggest South

**Prime Minister Modi said there would be 'limited relaxations' from April 20 for districts with no cases, and new guidelines for industry and agriculture would be released today. The announcement comes as debate rages around the world on how to lift restrictions so the economic carnage of the pandemic can be eased without a new spike in infections.**

Asian nations have so far been relatively unscathed by the epidemic, with around 10,800 cases and 353 deaths in India.

Some experts say not enough tests have been conducted and the true number of infections is much higher.

And with some of the most crowded cities on the planet, there are fears that numbers could take off and overwhelm the shaky healthcare system.

Several states including Maharashtra — home to Mumbai and with the highest number of cases — Tamil Nadu and Odisha already announced lockdown extensions.

The World Health Organisation yesterday praised India's decision to extend the lockdown, saying "it would go a long way in arresting the virus spread".

The shutdown, with strict

limits on activity, has been devastating for the economy — and in particular for India's poor.

Millions of daily wage labourers suddenly lost their jobs, forcing hundreds of thousands to travel hundreds of kilometres back to their home villages, often on foot.

Some died on the way, while others were shunned by locals when they made it back. One clip that went viral on social media showed a group of migrants being hosed down with chemicals by local officials.

Others have been stranded in cities in cramped, unsanitary conditions where the virus could spread quickly. New Delhi alone is providing hundreds of thousands of free meals.

In the financial capital Mumbai, some 800 migrant labourers gathered near a railway



A doctor in a protective chamber takes swab from a man to test for coronavirus disease at a newly installed Walk-In Sample Kiosk in a government-run hospital, in Chennai.

station yesterday and demanded to be allowed to return home. The protest was later dispersed by police.

Farmers have complained of a lack of workers to harvest crops while snarl-ups of thousands of trucks not allowed to move because of the lockdown have hampered food transport.

"We have tried to keep the interests of the poor and the daily wage workers in mind while making these new guidelines," Modi said in his 24-minute address.

"The central and state governments are working together to ensure that the farmers don't face any problems."

The commerce ministry has reportedly urged the government to consider opening more activities "with reasonable safeguards" even if the lockdown is extended.

On the deserted streets of Delhi, Manoj, a businessman, said the extended lockdown would further devastate the economy.

## Asean leaders discuss ways to deal with pandemic

ANATOLIA — JAKARTA

Leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) agreed yesterday to strengthen cooperation in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

The understanding was reached during a virtual meeting, the Special Asean Summit on Coronavirus Disease, chaired by Vietnamese premier Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, who accompanied President Joko Widodo, said cooperation between Asean countries includes information exchange, research and development, and medical

treatment. During the talks, the regional leaders agreed on the importance of ensuring protection of their citizens, and resolved to strengthen public communication and fight against stigma and discrimination.

The leaders also vowed to take joint steps and devise coordinated policies to deal with economic and social impact of COVID-19.

"Asean leaders will urge their economic ministers to prepare for the recovery period in the future. They will also observe SMEs sector and other vulnerable groups," the foreign minister added.

The trade ministers were asked to ensure the supply chain network such that trade between Asean countries could continue. Marsudi conveyed her support for the reallocation of the Asean Trust Fund to assist Asean countries in handling the crisis.

Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh, who was appointed as chairman of the Asean Coordinating Council, revealed that the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Asean reached 19,997, with 884 fatalities.

"We pledge to remain united and vigilant against COVID-19 and commit to work

closely with the WHO, Asean's external partners and the international community to suppress the spread of the pandemic, protect people's lives and livelihoods, [and] maintain socio-economic stability..." a joint declaration issued after the summit read.

The 11-member association was established on August 8, 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the Asean Declaration by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia joined in later years.

— Global situation Nearly two million cases have been

reported in 185 countries since late last year when the virus was first detected in Wuhan, China.

While the total death toll is almost 120,000, more than 458,000 patients have made recoveries, according to latest figures by U.S.-based Johns Hopkins University.

Europe remains to be the epicenter, however, the U.S. has surpassed all countries in terms of positive cases, and virus-linked deaths.

Billions of people around the world are in some form of restriction that includes lockdowns and national emergencies.

## Nepal extends lockdown till April 27

ANATOLIA — KATHMANDU

Nepal yesterday extended the nationwide lockdown until April 27 as part of measures to stem the spread of the coronavirus in the country.

A Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, took the decision as two new COVID-19 cases were reported yesterday.

Yesterday's decision came hours after India extended nationwide lockdown until May 3. Landlocked Nepal shares a 1,800km open border with India.

Nepal went into lockdown on March 24. People are advised to stay indoors and only essential services such as hospitals, police and grocery stores remained open. Public transport is also halted.

Yesterday, a 58-year-old man and his 81-year-old mother, who arrived in Nepal from the UK three weeks ago, tested positive, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 16.

## UN releases \$2.5m to help cyclone-hit Vanuatu island

AP — UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations released \$2.5m from its emergency humanitarian fund on Monday to help thousands of people in the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu affected by Cyclone Harold and offered support to other hard-hit countries.

The cyclone made landfall on the largest island in Vanuatu, Espiritu Santo, on April 6 before hitting the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga. The UN cited media reports saying the storm left more than two dozen people dead, and destroyed homes, buildings and crops in the four countries.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Sunday that Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed "deep solidarity with the people of the Pacific as they face the impact of this cyclone along with other climate-related challenges, as well as the coronavirus pandemic, which adds a worrying new dimension to existing vulnerabilities."

The secretary-general "stands ready" to support recovery efforts, he said.

In Vanuatu, the UN humanitarian office said, "Initial assessments suggest as much as 90 percent of the population in Sanma, the most affected province lost their homes, and more than half of all schools and almost a quarter of health centers were damaged."

## Australia, New Zealand flatten virus curve; lockdown remains

AFP — SYDNEY

Australia and New Zealand yesterday brushed aside calls for an easing of tough restrictions on travel and public gatherings despite their success in curbing the spread of COVID-19.

The number of new coronavirus cases in the neighbouring nations has fallen dramatically in the last two weeks, raising hopes that difficult social distancing measures may be relaxed.

But Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the country was still "many weeks away" from lifting any restrictions.

"Patience has got to be our virtue here," he said, noting that countries like Singapore and South Korea had initial success against COVID-19 but saw a surge in new cases after travel and other restrictions were eased.

Australia registered just 63 new infections on Sunday and Monday, bringing the total number of cases to 6,366 for a

population of 25 million.

It was the lowest two-day increase in a month.

New Zealand, a nation of five million, saw just eight new cases yesterday for a total of 1,072, its lowest daily increase in more than three weeks.

"We've been relatively successful — I don't want to squander that success or the sacrifices New Zealanders have made," New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern responded yesterday when asked when the lockdown will be eased.

"Our goal has to be go early and go hard, so that we get into a position where we can ease up restrictions with confidence," she said, adding that no action would be taken for at least another week.

Both countries have closed their borders to foreigners and imposed 14-day quarantines on returning residents.

New Zealand has enforced a strict stay-at-home lockdown while Australia imposed tight



People wearing face masks walk in the Burwood suburb of Sydney, yesterday.

restrictions on movement, gatherings and public activities.

"Australians are doing magnificently, we've seen real progress," Health Minister Greg Hunt said yesterday, linking the slowdown in new cases to

people honouring lockdown rules.

"The rest of the world would, overwhelmingly in a heartbeat, swap positions with Australia." But the clampdowns have caused significant economic

damage, with Australian officials yesterday predicting unemployment will double to 10 percent despite a massive government spending spree to counter the impact of the pandemic.

## North Korea fires barrage of missiles from ground and air

AP — SEOUL

A barrage of North Korean missiles fired from both the ground and fighter jets splashed down on the waters off the country's east coast yesterday, South Korea's military said, a show of force on the eve of a key state anniversary in the North and parliamentary elections in the rival South.

The back-to-back launches were the latest in a series of weapons tests that North Korea has conducted in recent weeks amid stalled nuclear talks and outside worries about a possible coronavirus outbreak in the country.

North Korean troops based in the eastern coastal city of Munchon first launched several projectiles — presumed to be cruise missiles — yesterday morning, South Korea's Joint

Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

The weapons flew more than 150km at a low altitude off the North's east coast, a South Korean defense official said. If confirmed, it would be the North's first cruise missile launch in about three years, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, citing department rules.

Later yesterday, North Korea launched several Sukhoi-class fighter jets that fired an unspecified number of air-to-surface missiles toward the North's eastern waters, the defence official said.

The official said North Korea has recently appeared to be resuming its military drills that it had scaled back due to concerns about the coronavirus pandemic. He said other North Korean fighter jets also flew on patrol near the

border with China yesterday.

All the recently tested missiles were short-range and didn't pose a direct threat to the US mainland. A test of a missile capable of reaching the US homeland would end North Korea's self-imposed moratorium on major weapons tests and likely completely derail nuclear diplomacy with the United States.

Some experts say North Korea likely used the latest weapons launches to bolster its striking capability against South Korea, which has been introducing US-made stealth F-35 jets and other sophisticated conventional weapons systems in recent years. Others say the latest weapons tests were also aimed at shoring up internal unity in the face of US-led sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic.

Go Myong-Hyun, an analyst



People watch a television news broadcast showing file footage of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un, in Seoul, yesterday.

at the Seoul-based Asan Institute for Policy, said North Korea also wants to maintain tensions to secure leverage over the US. in future negotiations.

"North Korea wants to create and maintain tensions, but still aims to prevent those tensions from growing too much and pressuring the US a lot," Go said.

# Pakistan Prime Minister calls for 'Global Initiative on Debt Relief'

AGENCIES — ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Imran Khan has appealed for a "Global Initiative on Debt Relief". While noting that COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented health and economic challenges, the Prime Minister underlined that a global recession was certain, one worse than the Great Depression.

A global pandemic cannot be contained without strong, coordinated and well-crafted global response, he stressed, said a statement issued by the Embassy of Pakistan.

The Global Initiative on Debt Relief will bring together stakeholders on a platform to promote coordinated health and economic response. During the past week, various announcements have been made by multilateral actors such as the UN, the IMF, and the World Bank.

The announcements include initial relief packages of \$1.4bn by the IMF, and \$1bn by the World Bank.

Prime Minister Imran Khan invited the Secretary-General to work with him in advancing the objectives of a coordinated response.

The proposed global initiative aims to lay ground for urgent



Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan.

debt relief to the developing countries, at their request, and without onerous conditionalities. The initiative is built on the Prime Minister's belief that enhanced fiscal capacity is fundamental to recovery from the ongoing pandemic. The Prime Minister cautioned that the pandemic's socio-economic impacts would be more consequential in the developing countries.

While proposing the initiative, the Prime Minister highlighted that his Government had provided a \$ 8bn stimulus package to help the most vulnerable Pakistanis.

Noting the United Nations

Secretary-General's call for action, the Prime Minister also urged world leaders to step up measures to help developing countries to overcome disastrous impacts of COVID-19.

He proposed that the developing countries be provided with fiscal space and financial relief through enhanced debt relief and restructuring and other additional measures that could help them manage the unfolding crisis.

As part of his diplomatic outreach, Prime Minister Imran Khan will be approaching Heads of State/Government from a wide range of countries

**The initiative is built on the Prime Minister's belief that enhanced fiscal capacity is fundamental to recovery from the ongoing pandemic. The Prime Minister cautioned that the pandemic's socio-economic impacts would be more consequential in the developing countries.**

notably from Paris Club, Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), Heads of International Organisations and others concerned to join him in this endeavour.

The Prime Minister has entrusted the Foreign Minister and the Adviser on Finance to reach out to their respective counterparts to work for the initiative with the objective of relieving developing countries of the financial challenge emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and realising sustainable development.

# Pakistan extends partial lockdown for two weeks

INTERNEWS — ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced to extend the partial lockdown across the country for the next two weeks with the opening of some sectors.

Talking to media after meeting of National Coordination Committee in Islamabad yesterday, he said we made the hard decision of imposing lockdown in the country which was very well implemented due to cooperation of the people.

Consequently, encouraging results are being received with spread of coronavirus slowing down to 30 percent of the projected target.

He said the government took a number of steps to stop the spread of coronavirus in the country, including closure of schools and educational institutions, cancelling of March 23rd Parade and PSL and all other official and private functions where people could congregate.

The Prime Minister said ventilators, protective clothing and other gear have been reaching the country to meet the

demand. However, if the cases spike, the existing equipment will be insufficient.

The Prime Minister said we are fighting on two fronts. One is containing the spread of coronavirus and second to overcome the unemployment.

He said daily wagers and other businesses are hurt by lockdown. He said Ehsaas Programme, the biggest in the history of the country, is playing a key role in provision of cash relief to daily wagers and poor people.

The programme is without any political influence and will help any eligible citizen of Pakistan.

Imran Khan announced to open the construction industry in cities from today as this has the lowest risk factor in terms of Coronavirus spread.

He said an ordinance will be laid out soon to provide big incentives to the construction sector to generate job opportunities.

The Prime Minister said the agriculture sector will also remain open due to upcoming harvesting of wheat.

# Philippines ramps up virus testing to find unknown infections

REUTERS — MANILA

The Philippines introduced a more aggressive testing programme for the coronavirus yesterday to locate what it said could be as many as 15,000 unknown infections, despite having implemented some of Asia's strictest and earliest lockdown measures.

Authorities have targeted several phases of ramped-up testing, starting yesterday with 8,000 people working at or admitted to Manila hospitals that were treating patients of COVID-19, a disease that so far infected 5,223 people locally and killed 335.

Although the Philippines has Southeast Asia's highest number of coronavirus infections and nearly 40 percent of its known fatalities, the government believes its swift move to close borders and put half its population under home quarantine may have averted a far greater toll and a healthcare disaster.

The former military chief in charge of the national coronavirus task force said yesterday modelling suggested 75 percent of infections — or 15,000 people — had yet to be detected.

"Our strategy is Metro

Manila first because this is the epicentre," Carlito Galvez said on radio.

"When we test Manila, we can win this battle against COVID."

The government has been criticised for being too slow with testing but it has accelerated since the start of April due to increases in test kits and laboratory capacity.

President Rodrigo Duterte on Monday approved the procurement of an additional 900,000 kits, on top of 100,000 now in use.

The number of people tested stood at 33,814 as of April 12, a tenfold increase from March 29, although still far short of the 110,000 in Vietnam, which has 265 coronavirus cases and no reported deaths.

Among its other neighbours, Indonesia is in a more precarious situation, according to health experts, who warn of more than 1.6 million infections in a best-case scenario, and intensive care units being overwhelmed, even if stronger containment measures are introduced.

Citing expert projections, Philippine Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said yesterday the local lockdown, which



Members of the Philippine Coast Guard stand outside a passenger vessel turned into a temporary quarantine facility for Filipino seafarers to contain the coronavirus in Manila.

started five days after confirmation of the first domestic transmission on March 7, may have prevented between 1.9 and 8.3 million coronavirus infections.

The government has stressed that it is not mass testing, but using a targeted,

risk-based approach, starting with the most vulnerable and aiming for 8,000 tests daily.

It wants to test more in areas with known outbreaks, or people showing symptoms, then isolate them at new treatment centres being prepared in stadiums and conference centres

until their recovery.

"This is where the quarantine facilities will come in handy, so we can unplug the already overheating health system," said task force spokesman Restituto Padilla. "We can maximise available test kits and flatten the curve."

# Singapore sees dramatic rise in COVID-19 cases

ANATOLIA — SINGAPORE

At least 386 new cases of the novel coronavirus were reported in Singapore over the past 24 hours, bringing the country's total to 2,918, local media said yesterday.

Channel News Asia said one more death was recorded during the period, bringing the total number of fatalities to nine.

According to the media, 222 of the latest coronavirus cases came from guesthouses where foreign workers live collectively.

So far, 586 coronavirus cases have been reported among those living in guesthouses.

On April 6, two regions where approximately 20,000 foreign workers lived were quarantined for 14 days.

After originating in Wuhan, China last December, the virus, officially known as COVID-19, has spread to at least 185 countries and regions across the world, with its epicentre shifting to Europe, while China has largely come out of the crisis.

# Kazakhstan calls in Chinese envoy over web article

AFP — NUR-SULTAN

Kazakhstan yesterday called in China's ambassador over a Chinese web article that said Kazakhstan would "return" to its giant neighbour.

In a statement on its website, the Kazakh foreign ministry said it informed Zhang Xiao, the ambassador, that the article "does not correspond to the spirit" of the pair's strategic partnership.

The article that appeared on the Sohu.com news site argued that Kazakhstan was historically part of China's territory and that there were still descendants of Han Chinese living in the country.

It was authored by the Elephant Media blog, which appears to have no links to official Chinese media and mostly republishes sensationalist content. The foreign ministry release said the two countries agreed to "cooperate closely in the field of mass media and information distribution" during the meeting.

Ex-Soviet Kazakhstan and China settled outstanding territorial disputes in 1998 and Kazakhstan has since emerged as Beijing's most important partner in resource-rich Central Asia.

# China tightens Russia border checks, approves virus vaccine trials

REUTERS — SUIFENHE

China has approved early-stage human tests of two experimental vaccines to combat the new coronavirus as the country where the virus was first detected battles to contain imported cases, especially from Russia.

Russia has become China's largest source of imported cases, with a total of 409 infections originating in its northern neighbour. Chinese there should stay put and not return home, the state-owned *Global Times* said yesterday.

"Chinese people have watched Russia become a severely affected country... This should sound the alarm: China must strictly prevent the inflow of cases and avoid a second outbreak," the paper, which is run by the Communist Party's *People's Daily*, said in an editorial.

China's northeastern border province of Heilongjiang saw 79 new cases of imported coronavirus cases on Monday, all Chinese citizens travelling home from Russia, state media said. Mainland China reported 89 new cases.

Heilongjiang's provincial authority said yesterday it had established a hotline to reward citizens as much as \$710 for handing over or reporting illegal immigrants.

China has reported 82,249

coronavirus cases and 3,341 deaths. It reported no new deaths yesterday. Mongolia also confirmed 13 new cases, all imported from Russia.

As China fights to prevent a second wave of coronavirus infections, two experimental vaccines will be tested on humans, the Xinhua state news agency reported.

They are being developed by a Beijing-based unit of Nasdaq-listed Sinovac Biotech and by the Wuhan Institute of Biological Products, an affiliate of state-owned China National Pharmaceutical Group.

In March, China gave the green light for another clinical trial for a vaccine candidate developed by China's military-backed Academy of Military Medical Sciences and Hong Kong-listed biotech firm CanSino Bio.

US drug developer Moderna said earlier it had begun human tests of its possible vaccine with the US National Institutes of Health.

But despite hopes for a vaccine, the epidemic could stretch on for up to two years and precautions such as masks and preventing big gatherings may need to continue, Zhang Boli, president of the Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, told reporters.

"We have to make



People wearing face masks are seen at a shopping area after the lockdown was lifted in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, in China, yesterday.

preparations for the long term," he said.

China's coronavirus task force decided on Monday to boost health resources at its borders. It will build hospitals and establish isolation points near borders and also strengthen cooperation with neighbours.

However, officials acknowledged that China's long border with numerous country roads, paths, ferry crossings and

mountain passes made it difficult to control.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said yesterday that authorities on both sides of the border should collectively take measures against illegal crossing.

"This responsibility must be shouldered by both sides to uphold order in the border area," he said, adding that there are about 100,000 Chinese nationals in Russia.

To ensure no infected people slip in from Russia, China has put in stringent measures in Suifenhe, a city in Heilongjiang with a checkpoint into Russia. Train services from it have been reduced and cars need a special pass to leave.

Piao Minghua, deputy head of customs in the area, said that everyone entering Suifenhe had to be tested for the coronavirus, give details of contacts and undergo quarantine.

# Deaths from virus in UK could be far higher than previously reported

REUTERS — LONDON

The United Kingdom's true death toll from the novel coronavirus far exceeds estimates previously published by the government, according to broader official data that include deaths in the community such as in nursing homes.

Even before the new figures, the official British death toll was the fifth-highest globally and a senior scientific adviser to the government has said the country risks becoming the worst-hit in Europe. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said 5,979 people in England had died by April 3 with COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus, mentioned on their death certificates — 15 percent more than numbers published by the health service.

"I am not remotely surprised there would be an undercounting," Bill Hanage, associate professor of epidemiology at Harvard's TH Chan School of Public Health, said.

"The UK hospital death toll that you are seeing — the one on the news each night — is a composite of things that have been trickling in over a period of time. It is not an exact number and does not include the numbers dying in places such as nursing homes."

The new numbers, which reflect both deaths caused primarily by COVID-19 and where it is mentioned as a factor, show how limited official data has been so far. Daily figures published by the health ministry record only COVID-19 deaths in hospitals.

Public Health England

**The Office for National Statistics said 5,979 people in England had died by April 3 with COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus, mentioned on their death certificates — 15 percent more than numbers published by the health service.**

Medical Director Yvonne Doyle said the government was working with the ONS to speed up the information.

"We just need to be absolutely clear that the cause of death that is attributed is correct and that is what takes time on the death certificate to get right," she said, adding the government hoped to produce more rapid data, preferably on a daily basis.

Compared with the ONS figures, the daily hospital counts had understated the true death toll for England and Wales by 52 percent as of April 3, although this had narrowed from 70 percent a week earlier. Still, it raises the likelihood that the latest death toll for the UK as a whole — 12,107 as of April 13 — is in reality thousands higher when deaths outside hospitals are included.

"These new figures clearly show the impact of COVID-19 for the first time," said Martin Hibberd, professor of emerging



People are seen wearing face masks amid spread of coronavirus, in London yesterday.

infectious disease at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. London was hit particularly hard in the week to April 3, when the ONS said nearly half (46.6 percent) of deaths in the capital involved COVID-19.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is now recuperating from COVID-19 complications that almost cost him his life, initially refrained from imposing the same stringent controls as other European leaders to counter the outbreak.

But as projections showed 250,000 Britons could be lost to the virus, Johnson moved to shutter the world's fifth-largest economy and told people to stay at home.

"The UK response was fractured and it was too late, and allowed a large number of people to become infected who didn't need to become infected," said Hanage at Harvard.

"This is the start of the pandemic, not the end, and people need to understand that," Hanage suggested a focus on testing, using new digital technologies to give targeted advice to the population, or even detecting the virus in sewage.

Government scientists have said the United Kingdom will do well if it manages to keep the coronavirus death toll below 20,000. Italy has

reported a death toll of more than 20,000.

Including Wales, some 6,235 people had died by April 3, the ONS said. Separate data from Scotland last week showed 354 deaths involved COVID-19 as of April 5. In Northern Ireland, the toll stood at 79 as of April 3.

Across England and Wales, deaths mentioning COVID-19 accounted for 21.2 percent of all deaths, compared with 4.8 percent in the previous week. The broader reading of total deaths showed that 16,387 people died in the week ending April 3 — the highest total since weekly death data started to be compiled in 2005.

## Sinn Fein leader says she is recovering from coronavirus

REUTERS — DUBLIN

The leader of the left-wing Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein, Mary Lou McDonald, said yesterday that a test taken at the end of March confirmed she had the coronavirus, but she was no longer infected and would return to work next week.

McDonald said she was given the result on Monday after "weeks of being very unwell". The test was taken on March 28.

McDonald's party stunned Ireland's establishment in February by winning the most votes in an inconclusive national election. The two centrist parties that have alternated in power throughout Ireland's history both refuse to work with Sinn Fein and are working on a plan for a coalition to govern together.

"Yesterday afternoon, I received a positive diagnosis for COVID-19 having been tested on Saturday, 28th March," McDonald said in a statement.

"The Public Health Doctor informs me that I am no longer infected or infectious, and this is a great relief after weeks of being very unwell."

"I had a setback in my recovery at the weekend and developed post-viral pleurisy in my right lung. I am on medication and responding very well, and I fully expect to be back at work next Monday," she added.

Sinn Fein operates in both British-ruled Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, where its influence was limited for decades by its history of alliance to IRA militants who waged a violent campaign against Britain in the north.

## Virus cases in Germany 'stable' as leaders mull easing lockdown

AFP — FRANKFURT AM MAIN

The number of people infected with coronavirus in Germany has "stabilised", the public health chief said yesterday, as politicians prepare for talks on when to end the lockdown measures used to slow the disease's spread.

"Numbers have stabilised at a relatively high level," Lothar Wieler of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for disease control told reporters.

"There is no clear sign at present that they're falling," he added.

Politicians are waiting on every comment by the country's leading medical experts, as Chancellor Angela Merkel will hold a conference today with state premiers on whether and for how long to extend infection control measures.

At present, they are slated to expire on April 19.

"We should keep up our discipline from the past weeks," Wieler urged yesterday, noting that while the trend on new infections was heading in a "positive" direction, it was not yet possible to say that the disease has been contained.

By midnight, 125,098 people in Europe's most populous country had tested positive for coronavirus, according to RKI data.

More than half — around 68,000 — went on to recover, while almost 3,000 have died.

Strict social distancing measures, including closures of schools and many businesses, have helped slow the virus' spread in Germany, while extensive testing has caught many cases early.

"Given the present momentum, there is no forecast of shortfalls" in the number of intensive care beds in German hospitals to treat critically ill COVID-19 patients, Wieler said.

"Compared with many other countries, we're doing well".

Even as Wieler called for infection control measures to be upheld, debate has begun about when everyday life can begin inching back towards normality.

## Italy reports 602 new deaths; infections hit new low

ANATOLIA — ROME

Italy yesterday reported 602 new deaths from the novel coronavirus, accelerating from the previous day and bringing the total number of fatalities to 21,067.

However, current infections grew only 0.6 percent from Monday to 104,291 — touching the lowest level since early March.

The number of recovered people continued to climb to 37,130, while the number of intensive care patients dropped for the 11th consecutive day, further lifting the burden over Italy's struggling healthcare system.

The epicentre of the Italian outbreak remains the northern Lombardy region, which now counts 11,142 victims, more than half of the total.

Waiting for a gradual lifting of the nationwide lockdown from May 3, a few regions yesterday allowed the reopening of book and stationery stores



A worker checks the temperature of a customer at the entrance of a supermarket as the spread of the coronavirus continues, in Turin, Italy, yesterday.

and baby clothing shops, following the government decree issued last week.

However, each region

decided to implement the new rules in a different way, splitting over how to prepare the so-called "phase-2" of the

recovery. Lombardy and Piemonte, for instance, kept their book and stationery stores closed, while Lazio postponed

**The number of recovered people continued to climb to 37,130 while the number of intensive care patients dropped for the 11th consecutive day, further lifting the burden over Italy's struggling healthcare system.**

the reopening until April 20. On the other hand, Veneto started what its governor dubbed a "soft lockdown," also relaxing some of the rules on jogging and physical exercise.

The government, however, is still struggling to plan the recovery phase and protect Italy's fragile economic system, as the country faces its worst recession since World War II.

## France records 762 more virus deaths taking total to 15,729

AFP — PARIS

France yesterday reported 762 more COVID-19 deaths in hospitals and nursing homes, bringing its total toll from the epidemic to 15,729.

The number of confirmed cases in France now exceeds 100,000, health official Jerome Salomon told reporters, adding however that the total number of patients in intensive care fell for the sixth day in a row, by 91 to 6,730.

Despite the heavy new death toll, Salomon said that the latest data confirmed that France's month-long lockdown was beginning to have an effect.

"We have observed a plateau over the last days... Thanks to your efforts and the lockdown we have managed to limit the spread of the virus," he said.

The new toll was released after President Emmanuel Macron on Monday said that the epidemic "was beginning to steady" in France and added the lockdown could begin to be eased from May 11.

The details of how the lockdown will be eased have yet to be made clear and Interior

Minister Christophe Castaner emphasised that the date was not set in stone and depended on positive trends continuing.

"May 11 is an objective," he told France Inter radio.

"It is a date that we must achieve by respecting the lockdown," he said. The most controversial announcement by Macron was that schools would open gradually from May 11, even though cafes and cultural venues would stay shut.

"We have found contradictions in this speech," Francette Popineau, General Secretary of Sniupp-FSU teachers' union said.

"We understood that there was to be an end to the confinement as of 11 May, but what we did not understand was why restaurants would be closed and why canteens would be open, why cinemas would be closed and why schools would be open," she added.

Macron in his speech also indicated that a COVID-19 vaccine would be the only long-term solution, adding there was no evidence of so-called herd immunity among people in France with only a minority of



A nurse takes blood sample for a COVID-19 serological test at a nursing home in Bergheim, eastern France, yesterday.

people infected.

Salomon said the estimates based on modelling indicated that around 5-10 percent of the

French population had been infected, but it varied according to region.

The official number of

confirmed COVID-19 cases in France is now 103,573 but officials believe this is vastly understated due to a lack of testing.

# Russian Foreign Minister calls for unity in virus fight

AP — MOSCOW

Russia's foreign minister yesterday rejected Western claims that Moscow has used the coronavirus crisis to expand its political influence, saying the world needs unity to surmount the pandemic.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that suggestions from some in the West that Russia had opaque motives for helping Italy respond to the virus resulted from "Russo-phobia." Russia sent military medics and disinfection experts to Italy as virus infections and deaths surged there last month. A similar Russian team was later dispatched to Serbia.

During a conference call with reporters, Lavrov dismissed Western claims that the Kremlin provided the assistance hoping it would help persuade the European Union to lift sanctions against Russia.

Asked if Moscow would push the EU to lift the

**Sergey Lavrov rejects claims Moscow used coronavirus crisis to expand its influence, terming such claims 'Russo-phobia'.**

restrictions, Lavrov said that Russia wouldn't ask for it.

"If the EU realises that this method has exhausted itself and renounces the decisions that were made in 2014, we will be ready to respond in kind," he added.

Lavrov also criticised those in the West who suggested that China should pay compensation for allegedly failing to provide early enough warnings about the country's virus cases, which were reported in December.

"The claims that China must pay everyone for the outbreak and the alleged failure



A food delivery courier cycles along pedestrian Arbat street as municipal vehicles clean and disinfect the area, in downtown Moscow, Russia, yesterday.

to give timely information about it cross all limits and go beyond any norms of decency," Lavrov said, emphasising that China has offered assistance to many nations.

Without mentioning the United States by name, Russia's top diplomat also countered Washington's criticism of the World Health Organization.

"I would warn against

attempts to politicise the coronavirus outbreak, and that refers not only to the WHO's role," Lavrov said, adding that international response efforts should be pooled.

"It's important to refrain from finger-pointing and realise that we face a common peril and we can only fight it together," he added.

Lavrov pointed to Russia's

shipment of medical supplies to the United States earlier this month and said Moscow was ready to send more, if needed.

He noted that Trump told Russian President Vladimir Putin in a recent phone call that the US could provide medical equipment to Russia once stocks are built up, praising the offer as a "partner-like approach."

# With eyes on May election, Poland to ease curbs from Sunday

REUTERS — WARSAW

Poland will gradually lift lockdown measures imposed to contain the novel coronavirus starting from this coming Sunday, the government said yesterday, as the nation prepares for a presidential election on May 10.

The ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party has said it wants to ease economic pain from the pandemic, with restrictions on public life costing the country some 10 billion zlotys (\$2.42bn) every day or two.

Several countries in Europe, including Poland's neighbour, the Czech Republic, have also decided to ease curbs as the growth of new reported cases of infection has slowed. In Poland, new case growth has held roughly steady from April after a jump in March, with a dip over Easter.

As of yesterday, Poland had reported 7,049 confirmed cases of the new coronavirus, and 251 deaths, relatively fewer than other countries in Europe. Testing rates in Poland have also been low.

"We are slowly unfreezing the economy, I think this is good news," Health Minister Lukasz Szumowski told a private radio broadcaster.

The initial easing of restrictions will include shops.

As Poland battles the epidemic, the presidential election has emerged as a contentious issue, with the ruling party arguing it needs to be held on time out of respect for democratic procedure. The opposition has accused PiS of sacrificing public health for political gain.

Opinion polls show the incumbent Andrzej Duda gaining in popularity.

# Finland's former president recovering from coronavirus

REUTERS — HELSINKI

Finland's former president Martti Ahtisaari, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008, is recovering after being infected with the coronavirus, Finland's presidential office said yesterday, some three weeks after Ahtisaari and his wife were found to have contracted the disease.

"President Martti Ahtisaari's and Mrs Eva Ahtisaari's latest coronavirus samples have been proven negative and they continue to recover," the office said in a statement.

Ahtisaari's infection was confirmed on March 23 and his wife's some days earlier.

82-year-old Ahtisaari, who was president of Finland from 1994 to 2000, won the Nobel Peace Prize for his long-standing contribution to peace mediation.

By Monday, Finland had 3,064 confirmed coronavirus cases and 59 dead from the virus.

# Romania extends lockdown for another month

AFP — BUCHAREST

Romania yesterday extended its nationwide lockdown for another month in a bid to slow the spread of the new coronavirus.

The government will maintain previously enforced restrictions, including allowing citizens to go outside only for work and essential shopping during day time, closing schools and barring most foreigners from entering the country.

"The danger hasn't passed. Relaxing restrictions... would lead to a drastic increase in new cases and pressure on the healthcare system," President Klaus Iohannis said during a televised address.

"It's clear we are facing an epidemic, which is very hard to control," he added.

Romania with a population of almost 20 million people has reported more than 6,800 confirmed cases of the new coronavirus so far with 346 deaths.

Around 800 healthcare workers have tested positive for COVID-19 in one of the EU's poorest nations, whose economy has also been hit hard. Government officials have called upon the millions of Romanians working abroad to refrain from coming home for Easter, saying they will be put in quarantine.

# Forest fire around Chernobyl plant put out: Ukraine

REUTERS — KIEV

A huge fire that tore through forests around the defunct Chernobyl nuclear plant has been put out, Ukrainian officials said yesterday, after hundreds of emergency workers used planes and helicopters to douse the flames.

Environmental activists said on Monday that the fire, near the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster in 1986, posed a radiation risk.

Officials said they registered short-term rises in Caesium-137

particles in the Kiev area to the south of the plant, but radiation levels were within normal limits overall and did not require additional protection measures. They did not say why the particle levels rose.

Assisted by rain, emergency services prevented the fire from spreading to either the plant or military facilities in the area, though they will need a few more days to fully extinguish it, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said in a statement.

Separately, the state agency responsible for managing the

area around the plant said new fires had broken out to the west and south of the site. Their extent was not immediately clear.

The main fire, one of several that followed unusually dry weather, broke out on April 3.

Police have accused a 27-year old local of deliberately starting it, and Zelenskyy's office said officers had detained suspected arsonists near two points where the fire broke out.

Parliament voted on Monday to increase fines for arson. The Chernobyl disaster

in then-Soviet Ukraine occurred on April 26, 1986. It was caused by a botched safety test in reactor and sent clouds of nuclear material across much of Europe.

The plant and the abandoned nearby town of Prip'yat have become a draw for tourists, especially since a critically acclaimed US television miniseries about the accident was aired last year.

The site is currently shut as part of a nationwide lockdown to contain the coronavirus pandemic.



Customers wearing face masks are seen outside a hardware store during a partial reopening after the Austrian government eased restrictions, in Vienna, yesterday.

# Austria reopens thousands of shops in first loosening of virus lockdown

REUTERS — VIENNA

Austria allowed thousands of shops to reopen yesterday, becoming one of the first countries in Europe to loosen its lockdown imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Austria acted early in its outbreak to close schools, theatres, restaurants, non-essential shops and other gathering places roughly four weeks ago. It has told the public to stay home and work from there if possible.

The Alpine republic has fared relatively well so far, having reported 384 deaths in total, fewer than some larger European countries have been suffering each day. The daily increase in confirmed cases has fallen to low single digits in percentage terms and hospitalisations have stabilised.

Last week, the government outlined a step-by-step plan to reopen parts of the economy, starting with shops of up to 400 square metres — roughly twice the playing area of a singles

tennis court — as well as all DIY and garden centres yesterday.

They are due to be followed by shopping centres, larger shops and hairdressers from May 1.

The previously bustling centre of Vienna was still quiet yesterday morning amid a cold snap. But DIY stores were busy, with long but orderly lines of shoppers outside pushing trolleys, reflecting the modified needs of a self-isolating public.

Each week of lockdown has cost Austria's economy €2.1bn.

# Coronavirus deaths in Sweden exceed 1,000

AFP — STOCKHOLM

Sweden yesterday reported that more than 1,000 people had died from the novel coronavirus, as a group of experts attacked the authorities' approach to the crisis.

Sweden's Public Health Agency said it had recorded a total of 11,445 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,033 deaths.

And it warned that because not all deaths had yet been reported over the four-day Easter weekend, the true number might be higher.

"Deceased per day is probably the figure we can trust the least today, because there is normally a lot of trailing when it comes to weekends," state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell told journalists.

Sweden has not imposed the extraordinary lockdown orders implemented elsewhere in Europe to stem the spread of the virus, instead calling for citizens to take responsibility to follow social distancing guidelines.

The government has banned gatherings of more than 50 people and barred visits to nursing homes.

But the Nordic country's softer approach has still drawn criticism abroad and been the subject of fierce debate at home.

A group of 22 doctors, virologists and researchers criticised the Public Health Agency in an op-ed published by *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper yesterday.

They accused it of having failed to draw up a proper strategy, pointing out that the mortality rate in Sweden was now way above that of its Nordic neighbours.

"So in Sweden more than 10 times as many people are dying than in our neighbouring country Finland," they wrote while stressing a number of more aggressive measures taken in Finland.

Finland, which has about half the population of Sweden, had as of Thursday reported 42 deaths, and has closed down restaurants and schools.

During the press conference Anders Tegnell however strongly rejected the accusations and disputed the figures they had advanced.

Tegnell has previously stated that Finland appears to be in a different phase of the epidemic, which partly explains the lower mortality.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Ann Linde has already pushed back at criticism from US President Donald Trump last week who said the country was not doing enough to combat the virus.

# Greece to begin relocating migrant children amid criticism

AFP — ATHENS

Greece's migration minister yesterday said dozens of unaccompanied migrant children would be relocated to other EU countries as a rights group described Athens' detention conditions for minors as "abusive".

"Twelve children will be relocated to Luxembourg (on Wednesday) and fifty to Germany on Saturday," Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi told Athens city radio.

Human Rights Watch earlier

yesterday called on the Greek government to release hundreds of unaccompanied minors held in "unhygienic police cells and detention centres" because of a lack of space elsewhere.

"Keeping children locked up in filthy police cells was always wrong, but now it also exposes them to the risk of COVID-19 infection," HRW Greece researcher Eva Cosse said in a statement.

"The Greek government has a duty to end this abusive practise and make sure these

vulnerable kids get the care and protection they need," said Cosse.

HRW pointed to government data that over 330 children are in police custody awaiting transfer to a shelter, up from 180 in January.

Last week, a Greek youth support group said it was giving psychological assistance by telephone to a 10-year-old Syrian boy who had spent 44 days in a police cell.

The boy, who was detained in February at the Greek-Albanian border whilst trying

to join family in Germany, could not immediately be physically reached because of coronavirus movement restrictions, the Arsis group said.

Greece is sheltering some 100,000 asylum seekers, mostly in camps and in hotel rooms and flats.

The worst congestion occurs in camps on five Aegean islands near Turkey where there are over 36,000 people for fewer than 6,100 places.

There have been two coronavirus outbreaks in camps on the Greek mainland, forcing

authorities to lock down both facilities.

For this reason, the government has so far resisted pressure to move asylum seekers to the mainland.

On Monday, the International Organisation for Migration said over 2,000 asylum seekers in high-risk groups would be temporarily moved from island camps to hotels and apartments.

This would include everyone over 65 years of age, said IOM mission chief for Greece Gianluca Rocco.

## Study: Brazil likely has 12 times more cases than official count

REUTERS — BRASILIA/RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazil likely has 12 times more cases of the new coronavirus than are being officially reported by the government, with too little testing and long waits to confirm the results, according to a study released on Monday.

Researchers at a consortium of Brazilian universities and institutes examined the ratio of cases resulting in deaths through April 10 and compared it with data on the expected death rate from the World Health Organization.

The much higher-than-expected death rate in Brazil indicates there are many more cases of the virus than are being counted, with the study estimating only 8% of cases are being officially reported.

The government has focused on testing serious cases rather than all suspected cases,

➤ Officially, Brazil's coronavirus death toll rose to 1,328 on Monday, while the number of confirmed cases hit 23,430.

➤ The government has focused on testing serious cases rather than all suspected cases, according to researchers.

according to the consortium, known as the Center for Health Operations and Intelligence. The center and medical professionals have also complained of long wait times to get test results.

Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta has said that it is difficult to distribute tests in Brazil because of the size of the country but acknowledges that testing needs to improve.

Officially, Brazil's coronavirus death toll rose to 1,328 on Monday, while the number of confirmed cases hit 23,430,

according to health ministry data.

As of last Thursday, Brazil had had around 127,000 suspected cases and carried out just short of 63,000 tests, ministry figures indicate. A health ministry official on Monday said more than 93,000 tests are still being processed for results.

Year to date, the number of hospitalizations for severe respiratory symptoms has been over three times higher than usual for the time of year, but only 12% of those have been confirmed as COVID-19.



Traffic moves along Brasil Avenue, one of the main roads in the city, during a period of social isolation, amid the COVID-19 outbreak, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, yesterday.

"The high degree of under-notification could give a false impression about control of the disease, and consequently, could lead to a decline in containment measures," the center said.

The center has thus far been accurate in predicting the evolution of the virus in Brazil, with the number of confirmed coronavirus cases through March 30 falling within the range that the researchers previously

predicted.

The researchers are now predicting that by April 20 the number of cases will grow to 25,164 in its most optimistic scenario and 60,413 cases in its most pessimistic.

## Mexico President challenges critics to vote him out early

REUTERS — MEXICO CITY

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador yesterday offered to bring forward a referendum on his presidency to June 2021 from 2022 as he sought to silence mounting criticism from businesses and the opposition of his record in power.

In recent days, critics of Lopez Obrador's management of the economy, his security record and handling of the coronavirus pandemic have urged voters to take advantage of a so-called recall referendum on his presidency in 2022 to vote him out.

Lopez Obrador, who won election by a landslide in 2018, proposed the referendum and



Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador during a news conference in Mexico City, Mexico, on April 10, 2020.

initially wanted to hold it on the same day as mid-term legislative elections due in June 2021.

However, the opposition balked at that and managed to force him to move the planned vote into the spring of 2022. Now that the President's popularity has fallen sharply, critics have seized on the referendum as a means of kicking him out early.

Never shy of scrapping with his adversaries, the leftist Lopez Obrador challenged them to put their grievances to the public by moving the recall vote to when he first proposed it.

"I'm offering them to bring forward the date. That we don't wait until 2022 for the recall vote, that we take advantage of the (mid-term) elections by holding it the same day," he told reporters at a regular gov-

ernment news conference.

Lopez Obrador, 66, took office in December 2018 with his approval ratings as high as 80% in some polls. But his popularity has tumbled in recent months and a daily survey by polling firm Mitofsky now puts his approval rating at 46.5%.

Mexico slipped into a mild recession last year, dragged down by a slump in investment precipitated in particular by concerns about the President's readiness to allow major contracts signed under the previous government to be called into question. And despite Lopez Obrador's pledge to reduce record levels of gang-fueled violence plaguing the country, homicides crept up to new highs in 2019.

## Bolivia's former president to donate salary to virus efforts

ANATOLIA — ANKARA

Bolivia's former President Evo Morales has announced that he will donate 100% of his former president's income in efforts to combat coronavirus outbreak inside the country.

"In the framework of my proposal for public servants to contribute to the #Coronavirus crisis, I will donate 100% of my former president's income for community kitchens in popular neighborhoods of humble families, as soon as the de facto government makes the payment viable," Morales said on Monday on Twitter, referring to the government led by Jeanine Anez.

Morales previously recommended that public officials who earn more than 7,000 Bolivian Bolivianos (nearly \$1,020) should donate 1,000 Bolivianos (\$145) of their salary for two or three months for a fund for community kitchens that guarantee food for poor families.

Bolivia is one of the countries which has the lowest number of virus cases and fatalities in the region.

Following the confirmation of the first coronavirus-related death in late March, the country has recorded 28 deaths among 354 cases, and 6 recoveries so far.

## US deportation flights resume to Guatemala

AP — GUATEMALA CITY

Guatemala again began receiving deportation flights from the United States this week after a one-week pause prompted by three deportees testing positive for COVID-19.

The Guatemalan government had asked the United States to not send more than 25 deportees per flight, to give them health exams before departure and to certify that they were not infected.

However, the flights resumed on Monday with 76 migrants aboard the first and 106 on the second.

The flights came on the same day that the US State Department announced that aid would continue to Guatemala and the other Northern Triangle countries.

At least three of the migrants who arrived on Monday were taken directly to a hospital for COVID-19 testing. One of the flights also included 16 unaccompanied minors, according to the Guatemalan Immigration Institute.

Citing the epidemic, the US has started swiftly deporting unaccompanied minors rather than holding them in protective settings as specified by law.

Also on Monday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement that he had informed Congress that the US government would continue assistance for Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in order to continue to lower illegal immigration and accomplish other policy objectives.

Pompeo said that since illegal immigration from those three countries peaked in May 2019, "encounters" with migrants from those countries had fallen by 76%.

The US government has effectively ended any possibility of seeking asylum at the southern border with emergency restrictions applied in the face of the epidemic.

## Third environmental activist killed in Mexico this year

AP — MEXICO CITY

The UN human rights office in Mexico issued a statement on Monday condemning the killing of an environmental activist in the violent Gulf coast state of Veracruz.

The office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said Adán Vez Lira was shot to death on April 8 while he rode his motorcycle in the township of Actopan.

Vez Lira was a longtime supporter and organizer at the La Mancha bird-watching reserve on the sparsely

populated stretch of coast north of the Veracruz state capital.

"Adán Vez Lira was a recognized environmental activists whose voice and leadership had played a notable role in several environmental defense causes in Actopan," the office said.

Mourners who posted messages on the reserve's Facebook page said he also was active in opposing mines and preserving wetlands. The area is noted for its tropical forest and coastal lagoons.

He was at least the third environmentalist killed in Mexico this year.

Mexico's National Human Rights Commission said at least two other activists have been killed in 2020.

In late March, unidentified gunmen shot to death Isaac Medardo Herrera, a lawyer and activist who defended a rural tract against development near the Mexican city of Cuernavaca.

His neighborhood activist group in Jiutepec, Morelos posted a statement saying the killers knocked on the door of Herrera's home and shot him, before fleeing.

Herrera had led a fight over

at least four years to stop plans to build a housing development on the Los Venados tract, an environmentally sensitive woodland area in Jiutepec, just south of Cuernavaca.

The development was halted and the area was supposed to be used as a nature reserve.

The Mexican Center for Environmental Rights reported that 15 land defenders were killed in Mexico in 2019. Morelos, the state where Jiutepec is located, was the third most dangerous for environmental activists in 2019.



## Salvadoran troops enforce quarantine

A man is held by security personnel after violating the quarantine to go for shopping groceries during a nationwide quarantine, in San Salvador, El Salvador, on Monday.

## Alleged Brazilian kingpin arrested after 20 years on the run

AFP — MAPUTO

One of Brazil's most wanted criminals, an alleged drug lord accused of running international cocaine operations for the country's biggest gang, was arrested on Monday in Mozambique, authorities have said.

Gilberto "Fuminho" Aparecido dos Santos, an alleged leader of the First Capital Command (PCC), was arrested in an international sting that included agents from Brazil, Mozambique and the US

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Mozambique police confirmed the arrest yesterday.

He is accused of shipping tonnes of cocaine around the world, the Brazilian federal police said in a statement.

"The accused was considered the largest cocaine supplier" for the PCC, and had been on the run for more than 20 years, it said.

Dos Santos was arrested at the Montebelo Indy, a luxury hotel in Maputo, along with two

Nigerian nationals, according to a statement by Mozambican authorities.

He had arrived in the southern African country mid-March, Mozambique police spokesman Leonardo Simbine, told reporters.

Brazil issued an international arrest warrant two years ago. Police said there was no evidence that dos Santos had previously been to Mozambique. Simbine said, however, "he does not operate alone, he is part of a gang." "We are still

investigating whether there are other gang members in Mozambique," he said.

One of the Nigerians held a visitor's visa for Mozambique while the other had a temporary residence visa.

Born in the prisons of Sao Paulo in the 1990s, the PCC is considered Brazil's top criminal gang, wielding control over cocaine supply routes from Colombia, Peru and Bolivia.

Its leader, Marcos Williams Herbas Camacho, is serving a sentence of more than 200

years in a maximum-security prison in the capital Brasilia.

Dos Santos is accused, among other things, of financing a plot to help Camacho escape, police said.

Mozambique police said it was still too early to speak of dos Santos possibly being extradited to Brazil to be tried.

Police recovered a fake Brazilian passport, 100 grammes of cannabis, 15 mobile phones and a car, as well as cash equivalent to around \$800 in Mozambican and South African currency.

# Trump's May 1 target for restarting economy 'overly optimistic': Fauci

REUTERS — WASHINGTON/NEW YORK

US President Donald Trump's May 1 target for restarting the economy is "overly optimistic," his top infectious disease adviser said yesterday, after a battle erupted between Trump and state governors over who has the power to lift restrictions aimed at curbing the coronavirus pandemic.

Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said public health officials must be able to test for the virus quickly, isolate new cases and track down new infections before social-distancing restrictions can be eased.

Trump's administration has recommended stay-at-home guidelines through the end of April, and Trump has floated May 1 as a possible date to start reopening some areas.

That date may be "a bit overly optimistic," Fauci, who has become a trusted national figure during the pandemic, said in an interview with AP.

Trump, a Republican running for re-election on November 3, lashed out at Democratic state governors, suggesting they were "mutineers" after New York's Andrew Cuomo said he would refuse any order by the President to

» Trump, insisting it was his decision when to reopen the economy, talked of "mutineers" after New York's governor said he would refuse any order by the President to reopen too soon.

» The US death toll from COVID-19 stood at nearly 25,000 yesterday, out of more than 584,000 known cases.

reopen the economy too soon. "If he ordered me to reopen in a way that would endanger the public health of the people of my state, I wouldn't do it," Cuomo told *CNN* early in the day, referring to Trump.

At a news conference later, Cuomo added, "We don't have a king in this country, we have a Constitution and we elect the President."

The coronavirus restrictions have crippled the US economy — with businesses forced to close and million of Americans becoming unemployed — a development that could hurt Trump's re-election prospects.

Offering an expansive assessment of the powers of the presidency, Trump on Monday asserted he had ultimate authority to reopen the largely shuttered economy even though he earlier had deferred to the governors in putting social-distancing orders in place.

Cuomo, a Democrat whose state has been the epicenter of

the outbreak in the United States, and governors of six other northeastern states said on Monday they would formulate a regional plan to gradually lift the restrictions.

On the Pacific Coast, the governors of California, Oregon and Washington state said they also would take a regional approach, but cautioned that any large-scale reopening would depend on a decline in the rate of spread in their area.

Trump, whose attacks on Democrats appeal to his conservative political base, posted tweets attacking Cuomo individually and Democratic governors in general.

"Tell the Democrat Governors that 'Mutiny On The Bounty' was one of my all time favorite movies," the Trump wrote on Twitter yesterday, referring to a film classic about a rebellion against the commanding officer of a British naval vessel in the late 18th century.

"A good old fashioned mutiny every now and then is an exciting and invigorating thing to watch, especially when the mutineers need so much from the Captain. Too easy!" Trump wrote.

Trump pushed back against the idea that governors should determine when and how to reopen their state economies, insisting that he had that right as president.

"When somebody is the president of the United States, the authority is total," he said at a Monday news briefing. "The governors know that."

Trump and Vice-President Mike Pence met with people who had recovered from COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus, at the White House yesterday and heard stories about their recoveries.

Some Republicans, including the governors of Ohio, Maryland and New Hampshire, have also said the states had the right to decide when and how



US President Donald Trump speaking during a meeting with patients who have recovered from the novel coronavirus, at the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday.

to reopen the economy.

The political posturing coincides with fresh signs the pandemic has been slowing in New York and other states where it struck early.

The US death toll from COVID-19 stood at nearly 25,000 yesterday, out of more than 584,000 known US infections.

Hospitalizations in New York have fallen for the first

time since the onset of the pandemic, Cuomo said, adding, "We think we are at the apex on the plateau." "It has been the most painful number every day," Cuomo said.

Cuomo said 778 New Yorkers died in the past day, up from 671 a day earlier that had marked the lowest daily death count since April 5. A total of 10,834 New Yorkers have died due to COVID-19.

## Canada toll above 800; shutdown to continue: PM

REUTERS — OTTAWA

Canada's economic shutdown will last for weeks more to ensure measures to fight the coronavirus are working, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said yesterday, while the death toll from the outbreak rose more than 12 percent.

Trudeau also told a daily briefing that he would shortly have more to say about a promised aid package for the oil and gas industry, which has been hard hit. He did not give details.

Authorities across Canada have ordered a shutdown of non-essential businesses, throwing millions of people out of work. The jobless rate is set to soar to 25 percent from around 6 percent before the crisis struck.

"Everyone is very interested to know when things are going to get back to normal, when they'll be able to go back to work.... The reality is, it is going to be weeks still. We recognize that it is going to be important to get our economy going and we will have to do it in phases," Trudeau said.

"We are having ongoing discussions with the provinces... about how we are going to reopen the economy. It's just that it's going to be a while still."

Public health officials said 823 people in Canada had died of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus, up from 734 on Monday. The number of positive diagnoses rose to 26,163, up from 24,804. Trudeau said authorities would have to be cautious about lifting the restrictions on the economy and the movement of people until a vaccine had been developed.

He also announced Ottawa was prepared to help pay the salaries of workers in long-term care facilities for the elderly, some of which are struggling to cope with the outbreak. Around half the deaths have occurred in seniors' residences.

Public health officials say they are particularly worried about the residences as well as Canada's remote northern regions, where the healthcare system is patchy.

Trudeau said Ottawa would provide a total of C\$140 million in new funding to the country's three Arctic territories to boost health and social services, make food more affordable and support regional airlines.

# Obama endorses Biden for president to 'heal' America

AFP — WASHINGTON

Former US president Barack Obama endorsed Joe Biden's White House bid yesterday, saying his longtime vice-president can unify and "heal" a nation struggling through some of its darkest moments.

The formal backing by perhaps the most popular politician in America is the latest shot in the arm for Biden's surging candidacy, and a further sign that Democratic leaders are rallying around the party flagbearer ahead of November's election.

"Joe has the character and the experience to guide us through one of our darkest times and heal us through a long recovery," Obama said in a 12-minute video filmed at his home in Washington and released online.

"I believe Joe has all the qualities we need in a president right now," Obama said, calling his choice of Biden as running mate in 2008 "one of the best decisions I ever made."

The 77-year-old former vice-president and Democratic stalwart is the party's presumptive nominee to challenge Donald Trump, after his lone



A November 4, 2008 file photo of former president Barack Obama and former vice-president Joe Biden at an election rally in Chicago.

remaining rival Bernie Sanders dropped out of the race last week.

The leftist US senator from Vermont endorsed his former rival on Monday, saying it was time for Americans of all political stripes to "come together" in

support of Biden.

Two-term president Obama also praised Sanders as a champion of progressive ideas, a passionate candidate whose energy and enthusiasm inspired young voters by the millions.

And he said it was time for those progressive supporters to help defeat the Republican incumbent.

"Right now, we need Americans of goodwill to unite in a great awakening against a politics that too often has been characterized by corruption, carelessness, self-dealing, disinformation, ignorance, and just plain meanness," Obama said.

"To change that, we need Americans of all political stripes to get involved in our politics and our public life like never before." Obama's endorsement comes as Biden and Trump have been forced off the campaign trail by the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

Under typical campaign conditions, such high-profile support would be followed by Obama's appearance at a major rally alongside Biden, generating major national buzz and prompting a deluge of campaign donations.

But it remains unclear when, if at all, on-the-ground campaigning will resume in 2020.

Obama forged a special bond with Biden during the eight years the former Delaware senator served as his vice-president.



Two men talk in front of a destroyed home in Nixville, South Carolina, on Monday.

## Tornadoes leave at least 34 dead in US

AP/AFP — BIRMINGHAM, US

The death toll from a tornado outbreak that ravaged parts of southern US rose to at least 34 yesterday as Mississippi officials said a 12th person had died there.

The storms claimed lives in at least six states, and the National Weather Service said preliminary assessments found evidence that at least 27 twisters struck the region.

The strongest twister was an EF-4 tornado that devastated southeastern Mississippi with winds as fast as 170 mph (273 kph).

Hundreds of homes and

businesses were damaged or destroyed, and heavy rains caused flooding in some areas.

Nashville, Tennessee, broke a 71-year-old record by receiving 2.23 inches (5.66 centimeters) of rain in a day, the weather service said.

Damage occurred up the East Coast, with a flurry of tornado warnings issued in Delaware after storms left the Southeast.

Cleaning up and helping people after the storms was complicated by social distancing guidelines and shutdowns meant to safeguard against COVID-19, the disease caused by the new

coronavirus.

US President Donald Trump offered his "warmest condolences" to those affected.

"My administration will do everything possible to help those communities get back on their feet," he said, promising that the Federal Emergency Management Association was already offering assistance.

"It's a tough deal," he said. "It was a bad grouping of tornadoes — something incredible, the horrible, destructive power." Over 1.3 million electricity customers were without power after the storms went through, reported Power-Outage.US.

## US Supreme Court to hear Trump's tax case in May

AFP — WASHINGTON

The US Supreme Court said on Monday that it will hear arguments by teleconference in May over whether President Donald Trump can continue to shield his tax returns from Congress and New York prosecutors.

The nation's highest court had been scheduled to hear arguments in the cases on March 31 but they were delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The court said it would hear the consolidated cases by telephone conference in May, a move which could allow it to deliver a ruling before the November presidential election.

"In keeping with public health guidance in response to COVID-19, the Justices and counsel will all participate remotely," the court said in a statement.

Two of the justices — Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer — are over 80 years old and six of the nine are over 65, putting them at increased risk of becoming severely ill from coronavirus.

In a break with tradition, the court said it would provide a live audio feed of the May arguments to news organizations.

The court normally does not release recordings until several days after a hearing. Gabe Roth, of Fix the Court

which lobbies to modernize the court, said he believed that it would retain a live audio feed permanently and that live video "is not too far behind."

The court said oral arguments in 10 cases would be held on May 4-6 and May 11-13 but it did not assign specific dates yet to each case.

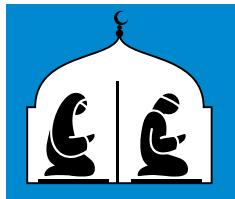
Trump broke with presidential norms during the 2016 election by refusing to release his tax returns as most presidents have done since the 1970s even though it is not required by law.

The New York real estate tycoon claimed his tax returns were under audit by the Internal Revenue Service and he would release them when the audit was done but he has never done so.

Three cases involving attempts to force Trump to release his tax returns and financial records are before the court. They are seen as a key test of the limits of presidential privilege and immunity.

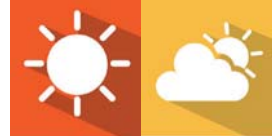
A federal appeals court in New York ordered the accounting firm Mazars USA to release eight years of Trump's tax returns in regards to the investigation, leading his attorneys to approach the Supreme Court.

The other cases involve subpoenas for Trump's tax returns issued by committees in the House of Representatives.



## PRAYER TIMINGS

|         |          |         |          |
|---------|----------|---------|----------|
| FAJR    | 03.53 am | SUNRISE | 05.12 am |
| ZUHR    | 11.34 am | ASR     | 03.04 pm |
| MAGHRIB | 05.58 pm | ISHA    | 07.28 pm |



## WEATHER TODAY

**21°C** | **26°C**  
Minimum | Maximum

Partly cloudy with a chance of cattered rain maybe thundery at places and slight dust at times.

HIGH TIDE 07:55- 22:47 LOW TIDE 05:00 - 15:33

» ALRUWAIS: 20°-25° » ALKHOR: 20°-26° » DUKHAN: 20°-28° » WAKRAH: 21°-26° » MESAIEED 21°-26° » ABUSAMRA 20°-28°



Follow The Peninsula on Instagram



# Scientists use lockdown as dry run for Mars mission

REUTERS — TOULOUSE

French space scientists are using the COVID-19 lockdown as a dry run for what it will be like to be cooped up inside a space craft on a mission to Mars.

The guinea pigs in the experiment are 60 students who are confined to their dormitory rooms in the southern city of Toulouse — not far removed from the kind of conditions they might experience on a long space mission.

When the French government imposed movement restrictions to curb the spread

**The advantage of the lockdown mission is that researchers had access to a larger sample size; most simulated missions involved four to six people.**

of the virus, space researcher Stephanie Lizy-Destrez decided to make the most of a bad situation, and signed up the student volunteers.

It's not an exact simulation

of space flight: tasks such as picking up samples from a planet's surface using a lunar rover do not feature, and the students can break off from their virtual space journey for a daily trip outside.

Instead, they conduct computer-based tasks such as memory tests and mental agility tests. They keep a daily journal, and every five days have to complete a questionnaire.

The students have a different set of motivations to real astronauts, said Lizy-Destrez, Associate Professor of Space Systems Engineering at

ISAE-SUPAERO, an aeronautics and space institute in southern France.

"In the case of the participants in the experiment on campus, it's a confinement which was imposed on them," she said.

But the tight living quarters — students are in rooms that measure 12 sq metres (130 square feet) — and the limits on what people can do are similar to conditions people might encounter in space.

So too are the adverse psychological effects this can have on people, which scientists are keen to better understand

before sending astronauts on a mission to Mars that could last several months.

Tom Lawson, a masters student in aerospace engineering who is participating in the programme, described the effects.

"A lot of the students are finding it extremely difficult to keep up with their work and keep up with what they have to do," Lawson said yesterday.

In 2017, six volunteers spent two weeks in Poland in a simulated version of a Mars base. The Mars Desert Research Station in Utah, the United

States, also stages simulated missions.

The advantage of the lockdown mission is that researchers had access to a larger sample size; most simulated missions involved four to six people.

French President Emmanuel Macron has said France will begin relaxing the lockdown from May 11. As with people returning home after a long space mission, the students will need to gradually readjust, said Lizy-Destrez.

"We'll have to be vigilant because there could be unpredictable behaviour," she said.

## 'One coronavirus patient can infect up to 400 people'

ANATOLIA — ANKARA

A coronavirus (COVID-19) patient who does not follow social distancing can infect up to 400 people, a Turkish professor said yesterday.

He quoted a recent study conducted by the University of Massachusetts Amherst, saying therefore lockdown rules must be adhered to.

"This is exponential...we should not forget that COVID-19 is not a disease that will only affect you," Professor Hasan Ozkan, who heads the Department of Gastroenterology at Ankara University, said.

"It is important to maintain social distancing during the outbreak, which could reduce the spread of the virus."

Stressing that two patients in China, who recovered from COVID-19, contracted the virus again, Ozkan said the possibility of reinfection was there.

He said there were no

protective antibodies in the blood of 30 out of 100 patients tested two weeks after their recovery.

"This makes us think that 30 percent of those who recover do not develop immunity, and could be infected again."

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), most people infected with the virus experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment.

However, older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

The virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

At this time, there are no specific vaccines for



Patients, who recovered after new type of coronavirus treatment, are being discharged from the hospital and being sent to their houses accompanied by applauds of doctors and nurses, at Beysehir district in Turkey's Konya, yesterday.

COVID-19. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential treatments.

Nearly two million COVID-19 cases have been reported in 185 countries and regions since last December,

according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. More than 120,400 people, meanwhile, have died.

## Motorola to launch Moto Edge, Moto Edge+ on April 22

IANIS — NEW DELHI

Lenovo-owned smartphone brand Motorola has announced it will unveil its new flagship smartphones, the Motorola Edge Plus and Edge, on April 22.

"It is arriving. Join us for the Motorola Flagship Launch E-vent, April 22nd, 11AM CDT," the company said in a tweet yesterday.

The smartphone maker also shared a six-second teaser which suggests that the device will have waterfall display along with a 90-degree curved edge design.

The company was expected to showcase both the devices at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) earlier this year, but the conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Edge Plus is expected to run on Qualcomm's top-end Snapdragon 865 processor coupled with up to 12GB of RAM and up to 256GB storage.

The handset is expected to feature a large 5,170mAh battery and run on Android 10 out-of-the-box.

The smartphone may come with 108MP sensor seen on the back of the phone, with two more cameras: a 16MP wide-angle camera and an 8MP telephoto camera.

The cheaper Edge model might feature less powerful hardware and a 64MP main sensor.

It may run on Qualcomm's Snapdragon 765 processor with 6GB of RAM and 128GB of onboard storage.

Motorola Mobility was sold to Lenovo in 2014. Motorola made its first Android smartphone in 2009, and its first Android tablet in the year 2011.

## Jon Bon Jovi asks kindergartners to 'Do What You Can'

AP — PALM BEACH GARDENS

A Florida kindergarten teacher took his virtual classroom to new levels on Monday when rock icon Jon Bon Jovi (pictured) popped in on a writing lesson about life in the coronavirus quarantine.

Last month, the Grammy award-winning 80s rocker released an incomplete version of "Do What You Can," which is a ballad about the nation's battle to contain the virus, and asked fans to submit verses to help complete it, the *Palm Beach Post* reported.

Michael Bonick, a teacher at Marsh Pointe Elementary School in Palm Beach Gardens and life-long Bon Jovi fan, saw



the singer's invitation and found contact information online for a member of Bon Jovi's staff. He sent along his students' writings about being stuck at home in quarantine.

A staffer replied that Bon Jovi wanted to meet the kids, and he popped onto their laptop screens at 10am on Monday.

"Mr. B got you guys writing and I was very excited to hear that," the former Bon Jovi frontman told the students, "because if you get to put your feelings down on paper sometimes they'll turn into songs, sometimes they'll turn into stories and you never know where it might lead you."

So far, the singer has received thousands of proposals

online, some of which he works into performances of the song that he broadcasts online from his home in New Jersey.

As the 20 kindergartners — and their parents — watched, Bon Jovi strummed an acoustic guitar and sang out three kindergartners' writing prompts about life in quarantine, each one touching on themes of idleness and isolation.

After singing eight lines ending with, "My parents try their best/But I can tell that they're stressed," he congratulated the author, a boy named AJ.

"You're a rock and roll star," he said. "We wrote this one together, me and you buddy."

Bonick made the homework assignment last week and encouraged the young children to write about where they are and who they are with. He said the recurring theme was being stuck at home, which is fine because he wants the young writers to document their lives in such an extraordinary time.

"Once we get out of this — because we will get out of this — it's history," he said.

A lifelong Bon Jovi fan, Bonick had seen the singer's invitation to fans to propose their own lyrics for "Do What You Can."

"They were blown away," Bonick said. "They loved every minute of it."

## Russian florists destroy millions of roses as demand wilts amid virus spread fears

REUTERS — MOSCOW

Russia's rose growers are destroying a million flowers a day after a coronavirus-induced slump in sales, with fears of worse to come as self-isolation measures take hold across the country.

With non-essential shops ordered to shut, florists are among many businesses fighting for survival and have turned to online sales in an attempt to recoup some of their lost revenue.

There is no room for excess inventory in such an environment.

In a country where flowers are so popular that some florists operate 24 hours a day, 1.2 million roses are being destroyed daily, the Russian Greenhouse Union said.

"Everyone has tears in their

eyes that they have to be thrown away: they were all grown, they're all alive," Yulia Charyshkina, director and owner of the Podosinka greenhouse complex, said.

President Vladimir Putin said in late March that Russia would embark on a special non-working period to try to curb the spread of the coronavirus and people should work from home if they could.

The move, which forced most businesses to shut except those deemed essential, has stopped many firms from working and squeezed profits as most consumers sit out the coronavirus outbreak at home.

Charyshkina said orders for her company's flowers dived to 5,000 from 50,000 the day after Putin's address. Orders had sometimes fallen to as low as 1,000 a day, she said, forcing

the company to destroy 200,000 flowers in stock and all new cuttings since self-isolation began.

With Russia's annual rose production at 300 million blooms, a month without sales could see 10 to 12 percent of the crop thrown away, Alexei Sitnikov, head of the Russian Greenhouse Union, said.

Producers have turned to the internet in an effort to boost sales, offering hefty discounts and emotional advertisements.

But slashing prices eats into profits and puts employees and entire companies at risk.

"We have a very expensive product. We now have a price that doesn't allow us to live," said Florence Gervais d'Alden, the owner of Kaluga-based firm Rose Fairy, which she set up in 2008.

She said she would eventually have to let some



An employee of a flower shop destroys unsold flowers as lockdown restrictions and self-isolation measures imposed by the government across the country to slow the spread of the COVID-19 led to a slump in flower sales, in Saint Petersburg, Russia, yesterday.

employees go, when a choice needs to be made between salaries and utility bills.

"The scariest thing is that this cycle cannot be stopped," she said. "I personally am

absolutely ready to go bankrupt, but I am not especially sure that we will survive."