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North Korea President Donald Trump sent a personal letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, seeking to maintain good relations and offering cooperation in fighting the viral pandemic, Kim's sister said yesterday. The latest correspondence came as Kim observed the firing of tactical guided weapons over the weekend



Iran's supreme leader refused U.S. assistance yesterday to fight the new coronavirus, citing an unfounded conspiracy theory that the virus could be man-made by America. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's comments come as Iran faces crushing U.S. sanctions blocking the country from selling its crude oil and accessing international financial markets.



Indian migrant workers attempting to reach their home villages crowded a railway station in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh yesterday, defying a 14-hour "people's curfew" that Prime Minister Narendra Modi called to stem a surge in coronavirus cases in the world's second-most populous country.

Egypt Authorities released a prominent political activist Friday amid calls for Egypt to let thousands of others go free to prevent the new coronavirus from spreading among the prison population. According to human rights groups, there are tens of thousands jailed in Egypt for their political views.

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MEDICAL DIRECTOR CALLS ON PUBLIC TO HALT SHAMING OF RETURNEES

ANTHONY LAM

At the end of the daily press briefing yesterday, Lo Iek Long, medical director of the Conde São Januário Hospital, took three minutes to explain that it is useless to blame returning residents for increasing the number of Covid-19 cases.

On the social media pages of several entities, including some local news outlets, the Government Information Bureau, and the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center, users have been posting comments to show their disapproval of Macau residents returning from Europe.

For example, a comment on yesterday's live broadcast of the press conference reads, "The government should mandate Macau ID holders who have not lived in the city for the past seven years to pay their bills if they get hospitalized in Macau for Covid-19."

"We are aware of the occurrence of hate or discriminatory speech against these new patients," Lo stated. "Personal data of some patients was even publicized online."

Lo expressed that these kinds of comments do not help the situation. "My opinion is that such comments do no good for the containment of the virus," Lo explained. "We should not differentiate between returning and local residents."

At the press conference, the authorities were also asked about whether the quarantined return-



nees had opened their hotel room windows or left their rooms, as some reports have already indicated.

"People being quarantined may do unacceptable things out of fear or anxiety," the medical director explained. "In this difficult time, we should be united to fight against the pandemic."

He stressed that the majority of people in Macau, whether they are parents, children or members of the public, have been diligent

in the fight. "The public should rest assured that we will do our part if a minority of people do not follow the rules," Lo stated.

Another social media comment asked why Hong Kong was not able to intercept cases confirmed by Macau. Indeed, four from the nine new cases were intercepted at a Macau border checkpoint.

Lo explained that this was due to the special mechanism that was agreed to by Macau and Hong Kong. "Even if the Hong Kong side

spotted patients, they will be sent to Macau due to the consensus," Lo pointed out.

With regards to false travel history declarations, Lo said that the authorities so far have no evidence to prove them.

Another major topic yesterday was the facemask supply scheme. Today is the start of the seventh round of mask sales in Macau.

This round will be no different to the previous rounds. People should not rush to mask sale loca-

tions at the beginning of the sale, because the quantity is guaranteed to be sufficient.

Following complaints about the quality of masks, with some masks so thin they were nearly transparent, Lo mentioned that the local government first checks the certification provided by the manufacturers. "These certifications should stipulate reliability that meets our requirements," Lo explained.

The local health authority also conducts quality checks on the masks before they are sold. However, considering the large volumes, not all products are able to be checked. A total of 34 million facemasks have been sold in the past 60 days, Lo revealed.

The medical doctor noted that the health authority is receptive to reports of low-quality facemasks. Lo encouraged the public to report to his bureau if quality concerns arise.

The panel was also asked about the number of Portuguese citizens currently quarantined in Macau. Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the local Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), stated the number was 14. She emphasized that only self-declared Portuguese citizens and those who entered Macau with a Portuguese passport were counted.

The health authority also hinted that approaching the government hospital for medical assistance is safe. The triage procedures will differentiate Covid-19 patients from others.

Inês Chan, an official from the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), reminded the currently quarantined population that causing disturbances during their quarantine period may result in criminal prosecution.

Seven quarantine facilities raise supply to over 1,700 rooms

SAN Tung Fong Commercial Inn, South Wing, situated on Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, has become the seventh hotel designated for medical observation purposes, the government announced last night.

With 89 rooms, the latest property to be transformed into a quarantine facility raises the supply of rooms for this purpose to 1,747 across the Macau SAR.

In a recent policy chan-

ge, the government has done away with an earlier measure allowing local residents to undergo their medical isolation either at home or at a government-designated location. Now, residents, upon their return to Macau, are to undergo medical observation at designated hotels only.

In addition to San Tung Fong Commercial Inn, South Wing, the other six properties serving as qua-

rantine facilities are Pousada Marina Infante Hotel, Golden Crown China Hotel, Regency Art Hotel, Grand Coloane Resort, Metropole Hotel, and Treasure Hotel.

The Treasure Hotel, a hotel located in Taipa that is not yet open to the public, is the sixth hotel to be designated as a quarantine facility, as announced by the government over the weekend. The hotel is located opposite Macau Inter-

national Airport and adjacent to the Golden Crown China Hotel.

According to government records, about 1,000 Macau students currently abroad have registered with the government to return home.

To accommodate the large number of returnees, the government is working to designate suitable venues in which to carry out medical examinations and

provide quarantine.

A statement issued by the government stressed that the authorities take into account "a diverse range of factors and conditions" when deciding which properties can be repurposed into quarantine facilities. It must also obtain the consent of the owners of such properties.

During the decision-making process, which is led by the Macao Go-

vernment Tourism Office (MGTO), the Health Bureau must also be consulted on potential risk factors.

The seven hotels currently in use as designated hotels "are committed to social responsibility, and providing support and coordination with the SAR Government for implementation of the measure of medical observation," the government said in a statement. DB/RM

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Three new Covid-19 cases confirmed in matter of hours

MACAU confirmed three new cases of Covid-19 infections last night within a matter of hours.

The 22nd case involves a 44-year-old male resident of Macau who departed Dublin on March 21 to travel to Hong Kong via Frankfurt.

Yesterday afternoon, he arrived at the Macau border post via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge where, due to symptoms including a runny nose, he was transported to the public hospital. A nucleic acid test showed that the man had developed pneumonia caused by the novel coronavirus.

The health authorities said in the early hours of today that more information will be disclosed later.

Hours earlier, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center reported on the 21st case of Covid-19 infection, involving a 19-year-old female resident who returned to Macau last Wednesday.

According to information released by the health authority, the patient boarded flight TG911 (seat 77G) departing from the United Kingdom to Bangkok on March 17, and then took flight TG638 (seat 35C), from Bangkok to Hong Kong. In the early hours of March 18, she took a bus over the Hong



Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge to return to Macau.

Since arriving in Macau, she has been under medical observation at the Golden Crown China Hotel.

Yesterday, a preliminary positive result for the novel coronavirus was obtained from the samples collected in the patient's throat. She was immediately transferred to the public hospital where the positive diagnosis was confirmed.

The patient remains in the care of the public hospital. Her condition is considered normal, according to the health authority.

The 20th patient, confirmed just hours before the 21st, con-

cerns a 20-year-old Macau resident of Portuguese nationality, who is a student in the United Kingdom. According to information disclosed by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center, the male student attended school in Warwick between March 3 and 13 and stayed overnight at a friend's house between March 14 and 15.

On the night of March 16, he took the British Airways flight BA27 (seat 64B) departing from London Heathrow airport. He arrived in Hong Kong on the afternoon of March 17. In the late afternoon, he took a taxi to the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bri-

dge and took the golden bus to Macau.

In Macau, quarantine personnel at the bridge's border post requested, according to the measures required at the time, medical observation at the Golden Crown China Hotel for 14 days.

Earlier yesterday, the patient tested positive in preliminary nucleic acid testing for the novel coronavirus. He was transferred to the public hospital for further testing where it was confirmed that he has pneumonia caused by Covid-19.

At the moment the patient's condition is considered normal. He remains hospitalized in the

public hospital's isolation ward. The local health authorities said in yesterday's statement that they have already notified their Hong Kong counterparts about the case, as well as his travel history.

Meanwhile, earlier in the day, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center announced the city's 19th case. The 19-year-old Macau resident studying in Connecticut is a son of the 18th case who, between February 28 and March 20, traveled to the U.S. to visit her three children, including the young man.

He also visited Mexico between March 8 and 14 and suffered symptoms of muscle pain, sweating, lightheadedness and loss of strength for two days. The symptoms disappeared on March 16. The health authority did not disclose whether the mother had traveled to Mexico with him.

On March 20, the mother, along with her two sons and one daughter, departed from the U.S. for Hong Kong. They flew on Cathay Pacific flight 845 from John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York to Hong Kong.

A day later, after arriving in Hong Kong, they were transferred to Macau by the charter vehicle arranged by the Tourism Crisis Management Office through the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge. The teenager was taken to Metropole Hotel for quarantine.

After his mother's infection was confirmed, he was also tested and later diagnosed with the infection on March 22. He is currently in a stable condition with no symptoms. **DB/AL**

Visitor arrivals plunged 95% in February

DANIEL BEITLER

VISITOR arrivals plunged 95% in February, the same month that Macau casinos faced an unprecedented 15-day shutdown amid an outbreak of the novel coronavirus in mainland China.

About 156,000 people visited Macau last month, according to official data disseminated by the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC), down 95.6% in year-on-year terms.

As one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, Macau received on average more than 3 million tourists per month last year. Tourists from the greater

China region made up the bulk of Macau visitation last year, accounting for over 92% of the 39.4 million visitors.

In December 2019, the last month unaffected by the coronavirus outbreak, mainland visitors to Macau totaled 2.09 million and accounted for 67% of all tourists, while those from the neighboring city of Hong Kong accounted for 21%.

The mainland continued to be Macau's primary visitor source market in February, but its share of visitors dropped to 46% of the total. Visitors from Hong Kong shot up to nearly 40%.

In February, the average length of stay of visitors increased more

than doubled to 2.8 days, attributed by DSEC a growth in the proportion of overnight stays among mainland visitors. The average duration for overnight visitors surged from 2.1 days in February last year to 5.4 days while that for same-day visitors dropped from 0.2 days to 0.1 days, the data shows.

China temporarily suspended the popular Individual Visit Scheme in late January as the country came to terms with the scale of the Covid-19 outbreak.

The scheme allows mainland Chinese to apply for a single-use travel permit to visit Macau or Hong Kong without the need to join a

tour group. Without the scheme, there are few ways for a mainland resident to visit Macau for tourism purposes.

Having largely suppressed the growth in new Covid-19 cases on the mainland, some analysts predict that Beijing will lift the suspension in either April or May.

The collapse in visitation comes as gross gaming revenue plummeted 87.8% last month to just 3.1 billion patacas in the steepest year-on-year decline since the establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region in 1999.

Visitor arrivals and gross gaming revenue are only loosely correlated because of the influence of the volatile VIP casino segment. Analysts told the Times last month that the VIP segment would likely be the first to area to recover.

HK TO EXTEND AIRPORT TESTING TO ASYMPTOMATIC ARRIVALS

HONG Kong will extend Covid-19 testing to asymptomatic arrivals after a sharp rise in infections driven mainly by imported cases, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said.

The government will take other measures, including postponing university entrance exams and ordering civil servants to return to working from home, Lam told the media Saturday. The resumption of schools, which have been closed since the lunar new year in January, will be delayed until further notice, Education Secretary Kevin Yeung said at the briefing.

The number of infections has more than doubled in Hong Kong from two weeks ago after the government said it would quarantine visitors from outside China and

more people returned to the city from virus-hit European countries. On Friday 48 infections were reported, the highest daily toll since the outbreak began.

"The epidemic caused by imported cases from overseas is more severe, more difficult to handle and more likely to cause large-scale, persistent community outbreak than any moment in the past two months of anti-epidemic efforts," Lam said.

On Tuesday, the government said it was extending mandatory 14-day quarantines for all visitors arriving from outside of Greater China. The quarantine measures took effect on Thursday.

The Macau government has urged its residents to avoid non-essential travel to Hong Kong. **BLOOMBERG**



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Property of the Week



FOR SALE

Manhattan High Floor Apartment, Taipa


HK\$17,980,000 2,305 ft² 4 🛏️ 2 🚗

SCAN ME

Fabulous family apartment on a high floor in the Manhattan, located in central Taipa. Four bedrooms: three doubles & one single, separate shower room and en-suite bathroom off the master room. Large open plan living dining area with a galley style modern kitchen with adjacent laundry balcony.

The Manhattan has a super outdoor lap pool and children pool, kids indoor playroom, kids outdoor climbing frame, large terrace for with BBQ pits, indoor private dining room for twenty, and a state of the art gym (better than many local hotels). Two car parks are available for sale separately.

Property Hotlist




FOR SALE

Large Bedroom Apartment, Coloane

\$12,980,000
2,530 ft²
3 🛏️ 2 🚗 2 🚗

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FOR SALE

Two Connected Apartments, Taipa

\$8,380,000
1,404 ft²
4 🛏️ 2 🚗

SCAN ME




FOR RENT

Vai Fung Triplex, Macau

\$15,800/mth
1,065 ft²
2 🛏️ 2 🚗

SCAN ME



FOR RENT

Hellene Garden Furnished, Coloane

\$14,000/mth
1,663 ft²
3 🛏️ 2 🚗 1 🚗

SCAN ME

More Listings


For Sale		For Rent	
[Macau] Apartment in Historical Centre	2 🛏️ 1 🚗 840 ft ² \$4,580,000 (ref: 20016003)	[Taipa] One Grantai	1 🚗 n/a ft ² \$2,500/mth (ref: 19091005)
[Taipa] Hoi Wan Garden	2 🛏️ 1 🚗 900 ft ² \$4,900,000 (ref: 19106003)	[Coloane] Grand Coloane Resort	1 🛏️ 1 🚗 710 ft ² \$10,000/mth (ref: n/a)
[Coloane] Beautiful Apartment	1 🚗 2 🛏️ 1 🚗 1,665 ft ² \$7,200,000 (ref: 19070001)	[Taipa] Nam Long	2 🛏️ 1 🚗 645 ft ² \$11,800/mth (ref: 19111001)
[Macau] Unique G/F Loft	2 🛏️ 2 🚗 2,200 ft ² \$9,990,000 (ref: 15115464)	[Taipa] Manhattan	4 🛏️ 2 🚗 2,305 ft ² \$22,000/mth (ref: 19091003)
[Taipa] One Central Lakeview	2 🛏️ 2 🚗 1,269 ft ² \$12,000,000 (ref: 19070000)	[Taipa] Ocean Garden	4 🛏️ 4 🚗 3,700 ft ² \$35,000/mth (ref: 18040674)

Recent Movements

Sold Pearl on the Lough, 4 beds, Taipa

Sold Hellene Garden, 3 beds, Coloane

Rented Buckingham, 2 beds, Taipa



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Government urges fuel companies to lower prices

RENATO MARQUES

THE government has issued a statement urging fuel companies to lower their prices in Macau due to the significant decrease in the price of petroleum products in international markets. The appeal from the government is a result of complaints from society, namely on social media.

In the past few days, people have been expressing their discontent with the fact that although the prices of fuel products have significantly decreased in world markets, local retail sellers are continuing to sell fuel products at the same prices and have not updated their prices according to the changing situation.

A joint statement from the Consumer Council (CC) and the Economic Services Bureau confirmed that the government is watching international fuel prices closely.

"Taking into account that the international price of crude oil recorded recently was influenced by the Covid-19 epidemic, as well as the breaching of the agreement among countries producing limited oil, the international price of crude oil suffered a significant decrease, falling from around \$67 (535 patacas) per barrel [at the beginning of January 2020] to around \$25 (200 patacas) per barrel [on March 19], a fact that represents a price decrease of about 60%."

The statement also mentio-



ned that in the same period, the international price of refined oil products has fallen by around \$40 per barrel, or as much as two-third of its price at the start of the year.

Although the government acknowledges that local fuel suppliers have reduced retail prices of several products on multiple occasions this year, it also deems it necessary to enforce an immediate adjustment of fuel prices corresponding to the changes in international markets, following the price adjustment guidelines which allow for both the increase and decrease of prices when justified.

In this sense, the government has "urged the sector to adjust the prices for oil pro-

ducts to be consistent with the pace of the international adjustment," and in this way "respond to the demands of society and the population in general."

Meanwhile, in a separate statement, the CC acknowledged that, according to a survey conducted on March 20, the prices of disinfectant products have held stable in the past week.

"It was found that the prices of the 29 disinfectant products [surveyed], including liquid alcohol, alcohol gel, liquid disinfectant soap, and disinfectant detergent, were similar to the prices recorded in the previous survey," conducted a week earlier, the CC said in the statement.

The CC also noted that some of these products that are available on the market still have a price variation of between 15% to 30% when compared between stores or suppliers. Consumers are advised to remain alert to this price variation when seeking to acquire such products.

The council also acknowledged that in the latest survey, the number of disinfectant products available in stores had increased significantly compared to last week. This signifies that items have been restocked and prices should be back to normal after recent price hikes resulting from the limited supply and excessive demand for products due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

50 WORKERS COMPLAIN TO GOVERNMENT ABOUT UNPAID WAGES

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) received complaints on Friday regarding unpaid salaries from a group of 50 local workers consisting of bus drivers, tour guides and salesmen. They accused their employers of owing them salaries since September 2019. They also claimed that they have not been working since the Covid-19 outbreak began two months ago. The whereabouts of their employers are not known either. The group had reported the issue to the DSAL in January but did not receive a response from the bureau. They had also complained to their companies multiple times but did not receive replies.

NON-LOCAL HEALTHCARE WORKERS MAY GET LIMITED APPROVAL TO PRACTICE

The healthcare professionals' qualification and license registration regime has proposed allowing non-local medical professionals to perform limited practices in Macau. The Second Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly (AL) continued discussing the bill last Friday. Lawmakers expressed their concerns about the career prospects for local healthcare professionals, if non-locals are allowed to operate in Macau. The government explained that the approval procedure for giving non-local healthcare professionals access to Macau's market would be restricted, and each approval must be announced via a Chief Executive order. The law currently allows organizations to hire non-local medical professionals only when Macau does not have relevant personnel available.

OVER 22,000 HYGIENE VIOLATIONS RECORDED IN 2019

In 2019, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), together with the Public Security Police Force, recorded over 22,700 cases of hygiene violations. Among these, there were over 11,000 littering cases and 1,787 spitting cases. In 226 of these cases, dog owners failed to clean up dog feces and urine on the streets. In total, the IAM has collected 12 million patacas in fines from all of these violations. This year, the IAM has made 3,763 prosecutions so far. Of these, 61 cases were related to dog feces and urine. Fong Vai Seng, head of the IAM's department of environment, hygiene, and licenses, remarked that the city's dog owners are still only cleaning up their dog's urine with water, stressing that a better cleanup method is necessary. Fong reiterated that the general rule in public places stipulates that failing to clean your dog's feces and urine is punishable. Local residents and foreigners account for half of these cases each. Currently, the IAM has 73 inspectors who work from 6 a.m. to midnight and are responsible for hygiene and environmental matters.

International Short Film Festival accepting submissions until mid-June

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macau International Short Film Festival will be returning for its 11th edition this year.

Formerly known as the Sound & Image Challenge International Festival, the festival is organized by the Center for Creative Industries (Creative Macau) and the Institute of European Studies of Macau. The organizers started accepting submissions on March 16

and will continue to do so until June 16 for the Short Films section, and until July 20 for the best music video award.

The short films section will continue to be organized in three different categories – Fiction, Documentary and Animation movies.

The international annual audio-visual festival will be held at Dom Pedro V Theatre from December 1 to 8 this year, and aims to continue pur-

suing its goal of fostering the production and display of both international and local films through the competition.

Since its first event, the festival has grown and has received international recognition, as demonstrated by the 3,897 submissions received by the organizers last year.

In addition, last year's final shortlist included 120 works across the different categories, representing submissions

from more than 40 different countries and regions.

As the organizers mentioned "the main objective of organizing the festival is to provide knowledge and experience exchange between international filmmakers and their Macau counterparts."

Hence, this year's festival has introduced a new award solely dedicated to student submissions. The "Best Student Film"

award, which is included on the "Shorts" competition, aims to encourage students to show their talent by participating in the festival.

More information and rules of the contest are available on the Macau International Short Film Festival's official website at www.soundandimagechallenge.com.

Macau Daily Times is a media partner of the Macau International Short Film Festival.



On PR offensive, China sends masks and experts abroad

KEN MORITSUGU

AS the fight against a new virus shifts to Europe and beyond, China is supplying millions of masks and other desperately needed items to struggling governments, hoping to build political ties and defuse criticism that it allowed the disease to spread early on.

Serbia's president plans to be at the airport this weekend to welcome a shipment of medical supplies from his "brother and friend," Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Xi's government has flown gloves and protective clothing to Liberia. It is sending 100,000 test kits to the Philippines. More than 10 flights carrying millions of masks and other supplies are bound for the Czech Republic this week.

China, said Czech Interior Minister Jan Hamacek, is "the only country capable of supplying Europe with such amounts."

It's part of an effort by the Communist Party to reshape the narrative, from one of early missteps to a nation that acted decisively to bring the outbreak under control. China is touting its deliveries of ventilators and masks overseas and dispatching its medical experts to share the lessons of its success.

China hopes to benefit from a realization in the West

of how difficult it is to bring the virus under control, said Julian Ku, a law professor at Hofstra University in New York.

"The Chinese government's failures ... will be less harshly viewed in light of the failures of other governments to respond effectively as well," he said.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic blasted the European Union and praised China for offering help when he announced a state of emergency to combat the outbreak. His country wants to join the EU, but his government has moved closer to Russia and China in a seesaw battle for influence.

"I believe in my brother and friend Xi Jinping and I believe in China's help," Vucic said. "European solidarity," he said, was just a fairy tale. EU officials denied they were stopping aid to Serbia, but said their first priority was EU members.

China has given \$20 million to the World Health Organization for COVID-19 efforts. While the EU and the U.S. have made larger pledges to combat the disease, they are now preoccupied by the crisis at home.

The Chinese "are winning points," said Theresa Fallon, the founder of the Center for Russia Europe Asia Studies in Brussels. "Serbia thinks that China is their savior."

Six weeks ago, Chinese authorities were trying to quell outrage at home and condemnation abroad. The critics said due to politically motivated foot-dragging, China had mishandled the viral outbreak racing through a major province and its capital, Wuhan.

Now the criticism is raining down on governments from Tehran to Washington, D.C. A visiting Chinese Red Cross official chastised Italy on Thursday for letting so many people stroll the streets of Milan.

"Right now we need to stop all economic activity, and we need to stop the mobility of people," said Executive Chairman Sun Shuopeng.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast majority of people recover from the new virus.

At one level, China is reciprocating assistance it received. Nearly 80 countries sent supplies to China, some on charter flights they sent to evacuate their citizens from Wuhan.

"It is China's traditional virtue to repay goodwill with greater kindness," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said, citing an ancient Confucian saying:

"You throw a peach to me, and I give you a white jade for friendship."

But at the same time, China is deepening ties with countries that have been receptive to its outreach as it assumes a larger international role. It is shipping supplies to Cambodia, whose Prime Minister Hun Sen has been an outspoken supporter of Xi and even visited him in Beijing last month as the outbreak raged.

China moved quickly to send experts and equipment to Italy, which last year became the first western European country to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. The massive program seeks to expand trade by building ports, roads and other transportation projects in a 21st century version of the fabled Silk Road.

China is ready to work with Italy to contribute to international cooperation on epidemic control and to the building of a "Health Silk Road," Xi was quoted as telling Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte in a phone call Monday.

"It's not an accident that the heat map of where Xi Jinping is sending condolences and China is sending N95 masks overlaps pretty closely with those countries that have demonstrated a willingness to accommodate China," said Daniel Russel, a former senior U.S. diplomat now with the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York. **AP**

HALF OF CHINESE RETAILERS RISK COLLAPSE WITHIN SIX MONTHS

ALMOST half of China's listed consumer companies don't have enough cash to survive another six months, underscoring the urgent task Beijing has to re-start its economy and get shoppers spending again.

Restaurants are in the worst shape as the coronavirus outbreak has kept consumers at home, with about 60% unable to cover labor and rental costs, according to data compiled by Bloomberg and company reports covering 50 listed firms. Among jewelry and apparel companies, almost half don't have the cash to last the six months unless demand rebounds sharply, the data show.

While the number of coronavirus infections in China has tapered off and retailers including Starbucks Corp. and Haidilao International Holding Ltd. have reopened more of their stores in low-risk areas, demand looks unlikely to rebound quickly as consumers remain hesitant to leave their houses after weeks of government warnings about the dangers of mingling with others.

Although Chinese factories have resumed production, hopes of a V-shaped recovery in retail and services have waned as the pandemic widens globally, sickening over 210,000 people and killing over 8,700. Economists now expect \$2.7 trillion to be wiped from the global economy.

Domestically, the largest consumer companies are in a position to stay afloat the longest. Hotpot chain Haidilao has hundreds of millions of dollars to support its business through nine months, and retailers Anta Sports Products Ltd. and Chow Tai Fook Jewellery Group Ltd. can also cover selling and marketing expenses beyond the six months.

Others are facing a reckoning much sooner. Leysen Jewelry Inc. can only cover fixed costs for three months. Fast-food operator Jiumaojiu International Holdings Ltd. and shoemaker Daphne International Holdings Ltd. will run out of cash even sooner if shoppers continue to stay home.

Many of China's small and medium businesses are already collapsing as they run out of cash, but the vulnerability of the publicly listed consumer companies points to greater economic danger, as some of these employ thousands of workers across the country. Store closures and layoffs are expected, said analysts.

Data released last week showed retail sales in the world's second-biggest economy plunged 20.5% in the first two months of the year, with the catering sector tumbling 43.1%.

China's government has cut interest rates, ordered banks to boost lending and loosened criteria for companies to restart operations and get the economy back on track. Local governments are also launching stimulus to bring customers out of their homes to spend money. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

AP PHOTO



A part of the old town of Edinburgh, Scotland, as seen on Saturday

THE virus pandemic advanced yesterday after the U.S. and Europe reported soaring new cases, prompting a scramble in some regions to set up additional hospital beds and replenish much-needed medical supplies.

Italy announced its biggest day-to-day increase of infections, which rose by 6,600 with nearly 800 new fatalities from the virus that causes COVID-19. The country's total death toll of more than 4,825 has surpassed the number of deaths in China, where the first cases emerged late last year.

In the U.S., where multiple states have ordered residents to stay indoors, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said the government is "literally scouring the globe looking for medical supplies." Health care workers from Oklahoma City to Minneapolis sought donations of protective equipment. Staff at a Detroit hospital began creating homemade face masks for workers. Even rural hospitals were strained as people increasingly felt the pandemic closing in.

In Washington, negotiators from Congress and the White House resumed top-level talks on a ballooning \$1 trillion-plus economic rescue package, urged by President Donald Trump to strike a deal to steady a nation thoroughly upended by the coronavirus pandemic. Trump continued to strike a confident tone about the nation's ability to defeat the pandemic soon,

Virus advances around the world as medical supplies dwindle

even as health leaders nationwide acknowledged that the U.S. is nowhere near the peak for the outbreak.

"We are going to be celebrating a great victory in the not too distant future," he said.

The contagion is starting to be felt in U.S. cities far from major metropolitan areas, including places that have resisted drastic shutdown measures. About 150 countries now have confirmed cases, and deaths have been reported in more than 30 American states. There are now more than 300,000 confirmed cases worldwide, according to a running tally by Johns Hopkins University.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with

more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover.

In Italy, local authorities in the hard-hit northern regions have been pleading with the national government to enact stricter measures. Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte told the nation he was tightening a lockdown and shutting down all production facilities except those providing essential goods and services. He cautioned citizens to be calm and patient, saying there is no alternative.

Behind China and Italy, Spain now has the third-highest number of infections worldwide, followed by the U.S.

Spanish health authorities have acknowledged that some intensive care units in the hardest-hit areas are close to their limit. The army was building a field hospital with 5,500 beds in a convention center in Madrid, where hotels are also being turned into wards for virus patients without serious breathing problems.

Lockdowns and curfews continue across the globe in a bid to contain the spread of infections

before healthcare systems are overwhelmed. Streets, squares and highways in major cities are deserted. In the U.S., New Jersey and St. Louis were added to a growing list of areas where residents were ordered to stay home.

Singapore said yesterday that it will fully shut its borders from tomorrow after recording its first two deaths. All short-term visitors will from tomorrow be barred from entering or transiting through the city-state in order to reduce the risk of imported cases and free up resources to focus on citizens, the government said in a statement. It said Singapore citizens, permanent residents and foreigners with long-term work passes can return but must undergo a 14-day self-quarantine.

The Chinese city of Wuhan — where the global pandemic was first detected and the first city to be locked down — went a fourth consecutive day yesterday without reporting any new or suspected cases of the virus. Wuhan must go 14 straight days without a new case in order for draconian travel restrictions to be lifted. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1983 REAGAN LAUNCHES COLD WAR INTO SPACE

President Reagan has unveiled plans to combat nuclear war in space.

The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) proposes a defensive shield, using laser or particle beam technology to "intercept and destroy" incoming missiles as they travel through the stars.

Defense analysts have described it as the first major attempt to move away from the 30 year-old Cold War strategy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) - where the threat of nuclear attack acts as a deterrent.

In a televised address from the White House the US leader said: "We seek neither military superiority nor political advantage. Our only purpose - one all people share - is to search for ways to avert the danger of nuclear war."

Speaking just half an hour after the House of Representatives (HOR) had rejected the Republican Party's demands for 10% increases in defence spending, President Reagan attempted to justify his \$2 trillion, five-year military spending plans.

In the first major congressional revolt against Mr Reagan's economic policies the HoR have voted in Democrat proposals to reduce the Republican budget by more than half.

The President said: "They're the same kind that led the democracies to neglect their defences in the 1930s and invited the tragedy of World War II."

Senior White House aide Michael Deaver reported a positive reaction to Mr Reagan's scheme: "He has had the most favorable response to any speech since he was elected President."

Critics argue SDI contravenes the Soviet-American Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972.

Article V of the treaty states: "Each party undertakes not to develop, test or deploy anti-ballistic missile systems or components."

President Reagan has stressed SDI does not entail the actual development of a defensive shield, but is a programme for research and development.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Reagan's SDI became known as "Star Wars" - after the George Lucas film.
President Andropov of the USSR was highly critical of the plan, saying it violated the 1972 ABM Treaty and there was little difference between building up weapons for purportedly defensive or offensive purposes.
The Democrats in the US - and even some Republicans - claimed Reagan's initiative was an expensive and unfeasible diversion from his administration's domestic failures.
SDI signalled a new round in the Arms Race and a worsening of the relationship between the US and the USSR.
The increasing financial strain it placed the Soviet Union under contributed to the break up of the regime.
SDI was abandoned in 1993 and the department was renamed the Ballistic Missile Defence organisation.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Listen to the problems of others and offer suggestions where possible. Others may want to steal your thunder when they realize your ideas are pretty solid. Sudden trips may take you by surprise.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
 Take time to relax. Stress and pressure at home may have worn you ragged. Get busy doing all those things at home that you have been putting off for so long. Don't let your family put demands on you.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
 Encourage the youngsters in your family. Don't let jealous friends put you down, making you insecure about your capabilities. You may find out that someone has not been completely honest with you.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Keep your wits about you and be sure that you can trust those you confide in. You will get out of shape easily if you don't keep on top of things. Helping children may be rewarding and challenging.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 You don't like confrontations at the best of times; however, you may find them difficult to avoid. You will have a tendency to exaggerate, which will lead to major confrontations with loved ones.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 You can find out interesting information if you get a chance to talk to people you respect. You can handle situations that require contact with institutions or large corporations.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Be sure to use your charm when dealing with new clients. Insincere gestures of friendliness may be misleading. Try to join groups of interest such as ballroom dance classes or perhaps an internet organization.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Try not to donate to organizations if you can hardly afford to take care of yourself. Travel may change your attitudes with regard to your philosophy. Your diplomatic nature will help you.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Take time to explain your intentions to loved ones. You're apt to make a move or experience changes at home. Your communication skills are at an all-time high.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Travel will be to your advantage; however, it might be expensive. You could have a change of heart if an old flame waltzes back into your life. Get involved in volunteer work that will bring you satisfaction.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Sudden trips will take you by surprise. Your ideas can be put into action. You can expect changes in your financial situation as well as in your status.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Finish projects that have been hanging over your head. Get busy making those changes to your home. Your dramatic approach to life has probably gotten to your mate.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-2	11	clear
Harbin	-16	0	clear
Tianjin	0	12	cloudy
Urumqi	-2	7	clear
Xi'an	2	16	cloudy
Lhasa	-2	11	cloudy
Chengdu	10	15	overcast
Chongqing	11	16	overcast
Kunming	8	20	cloudy
Nanjing	2	12	clear
Shanghai	5	10	clear
Wuhan	5	16	clear
Hangzhou	4	12	cloudy
Taipei	15	16	drizzle
Guangzhou	13	18	overcast
Hong Kong	16	19	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	2	6	cloudy
Frankfurt	2	10	moderate rain
Paris	6	9	moderate rain
London	2	10	drizzle
New York	0	9	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Hunk; 5- Org.; 9- Gilpin of "Frasier"; 13- Othello villain; 14- Circus performers?; 16- Classic autos; 17- Boris Godunov, for one; 18- Appropriate; 19- Romain de Tiroff, familiarly; 20- "___ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto); 21- Hellenic vowel; 22- Place side by side; 24- Crash wherever convenient; 26- Graven image; 27- Moonshine; 29- Turbinate; 33- Punctuation mark; 34- Hawaiian outdoor feast; 35- City on Norton Sound; 36- Messenger ___; 37- Quake; 38- Point of no return?; 39- The last Mrs. Chaplin; 41- CPR experts; 42- Measured with a watch; 44- Review; 46- Like Loki; 47- Boot attachment; 48- Search; 49- Walk stealthily; 52- Caught ya!; 53- Indifferent; 57- Calculus calculation; 58- More pleasant; 60- Store sign; 61- Assignment; 62- Lake in the Sierra Nevada; 63- Factory; 64- Poker stake; 65- Blend; 66- Hard to hold;

DOWN: 1- Construction locale; 2- Miss; 3- Turkish titles; 4- Tedium; 5- Anew; 6- Narrow openings; 7- Nintendo rival; 8- Slangy negative; 9- Devise beforehand; 10- Architect Saarinen; 11- Goes bad; 12- Aha!; 15- Sports arena; 23- ___ favor; 25- Andean tuber; 26- Bridge declaration; 27- High public esteem; 28- Muscat native; 29- Connected series of rooms; 30- Fertile soils; 31- Host; 32- Feat; 33- Plastic clog; 34- Mammal of Madagascar; 37- Following; 40- On the line; 42- Digit of the foot; 43- Annoying; 45- Wall St. debut; 46- Approached; 48- Biblical abode of the dead; 49- Parting word; 50- OPEC member; 51- Annoyance; 52- Dull pain, often in the head or back; 54- Mayberry moppet; 55- Offer; 56- One's partner; 59- Cartesian conclusion;

Friday's solution

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

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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CASINOS, CRUISE LINES POISED FOR AID AS BAILOUT LIST GROWS

CHRISTOPHER PALMERI & PATRICK CLARK

The biggest casino operator on the Las Vegas Strip weathered the 2008 financial crisis and a gunman's rampage nine years later that killed 58 and wounded hundreds. But now, with the coronavirus pandemic, MGM Resorts International is asking for help from the federal government.

MGM's chief executive officer, Jim Murren, was among the hospitality-business leaders who met at the White House with President Donald Trump. The administration is considering a \$1.3 trillion bailout for a range of Americans as the country shuts down to stem the virus's spread.

For MGM and its staff, the cost of the early days of the pandemic has been stark: The company furloughed 70,000 workers when it closed its resorts this week.

"Las Vegas, as you know, will come back rapidly once you give us the green light," Murren said at a press conference after the meeting with Trump. "But it's very important that we keep these people on our payrolls as soon as possible."

Casinos are asking for grants, loan guarantees or tax credits. The administration is considering an array of responses for the country, including giving every U.S. citizen \$1,000 to help weather the virus storm.

But there's something jarring about the sheer breadth of industries, from movie theaters to cruise lines, lining up with hat in hand seeking federal aid - and being taken seriously. In a crisis that's sweeping through so much of the economy, every sector can make the argument that it employs too many people and contributes too much to economic growth to be left behind.



A pedestrian walks along the Las Vegas Strip in Las Vegas

NO. 1 PRIORITY

At a press conference last week, Trump said the airlines were his "No. 1" priority, but that other industries were important.

"We're also playing with a lot of numbers, a lot of very big numbers and a lot of very small numbers frankly," he said. "We have to help everybody. It was nobody's fault this happened. None of these companies that all of a sudden had no passengers on planes, no passengers on cruise ships. They can't be blamed for this."

Democrats, including Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, said corporate handouts should be accompanied by, among other things, prohibitions on stock buybacks, which are intended to boost share prices but potentially take money away from workers.

"That money should come with serious long-term change to

the companies - no more buybacks, a \$15 minimum wage, and more," Warren wrote on Twitter.

New York Senator Chuck Schumer, a Democrat, gave a similar message at another press conference. "The aid has to be workers first, if we're going to help these industries," he said. "Not what happened in 2008, where the big boys got helped and the workers and everybody else were left by the wayside."

RETAIL AND OIL

The hospitality industry is hardly alone in asking for help. The requests are flowing in from a range of companies, from retailers to oil drillers and beyond.

According to the National Association of Theatre Owners, "the business model of the movie theater industry is uniquely vulnerable in the present crisis."

Robert Reffkin, chief executi-

ve officer of real estate brokerage Compass, is urging lawmakers to give workers in his industry assistance too. "Shelter in place" policies and social distancing prevent agents from showing properties, curbing their ability to make a living, Reffkin said in a letter to members of Congress.

OBAMA'S APPROACH

If Trump, a former casino owner, is more interested in aid for gambling companies, that would be in contrast to former President Barack Obama, who was criticized for telling people not to go to Las Vegas during the early stages of the 2008 financial crisis.

In fairness, Obama was speaking to bankers about their expense-account spending after receiving government aid. But some casino operators never forgave him. The Obama administration was also criticized

for bailing out banks and auto-makers, though those moves in retrospect seem to have thwarted a broader depression in the U.S. economy.

Back then, the feeling was that "banks screwed us over. Now we have to bail them out, there's a of validity to that feeling," said Bryan Del Monte, president of the Aviation Agency, a marketing group for the industry.

"I don't right now want to make moral judgments about whether this business serves the national interest," he said. "We've got to make sure the U.S. economy doesn't bleed out."

Not everyone want to see checks just fly out the door to casino operators or any others. Four Democratic Senators, including Edward Markey of Massachusetts and Connecticut's Richard Blumenthal, sent the Senate leadership a letter last Wednesday asking that strings be attached to federal handouts, including ending airline baggage fees and requiring doctors on cruise ships.

'MONEY FOR NOTHING'

Greg Mankiw, an economics professor at Harvard University, said he agreed money should come with restrictions.

"I would not bail out any company in the sense of handing them money for nothing," he said. "Providing loans makes more sense, as was done with the banks in 2008-2009. These loans often came with warrants for the government, and the taxpayer ended up making money on the deals."

The pressure is intense. The U.S. Travel Association, which helped organize the meeting with Trump, said the industry could see its revenue fall by \$355 billion, or 31%, this year - more than six times the drop after 9/11.

"The cold reality is they can't support their employees if they don't have any customers," said Roger Dow, CEO of the association. "And they don't have any customers because of the actions needed to halt the spread of coronavirus." **BLOOMBERG**

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Global athletes group calls for postponement of Olympics

EDDIE PELLIS

A worldwide group representing Olympic hopefuls is calling on the IOC to postpone the Tokyo Olympics until the coronavirus pandemic is under control.

"As the world unites to limit the spread of Covid-19 virus, the IOC ... must do the same," Global Athlete said in a news release yesterday.

This show of solidarity among Olympic hopefuls adds to the dozens of individual athletes who have come out against the IOC's current stance, which is to start the games as scheduled on July 24.

The IOC is in consultation with the World Health Organization and has stuck to the position that it's too early for drastic decisions.

"It's bizarre the IOC hasn't shown any real leadership," said Caradh O'Donovan, a Global Athlete founder from Ireland whose karate training has been put on hold due to restrictions in her country. "They're acting as though it's business as usual and



AP PHOTO

it just seems very strange."

O'Donovan said the unevenness around the globe regarding training, doping control and qualifying standards are among her key concerns — thoughts echoed by a number of athletes on social media and in interviews with The

Associated Press over the past few days.

"Athletes want to be part of a solution to ensure the Games are a success," the Global Athlete statement said. "But under the current global restrictions that are limiting public gatherings as well

as closing training facilities and borders, athletes do not have the ability to appropriately prepare for these Games, and their health and safety must come first."

The group also called on broadcasters, specifically NBC, and sponsors "to adopt the same level

of duty of care toward athletes by supporting the IOC and (International Paralympic Committee) with flexibility and understanding during these uncharted times."

The statement came out a few hours after U.S. athletes took part in a conference call to share their feelings about the crisis and the possibility of a postponed Olympics. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee is distributing a survey to athletes, with hopes of sharing some of the responses at an IOC meeting next week.

On Saturday, one of America's best-known Olympians, hurdler and bobsledder Lolo Jones, told the AP she was hoping the IOC would respond with a postponement.

"If our job as Olympians and Olympic hopefuls is to inspire society and be healthy, we're going in direct conflict with that by going out in public to find gyms and tracks and pools that are still open to train for the Games," Jones said. "Some people are doing that because the IOC is telling us to stay ready, to keep training."

It's a thought being echoed by the Global Athlete group.

"My dream is to go to the Olympics this year but it's an impossible task from my perspective and it's the same for a huge number of athletes," O'Donovan said. "I'd be absolutely stunned if they go on in July, as planned." AP

AD

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OPINION

World Views

Gary Shilling, Bloomberg

A LOOK AT ECONOMIES AND MARKETS AFTER COVID-19

The 1920s didn't "roar" until viewed from the perspective of the depressionary 1930s. Similarly, in the aftermath of the serious global recession I believe the coronavirus has sparked, the 2010s will look like a Golden Age of slow but steady economic growth with rising employment and declining inflation and interest rates. Here's what to expect when things return to "normal."

The drift from free foreign trade and globalization toward protectionism that started when China entered the World Trade Organization in 2001 will accelerate. The decline in manufacturing activity and related jobs in the West resulting from globalization and the vulnerability of worldwide supply chains will promote self-sufficiency but also the accompanying inefficiencies. The hopes of politicians that protectionism promotes domestic jobs and incomes will be dashed as, like in the 1930s, trade barriers reduce economic growth and spawn deflation.

The business and education shutdowns due to the virus reveal the waste of much of business travel and classroom time. Face-to-face interactions won't disappear, but instead will be reduced, to the benefit of communications hardware and software and to the detriment of airlines and hotels. Working at home will become even more acceptable.

The business and education shutdowns due to the virus reveal the waste of much of business travel and classroom time. Face-to-face interactions won't disappear, but instead will be reduced, to the benefit of communications hardware and software and to the detriment of airlines and hotels. Working at home will become even more acceptable.

Consumer caution will linger longer after the coronavirus crisis subsides, much as it did after the 2008 financial crisis. The attitude of use it up, wear it out, make do or do without may prevail for years, weighing on consumer spending and retail sales.

Fiscal stimulus will be magnified as monetary policy proves impotent. Beyond recession-induced unemployment relief and income supplements, major infrastructure spending is likely. Both Republicans and Democrats agree it's needed, and the collapse in U.S. Treasury yields in the face of soaring federal deficits have extinguished Washington's fear of huge borrowing to fund deficit spending.

Barring all-out protectionism, global supply will continue to exceed worldwide demand. The resulting saving glut will depress inflation and interest rates. The low rates of inflation, and possibly even deflation, will damp the zeal for spending, further restraining any economic recovery.

The recession may well kill President Donald Trump's re-election hopes and put Democrats in control of the White House and Congress. Then some sort of federal-sponsored medical care-for-all is likely. Also, tax rules to redistribute income from the rich to the poor would be enhanced.

The plunge in crude oil prices may force the Saudis and the Russians to cooperate to try to drive out U.S. frackers. Oil prices would then recover to the \$40 to \$60 per barrel range, but the resilient frackers will keep nipping at their heels.

The recession will push many junk bonds into default, especially those in the energy area. The expanding universe of "fallen angels," or those issuer who have been stripped of their investment-grade credit ratings, may lead to a collapse in junk-rated debt prices and spark a rush into U.S. Treasuries. Lending standards will tighten, much as they did for residential mortgages after the subprime collapse.

As usual, scapegoats will be needed to shoulder the blame for the coronavirus crisis and the recession it's initiating along with the collapse in stock prices. Candidates include the federal government, especially health care officials, and computerized trading on Wall Street. As usual, expect more government regulation in response. [Abridged]

Africa has received a much-needed coronavirus care package from Chinese billionaire Jack Ma.

A cargo flight containing more than 6 million medical items arrived yesterday in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. The supplies from Ma, the founder of China's e-commerce giant Alibaba, will be distributed to African countries in need of supplies to battle the spreading COVID-19 pandemic.

An Ethiopian Airlines cargo flight from Guangzhou, China arrived with 5.4 million face masks, 1.08 million testing kits, 40,000

sets of protective clothing and 60,000 protective face shields, according to Ethiopian officials and the Jack Ma Foundation.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed last week pledged to distribute the supplies to other countries in Africa. Ma has sent similar shipments of medical supplies to countries in Asia, Europe, North America and Latin America.

The virus has been slow to reach Africa but has now spread to at least 42 of the continent's 54 countries, with more than 1,100 cases confirmed.

ISRAELI LEADER OFFERS TO STEP DOWN NEXT YEAR IN UNITY DEAL

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ISRAEL'S prime minister Saturday said he is ready to step down next year as part of a proposed power-sharing agreement with his chief rival meant to steer the country through the coronavirus crisis and end a year-long political deadlock.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made his proposal during a nationally televised interview, calling for the formation of a three-year "emergency" unity government with the rival Blue and White Party.

Netanyahu told Channel 12 TV that he would remain as prime minister for the first year and a half, and allow Blue and White leader Benny Gantz to assume the post for a second year-and-a-half term in September 2021. He said each party would have an equal number of seats in the Cabinet.

"I will give up the prime minister's post in another year and a half," Netanyahu said.

Yair Lapid, a senior Blue and White leader, dismissed Netanyahu's unity offer as insincere. "Next week, we will go to choose a new parliament speaker and work to battle coronavirus for the good of the people," he said.

Israel is facing a growing threat from the coronavirus pandemic. It has detected nearly 900 cases and on Friday reported its first death. With the public largely confined to their homes, the economy appears to be in great danger, with tens of thousands of people losing their jobs.

Blue and White has accused Netanyahu of using the coronavirus crisis to undermine the country's democratic institutions and try to derail his scheduled trial on corruption charges. Senior members of Gantz' party have expressed skepticism at previous power-sharing overtures by Netanyahu, concerned that he would not follow through on his promises to cede power.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Israel this month held its third inconclusive election in under a year. Netanyahu's Likud emerged as the largest single party, but fell short of securing a required parliamentary majority. A slim majority of lawmakers has endorsed Gantz as their choice for prime minister, though it is unclear whether he will be able to cobble together a governing coalition either.

Gantz now has just over three weeks to form a new government. In the meantime, he is trying to push through legislation in parliament that would in effect prevent Netanyahu from serving as prime minister in the future. The legislation would impose term limits on the prime minister and bar a politician indicted on criminal charges, like Netanyahu, from being prime minister.

Last week, parliament Speaker Yuli Edelstein, a member of Likud, suspended the parliament's activities, preventing the newly elected legislature from choosing a new speaker and forming the committees needed to push through Blue and White's legislative agenda.

Netanyahu's hand-picked justice minister last week also shut down most of the court system, delaying the prime minister's trial until at least May.

Netanyahu's opponents have accused him and his

surrogates of undermining the country's democratic institutions. Blue and White planned to file a Supreme Court challenge on Sunday requiring parliament to resume its activities.

With the public ordered to stay at home, tens of thousands of people tuned in on social media late Saturday to a "virtual protest," accusing Netanyahu of endangering the country's democratic foundations. Former directors of the Mossad and Shin Bet security agencies were among the speakers.

"Benjamin Netanyahu, get yourself together and release us from being your hostages," said Yuval Diskin, a former Shin Bet director. "Do it for the good of the country and the people."

More than 275,000 people have been infected by the coronavirus worldwide. The virus has killed more than 11,000 people, while more than 88,000 have recovered.

Most people only experience minor flu-like symptoms from the coronavirus and recover within a few weeks, but the virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear well. It can cause severe illness, including pneumonia, in some patients, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health problems. AP



Gaza Authorities in the Gaza Strip, which has been under an Israeli and Egyptian blockade since the Islamic militant group Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007, confirmed its first two cases overnight in returnees who had come from Pakistan.



Czech Republic The Czech government is sending to Italy about 100,000 face masks and respirators that were among hundreds of thousands seized in the country earlier this week. Czech authorities used emergency powers to raid a warehouse and seize 680,000 masks and 28,000 respirators last week.



Croatia A strong earthquake shook Croatia and its capital yesterday, causing panic, the evacuation of hospitals and widespread damage — including to the city's iconic cathedral — all amid a partial coronavirus lockdown. A 15-year-old was reported in critical condition and several others were injured, news outlets reported.



Covid-19 From France to Florida to Australia, kitesurfers, college students and others crowd the beaches, holding 'Corona parties'. Their defiance of lockdown mandates and scientific advice to fight the coronavirus pandemic has prompted crackdowns by authorities on people trying to escape cabin fever brought on by virus restrictions. In some cases, these 'virus rebels' resist, threatening police as officials express outrage over public gatherings that could spread the virus.