WASHINGTON — Nearly 3.2 million laid-off workers applied for unemployment benefits last week as the business shutdowns caused by the viral outbreak deepened the worst U.S. economic catastrophe in decades.

Roughly 33.5 million people have now filed for jobless aid in the seven weeks since the coronavirus began forcing millions of companies to close their doors and slash their workforces. That is the equivalent of one in five Americans who had been employed back in February, when the unemployment rate had reached a 50-year low of just 3.5%.

The Labor Department's report Thursday suggests that layoffs, while still breathtakingly high, are steadily declining after sharp spikes in late March and early April. Initial claims for unemployment aid have now fallen for five straight weeks, from a peak of nearly 6.9 million during the week that ended March 28.

Applications for jobless aid rose in just six states last week, including Maine, New Jersey, and Oklahoma, and declined in the 44 others.

The report showed that 22.7 million people are now receiving unemployment aid — a rough measure of job losses since the shutdowns began.

See claims on page 10

By Christopher Rugaber
Associated Press

Unemployment claims surpass 33 million in US

Analysts say US operations in South China Sea aimed at quelling doubts over post-virus readiness

By Wyatt Olson
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military for years stayed largely mum about its missions in the South China Sea, where the Navy and Air Force routinely conduct surveillance and freedom-of-navigation operations with an eye on China's ambitions there.

But in past weeks, the Defense Department has highlighted sea and air operations in the contested sea, which some military experts say is an effort to dispel doubts over the capabilities of the American military as it contends with the coronavirus pandemic.

Marines with Battalion Landing Team, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit load onto an MV-22B Osprey during a combat mission rehearsal aboard the amphibious assault ship USS America on April 21 in the South China Sea.

Audrey M.C. Rampton/U.S. Marine Corps

By Collins Koh
Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore

The U.S. Navy has been particularly hard hit by the virus, with the carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt sidelined in Guam since March 26 as it grapples with the pandemic. More than 1,100 sailors on the ship have tested positive, with one death.

The Roosevelt contagion has left the regional allies and partners speculating about the U.S. military's readiness to respond to Indo-Pacific flashpoints, said Collin Koh, a naval expert at the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

See health on page 4

Related stories

U.S. Forces Korea maintains restrictions for now despite South Korea's initial moves to reopen

V-E Day 75th anniversary commemorations moved from streets to screens because of virus

Online: Get the latest news on the virus outbreak
stripes.com/coronavirus
Frontier Airlines drops open-seat fee amid outcry

Associated Press

Frontier Airlines is dropping plans to charge passengers extra to sit next to an empty middle seat after congressional Democrats accused the airline of profiting from fear over the new coronavirus.

“We recognize the concerns raised that we are profiting from safety and this was never our intent,” Frontier CEO Barry Biffle said late Wednesday in a letter to three lawmakers. “We simply wanted to provide our customers with an option for more space.”

Biffle said the airline will rescind the extra fee, which Frontier called More Room, and block the seats from being sold.

Earlier in the day, Democrats had railed against Frontier’s plan to charge passengers at least $39 per flight to guarantee they would sit next to an empty middle seat.

The chairman of the House Transportation Committee called it “outrageous.” Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., said the Denver-based airline highlighted the fee during a congressional hearing on how COVID-19 is affecting the airline industry.

“I don’t think it’s appropriate to charge passengers at least $39 to sit next to an empty middle seat,” DeFazio said.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., highlighted the fee during a congressional hearing on how COVID-19 is affecting the airline industry.

“I think it’s outrageous,” Klobuchar said.

Frontier Airlines is dropping open-seat fee amid outcry.

**EXCHANGE RATES**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rate to USD</th>
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**INTEREST RATES**

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The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

**TODAY IN STRIPES**

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Opinion .................. 18-19
Sports ..................... 20-24

**WEATHER OUTLOOK**

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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FRIDAY IN EUROPE

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SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

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FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC

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EXCHANGE RATES

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(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currency amounts to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euros.)
Pentagon reports on civilian deaths overseas

By John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. military forces killed 132 civilians and injured 91 others during operations last year in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, the Pentagon said.

The Defense Department issued its annual assessment Wednesday on civilian casualties as mandated by Congress. The report did not identify any civilian casualties connected to U.S. airstrikes in Yemen or Libya. The most deaths occurred in Afghanistan, where 108 civilians were killed, the Pentagon said.

U.S. military authorities in Afghanistan received 541 reports of civilian casualties for operations involving U.S. forces, which came from sources such as activist groups, the national government and media organizations. The military says it determined 57 reports of those were credible.

“For example, a report of civilian casualties would be considered as not credible if U.S. military operations were not conducted at the reported time or place or the reported casualties related to the incident were assessed to be enemy combatants rather than civilians,” the Pentagon report said.

There also were 22 civilians killed during operations against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and two civilians were killed in an airstrike in Somalia, the report said.

Activist groups, however, have said the military has a long track record of undercounting civilian deaths. Amnesty International also has put out numerous reports over the past year that say airstrikes in places like Somalia and Syria are higher than previously reported.

For its part, U.S. Africa Command has begun issuing quarterly reports on civilian casualties, in what it said is an effort to boost transparency.

In 2019, the Pentagon made 611 payments connected to property damage, civilian deaths and injury, the report said.

The report did not detail how those payments were doled out, but the Defense Department is authorized to spend up to $3 million annually on such payments.

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Space Force prepares to launch spaceplane with cadet’s satellite

By Christian Lopez
Stars and Stripes

The FalconSat-8 satellite developed by Air Force Academy cadets is slated to be launched into space aboard the X-37B Orbital Test Vehicle, a reusable unmanned spaceplane, on May 16 from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla.

The small satellite is an educational platform that carries five experimental payloads. They will conduct multiple experiments on advanced propulsion technologies and payloads while in orbit as part of X-37B’s sixth mission by the Air Force Rapid Capabilities Office, in partnership with the U.S. Space Force, according to a Space Force statement on Wednesday.

Alongside the FalconSat-8’s experiments, NASA will study the impact of radiation and similar space effects on potential food sources, such as seeds, the statement said. And the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory will conduct an experiment to “transform solar power into radio frequency microwaves,” which could then be transmitted to the ground.

The X-37B, based on a NASA design, was built by Boeing and serves as the Air Force’s most advanced re-entry spacecraft. In October 2019, the unmanned vehicle returned from its fifth mission after 780 days in orbit, a little more than two years.

The X-37B until then was a secret program; however, that flight, reported widely, stripped away the program’s veil though its actual missions were kept confidential. The spaceplane has spent a total of seven years and 10 months in orbit, according to the Space Force statement.

The X-37B is the first vehicle since NASA’s space shuttle that allows further analysis of experiments brought back from space, according to an Air Force fact sheet on the spacecraft.

“This sixth mission is a big step for the X-37B program,” Randy Walden, director and program executive officer for the Rapid Capabilities Office, said in the statement. “This will be the first X-37B mission to use a service module to host experiments. The incorporation of a service module on this mission enables us to continue to expand the capabilities of the spacecraft and host more experiments than any of the previous missions.”

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Navy’s vice chief tapped to command forces in Europe, Africa

By John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Adm. Robert P. Burke has been nominated to serve as the next commander of the Naples, Italy-based U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa in a series of Navy leadership changes announced by the Pentagon.

A career submariner, Burke will replace Adm. James Foggo, who has led NAV EUR and NATO’s Allied Joint Forces Command for nearly three years.

Neither a date for a change of command nor Burke’s next move were announced, but USNI News reported Foggo was expected to retire.

Burke’s expected move to Naples comes at a time when senior military officials have repeatedly expressed concerns about more aggressive Russian activity, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Arctic.

Having served since 2019 as vice chief of naval operations, Burke will arrive at his new headquarters with insight into whether leadership is on board with U.S. European Command’s call for more warships to be homeported in Rota, Spain, to counter the growing Russian presence.

A native of Portage, Mich., Burke previously held operational assignments aboard attack and ballistic missile submarines and commanded the submarine USS Hampton in Norfolk, Va. He was also commander of Submarine Development Squadron 12 in Groton, Conn.

Tapped to replace Burke in Washington was Vice Adm. William K. Lescher, who was nominated for the rank of admiral. Lescher now serves as deputy chief of naval operations for integration of capabilities and resources in Washington.

Navy Vice Adm. Lisa M. Franchetti, who leads the Naples-based 6th Fleet, was nominated to serve as deputy chief of naval operations for war fighting development in Washington, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

She will be replaced by Navy Rear Adm. Eugene H. Black III, who was nominated for the rank of vice admiral. Black currently serves as director of the surface warfare division in Washington.

Rear Adm. Randy B. Crites was nominated for vice admiral and an assignment as deputy chief of naval operations for integration of capabilities and resources in Washington. He now serves as deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget and director of the fiscal management division in Washington.

Rear Adm. Yancy B. Lindsey was nominated for vice admiral and a new assignment as head of Navy Installations Command in Washington. Lindsey now serves as commander of Navy Region Europe, Africa, Southwest Asia and as commander of Maritime Air Forces in Naples.

Rear Adm. Kenneth R. Whitesell was tapped for vice admiral and assignment as commander of Naval Air Forces and Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, based in San Diego. He currently serves as deputy commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

vandiver.john@stripes.com
Twitter: @john_vandiver
German dining out is near, but not for troops

By Jennifer H. Swan and Marcus Kloeckner
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — U.S. military personnel in Germany may have to bide their time before they can enjoy a night out again in the country, where restaurants and hotels will begin to cautiously reopen this month after weeks of coronavirus closures.

Each of Germany’s 16 federal states is deciding when to reopen eating and drinking establishments, with some saying the hospitality businesses can welcome guests again starting next week, but must continue to follow strict social distancing rules.

But depending on which branch of the military they’re with and where they live, American military personnel and their families may have to wait up to three or four weeks before they can eat out again.

In Rheinland-Pfalz, home to about 50,000 U.S. personnel and their families, restaurants can reopen by May 13, regardless of whether they offer indoor or outdoor seating, or both, according to local media outlet SWR. Hotels, youth hostels and campgrounds with their own sanitary facilities will follow on May 18.

But Army personnel and families in the southwestern state, which includes Kaiserslautern, are authorized to use only the outdoor seating area of restaurants when they reopen, according to an order issued Tuesday by Maj. Gen. Christopher O. Mohan of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command, spokesman Master Sgt. Dan Bailey said.

This order is unlikely to change in the next few days, Bailey said, because the 21st TSC “will generally trail host nation decisions by a recommended 14 days before implementing any changes to restrictions for our personnel.”

“This allows for one full [coronavirus] incubation period to pass before we implement similar changes to maintain a safe and secure environment for our garrison and local communities,” Bailey said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said restrictions would be reintroduced if there are more than 50 new coronavirus infections per 100,000 people within seven days. Social distancing measures in the country have been extended until at least June.

A midnight to 5 a.m. curfew and 100-kilometer travel restriction included in Mohan’s order will make hotel stays “impractical,” but not necessarily put them off-limits, Bailey said. Exceptions will be made for official duty.

In Bavaria, Germany’s second most populous state and home to about 40,000 U.S. military personnel and their families, beer gardens and restaurants with outdoor terraces will be welcoming customers again by May 18.

Restaurants that only have indoor dining will join them a week later, and hotels will reopen by the end of the month, officials announced this week.

Customers at restaurants will be required to wear face masks when entering and when going to the restrooms. Tables will have to be at least 6.5 feet apart.

The state saw a high density of coronavirus infections and U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria personnel are barred from going to restaurants and hotels. Although the order is expected to be modified, it was unclear when that might happen and what the changes would be, a garrison spokesman said.

Air Force personnel assigned to Ramstein Air Base, located near the Rheinland-Pfalz are less restricted than their Army counterparts.

They may patronize off-base restaurants and hotels as soon as they are legally allowed to reopen, spokesperson Sandra Archer said Thursday.

Air Force personnel are also not under the same 100-kilometer travel restriction as their Army counterparts in Rheinland-Pfalz. As for when on-base restaurants and hotels will return to full service, “the Service is currently working” through the changes, Archer said.

“This is meant to stay aligned with local and state government regulations,” she said.

Restaurants in Rheinland-Pfalz were allowed to reopen last week after closed for almost two months.

In Baden-Wuerttemberg, home to the Stuttgart Army garrison, the U.S. European and Africa commands, has not announced when restaurants and hotels will be allowed to reopen.

In Bavaria, tourism officials warned they believed their indoor seating would be restricted until at least June.

In the U.S., the White House said it would be at least 60 days after their states meet certain criteria before they can reopen their economies.

In Germany, the guidelines for when restaurants and hotels can reopen are up to individual states, but guidelines have been in place to help guide them.

“T he intent is to align with state guidelines and policies,” a spokesperson for the 21st Theater Sustainment Command said.

By April 30, two Air Force B-1B bombers flew a sortie over the South China Sea in a demonstra-

FROM FRONT PAGE

“The Chinese state media has been adding this through its own propaganda and possibly disinforma-

tion campaign that focuses on arguing that the U.S. military is seriously undermined by the pandemic and therefore not in a position to contest Beijing’s rivals in the South China Sea, amongst other flashpoints,” said Koh, one of a number of Asia experts interviewed by Stars and Stripes this week by phone and email. “In short, given the credibility at stake, it’s understandable if the U.S. Navy is seeking to demonstrate its continued primacy in the area.”

The Defense Department repeatedly publicized air-ground operations by the Marine Corps 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit from the amphibious assault ship USS America in the South China Sea recently was already planned and that other elements were added after the outbreak on the USS Theodore Roosevelt,” said Zach Cooper, a fellow at the Washington D.C.-based think tank American Enterprise Institute and an expert on U.S. defense strategy in Asia.

“I haven’t heard this directly, but my expectation is that the Navy tried to increase their demonstra-
tions of presence to avoid a weakened deterrence pos-
ture with the Roosevelt stuck in Guam.”

Retired Navy Cmdr. Bryan McGrath, founder of the Mary-
land-based naval consultancy FerryBridge Group, said that while he had not perceived a shift in the tempo of Navy operations in the South China Sea over the past year, there nonetheless has been a change.

“It looks to me that the Navy’s efforts to highlight these operations has, in fact, picked up a bit,” he said. “There is doubt, however, that the pace of U.S. Navy operations in China’s near abroad has picked up in the Trump administration as part of its overall signaling campaign to China.”

But Army personnel and families may have to wait up to three or four weeks before they can eat out again.

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Former strategic planner for the Washington, D.
C.
Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assess-
ments and 100-kilometer travel restric-
tions for our personnel. “In short, given

The guided-missile destroyer USS Barry sailed near the Param-
cels on April 28, and the follow-
ing day, the guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill steamed near the Spratlys while con-
tacting freedom-of-navigation operations.

On April 30, two Air Force B-1B bombers flew a sortie over the South China Sea in a demonstra-
tion of the service’s new “dynamic force employment model” intend-ed to keep would-be adversaries off balance with less predictable operations.

“It is possible that recent U.S. activity in the South China Sea has been driven by the pandemic, but my guess is that some of this was already planned and that other elements were added after

More than 30,000 military families allowed to move

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — More than 30,000 military families are expected to start the moving process between now and the end of June despite a Defense Department directive prohibiting such moves during the coronavirus pandemic, defense officials said Wednesday.

“So those are the families who have been approved or authorized to move, if conditions allow, will proceed with their [permanent change of station],” Rick Marsh, director of the Defense Personal Property Program for U.S. Transportation Command, said Wednesday during a Pentagon news conference on military moves during the pandemic.

The most recent stop-move-ment order issued April 20 by Defense Secretary Mark Esper ends June 30, but it allows priority personnel to receive a waiver to the policy through their chain of command so they can move to their next duty station during the halt.

TRANSCOM is tracking these families in their shipment system and they are in various stages of the process to have their household goods picked up sometime before June 30, Marsh said.

So far, more than 12,500 families have moved since early March when travel restrictions were first put in place, Marsh said. These moves were 30% of the volume that they typically have during that time, he said.

In a normal year, about 400,000 service members, DOD civilians and their families are moved, with 40% of moves happening between May 15 and Aug. 31, according to the Pentagon.

Marsh said they expect moves to continue through the fall and winter due to the demand, and it was possible that more families could be added to their queue before June 30. Shipment and delivery of the household goods are conditions based, including whether families feel it’s not yet safe at the new location, he said.

TRANSCOM also announced Wednesday that companies helping military members move must have their personnel follow more safety measures during the packing and shipment of household goods. Families will be emailed details about these safety protocols during the moving process, according to Marsh.

“Because the relocation process is intrusive with moving personnel working inside homes along DOD personnel and their families, DOD has directed that industry personnel adhere to Centers for Disease Control [and Prevention] health protection protocols,” Marsh said.

Movers must wear face coverings while in the home, clean frequently touched surfaces and sanitize their hands. There will also be fewer movers working at the residence in order to ensure social distancing requirements, according to Marsh. Service members are also asked to limit family members in the home or restrict them to one room in the house during the packing and moving process, according to a TRANSCOM document on the new safety measures.

Companies also must certify their personnel have been screened for symptoms according to CDC guidelines and present documentation to the family when they arrive to the home, Marsh said. Families are also asked to comply with these safety measures and reschedule moves if they are sick or are in self quarantine.

Service members can question movers about whether they are following the safety measures and can deny them from entering their home. They can also stop the move entirely if they feel the movers are “compromising their safety,” according to a TRANSCOM statement. The service member would work with their local transportation office and chain of command to reschedule their move.

“Families are empowered to make decisions, they’re not alone. A duty representative will contact every DOD member during every move — in person or virtually — to ensure protocols are being followed,” Marsh said.

After delay, Marines restart annual Australia rotation

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps is resuming its summer deployment of Marines and sailors to Darwin, Australia, that was postponed over the coronavirus pandemic.

The Marines delayed the rotation of 2,500 Marines on March 30 following an order from Defense Secretary Mark Esper a week earlier barring nearly all official movement overseas for Defense Department personnel.

On Tuesday, however, a statement by U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific announced that the annual Marine Rotational Force-Darwin deployment is back on.

“The decision to resume the deployment comes as the government of Australia is granting an exemption to current travel restrictions to allow the 2020 MRF-D rotation to proceed,” it said.

The decision is based on Australia’s record of managing impacts from the coronavirus and adherence by deployed U.S. Marines to a 14-day quarantine and other requirements when they arrive in country.

“The Marine Corps is committed to ensuring the health and safety of its forces and the Australian people, including local indigenous communities,” the statement said.

The Darwin force, which trains in Australia each summer, has built up slowly since an initial contingent of 250 Marines hit the beach there in 2012. Last year, the Marines rotational force had grown to 10 times that size, its target strength.

The Marines are working with the Australians to determine the composition of the force that will resume the rotation along with timing and training plans according to Thursday’s statement. Changes to this year’s deployment do not impact plans for those in subsequent years.

Fifty-four Marines who arrived in Darwin in an advance party in March have already gone through quarantine and began training with their Australian counterparts, according to officials.

Equipment and supplies for the Marines continued to arrive in Darwin last month despite the hold-up for personnel.

Marines and Australian soldiers practiced simulating shooting with each other’s weapons April 29, according to a Marine Corps news release dated April 30.

“Families are empowered to make decisions, they’re not alone. A duty representative will contact every DOD member during every move — in person or virtually — to ensure protocols are being followed,” Marsh said.
**VIRUS OUTBREAK**

## DOD memo: COVID-19 disqualifies recruits

**By Tara Copp**
McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Department of Defense has issued new guidelines that would disqualify anyone who previously had COVID-19 from joining the military, according to a new memo.

The U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command, in a memo issued last week, said that “during the time of history review or examination, a history of COVID-19, confirmed by either a laboratory test or clinician diagnosis, is permanently disqualifying.”

A defense official, who spoke to McClatchy on the condition of not being identified, confirmed the authenticity of the memo, first reported by Military Times, and said it is interim guidance.

The official said the new policy would not necessarily disqualify a potential recruit, but would force an additional review where the recruit would need to get a waiver to move forward with the enlistment.

The new policy would mean a past coronavirus exposure would be treated the same as other medical conditions, such as hearing loss, “that are considered ‘permanently disqualifying,’ subject to a medical waiver,” the official said.

But the new policy comes as military recruiters are already facing challenges as COVID-19 has closed the high schools, malls and job fairs where they typically meet prospects.

Most of the military services told McClatchy they have seen shortfalls in recruiting since the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, every service told McClatchy they do not anticipate being at full strength in terms of the number of forces they require by the end of the year.

More than 1.2 million Americans have tested positive for the virus and 72,617 have died as of Wednesday, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Nelson Lim, a senior social scientist at the Rand Corp. who has researched military personnel policy for more than two decades, said it was too early to determine the impact of the new policy, because there is still much that is unknown about the accuracy of antibody testing and immunity with COVID-19.

“We don’t have good estimates on the younger population” and the virus impact, Lim said. “Testing is essentially limited to people with symptoms or high risk. So it is difficult to get a clear picture of the impact of this decision.”

It was unclear whether the interim Pentagon policy would eventually extend to currently serving forces who have been ill from the coronavirus while on duty. More than 5,000 military personnel have been infected with COVID-19, almost 1,900 of whom have recovered.

A request for comment to the Defense Department on the impact of the policy on recruiting, and whether it would extend to currently serving forces who re-enlist, was not immediately answered.

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## Military keeps curbs as S. Korea starts to reopen

**By Kim Gamel**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Restaurants and bars are crowded, public transportation is buzzing and students are preparing to return to school starting next week as South Korea loosens anti-coronavirus restrictions after days of no local transmissions.

But U.S. Forces Korea says not yet for its community of 58,000 American troops, family members, contractors and other civilians who have been largely locked down on bases for more than two months because of the pandemic.

The South wrapped up an intensive social distancing campaign on Wednesday, announcing it would begin reestablishing a sense of normalcy with many facilities resuming routine operations.

USFK commander Gen. Robert Abrams said he will maintain restrictions under a designation known as Health Protection Condition Charlie on U.S. installations, while monitoring South Korea’s progress.

The host country “has done an amazing job, and we are going to let them take the lead as they relax some of their social distancing measures,” Abrams said in a statement posted on social media.

“We’ll watch and see how these new measures play out over the next week or so, and then if the current conditions are maintained, we’ll move forward with relaxing our preventative measures as well,” he said.

USFK also held discussions with its South Korean counterparts on the need for local troops who require access to U.S. installations to abide by the same rules, U.S. and South Korean officials said.

South Korea reported four new infections on Thursday for a total of 10,810 cases, with 256 deaths, since the virus began spreading from China late last year. Three of those cases were imported from abroad.

The daily count has sharply declined since surpassing 500 in late February and early March amid an outbreak in the south-central city of Daegu.

USFK, which has reported 26 cases, including two soldiers, credits the strict anti-virus measures, which include a ban on eating at local restaurants and bars, for its low infection rate.

Barber shops and gyms reopened last month, but people must wear face masks inside facilities and long lines form at stores where people are required to stand at least six feet apart to prevent contamination.

Plexiglass divides diners at the food courts. On-base buses have resumed service, but taxis remained banned on the largest overseas U.S. base, Camp Humphreys, causing hardships for soldiers below a certain rank who aren’t allowed to have cars.

Both allies stressed the need for a “new normal” even after restrictions are lifted, with health authorities encouraging people to continue washing their hands thoroughly and frequently and to maintain healthy distances from each other.

Abrams also has extended a public health emergency, which gives him expanded authority over civilians as well as troops, through May 23, although he could decide to end that earlier.

Some 28,500 U.S. service members are stationed in South Korea, which remains technically at war with the North after their 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

“We’ve got a mission to accomplish, and we’ve got to keep our force healthy,” Abrams said.

Many in the community expressed growing impatience as life began to spring back outside the gates.

“Yeah the virus is pretty SQUASHED yet HERE WE ARE. Not moving forward at all,” one commentor said during an online forum.

South Korea also plans to reopen schools in phases, starting with high schools next week, followed by months of online classes.

The Department of Defense Education Activity, or DODEA, said most of its schools will remain closed and students will continue virtual learning for the rest of the academic year, although it said those in South Korea may reopen in coming weeks due to the improved situation there.

It was unclear when a decision will be made.

“Pretty sure things will go back to normal soon,” one reader commented.

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**It makes the morale really low in the soldier community because our release from work and our decompression happens on the weekend.**

**Pvt. Josten Pervez**

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Pervez, who had a wagon to carry goods back to the barracks, said she’s only in South Korea for a year and wants to enjoy the culture. But she’s not angry about the extended restrictions.

“It is what it is. You just kind of take it with a grain of salt and hope that eventually it gets better,” she said.

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Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong-Chang contributed to this report. gamel.kim@stripes.com

Twitter: @kimgamel
The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan is seen from the air at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on April 25.

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The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan was seen from the air at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on April 25.
VIRUS OUTBREAK

75th V-E Day commemorations go virtual

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Seventy-five years ago, throngs filled the streets of Paris, London, Moscow and New York to celebrate Victory in Europe Day. But on Friday, as the world marks the anniversary of Nazi Germany's defeat, the ceremonial pomp will be muted.

Not only has the coronavirus upended commemoration plans slated to take place across Europe and the U.S., it also has ratcheted much of the post-World War II order now trying to contain the pandemic.

With gatherings canceled that would have included the dwindling number of surviving World War II veterans, the Pentagon will go virtual Friday to call attention to the sacrifices on the 75th anniversary of V-E Day.

At U.S. European Command's Patch Barracks headquarters in Stuttgart — a base named after Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch, who led the allied push into southern Germany — public events will also go virtual.

On Friday, Gen. Tod Wolters, EUCOM chief and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, will participate in a virtual wreath laying in Belgium.

"On this milestone anniversary of V-E Day, we remember all who resisted behind enemy lines, those who tirelessly worked on farms and in factories to supply and equip the war effort, who fought on land, sea, and in the air," Wolters said in a statement. "We also reflect on the horrors of World War II, the Holocaust, the tremendous destruction, the millions of lives lost which are all solemn reminders of the importance of preserving peace."

"Just happy to be going home"

Among those who fought was Charles Shay, who served as an Army medic and took part in the D-Day invasion and the Battle of the Bulge. He will mark the day from his home in Normandy, where he moved two years ago to be closer to comrades buried in the nearby American military cemetery.

"On May 8th, 1945, if I recall well, I was in Bremerhaven, Germany waiting for a boat to return home," Shay said in a phone interview. "I was just happy to be going home and happy to be away from all the confusion and fighting that was going on in Europe."

Shay, 95, was taken prisoner by German forces in March 1945 while on a reconnaissance mission in France. The allies were taken by surprise and surprised to win over several weeks. The battle left nearly 20,000 U.S. troops dead.

"After the Bulge, crossing the Rhine River in March 1945 capped a huge logistical achievement. Western allies were advancing on all fronts, with the Russians in the east closing fast. It then became a question of how fast victory would come. But even after Germany's surrender, there were concerns, particularly in the south, where U.S. forces were in control."

Patch's advance into southern Germany positioned allies to quash the remaining Nazi elements, which Eisenhower feared could hole up in the Alps.

"We had met our Soviet allies up north, but there was still major concern by Gen. Eisenhower with respect to any lingering resistance that could possibly fester for months and years," Butler said.

U.S. bases in southern Germany, like EUCOM's headquarters, are partly a legacy of that focus on defeating a guerrilla campaign which failed to materialize.

Over time, U.S. forces based in places like Stuttgart evolved into a Cold War force focused on countering the Soviet Union, followed by other global threats.

"And here we still are," Butler said.

The Bulge, Germany's last major offensive, fought in the forests of Belgium, Luxembourg and France. The allies were taken by surprise but regrouped over several weeks. The battle left nearly 20,000 U.S. troops dead.

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"And here we still are," Butler said.
Texas governor softens jail order on hair salon owner for violation

**By Paul J. Weber**
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Thursday removed jail as a punishment for violating his coronavirus restrictions following an outcry by conservatives over a Dallas salon owner who was jailed for refusing to keep her business closed.

Abbott said his new order should free Shelley Luther, who was booked in the Dallas County jail this week for keeping her salon open in defiance of the governor’s restrictions meant to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Luther refused to apologize for repeatedly flouting the order, leading a judge to find her in contempt of court and sentence her to a week behind bars.

“Throwing Texans in jail who have had their businesses shut down through no fault of their own is nonsensical, and I will not allow it to happen,” Abbott said in a statement.

The reversal reflects the increasing pressure Abbott has faced as business owners protest mandatory closures.

Abbott said his new order will allow the salon to remain open, subject to daily inspections and a $5,000 bond.

U.S. bases in Japan before boarding USS Ronald Reagan carrier strike group vessels for an upcoming patrol. The Reagan left Yokosuka Naval Base for sea trials this week.

The support team tended to the needs of the sequestered sailors, who lived away from the base population during the quarantine period and were restricted to their quarters.

Once screened and cleared, those quarantined sailors were permitted to board their vessels. However, an undisclosed number of those sailors tested positive for the virus, Jones reported last week.

The support personnel were not sequestered while tending to the ships’ crews. Jones said he decided “out of an abundance of caution” to test the support team, as well.

“Our public health experts are working closely with the Navy to ensure both communities are being protected through recommended isolation and quarantine measures,” he wrote Thursday afternoon.

His message provided no other details.

“Your safety remains my absolute highest priority,” Jones wrote. “My team and I will continue to keep our community aware of any future concerns.”

**Yokota Air Base commander reports more cases among Navy personnel**

**By Joseph Ditzler**
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Some base exchanges in Japan and South Korea are now allowing customers to buy up to three sanitizer products.

Army and Air Force Exchange Service stores at Yokota Air Base, Japan, and Osan Air Base, South Korea, have new purchase limits for sanitizer products.

Navy Exchange was still limiting customers to a single item for one brand of sanitizer and two items for another.

Navy civilian worker Leonard Davis, 51, and daughters Sia, 19, and Ania, 17, were buying sanitizer at the Yokota exchange Thursday. The family split their purchase of two bottles between them because they were unaware of the new three-item limit.

“They’ve been going through quite a lot of product, he said. “I’ve been sanitizing at least every hour, but I don’t want to make my hands too dry,” he said.

Army and Air Force Exchange Service stores at Yokota Air Base, Japan, and Osan Air Base, South Korea, have new purchase limits for sanitizer products.

Sanitizer was in short supply in 2020. New limits for sanitizer products are being enforced at the Yokota Air Base, Japan, and Osan Air Base, South Korea, military bases.

In store, the Navy Exchange sold one brand of sanitizer and two items of sanitizing hand-gel at $6.95 each, spray for $6.95 or disinfectant wipes for $1.45, according to in-store advertising.

AAFES and Navy Exchange Sanitizer Command compliance officers didn’t immediately respond Thursday to emailed questions about the limits.

Sanitizer was in short supply after customers rushed to stock up in early March as coronavirus cases surged. Shortages that month forced the exchange at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, in southwestern Japan, to stock Japanese hand sanitizer that sold for $18.99 a bottle.

Exchange stores boosted supply to meet demand. The Navy Exchange, for example, acquired an additional 24,000 masks and more than 70,000 units of hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes by mid-March.

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Fractures in many nations widen as lockdowns ease

VIRUS OUTBREAK

FROM FRONT PAGE

That figure lags a week behind the figures for first-time unemployment claims and is not adjusted for unemploy-
ment benefits. A broader measure — the proportion of adults with jobs who could have their benefits cut — hit a record low.

The official figures for jobless claims could also be undercount-
ing layoffs. Surveys by academic economists and think tanks have suggested that as many as 12 mil-
lion workers who were laid off by mid-April did not file for unem-
ployment benefits by then, either because they couldn’t navigate their state’s overwhelmed sys-
tems or they felt too discouraged to try.

As the economy slides further into what looks like a severe re-
cession, economists are pro-
jecting that the gross domestic product — the broadest gauge of economic growth — is contracting in the current April-June quarter by a shocking 40% annual rate. As it does, more layoffs appear to be spreading beyond front-line industries like restaurants, hotels and retail stores.

GE Aviation, for example, has said that it is cutting up to 13,000 jobs. Uber will shed 3,700 posi-
tions. MGM Resorts International has announced that the furloughs of 18,000 displaced employees could turn into layoffs.

But the job cuts have hammered workers at restaurants, hotels and retail firms particularly hard.

According to the payroll proces-
or ADP, about half the total jobs in the hotel and restaurant indus-
tory — 8.6 million — disappeared in April, based on data from its corporate clients. A category that includes retail and shipping shed 3.4 million workers.

As businesses across the coun-
try have shut down and laid off tens of millions, the economy has sunk into a near-paralysis. Even as some businesses are beginning to reopen in certain states, facto-
ries, hotels, restaurants, resorts, sporting venues, movie theaters and many small businesses are still largely shuttered. Home sales are falling. Consumer confidence and spending are sinking.

The difference between the 30 million-plus unemployment claims that have been filed in the past several weeks and the ex-
pected April job loss of just over 20 million reflects differences in how the figures are compiled.

The government calculates job los-
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ment benefits. It does not include the hundreds of millions in unemployment claims that have been filed in the last few weeks, saying the roughly 14 million workers who were laid off by mid-April did not file for unemployment benefits by then, either because they couldn’t navigate their state’s overwhelmed sys-
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tems or they felt too discouraged to try.
**Virus Outbreak Roundup**

**Mall reopens as rural counties defy state order**

Associated Press

YUBA CITY, Calif. — Some businesses that reopened in two Northern California counties that defied the state's stay-at-home order are not following safety requirements, and the area's top health official said Wednesday that it's "imperative" they do to avoid a resurgence of coronavirus and return to stricter rules.

The local health order that took effect in Sutter and Yuba counties this week allowed diners in restaurants and opened far more retailers than the state approved. It's the most permissive yet in the nation's most populous state, but still requires employees and customers wear masks at indoor businesses.

On Wednesday, Sutter Yuba Mall became the first in California to reopen during the outbreak. Hundreds of shoppers — many not wearing masks — strolled through a long line quickly formed at the nail salon, a business not allowed to open under Gov. Gavin Newsom's order.

A day earlier, Newsom said that allowing so many businesses to reopen was a mistake and urged leaders to "do the right thing."

**California**

SAN DIEGO — Former Californian San Diego Mayor Bob Filner this week filed a joint motion in federal court to strike down Gov. Gavin Newsom's order that took effect through May 28.

The lawsuit, filed in the state Court of Claims, said that a 1945 law which gives the governor broad emergency powers to order such restrictions governs local, not statewide, declarations like one that has been in place since March 19. A 1976 law gives Whitmer emergency authority over a limited period that expired when the House and Senate did not extend her emergency and disaster declarations last week, according to the suit that alleges a "patent disregard for the law" and a violation of the separation of powers.

The stay-at-home directive is in place through at least May 15 and generally requires people to shelter in place, except to do critical jobs, exercise outdoors and buy groceries or other items. An order closing places of public accommodation and limiting restaurants to pickup and delivery is in effect through May 28.

**Minnesota**

LANSING — The Republican-led Michigan Legislature and Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on Wednesday, asking a judge to declare invalid and unenforceable her stay-at-home order and other measures issued to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The lawsuit, filed in the state Court of Claims, said that a 1945 law which gives the governor broad emergency powers to order such restrictions governs local, not statewide, declarations like one that has been in place since March 19. A 1976 law gives Whitmer emergency authority over a limited period that expired when the House and Senate did not extend her emergency and disaster declarations last week, according to the suit that alleges a "patent disregard for the law" and a violation of the separation of powers.

The Minnesota Department of Health on Wednesday reported new one-day highs for the state in confirmed coronavirus cases at 728, and deaths at 30, which raised Minnesota's totals to 8,579 cases and 483 deaths. The new deaths included one in Nobles County, where an outbreak connected with the JBS pork processing plant in Worthington has resulted in 1,082 confirmed cases and one other death.

**Louisiana**

BATON ROUGE — Republican lawmakers trying to unravel Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards’ statewide stay-at-home order began moving legislation Wednesday that would keep the Democratic governor from enforcing restrictions enacted to combat the coronavirus.

Edwards’ decision to extend his stay-at-home order through May 15 provoked strong criticism from Republicans who prefer a parish-by-parish approach to loosening restrictions that have shuttered businesses and driven up unemployment.

In a rebuke to Edwards, the House and Governmental Affairs Committee voted 9-7 to advance a proposal from House GOP leader Blake Miguez that would strip the language of his ability to penalize businesses that don’t comply with his order, for 15 days from passage.

The vote was a near party-line decision.

That means closure requirements for bars, theaters, gyms, restaurants and other non-essential businesses won’t be lifted in separate parishes even if every other parish in the state agrees to reopen.

**Michigan**

On Wednesday, the Upper Midwest Law Center, a Minnesota-based public interest law firm, sued in federal court on behalf of Minnesota churches and small business owners wanting to strike down Gov. Tim Walz’s stay-at-home emergency orders as unconstitutional.

The lawsuit claims Walz’s stay-at-home emergency order is “an illegal broadside against a wide variety of businesses,” according to the Center. Walz announced the order March 23.

The Primary Health Care Agency in northern Wisconsin, which serves 12 of the state’s 72 counties, reported a one-day high in COVID-19 cases and one other death.

Nearly 411,000 people showed up statewide to vote, some waiting in lines for hours in Milwaukee, many of them wearing masks and voicing anger at Republicans in the Legislature who refused to delay the election. Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, who worked the polls in a mask, gloves and protective gown, was widely decried for reassuring voters that it was “incredibly safe to go out.”

It will likely never be known just how safe, or not, it was to vote, public health leaders said.
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Wednesday vetoed a resolution that said he must get a nod from Congress before engaging in further military action against Iran. Trump called it “in-sulting” to the presidency.

The nonbinding congressional resolution was introduced first in the House after the U.S. launched an airstrike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani. There was concern in Congress that Tehran and Washington were perilously close to all-out conflict, and some lawmakers wanted to restrain further actions Trump might take against Iran.

The Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war. Even so, Trump said the resolution implied that his own constitutional authority to use military force was limited to defending the United States and its forces against imminent attack.

“THAT is incorrect,” Trump said in a statement. “We live in a hostile world of evolving threats and the Constitution recognizes that the president must be able to anticipate our adversaries’ next moves and take swift and decisive action in response. That’s what I did!”

The resolution came in the wake of rising conflict between the U.S. and Iran.
COLUMBIA — A South Carolina man was arrested and accused of illegally possessing 90 weapons, including numerous assault rifles, authorities said. Edward Daniel Kimpton Jr., 25, was charged Tuesday with wire fraud, mail fraud and illegal possession of machine guns, The Columbia State reported.

Kimpton was arrested after an 18-month investigation by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Secret Service. Authorities said Kimpton purchased firearms, bullets, scopes and tactical gear online from individual and retail sellers using a false name and an electronic payment platform.

A criminal complaint said Kimpton had the guns shipped to federal firearm license-holders in different South Carolina counties, then he would pick up the gear and contest the sale, stating he never received the items. The complaint said Kimpton retained the guns and the money.

During the investigation, authorities discovered that Kimpton researched content on South Carolina mass shooters in Charleston in 2015 and Florence in 2018.

Baltimore Sun¨s Tribune reported. Leaders cited declining enrollment, financial difficulties and a need to raise millions of dollars with at least $5 million in cash, other ties and a need to raise millions of dollars with at least $5 million in cash, including $915,000 in cash, and a police dog alerted to the odor of drugs on the money, the California Highway Patrol said.

Frank Capraro, 23, and Desmond McDow, 25, both of Medford, were arrested last Friday evening, the Merced Sun-Star reported. The passenger was partially trapped and the vehicle had to be cut open for first responders to free him.

The juror was a member of the Paha Sapa Grotto, a local caving group. He added the mine is 25 feet to 30 feet below ground.

The Institute of Notre Dame Catholic college preparatory school for girls which counts among its alumni House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski announced on Tuesday that it is closing.

The number of drivers cited for speeding or having loud exhausts on Pacific Coast Highway in south Orange County, Calif., during the weekend. The crackdown was prompted by incidents a week earlier when residents complained to authorities that motorists and motorcyclists were speeding through coastal towns, The Orange County Register reported. A county sheriff’s deputy clocked one motorcyclist going 103 mph, said Laguna Beach police Capt. Jeff Calvert, who was in charge of the enforcement effort.

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The number of drivers cited for speeding or having loud exhausts on Pacific Coast Highway in south Orange County, Calif., during the weekend. The crackdown was prompted by incidents a week earlier when residents complained to authorities that motorists and motorcyclists were speeding through coastal towns, The Orange County Register reported. A county sheriff’s deputy clocked one motorcyclist going 103 mph, said Laguna Beach police Capt. Jeff Calvert, who was in charge of the enforcement effort.
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is again pushing to have his border wall painted black, a design change that is projected to add at least $500 million in costs, according to government contracting estimates obtained by The Washington Post.

The president’s determination to have the steel bollards coated in black has fluctuated during the past several years, and military commanders and border officials believed as recently as last fall that they had finally talked him out of it. They consider the black paint unnecessary, costly and a significant long-term maintenance burden, and they left it out of the original U.S. Customs and Border Protection design specifications.

Trump has not let go of the idea, insisting that the dark color will enhance its forbidding appearance and leave the steel too hot to touch during summer months. During a border wall meeting at the White House last month amid the coronavirus pandemic, the president told senior adviser Jared Kushner and aides to move forward with the paint job and to seek out cost estimates, according to four administration officials with knowledge of the meeting.

“POTUS has changed his mind and now wants the fence painted. We are modifying contracts to add,” said one official involved in the construction effort who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of being fired.

Trump directed aides to seek input from North Dakota-based Fisher Sand and Gravel, a company the president favors. Fisher has a $400 million contract to build a section of new barrier in Arizona, an award that is under review by the Department of Defense inspector general.

The Post obtained a copy of painting estimates that federal contracting officials produced, and it shows costs ranging from $500 million for two coats of acrylic paint to more than $3 billion for a premium “powder coating” on the structure, the high end of the options the officials have identified.

The White House has not yet chosen a grade of paint, but Trump has insisted for years that the barrier should be black to discourage climbers. He has favored a shade known as “flat black” or “matte black” because of its heat-absorbent properties.

NATION

US Census workers to restart Alaska door-to-door canvassing

Associated Press
BETHEL, Alaska — The U.S. Census Bureau plans to restart its efforts to reach residents without a listed physical address.

The agency was expected to renew its door-to-door canvassing Wednesday after hand delivery of census materials that began March 15 was postponed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, KYUK-AM reported. Teams delivering the materials have been trained to observe social distancing and will follow federal health and safety guidelines, the Census Bureau said.

Temporary field staff will also use protective equipment provided by the government while distributing census materials to households, the agency said.

The bureau expects its field operation to deliver materials to 110,000 households in Alaska as part of the national census conducted every 10 years.

Less than 27% of Alaska households had completed the form by the first week of April, compared to the national response rate of nearly 43%.

Cook Inlet Housing Authority Chief Operating Officer Gabe Layman, who has assisted the nonprofit census education campaign Alaska Counts, previously said that many households in remote areas of Alaska were unaware they could file census information online rather than wait for a personal visit. Households can also submit information by phone, Layman said.

Alaska Counts has warned that the state will not receive a fair share of federal funds and programs allocated using figures compiled by the census if the new count is not accurate.
Officials: US to investigate claim of Venezuela raid

By Joshua Goodman
Associated Press

MIAMI — A former Green Beret who has claimed responsibility for an incursion into Venezuela is under federal investigation for arms trafficking, according to current and former U.S. law enforcement officials.

The investigation into Jordan Goudreau is in its initial stages and it’s unclear if it will result in charges, according to a U.S. law enforcement official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The probe stems from a frenzy of contradictory comments Goudreau has made since a small cadre of volunteer combatants he was advising on Sunday launched an impossible raid aimed at overthrowing Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Members of the U.S. Congress are also asking the State Department about its knowledge of Goudreau’s plans and raised concerns that he may have violated arms trafficking rules.

An AP investigation published prior to the failed raid places Goudreau at the center of a plot hatched with a rebellious former Venezuelan army general, Cliver Alcala, to secretly train dozens of Venezuelan military deserters in secret camps in Colombia to carry out a swift operation against Maduro. The U.S. has offered a $15 million reward for information leading to Maduro’s arrest or conviction. He was indicted by the Trump administration in March on narco-terrorist charges.

The men were being readied for combat at three rudimentary camps in Colombia with the help of Goudreau and his Florida-based company, Silvercorp USA, multiple Maduro opponents and aspiring freedom fighters told the AP. But the plot seemed doomed from the start because it lacked the support of the Trump administration and was infiltrated by Maduro’s vast, Cuban-trained intelligence network, the AP found.

The law enforcement official said Goudreau’s comments suggest his work on behalf of the volunteer army may have violated laws that require any U.S. company supplying weapons or military equipment, as well as military training and advice, to foreign persons to seek State Department approval.

Experts agree.

“Goudreau’s public comments alone show he was exporting his lethal expertise into a foreign country,” said Sean F�ate, a former U.S. Army paratrooper who worked as a private military contractor and is the author of a book, “The New Rules of War,” on the foreign policy implications of privatized warfare. “This is a serious violation.”

Goudreau declined to comment Tuesday. The State Department said it is restricted under law from confirming licensing activities.

The law enforcement official said Goudreau’s possible involvement in weapons smuggling stems from the March 23 seizure by police in Colombia of a stockpile of weapons being transported in a truck. Alcala claimed ownership of the cache shortly before surrendering to face U.S. narcotics charges in the same case for which Maduro was indicted.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday reiterated President Donald Trump’s claims a day earlier that there was no direct U.S. government involvement in Goudreau’s brazen operation.

“If we’d have been involved, it would have gone differently,” he joked. “As for who bankrolled it, we’re not prepared to share any more information about what we know took place. We’ll unpack that at an appropriate time, we’ll share that information if it makes good sense.”

Goudreau, a three-time Bronze Star recipient, has insisted that his work providing only strategic advice to the combatants doesn’t require special licensing. Still, he acknowledged sending into battle two special forces buddies associated with Silvercorp and who are now in Venezuelan custody.

Afghanistan, Iran investigate deaths of 16 Afghan migrants

By Susannah George
The Washington Post

ISLAMABAD — Afghanistan and Iran have launched a joint investigation into allegations that dozens of Afghan migrants who crossed illegally into Iran were tortured by Iranian border guards and thrown into a river, where at least 16 drowned.

Afghanistan’s foreign ministry announced the launch of the joint investigation Wednesday after reports of the torture and killings emerged this week. The announcement follows criticism from Afghan and U.S. officials. The Afghan presidential spokesman called the reported killings “unforgivable crimes.”

The allegations come as coronavirus lockdowns in Afghanistan have caused unemployment to spike and food prices to soar. As coronavirus spread in Iran earlier this year, more than 200,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan. And now as the Afghan economy has been crippled by the pandemic, some are trying to return to Iran in search of work.

Afghanistan’s acting foreign minister, Mohammad Hamid Atmar, told lawmakers Wednesday that talks with Iranian officials “ended with tension,” according to Afghan media reports. Atmar said that 16 bodies had been recovered from the site and that 18 to 20 people are missing.

Atmar launched a separate investigation by the Afghan government into the incident earlier this week, pledging in a tweet Tuesday, “we will pursue this unforgivable crime with all our country’s diplomatic means until we achieve justice and righteousness.” Atmar’s post included images from Afghan social media of bodies wrapped in cloth loaded into the back of a vehicle.

Former Iraqi spy chief is new premier

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq’s former spy chief was sworn in as prime minister by lawmakers early Thursday after weeks of tense political negotiations as the country faces a severe economic crisis spurred by plummeting oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic.

The majority of 255 legislators attending the session approved the government plan and the majority of Cabinet ministers proposed by Mustafa al-Kadhimi, officially inaugurating him as Iraq’s sixth premier since 2003 and ending five months of a leadership void.

Al-Kadhimi, who gave up the intelligence post when he became the prime minister-designate, assumed the prime ministership as Iraq faces unprecedented crises amid falling oil revenues that will likely prompt unpopular austerity measures, a rising daily tally of coronavirus cases, and expected U.S.-Iraq talks.

US eyes deal to free American in Iran

By Matthew Lee and Eric Tucker
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials believe they’re making progress in efforts to secure the release of Iran from a detained Navy veteran, but they are pushing back on Iranian suggestions that a swap is in the works for an imprisoned Iranian that American officials have been trying to deport since last year.

Ken Cuccinelli, the acting deputy Homeland Security secretary, said Wednesday that the cases of American detainees Michael White in Iran and Sirous Asgari, the Iranian imprisoned in the United States, have never been connected. He expressed frustration with recent comments from Iranian officials that there may be a link between the two and complained that Iran had been slow to accept Asgari’s return.

“We’ve been trying to deported this guy for months,” Cuccinelli told The Associated Press. “There has never been any breath of a link between the two until they made it a news story a couple of days ago.”

Cuccinelli said DHS had started to try to deport Asgari on Dec. 12 after his acquittal on charges of trying to steal sensitive trade secrets. However, he said, Iran refused to recognize him as legitimately Iranian and provide him with a validated passport until late February.

Once Asgari received the passport, DHS made several attempts to fly him back to Iran, purchasing tickets for flights on March 10, March 18, March 23, April 1 and May 1, according to Cuccinelli. Each of those flights was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic, he said.

Cuccinelli, an immigration hardliner who has advocated for tougher deportation policies, said Iran has also been slow-walking the return of 10 other Iranian prisoners slated for deportation from the U.S.
A warts-and-all approach

‘Never Have I Ever’ gives mothers the dimension they rarely receive on TV

BY SONIA RAO

The Washington Post

Roughly halfway into the Netflix series “Never Have I Ever,” 15-year-old Devi Vishwakumar’s mother, Nalini, drags her to her high school on a weekend morning for Ganesha Puja, a traditional ceremony honoring the Hindu god. Normally inhabited by hormonal teenagers, the hallways are instead filled with members of a local Hindu society dressed in silk saris and kurtas. Floral garlands wrap around the doorways.

Actress Poorna Jagannathan, who plays Nalini, recalls the “special feeling” of shooting the episode.

“We’ve been live!” Chou said. “It’s Netflix!” she says. “And it’s all brown people.”

“Never Have I Ever,” created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher, isn’t the first of Kaling’s comedies to feature an Indian American lead character. But it is the first to center on an Indian American family, a rarity across genres. Whereas immigrant parents can sometimes be reduced to stereotypes on screen, Nalini — as well as Devi’s late father Mohan, who appears in flashbacks — are depicted with unrelenting honesty.

This warts-and-all approach means that the dynamic between Devi (Maitreyi Ramakrishnan) and Nalini, a vital component of the coming-of-age story, can get quite tricky. The headstrong woman lash out at each other, their anger thinly veiling the immense grief of losing Mohan (Sendhil Ramamurthy). Devi at times feels suffocated by Nalini’s parenting, but the show makes sure to shed light on both sides.

“The story of immigrants is told by their first-generation kids,” Jagannathan says. “Those are the people with agency, so they’re the center of their own story. The perspective is (often) only of the kids going through life, and the parents are presented as obstacles to get what they want to do. The moms sometimes feel like caricatures, only wanting their kids to get married, or being a little suffocating.”

Jagannathan has taken on many roles like Nalini; American audiences might remember her as Nicole Kidman’s lawyer in the second season of “Big Little Lies," or as Riz Ahmed’s mother in “The Night Of.” An immigrant herself, she worried after learning “Never Have I Ever” is a young-adult series that Nalini’s story line would be akin to a “Disney version of immigration.” Kaling and Fisher assured her otherwise.

“As an actor, a lot of times you sign on blind,” Jagannathan says. “You sign on (with) trust, and it’s tricky because you don’t really have any scripts. You really don’t know what your character arc is going to be. I definitely just trusted Mindy and Lang would do the character justice.”

Even when Devi is upset with Nalini — whether because of the teenager’s reaction to her heritage, or a feeling that she’s burdening her now-single mother — “Never Have I Ever” finds a way to empathize with the character. Viewers feel for Nalini when she insists on attending the nupu for the sense of community, only to be put down by the pinying glances of those who let Mohan’s death define her.

The mother-daughter dynamic came naturally to the actresses, according to Jagannathan, who was present during Kaling’s second audition. Jagannathan likens the cast’s chemistry to the thousand-piece puzzles she has been working on during quarantine. It’s difficult to distinguish pieces among all the others at first, but once you find the right one and place it where it belongs, she says, it feels effortless.

Jagannathan was initially drawn to the project by Kaling’s established sense of humor, which the actress says is “built on top of very delicate experiences.”

“There’s something about how she experiences life and spits it out,” she adds.

Jagannathan also filters her life through humor, which the actress says is “built on top of very delicate experiences.”

Never Have I Ever’ gives mothers the dimension they rarely receive on TV

CBS renews 23 shows for 2020-2021 television season

TV viewers craving familiarity will find it on CBS, which is renewing nearly two dozen series including newcomers “The Unicorn” and “All Rise” and stalwarts “Blue Bloods” and “The Amazing Race.”

CBS said Wednesday that 23 returning shows will be part of the network’s lineup for the 2020-2021 season, along with new series to be unveiled in the coming weeks.

Among returning are “Young Sheldon,” “Bob Hearts Abishola” and “Evil.”

Other news

Lady Gaga’s highly anticipated album finally has a release date after the coronavirus crisis put it on ice for a month. On Wednesday, the “Stupid Love” singer announced that “Chromatica” will drop on May 29, rather than a month after its original April 10 release date.

Compiled from wire services
America needs a new FDR. Trump is not him.

By Henry Olsen

A new campaign ad for President Donald Trump argues that he is the "New FDR." A critic at The Washington Post, George Orwell, described a government-operated Ministry of Truth, which indoctrinated the population with irrational NewSpeak messages like "war is peace" and "freedom is slavery." Today, online platforms regularly propagate nonsensical coronavirus-related phraseology like "wagenotgether." It is frightening how many Americans today accept a ministry of truth, insisting on everyone agreeing to one set of facts determined either by the political narrative of the day or manipulated history. It plays into the theory that Americans are fragile or infallible, in need of guardians or babysitters, since it is impossible for them to change their minds for themselves right from wrong, safe from unsafe, or truth from lies. And it can only serve to stifle the search for a path forward at a time when the country needs all the creative thinking it can get.

When Donald Trump was elected president, there were immediate demands to investigate allegations that Russia had influenced the election by planting false information on social media. Facebook and others have since caved to pressure to identify and prohibit fabricated stories, appointing or firing people to take the blame. But even the face of the data, elections, misleading and inaccurate information has been employed by candidates and campaigners alike when the win is at stake. Now comes the new coronavirus pandemic, and an insistence by the state and many in the media that we must all sing from the same hymn book. To do otherwise represents a danger to ourselves or to our democracy, and an insistence by the state and others have since caved to pressure to require that we wear masks, social distance, or maintain physical distance from one another. To do otherwise represents a danger to ourselves or to our democracy.

Some of them do carry guns, of course, but far and from it, it is also worth noting that many American troops abroad were not wearing masks when they were deployed. In the face of evidence that the idea that Americans are fragile or infallible, in need of guardians or babysitters, since it is impossible for them to change their minds for themselves right from wrong, safe from unsafe, or truth from lies. And it can only serve to stifle the search for a path forward at a time when the country needs all the creative thinking it can get. When Donald Trump was elected president, there were immediate demands to investigate allegations that Russia had influenced the election by planting false information on social media. Facebook and others have since caved to pressure to identify and prohibit fabricated stories, appointing or firing people to take the blame. But even the face of the data, elections, misleading and inaccurate information has been employed by candidates and campaigners alike when the win is at stake. Now comes the new coronavirus pandemic, and an insistence by the state and many in the media that we must all sing from the same hymn book. To do otherwise represents a danger to ourselves or to our democracy.

 Sadly, when the media is presented with the challenge of demonstrating its reliability, it too often chooses to perpetuate its grudge against President Trump by misleading and inaccurate information. We would like to believe that we can trust institutional media outlets to separate the information wheat from the chaff. But that the state and many in the media that we must all sing from the same hymn book. To do otherwise represents a danger to ourselves or to our democracy.

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What newspapers are saying at home

The following editorial sections are selected from a cross-section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editorials are provided by The Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

If Biden vows higher standard, investigate Reade claim fully

The New York Times

Former Vice President Joe Biden, the Democrats’ presumptive nominee for president, has forcefully denied allegations of sexual misconduct and assault made against him by Tara Reade, a former staff assistant in his Senate office.

“I retold the story from that statement last Friday. ‘This never happened.’ Reade’s accusations, which have been percolating for several weeks, are grave and serious. She charges that, in the spring of 1993, Biden cornered her in a deserted hallway of the Capitol complex, pinned her against a wall, reached under her skirt and penetrated her with his fingers.

Biden’s brother and multiple friends have said she has not told them the incident around the time it occurred. Some bits of evidence lend credence to her claim, even as others do not. When Biden’s brother, Collin Moulton, first spoke to The Washington Post about his sister’s accusations, for instance, he mentioned only that he thought about those rumors. His young brother, several days later, Moulton texted The Post to say that he also recalled her sharing that Biden had put his hand ‘under her clothes.’

As is so often the case in such situations, it is still too early to determine the truth. But the stakes are too high to let the matter fester — or leave it to be investigated by and adjudicated in the media. Biden is involved in the nomination process.

In 2018, this board advocated strongly for a vigorous inquiry into accusations of sexual misconduct raised against Brett Kavanaugh when he was nominated to a seat on the Supreme Court. Biden’s pursuit of the presidency requires no less. His campaign should move to investigate the allegations.

In an interview on MSNBC, Biden re- stated these calls, insisting that his Senate paper does not contain any personnel files and so could not possibly shed light on Reade’s allegations. He added that they do, however, contain sensitive information about his past work that could be unfairly exploited in a presidential campaign.

While understandable, this concern is not prohibited by law — and the word is insufficient to dispel the cloud. Any inventory should be strictly limited to information about Reade and conducted in an unbiased, apolitical panel, put together by the DNC and chosen to foster as much trust in its findings as possible. Adversely affecting would be a major undertaking. But the question at hand is no less than Biden’s fitness for the presidency. No relevant memo should be left unexamined.

It has been noted that President Donald Trump has been accused of sexual harassment or assault by more than a dozen women. Those claims also should be investigated. Trump does not seriously address the claims against him; he simply denies them and attacks his accusers.

Biden has set higher standards for himself. That has been central to his appeal. His campaign is founded on the promise of restoring sanity, civility and decency to the presidency. Even if certainty isn’t possible in this matter, the American people deserve at least the confidence that he, and the Democratic Party, have made every effort to bring the truth to light.

Data showed targeted lockdowns would work — and save jobs

The Wall Street Journal

American workers are paying the price for the government’s strict lockdowns of American life and commerce, and now comes evidence that targeted lockdowns aimed at protecting those who are most vulnerable to the coronavirus would be better for public health and the economy.

That conclusion comes in a new working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research by MIT economists Daron Acemoglu, Victor Chernozhukov, Ivan Werning and Michael Whinston. The authors compared relative risks of infection, hospitalization and death for the young-middle-aged and those over age 65. They then compared strict lockdowns that treat all age groups the same with a more targeted strategy that protects the old.

“Interestingly, we find that semi-targeted policies that simply apply a strict lockdown on the oldest group can achieve the majority of the gains from fully-targeted policies,” the authors write. “For example, a semi-targeted policy that involves the lockdown of those above 65 until a vaccine becomes available can reach the young-middle- aged groups back into the economy much more quickly, and still achieve a much lower fatality rate in the population (just above 1% of the population instead of 1.83% with the optimal uniform policy).”

Low-hanging fruit of success, denying lockdowns of March and April have been aimed specifically at preventing hospitals from being overrun with COVID-19 patients and thus reducing the death rate. But the paper says a targeted lockdown aimed at seniors combined with other policies like social distancing will reduce the death rate by more than half.

Targeted lockdowns also reduce economic harm, as you’d expect. “This policy also reduces the economic damage from 24.3% to 12.8% of one year’s GDP. The reason is that, once the most vulnerable group is protected, the other groups can be reincorporated into the economy more quickly,” the authors write.

The universal lockdowns are finally easing in many states, and the damage in the last two months can’t be undone. But these studies can inform governors as they consider how and what to reopen in their states. And in particular they should inform government decisions about the kind of lockdowns to reimpose if there are coronavirus flare-ups, as there are likely to be until a vaccine or cure arrives.

Protect the most vulnerable, but don’t put the entire state in economic cold storage in the name of a false choice between saving lives and saving money. On the growing evidence, targeted lockdowns can save more lives and more livelihoods.

Trump’s absence of leadership has put people at greater risk

The Washington Post

Amanda hyperbole is a cheap price for the government’s strict lockdowns of American life and commerce, and now comes evidence that targeted lockdowns aimed at protecting those who are most vulnerable to the coronavirus would be better for public health and the economy.

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Protect the most vulnerable, but don’t put the entire state in economic cold storage in the name of a false choice between saving lives and saving money. On the growing evidence, targeted lockdowns can save more lives and more livelihoods.

What we do know is this: If these jeers show their faces in Texas, authorities should show no hesitation in eradicating every last one of them. We’re still hoping that these invasive bugs can be murdered off in Washington state before they gain so much of a foothold that they become impossible to dislodge. Otherwise, we’ll see these hornets wreck honeybee hives by invading them as they reanimate themselves. That’s a very real danger.

The nation’s economic implosion demands action, but the correct response is to respond with sustained and effective social distancing, not to open the floodgates, which does not cost thousands of additional lives. Trump not only does not know how to get there, but he also appears unwilling to seriously do the necessary. We may see terrible consequences from this abdication.

Like the rest of America, we’ve been following the coverage of the so-called murder hornets showing up in northern Washington state and across the Pacific North- west in Canada. We still don’t know how deeply these hornets from Asia have integrated into the United States. Whether this will become a problem that will challenge honeybee hives across the Pacific, or whether this will become a problem that will challenge honeybee hives across the United States.

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In Japan, apparently, honeybees have figured out a defense against the murder hornets. They have put into place one of these tough creatures as it tries to make its way into their hive, and rather than uselessly empurple itself, the murder hornet built its net’s hard outer-shell, the bees work to overheat the hornet. Essentially, the bees form a ball around the invader and release a chemical that causes the hornet’s carcasses to feed their own young. In Japan, apparently, honeybees have figured out a defense against the murder hornets. They have put into place one of these tough creatures as it tries to make its way into their hive, and rather than uselessly empurple itself, the murder hornet built its net’s hard outer-shell, the bees work to overheat the hornet. Essentially, the bees form a ball around the invader and release a chemical that causes the hornet’s carcasses to feed their own young.

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Players that endured COVID-19 can provide scientific information

By Tim Reynolds  
Associated Press

Dr. Priya Sampathkumar gets asked by her two teen-aged sons every day when they can expect to see NBA games again. She’s among the doctors desperately trying to answer that question — and the NBA is now trying to help.

Sampathkumar is on the staff at the Mayo Clinic, which is starting to get support from the NBA business. Her salary for a study that will aim to shed more light on how antibody testing can help the medical world further understand COVID-19. NBA teams were told this week about the study through an invitation for players and staff to volunteer to take part.

“I think this is one step towards understanding when we might be able to open things back up,” said Sampathkumar, the Mayo Clinic’s Chair of the Immunization and the Infection Prevention Center and Control Specialty Councils.

“It’s certainly not that at the end of the study, we’re not going to be able to say, ‘OK, on X, Y and Z state everything can open up again.’ But every little bit helps right now, which is why the NBA asked teams to assist, if possible. Teams were told that the study would also help doctors understand the prevalence of COVID-19 among asymptomatic individuals who were asymptomatic or experienced only mild symptoms.

“From a team perspective, and saying this broadly across all teams, participation across the NBA allows for more robust information from the community at large in providing prevalence data,” said Dr. Mimmce, the team’s medical officer. It’s a relatively simple process: Teams will receive materials from researchers, then have phlebotomists collect specimens that will be shipped back to the Mayo Clinic. Participants will also have to fill out a survey to gauge their level of potential exposure. Within two days, test results will be known — and because this is about antibodies, it will not take resources away from doing other testing to identify who are sick with the virus.

Additional goals of the study include being able to identify more patients who could donate plasma and improve care for patients who are dealing with the coronavirus, plus potentially move researchers closer to a vaccine.

“It really has a couple of different potential goals in the sense that it is one that does help to assess the prevalence of antibodies within society in general and certainly for those players who participate with the NBA in terms of exposure,” said Dr. John DiFlorio, the NBA’s director of sports medicine. “But it also is a study that is attempting to do sort of a higher-level validation of a tool that will be more easy at point of care or at home. So, it has two parts to it.”

The virus has infected more than 3.6 million people worldwide and killed a quarter-million, according to a tally through Wednesday by Johns Hopkins University. Experts believe the actual number of infections and deaths are higher than what has been officially reported by governments.

Briefly

NCAA waives scholarships spending minimum

The NCAA approved a waiver that will allow schools to spend below the minimum level on athletic scholarships required to compete in Division I. The Division I Council Coordination Committee approved two other blanket waivers Wednesday that had been requested by several conferences in recent weeks in response to coronavirus pandemic.

Basketball and football players will be allowed to participate in summer athletic activities without being enrolled in school. Schools that are in the process of moving to D-I can be counted toward the minimum required Division I opponents.

The coordinator committee also signed off on waiving some recruiting rules to provide more flexibility for coaches and athletes through the extended dead period. The dead period for all sports currently runs through May 31. The committee decided at its May 13 meeting to extend the dead period through June 30.

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Sarr transferring to Kentucky

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Four MLS teams allow workouts; more to join

By Tim Booth

Associated Press

Four Major League Soccer teams took the first small step toward returning to play Wednesday by allowing players to use team training fields for individual workouts.

Sporting Kansas City, Atlanta United, Orlando City and Inter Miami let players in for vigorous, controlled voluntary workouts on the first day they were permitted by the league.

Nashville, Real Salt Lake, LAFC, Houston and Portland are among the league’s 26 teams that planned to start Thursday, with private field access only. If they have,” he said.

Some teams simply can’t open up for workouts just yet. In Seattle, which was hit hard by the coronavirus, stay-at-home orders are in place until May 31. Many other states and cities also have similar orders in place.

MLS protocols for the individual workouts include restricting facilities to essential staff, disinfection of all equipment after each session, screening measures including temperature checks, and staggered player and staff arrivals and departures, as well as designated parking that ensures proper distancing.

Players are still not allowed access to indoor facilities, such as locker rooms. They must also wear personal protective equipment such as masks upon arriving and departing from the fields, while staff will be required to use such equipment at all times. Staff must maintain a distance of 10 feet from players at all times.

“We got a lot of information last night about the process, and it’s a tedious one but it’s an important one because we want to make sure that we’re exercising every safety precaution,” Inter Miami goalkeeper Luis Robles said.

AP sports writers Tim Reynolds in Miami, Paul Newberry in Atlanta, Joe Kay in Cincinnati and Dave Skretta in Kansas City contributed to this report.

Four MLS teams allow workouts; more to join

By Anne M. Peterson

Associated Press

Teams that want to start workouts must first get MLS approval. Many haven’t yet completed the process, while numerous others are in areas still under stay-at-home orders to limit the spread of COVID-19. Four clubs began workouts Wednesday and four more were scheduled to begin Thursday. Others will begin next week.

SOURCE: Associated Press

completed the process yet. Numerous other teams are in areas still under stay-at-home orders to limit the spread of COVID-19, or are awaiting approval from local health authorities before moving forward with their plans.

Sporting Kansas City advocated for giving players individual access to private team facilities for safety reasons. They could get recognized and approached in public parks and other fields are not well-groomed and could cause injury.

“This is individual workouts with private field access only. If you think of it that way, you’re thinking of it based on putting the player safety first,” Sporting coach Peter Vermes said. “And again, this is a much safer environment than the alternatives they have.”

FC Dallas defender Ryan Hollingshead welcomed the opportunity to play on maintained fields. Dallas is expected to start workouts Monday.

“We have been playing on terrible park fields and trying to find a place that has at least some sort of surface to play soccer on. But these fields are rock hard, they’re so bouncy. It’s almost impossible to do any of the drills that we’re trying to do on these fields,” he said.

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Four MLS teams allow workouts; more to join

By Rob Harris

Associated Press

Germany’s decision that soccer can return this month provided encouragement for players and teams across Europe on Wednesday that the shutdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic could soon be coming to an end.

With COVID-19 infections declining, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that the return of the top two leagues could be included in the loosening of lockdown measures. However, supporters will be locked out of stadiums for some time to come across Europe to contain the coronavirus while there is no vaccine.

The Bundesliga is now set to be the first major men’s soccer competition to resume in Europe on Friday, May 15, after the shutdown of the sport across the continent in March. The Belgian, French and Dutch leagues were all canceled prematurely after governments decided it is not safe for sports to be staged yet — even without fans.

This ensures that the sporting decision is made on the pitch and not in the boardroom,” said Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, the chairman of Bayern Munich, which has a four-point lead over Borussia Dortmund with nine games remaining.

“Let’s pick up where you left off, Erling,” Dortmund said in a tweet linking to a compilation of goals by teenage sensation Erling Haaland.

Croatia also announced plans Wednesday to bring back soccer on May 30 and Turkey said it was aiming for June 12 and still hopes to host the postponed Champions League final in Istanbul in August.

The English Premier League and Spain’s LaLiga hope to start up again in June but are yet to announce a date.

“It’s still not certain if the English Premier League trophy will be presented this season. The Premier League hopes to start up again in June but has yet to make an official announcement.”
Running the option: College football not in sync yet on start

**By Ralph D. Russo**
Associated Press

There are 130 major college football teams, spread across 41 states and competing in 10 conferences, save for a handful of independents.

The goal is to have all those teams start the upcoming season at the same time — whether that’s around Labor Day as scheduled or later — and play the same number of games.

With each passing day it is becoming apparent the COVID-19 pandemic is going to make that goal difficult to achieve. Despite the best intentions of conference leaders, the possibility exists of college football being played in SEC country before it begins in Pac-12 territory — or something else entirely.

“I can’t say enough about the extent to which they’re working closely together, spending time together, communicating with each other,” Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick said. “And I think that’s the most important thing. It gives us a chance to come up with an overarching policy and an ability to start together.”

“Having said that, I think we all recognize that there is a significant chance that that may not be possible,” he said.

The coronavirus is affecting different regions of the country in different ways, prompting a wide range of responses to fight the spread.

Some states such as Georgia and Florida have already begun to re-open businesses. Others such as California and Washington are going more slowly. Where that leaves them all four months from now is hard to predict and the uncertainty is reflected across college sports.

The NCAA football oversight committee agreed on a six-week plan for teams to prepare to start the season. Teams would ideally be on campus by mid-July for the season to start on time.

Beyond that, the NCAA has little influence on the logistics of college football. The conferences are making the charge, with commissioners leading the way.

The commissioners of the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12 and Southeastern Conference say they have been in almost constant contact since the NCAA men’s basketball tournament was canceled on March 12.

“Based on the very positive and close collaboration among the leaders in college football and discussions with schools, other leagues and the medical community, at this point in time we are planning to start the football season on time and together on a national basis,” Pac-12 Commissioner Larry Scott said.

But can that plan hold?

An interview SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey did last week with a Jacksonville, Fla., radio station became a headline when he said: “There is room for different conferences to make different decisions.” In an interview with the Big Ten network, Commissioner Kevin Warren suggested something similar.

Penn State coach James Franklin wondered if ever conferences schools would be uniform in their return to play.

“Say you have six schools in your conference or eight schools in your conference that all are able to open, and there are one or two that can’t. Are you going to penalize all these schools not being able to reopen?” Franklin asked reporters.

NFL adopts plans for opening team practice facilities

**By Barry Wilner**
Associated Press

The NFL has set protocols for reopening team facilities and has told the 32 teams to have them in place by May 15.

In a memo sent by Commissioner Roger Goodell, several phases of the protocols were laid out. The first phase to deal with the coronavirus pandemic would involve a limited number of nonplayer personnel, initially 50% of the nonplayer employees (up to a total of 75) on any single day, being approved to be at the facility. But state or local regulations could require a lower number.

The individual clubs would decide which employees could return to the facility and when once facilities reopen. No players would be permitted in the facility except to continue therapy and rehabilitative care. On-field practices could not begin until the facility manager.

Following that, the protocols would allow for an Infection Control Officer.

The response team must consist of a local public health information to the ICO.

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Auditor: Favre is repaying $1.1M for no-show speeches

**By Emily Wagster Pettus**
Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — Former NFL quarterback Brett Favre is repaying $1.1 million in welfare money that he received for multiple speeches where he did not show up, the Mississippi state auditor said Wednesday.

Auditor Shad White said his office received $500,000 from Favre on Wednesday, plus a commitment that Favre will repay the other $600,000 in installments over the next few months.

Favre’s effort to repay the money came two days after White released an audit of spending by the Mississippi Department of Human Services that showed Favre had been paid by Mississippi Community Education Center, a nonprofit group whose former leader has been indicted in a welfare embezzlement scheme.

Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the U.S., and the community education center had contracts with Human Services to spend money through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, also known as TANF.

“Mr. Favre has made it clear that he wants to make this right and make the taxpayers whole,” White said in a statement Wednesday. “To date, we have seen no records indicating Mr. Favre knew that TANF was the program that served as the source of the money he was paid.”

The audit released Monday said the center paid Favre Enterprises $500,000 in December 2017 and $600,000 in June 2018, and it was supposed to make speeches for at least three events. The auditor’s report said that “upon a cursory review of those dates, auditors were able to determine that the individual contracted did not speak nor was he present for those events.”

Favre, who lives in Mississippi, faces no criminal charges. The audit report lists the payments to him as “questioned” costs.

In a Facebook post Wednesday night, Favre said he didn’t know the payments he received came from welfare funds and noted his charity had provided millions of dollars to poor kids in his home state of Mississippi and Wisconsin.

“My agent is often approached by different products or brands for me to appear in one way or another. This request was no different, and I did nudgers for Family First,” Favre wrote.

Associated Press sports writer Annie Stapleton contributed to this report.
Regional fighters face uphill battle during pandemic

Limited options for those yet to break through with UFC

By Dan Gelston
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Kyle Daukaus couldn’t find a job. The Philadelphia native seeks manual labor work to earn money while on a break from the kind of professional fighting not often noted on LinkedIn: the undefeated middleweight champion of regional MMA promotion Cage Fury Fighting Championships.

“The country is open, but for me, I can’t do anything.” Daukaus said, “I can’t do anything.”

Outside of UFC, the mixed martial arts world has largely shut down, leaving thousands of prospects like the 27-year-old Daukaus out of work and with little idea when the cage door will open again.

“There’s nowhere to fight — the regional scene has vanished during the coronavirus pandemic — and their gyms are shuttered. So Daukaus does what he can, taking to a nearby park for sprints on empty parking lots and pounding pads with his brother in the garage of his Philly home. Far from the millions top MMA fighters earn with each massive pay-per-view fight, Daukaus is paid by CFFC almost on commission — the more tickets he sells to friends and family for one of his fight nights, the more cash he can earn.

And in this climate, there’s nothing to sell.

Cage Fury has postponed its scheduled cards, as have most of the larger MMA promotions such as Bellator, One Championship and the Professional Fighters League.

The promotional drought has left fighters scurrying for a nibble of whatever open preliminary bouts might be available on a UFC card.

Hector Castro, a fight manager with Elite Xtreme Combat, said UFC has tightened the ship on which outliers are offered deals. But his phone is buzzing from the pleas of his stable of roughly 20 fighters who crave a fight with any promotion.

“Everybody wants to get in there,” he said. “But the major issue is, they want to be smart about it. They understand this is how they make a living. But a lot of them also see the opportunity.”

Daukaus is among the fighters looking to seize the moment. He fought on the UFC “Contender Series” and nearly scored a contract with the company. There’s a chance he could earn another crack at UFC if he lands a spot on the next “Contender” if it goes through with a summer taping.

“He texts me almost every other day, ‘Hey, tell (UFC) I’m ready,” Castro said.

“Tell the Bellator guys, ‘Hey, I want this guy. I’m like, listen, bro. It’s quiet right now. There’s nothing going on. Let’s hope we can get back to work, and these guys can make a living. The longer we go, the longer the line goes. You’re only allowed 12 fights, 15 fights a card. You’re at the bottom of the totem pole.’

With no money stream, fighters are more willing than ever to gamble with their health and fight during the outbreak.

“Will they risk getting sick? I’m sure 90% would,” Castro said. “The mentally strong are going to survive this.”

Daukaus normally trained twice daily with jiu-jitsu sessions in the morning and practicing other mixed martial arts skills at night. He taught kickboxing classes at a Philly gym and worked out with a strength and conditioning coach in New Jersey. He because they have a 30,000-square-foot facility. We can’t do that. So what do we do?

Said in a phone interview. “I’m not having any income. I know that fight as a profession is a struggle in the beginning, and I’m fine with struggling like that. But I’m not even guaranteed monthly payments from the gym right now. I’m doing as best as I can spend as minimal an amount as possible.”

Daukaus had hoped to fight again this month. Instead, he trains at home for a fight that could earn him a title shot.

“I don’t have a Plan B,” Daukaus said. “If the opportunity comes and I get a call, I’m going to take it.”

UFC 249 participants ready to inspire hope knowing risk

By Greg Beacham
Associated Press

PHOENIX — The fighters of UFC 249 may be about to crack the screen, but their impact could define the pandemic.

Lightweight contenders Tony Ferguson, pictured, and Justin Gaethje will headline UFC 249 on Saturday in Jacksonville, Fla.

Ferguson and Gaethje both believe their risks are outweighed by the sporting rewards they will reap and the example they will provide when they fight for the interim UFC lightweight title in a fan-free arena.

“We’re going to bring a sense of normalcy to people,” Gaethje said in a phone interview. “I’m proud to be a part of it. It’s the opportunity to inspire. People need to be inspired right now. They need to not let themselves become depressed or (emotional) because they can’t control what’s going on right now. We’ve got to ride it through. They need to be inspired, and we can do that.”

“When I honestly had no reservations,” Ferguson added. “Fighting is very dangerous, so I think we’ll be just fine.”

The UFC never wanted to stop competition while the pandemic grew, and president Dana White was never short of fighters willing to compete while he scrambled desperately to keep holding fights amid the unprecedented public health crisis. Now that White has found a state and an athletic commission willing to host him, UFC 249 will be followed by additional shows on May 13, May 16 and probably May 23 from Jacksonville.

“There’s not very often you’re going to get to fight for a world title, much less during a pandemic when there’s zero sports going on and you’re going to be the only one on TV,” Gaethje said. “You have to face your fears. You’ve got to go out there and take the chances when they’re presented.”

Even seasoned veterans like ex-champion Dominick Cruz have jumped at the opportunity despite being well aware of the health risks involved. Like Gaethje, Cruz sees UFC 249 as an opportunity to overcome fear.

“Realistically, anybody can contract this virus,” said Cruz, who will return from a three-year cage absence to fight bantamweight Henry Cejudo on Saturday. “I think that’s partially the point, is understanding that anybody out there can get this, but you can’t just freeze up when you see something that’s scary. You’ve got to take the precautions, be as safe as possible, but live your life. That’s what I’m doing.”
Fighting for a future

With gyms – and cages – shuttered, limited options available to UFC hopefuls looking to train, and earn, during pandemic

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Fighter Kyle Daukaus, right, trains with his brother Chris Daukaus in their garage last week in Philadelphia. Kyle, a rising star in the regional MMA promotion Cage Fury Fighting Championships, is still chasing his dream of getting the call to fight for UFC despite the coronavirus pandemic.

MATT SLOCUM / AP

Inside:
- Fighters see UFC 249 as chance to spread hope, inspiration, Page 23

TO OUR READERS

As the sports world pauses to join the rest of the world in fighting the coronavirus pandemic, you will see fewer sports stories in Stars and Stripes. We look forward to resuming our normal coverage when the leagues and governing bodies determine it is safe for athletes and fans to return to competition.