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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Navy teams batch test on 7th Fleet ships

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy has taken coronavirus testing directly to ships at sea by deploying medical teams equipped with test kits to combat the spreading virus, according to the 7th Fleet.

Teams of preventive medicine and medical research specialists were sent March 14 to the amphibious assault ship USS America, stationed at Sasebo Naval Base, Japan; the USS Blue Ridge, the 7th Fleet flagship based at Yokosuka; and the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, according to the 7th Fleet Public Affairs Office on Saturday. The Roosevelt, homeported in California, was in the western Pacific when the teams deployed, according to navy.mil.

The teams are batch testing sailors with flulike symptoms aboard those vessels rather than sending the samples ashore for testing, according to the 7th Fleet. Batch testing means one test is done simultaneously on multiple specimens.

So far, no one aboard a 7th Fleet vessel has tested positive for coronavirus, according to Saturday's statement.

"The team here in 7th Fleet has taken COVID-19 seriously from the beginning and has many public health measures

already in place," 7th Fleet Surgeon Capt. Christine Sears said in the statement. The deployed medical teams "provide additional depth in our ability to combat this virus."

The medical teams are only looking for the presence of coronavirus on board those ships. The results they collect cannot indicate individual cases, according to the Navy statement.

If a batch sample comes back positive for the virus, the sailors in that group may be isolated or, depending on their symptoms, evacuated off the ship for further testing, according to the statement.

The embarked medical teams are composed of a preventive medicine technician, preventative medicine officer, a microbiologist and medical laboratory technician, according to the statement.

The two tests being utilized by the teams are the BioFire Film array, which tests for respiratory diseases, and the Step One RT-PCR System, which allows the team to perform more comprehensive coronavirus tests at sea.

"This capability allows us, the Navy, to protect mission readiness and protection of our sailors," Lt. Cmdr. Rebecca Pavlicek, Blue Ridge COVID-19 testing team lead, said in the statement.

USNS Mercy heads to Los Angeles to help local hospitals

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The hospital ship USNS Mercy is departing Monday from Naval Station San Diego for Los Angeles to help with local medical efforts as the federal government predicts a surge of cases in the region and an increased need for hospital beds.

The Mercy has more than 800 Navy medical personnel and support staff and will take on non-coronavirus patients that have been referred by LA hospitals, according to a Navy statement. The ship will be able to provide "a full spectrum of medical care to include critical and urgent care for adults."

By not treating coronavirus patients, the ship will allow local hospitals to care for people who have been infected without taxing their already strained medical system with other critical cases.

"We can take care of ... trauma patients ... [to] open up more rooms for patients with the [coronavirus] because what they require are special rooms that are sequestered, that have other capabilities that we don't necessarily have available to us," Defense Secretary Mark Esper said last week. "It's a different approach, but we want to make all that available so that we're doing everything we can to help the American people."

California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Thursday that he had sent a letter to President Donald Trump requesting the ship be sent to the LA area, saying they expect more than half of the state's population — 25.5 million people — will be infect-

ed during an eight-week period as the coronavirus outbreak worsens in the United States.

Trump announced Sunday that the Mercy was heading to LA and not Seattle, one of the other locations considered for the ship. Peter Gaynor, the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said the decision was based on analysis of potential hospital bed needs. Washington was one of the first states to see an outbreak of cases and deaths from the virus.

"Even though there are more cases right now in Washington, the projected needs for beds in California is five times more than that of Washington," Gaynor said.

LA has 409 confirmed cases and five deaths from the coronavirus as of Monday, according to Johns Hopkins University. King County, Wash., which includes Seattle, has more than 1,000 confirmed cases and 75 deaths from the virus, according to Johns Hopkins.

New York will receive the other Navy hospital ship, the USNS Comfort. However, it is not expected to arrive until mid-April due to maintenance, according to Trump.

New York City has more than 10,700 confirmed cases and 99 deaths from the virus, according to Johns Hopkins. The New York City region has seen a surge of cases and area hospital officials are concerned about supply, including ventilators and masks, The New York Times reported Sunday.

Ramstein and Aviano airmen provide Italy with medical support

BY KENT HARRIS
Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — The U.S. military is assisting Italy's coronavirus response by providing a modular unit capable of helping medical workers treat up to 40 patients a day, Air Force officials said Monday.

A C130-J transport plane from the 86th Airlift Wing at Ramstein Air Base in Germany delivered five pallets of material to Aviano on Friday night containing medical supplies for 22 days, 10 beds and two tents, said Maj. Sarah Babcock, 31st Fighter Wing spokeswoman.

The En-Route Patient Staging System is meant for treating patients and not for coronavirus testing, Babcock said.

No personnel have been assigned to accompany the supplies, Babcock said.

"We're just waiting to turn it over to the Italians," she said, referring questions about its intended use to the Italian Defense Ministry, who were not

immediately available for comment Monday.

Aviano is ready to serve as a staging area for more supplies if needed, Babcock said.

"It's evidence why this airfield and us being mission-ready is so important," she said. "So supplies like this can come in. We're always ready to support our partners during these challenging times."

Elsewhere in Italy, the 405th Army Field Support Battalion-Africa is gathering supplies at Camp Darby, said Jim Brooks, spokesman for U.S. Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza.

It's the second recent notable exchange between the two NATO allies, who are both confronted by tens of thousands of people who have tested positive for COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

The Associated Press quoted officials as saying Monday that Italy recorded a smaller day-to-day increase in new coronavirus cases for the second straight day.

Army restarting limited virus testing in Stuttgart

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — Coronavirus testing at the Army garrison here briefly expanded to include symptom-free people who live in on-base apartment buildings or work in customer service, as the military tried a new strategy to stem the spread of the virus, officials said.

But the effort, launched over the weekend, was curtailed two days after it began because of limited supplies. Garrison officials hope to restart limited testing Tuesday.

The halt came because "there is the potential you can overwhelm the system," garrison commander Col. Jason Condrey said in an interview Monday.

Thirty-one people in the Stuttgart military community have tested positive for the virus, which is more confirmed cases than any other military area overseas. The virus has been diagnosed in around 60 personnel at U.S. bases in Europe.

As results from the first batch of tests come in, the garrison expects to better understand the scope of the problem,

Condrey said.

A new testing center was set up at the Exchange on Panzer Kaserne over the weekend and 250 test samples were taken, Condrey said in an announcement Sunday.

"In order to get ahead of the virus, we need to look in every workspace, in every stairwell apartment within our family housing, and look at our workforce in some of those critical, high-contact services," he said.

The expanded testing plan stopped Monday because of a shortage of testing supplies, garrison officials said. Landstuhl Regional Medical Center's ability to process the greater number of tests also was a "limiting factor," Condrey said.

As of Friday, LRMC had processed about 550 total coronavirus tests and was averaging roughly 40 test analyses per day, hospital officials said. The recent arrival of new processing equipment has allowed the hospital to increase that test rate more than tenfold to 435 daily.

Testing asymptomatic people doesn't mean everyone on post can get screened, Condrey said.

Tokyo tells cherry blossom viewers to keep it moving

BY HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The Tokyo Metropolitan Government is cautioning visitors to city parks to set aside tradition to avoid the threat of coronavirus as they enjoy the iconic, seasonal Japanese cherry blossoms.

Nonetheless, throngs of visitors gathered beneath the cherry blossoms in Tokyo city parks over the weekend. Of those that turned up Sunday in Ueno Park, where more than 3 million took part in cherry blossom season last year, many came wearing surgical-style face masks.

The advent of sakura, or cherry blossoms, came early this year, on March 14, thanks to temperatures more like May

than March, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. The blooms' peak occurred Sunday.

In early March, the Tokyo government called on visitors to refrain from having hanami picnics in city parks to combat the spread of coronavirus. Hanami is Japanese for flower viewing, a pastime tied to cherry blossoms. It's one of the most popular seasonal events in Japan, where picnickers welcome spring beneath blooming trees in parks and other public spaces.

As of Sunday, Japan has counted 1,046 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 36 deaths, according to World Health Organization. Friday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention heightened its trav-

el advisory for Japan to level 3, or "avoid nonessential travel." Japan is experiencing a "widespread ongoing transmission" of coronavirus, according to the agency.

At Ueno Park, the city taped off areas along a main road, which is usually set aside for picnics and parties. Signs and loudspeakers carried messages urging people to refrain from traditional hanami parties. And park officials and security guards patrolled the park carrying the same message.

"Please cooperate and refrain from putting out picnic sheets and having parties where you eat and drink in groups during the cherry blossom season," the posted notices stated.

Over 1.5 billion globally asked to stay home

Associated Press

PARIS — The hunt for masks, ventilators and other medical supplies consumed the U.S. and Europe, as more than 1.5 billion people — one-fifth of the world's population — were urged or ordered to stay home Monday to try to blunt the spread of the coronavirus.

Political paralysis stalled efforts for a quick aid package from Congress. Investor fears about the outbreak's economic toll pushed U.S. stocks down in morning trading even after the Federal Reserve said that it will buy as much government debt as necessary and lend to small and large businesses and local governments to help them cope.

In New York, a near-lockdown took effect statewide over the weekend amid worries that

New York City, which has 8.4 million residents, could become one of the world's biggest hot spots. Nearly 10,000 people have tested positive in the city, and almost 100 have died.

The governor announced plans to convert a huge New York City convention center into a hospital with 1,000 beds. Meanwhile, the mayor warned that the city's hospitals are just 10 days away from shortages in "really basic supplies" needed to protect health care workers and patients alike.

"If we don't get the equipment, we're literally going to lose lives," Mayor Bill de Blasio told CNN.

The risk to doctors, nurses and others on the front lines has become plain: Italy has seen at least 18 doctors with the coronavirus die. Spain reported that more than 3,900 health care

workers have become infected, accounting for roughly 12% of the country's total cases.

British health workers pleaded for more gear, saying they felt like "cannon fodder." In France, doctors scrounged masks from construction workers, factory floors and architects.

"There's a wild race to get surgical masks," Francois Blanchecott, a biologist on the front lines of testing, told France Inter radio. "We're asking mayors' offices, industries, any enterprises that might have a store of masks."

With the crisis easing in China, where it began late last year, only the area around the city of Wuhan was still considered high-risk, with people asked to stay inside.

In the U.S., a fierce political battle over ventilators has

emerged, especially after President Donald Trump told governors that they should find their own medical equipment if they think they can get it faster than the U.S. government. Alaska is expected to run out of money imminently to pay doctors, hospitals and clinics who treat Medicaid patients.

China has been the one nation to counter this trend, sending planeloads of equipment like masks, gloves and protective gear as well as doctors to countries across Europe, including hard-hit Italy, France and Spain as well as places with weaker medical systems like Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia.

"The U.S. is completely wasting the precious time that China has won for the world," said Geng Shuang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman.

Drive-thru test sites marked by chaos

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Drive-thru sites have been opening around the United States to make it quicker and safer to test people for the new coronavirus. But much like the rest of the U.S. response to the pandemic, the system has been marked by inconsistencies, delays and shortages. Many people who have symptoms and a doctor's order have waited hours or days for a test.

More than a week after President Donald Trump promised that states and retail stores such as Walmart and CVS would open drive-thru test centers, few sites are up and running, and they're not yet open to the general public. Some states are leaving it to the private sector to open test locations; others are coordinating the effort through state health departments.

Patients have complained that they had to jump through cumbersome bureaucratic hoops and wait days to get test-

ed, then wait even longer for a result. Testing centers opened in some places only to be shut down shortly afterward because of shortages of supplies and staff. And while the drive-thru test centers that have opened are generally orderly, there have been long lines at some. The slow ramp-up of testing and the spotty nature of the system makes it hard for officials to track the spread of the disease and bring it under control.

"We need to be testing more broadly to fully understand the scope of the public health situation we are facing," said Joseph Wendelken, a spokesman for the Rhode Island Department of Health.

Dr. Brett Giroir, the federal health official tasked with overseeing testing, said at a White House briefing Saturday that about 195,000 people have been tested in the U.S. so far. That figure does not include people who have been tested in private labs.

DOJ brings first fraud case from epidemic

The Washington Post

The U.S. Justice Department this weekend brought its first case of alleged fraud stemming from the coronavirus crisis, convincing a federal judge to issue a restraining order to block a website that claimed to be distributing vaccines.

In court documents, the department said that the operator of coronavirusmedicalkit.com was facilitating a wire-fraud scheme, "intentionally making false statements" about the vaccines, which do not exist.

"The website falsely claims that the World Health Organization is giving away free vaccine kits and that individuals who visit the website can order such a kit by paying \$4.95 for shipping," the Justice Department wrote. "The World Health Organization is not offering free 'vaccine kits' for COVID-19. Indeed, there exists no known vaccine that is effective against COVID-19."

U.S. District Judge Robert

Pitman granted the department's request for a temporary restraining order against the site and the entity that registered it on Sunday — though as of late afternoon, it remained live.

The coronavirusmedicalkit.com site is a simple one. Below an NBC News video clip about the crisis, it falsely claims that the World Health Organization is "giving away vaccine kits" to people willing to pay \$4.95 for shipping, and prompts users to click a button to "ORDER NOW."

A Justice Department official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the ongoing investigation, said that officials do not know who created the site, and it is possible it was registered with NameCheap by someone using a fake name or other tools to hide their identity. The restraining order, the official said, also covers NameCheap, though there is no allegation that the company has committed a crime.

Fed to buy government debt, lend to firms

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In its boldest effort to protect the U.S. economy from the coronavirus, the Federal Reserve says it will buy as much government debt as it deems necessary and will also begin lending to small and large businesses and local governments to help them weather the crisis.

The Fed's announcement Monday removes any dollar limits from its plans to support the flow of credit through an economy that has been ravaged by the viral outbreak. The central bank's all-out effort has now gone beyond even the extraordinary drive it made to rescue the economy from the 2008 financial crisis.

"The coronavirus pandemic is causing tremendous hardship across the United States and around the world," the Fed

said in a statement. "While great uncertainty remains, it has become clear that our economy will face severe disruptions. Aggressive efforts must be taken across the public and private sectors to limit the losses to jobs and incomes and to promote a swift recovery once the disruptions abate."

Financial markets sharply reversed themselves after the announcement but then fell back again after the market opened. By midday, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down about 4%. The yield on the 10-year Treasury bond fell, a sign that more investors are willing to purchase the securities.

In unleashing its aggressive new efforts, the Fed, led by Chairman Jerome Powell, is trying both to stabilize the economy and allay panic in financial markets. Many cor-

porations and city and state governments are in need of loans to pay bills and maintain operations as their revenue from customers or taxpayers collapses. That need has escalated demand for cash. In the meantime, large businesses have been drawing, as much as they can, on existing borrowing relationships with banks.

The intensifying needs for cash means that banks and other investors are seeking to rapidly unload Treasuries, short-term corporate debt, municipal bonds and other securities. The Fed's move to step in and act as a buyer of last resort is intended to provide that needed cash.

The central bank's actions increase pressure on Congress to approve a nearly \$2 trillion stimulus package that stalled late Sunday. The bill includes

funds that would help backstop the Fed's lending. Many economists say that whatever financial support Congress eventually provides will likely be even more important than the Fed's intervention. And they warn that such fiscal help needs to come soon.

"The Fed's intervention is not a substitute for fiscal stimulus," said Joseph Gagnon, a former Fed economist who is now senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. "Let's hope Congress passes something quickly."

Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at RSM, a tax and advisory firm, said that if Congress can pass the legislation and have it signed into law by Tuesday, banks could start making loans to small and medium-sized businesses, with the Fed's support, by Friday.

War-torn Syria braces for lockdown after first case

Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syrians rushed to stock up on food and fuel Monday amid fears that authorities would resort to even stricter measures after reporting the first coronavirus infection in the country, where the health care system has been decimated by nearly a decade of civil war.

The arrival of the global pandemic in Syria as well as the Gaza Strip has raised concerns it could run rampant in some of the most vulnerable areas in the Middle East. War-torn Libya and Yemen, which have yet to report any cases, are also a source of concern.

Lines formed outside grocery stores, banks and petrol stations across the Syrian capital, Damascus, as people braced for wider closures. The government has already closed restaurants, cafes and other businesses, and has halted public transportation.

The city's famed Hamidi-

yeh souk, a network of covered markets running through the Old City, was deserted after the government ordered all shops closed on Sunday.

Authorities closed border crossings with Lebanon and Jordan, and Damascus International Airport was closed to commercial traffic after a final flight arrived from Moscow. State-run newspapers issued their last print edition and will only be available online.

Syria's Health Ministry reported the first case of coronavirus late Sunday — a 20-year-old woman it said had arrived from another country, without elaborating.

Syria's health care system has been ravaged by nearly a decade of war that has displaced millions of people and spawned rampant poverty. Hospitals and clinics across the country have been destroyed or damaged. The government is also under heavy international sanctions linked to its conduct during the war.

India halts critical train network to curb spread

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — As India expanded its virus-containment measures and halted its train network, the country's lifeblood, the federal government warned Monday of strict legal action for those who flout the rules.

"Please save yourself, save your family," Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted in Hindi, calling for states to follow the preventive measures issued by the federal government to contain the spread of the virus.

The strict legal action vowed wasn't immediately clear. Other places have simply sent violators home since alternatives like detention would create crowded conditions where the virus could spread.

To contain the outbreak, authorities have gradually started to lock down many of the country of 1.3 billion people, sending stock markets to record lows. Parliament adjourned its

session, and India's civil aviation authority banned all commercial flights within India starting Wednesday. International flights were kept from landing from Sunday until at least March 31.

Modi's call for a 14-hour voluntary curfew on Sunday was the first nationwide effort at social isolation practices the World Health Organization believes are critical to slowing the outbreak to a level that doesn't overwhelm health care systems.

Streets across India's cities on Sunday were deserted as citizens stayed indoors heeding Modi's call. But key train stations were packed with thousands of migrant workers suddenly out of work and trying to head to their villages, risking carrying the infection to the nation's vast hinterland.

Late Sunday, train services were suspended until March 31 while crowds were still waiting to board.

Pompeo makes surprise Afghanistan visit

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a surprise visit to Kabul on Monday to try to salvage the 3-week-old deal between the U.S. and the Taliban, which has faltered amid disagreements over presidential election results and a prisoner release, and could be further delayed by the coronavirus.

Pompeo's visit, which came despite a State Department warning against all international travel because of the coronavirus, underscored the urgency the U.S. places on advancing the peace process, which could see all American troops withdraw from Afghanistan by next spring.

Pompeo held talks with President Ashraf Ghani and his main political rival Abdullah

Abdullah to try to end their standoff over who won last year's presidential election. The claim by both men that they won has been partly responsible for delaying the start of talks between the government and the Taliban, officials from both sides said.

Pompeo left Afghanistan the same day, the Associated Press reported. There was no immediate announcement that a power sharing agreement had been reached.

Talks between the government and the Taliban are a key precondition for the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in the deal signed by the U.S. and Taliban on Feb. 29 in Qatar. A phased drawdown that began this month will be completed within 14 months, provided all sides fulfill their commitments under the U.S.-Taliban deal.

Among those commitments was for

intra-Afghan talks to begin on March 10 and, prior to that date, for the Taliban to release up to 1,000 detainees and the government up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners.

Ghani initially refused to release jailed Taliban fighters, saying that nothing in the deal prevented them from returning to the battlefield. But he later agreed to free the prisoners in phases if they had their biometric data recorded and signed a guarantee that they would not return to combat. The Taliban rejected that offer, saying all 5,000 of their fighters must be released at once.

On Sunday, the Taliban and government moved ahead on prisoner release when they held the first "technical talks" on the issue, via Skype video conferencing, U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad said on Twitter.

ISIS attack on troops is third since peace deal

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — An Islamic State militant fired mortars at U.S. and international troops at Bagram Airfield in what security officials said was the third attack on the base since the U.S. signed a peace deal with the Taliban last month.

No one was hurt during the attack Saturday night and Bagram Airfield, the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan, was not damaged, a spokesman for the NATO Resolute Support mission said Monday.

A man in a small pickup drove through a police checkpoint near Bagram around 8 p.m. Saturday and fired three mortars at the base before es-

caping, said Mohammad Mahfooz Alizada, police chief of Parwan province.

Afghan police destroyed the militant's truck, causing a large explosion, said Bagram district governor Abdul Shokour Qudousi. All of the mortars were shot down, he said.

ISIS claimed the attack shortly afterward. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Muja-

hid said that the group blamed the attack on spoilers trying to "sabotage" the peace process.

A deal signed by the Taliban and the U.S. last month outlined the withdrawal of American and coalition troops, in exchange for several concessions from the Taliban, including a commitment to stop attacking U.S. and foreign partner forces.

PG&E pleads guilty to involuntary manslaughter in fire

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Pacific Gas & Electric announced Monday it has pleaded guilty to 84 counts of involuntary manslaughter related to California's most destructive wildfire that burned much of Paradise, Calif., in 2018.

In a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, PG&E said it reached the settlement with the Butte County district attorney's office on March 17. Under the deal, PG&E said prosecutors won't pursue further criminal charges.

PG&E also pleaded guilty to one count of causing a fire in violation of the state penal code.

"The Utility will be sentenced to pay the maximum total fine and penalty of approximately \$3.5 million. The Agreement

provides that no other or additional sentence will be imposed on the Utility in the criminal action in connection with the 2018 Camp Fire," PG&E said in its filing. "The Utility has also agreed to pay \$500,000 to the Butte County District Attorney Environmental and Consumer Protection Fund to reimburse costs spent on the investigation of the 2018 Camp Fire."

Last year, Pacific Gas & Electric admitted in federal court that its equipment probably caused 10 wildfires in Northern and Central California.

The Camp Fire, which raced through Paradise in 2018, killed 85 people and destroyed more than 13,900 homes. Both the California Public Utilities Commission and the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection concluded that poorly maintained PG&E equipment sparked that

blaze.

The commission also noted that for years, PG&E failed to do climbing inspections of a century-old tower that malfunctioned, causing sparks where the fire originated. Investigators said there was "visible wear" on the arms of a tower linked to the blaze, but that PG&E crews had not climbed the tower since at least 2001.

Such an inspection could have identified problems with a small metal hook that was supposed to hold up a transmission line and insulator on the tower, and "its timely replacement could have prevented the ignition of the Camp Fire," investigators said.

The omission of climbing inspections on the failed tower "is a violation of PG&E's own policy requiring climbing inspections on towers where recurring problems exist," investigators wrote.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 injured after falling from pickup truck

MD FREDERICK — Two young men were seriously injured when they fell from the back of a pickup truck whose tires were spinning as the vehicle got back on a Maryland road, authorities said.

The Frederick County Sheriff's Office said the vehicle was part of street-racing event that officers received a call about. A second call directed them to the injuries, the sheriff's office said in a news release.

The truck was traveling with at least three people in the flatbed when it went off a road and then back onto the road. A 19-year-old man and a 22-year-old man were taken to the University of Maryland shock trauma center in Baltimore, the release said.

Bronze gates stolen from park arboretum

WA SEATTLE — Custom-made bronze gates that stood at the entrance to the Washington Park Arboretum in Seattle since 1976 have been stolen, facility workers said.

Arboretum curator Ray Larson said staff noticed the gates were missing when gardeners arrived for work, *The Seattle Times* reported.

"It would be a pretty enormous task to haul them out," Larson said. "People are just shocked, and appalled. It was so brazen. Our hope is that someone may have seen something."

The solid bronze Memorial Gates were made by internationally renowned sculptor George Tsutakawa and commissioned in 1971 by the University of Washington and the Arboretum Foundation as a memorial to all who loved and

cared for the arboretum.

The gates are about 20 feet wide and kept open in part because they are so heavy, he said, adding that he fears thieves will take them to a scrapper for the value of the metal.

Man filmed himself pointing gun at officer

GA JONESBORO — A Georgia man was arrested and accused of posting an Instagram video of himself pointing a gun at a police officer, authorities said.

A video uploaded showed a man aiming a gun at a Jonesboro police officer, who was performing a traffic stop, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported.

Clayton County Sheriff Victor Hill said detectives identified Jordan Jones, 18, as the owner of the Instagram account. A news release said Jones' mother turned him in, and he was later charged with one count of pointing a gun at another.

Woman accused of taxi theft, biting deputy

AZ SCOTTSDALE — A woman is accused of stealing a taxi in Scottsdale and then biting an off-duty Maricopa County Sheriff's deputy on the arm after she was arrested, police said.

Ciara Leticia Enns, 25, is facing charges of vehicle theft, resisting arrest and aggravated assault.

Police said the cab driver was standing outside his vehicle when Enns reportedly jumped into the taxi and drove off.

The driver alerted two off-duty MCSO deputies as he ran after his cab.

Enns crashed the cab nearby and was detained by the deputies until police arrived on the scene.

The woman reportedly fought

with the two deputies as they were placing her in a patrol car and she bit one officer.

Woman gives birth inside Walmart store

MO SPRINGFIELD — During a time of panic buying and store closures amid the coronavirus pandemic, one Walmart store in Springfield had some joyful news when a woman gave birth to a baby girl in the store.

Store manager Jessica Hinkle said the woman told employees that her water broke and she was about to go into labor in the toilet paper aisle of the store.

Hinkle held up a sheet for privacy while a labor nurse who happened to be in the store and firefighters helped the woman deliver her baby in just 45 minutes, *KYTV* reported.

Customers encouraged the woman throughout the birth and cheered as she and the baby were taken away to an ambulance.

Man damaged graves while 'doing donuts'

NC CHADBOURN — A 20-year-old man was charged with desecrating a gravesite this week after witnesses reported he drove in circles through a North Carolina cemetery and damaged headstones and floral arrangements.

Deputies with the Columbus County Sheriff's Office responded to a graveyard in Chadbourn on calls someone was "doing donuts" in a vehicle through the area, the office said in a statement.

The investigation led deputies to Christian Quinn Walters, the statement said. He was charged with desecration of a gravesite in excess of \$1,000 and jailed on a \$50,000 bond.

Woman guilty of trying to run over employee

MD WESTMINSTER — A Maryland woman was convicted of assault in a grocery store theft in which she nearly ran over an employee with her car.

Shana Christina Frundt, 27, was sentenced to six years in jail with all but 18 months suspended, the Carroll County State's Attorney's Office said in a press release.

Known as the "Crab Leg Bandit," Frundt was accused of taking \$230 worth of food last year from Martin's Food in Eldersburg, news outlets reported. Frundt noticed an employee taking photos of her car and attempted to take his phone, the release stated. She then drove toward the employee, and he had to jump out of the way to avoid being hit.

Family of boy left on school bus gets \$200K

FL BOCA RATON — The family of a second-grade autistic boy who was left on a Florida school bus for more than five hours in 2015 will receive a \$200,000 settlement from Palm Beach County public schools.

The school board approved the payment to settle a lawsuit brought by the 7-year-old boy's parents, Eva Palomino and Eddi Guevara.

The child boarded the bus to head to J.C. Mitchell Elementary in Boca Raton on Oct. 12, 2015, but never made it to the campus, the *Palm Beach Post* reported. He remained on board as the bus picked up and dropped off middle school students and when the driver and bus aide returned to the bus depot. The driver and aide then left without doing a thorough inspection, officials said.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

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IOC looks at postponement of Games

Associated Press

TOKYO — The Tokyo Olympics are going to happen — but almost surely in 2021 rather than in four months as planned.

This became clear after the IOC on Sunday announced it was considering a postponement. Major Olympic nations like Canada and Australia have added pressure by saying they will not go if the games are staged this year.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach sent a letter to athletes explaining the decision and why it might take so long, while also acknowledging the extended timeline might not be popular.

“I know that this unprecedented situation leaves many of your questions open,” he wrote. “I also know that this rational approach may not be in line with the emotions many of you have to go through.”

The IOC’s move seemed inevitable for a week with pressure mounting from all quarters — athletes, sponsors, broadcasters and more than 200 national Olympic committees, and international sports federations.

Shortly after Bach’s statement, the Canadian Olympic

Committee said it won’t send teams to the Olympics unless the games are postponed by a year. Australia issued a statement saying it was advising its athletes to prepare for an Olympics in 2021.

World Athletics President Seb Coe sent a letter to Bach saying that holding the Olympics in July “is neither feasible nor desirable.” He outlined a number of reasons, including competitive fairness, the likelihood athletes would overtrain if given a compressed schedule and the uncertainty caused by orders in many countries barring people from gyms and other workout venues.

National Olympic committees in Brazil and Slovenia had also called for postponement until 2021. Norway’s Olympic body said it did not want athletes going to Tokyo until the global health crisis is under control.

The United States governing bodies of swimming and track — two of the three top-tier Summer Games sports — had called on their national Olympic officials to push for a postponement.

Japan’s politicians fell in line quickly on Monday as they awakened to Bach’s move.

Japan’s Prime Minister

Shinzo Abe, speaking at a parliamentary session, said a postponement of the Tokyo Olympics would be unavoidable if the games cannot be held in a complete way because of the coronavirus pandemic.

“If it is difficult to hold (the Games) in a complete way, a decision of postponement would be unavoidable as we think the athletes’ safety is paramount,” he said.

Abe said he hoped the IOC would make a decision early if it is postponed, because the process would involve a lot of work and should start as soon as possible.

Tokyo Governor Yurko Koike echoed Abe.

“The IOC will fully examine what to do over the next four weeks, and in that process that word (postponement) may be included,” she said.

The IOC holds most of the cards in any rescheduling, spelled out in a Host City Contract signed in 2013 between the IOC, the Japanese Olympic Committee and the city of Tokyo.

Japan is officially spending \$12.6 billion to organize the Olympics, but a national audit put the figure at more than twice that much. The bill is

sure to increase with any postponement, and the vast majority of the spending if from the public treasury.

The IOC has a reserve fund of about \$2 billion to tide itself over, and also has insurance against postponement or cancellation.

“The public is expecting and supports postponement, so it won’t be a big deal,” Jeff Kingston, who studies Japanese politics at Temple University in Tokyo, said in an email to Associated Press. “People are way more worried about the economic consequences and their jobs and if the number of cases ramps.”

Former IOC marketing director Michael Payne said the delay might work to the advantage of the IOC and Japan.

“What better platform is there going to be than the Olympic Games when the world has pulled through the virus,” Payne told AP in an interview Sunday, just before the IOC announcement. “You’ve got a dynamic that will be even more powerful for Japan and the rest of the world. But you are going to have a tough road getting there.”

US Olympic chief not using power to influence IOC

Associated Press

DENVER — The CEO of the U.S. Olympic team is well aware of the power her country wields in a situation like this, with the coronavirus raging across the globe and the IOC taking its time before deciding whether to postpone the Tokyo Games.

She’s not in a big rush to use it.

“My role is not to make demands of those making decisions, but to bring forward solutions,” Sarah Hirshland, the CEO of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, told The Associated Press on Sunday.

Hirshland and the USOPC leadership have endured their share of criticism for not calling on the IOC to postpone the Games — a move being made by a growing number of athletes and organizations, including a couple major ones in America:

USA Swimming and USA Track and Field.

She says she wants people to know that she’s doing her best to make sure that postponing is the correct call and, maybe more importantly, what the next step should be. At the heart of that effort is a survey the USOPC sent to around 4,000 Olympic hopefuls over the weekend, asking them about training conditions and the medical conditions in the places they live, along with their thoughts about when the Olympics should take place.

“We’re hearing from the athletes loud and clear, and I can guarantee you, the IOC is going to hear from us, loud and clear,” Hirshland said.

But, as she’s finding out, it might not be practical to decide everything based on majority rule or the loudest voice. She told

of one survey response from an athlete who took a yearlong sabbatical to get ready for the Olympics, whose training hasn’t been curtailed much, and who has no wiggle room to push an effort to make the Games into 2021 or beyond.

“These are real scenarios we’re facing,” Hirshland said. “The beauty of the diversity leads to having to be real thoughtful, and take this almost on a case-by-case basis, and think about how we mitigate these challenges as best we can.”

It could help explain the more tempered statement she put out Sunday, along with Han Xiao, the chair of the athletes’ advisory council. They were part of a board meeting held after the IOC said it might need up to four weeks to decide what step to take.

NFL players try to stay ready at home

Associated Press

Tennessee Titans offensive tackle Dennis Kelly has been hunkered down with his family in the Indianapolis area since the birth of his third daughter a month ago.

He has been self-isolating before the spread of COVID-19, the coronavirus.

"We're already kind of in a self-imposed quarantine on our own, because with a new baby and not having shots and everything like that, especially with it being winter and how bad the flu was this year," said Kelly, one of hundreds of NFL players who are self-isolating while the league sorts through what's next. "We're in week four already of kind of being separated. For most of society, obviously it's even more extreme."

Though it's the offseason for the NFL, the need for social distancing and self-isolation by the pro football community was driven home when New Orleans coach Sean Payton announced Thursday he was the first in the NFL to test positive.

NFL players usually use this time to prepare for offseason programs that traditionally start in April. With those programs delayed indefinitely,

players are trying to stay connected with teammates via group chats and social media. Workouts also are an issue with more gyms closing, though some players have their own equipment at home.

New Orleans Saints long snapper Zach Wood, who signed an extension just before free agency started, lives in an apartment and has been staying away from gyms in Dallas. His workouts involve push-ups, pull-ups and squats and now more running outside.

"I'm just like a sprinkler throwing sweat everywhere, which is disgusting, so I guess I better start going outside and finding ways to do something in the park or on a trail or something because the apartment is just not having it for me," Wood said.

Ryan Tannehill, who received a four-year, \$118 million contract from Tennessee, normally would be busy lining up workouts with wide receivers to start honing their chemistry and timing.

"Guys getting on planes right now is not a good situation," said Tannehill, who is also doing some personal training while sticking around the house with his two children and en-

joying more home cooking by his wife, Lauren. "... Hopefully as a nation we can kind of get this thing turned around, flatten the curve so to speak, and start moving forward."

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

NFL free agency business has been one of the few things close to normal in the sports world in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Cornerback A.J. Bouye is one of the players facing the challenge of changing teams during this isolation period after being traded by Jacksonville to Denver. The group chats that Tannehill and Kelly use to stay in touch aren't easy for a player with new teammates.

Taking care of his family is at the top of Bouye's to-do list. His daughters are in a different state, and Bouye, who's continuing to work out at his home gym in Atlanta, also is focused on his parents and other relatives.

"Once we get everything situated with that, we just have to monitor when we could go

back," Bouye said. "One thing about it, I'm just focused more on working out also. I have everything set up at home. My trainer is with me, so I'm definitely good with that."

Titans center Ben Jones also has been working out at home. In video shared on social media Friday by Tennessee, Jones could be seen throwing a medicine ball at the wall beside his garage and lifting weights outdoors.

Before New England traded linebacker Duron Harmon to Detroit, he was able to go to the stadium. On Friday, he worked out on a Peloton bike in his basement, and can run on a hill near his home.

"Anything I need is right here," Harmon said. "I'm willing to go out there and do that each and every day, until I'm able to get to a gym or to get up to Detroit and work out with the team."

Bills safety Jordan Poyer, who just signed a two-year extension, said one key is staying educated about what's been affected by the pandemic. He's in Florida where his training facility closed down, forcing him to train on his own with his brother. They've been working outdoors on a field.

Jays' Shapiro: MLB restart would take a month

Associated Press

TORONTO — With no sign of when training camps can resume, Toronto Blue Jays president Mark Shapiro says he thinks Major League Baseball would need at least a month of workouts and exhibition games before regular season play can begin.

Opening day has been postponed until at least mid-May because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Knowing that so many players are not even having any access to throwing at all or hitting at all, but most importantly just throwing, and probably limited access to just training and exercise, it's hard to imagine we could get ready in less than four weeks," Shapiro said in a teleconference with Toronto reporters.

Shapiro cautioned that training camps

aren't likely to reopen for some time yet.

"I do think that we're, by and large, waiting for some sort of flattening of the curve and recognition that we have done our best to limit the strain on the health care system and the economic system," he said. "Until that time, the exact outcome and impact on our schedule, and all of the corresponding business that cascades off that, really can't be determined."

"It certainly looks like we are not dealing with days and likely not weeks, but closer to months," he said.

Shapiro said he expects negotiations between Major League Baseball and the players' union on an industrywide plan to compensate players for missed games to conclude "in the next 24 to 48 hours."

All but three of Toronto's major league

players have left the team's spring training site in Dunedin, Fla. Those that remain are South Korean left-hander Hyun-Jin Ryu, Japanese right-hander Shun Yamaguchi and right-hander Rafael Dolis, who is from the Dominican Republic.

Shapiro said the three players "did not have any place to go."

Ryu is accompanied by his wife, who is seven months pregnant.

Shapiro said no Blue Jays players or staff have displayed any symptoms of the new coronavirus, and that no one has been tested.

Some 30 minor league players and four staffers who have been unable to go home are being housed in a Dunedin-area hotel, Shapiro said. Eighteen of those players are from Venezuela, and cannot return home.