

Lifestyle | Features



Ugandan Mullika Indy, an employee of CAFU, the first fuel delivery service in the region, service, refills a car using a mini tanker outside a client's house in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.



Motorbikes belonging to a delivery company are picture lined up in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.—AFP photos

DUBAI'S OVER-THE-TOP DELIVERY CULTURE MAKES LOCKDOWN EASIER

Tamara, one of Dubai's many foreign residents, hasn't been to a petrol station in years — a click on a smart phone app is all it takes to bring a mini tanker to her doorstep. In better times, the wealthy emirate's over-the-top delivery culture made life easy for citizens and expats who could summon groceries and services — even a single chocolate bar — within minutes. Dubai is now under strict 24-hour lockdown but is ideally positioned for the "stay at home" coronavirus challenge.

A large number of delivery service operators bring anything under the sun, from a hot cup of morning coffee to your office, pharmacy items at midnight, or even giant ice cubes to cool swimming pools in the scorching summer heat. Tamara, a 28-year-old-Lebanese expatriate who works in social media, orders petrol once a week through an app for Cafu, the first fuel delivery service in the region. Once she's sent her vehicle's location, the app which stores her number plate and credit details sends a driver with a mini-tanker within the hour, filling up the car while the customer is at home, work, or out at the shops or the gym. "All (the customer) has to do is leave the fuel cup open... we don't need the customer to be there," Cafu driver Mullika Indy told AFP.

Even though Dubai's many petrol stations have attendants on hand to fill up the tank, with strict social distancing in force as the coronavirus spreads, Tamara says the #stayathome option is ever more appealing. "I don't like waiting in queues or leaving



An employee of a delivery company prepares to leave for a job.

home. I simply order and they come," she told AFP. Promoted by authorities as a global "smart city", Dubai extensively uses state-of-the-art technology and mobile apps to allow most government transactions including fines and fees to be processed remotely. Most people never visit their bank branch again after having set up their accounts.

Delivery army

The people who make it all possible are the army of delivery drivers who traverse the city's sprawling highway network at all hours of the day and night, under scorching summer heat and in rare winter storms. In the weeks since the lockdown was

enforced, the streets are almost deserted except for delivery motorbikes and vans racing to their destinations, becoming an essential "second line" response to the coronavirus outbreak after the "front line" medical workers.

"If we don't go out to deliver then everyone would have to leave their homes... then the spread of the coronavirus will become a big problem," Deliveroo driver Issa Jandir told AFP. "With our mission to serve the community, God willing, it will help end the coronavirus outbreak," said the 38-year-old from Pakistan. Delivery apps flash messages highlighting preventive measures adopted by drivers, including continuous sterilization of hands and frequent medical tests. The drivers wear gloves and masks and keep their distance, or drop the goods at the doorstep, to minimize contact with customers. Payment is normally made in advance through credit cards.

The services were busy in ordinary times, but now with the city's 3.4 million residents staying at home, they are under tremendous pressure, forcing some providers to announce delays until they have hired more staff. Indian Chen Singh, 22, who also works for Deliveroo, said the service was slower than usual because of the pandemic and the extra precautions that need to be taken. "Now, we have to first use sanitizer, then put on the gloves... we ring the doorbell and keep the order one meter (three feet) away from the door until it is collected."

Malls deserted

Dubai styles itself as a regional center for trade and services, and it is a major tourist attraction, visited by more than 16 million tourists last year. But the emirate, home to the world's tallest tower Burj Khalifa, has shut down its glitzy shopping malls and upscale restaurants as it fights the spread of coronavirus. The disease has already infected more than 6,700 people in the United Arab Emirates, and 41 people have died.

Dubai, one of seven emirates in the UAE, imposed a 24-hour lockdown on April 4 as the number of cases soared. But with the closure of malls, restaurants, cafes and public beaches, some delivery services are providing options to beat the boredom at home for Dubai residents not used to cooking or staying indoors for long.

Health and fitness centers, shut over the deadly disease, are offering to deliver fitness equipment for clients to help them exercise at home. And deliveries of alcohol, which is allowed in Dubai, but only in certain places and to those holding alcohol "licenses", is now also available for home delivery. Wael Mohammed, a 35-year old engineer, says that Dubai could be the only city where residents need not be concerned about getting what they need delivered to their doorstep. "Recently I ordered weights for exercising at home... Dubai will not be stopped by coronavirus," he told AFP.—AFP



A woman looks at an image of silhouettes of the "Virus Vanguard" superhero campaign to fight the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak that was launched then shelved by Singapore authorities on a government Facebook page in Singapore yesterday.—AFP

Singapore shelves virus superheroes after backlash

A band of Singapore superheroes created to help in the coronavirus fight has been shelved after internet users criticized the campaign for being too light-hearted and for mocking Liverpool football club. The "Virus Vanguard" featured comic-book characters including "Dr Disinfectant", "Fake News Buster", and "Must Always Walk Alone (MAWA) Man" — a jibe referring to the English Premier League side's anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone". The initiative devised by the government and local artists was aimed at encouraging people to follow rules to combat a worsening virus outbreak, but social media quickly lit up with mockery and anger.

Late Monday, the government announced on its Facebook page the campaign was under review, while a picture of the characters disappeared and was replaced by their silhouettes. "We have received quite a lot of feedback on the characters and we will be reviewing them. We are sorry if we offended anyone," the post said. One user described

the outfit as "too light-hearted and frivolous — perhaps tone deaf even", while another described the characters as "offensive". The band first appeared Monday, the same day Singapore reported a record jump in virus cases that took its total to over 8,000.

Fake News Buster, who according to local news website CNA "wields the Mallet of Truth" in his battle against fake news, came in for special mockery. But there was particular anger at MAWA Man, who was described in local media as a fanatical Manchester United fan who enforced social distancing using special powers to repel objects and people. Supporters of rival club Liverpool in Singapore — where Premier League football is hugely popular — set up an online petition calling for MAWA Man to be removed from the campaign, which garnered hundreds of signatures.—AFP

Wildlife photographer Peter Beard dead at 82

Peter Beard, the influential photographer renowned for his wildlife shots, was found dead after going missing several weeks ago. He was 82 years old. "We are all heartbroken by the confirmation of our beloved Peter's death," his family said in a statement. Beard, who was suffering from dementia, went missing on March 31. A hunter found his remains over the weekend in a remote wooded area of a state park in Long Island, east of New York City, local police said. Police were called to the site in Camp Hero State Park in Montauk, on the tip of Long Island, and the deceased's clothing was found to match those Beard had worn.

Known for his death-defying images of African fauna, Beard's text and photo book "The End of the Game," first published in 1965, captured the destruction of a continent long seen by colonialists as a treasure chest. A man as wild as his photographs, Beard had a brush with death when he was trampled by an elephant in the 1990s and was known to rope rhinoceroses. "Peter was an extraordinary man who led an exceptional life. He lived life to the fullest; he squeezed every drop out of every day," his family said. "He was an intrepid explorer, unfailingly generous, charismatic, and discerning. Peter defined what it means to be open: open to new ideas, new encounters, new people, new ways of living and being," the statement continued. "He died where he lived: in nature." Born into privilege on January 22, 1938 in Manhattan, Beard attended some of the US east coast's most elite private schools but was by his own account the family's black sheep.

Respected for his photography — Beard received solo shows at Manhattan's International Center of Photography, as well as Paris' Centre National de la Photographie — he also gained notoriety for his high-octane



In this file photo Peter Beard attends 2013 Gordon Parks Foundation Awards at The Plaza Hotel on June 4, 2013 in New York City.—AFP

social life. Beard was a regular at the iconic Studio 54 disco club and a mainstay in the fashion world, famously discovering the model Iman in Kenya and photographing some of the world's top supermodels — and carrying on high-profile dalliances with several of them.

He had well-documented trysts with both Candice Bergen and Lee Radziwill, Jackie Kennedy's sister, and was married three times. "It's marvelous that death is an end — what's the matter with that?" he said during the 1977 opening of his ICP show. "We have plenty of time to live; we have plenty of time to have fun and really get into things. I have absolutely no fear of dying — it's one of the most natural processes there is."—AFP

Finland's opera-singing policeman spreads message of love under lockdown

A police officer in northern Finland has hit on a novel way to help the public weather the coronavirus lockdown, using his singing talent to lift spirits and going viral in the process. A video of senior constable Petrus Schroderus singing a Finnish version of the Soviet classic song "I love you, life" as he walks the deserted streets of Oulu, a town just 200 kilometers (125 miles) south of the Arctic Circle, has quickly amassed more than a million views on YouTube. "I wanted to sing something that I really feel helps my own heart," the classically trained tenor told AFP, adding that he wanted to offer "some kind of comfort" to people who are incapacitated and alone during the coronavirus crisis.

The song promises that "The night will end, the morning will come, when the bright new day arrives." Within 24 hours of posting the video last Friday, Schroderus was "flabbergasted" to receive a thousand messages of appreciation, from around Europe, Russia, Australia and the US, "even if they don't understand the lyrics." "There's just something about that song," he reflected. "One young girl wrote that she was hospitalized, that she watched my video and cried," Schroderus told AFP, adding that he has tried to reply to every contact. Since late March, schools in Finland have been closed to older children and gatherings of more than 10 people banned as authorities try to stem the spread of the new coronavirus, which has led to 94 deaths in the country so far.

Schroderus says that apart from the occasional group of youngsters who need to be dispersed, the residents of Oulu have followed the rules well, and the bigger problem is the lockdown's impact on people's mental state. The long-serving officer took a break from policing 22 years ago to study under one of the country's most renowned opera teachers, Esko Jurvelin, before singing for the Finnish National Opera for seven years. Schroderus returned to the force in 2012, but has kept up his singing on the side, performing up to 40 concerts a year. His police colleagues are nothing but supportive, Schroderus said, and although he keeps his police work separate, he sang a theme from Jean Sibelius's symphonic poem, "Finlandia", in uniform in a 2017 video to mark the centenary of Finnish independence. A recording deal is now in the works, "but I can't say any more about that," he said.—AFP



Senior constable Petrus Schroderus singing a Finnish version of the Soviet classic song 'I love you, life' as he walks the deserted streets of Oulu in Finland. — www.freemalaysiatoday.com

Facebook launches app for livestream gaming



Picture shows the logo of "facebook gaming" during the media day of the Gamescom video games trade fair in Cologne, western Germany.—AFP

Facebook on Monday launched a standalone gaming app, allowing users to create and watch livestreams of games in a challenge to the Amazon-owned Twitch platform. The new app was available Monday for Android devices, with a separate version for Apple's iOS in the works. Facebook said the new app will enable users to watch "e-sports" or game competitions as well as participate in games with other users online. The leading social network said it accelerated the launch "to encourage meaningful community interactions" for people locked down due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Facebook said it sees strong interest in the new app, with some 700 million of its global users already playing games or participating in gaming groups on its platform. It has been testing the app in some parts of the world since 2018. "The Facebook Gaming app is a focused, gaming-only experience where you can watch your favorite streamers, play instant games and take part in gaming groups," the leading social network said in a statement on Twitter. "It's all of Facebook Gaming in one neat, app-sized package."—AFP