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A Palestinian man wearing a coronavirus costume sewed by his sister plays with a girl in the central Gaza Strip amid the COVID-19 pandemic on April 20, 2020.—AFP

Young guitarist enchants locked down Rome

The melodic theme music from "Cinema Paradiso" soars over a completely still and silent Rome every sunset. It provides an enchanting end to surreal days in lockdown living through a pandemic that has claimed over 22,000 lives in Italy and 145,000 worldwide. The 18-year-old guitarist behind the performances has turned into a social media star for his impromptu covers of Ennio Morricone classics. He plays from the terrace of his luxurious flat overlooking the fountains of Rome's now-empty Piazza Navona. The Vatican's dome stands to the left of the setting sun and the sea gulls flutter overhead as he plays. "We decided to lend a hand to Italians: a message of hope," Jacopo Mastrangelo tells AFP from his patio.



Jacopo Mastrangelo plays the guitar from his terrace overlooking Piazza Navona in Rome.—AFP

"We are accustomed to always seeing Rome full, teeming with people. Now the grass is growing between the cobblestones, everything has been left abandoned, and we decided to help," Mastrangelo's father is a senior accountant and the teenager lives an admittedly privileged life in one of Rome's most exclusive neighborhoods. The Rome mayor heard about the teen and invited him to play a special Easter Sunday performance from the hilltop Piazza del Campidoglio that rises above the Forum.

"He moved us when he played from his terrace overlooking Piazza Navona," Raggi said in her introduction to his Easter concert. "Today, from Rome, we

want to pay homage to Romans, Italians and the whole world." Mastrangelo said the mayor phoned him up one day and they agreed that he would perform three songs. "I was nervous. Because it's one thing to play here with my father, like it's my hobby, and quite another when it's the mayor looking straight into my eyes," he recalls. "I was stressed." He says that he still worries about his high school exams this year — but his sudden popularity does not hurt. "Nothing is impossible now, with this popularity," he says. "I did not expect it. Everything happened very quickly."

Indonesia locks virus violators in 'haunted house'

Fed up with people breaking virus quarantine rules, one Indonesian politician has decided to scare rulebreakers straight by locking them in a "haunted house". Sragen regency head Kusdinan Untung Yuni Sukowati says she issued the unusual edict this week to deal with an influx of people to the area after lockdowns in the capital Jakarta and other major cities. Some newcomers, however, weren't respecting orders that they isolate themselves for 14 days to prevent the spread of coronavirus across the region on Indonesia's densely populated Java island. So Sukowati instructed communities to repurpose abandoned houses that were feared to be haunted — tapping widespread beliefs in the supernatural, which play a key role in Indonesian folklore.

Five people have been tossed into Sragen's spooky jails so far. "If there's an empty and haunted house in the village, put people in there and lock them up," Sukowati told AFP Tuesday when asked about the rule. Officials in Sepat village chose a long-abandoned house and outfitted it with beds placed at a distance and separated by curtains. So far, the village has locked up three recently-arrived residents who are being forced to spend the remainder of their two-week quarantine in the spooky abode. Among them was Heri Susanto, who said his punishment hadn't brought him face to face with any ghosts — so far. "But whatever happens, happens," said Susanto, who came from neighboring Sumatra island. "I know this is for everyone's safety. Lesson learned."—AFP



A volunteer keeps watch at a quarantine facility, a repurposed abandoned house believed by some locals to be haunted.—AFP

Netflix profits soar as pandemic shut-ins sign up

Netflix on Tuesday reported its quarterly profit more than doubled as subscriptions surged at the streaming television service during the pandemic. Netflix made a profit of \$709 million on revenue of \$5.8 billion in the first three months of this year, while the number of subscribers grew by 15.7 million to total nearly 183 million, according to earnings figures.

The California-based company said that the long term effects of huge job losses due to the coronavirus crisis on Netflix revenue remained unclear. "In our 20+ year history, we have never seen a future more uncertain or unsettling," executives said in a letter to investors.—AFP



In this file photo illustration a mobile phone screen displays the Netflix logo next to a coronavirus, COVID-19, illustration graphic background in Arlington, Virginia.—AFP

Queen Elizabeth II marks 94th birthday with no fanfare

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her 94th birthday on Tuesday, but the traditional gun salute was called off this year because of the coronavirus crisis. The monarch was said to be marking the occasion with her 98-year-old husband, Prince Philip, at Windsor Castle, west of London. The couple, whose age puts them in a high-risk category for COVID-19, have been following the government's lockdown orders and maintaining social distancing rules during the pandemic. Other senior royals have

been housebound at their residences around Britain, so publicly wished the queen a happy birthday on social media instead.

"Wishing Her Majesty The Queen a very Happy 94th Birthday," her son and heir to the throne Prince Charles and his wife Camilla posted on Twitter alongside a selection of photographs of his mother through the decades. Buckingham Palace said on Saturday that the queen would not celebrate her birthday with a traditional gun salute given Britain's struggles to contain

COVID-19. The country is among the worst-hit in the world by the virus, registering nearly 17,000 deaths in hospitals and almost 125,000 cases to date. "Her Majesty was keen that no special measures were put in place to allow gun salutes as she did not feel it appropriate in the current circumstances," the palace said. The monarch made a rare national address at Easter, urging a collective response to the outbreak.—AFP



In this file photo taken on April 21, 2017 The Honourable Artillery Company fire a 62-gun salute against a backdrop of London's Tower Bridge, as Britain's Queen Elizabeth II celebrates her 91st birthday.—AFP photos



In this file photo taken on October 11, 2019 Britain's Queen Elizabeth II reacts as she visits the Haig Housing Trust in Morden, southwest London, to open their new veteran housing development.

Josh Brolin apologizes for visiting dad and Barbra Streisand

Josh Brolin has apologised for breaking California's strict stay at home orders to visit his dad James Brolin and stepmother Barbra Streisand. The 'Avengers: Endgame' star received criticism online last week when he and his wife Kathryn Boyd took their daughter Westlyn Reign to visit her grandparents, despite the social distancing and self-isolation rules that have been put in place amid the coronavirus pandemic. And in an Instagram video, the 52-year-old actor has now admitted his actions were "irresponsible". He said in the clip: "My father lives next door to us and we had a plan to go see them and not be near them and that plan was broken and that is our responsibility. We were going to pick something up and show Bean the pool and and I think it was irresponsible."



"It's hard to be honest sometimes, it's hard to be honest and say, 'Well maybe I screwed up.' The responses brought me back to my own truth. It's humbling as hell, because I know there are some people out there with no masks, no gloves, no interest in it, they think it's in your head, that you'll survive because of immunity that is created because of your own psychic weight. But I know for me that's not the case and we've been very responsible and I apologize about that."

Josh then insisted he is "not an advocate" for breaking quarantine rules "outside of taking care of each other". He added: "My apologies, and I'm not an advocate of doing anything outside of taking care of each other and making sure we get through this even if we go overboard and are too protective. We'll look back on this as being a short time for a very long term solution and a long life."— Bang Showbiz

Russia's Hermitage Museum calls for state support

The head of Russia's renowned Hermitage Museum said on Tuesday the government should ensure the survival of museums which are struggling during a coronavirus lockdown. Since the introduction of a ban on gatherings of more than 50 people in mid-March, museums across Russia have gradually closed their doors to the public. President Vladimir Putin then declared April a non-working month, encouraging Russians to stay home to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Hermitage chief Mikhail Piotrovsky said the museum had already lost half of its annual budget and was now in talks with the government in the hope to secure financial aid. "The state must ensure the survival of culture," Piotrovsky said during an online news conference. The museum earned 2.5 billion rubles (\$32 million) in 2018. Piotrovsky said that once the lockdown is over the

museum would need about a month to prepare for a re-opening. The museum was founded in 1764 under Empress Catherine the Great and features more than three million works of art and world culture artefacts. Nearly five million people visited the Hermitage last year.

Since the beginning of the lockdown, the museum has been organizing virtual tours which have become very popular with art lovers. Piotrovsky said museum staff also kept feeding its "famous" cats that live there and hunt for mice and rats. Cats first found a home at the Hermitage long before it became a museum open to the public in the 1850s. They are now hugely popular with tourists who snap up souvenirs and postcards adorned with cat pictures on sale in the museum's shops.—AFP

