

THE SHOW CAN'T GO ON: VIRUS HALTS TRAVELLING CIRCUS

There are 50 animals to feed and no tickets to sell. The Zavatelli Circus has been blocked in Belgium for almost a year by the coronavirus epidemic. Now the family-run firm is appealing to local donors to help them feed the camels, horses and llamas they have grazing outside the southern Wallon town of Gembloux. "Just to buy food for the animals we need 500 euros (\$600) a week, it's a huge budget. We've had problems before, but never something like this," circus director Simon Dubois told AFP. In a normal year, the circus would have roamed the back roads of Belgium and northern France, but in 2020 it was stopped in its tracks by the partial lockdown of mid-March ordered to curb the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the measures were lifted, the circus was prepared to observe social-distancing rules by reducing the crowd size in the big top from 600 to 200, and separating the spectators. But potential venues were nervous. And so the Gembloux stopover began to stretch out and, with lockdown rules brought back in October to fight a second wave of infections, the situation is bleak. The colorfully painted trucks are aligned in tight rows on a parking lot and the 25 clowns, rope walkers, jugglers and animal handlers—mainly members of one extended family—are effectively unemployed.

Nicky Dubois, Simon's cousin, has given up rehearsing his acrobatic act, which normally takes place 10 meters (30 feet) off the ground. "For that, the big top has to go up," he said. Currently, it remains packed away. It has been a depressing period for a close-knit team. Nicky's brother Kevin, the tightrope walker, complained: "Normally



Kevin Dubois, equilibrist, trains in a parking as his circus is stuck since 9 months due to COVID-19 restrictions. — AFP photos

it's lively. A circus is joyful, there's good humor, we have a laugh while we're setting things up." And now Europe's winter is coming, when the circus would normally take a three-month break. "We had some money saved up, but we're dipping into that now. We have to eat every day ourselves, and then there's the animals..." Kevin said. When the local media reported the circus' plight, one neighbor delivered three big sacks of carrots. But the show itself can't yet go on. — AFP



This picture shows a circus stuck since 9 months due to COVID-19 restrictions.



Kevin Dubois, equilibrist, trains in a parking.



Leyns Dubois, a young juggler of 16 years old trains in a parking.



Nicky Dubois, equilibrist, carries food for the circus animals.