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Exclusive: Pressed by Trump, U.S. pushed unproven coronavirus treatment guidance



Inside C2

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With hospitals stressed, U.S. enters ‘peak death week’ in coronavirus crisis



Healthcare workers walk in personal protective equipment (PPE) outside the Wyckoff Heights Medical Center during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, New York, U.S., April 6, 2020. REUTERS/Brendan McDermid

GLIMMER OF HOPEDespite the grim warnings, at least one model offered hope that the death rate was slowing.

The University of Washington model, one of several cited by U.S. and some state officials, now projects U.S. deaths at 81,766 by Aug. 4, down about 12,000 from a projection over the weekend.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States entered what an official called the “peak death week” of the coronavirus on Monday while a watchdog report said hospitals were struggling to maintain and expand capacity to care for infected patients.

The U.S. death toll, which topped 10,000 on Monday, was rapidly closing in on Italy and Spain, the countries with the most fatalities to date at nearly 16,000 and about 12,500 respectively, according to a Reuters tally of official data. “It’s going to be the peak hospitalization, peak ICU week and unfortunately, peak death week,” Admiral Brett Giroir, a physician and member of the White House coronavirus task force, told ABC’s “Good Morning America” on Monday.

RELATED COVERAGE

U.S. death toll from coronavirus tops 10,000: Reuters tally He raised particular alarm for the states of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and the city of Detroit. Separately, on NBC’s “Today” Giroir said: “Whether you live in small town America or you live in the ‘Big Apple,’ everyone is susceptible to this and everyone needs to follow the precautions we’ve laid out.” More than 90% of Americans are under stay-at-home orders issued by state governors while eight states still were holding out on imposing such restrictions. The report, based on a national March 23-27 survey, showed that “severe shortages” of testing supplies and long waits for test results were limiting the ability of hospitals to keep track of the health of staff and patients, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General said. bit.ly/2xOZfof

spread of coronavirus

“Hospitals also described substantial challenges maintaining and expanding capacity to care for patients,” said the report, described as a snapshot of the issues hospitals faced in mid-March. Efforts were being made to address those issues, it said. The watchdog said “inconsistent guidance from federal, State, and local authorities” was confusing hospitals and the public, while widespread shortages of personal protective equipment put hospital staff and patients at risk.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said that a shortage of medical professionals was replacing a lack of equipment as the city’s primary need, calling for an additional 45,000 clinical personnel for April.

“More and more, the challenge is going to be personnel,” de Blasio told reporters outside a surgical gown manufacturing facility. “We need these supplies, but we also need heroes to wear them.”

The city has reported more than 3,100 deaths, and it may resort to temporarily burying the dead in an unspecified park, said Mark Levine, chair of the New York City Council health committee. “Soon we’ll start ‘temporary interment’. This likely will be done by using a NYC park for burials (yes you read that right). Trenches will be dug for 10 caskets in a line,” Levine wrote on Twitter. “It will be done in a dignified, orderly - and temporary - manner. But it will be tough for NYers to take.” The pandemic was also taking a toll on the New York Police Department, which said 18.6% of its uniformed workforce was out sick on Sunday, including 5.1% who tested positive for the coronavirus.

The model, which is frequently updated with new data, projects the peak need for hospital beds on April 15 and for daily deaths at 3,130 on April 16.

The grim outlook has triggered a debate within the White House about the efficacy of a malaria drug, hydroxychloroquine, for use against COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus.

In a CNN interview on Monday, trade adviser Peter Navarro acknowledged that members of the White House coronavirus task force disagreed over the drug.

Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and other top health advisers have argued there have not been enough studies done to prove the drug was effective against COVID-19.

U.S. President Donald Trump has personally pressed federal health officials to make the drug available to treat coronavirus, two sources have told Reuters.

Navarro told CNN that task force members eventually agreed the Federal Emergency Management Agency “would immediately begin surging hydroxy into the hot zones.” All decisions on dispensing the drug will involve only a doctor and patient, not the federal government, he said.

Navarro said 29 million tablets of hydroxychloroquine were sitting in a warehouse, ready to be distributed.

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Exclusive: Pressed by Trump, U.S. pushed unproven coronavirus treatment guidance

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - In mid-March, President Donald Trump personally pressed federal health officials to make malaria drugs available to treat the novel coronavirus, though they had been untested for COVID-19, two sources told Reuters. Shortly afterward, the federal government published highly unusual guidance informing doctors they had the option to prescribe the drugs, with key dosing information based on unattributed anecdotes rather than peer-reviewed science. While Trump, in a series of tweets and press comments, had made his opinions on the drugs, chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine, well known, the nature of his behind-the-scenes intervention has not been previously reported. The guidance, published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has received scant notice outside medical circles. The episode reveals how the president's efforts could change the nature of drug oversight, a field long governed by strict rules of science and testing. Rarely, if ever, has a U.S. president lobbied regulators and health officials to focus their efforts on specific unproven drugs. "The president is short-circuiting the process with his gut feelings," said Jeffrey Flier, a former dean of Harvard Medical School. "We are in an emergency and we need to rely on our government to ensure that all these potential therapies are tested in the most effective and objective way." In a statement to Reuters, the White House said the president had not launched a "pressure campaign" but was taking appropriate action. "The President's top priority is the health and safety of the American people which is why he has brought together the federal government and private sector, including doctors, scientists, and medical researchers, for an unprecedented collaboration to expedite vaccine development," said the statement, which did not address Reuters questions about the CDC guidance. Administration supporters say the CDC document, highlighting options, makes sense at a time of medical calamity with no proven treatment. And, they note, chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine have been



FILE PHOTO: Laura Ng, who has lupus and had to recently call at least five pharmacies before she could find a place to fill her hydroxychloroquine prescription, is photographed in Seattle, Washington, U.S. March 31, 2020. REUTERS/Lindsey Wasson

prescribed for years with known risks. Any potential risk to coronavirus patients, some argue, is worth taking given the health crisis. "In a perfect situation you would never do this," said a public health specialist who recently left government. "But if you know what the safety downside is, and the patient is ready to try it, it's worth a try." It has long been known that in certain patients, and with prolonged use, hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine can cause an interrupted heartbeat or a cardiac arrhythmia, the medical literature shows. A new research paper says these "may pose particular risk to critically ill persons." NOT HAPPY In a series of conversations last month, President Trump personally instructed top officials at the Centers for Disease Control, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health to focus on the two drugs as potential therapies, said two sources familiar with the president's efforts. In seeking a medical breakthrough to the global crisis, Trump had contacted Dr.

Stephen Hahn, the FDA administrator, and other top health officials, questioning whether they were moving rapidly enough to make the drugs more widely available, one source said. "He was not happy because of the bureaucracy." Trump did not raise his voice or express anger, but did emphasize the "urgency" of fast-tracking access to the drugs, the other source said. A cascade of federal action soon followed to make the drugs more available, including the federal government's grant of emergency authorization to supply them nationwide. An NIH spokeswoman said the agency was "not the source of the content" of the CDC-compiled document. The CDC said it presented the guidance to doctors at the request of a coronavirus task force, which urged prompt action. An FDA spokesperson declined to discuss any push by the president or address the CDC-issued guidance. The agency, in a statement to Reuters, said it acted appropriately when, later in March, it

issued an emergency order allowing the drugs to be prescribed and distributed. "It was determined, based on the scientific evidence available, that it is reasonable to believe that the specific drugs may be effective in treating COVID-19, and that, given there are no adequate, approved, or available alternative treatments, the known and potential benefits to treat this serious or life-threatening virus outweigh the known and potential risks," the FDA statement said. The first official action came March 21, at the height of the president's efforts, when the CDC prepared a document, Information for Clinicians on Treatment Options for COVID-19 Patients, that included a section on the antimalarial drugs. The document describes possible prescription information for coronavirus patients, while at the same time proposing hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine as an option in coronavirus treatment. It was the first time the federal government's disease control agency had officially floated the idea. "Although optimal dosing and duration of hydroxychloroquine for treatment of COVID-19 are unknown," the document says, "some U.S. clinicians have reported anecdotally" about different hydroxychloroquine doses. The document does not name the clinicians, say whether their treatment was successful or explain the paper's sourcing. Dr. Lynn Goldman, dean of the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University, says she was surprised to read the document guidance, after Reuters pointed it out to her. "Geez!" she said. "No references, no nothing! Why would CDC be publishing anecdotes? That doesn't make sense. This is very unusual." Flier, the former Harvard dean, agreed. "It's kind of offering these drugs up and suggesting that doctors might prescribe them when it's obviously not established whether or not they are effective or harmful," he said.

Stay home!

BUSINESS

Work safe!

Preparing For 'Our Pearl Harbor Moment'

Coronavirus Cases Rise Sharply, As U.S. Braces For Most Challenging Days Ahead



Overview

White House warns that the week ahead will be full of sadness as U.S. death toll approaches 10,000.
Hospitals face severe shortages of critical supplies, according to a new government report.
Metrics model shows the US is 10 days from its peak resource use, when 262,092 hospital beds, including 39,727 ICU beds, will be needed
It shows New York - the epicenter of the outbreak in the US - will reach its peak in five days with 855 deaths
Hospitals face severe shortages of critical supplies, according to a new government report.
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Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

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The White House warns that the week ahead will be full of sadness as U.S. death toll approaches 10,000.

White House officials warned Americans to brace for a terrible week ahead of "death" and "sadness," as the number of confirmed cases in the country surged past the combined totals of detected infections in Italy and Spain — the two hardest-hit countries in Europe. With testing still lagging in many parts of the United States, and with as many as half of all those infected showing no symptoms but still able to spread the

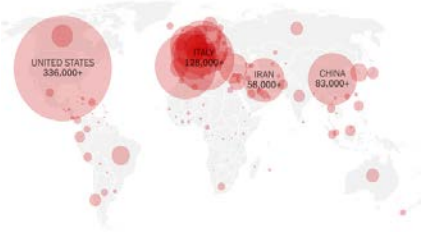
virus, the more than 336,000 confirmed cases almost inevitably understates the enormity of the crisis. Even the surging death toll, approaching 10,000 by Monday morning, failed to capture the true scale of the epidemic, public health officials said. Like the broader fight against the virus, the basic task of counting the dead has been hampered by a patchwork approach reflecting a chaotic and disorganized fed-

eral effort, with the states employing inconsistent protocols and struggling with a lack of resources.



A temporary morgue in New York. Mayor Bill de Blasio said on Sunday that the city had enough critical medical supplies to last "a few more days." Jonah Markowitz for The New York Times

The halting federal response has left states and counties fighting with one another for critical supplies and has led governors to impose restrictions such as mandatory quarantines on neighboring states. Florida set up checkpoints to identify cars from New York City and Louisiana, another hot spot, and Texas officials said they would screen drivers entering from Louisiana. New York City remained the epicenter for the outbreak, with harrowing scenes of panicked doctors and besieged hospitals. The virus is now enveloping New Jersey's densely packed cities and suburbs, and it has seeded itself in all 50 states, with cities including Los Angeles, Miami and New Orleans seeing the number of cases doubling every two to five days. The pandemic showed little sign of letting up around the world, but the slowing death rate in Italy and signs of some stability in Spain, led investors early Monday to send stocks higher, with Wall Street opening 4 percent up. However, economists warned that there would not be a fully functioning economy again until people were confident that they could go about their business without a high risk of catching the virus. And for many countries, the toughest days lie ahead.



'Our Pearl Harbor Moment'

The U.S. surgeon general invoked World War II on Sunday in warning Americans to brace for a surging death toll from the coronavirus. "It's going to be the hardest moment for many Americans in their entire lives," Dr. Jerome Adams said. Several governors said their states urgently needed federal help and complained about the absence of a consistent strategy from the Trump administration. Here are the latest updates and maps of the pandemic. ■ Inconsistent protocols, limited resources and a patchwork of decision making has led to an undercounting of coronavirus deaths in the U.S., according to hospital officials, public health experts and medical examiners. ■ President Trump again pushed the use of the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine, offering medical advice that went well beyond the limited evidence of its effectiveness. "I'm not a doctor," the president noted. ■ A makeshift hospital at the event center at CenturyLink Field in Seattle on Sunday. Credit: Ruth Fremson/The New York Times ■ Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced a one-day drop in the number of deaths in New York State but cautioned that it could be a "blip." ■ Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Brit-

ain was admitted to the hospital for tests, 10 days after testing positive for the virus. ■ Capt. Brett Crozier, who was removed from command of the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt amid an outbreak on the ship, has become infected, friends said. ■ The pandemic has hit Germany hard, but the percentage of fatal cases has been remarkably low. Our Berlin bureau chief explored the reasons, including aggressive testing. ■ A tiger at the Bronx Zoo has tested positive for the virus, in what is believed to be the first known infection in an animal in the U.S., officials said. Other tigers and lions at the zoo have also become sick. **Quotable:** "I hope in the years to come, everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge," Queen Elizabeth II said on Sunday, making a rare televised address to the British public. (Courtesy newyorktimes.com)



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Editor's Choice



Army Spc. Daniel Fields takes a patient's blood pressure reading at the Javits New York Medical Station that is housing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) patients in the Manhattan borough of New York City, U.S., April 4, 2020.



Soldiers assigned to the Javits New York Medical Station monitor coronavirus disease (COVID-19) patients in the facility's intensive care unit in the Manhattan borough of New York City, U.S., April 4, 2020. Picture taken April 4, 2020. Barry Riley/U.S. Navy/Handout via REUTERS



Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro looks on near a Brazilian Army soldier as he leaves the Alvorada Palace, amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak



Co-founder of fashion brand Osei-Duro, Molly Keogh, 39, produces protective masks at her home office as Ghana enforces a partial lockdown in the cities of Accra and Kumasi to slow the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Accra, Ghana April 6, 2020. REUTERS/Francis



A delivery courier rides a bicycle past an entrance of the temporarily closed Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy (VDNKh), after the city authorities announced a partial lockdown ordering residents to stay at home to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Moscow, Russia April 6, 2020.



Britain's Chief Scientific Adviser for the Ministry of Defence Angela MacLean speaks during a COVID-19 Digital Press Conference at 10 Downing Street in London, Britain April 6, 2020



A banner reading "we are closed from March 14 until further notice due to COVID-19" is seen on the door of a closed business during the lockdown amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Madrid, Spain, April 6, 2020. REUTERS/Susana Vera



A man shows his mobile phone with permission to leave home, received in a text message, after the authorities imposed restrictions on movement to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Baku, Azerbaijan April 6, 2020. According to the new restrictions, citizens have to obtain permission by sending a text message in order to leave home for essential trips, including visits to grocery stores, pharmacies, medical facilities, banks or post offices, or to attend funerals. REUTERS/Aziz Karim

The Worldwide Health Crisis....



...Meets Houston’s World-Class Community Responders

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Throughout history, in times of crisis, there are always individuals who stand up and respond to the difficulties they and their communities face with courage, insight and strength to meet headon the challenges before them. The COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus is the most challenging crisis of our time that is causing illness, death and chaos all over the world. At a time such as this, which has no comparison other than the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918, leadership and guidance at all levels of government along with the knowledge and skills of scientists and researchers along with economists and many teachers and educational professionals is key to bringing a positive and informed response and conclusion to the challenge at hand with measured and unflinching action. Meeting the challenges of the Coronavirus in Houston, Texas, are three individuals, two from government service and another, a business and community leader, who have stepped

up at this moment of crisis to be in the front lines of leadership to meet the needs of the community, to work tirelessly to uplift the community until the crisis has ended.



They are Congressman Al Green, 9th Congressional District, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, 18th Congressional District and Wea H. Lee, CEO of Southern Group and Chairman of the International District. These three individuals have assumed leadership roles of Corinavi-rus-related projects that include, but are not limited to, the following: Congressman Green has introduced additional bills in the U.S. Congress for Coronavirus economic relief, in-

cluding a second economic stimulus bill. The congressman has presented two webinars for small businesses, NGOs, and non-profits that have been economically impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. On Saturday, April 4, 2020, Congressman Green joined Mr. Wea Lee and International Management personnel to distribute 10,000 procedural masks to City of Houston health officials to help supplement the shrinking inventory of PPE. Also, he recently assisted in donating masks to officials in Ft. Bend County. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) and Raul Ruiz (D-CA) were selected to head up the new Bipartisan Congressional Coronavirus Task Force. Congresswoman Jackson Lee led the charge for more Coronavirus Test Kits and Protective Gear both nationally and locally. Wea H. Lee, together with the help of the offices of Congressman Al Green and Stephen Yoe, have established a Community SBA Loan Service that will provide Economic Injury and Disaster loans, Economic Grants and a Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program to the community as part of the \$350B relief legislation passed by the federal government. [Editor]



WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES
大俠天下行

美國新冠肺炎防疫日記 4/2/2020
相互扶持 同舟共濟

United We Will Prevail

An open letter to my Dear Brothers and Sisters

In the last thirty days the coronavirus has attacked our nation as well as the entire world and has become the most serious disaster since World War II.

More than two hundred million people are now staying at home and the economic damage to the economy is as diverse as airlines, hotels and especially small businesses.

As part of the new relief legislation, the Small Business Administration (SBA) has set aside \$350 billion for a loan program such as Paycheck Protection Program.

Assistance includes Economic Injury, Disaster Loans, Economic Injury Grants and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program.

With the help of the offices of Congressman Al Green and Stephen Yoe, we are creating a Community SBA Loan Service under the International District and the International Trade Center.

If you have questions or need assistance with the SBA program or tax matters, please call: 713-496-3348 or 832-452-5757

Ask for Carol Hyman or Stephen Yoe.

For the Chinese hotline, please call 281-917-0504 and ask for Dr. Zhu.

We are here to help our community. This is a very critical time. We are united we will prevail.

Take care of yourself -- especially your health.

The Houston Community Thanks Our Heroes!!

Related Coronavirus News

Texas Gov. Abbott Clarifies Order, Saying It ‘Requires All Texans To Stay At Home’

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, flanked by Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, left, and House Speaker Dennis Bonnen, speaks during a press conference at the state Capitol about the state’s response to the coronavirus on Tuesday, March 31, 2020, in Austin, Texas. (Photo/Austin American-Statesman via AP)

Gov. Greg Abbott released a new video Wednesday clarifying that his executive order issued on Tuesday “requires all Texans to stay at home” except for essential activities.

“Now, I know this is a great sacrifice but we must respond to this challenge with strength and with resolve,” Abbott said in the 48-second video.

Abbott’s order goes into effect at midnight on Thursday morning. With that, Texas now joins 37 other states that have enacted state-wide stay-at-home orders. Mississippi, Georgia and Florida were among those to join that list on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Abbott intentionally avoided using the phrase “stay at home” during a briefing while describing his executive order, leading some to believe he had stopped short of ordering Texans to stay at home. (Courtesy https://www.houstonchronicle.com/)

改作過渡性房屋 分拆售予年輕人



香港過去近 10 個月接連飽受黑暴及新冠肺炎疫情打擊，訪港旅客人次迅速下跌，酒店業步入寒冬，不少酒店的入住率跌至 5%。在香港經營四星酒店逾 20 年的華大酒店投資主席鄭啟文心情很“灰”，旗下 10 間市區酒店都要虧本經營，他在接受香港文匯報訪問時建議：“政府不如包租一幢幢的酒店作過渡性房屋，或修例將已供應過剩的工廠區酒店變為可分拆出售予年輕人的居所。政府於疫情過後應向海外旅客派錢補貼刺激來港旅遊消費，並要向中央爭取進一步放寬個人遊城市數目。”

■香港文匯報記者 梁悅琴

鄭啟文：旅業環境大變
倡工廠區酒店“再活化”



◀鄭啟文（圖）指酒店業步入寒冬，旗下 10 間市區酒店都要蝕本經營。圖為皇后大道西華美達海景酒店。香港文匯報記者 攝

鄭啟文認為，既然政府不時說難覓土地建屋解決房屋供應不足問題，又要借私人發展商農地來花納稅人金錢投入基礎設施，再等數年後才可供應過渡性房屋予輪候上公屋人士居住，但這批過渡性房屋於數年後或要將之拆卸。實際上是明益發展商日後發展農地，不用再等基建配套興建時間已可建私樓。

租酒店比住水管屋更有人性

反觀現時全港酒店共約 8.4 萬個酒店房間，入住率及日租都已大跌，部分酒店索性暫停營業或只開少量房間，估計未來半年至一年的入住率都未必會有改善。與其連水難救近火，他覺得，政府不妨考慮向香港的酒店業主們包租一幢幢酒店，已可即時解決過渡性房屋不足問題，總比政府花納稅人金錢在荃灣路天橋建水管屋來作過渡性房屋更有人性。他坦言：“如果政府肯租用旗下酒店作過渡性房屋，我一定會租佢哋。”

鄭啟文又覺得，作為旅客一般都喜歡居住鄰近地鐵站的市區酒店，認為現時處工廠區的酒店供應已出現過剩問題，政府應考慮修例容許這批工廠區酒店可以拆散後只售予香港青年人作自住用。

事實上，2003 年 SARS 後，中央放寬個人遊逛香港，2009 年深圳推出“一簽多行”，吸引內地客毋須跟團都可來香港旅遊消費。政府翌年火速推出活化工廈計劃，令不少位處葵涌、荃灣、青衣、觀塘、黃竹坑工廠區的工廈貨倉業主一窩蜂申請將物業改為巨無霸酒店，部分酒店的房間供應量達 700 至 800 個，之後數年出現大量位處工廠區的酒店。香港酒店數目亦由 2009 年深圳推出“一簽多行”時的 167 間升至今年 2 月底的 319 間，增幅達 91%，期內酒店房間數目由 59,627 個增長 40% 至約 8.4 萬個酒店房間。

鄭啟文認為：“這批位處工廠區的酒店，早期仍可吸引一批由內地旅行社安排以零團費購物團旅客入住，當時每日約 300 團零團費旅客，惟這批酒店於旺市時都只是 200（港元，下同）至 300 元一日，入住率亦不算高，更拉低了市區酒店房租。”

青衣房租近日低見 70 元晚

然而，深圳於 2015 年將“一簽多行”改為“一周一行”，內地又取消了不時引起紛爭的零團費團，進一步令 2015 年及 2016 年訪港旅客齊齊下跌。他稱：“零團費購物團雖然仍巧立名目來



■內地旅客大減，香港不少經營者都看淡酒店業前景。圖為鄭啟文旗下銅鑼灣華麗酒店。香港文匯報記者 攝

持續經營，惟數量已大減至疫情前的每日約 50 團，令這批工廠區酒店入住率及房租大受壓力，甚至連跟隨零團費迫遊客去的海洋公園及迪士尼樂園入場人次都年年下跌。”近月來青衣、黃竹坑區酒店日租近月已低見約 70 多元及約 200 多元，可見香港的旅遊市場已經大變，酒店嚴重過剩。

投資者仍看好 3 年內增逾六千新房

香港文匯報訊（記者 梁悅琴）縱然酒店業已受重創近 10 個月，惟仍有對後市看好的投資者繼續發展香港酒店業。業界估計，三年內香港每年仍有約有 2,000 多個新酒店房間供應市場。

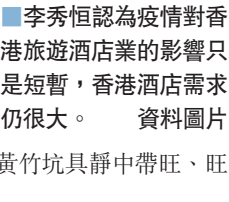
“收樓大王”楊世杭旗下培新集團位於尖沙咀赫德道麗景酒店，於今年 4 月 1 日起暫停營運，大業主將投入 1.5 億元（港元，下同）翻新酒店，為期 18 個月，打造全新 Lifestyle Hotel。翻新後酒店會與國際管理集團合作營運，以迎合國際旅客需求及旅遊業未來發展，房間數量維持 324 個。

培新集團發言人接受查詢時指出，近期疫情對香港旅遊業帶來影響，整體酒店入住率按年下跌超過八成，該酒店入住率亦錄得相若數字，但集團相信短期影響總會過去，對旅遊業長遠發展仍然充滿信心。

該酒店已於 2 月 28 日通知全體酒店員工，酒店營運至 3 月 31 日，部分員工最後工作日為 3 月 31 日，亦有部分為 4 月 30 日，受影響員工約 100 名。發言人稱，所有員工的遣散安排，均合乎香港勞工法定補償。而早前曾有安排員工放無薪假期，現亦取消有關安排，相關同事將獲補發相關薪金。集團亦有設立特惠津貼，發放基礎以平衡員工未來 3 個月有穩定收入為目的，減輕對員工的影響，金額將按個別員工的僱傭合約及年資而定。此外，為感謝員工多年的努力和付出，集團特別增設長期服務特別金，按服務年資發放。

偉晉中心最快年底動工

另一邊廂，金寶國際董事長李秀恒接受專訪時亦指，無改變長遠看法，相信疫情對香港旅遊酒店業的影響只是短暫，香港酒店需求仍很大。資料圖片



■李秀恒認為疫情對香港旅遊酒店業的影響只是短暫，香港酒店需求仍很大。資料圖片

他表示，偉晉中心一期及二期改裝為商廈及酒店計劃已獲城規會批准；總樓面約 18 萬方呎，總投資額約 5 億元。其中一幢為商廈、一幢為四星級酒店，提供 130 多個酒店房間，預計今年年底動工，2022 年上半年開業。

對於黃竹坑區酒店目前日租都只是 200 多元至 300 多元的低水平，其酒店又會是什麼客源？李秀恒認為，考慮將該商廈配酒店的設計概念是日後該商廈吸納了國際機構租戶時，其租戶的高級管理層或海外客戶到其寫字樓商談生意時，都有居住需要，此舉可令兩者互相配合。