

YOUR FULL FIVE DAY WEATHER FORECAST: SEE INSIDE

Majorca Daily Bulletin

Friday, April 17 2020

1.20€ · Founded 1962 · N.17193 · Passeig de Mallorca 9 A, Palma 07011

UK headed for historic slump as retail sales slide, firms close

London.— Britain's economy looks set for a widely feared record contraction after figures showed retail spending plunged by more than a quarter and one in four firms stopped trading temporarily due to the coronavirus lockdown.

The British Retail Consortium (BRC) reported yesterday a 27% year-on-year drop in sales in the two weeks to April 4, which included the period after the March 23

start of a lockdown that has shuttered shops other than supermarkets.

"The closure of non-essential shops led to deserted high streets and high double-digit declines in sales which even a rise in online shopping could not compensate for," BRC chief executive Helen Dickinson said.

A separate survey from the Office for National Statistics showed 25% of businesses had temporarily closed or

paused trading since the lockdown. In those businesses that remained open, a fifth of workers had been placed on temporary leave.

Britain's budget forecasters say the economy could be on track for an unprecedented 35% decline in the April-June period.

Even if the lockdown eases and growth rebounds, annual output could still fall 13% in 2020, the biggest annual decline in over 300 years.

IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

**Balearic
death toll
from
coronavirus
rises to
131 people**

Europe is in eye of the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the number of cases nearing a million, and should move with extreme caution when considering easing lockdowns, the World Health Organization's regional director said yesterday. "Case numbers across the region continue to climb. In the past 10 days, the number of cases reported in Europe has nearly doubled to close to 1 million," the WHO's European director, Hans Kluge, told reporters in an online briefing. This meant that about 50% of the global burden of COVID-19 was in Europe, Kluge said. More than 84,000 people in Europe have died in the epidemic, he said.

London.— "The storm clouds of this pandemic still hang heavily over the European region," Kluge said.

As some countries start to consider whether restrictions may be eased and whether schools and some workplaces might start to reopen, he said it was critical to understand the complexity and uncertainty of such transitioning.

Companies and politicians across the world are worried about the economic impact of a long shutdown, and some countries in Europe - such as

Germany, Denmark, Spain and others - are beginning to think about how to ease some societal restrictions.

Kluge said the WHO recognised that social distancing policies designed to slow the spread of the virus "are affecting lives and livelihoods".

"People are rightly asking: How much do we have to endure? And for how long? In response, we, governments, and health authorities must come up with answers to identify when, under what conditions and how we can consider a safe transition."

**Spain's
death toll
from
coronavirus
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19,130**

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