

12 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

PANDEMIC WATCH



Sales jumped by 20.6 pc in March. Reuters/File

UK Supermarkets record busiest month in history

London: British supermarkets had their busiest month in history as demand soared from people preparing to stay at home to avoid the coronavirus. New figures from market research firm Kantar show British grocery sales jumped by 20.6 per cent in March compared with a year earlier, making it the fastest rate of growth on record. As Britain prepared for a lockdown, images of shelves stripped of essentials like pasta and toilet paper circulated on social media, prompting British supermarkets to take out newspaper ads urging people not to panic buy.

FRANCE Charlie Hebdo attack trial pushed to Sept

Paris: The trial of 14 people accused of aiding jihadist gunmen who targeted the Charlie Hebdo newspaper and other Paris targets in January 2015 has been postponed till September, after courts were almost totally shut down in France's coronavirus fight, prosecutors said Tuesday. Seventeen people were killed over three days after brothers Cherif and Said Kouachi massacred 12 people at the offices of the satirical paper, heralding a wave of Islamic attacks on French soil in the following years. The trial is now to open on September 2 and run until November 10, France's anti-terrorism prosecutors said.

PAKISTAN Pak increases its testing capability

Islamabad: Pakistan said on Tuesday that it considerably increased its testing capability since the outbreak as the number of the cases crossed 1,900, showing a constant upward trajectory despite efforts to pull it downwards. "The country had the capacity to test 30,000 people on March 13, and this will rise to 280,000 by tomorrow... By April 15, we will further increase it to 900,000," minister Asad Umar, who was flanked by Prime Minister's Advisor on Health Dr Zafar Mirza and Revenue Minister Hammad Azhar, said.

US, Spain witness deadliest day yet

Over 800,000 confirmed cases, 40,000 deaths recorded worldwide

STEPHANIE KELLY & DANIEL TROTTA
NEW YORK, MARCH 31

THE US death toll from the coronavirus pandemic climbed past 3,000 on Monday, the deadliest day yet in the country's mounting crisis, while New York cheered the arrival of a gleaming 1,000-bed US Navy hospital ship as a sign of hope in the city's desperate fight.

In a grim new milestone marking the spread of the virus, total deaths across the United States hit 3,017, including at least 540 on Monday, and the reported cases climbed to more than 163,000, according to a Reuters tally.

The coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 40,000 people worldwide with nearly three-quarters of the deaths in Europe, according to an AFP tally. Over 800,000 cases have been registered globally.

People in New York and New Jersey lined both sides of the Hudson River to cheer the US Navy ship Comfort, a converted oil tanker painted white with giant red crosses, as it sailed past the Statue of Liberty accompanied by support ships and helicopters.

The Comfort will treat non-coronavirus patients, including those who require surgery and critical care, in an effort to free up other resources to fight the virus, the Navy said.

"It's a wartime atmosphere and we all have to pull together," said New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio.

United States health officials are urging Americans to follow stay-at-home orders until the end of April to contain the spread of the virus, which originated in

1 MILLION HEALTH WORKERS NEEDED, SAYS CUOMO

NEW YORK Governor Andrew Cuomo said up to 1 million more healthcare workers were needed to combat the pandemic

CUOMO SAID New York added 6,984 cases and the total number of confirmed patients statewide is 66,000 with 1,218 deaths

"WE NEED supplies desperately and we're working on that...we're in a situation where you have 50 states competing for supplies," he said



Reuters

China and has infected about three-quarters of a million people around the world.

"If we do things together well - almost perfectly - we could get in the range of 100,000 to 200,000 fatalities," Dr Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House's coronavirus task force, told NBC's "Today" show. REUTERS



People prepare places to sleep at a makeshift camp for the homeless in Las Vegas on Monday. AP

849 new deaths, Spain's hospitals struggle

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MADRID, MARCH 31

SPAIN'S CORONAVIRUS deaths jumped by a record number Tuesday as the country's medical system strained to care for its tens of thousands of infected patients and the world total climbed to more than 800,000 case.

Spain and Italy are still struggling to avoid the collapse of their health systems, with Spain saying hospitals in at least half of its 17 regions are at or very near their ICU bed limits and more than 13,000 medical workers are



In Sabadell, Tuesday. AP

among the country's reported 94,417 infections.

Dozens of hotels across Spain have been converted into recov-

ery rooms for patients in less-serious condition, and authorities are building makeshift field hospitals in sports centres, libraries and exhibition halls. So far they have added 23,000 beds.

Overnight, Spain recorded 849 new deaths, the highest daily toll since the pandemic hit the southern European country. It has now claimed the lives of 8,189 people in Spain, forcing Madrid to open a second temporary morgue this week after an ice rink pressed into service last week become overwhelmed.

Authorities are shifting ventilating machines to regions with

the highest number of ICU patients, and moving the patients themselves between regions "has not been ruled out," said Dr. María José Sierra of Spain's health emergencies centre.

The death toll in Italy has climbed by 837 to 12,428, the Civil Protection Agency said on Tuesday, with the daily tally rising, albeit slightly, for a second day running.

The number of new cases was broadly steady, growing by 4,053 against 4,050 on Monday, and bringing total infections since the outbreak came to light on February 21 to 105,792.

Epidemic far from over in Asia: WHO

REUTERS
BEIJING, MARCH 31

THE CORONAVIRUS epidemic is "far from over" in the Asia-Pacific region, and current measures to curb the spread of the virus are buying time for countries to prepare for large-scale community transmissions, a WHO official said on Tuesday.

Even with all the measures, the risk of transmission in the region will not go away as long as the pandemic continues, said Takeshi Kasai, Regional Director for the Western Pacific at the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The new coronavirus first surfaced in central China in late 2019. Infections have now exceeded 770,000 cases worldwide, with the United States, Italy and Spain overtaking China.

"Let me be clear. The epidemic is far from over in Asia and the Pacific. This is going to be a long-term battle and we cannot let down our guard," Kasai told a virtual media briefing.

"We need every country to keep preparing for large-scale community transmission."

Countries with limited resources are a priority, such as Pacific Island nations, he said, as they have to ship samples to other countries for diagnoses.

Kasai warned that for countries that are seeing a tapering off of cases, they should not let down their guard, or the virus may come surging back.

With 381 new deaths, UK toll sees spike

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, MARCH 31

THE UK on Tuesday registered its biggest single-day coronavirus toll of 381, taking the total number of deaths from the virus to 1,789 in the country with around 25,150 testing positive for COVID-19.

The UK's Department of Health figures came as the spokesperson for British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who remains in self-isolation at 10 Downing Street after his diagnosis with mild coronavirus symptoms, said the surge in figures is reflective of the urgent need to adhere to the government's advice to stay at home and follow social distancing norms strictly.

"The PM said the rising death toll in recent days showed the vital importance of the public con-

tinuing to stick to the social distancing guidance which has been put in place by the government, based on scientific and medical advice," the spokesperson said.

Johnson, who led his first virtual Cabinet meeting via video conference from Downing Street earlier on Tuesday, reiterated the same message on Twitter alongside an image of the first-of-its-kind remote ministerial meeting with his top team.

"This morning I chaired the first-ever digital Cabinet. Our message to the public is: stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives," the prime minister said.

"We recorded the highest single (day) increase in deaths as a result of COVID-19. Every death is the loss of a loved one and our thoughts and prayers are with those grieving," Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove said. PTI



CALL TO ALMS

Buddhist monks wearing face shields and masks collect alms in Bangkok, Tuesday. Reuters

Don't flout democracy: EU to Hungary on virus laws

REUTERS
BRUSSELS, MARCH 31

THE EUROPEAN Union's executive warned Hungary on Tuesday that emergency measures adopted by governments to fight the coronavirus crisis must not undercut democracy.

The Hungarian parliament on Monday granted nationalist prime minister Viktor Orban an

open-ended right to rule by executive decree and introduced jail sentences for anyone hindering measures to curb the spread of the virus or spreading false information related to the pandemic.

"It is of utmost importance that emergency measures are not at the expense of our fundamental principles and values... Democracy cannot work without free and independent media," said European Commission

President Ursula von der Leyen.

"Any emergency measures must be limited to what is necessary and strictly proportionate. They must not last indefinitely... governments must make sure that such measures are subject to regular scrutiny," she added in a statement.

The Commission, the EU's executive body, said it would analyse Hungary's law and monitor its implementation.

'LOCKDOWNS MAY HAVE SAVED 59,000 LIVES'

Paris: Strict containment measures might have already saved up to 59,000 lives across 11 European countries battling the spread of the coronavirus, experts in Britain say.

"With current interventions remaining in place to at

least the end of March, we estimate that interventions across all 11 countries will have averted 59,000 deaths up to 31 March," researchers from Imperial College London said in the report, which was released Monday.

Europe delivers gear to Iran; US extends n-sanction waivers

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON, BERLIN, MARCH 31

THE TRUMP administration on Monday renewed several waivers on US sanctions against Iran, allowing Russian, European and Chinese companies to continue to work on Iran's civilian nuclear facilities without drawing American penalties.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo signed off on the waiver extensions but couched the decision as one that continues restrictions on Iran's atomic work. "Iran's continued expansion of nuclear activities is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, European nations have delivered medical goods to Iran in the first transaction under the Instex mechanism set up to evade American sanctions on Tehran, the German foreign ministry said Tuesday.

"France, Germany and the United Kingdom confirm that Instex has successfully concluded its first transaction, facilitating the export of medical goods from Europe to Iran. These goods are now in Iran," the ministry said in a statement.

"Now the first transaction is complete, Instex and its Iranian counterpart STFI will work on more transactions and enhancing the mechanism," Berlin said.

EXPLAINED A matter of contention

The US waivers come at a time when the US is facing pressure for refusing to ease sanctions on Iran. The waivers were issued with the intention of allowing foreign companies to get involved in non-proliferation work in Iran, as per reports. Their argument is that such projects would make it harder for nuclear weapons to be developed in the nation.

Britain, France and Germany were among a list of countries that Iran reported receiving medical aid from earlier this month as it battles a serious outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

Iran on Tuesday said 141 more people have died from the novel coronavirus, raising the official toll to 2,898. Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said 3,111 new infections have been confirmed.

12-year-old COVID-19 patient dies in Belgium

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRUSSELS, MARCH 31

A 12-YEAR-OLD girl confirmed infected with COVID-19 has died in Belgium, health officials said Tuesday.

Fatality at such a young age "is a very rare occurrence," said government spokesman Dr Emmanuel Andre, adding that her death "shook us". The girl had had a fever for three days before her death, and tested positive for COVID-19, said another spokesman, Steven Van Gucht.

No other details were given about her case, including whether she had any other un-

derlying health problems.

It was the first death of a child in the coronavirus crisis in Belgium, which has now recorded a total 705 deaths from the disease it causes, according to the latest official toll.

Last week, France reported the death of a 16-year-old girl from coronavirus in the greater Paris region. Although serious COVID-19 infections are uncommon among the young, some exceptional cases have been taken to hospital intensive-care wards, as US health authorities have pointed out.

Belgium's toll on Tuesday represented a jump of nearly 200 fatalities from that given the previous day, which stood at 513.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KUALA LUMPUR, MARCH 31

MALAYSIAN AUTHORITIES have advised women to wear make-up, not to nag their husbands and speak with cartoon character's soothing voice during the virus lockdown, sparking a flood of mockery online.

Like many countries, the Southeast Asian nation has ordered all citizens to stay at home to stem the spread of the coronavirus, which has killed over 30,000 people globally.

In a series of now-deleted

Facebook posts, the Malaysian women's ministry offered tips for how wives should behave during the lockdown.

One showed a picture of a couple hanging up clothes together next to a caption that advised women to "avoid nagging" their husbands, and to imitate the squeaky voice of Doraemon, a cartoon robot cat from Japan that is popular across Asia. The post was removed Tuesday afternoon following a flood of criticism, with many accusing the government of sexism.

Other posts advised women



Firefighters spray disinfectant in Kuala Lumpur. Reuters

working at home to wear make-up and dress neatly, rather than in casual clothes.

"This must be a pressing issue," said one Facebook post. "How will dressing up and putting on make-up at home (prevent) COVID-19? Pray, tell?" "It's already 2020, please progress. Focus on more important matters for women," read another.

There have been fears of a surge in domestic violence worldwide, as the stress caused by confinement and job insecurity increase the likelihood of conflicts.

A government run helpline for vulnerable people, including victims of domestic abuse, in Malaysia has seen an increase in calls of more than 50 percent since the start of the lockdown on March 18, local media reported.

The women's ministry apologised on Tuesday, conceding the posts may have offended some people, and said it would "remain cautious in future".

But it insisted the suggestions were merely aimed at "maintaining positive relationships among family members during the period they are working from home".