

17 THE WORLD

ITALIANS SING AT WINDOWS TO BEAT VIRUS BLUES

Italians are beating the social isolation imposed by the country's coronavirus lockdown by taking to their windows and singing in unison, with videos of the phenomenon racking up thousands of views online. One recording in the Tuscan city of Siena has been viewed over 600,000 times on Twitter

PANDEMIC WATCH



Scott Morrison

AUSTRALIA Govt bans crowds, advises limited travel

Melbourne: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison Friday announced a ban on all non-essential gatherings of over 500 people starting Monday and urged citizens to reconsider foreign travel. Morrison said the ban would not be extended to schools, universities, public transport or airports. "It is a precautionary (measure). It is getting ahead of this to ensure that we can minimise the impact on your health and (so) we can ensure with confidence the ability for people to be accessing the health services..." he said.

PAKISTAN Border with Iran, Afghanistan to be closed

Islamabad: Pakistan will close its border with Iran and Afghanistan in a bid to control the spread of the coronavirus, the interior ministry said Friday. The closure of Pakistan's porous border with Iran—where hundreds of people have died from the disease—and Afghanistan will start March 16. It will be for "an initial period of two weeks... in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, in the best interest of all three brotherly countries", Pakistan's interior ministry said.

NEPAL Expeditions halted, tourist visas suspended

Kathmandu: Nepal has halted all mountaineering expeditions, including Mount Everest ascents, and stopped issuing on-arrival tourist visas after the WHO declared the outbreak a pandemic and urged countries to take precautionary measures. The Himalayan country attracts mountaineers from all over the world and earns millions of dollars a year from Everest permits. Nepal has so far confirmed only one case of coronavirus, though dozens of people suspected to have coronavirus were admitted to the government hospital for tests.

SPAIN Emergency declared, over 4,200 cases

AGENCIES MARCH 13

THE WORLD Health Organisation said Friday that Europe was now the "epicentre" for the global coronavirus pandemic, and warned it was impossible to know when the outbreak would peak.

"Europe has now become the epicentre of the pandemic," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a virtual press conference.

He said the continent had now more reported cases and deaths than the rest of the world combined, apart from China. "More cases are now being reported every day than were reported in China at the height of its epidemic," he said, referring to the global numbers.

Italy on Friday recorded its highest one-day death toll yet from cases of the new coronavirus, according to official data.

There were 250 deaths recorded over the past 24 hours, taking the total to 1,266, with 17,660 infections overall, a rise of 2,547 since Thursday evening.

Spain said it would declare a 15-day state of emergency from Saturday, signaling a sharp escalation in its fight against the coronavirus, as some regions shut shops and church authorities canceled at least two Easter parades. Cases in Spain soared to more than 4,200 on Friday, as the number of deaths rose by some 50 percent to 120, the health ministry said.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said the number of cases could top 10,000 by next week—more than double the current level—and asked citizens to play their part.

The German government on Friday unleashed the biggest economic aid package in the country's post-war history, offering companies "unlimited" credit to keep them afloat during the coronavirus crisis.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said the measures "are unprecedented in the history of the

ITALY One-day record with 250 new deaths

EXPLAINED E.

EU attempts to unify

THE EU is attempting to ensure unity at a time when member countries have increasingly taken unilateral action, including closure of borders and stockpiling of essential medical equipment. The global body's direct role in tackling the crisis is limited, as per experts, but it maintains that a unified front will be essential in ensuring that the coronavirus is contained. However, the extent to which this call is answered remains to be seen.

German government", and repeated that Berlin would do "whatever is necessary" to tackle the fallout from the pandemic. Most schools across Germany will now be shut from Monday.

France announced Friday it was limiting gatherings to no more than 100 people in a bid to slow the spread of the coronavirus, a day after closing schools until further notice in its toughest measures yet. France previously limited gatherings to 1,000 people, and the tightened measures could squeeze venues even further.

EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen warned Friday against imposing unilateral travel restrictions to fight the coronavirus epidemic, as some member states have done.

She spoke after the Czech Republic announced that it would ban all foreigners from entering the country and all Czechs from leaving as of Monday. "Certain controls may be justified, but general travel bans are not seen as being the most effective by the WHO," von der Leyen said.



DAY 4 OF ITALY LOCKDOWN: Medical personnel at the Spedali Civili hospital in Brescia, Italy, on Friday. Reuters

Outbreak reaches halls of power

NYT & REUTERS MARCH 13

PRESIDENT TRUMP said he had not been tested for the coronavirus despite coming into contact with a person who only days later tested positive. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada is self-isolating after his wife tested positive. And the Australian minister for home affairs, Peter Dutton, tested positive on Friday, days after meeting with Attorney General William P Barr and Ivanka Trump.

The reach of the virus into the world's highest political reaches was a stark reminder—if one was needed—that the pathogen knows no limits and that no corner of daily life was immune.

Australia's minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, who last



After a scare, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said he tested negative.

week met with Ivanka Trump, President Trump's daughter and senior adviser, said he had contracted the new coronavirus.

Last week, Dutton met with Trump and Attorney General William P Barr in Washington.

Dutton is the latest in a string of foreign dignitaries who have met with associates of Trump in

recent days, only to later learn they had been infected.

Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, the wife of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada, has tested positive for the coronavirus, the prime minister's office said in a statement on Thursday night.

"She is feeling well, is taking all the recommended precautions and her symptoms remain mild," the statement said.

Earlier in the day, Trudeau announced that he, Grégoire Trudeau and their three children had voluntarily isolated themselves at the prime minister's residence in Ottawa as they awaited the test result.

The Kremlin has asked that journalists who feel sick steer clear of events with the Russian president, Vladimir V Putin.

Dmitri S Peskov, Putin's spokesman, said the measure

was necessary to protect the president and his staff from the coronavirus. "If you feel unwell, if you don't feel 100 percent healthy, please do not come to the Kremlin," Peskov told journalists during his regular telephone briefing.

Romania's Prime Minister Ludovic Orban said Friday he would self-quarantine after attending the same meeting as a senator from his party who tested positive for the novel coronavirus. "I will put myself in isolation (...), while continuing to exercise my duties," Orban told journalists.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said Friday he had tested negative for the new coronavirus, after a scare over a trip on which at least one infected member of his staff rubbed shoulders with Donald Trump.

Ethiopia, Kenya confirm first coronavirus cases in East Africa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NAIROBI, MARCH 13

KENYA AND Ethiopia on Friday announced their first confirmed cases of coronavirus, as East Africa, which has so far been unscathed by the global pandemic, scaled up emergency measures to contain its spread.

In Kenya, a 27-year-old Kenyan woman tested positive for the virus on Thursday in Nairobi, a week after returning from the United States via London. She was in a stable condition and recovering, Health Minister Mutahi Kagwe told reporters.

"We wish to assure all Kenyans that the government will use all the resources avail-



At an infectious disease unit in Kenya. AP

able to fight coronavirus," he said, as the government rolled out a raft of new containment measures.

The government had traced all the contacts of the patient since she arrived back in Kenya on March 5, he said. "At the moment, there is absolutely no need for panic and worry," he said.

Kenya, with a population of 50 million people, saw a spree of

panic buying among the middle-class in Nairobi supermarkets, in the wake of the announcement.

Meanwhile Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous nation with over 100 million people, said a 48-year-old Japanese man who had arrived in the country on March 4 from Burkina Faso was confirmed to have contracted the virus.

Trump expected to announce COVID-19 a national emergency

ANNIE KARNI, PETER BAKER & MAGGIE HABERMAN NEW YORK, MARCH 13

PRESIDENT TRUMP is expected to declare a national emergency on Friday afternoon, a move that would give him authority to use \$40 billion allocated by Congress for disaster relief to address the coronavirus crisis.

Trump, according to a senior administration official, is expected to invoke the Stafford Act, a law that empowers the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate disaster response and aid state and local governments.

Trump has been hinting in



Donald Trump

recent days that he had been briefed on using the law to address the pandemic, and Democratic lawmakers like Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader, have been pressing him to invoke it.

Trump's decision to employ the Stafford Act to address the

coronavirus crisis was reported earlier by Bloomberg News.

"We have very strong emergency powers under the Stafford Act," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Thursday. "I have it memorised, practically, as to the powers in that act. And if I need to do something, I'll do it. I have the right to do a lot of things that people don't even know about."

The details of Trump's announcement, another official cautioned, were in flux and being finalised ahead of a 3 pm news conference Trump announced on Twitter Friday morning.

Presidents frequently invoke the Stafford Act in response to natural disasters, like the recent tornado that killed two dozen people in Tennessee. NYT

THREE KEY FIGURES

2,50,000

The number of worshippers gathered in eastern Pakistan for the annual Tablighi Ijtema congregation. Organisers have curtailed the five-day festival, citing rainy weather, but not all people have dispersed so far

1,00,000

The number of people suspected to be carrying the coronavirus in the US state of Ohio, as per its state health department director. "We know now just the fact of community spread says that at least one percent, at the very least, one percent of our population is carrying this virus in Ohio today," the director said

1,000

The approximate number of people aboard a cruise liner with a sick passenger on board, which is sailing to Malta, a Cypriot official announced Friday. Cyprus had said it could anchor offshore but passengers could not disembark

Iran imposes lockdown to check all citizens

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA TEHRAN, MARCH 13

IRAN SAID Friday the security forces will clear the streets nationwide within 24 hours so all citizens can be checked for coronavirus—its toughest measure yet to combat the outbreak.

The COVID-19 epidemic in Iran—a nation of more than 80 million people—has now claimed over 500 lives and infected more than 11,000.

Since it announced the first deaths last month, Iran has shut schools, postponed events and discouraged travel ahead of Nowrouz, the country's New Year holidays.

But despite those and other measures including the cancellation of the main weekly Friday prayers, the official number of deaths and infections has continued to grow exponentially.

Iran's supreme leader on Thursday ordered the armed forces to lead the battle against the outbreak. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei instructed the security forces to bring their services together and expand efforts to combat the virus.

Acting on those orders, armed forces chief of staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri chaired a meeting on Friday that included Revolutionary Guard commander Hossein Salami and police chief Hossein Ashtari.

Greece's first woman president begins term

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ATHENS, MARCH 13

GREECE'S FIRST woman president began her term on Friday with a pledge to protect the country's borders and defend human rights, whilst warning Greeks to follow health rules as the country grapples with over 100 coronavirus cases.

Katerina Sakellariopoulou, a 63-year-old former senior judge, said she would "walk together" with Greeks to create a "prosperous" and "cosmopolitan" future "that includes all of us."

The new head of the Greek state begins her five-year term in a terse standoff with neighbouring Turkey, which has allowed tens of thousands of refugees to mass at the border.

Sakellariopoulou said Greeks had to "repulse the aggression of those who make designs on our



Katerina Sakellariopoulou

national sovereignty by making use of human pain."

The new president also insisted that Greece had a "humanitarian duty" to defend "defenceless and desperate people."

Sakellariopoulou urged the public to follow health warnings "to avoid spreading panic".

She took a religious oath in parliament before Archbishop Ieronymos, head of the Orthodox Church of Greece.

US carries out retaliatory strikes on Iranian-backed militia in Iraq

AGENCIES WASHINGTON, TEHRAN, MARCH 13

UNITED STATES warplanes struck five targets in southern Iraq on Thursday night, hitting back at an Iraqi militia with ties to Iran that is believed to have been part of a rocket attack on Wednesday that killed two Americans and a British soldier, American officials said.

The airstrikes, which were supported by the British military, targeted the militia Kataib Hezbollah and facilities that were believed to store the type of rockets used in the attack on coalition forces on Wednesday. It is not known how many militia members, if any, were killed, a military official said. "The United States will not tolerate attacks against our people, our interests or our al-



Mark Esper

lies," Defense Secretary Mark T Esper said in a statement.

Esper's language falls in line with a now familiar pattern as Washington moves to curb malign efforts from Iran and its proxies across the region. But ultimately, the effort has translated into a violent tit-for-tat exchange with an outcome that is anything but clear.

A Defense Department official said the strikes were specif-

ically designed to be punishing and retaliatory—but not to escalate into a conflict with Iran. Another military official noted that the attack was ordered at night in Iraq with the intention of minimising civilian casualties.

Kataib Hezbollah released a statement on Thursday praising those who had carried out the strikes on Wednesday, though the group denied responsibility.

Iran on Friday warned US President Donald Trump against taking "dangerous actions" after American forces launched air strikes that they said targeted a pro-Iranian armed group in neighbouring Iraq. "The United States cannot blame others... for the consequences of its illegal presence in Iraq and the nation's reaction to the assassination and killing of Iraqi commanders and fighters," foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said.

STRIKES KILL FIVE SECURITY FORCES, 1 CIVILIAN: IRAQ ARMY

Baghdad: Iraq's military said five security force members and a civilian were killed early Friday in the barrage of US airstrikes.

Iraq's military said the strikes killed three Iraqi army commandos and two federal police officers. A Shiite endowment in Karbala said the strikes resulted in the death of one civilian. An Iran-backed Shiite militia group vowed to exact revenge for the US strikes, potentially signalling another cycle of tit-for-tat violence between Washington and Tehran. AP

Pak media mogul arrested in 34-yr-old land allotment case

M ZULQERNAIN LAHORE, MARCH 13

PAKISTANI MEDIA mogul and the owner of Jang/Geo group, Mir Shakilur Rehman, was on Friday remanded into the custody of the country's anti-graft body till March 25 in a 34-year-old land allotment case.

Rehman, the editor-in-chief of Jang/Geo media group, was arrested by the National Accountability Bureau on Thursday on charges that he illegally acquired 54 plots each measuring one kanal on a prime location in Lahore at a throwaway price in 1986 during the tenure of then-chief minister of Punjab Nawaz Sharif.

An accountability court in Lahore accepted the plea of NAB

on Friday and remanded him in its custody for 12 days.

Rehman's counsel Aitzaz Ahsan opposed the NAB plea to hand over his client to its custody in a 34-year-old land case against him which he said based on NAB's malafide.

During the hearing, Rehman's counsel Aitzaz Ahsan opposed NAB's request for physical remand, saying NAB's "attitude towards Rahman is based on maliciousness".

Ahsan termed his client's arrest as "illegal", arguing that Rahman was cooperating with the accountability watchdog. After his appearance before the NAB team in Lahore last week, Rahman had said he had bought the land in question from a private party and no illegality had been committed in this respect. PTI