

19 THE WORLD

IN COLD NUMBERS

384,000

The number of people who have died in Syria, including more than 116,000 civilians, since the war began in March 2011, as per an observatory. The conflict is the "worst man-made disaster since World War II," the United Nations human rights chief declared in 2017

PANDEMIC WATCH



In Kenya, where the first East Africa case was reported. AP

EAST AFRICA

Rwanda's 1st coronavirus patient is Indian

Kigali: An Indian national in Rwanda has been tested positive for the coronavirus, becoming the first confirmed case in the east African country, health officials said Saturday. Its health ministry said the Indian citizen arrived from Mumbai on March 8. "The patient had no symptoms upon arrival in Rwanda and reported himself to a health facility on March 13, where he was immediately tested," the ministry said on Twitter. He is currently under treatment in stable condition, isolated from other patients, a statement said.

NEPAL

20,000 people to lose jobs

Kathmandu: Around 20,000 people are expected to go jobless after Nepal temporarily stopped issuing on-arrival tourist visas to all countries and put an end to all mountaineering expeditions for this season, in efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a media report on Saturday. Nepal has so far reported only one case of coronavirus and the infected person has already been treated. Hundreds of climbers flock each year to Nepal, home to several of the world's highest mountains, including Mt. Everest, to scale the Himalayan peaks during the spring season.

GREECE

Pandemic death toll at 3

Athens: Greece announced two more coronavirus deaths on Saturday bringing the toll to three, as an unprecedented lockdown takes effect. A 67-year-old man died on Zakynthos island early on Saturday and a 90-year-old man died in the northern city of Ptolemaida, the health ministry said. Both men had health problems. The man in Zakynthos was believed to have contracted the virus after visiting a hospital in western Greece where the first fatality was confirmed, Athens News Agency reported.

UNITED KINGDOM

Prepares to enforce ban on mass gatherings

UNITED STATES

Extends travel ban to UK, Republic of Ireland

SAUDI ARABIA

Suspends international flights for 2 weeks

World closes borders, restricts travel

AGENCIES MARCH 14

COUNTRIES AROUND the world on Saturday continued to close borders, impose strict entry and quarantine requirements and restrict large gatherings in efforts to contain the spread of the new coronavirus.

Countries have shuttered museums, tourist attractions and sporting events to minimise the risk of coronavirus transmission, with more than 138,000 people worldwide infected and more than 5,000 dead.

Vice President Mike Pence announced Saturday that a travel ban imposed on European nations would be extended to the United Kingdom and Ireland starting at 0400 GMT Tuesday.

"Americans in the UK or Ireland can come home. Legal residents can come home," Pence told a White House news conference. Trump had earlier confirmed the ban would be extended to those countries as the pandemic progresses, saying: "They've had a little bit of activity, unfortunately."

The death toll in Italy rose to 1,441 on Saturday, up from 1,266, the civil protection authority said on Saturday. The total number of cases rose to 21,157 from 17,660, the authority said.

Saudi Arabia will suspend all international flights for two weeks, starting Sunday, state news agency SPA said. Taiwan will require travelers from mainland Europe, Britain and Ireland to self-isolate for 14 days, while New Zealand implemented a similar measure.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern also called on cruise ships, a major source of infections in some countries, not to come to New Zealand until June 30. "Alongside Israel, and a small number of Pacific Islands who have effectively closed their border, this decision will mean New Zealand will have the widest ranging and toughest border restrictions of any country in the world," she said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has faced criticism for his country's light touch ap-

MORE MEASURES

CHILE
President Sebastian Piner announced a ban on public events with more than 500 people on Friday

PHILIPPINES
Manila, home to 12 million people, announced nighttime curfews on Saturday and urged malls to close for one month

JORDAN
Jordan said it would halt flights, close its land borders and shut down schools, places of worship and public gatherings

RUSSIA
Russia will close its land borders with Poland and Norway to foreigners, the country's prime minister said Saturday

VENEZUELA
Venezuela confirmed its first two cases Friday. Schools have closed and flights to Europe and Colombia were halted

proach to tackling the coronavirus outbreak, is preparing to review its approach and ban mass gatherings, according to government sources Saturday.

Emergency legislation is due to be passed next week in parliament and the ban would come into force from next weekend.

Sri Lanka on Saturday cancelled all public events and gatherings for two weeks as the number of cases in the country rose to eight, the health minister said. Director General of Health Services Dr Anil Jasinghe said two more cases of COVID-19 were identified on Saturday.

Health Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi said all public events stand cancelled for a period of two weeks as a measure to help the authorities.



Taiwanese army soldiers during a drill to prevent community cluster infection in New Taipei City on Saturday. AP

US House passes sweeping bipartisan relief bill after declaring emergency

JIM TANKERSLEY & EMILY COCHRANE WASHINGTON, MARCH 14

PRESIDENT TRUMP declared a national emergency on Friday over the coronavirus pandemic and announced steps he said would speed the availability of testing, and early Saturday, the House passed a bill reflecting a deal with his administration to provide billions of dollars to help sick workers and to prop up a slumping economy.

The president also said he would indefinitely suspend interest collections on federal student loans, although no bills would go down. And he instructed the Energy Department to buy enough oil to fill the nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve "to the top." He said his plan would speed



PROTOCOL BREACH: At the press meet, Trump followed none of the recommended safety protocols, shaking hands with officials and sharing a microphone with them. Reuters/AP

the ability of Americans to be tested for the virus. It includes private partnerships to speed tests to the market and a website designed by Google. The president said the site would be available starting on Sunday, with the goal of allowing all Americans who needed a test to get one "very

safely, quickly and conveniently." The president, who has claimed that anyone who wanted a test could get one, also deflected any blame for the testing delays that have hampered the government's response. "I don't take responsibility at all," Trump said. NYT

CHECKS FOR ALL IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH TRUMP

Washington: The White House said Saturday it is now checking the temperature of anyone coming into close contact with President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, as a precaution amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"Out of an abundance of caution, temperature checks are now being performed on any individuals who are in close contact with the President and Vice President," Deputy Press Secretary Judd Deere said in a statement. PTI

As outbreak threat grows, Boris pressed to move Brexit deadline

MARK LANDLER & STEPHEN CASTLE LONDON, MARCH 14

AS LEADERS on both sides of the English Channel batten down the hatches for the coronavirus, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is coming under rising pressure to ask the European Union for an extension in its negotiations to reach a trade agreement — in effect, putting off the next stage of Brexit until the virus exits.

Under the terms of its withdrawal agreement with Brussels, Britain legally left the European Union on January 31, but it is now in a transition period that preserves most of the old relationship, and has until December 31 to strike a new deal. European officials, and many in Britain, have already said that timetable was hopelessly compressed.

"It's going to be awfully difficult for the government to focus on this while dealing with the virus and maybe a financial crisis, too," said David Henig, a former British trade negotiator. "We are already being overtaken by events, and I think that pressure is going to start to become pretty intense."

A spokesman for Johnson said on Friday that Britain had no plans to ask for an extension and that there were ways to conduct the negotiations even during the peak of the outbreak. Most of the substantive talks are not expected to happen until the fall anyway, and in the meantime, officials are discussing options for video conferencing links.

The opening round of negotiations took place in Brussels this month and underscored deep differences. Negotiators called off a plan to meet in person in London next week. NYT

Iran says virus kills another 97, death toll at 611

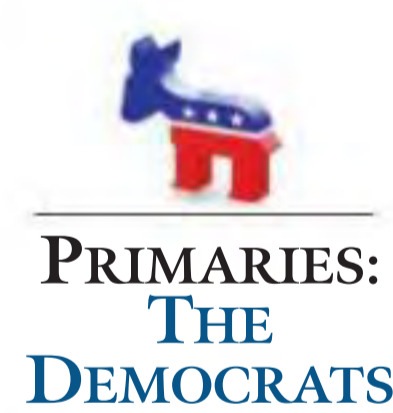
ASSOCIATED PRESS TEHRAN, MARCH 14

IRANIAN STATE TV said Saturday the new coronavirus outbreak has killed another 97 people, pushing the death toll in the country to 611 amid 12,729 confirmed cases.

Iran is suffering from the worst outbreak in the Middle East. The virus has also infected a number of senior officials there. Gulf nations have been scrambling to contain the pandemic, which has spread to more than 100 countries and infected more than 130,000 people. Of special concern is nearby Iraq.

For most people, the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness.

Rewriting primaries: Biden, Sanders to clash amid crisis



SHANE GOLDMACHER NEW YORK, MARCH 14

FOR THE first time in the long Democratic primary campaign, Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and former Vice President Joseph R Biden, Jr will meet in a one-on-one debate, facing off Sunday night as Sanders fights for the future of his candidacy against a rival who has taken a commanding position.



Joe Biden held a 'virtual townhall' on Saturday. AP

But that isn't why this debate is different from most others in modern politics. Both men will be auditioning for the presidency amid an unfolding national emergency over the coronavirus; the last candidates to debate in such urgent circumstances were Barack Obama and John McCain during the 2008 financial crisis. Sanders will be under added pressure to show why he is still

running, at a time when people are worried about far more than presidential politics, while Biden — often uneven in these debate settings — must navigate far more speaking time as he tries to appear capable of uniting the country and leading it through a crisis.

Rarely has a debate been so shaped by palpable anxiety: The event has been relocated from a Phoenix theatre to a Washington, DC, TV studio to limit any unnecessary travel. There will be no live audience and no spin room. One moderator who had potentially been exposed to the virus has bowed out.

Debates are often unpredictable, but it is especially hard to game out how this debate will unfold and how people will process it. Hundreds of thousands of viewers, if not millions, will have been personally affected by Sunday. NYT

Taliban prisoner release stalls over guarantees

REUTERS KABUL, MARCH 14

PLANS FOR the Afghan government to begin releasing Taliban prisoners were stalled on Saturday over disagreements on the number of detainees to be released and guarantees that they will not return to fighting, a security spokesman said.

The Taliban promised to open talks with the Afghan government as part of an accord reached with the United States last month.

The militants say the agreement requires the government to release 5,000 prisoners before talks begin. The government says the talks must begin and vi-

olence subside before it will free all the detainees.

"We are ready to start the process the way it is described in the presidential decree but we won't release anyone if there is no guarantee that they will not return to fighting," said Javid Faisal, spokesman for the Afghan government's national security advisor. "The Taliban have to show flexibility."

The Taliban are refusing to accept a partial release of the prisoners or any conditions on their release, its spokesman told Reuters on Friday. "Our stance on the prisoners' release is crystal clear. They should be released without any pre-condition..." Zabihullah Mujahid said.

New barrage of rockets hits Iraq base, days after strikes kill US, UK troops

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA BAGHDAD, MARCH 14

A FRESH spate of rockets targeted an Iraqi base north of Baghdad on Saturday where foreign troops are deployed, Iraqi and US security sources told AFP, in a rare daytime attack.

It was the 23rd such attack since late October on installations across Iraq where American troops and diplomats are based, with the latest rounds growing deadlier. None of the attacks have ever been claimed but the US has blamed hardline elements of the Hashed al-Shaabi, a network of armed groups in-



At the funeral for Iraqi police officers killed in a retaliatory US airstrike, in Najaf on Saturday. Reuters

corporated into the Iraqi state. At least 33 rockets hit Iraqi air defence units at the Taji air base

on Saturday, the country's military said. "The initial toll is two

wounded Iraqi Air Defence personnel who are in very critical condition," said Tahsin al-Khafaji, spokesman for Iraq's Joint Operations Command.

The US-led coalition said three of its members were also wounded in the attack. Iraq's military said it had found another 24 missiles at a nearby launching site and had detained the owner of the plot of land.

The US-led coalition's surveillance has been impaired by cloudy weather, which a US official said may have contributed to the attackers' readiness to launch the rockets during the day instead of under the cover of night.

'FOR BEING WHITE' Police watchdog sues UK Home Office for race bias

ADITI KHANNA LONDON, MARCH 14

A UK police watchdog is taking legal action against the country's Home Office for alleged race discrimination, claiming to be paid less as a white official as compared to his black predecessor.

Matthew John Parr, one of the five Inspectors of Constabulary who oversee the UK's police forces including the Metropolitan Police, took his claim to the employment tribunal in 2018 and the case is to come up for a full hearing this year.

The details came to light this week as a High Court judge

ruled to lift restrictions on it being reported after UK Home Secretary Priti Patel lost an appeal for the proceedings to be kept confidential.

In his claims for equal pay and sex and race discrimination, Parr says that his 140,000 pounds a year salary is too low compared with the 185,000 pounds salary of Wendy Williams, the last inspector appointed before him, and alleges gender and race-related grounds for that discrepancy.

The UK Home Office insists his lower salary is the result of a drive within the department to reduce senior staff salary burdens. PTI