

Spain, France tighten border controls

Germany also plans to close borders from Monday; death toll from the virus crosses 6,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Cafes, shops and restaurants shut down across France and Spain on Sunday as governments stepped up their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic...



Hand of support: Doctors and members of the Chinese Red Cross, who are in Italy to assist the country in fighting the outbreak, in Rome on Sunday.

Spike in Italy deaths

Spain and France are among the worst-hit countries in Europe although Italy, which imposed Europe's most draconian lockdown on its 60 million citizens last week...

A spike in deaths reported in Spain from 183 on Saturday to 288 on Sunday took the global toll to 6,036 from almost 1,60,000 infections...

Experts warn, however, that the real figure is likely to be higher as tests are not available to everyone and people can be infected without showing symptoms.

The disease has hit all global regions, ripping up sporting and cultural calendars, causing panic in markets and companies and prompting often contradictory responses from governments.

As the virus continued its

global spread, the plight of existing hotspots intensified. Iran announced 113 new deaths on Sunday taking its total to 724...

Britain, which had avoided crackdowns and instead tried to manage the spread and create 'herd immunity', cancelled local elections and hinted that it would follow most other affected European nations...

On the other hand, France allowed municipal elections to go ahead on Sunday even as officials imposed a drastic nationwide shutdown on all non-essential businesses...

Norway announced it would shut ports and airports with international connections on Saturday before retreating a day later and saying although foreigners would be turned away, the facilities would remain open.

Majority of Malaysia cases linked to Islamic gathering

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KUALA LUMPUR
Malaysia said on Sunday that more than half the country's 428 COVID-19 cases were linked to an international Islamic gathering held last month.

The Southeast Asian nation announced a spike of 190 new infections over the weekend, mostly linked to a global Islamic event attended by almost 20,000 people.

Trump has tested negative, says physician

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON
U.S. President Donald Trump has tested negative for COVID-19, his physician said, following concerns over his exposure to a disease that has paralysed the globe.

Brunei reported some 40 cases on Saturday, most in people who attended the Malaysia gathering. Singapore has also announced cases linked to the event.

delegation visiting his Florida resort who have since tested positive for the virus. 'This evening I received confirmation that the test is negative,' the President's physician Sean Conley said in a Saturday memo.

Germany trying to stop U.S. from luring away firm preparing vaccine

Trump tried to secure exclusive access to CureVac's work

REUTERS
BERLIN

Berlin is trying to stop Washington from persuading a German company seeking a vaccine to the virus to move its research to the United States, prompting German politicians to insist no country should have a monopoly on any future vaccine.

German government sources said on Sunday that the U.S. administration was looking into how it could gain access to a potential vaccine being developed by a German firm, CureVac.

Early in the Welt am Sonntag German newspaper reported that U.S. President Donald Trump had offered funds to lure CureVac to the United States, and the German government was making counter-offers to tempt it to stay.



Florian von der Muelbe, an official at CureVac.

Germany is very interested in ensuring that vaccines and active substances against the new coronavirus are also developed in Germany and Europe, a Health Ministry spokeswoman said, confirming a quote in the newspaper.

'In this regard, the government is in intensive exchange with the company

CureVac,' she added. Welt am Sonntag also quoted an unidentified German government source as saying Mr. Trump was trying to secure the scientists' work exclusively, and would do anything to get a vaccine for the United States...

2 candidates for trial Florian von der Muelbe, CureVac's chief production officer and co-founder, said last week the company had started with a multitude of vaccine candidates and was now selecting the two best to go into clinical trials.

China reports 16 'imported' virus cases

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

China on Sunday reported 16 new imported cases of the virus, the highest in over a week, as domestic cases dwindle in the country. The National Health Commission said infections involving people arriving from overseas were reported in five provinces and cities, including Beijing and Shanghai.

Only four new domestic cases were detected, all in Wuhan. There have now been 111 imported infections, with regions outside of Hubei reporting no new indigenous cases for the third day in the row.

Seven more infected in Sri Lanka

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan health authorities on Sunday said seven more patients have tested positive for COVID-19, taking the total number of cases to 18.

The patients are undergoing treatment in government hospitals, officials said, while over 100 others are under observation for suspected coronavirus infections.

Sri Lanka has already closed schools for five weeks and universities for two weeks in a move aimed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the island.

U.S. airport authorities feel the heat as passengers return from Europe

People complain of general disarray in screening process

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Chaos gripped major U.S. airports on Sunday as Americans returning from COVID-19-hit European countries overwhelmed authorities attempting to process the surge.

Frustrated passengers complained of hours-long lines, crowded and unsanitary conditions and general disarray in the system for screening people for symptoms of the virus.

'Very close quarters,' Ann Lewis Schmidt told CNN, describing conditions at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport

(ORD). 'So if we didn't have the virus before, we have a great chance of getting it now!'

Ban now applies to U.K. The United States on Saturday extended the ban on travel from Europe, South Korea and China to Britain and Ireland.

Only U.S. citizens and legal residents are being allowed in from those countries, and they are then supposed to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Similar conditions were reported at New York's JFK Airport and in Dallas.

Chad Wolf, acting Homeland Security secretary, acknowledged the long lines in a tweet and said his department was trying to add screening capacity.

'It currently takes -60 seconds for medical professionals to screen each passenger. We will be increasing capacity but the health and safety of the American public is first & foremost.'

The airport bottlenecks were the latest evidence of turbulence in the administration's response to a pandemic that started in China in December and has since spread worldwide.

ELSEWHERE



Gantz gets chance to form new Israel gov.

JERUSALEM
Israel's President on Sunday said he has decided to give Opposition leader Benny Gantz the first opportunity to form a new government. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud emerged as the largest party in the March 2 election.

U.S. officials spreading political virus, says China

War of words escalates between nations

REUTERS
BEIJING

Some U.S. politicians are using coronavirus (SARS-Cov-2) as a weapon to smear China, the Xinhua official news agency said on Sunday, as a war of words escalated between the two countries over China's handling of the epidemic.

The editorial accused Robert O'Brien, the U.S. National Security Adviser, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo of spreading a 'political virus' and using it to put China down.

Mr. O'Brien said last week that China had reacted slowly to the virus, probably costing the world two months when it could have been preparing, in remarks

that angered China. Mr. Pompeo has said the U.S. response to the outbreak had been hindered by what he called imperfect data from China.

'Precious time' earned However, Xinhua said China's actions including strict quarantine of millions of people had earned the world 'precious time' to prepare for the epidemic, which has been recognised by the international community.

It added that the U.S. efforts to deal with its own virus cases had been widely criticised.

Xinhua also attacked the U.S. politicians for calling the virus the 'Wuhan virus' or 'Chinese virus'.

Protests cut short Syria joint patrol

Rebels opposed to Turkey-Russia deal block highway

REUTERS
IDLIB/MOSCOW

Russia and Turkey cut short their first joint patrol in Syria's Idlib on Sunday after rebels and civilians opposed to a ceasefire agreement cut off a main roadway to block its path, according to witnesses and Russian news agencies.

The patrol on the M4 highway in Idlib province was the result of a March 5 ceasefire accord between Moscow and Ankara, which back opposing sides in Syria's nine-year war. The ceasefire has largely held since then. Under the deal, Turkish and Russian forces are to establish a security corridor on either side of the M4, as well as carry out joint patrols along it.

But on Sunday, hundreds of civilians and rebels cut off



Syrian rebels protesting along a highway in the northern part of the country, ahead of Turkey-Russia patrols.

the roadway, rejecting the presence of Russian forces and what they said was an agreement that did not guarantee their re-settlement after being pushed out by violence. 'If the patrols happen without people being able to return to their lands, we oppose them,' said Osama Ra-

hal, a military commander with the rebels.

The Russian Defence Ministry said the joint patrols were cut short because of rebel 'provocations' and civilians being used as a human shield, forcing them to take a shorter route, according to Russian news agency RIA.

4 sentenced to death for Bangladesh priest's murder

They are members of the Islamist JMB

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DHAKA

Four Islamist extremists were sentenced to death in Bangladesh on Sunday for the 2016 decapitation of a senior Hindu priest during a spate of attacks targeting religious minorities in the Muslim-majority nation.

The Islamic State (IS) had claimed responsibility for the attack in the northern district of Panchagarh, but authorities blamed militants from Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

'The court... sentenced all four to death over the murder. They are JMB members,' said Abdur Raqique, a court official in the capital Dhaka.

The priest was a prominent member of Bangla-

desh's Hindu community, which makes up nearly 10% of the South Asian country's population of 168 million.

JMB was blamed for the murders of minorities, secular writers, publishers and foreigners between 2013 and 2016. Among them was a savage attack at a Dhaka cafe in 2016 that killed 22 people, mostly foreigners.

Seven Islamist extremists were sentenced to death in November over the assault that was claimed by the IS.

Bangladesh security forces launched a nationwide crackdown after the cafe siege, killing more than 100 members of the JMB, including its top leaders, and arresting hundreds of suspected militants.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12884

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles

Crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-31 indicating starting positions for clues.

(set by Gussalufz)

- ACROSS
1 Utter ecstasy: Xacuti starters followed by Goan tirsya stuffed with a bit of imli! (7)
5 Laziness - that's what the former ruler of Iran kept hidden, reportedly (7)
9 Power apparatus up after one euro and one rupee are inserted, understand? (9)
10 Peers ask Wagner piece

SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers 1-9 and difficulty rating: ★★★★★.

Solution to puzzle 12883 and solution to yesterday's Sudoku.

FAITH

Manmatha's praise

King Nimi asks Dhrumila, one of the nava yogiswaras, to tell him about Lord Narayana's avatars, said P.T. Seshadri in a discourse. He wants to know about the Lord's deeds in the past, present and future. Dhrumila answers that the Lord is limitless, and so are His gunas. None is capable of speaking of all His qualities. It is far easier to try to describe the specks of dust in the world than to try to describe His qualities. Even the Vedas tried to praise Him and failed, for His auspicious qualities are infinite. The Lord made the Universe and everything in it, and He is in everything as antaryami. He has the three lokas as His body. He creates, sustains and dissolves the world. His first avatara was the Nara Narayana avatara in Badrikasrama, where the Lord appeared as both Nara and Narayana and did tapas. Indra wanted to disturb the penance. He sent Manmatha, the god of love, to disrupt the tapas.

When Narayana opened His eyes and looked at Manmatha, he praised the Lord thus: 'When yagas are performed, havis is offered to various devatas. Because they get havis, they do not disrupt the yagas. But Vishnu bhaktas seek no benefits. All they want is Paramapada. If everyone becomes a Vishnu bhakta and reaches Sri Vaikuntha, there will be none left on earth to give havis to the devas. Afraid that this might happen, they put hurdles in the path of Vishnu bhaktas. But because of Your mercy, Your devotees cross these hurdles. Those who do not worship You do not know how trivial worldly desires are. They drown in worldly pleasures. Even small joys of life are enough to keep them immersed in worldly life. They are like a man who can drown in even a small volume of water, for example, the water that can be contained in a cow's hooves.'