

15 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Joko Widodo

INDONESIA

Deaths climb, Joko wants more tests

Jakarta: Faced by a rising death toll from coronavirus and a big jump in infections, Indonesia's president called for testing to be stepped up immediately in the world's fourth most populous country. "I ask that the number of testing kits and the number of test centres are increased and we get more hospitals involved," Joko Widodo said. Less than three weeks since the country of more than 260 million people announced its first case of the virus, its death toll had reached 25 — higher than in any other Southeast Asian country.

AUSTRALIA

Australia closes borders to non-residents

Sydney: Australia is closing its borders to foreigners and pumping about \$100 billion (\$56 billion) into the economy as it seeks to minimise the blow from the coronavirus epidemic. Australia has recorded around 600 coronavirus infections and six deaths, a relatively small number compared to other countries, but officials are growing increasingly concerned about the prospect of an exponential rise in cases. With the majority of the cases originating overseas, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Thursday all non-Australian residents would be barred from entering the country from 9pm on Friday. In neighbouring New Zealand, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced the same measure almost simultaneously, with the ban on foreign arrivals there beginning on Thursday evening.

TURKEY

Shops close across Turkey

Ankara: Shops closed across Turkey on Thursday to help halt the coronavirus spread, dimming the economy's prospects and raising questions for hundreds of thousands of workers after Ankara pledged \$15 billion in support and advised Turks to stay home. Clothing retailers shuttered and malls, with some 530,000 employees and annual turnover of \$160 billion, were set to follow suit after Turkey announced cases of the virus had nearly doubled to 191 including a second death.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi cancels Jeddah festival

Riyadh: Saudi Arabia cancelled "Jeddah Season", a weeks-long entertainment and cultural festival in the Red Sea port city, as part of measures to curb the coronavirus outbreak, state television reported on Thursday. The event, which had been scheduled for June and July, was first run last year under efforts by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

NO NEW LOCAL INFECTIONS IN CHINESE CITY; GLOBAL TOLL NEARS 10,000

Italy toll overtakes China's, Wuhan offers hope

NICOLE WINFIELD & TIM SULLIVAN
ROME, MARCH 19

THE DEATH toll in Italy from the coronavirus overtook China's on Thursday in a stark illustration of how the outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States.

Italy, with a population of 60 million, recorded at least 3,405 deaths, or roughly 150 more than in China — a country with a population over 20 times larger.

Italy reached the bleak milestone the same day that Wuhan, the Chinese city where the coronavirus first emerged three months ago, recorded no new infections, a sign that the communist country's draconian lockdowns were a powerful method to stop the virus' spread.

On Thursday, a visiting Chinese Red Cross team criticized Italians' failure to properly quarantine themselves and take the national lockdown seriously.

The epidemic has also now reached at least one European head of state, 62-year-old Prince Albert II of the tiny principality of Monaco. The palace announced that he tested positive for the virus but was continuing to work from his office and was being treated by doctors from Princess Grace Hospital, named after his American actress mother.

The worldwide death toll crept toward 10,000 as the total number of infections topped 220,000, including nearly 85,000 people who have recovered.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe pleaded with people to keep their distance from one another to avoid spreading the virus, even as the crisis pushed them to seek com-



A fitness trainer (above) carries out an exercise class for her neighbours from her balcony in Rome; medical workers bid farewell to each other at the Wuhan railway station. Reuters



fort.

"When you love someone, you should avoid taking them in your arms," he said in Parliament. "It's counterintuitive, and it's painful. The psychological consequences, the way we are living, are very disturbing — but it's what we must do."

Spain has been the hardest-hit European country after Italy, and in Madrid a four-star hotel began operating as a makeshift hospital for coronavirus patients.

The director of the group that runs the Ayre GH Colon hotel tweeted: "365 rooms more to help win the war." The Madrid Hotel Business Association said it has placed 40 hotels with room for 9,000 people at the service of the Madrid region, which has near half of Spain's 17,000 or so cases.

AP

COVID-19 mortality was 1.4% in outbreak epicentre: study

AGENCIES
PARIS, MARCH 19

THE NOVEL coronavirus proved deadly in 1.4 per cent of all people infected in the Chinese outbreak city of Wuhan, far lower than global estimates of the killer pandemic, researchers said Thursday.

The World Health Organization said this month that COVID-19 proves deadly in 3.4 percent of confirmed cases.

But with limited testing capacity and confirmed cases likely to be towards the severe end of the spectrum, several experts have suggested the true mortal-

ity rate may be significantly lower.

A team of researchers in China has now reviewed eight separate public and private data sources on COVID-19 in Wuhan, and believe they have come up with a more accurate mortality estimate. They found that the probability of dying after developing COVID-19 symptoms was 1.4 percent.

"Estimation of true case numbers — necessary to determine the severity per case — is challenging in the setting of an overwhelmed healthcare system that cannot ascertain cases effectively," said the study, published in *Nature Medicine*.

'WHISTLEBLOWER IN WUHAN PUNISHED INAPPROPRIATELY'

Police in China's virus epicentre Wuhan on Thursday apologised to the family of a doctor, who was reprimanded for trying to issue the first warning about the deadly coronavirus outbreak, after a Chinese government investigation found that their action against the whistleblower was not appropriate.



A homeless man outside Westminster underground station in London. Reuters/Hannah McKay

Brexit talks suffer complications, London braces for shutdown

GABRIELA BACZYNSKA
BRUSSELS, MARCH 19

IT WAS always going to be a challenge for Britain and the European Union to meet an end-of-year deadline to agree on their post-Brexit relationship.

But the coronavirus has just made it even harder, and calls for an extension to the deadline are gaining traction in mainland Europe as parts of the continent go into lockdown.

Talks planned for this week have been postponed because of the outbreak, and the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, said on Thursday he has the COVID-19 respiratory illness that the



EU's chief negotiator for Brexit Michel Barnier tested positive

coronavirus can cause.

"I tested positive for COVID-19 yesterday," Barnier said in a video message from his home in France where he is now confined. He also issued a rallying cry for fellow Europeans to "win this collective battle, this war, against the virus."

Meanwhile, the UK was bracing on Thursday for the virtual shut down of London as under-

ground train stations across the capital closed and Prime Minister Boris Johnson mulled tougher measures to tackle the coronavirus crisis.

Johnson said that unlike during the financial crisis, Britain will put its people first in the fight against the coronavirus and more measures will be announced by the government on Friday. "This time it is going to be different," Johnson said. "(Remember) what happened in 2008, everybody said we bailed out the banks and we didn't look after the people who really suffered — this time we are going to make sure that we look after the people who really suffer from the economic consequences." REUTERS

US scrambles to assess growing coronavirus toll

MARIA CASPANI & DOINA CHICAU
NEW YORK, WASHINGTON, MARCH 19

HEALTH OFFICIALS across the United States scrambled on Thursday to step up testing for the coronavirus, trying to get a handle on how many Americans have been sickened in the pandemic.

The fast-spreading respiratory disease has widely disrupted life across the country, shuttering schools and businesses and leaving millions to work from home or out of work, hammering the economy and disrupting travel.

New York State tested more than 7,500 patients overnight and ordered three-quarters of state employees to work from home, while the governor of neighboring New Jersey warned that he expected the number of sick people in the state to spiral into the thousands.

More than 10,000 people across the United States have been diagnosed with the illness called COVID-19 and more than 160 have died, with the largest numbers so far in Washington state and New York.

The US Senate was aiming to unveil details of a \$1 trillion-plus coronavirus bill later on Thursday intended to help the US economy weather the ill-effects of the growing outbreak. President Donald Trump has been eagerly calling for that package. REUTERS



Donald Trump with members of the US administration's coronavirus task force at the White House. Reuters

FDA nod to anti-malarial drug for COVID-19: Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, MARCH 19

THE US government has approved chloroquine, an anti-malarial drug, to treat coronavirus infection, US President Donald Trump said Thursday.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has also approved compassionate use of certain other drugs, currently under trial, for a significant number of patients, Trump told journalists at the White House.

"We are very excited about chloroquine... if it works. The beauty is that these drugs have been out there," he said, an-

Every 10 mins, one person dies from the virus in Iran

AGENCIES
DUBAI, MARCH 19

THE NEW coronavirus kills one person every 10 minutes in Iran, the health ministry spokesman tweeted on Thursday, as the death toll in the Middle East's worst-affected country climbed to 1,284.

"Based on our information, every 10 minutes one person dies from the coronavirus and some 50 people become infected with the virus every hour in Iran," Kianush Jahanpur tweeted.

Meanwhile, Iran's top leader will pardon 10,000 more prisoners in an apparent effort to combat the coronavirus, state TV reported Thursday.

As part of steps to curb the spread of the new virus that has killed more than 1,100 people in Iran, the country has already released 85,000 prisoners on temporary leave.

Iran will also not celebrate its annual national nuclear day because of the outbreak, the country's nuclear chief Ali Akbar Salehi told state TV on Thursday. Iran holds an annual celebration of its nuclear programme, during which Tehran announces its nuclear achievements.

Separately, the United Arab Emirates added to its list of people barred from entering all residents who are currently abroad. The decision impacts people whose homes, children, bank accounts and livelihoods are in the country,

EXPLAINED

US sanctions worsen situation

THE US sanctions affect Iran's capacity to respond to the crisis. The US has already declared that it will expand its sanctions on Iran and entities that helped the Iranian government in its trade in petrochemicals and other restricted activities. Iran Thursday released a US military veteran as a humanitarian gesture even as the US called on Iran to free other Americans who remain jailed there. While questions have been raised over Iran's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the pandemic has also dented the legitimacy of coercive US sanctions on Iran.

but who were traveling or outside the country. The ban goes into effect at mid-day Thursday for at least two weeks.

The Middle East has some 20,000 cases of the virus, with most in Iran or originating from Iran.

Sharp increase in Moscow pneumonia cases fuels fears over statistics

AGENCIES
MOSCOW, MARCH 19

A REPORTED sharp increase in pneumonia cases in the Russian capital and contradictory information around the issue is fuelling fears about the accuracy of official coronavirus data which remains much lower than many European countries.

Russia, which has a population of 144 million, has reported just 199 coronavirus cases and some doctors have questioned how far the official data reflects reality, given what they say is the patchy nature and quality of testing.

A sharp spike in pneumonia cases in Moscow, Russia's biggest transport hub and a city with a population of around 13 million, has further raised doubts. "I have a feeling they (the authorities) are lying to us," said Anastasia Vasilyeva, head of Russia's Doctor's Alliance trade union.

Moscow clarifies cause of 1 death

Meanwhile, Russia reported its first death connected to the coronavirus pandemic on Thursday, initially saying an elderly woman died of pneumonia before changing the cause of death to a blood clot.

The Moscow health department said the 79-year-old, who had tested positive for COVID-19, died in a Moscow hospital.

2 deaths in Brazil; protesters bang pots

AGENCIES
RIO DE JANEIRO, SAO PAULO MARCH 19 (REUTERS)

THE CORONAVIRUS outbreak has hammered Brazil, crushing local markets, infecting more members of the country's political elite and prompting loud protests against President Jair Bolsonaro's handling of the mounting crisis.

Brazil's tourist mecca of Rio de Janeiro reported its first two coronavirus deaths on Thursday, bringing the country's toll to six. The state government said the two deaths were a 63-year-



Women bang pots at the window of their house as they protest against Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, in Rio de Janeiro. Reuters/Ricardo Moraes

old diabetic woman in the hilly interior of Rio de Janeiro state and a 69-year-old man, also dia-

betic, in the city of Niteroi. President Jair Bolsonaro, who has faced criticism for his lax

handling of an outbreak he initially called a "fantasy," issued a decree restricting entry of foreign visitors at land borders with Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Suriname and French Guiana.

Brazil had reported 428 confirmed cases of the virus as of Wednesday evening, more than doubling in three days.

On Wednesday night, Brazil erupted to the sound of banging pots and pans and shouts of "Bolsonaro out!" with housebound protesters expressing their anger toward the president for the second night in a row.

Pak coronavirus cases rise to 453

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 19

PAKISTAN'S CORONAVIRUS cases sharply rose to 453 on Thursday, as the military said measures are being taken to make the armed forces' medical facilities available for an "extreme emergency" situation.

Pakistan on Wednesday reported its first two casualties due to the coronavirus that has spread to more than 160 countries, killing over 9,000 people.

On Thursday, maximum new cases were recorded in

Balochistan where the number of infected people rose to 81 from 23. Punjab was the next where the number rose from 33 to 78, the *Dawn* reported.

But the worst-hit Sindh province was still on the top with 245 confirmed cases, while Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa had 23, Islamabad 2 and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan 24, the paper said.

Army spokesman Major General Babar Iftikhar told the media that army was fully geared up to support the civil administration in fighting coronavirus.

"Medical facilities of armed

forces will be available in case of emergency," he said.

Pakistan also announced on Thursday to close down Wagah border with India for two weeks.

The interior ministry through a notification said that it closed the key border point with India "for an initial period of two weeks (14 days) with immediate effect".

It said the measure was taken to "prevent the spread of COVID-19, in the best interest of both countries".

Pakistan's western border with Iran and Afghanistan had already been closed to curb the spread of the deadly virus.