

14 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



In Colombo. Reuters

SRI LANKA
340 arrested for defying curfew

Colombo: Nearly 340 people have been arrested in Sri Lanka for defying a nationwide curfew imposed by the government to contain the fast-spreading coronavirus pandemic that has claimed over 13,000 lives globally, police said on Sunday. The suspects were apprehended from areas coming under several police stations. Most were arrested for drinking at public places, driving on the roads, keeping their restaurants open, for unruly behaviour after drinking and selling merchandise during the curfew, the Colombo Page quoted police spokesman S P Jaliya Senaratne as saying.

CYPRUS
First coronavirus death reported

Nicosia: Cyprus' health ministry has announced its first coronavirus death and said there were 83 cases. The number of COVID-19 cases in the island's breakaway Turkish Cypriot north has meanwhile risen to 35, including 31 German tourists, with no deaths, officials there said. The eastern Mediterranean island is divided between the internationally-recognised Republic of Cyprus and the northern third under Turkish control. The deceased was a 70-year-old British man who had contracted the virus from another Briton while being treated at Paphos general hospital's ICU, said news site Phileletheros.

FRANCE
Doctor dies of COVID-19

Paris: France on Sunday reported its first death of a hospital doctor from coronavirus. Health Minister Olivier Veran said that as far as he knew the man -- who died on Saturday -- was the "first hospital doctor to be hit". The accident and emergency practitioner worked at a hospital in Compiègne, north of Paris, AFP was able to confirm. Veran refused to give any more information about the victim, saying details were being withheld for medical reasons and to respect the wishes of the doctor's family. Compiègne is in the Oise department, the first area in France to be badly hit by the outbreak.

Over 300,000 cases, half in Europe

651 more deaths in Italy; China diverts all intl flights; Merkel in quarantine

AGENCIES
MARCH 22

THERE ARE more than 300,000 declared cases of the new coronavirus around the world, according to an AFP tally on Sunday. At least 300,097 infections have been confirmed globally, including 12,895 deaths, in 169 countries and territories, according to data collected from national authorities and the World Health Organisation. The cases in Europe topped 150,000, as per the AFP tally. The raging pandemic has forced lockdowns in 35 countries, disrupting lives, travel and businesses as governments scramble to shut borders and unleash hundreds of billions in emergency measures to avoid a widespread virus-fuelled economic meltdown.

Italy's world-topping toll from the coronavirus pandemic approached 5,500 on Sunday after the Mediterranean country reported another 651 deaths.

China will redirect all arriving international flights from its capital Beijing to 12 other cities from Monday to control the surge of imported coronavirus cases as the country reported its first domestically transmitted COVID-19 case after a gap of three days, officials said on Sunday.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Sunday that gatherings of more than two people will be banned in public to control the spread of the coronavirus. "Our own behaviour is the most effective way" of slowing the rate of infection, Merkel said.

Merkel will quarantine herself at home after being treated by a doctor who has since tested positive for the novel coronavirus, a government spokesman said Sunday.

Lockdowns alone won't defeat outbreak: WHO expert

REUTERS
LONDON, MARCH 22

Countries can't simply lockdown their societies to defeat coronavirus, the World Health Organisation's top emergency expert said on Sunday, adding that public health measures are needed to avoid a resurgence.

"What we really need to focus on is finding those who are sick, those who have the virus, and isolate them, find their contacts and isolate them," Mike Ryan said in an interview on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show. "The danger right now with the lockdowns... if we don't put in place the strong public health measures now, when those movement restrictions and lockdowns are lifted, the danger is the disease will jump back up."

Ryan said the examples of China, Singapore and South Korea, which coupled restrictions with rigorous measures to test every possible suspect, provided a model for Europe, which the WHO has said has replaced Asia as the epicentre of the pandemic.



Beds for COVID-19 patients are placed at IFEMA convention centre in Madrid, Spain on Saturday. Spanish health authorities have acknowledged that some intensive care units in the hardest-hit areas are close to their limit. AP

The country's National Health Commission (NHC) said that 46 new confirmed cases were reported on the mainland on Saturday, including one domestic infection transmitted by imported cases in Guangzhou.

Fatalities in France jumped to 562 as police said helicopters and drones were being deployed to boost the government's attempts to keep people in their homes. Britain has told pubs, restaurants and theatres to close and warned citizens to stop panic-buying.

The Canadian death toll from the coronavirus outbreak jumped almost 50% percent to 19 in less than a day and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau predicted on Sunday the crisis would last for months.

Canada has already closed its borders to all but essential travel and announced a C\$27 billion aid package.

In Spain, toll up by 30%, PM to extend state of emergency

PTI & REUTERS
MADRID, MARCH 22

SPAIN ON Sunday announced 394 new deaths caused by the novel coronavirus, raising to 1,720 the official death toll in Europe's worst-hit country after Italy, a 30 percent increase over the previous day.

The number of confirmed cases of the disease rose by 3,646, or 14.6 per cent, to 28,572, according to health ministry figures, with officials warning infections will rise further in the coming days.

Meanwhile, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said

We must prepare ourselves emotionally and psychologically for very hard days ahead

PEDRO SANCHEZ
SPAIN'S PM

Sunday his government would ask parliament to extend for another 15 days until April 11 a state of emergency it imposed this month to try to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

"I know that is a drastic measure...but experts agree that it is an effective measure in the fight against coronavirus," he told a news conference after

holding talks via video conference with the heads of Spain's regional governments.

The country has mobilised 52,000 additional health workers and racing to finish construction of field hospitals.

"We must prepare ourselves emotionally and psychologically for very hard days ahead," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez had earlier told the nation in a televised address.

"The cases are rising and are going to continue to rise in the coming days," ministry spokeswoman Maria Jose Sierra told journalists, saying nobody knew when the outbreak in Spain would peak.

US 'close' to \$2 trn package, Pence tests negative for virus

AGENCIES
MARCH 22

TREASURY SECRETARY Steven Mnuchin said on Sunday that bipartisan negotiations over an economic relief package were nearing completion and that he expected a vote on stimulus legislation on Monday morning.

The package, which is expected to approach \$2 trillion dollars, is designed to help small businesses keep their workers employed and offer direct payments to many Americans as more and more of the U.S. economy comes to a halt because of the coronavirus. "We've ordered a major part of the economy to shut down, and the president wants to protect them," Mnuchin said on "Fox News Sunday."

However, a top Democrat said she would introduce her own bill. "We will be introducing our own bill," Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said earlier as she left the meeting, while adding negotiators were still talking and that she hoped for a bipartisan agreement.

During his news conference,



A health worker at Times Square in New York. Reuters

McConnell suggested the differences were just part of the usual jockeying in Congress.

"It's still some elbowing and maneuvering for room as you can imagine, but this is a pretty solidly bi-partisan proposal agreed to by a lot of rank and file Democrats who were involved in drafting it," McConnell told reporters.

"We are poised to deliver the significant relief that Americans need with the speed that this crisis demands," McConnell said.

US Vice President Mike Pence and his wife Karen Pence have tested negative for the deadly novel coronavirus, a top White House official said on Saturday.

EXPLAINED

Direction of bill debated

US LEADERS didn't mention specifics about Democrat-Republican differences over the relief package. However, experts said areas such as helping corporations rather than workers and provisions on allowing companies to buy back their stock were likely the sticking points. The measures in the proposed bill include direct payments for Americans and loans for small businesses. The debate, then, appears to be where these funds should be injected: Corporate America or other avenues of reaching citizens.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FOUR KEY FIGURES

€150 bn
The amount German officials are preparing to make available in its budget to help the country weather the economic effects

\$38 bn
The amount announced by Australia on Sunday as part of measures to limit the economic damage from the coronavirus pandemic

6 mn
The number of medical items sent to Ethiopia, including masks, testing kits and protective clothing by the Jack Ma Foundation in China

100
The number of army virus experts and medics being sent by Russia to Italy to help fight the outbreak

TOLL UP BY 129 TO 1,685

Iran leader refuses US help, citing virus conspiracy theory

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, MARCH 22

IRAN'S SUPREME leader refused US assistance Sunday to fight the new coronavirus, citing an unfounded conspiracy theory that the virus could be man-made by America.

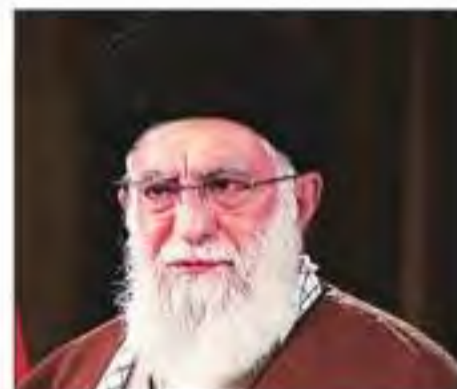
Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's comments come as Iran faces crushing US sanctions blocking the country from selling its crude oil and accessing international financial markets.

But while Iranian civilian officials in recent days have increasingly criticised those sanctions, 80-year-old Khamenei instead chose to traffic in the same conspiracy theory increasingly used by Chinese officials about the new virus to deflect blame for the pandemic.

"I do not know how real this accusation is but when it exists, who in their right mind would trust you to bring them medication?" Khamenei said.

"Possibly your medicine is a way to spread the virus more." He also alleged without offering any evidence that the virus "is specifically built for Iran using the genetic data of Iranians which they have obtained through different means."

"You might send people as doctors and therapists, maybe they would want to come here and see the effect of the poison they have produced in person,"



...who in their right mind would trust you to bring them medication... You might send people as doctors and therapists, maybe they would want to come here and see the effect of the poison they have produced in person"

ALI KHAMENEI
IRAN'S LEADER

he said.

There is no scientific proof offered anywhere in the world to support Khamenei's comments.

His comments come as Iran has over 21,600 confirmed cases of the new coronavirus amid 1,685 reported deaths, according to government figures released Sunday.

Iran is one of the hardest-hit countries in the world by the new virus. Across the Mideast, Iran represents eight of 10 cases of the virus and those leaving the Islamic Republic have carried the virus to other countries.

NHS could soon be overwhelmed like Italy, warns UK PM

REUTERS
LONDON, MARCH 22

BRITAIN'S NATIONAL Health Service (NHS) could be "overwhelmed" by the coronavirus like the Italian health system in just two weeks, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has warned in the face of rising numbers of deaths.

The death toll in Britain hit 233. In comments carried in Sunday Telegraph and other Sunday newspapers, Johnson again urged Britons to stay at home to stop the virus spread.

"The numbers are very stark, and they are accelerating. We are only a matter of weeks - two or three - behind Italy," he said.

"Unless we act together, unless we make the heroic and collective national effort to slow the spread - then it is all too likely that our own NHS will be similarly overwhelmed," he said.

Italy overtook China as the country worst affected by the virus on Thursday. The Italian government has ordered that all businesses must close until April 3 in its latest desperate effort to halt the epidemic.

The last week has seen Johnson's government quickly step-up warnings over the virus. It has closed schools for most



In London on Sunday. AP

pupils, told pubs and restaurants to shut and asked people to avoid unnecessary social interactions.

On Saturday Britain's NHS struck a deal with the independent hospital sector, giving the institution more ventilators and thousands of extra beds and healthcare staff on hand from next week. Britain also urged 1.5 million people identified by the NHS as being at higher risk of severe illness if they contract coronavirus to not leave their homes, to protect themselves.

But Johnson cautioned that from the Italian experience, even the best hospitals could be overwhelmed by COVID-19. "The Italians have a superb healthcare system. And yet their doctors and nurses have been completely overwhelmed by the demand," Johnson noted.

As cases rise to 757, Imran rules out full lockdown

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 22

PAKISTAN PRIME Minister Imran Khan on Sunday ruled out a complete nationwide lockdown, saying it will create chaos and urged people to self-quarantine to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic which has so far claimed four lives and infected over 750 people in the country.

Addressing the nation as cases of the coronavirus surged, Khan reiterated that a lockdown will create chaos as more than 25 per cent people were living below poverty line and their lives will be shattered.

He said the situation in

Pakistan does not call for a lockdown yet. "Let me first tell you what a complete lockdown is. It means imposing a curfew and locking people in their homes," said Khan.

"We cannot afford complete lockdown as it will create massive unrest," he said, adding that the situation in the country is not as bad as in Italy or France.

"If the condition was similar to that of Italy, I would have imposed a lockdown," he said.

He urged the people to follow the policy of self-isolation and stay inside their homes. He said the government was constantly watching the situation and all necessary measures will be taken accordingly. **PTI**

US SHUTS OFF ACCESS TO ITS ASYLUM PROGRAMME FOR FIRST TIME IN 40 YEARS

A closed border, dashed hopes and a looming disaster

AZAM AHMED, MIRIAM JORDAN & KIRK SEMPLE
CIUDAD JUÁREZ, MARCH 22

TANIA BONILLA arrived in this Mexican border city on Wednesday determined to apply for asylum in the United States.

With her 1-year-old in tow, she had defied the odds - evading a death sentence by a Honduran gang at home, she said, as well as deportation by the Mexican authorities at the southern border and kidnapping by smugglers en route.

But now, in eyeshot of an international bridge connecting the Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez to the United States, a new and much more serious problem presented itself: the coronavirus.

In response to its rapid spread, which has claimed about 13,000 lives worldwide, the United States government announced on Friday that in addition to closing the Mexican border to nonessential traffic, it would shut off access for anyone trying to claim asylum from the border.

In practice, the US will deport anyone caught crossing between official ports of entry, including



Outside the immigration office in Ciudad Juárez. NYT

those hoping to turn themselves in, denying them access to asylum and potentially sending them back into harm's way.

Analysts said this was the first time in memory since the creation of the current asylum system 40 years ago that the United States had shut down access to its program along the border. Some viewed it as an attempt to use a global pandemic as a pretext to summarily block access to the US asylum system for those coming from the south.

"I think when you have a crisis of these proportions, it's possible to get away with a lot,

and that's possibly what they are doing here," said Sarah Pierce, an analyst.

For some migrants, the move felt existential, as though what little hope remained had been plundered by a virus that is far more widespread in the US than in their own countries.

"Right now, I don't know what I'm going to do," said Bonilla, 22, outside the state of Chihuahua's migrant affairs offices. Her son played with another group of children whose parents were also fleeing violence. "The one thing I can't do is go back." **NYT**