

14 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



At the Hong Kong airport, Monday. AP

HONG KONG
Non-residents, barred from entering country

Hong Kong: Hong Kong will ban all non-residents from entering from midnight on Tuesday evening in a bid to halt the coronavirus, its leader said Monday, as she also ordered restaurants and bars to stop serving alcohol. In the last two weeks, the number of cases has more than doubled to 356 infections after locals and foreign residents flooded back. "From midnight of March 25, all non-Hong Kong residents flying in from overseas will not be allowed into the city," chief executive Carrie Lam said, adding the order would be in place for at least two weeks.

PAKISTAN
Army deployed to enforce lockdown

Islamabad: Pakistan on Monday deployed army to assist the civil administration to enforce nationwide lockdown and perform other duties as the number of coronavirus cases sharply rose to 875. Army will assist federal and provincial governments in their respective plans to deal with COVID-19. Army spokesman Maj Gen Babar Iftikhar said in Rawalpindi. The decision was taken as police faced problems in enforcing measures after all provincial governments announced complete or partial lockdown.

BANGLADESH
10-day holiday, Army called to enforce curbs

Dhaka: Bangladesh on Monday declared a 10-day nationwide holiday from March 26 and called out the Army to enforce social distancing to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic which has claimed over 15,000 lives globally. All government and private offices will be closed from March 26 to April 4. "The holidays will begin with the March 26 Independence Day holiday in view of the COVID-19 situation," Cabinet Secretary Khondker Anwarul Islam told a media briefing in the capital. Bangladesh has reported 33 coronavirus cases so far.

SYRIA
Syrians brace for lockdown after 1st case

Damascus: Syrians rushed to stock up on food and fuel Monday amid fears that authorities would resort to even stricter measures after reporting the first coronavirus infection in the country, where the healthcare system has been decimated by nearly a decade of civil war. The arrival of the global pandemic in Syria as well as the Gaza Strip has raised concerns it could run rampant in some of the most vulnerable areas in the Middle East. War-torn Libya and Yemen, which have yet to report any cases, are also a source of concern.

Pandemic accelerating, warns WHO

UN chief calls for global ceasefire as toll crosses 15,000; Spain's fatalities up by 462 to cross 2,000

AGENCIES
MARCH 23

The new coronavirus pandemic is clearly "accelerating", the World Health Organisation warned on Monday, but said it was still possible to "change the trajectory" of the outbreak.

"The pandemic is accelerating," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told journalists in a virtual news briefing, saying "it took 67 days from the first reported case to reach the first 100,000 cases, 11 days for the second 100,000 cases and just four days for the third 100,000 cases."

But he said "we are not helpless bystanders. We can change the trajectory of this pandemic."

The death toll from the virus surged to more than 15,000, with over 340,000 infections, according to an AFP tally on Monday, with Europe the new epicentre of the outbreak that first emerged in China late last year.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday called for an "immediate global ceasefire" in all corners of the world, emphasising that it is time to put armed conflict in lockdown and focus on the fight against the coronavirus.

"The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war. That is why today, I am calling for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. It is time to put armed conflict in lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives," the UN chief said.

Italy's world-worst toll from the pandemic approached 5,500 with another 651 deaths reported on Sunday.

Italy also banned travel and shut down a range of industries and businesses on Monday, a new wave of restrictions designed to finally slow the rate of deaths and infections.

The coronavirus death toll in Spain surged to 2,182 after 462 people died within 24 hours, the



ENFORCED DISTANCING: Benches arranged to enforce social distancing at a bus station in Thailand. Reuters

health ministry said on Monday. The death rate showed a 27-per cent increase on the figures released a day earlier, with the number of cases of COVID-19 rising to 33,089 in Spain.

Despite an unprecedented national lockdown which was put in place on March 14, the number of deaths and infections have spiralled in Spain, with the figures growing as the country steps up its capacity for testing.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced the ban on gatherings of more than two people. She did so while in quarantine herself because she had met an infected doctor.

Residents across France, where the death toll jumped to 860, remained shut in their homes. A curfew was imposed in some regions and the mayor of Paris called for even more drastic confinement measures in a city under lockdown.

As the pandemic over-

whelms hospitals, doctors are having to quickly prioritise patients based on their chances of survival, inflicting a huge moral burden. "We go into medicine to heal people. Not to make choices about who can live," said Philippe Devos, an anaesthesiologist in Belgium.

China on Monday reported no new local cases of the virus, but confirmed another 39 infections from overseas.

Meanwhile, Britain inched towards similar tough measures, with the government under pressure to clamp down after crowds flocked to holiday hotspots and beaches at the weekend, defying social distancing recommendations.

"This is the biggest economic shock our nation has faced in generations," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said as he warned the pandemic could lead to a crisis akin to the 1930s Great Depression.

Iran toll over 1,800, EU says it needs global aid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
TEHRAN, MARCH 23

IRAN ON Monday announced 127 new deaths from the novel coronavirus, raising the official toll to 1,812 in one of the worst hit countries along with Italy, Spain and China.

The EU on Monday urged the international community to send humanitarian aid to Iran to help its coronavirus fight, arguing that such steps would not breach US sanctions.

The bloc is preparing to send 20 million euros' (\$21.5 million) worth of humanitarian aid to Iran, where the coronavirus has killed more than 1,800 people. Health ministry spokesman

Kianouche Jahanpour said 1,411 new cases had been recorded in Iran over the past 24 hours, bringing the total of those infected to 23,049.

Jahanpour, who was speaking during his daily news conference devoted to the pandemic, said he would no longer give a breakdown of cases by province.

This was necessary, he said, to avoid sparking undue concern among residents of the most stricken areas and ensure that those in less affected zones remained cautious.

Josep Borrell, the EU's chief diplomat, said Brussels would support requests for help made by Iran and Venezuela — also heavily sanctioned — to the International Monetary Fund.

Pompeo rushes to Kabul to jumpstart flagging peace deal

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KABUL, MARCH 23

US SECRETARY of State Mike Pompeo arrived on Monday in Kabul on an urgent visit to try to move forward a US peace deal signed last month with the Taliban, a trip that comes despite the pandemic, at a time when world leaders and statesmen are curtailing official travel.

Since the signing of the deal, the peace process has become stalled amid political turmoil in Afghanistan, with the country's leaders squabbling over who was elected president.

President Ashraf Ghani and his main rival in last September's presidential polls, Abdullah Abdullah, have both declared themselves the country's president in dueling inauguration ceremonies earlier this month.

During his visit, Pompeo is expected to try to help end the impasse, which has put on hold the start of intra-Afghan peace talks that would include the Taliban. Those talks are seen as a critical next step in the peace deal, negotiated to allow the



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (right) in Kabul. AP

United States to bring home its troops and give Afghans the best chance at peace.

The final pullout of US forces is not dependent on the success of intra-Afghan negotiations but rather on promises made by the Taliban to deny space in Afghanistan to other terror groups, such as the insurgents' rival Islamic State group.

But within days of the US and the Taliban signing the peace deal in Qatar on February 29, Afghanistan sunk into a political crisis with Ghani and Abdullah squaring off over election results and Ghani refusing to fulfil his part of a promise made in the US-Taliban deal to free up to

EXPLAINED
E
Many hurdles to overcome

THERE ARE a number of hurdles in the ongoing peace talks. The Afghan government and Taliban have so far not made any concessions regarding a planned prisoner exchange. Within the government, both Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah had declared themselves the winners of a recent election. This, too, has contributed to the ongoing impasse.

5,000 Taliban prisoners. The insurgents were for their part, to free 1,000 Afghan officials and soldiers they hold captive. The exchange was meant to be a good-will gesture by both sides to start the negotiations.

Nepal orders nationwide lockdown

SHIRISH B PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, MARCH 23

NEPAL ON Monday announced a nationwide lockdown for a week amidst concern over the possible spread of the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

A meeting of the high-level committee for the prevention and control of COVID-19, led by Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel, took the decision on Monday evening, hours after a second coronavirus case was confirmed.

There will be a nationwide lockdown from Tuesday 6 AM, officials said, adding that the mobility of people, except for emergencies, will be halted.

The Ministry of Health on Monday said that a 19-year-old Nepali student who returned from France via Qatar tested positive for COVID-19.

"We have decided to go for a lockdown from 6 AM Tuesday for a week," said Bhanubhakta Dhakal, minister for health and population, who is a member of the high-level committee. PTI

Trillion-dollar aid package crashes in US Senate, toll 400

AGENCIES
MARCH 23

A TRILLION-DOLLAR Senate proposal to rescue the reeling US economy crashed to defeat Sunday after receiving zero support from Democrats, and with five Republicans absent from the chamber because of virus-related quarantines.

The US has seen a significant spike in coronavirus cases with the total confirmed infections jumping to nearly 34,000 while over 400 fatalities were recorded, even as one in every three Americans has been told to stay home.

Democrats said the Republican plan failed to sufficiently protect millions of American workers or shore up the critically under-equipped health care system during the coronavirus crisis. The bill proposed an estimated \$1.7 trillion or more in funding to cushion the blow for American families and thousands of shuttered or suffering businesses.

Despite intense negotiations between Republicans, Democrats and President Donald Trump's administration, the roll call was 47-47, far short of the 60

votes needed to advance. President Donald Trump has said that illegal and undocumented immigrants, including from India, would not be denied from a test for the coronavirus.

The United States currently has some 11 million undocumented people, several hundred thousands of which are from India and South Asia.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell blasted the Democratic opposition and warned of economic devastation ahead if Congress does not act promptly. "The notion that we have time to play games here with the American economy and the American people is utterly absurd," he fumed.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer insisted the bill falls well short of sufficiently protecting US employees, millions of whom are at risk of losing their jobs as the economy grinds to a halt, while offering a "large corporate bailout with no protections for workers and virtually no oversight". He accused Republicans of trying to "skimp on funding" to address shortfalls for hospitals, equipment, medical personnel and other health care infrastructure.



President Donald Trump at the White House. AP

Netanyahu opponents take battle to court, citing threat to democracy

ISABEL KERSHNER
NEW YORK, MARCH 23



BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

CITING A threat to Israeli democracy, opponents of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked the Supreme Court on Sunday to block what they described as a power grab by the caretaker government under the guise of combating the coronavirus epidemic.

The petitioners asked the court to restore the full powers of Parliament, which has been largely blocked from functioning by a Netanyahu ally, Yuli Edelstein, the speaker. He has claimed public health concerns.

A new Parliament was sworn in last week, but among the key votes Edelstein has prevented is one on replacing him as speaker.

The paralysis in Parliament has only compounded the country's political deadlock and chaos in the wake of three inconclusive elections in the past 12 months.

Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, has every interest in remaining in power. The coronavirus outbreak has provided him with a new opportunity to try to maintain his grip on power. Netanyahu has been trying to push his main rival, Benny Gantz, to join him in an emergency unity government.

Gantz's party, one of the petitioners to the Supreme Court, responded: "The ultimatum, while harming our democracy, makes evident that Netanyahu would like to drag this country into a fourth round of elections, even in the throes of a crisis that demands that we all act on behalf of the people, both in government and in Parliament." NYT

'THEY ARE GOING TO CALL MY 8-YEAR-OLD SON A CHINESE VIRUS'

Spit on, yelled at, attacked: Chinese-Americans fear for safety

SABRINA TAVERNISE & RICHARD A OPPEL JR
NEW YORK, MARCH 23

YUANYUAN ZHU was walking to her gym in San Francisco on March 9, thinking the workout could be her last for a while, when she noticed that a man was shouting at her. He was yelling an epithet about China. Then a bus passed, she recalled, and he screamed after it, "Run them over."

She tried to keep her distance, but when the light changed, she was stuck waiting

with him at the crosswalk. She could feel him staring at her. And then, suddenly, she felt it: his saliva hitting her face and her favourite sweater.

In shock, Zhu, who is 26 and moved to the United States from China five years ago, hurried the rest of the way to the gym. She found a corner where no one could see her, and she cried quietly. "That person didn't look strange or angry or anything, you know?" she said of her tormentor. "He just looked like a normal person."

As the coronavirus upends American life, Chinese-

Americans face a double threat. Not only are they grappling like everyone else with how to avoid the virus itself, they are also contending with growing racism in the form of verbal and physical attacks. Other Asians-Americans — with families from Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, Myanmar and other places — are facing threats, too, lumped together with Chinese-Americans by a bigotry that does not know the difference.

In interviews over the past week, nearly two dozen Asian-Americans across the country said they were afraid — to go grocery shopping, to travel alone on subways or buses, to let their children go outside. Many described being yelled at in public.



Yuanyuan Zhu said a man started shouting at her and then spat at her as she waited to cross the street. NYT

Trump and his Republican allies are intent on calling the coronavirus "the Chinese virus," rejecting the World Health Organisation's guidance against using geographic locations when naming illnesses, since past names have provoked a backlash.

"If they keep using these terms, the kids are going to pick it up," said Tony Du, an epidemiologist in Howard County, Md, who fears for his son, Larry, 8. "They are going to call my 8-year-old son a

Chinese virus. It's serious." While no firm numbers exist yet, Asian-American advocacy groups and researchers say there has been a surge of verbal and physical assaults reported in newspapers and on tip lines.

Benny Luo, founder and chief executive of NextShark, a website focused on Asian-American news, said the site used to get a few tips a day. Now it is dozens.

Edward Chew, the head of the emergency department at a large Manhattan hospital, is on the front lines of fighting the coronavirus. He said that over the past few weeks, he has no-

ticed people trying to cover their nose and mouth with their shirts when they are near him.

Chew has been using his free time to buy protective gear, like goggles and face shields, for his staff, in case his hospital runs out. On Wednesday night at a Home Depot, with his cart filled with face shields, masks and Tyvek suits, he said he was harassed by three men in their 20s, who then followed him out into the parking lot.

"I heard of other Asians being assaulted over this, but when you are actually ridiculed yourself, you really feel it," he said the following day. NYT