

13 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



The Ruby Princess in Sydney. Reuters/File

AUSTRALIA
Thousands stuck on cruise ships off coast

Perth: Thousands of passengers on three cruise ships were stranded off Australia's west coast Wednesday as officials refused to let them land to avoid repeating the "utter disaster" of a previous cruise-related case surge. The Artania and Magnifica were anchored off the port of Fremantle with a third, the Vasco de Gama, on its way. "There are no circumstances we will allow passengers or crew to wander the streets in our state," West Australian Premier Mark McGowan told media Wednesday. A string of virus cases have been connected with cruise ship arrivals.

WEST AFRICA
Mali declares its first two virus cases

Bamako: Mali announced its first two cases of coronavirus on Wednesday, to fears that the war-torn West African state will struggle to handle an outbreak. Two Malian nationals who arrived from France in mid-March tested positive for the virus, the government said in a statement on Wednesday, and are receiving medical treatment. The statement added people should "remain calm and strictly respect the recommended preventive measures". There are fears that Mali is at particular risk in the event of an outbreak, however.

LIBYA
First COVID-19 cases reported

Tripoli: Libya has reported its first case of the novel coronavirus, a particular source of concern in the North African country where civil war has badly degraded the public healthcare system. Libya has been mired in chaos since the 2011 overthrow of longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi. The health minister of the UN-recognised GNA late Tuesday reported "a first contamination with the coronavirus in Libya," without giving details of the case. "The necessary measures have been taken to treat" the patient, the minister, Ehmed Ben Omar, said in a brief online statement.

Global toll 20,000, 3 bn told to stay home

Italy fatalities rise by 683 to 7,503; total cases 73,386

AGENCIES
MARCH 25

THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic has killed more than 20,000 people worldwide, most of them in Europe, according to an AFP tally Wednesday using official figures. A total of 20,334 deaths were reported, of which 13,581 were in Europe.

With 7,503 deaths, Italy is the most affected country ahead of Spain with 3,434 and China with 3,281, the country where the initial outbreak occurred.

This comes even as more than three billion people have been asked to stay home in almost 70 countries and territories as governments battle the pandemic.

Most of the countries concerned, including Argentina, Britain, France, India and Italy as well as many US states, have imposed mandatory lockdown measures. Others have introduced curfews, quarantines and other social distancing recommendations.

The death toll from an outbreak of coronavirus in Italy has grown by 683 to 7,503, the Civil Protection Agency said on Wednesday, a decline in the daily tally of fatalities following a spike the day before.

On Tuesday 743 people died. That followed 602 deaths on Monday, 650 on Sunday and a record of 793 on Saturday — the highest daily figure since February 21. The total number of confirmed cases in Italy rose to 74,386 from a previous 69,176, the Civil Protection Agency said.



A row of military trucks wait to take away coffins that have been piling up in a church in Italy on Wednesday. Reuters

Spain death toll crosses China's

AGENCIES
MADRID, MARCH 25

SPAIN'S CORONAVIRUS death toll overtook that of China on Wednesday, rising to 3,434 after 738 people died over the past 24 hours, the government said.

Across the world, only Italy now has a higher death toll than that of Spain. In China, where the virus emerged late last year, 3,281 people have died.

The spiralling number of deaths came as Spain entered the 11th day of an unprecedented lockdown to try and rein

in the COVID-19 epidemic that has now infected 47,610 people, the health ministry said.

As the authorities stepped up testing, the number of cases showed a 20 per cent increase on the figures for Tuesday, while the death toll showed a 27 per cent rise over the same period.

Despite the national lockdown imposed on March 14, which is to be extended until April 11, both deaths and infections have continued to mount, with officials warning this week would be particularly bad.

"We are approaching the peak," the ministry's emergen-

cies coordinator Fernando Simon said in announcing the figures. Health authorities are hoping it will soon become clear whether the lockdown is having the desired effect.

Madrid has suffered the brunt with 14,597 infections — just under a third of the total — and 1,825 deaths, or 53 per cent of the national figure.

Troops have set up a massive field hospital in Madrid's vast IFEMA exhibition centre which currently has 1,500 beds but which could be expanded to take in up to 5,500 people — making it the largest hospital in Spain.

EXPLAINED
War of attrition

IN MANY parts of Europe, the ranks of health workers have been thinning in a war of attrition. In Spain, 14% of cases are medical professionals. As per experts, this situation is damaging as it adds to the toll while cutting down the number of responders. This draws renewed attention to need to equip such workers properly.

Iran to ban intercity travel as virus death toll tops 2,000

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
TEHRAN, MARCH 25

IRAN WILL ban intercity travel within days as it finally gets tough with the coronavirus that has killed more than 2,000 people in one of the world's deadliest outbreaks, officials said Wednesday.

The strict new measures come after weeks of cajoling largely failed to prevent hundreds of thousands of Iranians taking to the roads to visit family for the two-week Persian New Year holiday.

"New journeys will be banned, leaving towns and cities will be banned," government spokesman Ali Rabii announced, hours after President Hassan Rouhani revealed the government was poised to introduce "difficult" new measures against the outbreak.

"People should return to



Hassan Rouhani

their home towns as quickly as possible," Rabii said.

He said the government would issue a statutory instrument setting out fines for violations. "Of course, the security forces are going to stop it," he said, referring to travel on Iran's major highways.

Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli told official news agency IRNA Wednesday that

the ban would enter force "tomorrow or the day after".

Iran on Wednesday announced 143 new deaths from the coronavirus, raising the official death toll to 2,077.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour added that "our colleagues have registered 2,206 new cases of COVID-19 infection" in the past 24 hours, bringing total infections to 27,017.

Iran had long resisted imposing any lockdown, choosing instead to rely on verbal appeals for people to stay home.

"There has been a long debate within the National Committee for Fighting the Coronavirus about how to strengthen the measures we have taken," Rouhani said.

"It may create problems for people's travel plans and require that people return home early," the president said.

US lawmakers reach deal for \$2-trillion financial aid package

NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, MARCH 25

THE WHITE House and Congress struck a deal in the predawn hours to deliver \$2 trillion in government relief to a nation increasingly under lockdown, watching nervously as the twin threats of disease and economic ruin grow more dire.

Reached after midnight, the stimulus deal was the product of a marathon set of negotiations among Senate Republicans, Democrats and the White House that had stalled as Democrats insisted on stronger worker protections and oversight of a \$500 billion fund to bail out distressed businesses.

Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the majority leader, announced the deal on the Senate floor well after midnight. "At last, we have a deal," he said. "In effect, this is a wartime level of investment into our nation."

The sheer size and scope of the stimulus package would have been unthinkable only a couple of weeks ago. Administration officials said they hoped that its effect on a battered economy would be exponentially greater than its \$2 trillion cost, generating as much as \$4 trillion in economic activity.

"This is not a moment of celebration, but one of necessity," the minority leader, Senator Chuck Schumer, said as he took careful note of the changes his

TESTING KITS

■ US President Donald Trump has requested test kits from South Korea, his counterpart Moon Jae-in said on Wednesday

■ Over 367,000 people in have been tested in South Korea, once the worst-hit country outside China

■ 'If there is a domestic surplus, I will support as much as possible,' Moon told Trump

party had secured in the legislation. "To all Americans I say, 'Hell is on the way.'"

The Democratic-led House is unlikely to take up the package until at least Thursday, when Speaker Nancy Pelosi hopes to approve it by unanimous consent, a practice usually reserved for minor, uncontroversial measures. In this case, it would ensure House members, who are scattered across the country, do not have to travel back to Washington.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump pressed to reopen the country for business by Easter, on April 12.

When asked how he came up with April 12 as a target date, Trump did not cite any scientific evidence. "I just thought it was a beautiful time," he said.



A COVID-19 drive-thru test site in Chicago. AP

Citing virus, Putin delays vote on changes to extend his rule

ANDREW OSBORN & TOM BALMFORTH
MOSCOW, MARCH 25

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin on Wednesday postponed a nationwide vote on constitutional changes that would allow him to extend his rule, saying the health and safety of citizens was his top priority as the global coronavirus pandemic worsens.

His postponement followed calls from critics to delay the vote, which had been planned for April 22. One opposition activist, Andrei Pivovarov, likened the idea to "holding a party during the plague".

"We see how severely the coronavirus epidemic is developing in the world. In many

countries the number of cases is continuing to grow, the whole world economy is under threat," Putin said in a televised address.

"The absolute priority for us is the health, life and safety of people. Therefore I believe that the vote should be postponed until a later date."

Putin spoke on the day Russia recorded its biggest one day rise in cases, though at 658, the official tally remains much lower than in many European countries.

The mayor of Moscow told Putin on Tuesday however that the real scale of the problem far exceeded official figures, and Reuters reported earlier this month that a reported increase in pneumonia cases in Moscow was fuelling fears about the accuracy of official data. REUTERS

UK issues visa extensions for those hit by travel ban

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, MARCH 25

BRITAIN'S INDIAN-ORIGIN Home Secretary Priti Patel has issued an over two-month extension on visas to foreign nationals who were stranded in the UK due to COVID-19 related travel bans imposed by several countries, including India.

The announcement, made on Tuesday, came as a relief for Indian nationals, including tourists, professionals and students, who were inundating the social media channels of the Indian High Commission in London with queries about their expired or soon to be expiring visas.

Like many foreign nationals, the Indian citizens also found themselves unable to return home amid the coronavirus pandemic due to flight cancellations



Priti Patel

and border restrictions.

Giving them a grace period until May 31, Patel said she wanted to give people peace of mind that no enforcement action will be taken against anyone caught up due to the current stringent travel restrictions.

"The UK continues to put the health and wellbeing of people first and nobody will be punished for circumstances outside of their control. By extending people's visas, we are giving people peace of mind and also ensuring that those in vital services can continue their work," the senior UK Cabinet minister said. PTI

Prince Charles tests positive

MICHAEL HOLDEN & GUY FAULCONBRIDGE
LONDON, MARCH 25

PRINCE CHARLES, the 71-year-old heir to the British throne, has tested positive for coronavirus but is in good health and is now self isolating in Scotland with mild symptoms.

Charles, eldest son of Queen Elizabeth, is displaying what Clarence House said were mild symptoms. His wife, Camilla, 72, tested negative.



Prince Charles

"The Prince of Wales has tested positive for coronavirus," Clarence House said. "He has been displaying mild symptoms

but otherwise remains in good health and has been working from home throughout the last few days as usual."

"The Duchess of Cornwall has also been tested but does not have the virus," Clarence House said. Queen Elizabeth who is currently at Windsor Castle is in good health, Buckingham Palace said.

A royal source said the Prince of Wales, who was tested on Monday and got the results on Tuesday, was advised the condition was unlikely to escalate into a more serious case. REUTERS

Pak suspends domestic flights as cases top 1,000

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 25

PAKISTAN HAS suspended all domestic flight operations until April 2 to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus after the country reported over 1,000 cases and seven deaths from the COVID-19 infection, authorities said on Wednesday.

The nationwide tally of COVID-19 patients touched 1,037 with 413 cases in Sindh; 115 in Balochistan; 296 in Punjab; 117 in K-P; 80 in Gilgit-Baltistan; 15 in Islamabad; and one in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The Express Tribune reported.

Management Authority has said that so far 7 people have died due to the novel coronavirus and 18 recovered. In the wake of the outbreak, the country has halted its domestic flights operations.

Abdul Sattar Khokhar, the spokesman of Aviation Division, said that the decision was part of ongoing efforts to contain the deadly coronavirus. The ban will be effective from Thursday, Khokhar said.

According to a statement on the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority's website on Tuesday, the government has "decided to suspend all types of domestic scheduled/non-scheduled, chartered and private aircraft passenger flight operations..." PTI

'Corona time' for refugees in Europe's main migrant camp

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PAZIANOU LESBOS ISLAND (GREECE), MARCH 25

IN EUROPE'S biggest asylum seeker camp of Moria, on the Greek island of Lesbos, authorities are trying to keep residents apart from a population with at least three coronavirus cases.

But in a sprawling, overstretched facility that was already a health hazard before the virus made landfall in Greece, there is widespread concern. "As you all know we are in corona time and...the (biggest) problem

that we have is overcrowding inside these camps," Mohamed Omid, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan posted on Facebook Tuesday from inside Moria.

There have been 20 recorded deaths and 743 officially announced infections from the coronavirus in Greece, which has a population of 11 million. Three of the cases have been reported among Lesbos islanders.

There are nearly 38,000 people crammed into overstretched refugee centres on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos. Moria alone has over 19,000. The European parliament's



Migrants at the Moria camp in Lesbos, Greece. Reuters/File

civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee this week

called for urgent measures to relieve pressure on the camps.

"Many of those in the camps are already in precarious health situations due to the bad conditions in which they have lived for a long time," said Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar, a Spanish socialist MEP who chairs the committee.

"There is no chance of isolation or social distancing, nor is it possible to ensure appropriate hygienic conditions," he said, adding that there are only six intensive care beds available on Lesbos.

As the island camps were originally intended to handle around 6,000 people, many sleep outdoors in makeshift shelters with minimal access to hygiene. The

situation was recently termed a "health bomb" by government spokesman Stelios Petsas.

In Moria, not everyone has access to water and refuse routinely piles up. With staff and police now called away because of the lockdown, many residents are fearful. "The virus has brought chaos...the police are not here, staff do not come," said Sayed Nasid Haidari, an Afghan.

"Moria is divided into two groups. Around 20 per cent are scared and hiding in their tents, and 80 per cent are still walking around as if nothing is happening," said Haidari.