

## Economy in peril

Globally, governments and central banks are ripping up the policy rulebook as they battle to immunise their economies from a deeper coronavirus carnage

### U.S.

The White House and Senate leaders agreed on a \$2 trillion stimulus package, which will put cash into the hands of Americans, provide grants to small businesses and loans to larger corporations

A separate package from U.S. financial overseers would provide \$4 trillion in liquidity to juice up the economy

**SAUDI ARABIA**  
Saudi Arabia, which holds the G20 presidency, confirmed that it would

convene a videoconference summit of leaders on Thursday

G7 Finance Ministers and central bank chiefs said they were working on "substantial and complementary packages"

### GERMANY

Germany plans to abandon its constitutional debt limits and raise €156 bn in new borrowing to stop Europe's largest economy from going under

### EUROPEAN UNION

The EU has suspended limits on members' debt and deficit levels

Backed by France, hard-pressed Italy wants the EU to let members pool their debts and issue so-called coronabonds

**Booster shots:** Printing money, gargantuan debt spending, loan guarantees, tax breaks and even direct payments to workers are all in the highly unorthodox mix

**To the American people, we say, big help, quick help is on the way**  
— CHUCK SCHUMER, U.S. SENATE MINORITY LEADER

**CENTRAL BANKS:** The ECB, after being criticised for keeping interest rates on hold, last week announced a €750 billion scheme to buy government and corporate bonds

The Fed, the ECB and the Bank of Japan have joined other central banks in enhancing currency swaps to maintain a plentiful supply of dollars running through seized-up credit markets

### HARDEST HIT

INFECTIONS  
DEATHS



SOURCE: JOHNS HOPKINS CORONAVIRUS RESOURCE CENTRE & AFP

# Spain overtakes China's virus death toll

Country saw number of casualties rise by 738 in a single day; UN chief seeks \$2 billion to help the poor

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MADRID

Spain joined Italy on Wednesday in seeing its death toll from the coronavirus epidemic surpass that of China, as more than a billion Indians joined a lockdown that has confined a third of humanity.

"COVID-19 is threatening the whole of humanity – and the whole of humanity must fight back," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said, launching an appeal for \$2 billion to help the world's poor.

On Wednesday, the number of deaths around the world from the novel coronavirus strain stood at 19,647, with more than 436,000 declared cases registered in 181 countries and territories.

India's stay-at-home order is now the biggest, and Rus-

sia will follow suit, with President Vladimir Putin declaring next week a public holiday and postponing a public vote on constitutional reforms.

The G20 major economies will hold an emergency videoconference summit on Thursday to discuss a global response to the crisis, as will the 27 leaders of the European Union, the outbreak's new epicentre.

Spain saw the number of deaths surge to 3,434 after more than 738 people died in the past 24 hours, following Italy in overtaking the figure in China, where the virus originated late last year.

**'People dying alone'**  
At the La Paz university hospital in Madrid, A&E nurse Guillen del Barrio sounded completely empty as he re-

lated what happened overnight.

"It is really hard, we had feverish people for many hours in the waiting room," the 30-year-old told AFP by telephone. "Many of my colleagues were crying because there were people who are dying alone, without seeing their family for the last time."

Hard-hit Spain and Italy were joined by France and six more EU countries in urging Germany and the Netherlands to allow the issue joint European bonds to cut borrowing costs and stabilise the eurozone economy.

Meanwhile in Iran, the coronavirus has claimed more than 2,000 lives until now.

"New journeys will be banned, leaving towns and cities will be banned," government spokesman Ali Rabbani announced.

## Prince Charles tests positive for COVID-19

REUTERS  
LONDON

Prince Charles, the 71-year-old heir to the British throne, has tested positive for COVID-19 but is in good health and is now self-isolating in Scotland.

Prince Charles, eldest son of Queen Elizabeth, is displaying what Clarence House said were mild symptoms but remains in good health and has been working from his Birkhall residence in Scotland. His wife, Camilla, 72, tested negative.

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



Prince Charles

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

Queen Elizabeth, who is currently at Windsor Castle, is reportedly in good health.

## White House, Congress agree on \$2 trillion virus rescue Bill

Measures include aid to businesses, workers and healthcare

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

The White House and Senate leaders of both parties announced agreement on Wednesday on an unprecedented \$2 trillion emergency Bill to rush sweeping aid to businesses, workers and a health care system slammed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The urgently needed measure is the largest economic rescue Bill in history. It is intended as a weeks-long or months-long patch for an economy spiralling into recession – or worse – and a nation facing a potentially ghastly toll.

### 'Help is on the way'

"To the American people, we say, big help, quick help is on the way," Senate Minor-

ity Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said.

Top White House aide Eric Ueland announced the agreement on Wednesday, capping days of often intense haggling and mounting pressure. Some final pieces of the agreement need to be finalised in detailed legislative language.

The measure is the third Bill produced by Congress and by far the largest in response to COVID-19, building on earlier efforts focussed on vaccines and emergency response, sick and family medical leave for workers, and food aid.

It would give direct payments to most Americans, expand unemployment benefits and provide a \$367 billion programme for small

businesses to keep making payroll while workers are forced to stay home.

One of the last issues to close concerned \$500 billion for guaranteed, subsidised loans to larger industries, including a fight over how generous to be with the airlines. Hospitals would get significant help as well.

"After days of discussions, the Senate has reached a bipartisan agreement on a historic relief package for this pandemic," said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

The package would give one-time payments to Americans – \$1,200 per adult making up to \$75,000 a year, and \$2,400 to a married couple making up to \$150,000, with \$500 payments per child.

## Bolsonaro slams virus quarantines

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BRASLIA

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro lashed out on Tuesday at what he called "scorched-earth" quarantine policies to contain the pandemic, saying they risked wrecking the economy.

The far-right leader condemned the containment measures in places such as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, saying they risked killing people's jobs in a misguided effort to save lives.

"Some state and local authorities need to abandon the scorched-earth concept: blocking transport, closing businesses and confining people en masse," he said.

"We need to preserve jobs and families' livelihoods." Mr. Bolsonaro said.

## Turkey charges 20 Saudis over Khashoggi murder

2 former top aides to Saudi Crown Prince among suspects

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ISTANBUL

Turkish prosecutors have charged 20 suspects, including two former top aides to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, over the 2018 murder of Riyadh critic Jamal Khashoggi.

Prosecutors accuse Saudi Arabia's deputy intelligence chief Ahmed al-Assiri and the royal court's media czar Saud al-Qahtani of leading the operation against Khashoggi and giving orders to a Saudi hit team.

Khashoggi, 59, a commentator who wrote for The Washington Post, was killed after he entered the Saudi consulate on October 2, 2018, to obtain paperwork for his wedding to Turkish fiancée Hatice Cengiz.

## 25 worshippers killed in IS attack on Kabul gurdwara

80 rescued after gunman laid siege to the worship house

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
KABUL

A lone Islamic State gunman rampaged through a Sikh house of worship in the heart of the Afghan capital, Kabul, on Wednesday, killing 25 worshippers and wounding eight, Afghanistan's Interior Ministry said.

The gunman held many of the worshippers hostage for several hours as Afghan special forces, helped by international troops, tried to clear the building. At least one of the dead was a child.

Within hours, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack.

As the siege ended, the Afghan special forces rescued at least 80 worshippers, who had been trapped inside the gurdwara, as the gunman lobbed grenades and fired his automatic rifle into the crowd, the ministry said.

Earlier, Afghan lawmaker Narindra Singh Khalsa said he rushed over to help after receiving a call from a worshipper inside the gurdwara telling him of the attack. There were about 150 worshippers inside the gurdwara at the time, he added.

The SITE Intelligence Group, which tracks militant postings and groups, said IS had claimed responsibility for the attack on the group's



Targeting the faithful: Afghan security personnel inspecting the gurdwara in Kabul after the attack. ■ REUTERS

Amaq media arm.

At a Kabul hospital, Mohan Singh, who was in the gurdwara when the attack began, said he first heard the sound of gunshots and ducked for cover under a table. Later, he heard the sounds of explosions, adding that he believes they were hand grenades. He was injured when parts of the ceiling fell on him.

### Children rescued

In photographs shared by the Interior Ministry, about a dozen children were seen being rushed out of the gurdwara by Afghan special forces, many of them barefoot and crying.

As the news of the attack first broke on Wednesday,

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed tweeted that the Taliban was not involved. Earlier this month, Afghanistan's IS affiliate struck a gathering of minority Shiite Muslims in Kabul, killing 32 people.

Afghanistan's National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib condemned the attack in a tweet, while neighbouring Pakistan and India both issued statements of condemnation. Pakistan described the attack as "heinous".

"Such cowardly attacks on the places of religious worship of the minority community," India said, reflect the "diabolical mindset of the perpetrators and their backers."

## Netanyahu ally resigns as Speaker

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
JERUSALEM

Israel's parliamentary Speaker, an ally of Benjamin Netanyahu, resigned on Wednesday, clearing the way for a vote that could see him replaced by an opponent of the embattled premier.

Yuli Edelstein, a member of Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, had refused to schedule a Speakership vote

until a new government was formed, but stood down after the Supreme Court set a Wednesday deadline for the vote to take place.

"The court ruling constitutes crude and arrogant intervention of the judiciary in the matters of the elected legislature," Mr. Edelstein said.

"I won't allow Israel to descend into anarchy. I won't lend a hand to civil

war," he said as the court's deadline approached.

"I hereby resign from my position as Knesset Speaker."

The announcement could pave the way for the opposition, led by the centrist Blue and White party, to take control of the legislative agenda.

It also came after a year of political turmoil that has seen three inconclusive elections.

### ELSEWHERE



### Bangladesh frees opposition leader Zia

DHAKA  
Bangladesh released opposition leader Khaleda Zia, 74, from jail on Wednesday for six months to allow the two-time former Prime Minister to undergo urgent medical treatment. Zia has spent more than two years behind bars on corruption charges. AFP

### 67 Italian priests have died of virus: report

ROME  
A total of 67 Italian priests infected with the COVID-19 have died since the pandemic reached the Mediterranean country last month, the *Avvenire* newspaper said on Wednesday. The youngest of those listed by the Catholic Church-affiliated paper was 53. AFP

## In New York, some women will have to deliver babies alone

Spouses, partners and other family members barred as a measure to help protect mothers and children from COVID-19

CHRISTINA CARON  
KATIE VAN SYCKLE  
NEW YORK

Women giving birth at two leading New York City hospital networks are being told they must labour without spouses, partners or doulas by their side – leaving the expectant mothers anxious and frightened about their upcoming deliveries.

The New York City hospital network NewYork-Presbyterian on Monday instituted one of the most restrictive visitor policies in the country for women giving birth, barring spouses, partners and other family members or outside support people, such as doulas, from the delivery room – a rule it said would

help protect mothers and children during the coronavirus outbreak.

And on Monday night, Mt. Sinai Health System announced it would also bar partners and other visitors from its labour and delivery rooms, beginning Tuesday.

"We do not take this decision lightly, but these are unprecedented times that require unprecedented steps to protect our patients, their families and their new babies," Lucia Lee, a spokeswoman for Mt. Sinai, said in a statement.

The new rules at NewYork-Presbyterian network, where about 15,000 infants are delivered each year, started two days after



Tough times: Medical personnel outside the emergency room at NewYork-Presbyterian hospital. ■ AP

the New York State Department of Health issued guidance stating that one support person could be in the delivery room during the co-

ronavirus outbreak because a support person was "essential to patient care throughout labour, delivery and the immediate postpartum pe-

riod." The State said the support person must be asymptomatic for COVID-19 and should be screened for any symptoms, with their temperature checked before they enter the labour and delivery floor.

Pregnant women here say they are increasingly on edge as they prepare to deliver a baby in a region that has become the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. at a time when very little is known about how the disease affects an expectant mother or her unborn child.

"I have so much anxiety now and literally have not stopped crying after hearing that my husband can't be with me," said Samantha

Moshen, 37, who is due in early June and plans to deliver at the Weill Cornell Medical Center, part of the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital system. "I haven't been able to sleep. I've just been a mess." Ms. Moshen, a prekindergarten teacher in Manhattan, said she nearly underwent an emergency C-section with the birth of her first child, a boy who is now 4, and the experience has made her fearful that something may go wrong during her second delivery.

NewYork-Presbyterian announced Sunday that it would be instituting the new rules, saying they were "a necessary step to promote patient safety." NY TIMES

## Sudan Defence Minister dies at Juba peace talks

'He died of an unspecified illness'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KHARTOUM

Sudanese Defence Minister Lieutenant General Jamal al-Din Omar died of an unspecified illness on Wednesday while in neighbouring South Sudan for peace talks with his country's main rebel groups, the military announced.

Mr. Omar had "suffered from a number of chronic illnesses," armed forces spokesman Amer Mohamed al-Hassan said without elaborating.

The government delegation in the South Sudanese capital Juba said Mr. Omar died at 2:30 a.m. (2330 GMT on Tuesday) "after a sudden

heart attack during the performance of his sacred duty".

Born in 1960, Mr. Omar was named Defence Minister after the armed forces toppled veteran President Omar Bashir in a palace coup last April following months of nationwide protests.

Before becoming Minister, he headed the security and defence committee. Before Bashir was overthrown, he served as head of military intelligence.

Since October, Sudan's transitional government has been locked in talks with rebel groups that fought Bashir's regime.