

# 14 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



In Karachi, Saturday. AP

## PAKISTAN

**Pak Punjab now epicentre; cases cross 1,400**

Islamabad: The coronavirus cases in Pakistan on Saturday reached 1,321, including 11 deaths, with the Punjab province emerging as the new epicentre of the deadly viral infection in the country. Punjab recorded a total of 448 COVID-19 cases on Saturday, up from 419 cases on Friday. The number surpassed Sindh's tally of 440 cases. Sindh was the province, which reported Pakistan's first coronavirus case. Twenty-three people have recovered. Punjab chief minister Buzdar tweeted that a 22-year-old COVID-19 patient died in Faisalabad, taking the total number of deaths due to the disease in the province to five.

## CANADA

**Virus military's primary concern, says general**

Montreal: The head of Canada's armed forces has said preventing the spread of the coronavirus is the "primary concern" of his troops. "Today, our mission along with the armed defence of Canada is to safeguard our health, safeguard the health of Canadians, and be prepared to respond to calls for assistance," General Jonathan Vance said in a statement Friday. Units will be able to "deploy by sea, road or air" to support authorities in the battle against the pandemic in Canada, the statement added. All those returning from deployment will be quarantined for 14 days.

## CHINA

**Clashes erupt as people try to leave Hubei**

Beijing: In a rare display of public anger in China, dozens of people in central Hubei attacked official vehicles after they were stopped from crossing a bridge and travel to Jiangxi. Videos on Chinese social media on Friday showed unprecedented scenes of police from Hubei and Jiangxi clashing on the bridge connecting the two provinces over barricades erected from stopping Hubei people from moving out over fears of coronavirus spreading. Policemen argued over how to verify if people were allowed to enter Jiangxi, as per reports.

## JAPAN

**Abe says nation at critical stage**

Tokyo: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says the country is at a critical stage, but not at a point to declare a state of emergency. Abe says Japan has managed to keep clusters under control by following infection routes. But the strategy is now having difficulty, with a rise of infections that are no longer traceable — an early sign of infection explosion. He says once there is infection overshoot, "our strategy of slowing down the peak of the infections will instantly fall apart." He adds "under the current situation, we are just barely holding up. But I understand we are standing on the edge."

# Grim records in Italy, Spain as toll rises



Coffins pile up in a church due to a high number of deaths in Seriate, Italy, on Saturday; a police officer detains a man from a distance for defying lockdown in Kathmandu. Reuters

## As global infections cross 620,000, Trump signs \$2-trn stimulus package

AGENCIES  
MARCH 28

THE NUMBER of confirmed coronavirus infections worldwide topped 620,000 on Saturday as new cases stacked up quickly in Europe and the United States and officials dug in for a long fight against the pandemic.

The pandemic has killed more than 20,000 people in Europe. Europe is now the most affected continent with 20,059 deaths from a total of 337,632 cases.

US President Donald Trump has signed into law the historic \$2 trillion rescue package, setting in motion a desperately needed financial relief for millions of Americans and secure the country's economy ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic that has killed over 1,700 and infected more than 100,000 people across the nation.

The far-reaching legislation is the largest emergency aid package in US history and promises to deliver a tidal wave of cash to individual Americans,



President Donald Trump signs the stimulus relief package, at the White House. AP

businesses and health care facilities all reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Help is on the way," Trump assured his countrymen as he signed the bill in the Oval Office at the White House. The Senate and the House of Representatives earlier passed the Bill.

"We got hit by the invisible enemy and we got hit hard," he

said, adding the economy would come roaring back. "I think we are going to have a tremendous rebound," he said.

New York remained the worst-hit city, but Americans braced for worsening conditions elsewhere, with worrisome infection numbers being reported in New Orleans, Chicago and Detroit.

"We cannot completely prevent infections at this stage, but we can and must in the immediate future achieve fewer new infections per day, a slower spread," German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is in quarantine at home after her doctor tested positive for the virus, told her compatriots in an audio message.

"That will decide whether our health system can stand up to the virus." The virus already has put health systems in Italy, Spain and France under extreme strain. Lockdowns of varying severity have been introduced across Europe, nearly emptying streets in normally bustling cities, including Paris where drone photos showed the city's landmarks eerily deserted.

In parts of Africa, virus prevention measures have taken a violent turn as countries impose lockdowns and curfews or seal off major cities, with police in Kenya firing tear gas and officers elsewhere captured in mobile phone footage whacking people with batons.

## Fatalities in Spain rise by 832 in a day

REUTERS  
MADRID, MARCH 28

SPAIN'S CORONAVIRUS fatalities rose by a record 832 people overnight to 5,690 as hospitals and morgues were overwhelmed and a police chief fought back tears announcing a colleague's death.

Second only to Italy in fatalities, Spain also saw infections rise to 72,248 on Saturday from 64,059 the day before.

Health emergency chief Fernando Simon said the epidemic appeared to be reaching its peak in some areas, but the nation was short of intensive care unit beds.

"We continue to have a major problem with ICU saturation," said Simon.

As Spain prepared to enter its third week of lockdown, an unused public building known as "the doughnut" was the latest to be turned into a makeshift morgue after a city ice rink last week, Spanish media including El Pais newspaper reported.

## Virus response fateful for EU, says Italy PM, as death toll tops 10,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ROME, MARCH 28

ITALIAN PRIME Minister Giuseppe Conte warned Saturday that the European Union could lose its purpose if it fails to come up with a strong response to the coronavirus threat.

The move comes even as Italy's death toll exceeded 10,000, as per a government official.

Conte aired his grievances after the 27 EU leaders could not agree on an action plan during an argumentative six-hour video conference Thursday.

The crux of the argument is about the extent to which the EU should abandon its policy of keeping within tight budget constraints. Rome and Madrid want the EU to start issuing "corona bonds" — a form of common debt that governments sell on markets to raise money and address individual economic needs. "If Europe does not rise to this

## EXPLAINED Calls for more to be done

THE EU meet was held even as the eurozone is predicted to face recession. As opposed to its policy of tight budgets, the EU has approved major sums to combat effects of the pandemic. Spain and Italy, the most affected nations, call for more to be done. As per reports, this has led to hesitance from some countries, especially over the idea of joint debt.

unprecedented challenge, the whole European structure loses its raison d'être (reason for existing) to the people," Conte said.

## In COVID-19 fight in Scandinavia, Sweden stands out as unorthodox

CHRISTINA ANDERSON & HENRIK PRYSER LIBELL  
STOCKHOLM, MARCH 28

WHEN THE coronavirus swept into the Scandinavian countries, Norway and Denmark scrambled to place extensive restrictions on their borders to stem the outbreak. Sweden, their neighbour, took a decidedly different path.

While Denmark and Norway closed their borders, shut restaurants and ski slopes and told all students to stay home this month, Sweden closed only its high schools and colleges, kept its preschools, grade schools, pubs, restaurants and borders open — and put no limits on the slopes.

Sweden's approach has raised questions about whether it's gambling with a disease, COVID-19, that has no cure or vaccine, or if its tactic will be



Crowded cafes in Stockholm on March 26. Reuters

seen as a savvy strategy to fight a scourge that has laid waste to millions of jobs and prompted global lockdowns. By Saturday, Sweden, with 10.12 million people, recorded more than 3,060 cases and 105 deaths.

There is no evidence that Swedes are underplaying the enormity of the disease rampaging across the globe. The country's leader and health officials

have stressed hand washing, social distancing and protecting people over the age of 70 by limiting contact with them.

The state epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, said in an interview that Sweden's strategy is based on science and boiled down to this: "We are trying to slow the spread enough so that we can deal with the patients coming in."

Sweden's approach appeals to the public's self-restraint and sense of responsibility, Tegnell said. "That's the way we work in Sweden. Our whole system for communicable disease control is based on voluntary action. The immunization system is completely voluntary and there is 98 percent coverage," he explained.

"You give them the option to do what is best in their lives," he added. "That works very well, according to our experience." NYT

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THREE KEY FIGURES

**\$142 bn**  
Canada PM Justin Trudeau announced measures, doubling the aid pledged days ago to more than Can\$200 bn

**\$300,000**  
The emergency funds granted by the Asian Development Bank to Bangladesh to help the country tackle the virus pandemic

**900%**  
The percentage by which hate speech towards China and Chinese people has increased on Twitter, according to a report by a tech startup

## 1,000 deaths in UK, testing stepped up

ESTELLE SHIRBON  
LONDON, MARCH 28

MEDICAL WORKERS in England on the front line of the coronavirus pandemic started to be tested on Saturday as the number of COVID-19 deaths in Britain topped 1,000 after a record 260 people died in the previous 24 hours.

Government figures showed 1,019 people had died as of 17:00 GMT on Friday, while the number of confirmed cases stood at 17,089 on Saturday morning, up 17.5% on a day earlier. Britain is bracing for the epidemic to peak in the coming weeks, and is building field hospitals in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Cardiff to bolster the response from its NHS.

The government, which had been criticised by some doctors and nurses for not providing them



Paramedics in London. Reuters

with enough protective gear and testing kits, announced on Friday it was introducing a much bigger testing regime, with checks for health workers in England.

Frontline medical staff in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are already being tested.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson and health minister Matt Hancock are among those who tested positive. REUTERS

## AFGHANISTAN Taliban carry out attacks amid growing virus threat

MUJIB MASHAL & NAJIM RAHIM  
KABUL, MARCH 28

THE TALIBAN on Saturday attacked several provinces in northern Afghanistan, overrunning large parts of one district even as American diplomats expressed optimism that a peace process stalled over the release of prisoners was getting back on track.

The insurgents launched major assaults in three northern provinces — in Kunduz, whose capital was overrun by the Taliban repeatedly in recent years, as well as in Faryab and Badakhshan. Some of the worst fighting occurred in Badakhshan Province, where the insurgents took control of much of the district of Yamgan and inflicted heavy casualties on Afghan forces in another district, Jurm.

Amanullah Iman, who leads the executive branch of the Yamgan district office, said hundreds of Taliban fighters attacked soon after dawn and captured the district centre after three hours of fighting. "There were five outposts in Yamgan district center, and the Taliban captured all of them," Iman said. "The security forces escaped to a military base in another part of this district."

The fighting rages despite an appeal for a cease-fire on humanitarian grounds to slow the spread of the coronavirus across the country. In the roughly dozen Afghan provinces that have reported positive cases, the Taliban launched more than 300 attacks last week. The capital, Kabul, as well as Herat, have gone under partial lockdown. NYT

## AT A HOSPITAL, SHE WAS TOLD HER SICKNESS WAS RUTHLESS

# 'Patient Zero': 57-year-old shrimp seller in Wuhan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BEIJING/LONDON, MARCH 28

A 57-YEAR-OLD female shrimp seller in China's Wuhan city, the originating point of the coronavirus pandemic, has been identified as one of the first victims of COVID-19, which has claimed nearly 28,000 lives around the world so far, as per media reports.

The coronavirus 'patient zero', who made a full recovery in January after month-long treatment, believes the Chinese government could have checked the spread of the disease had it

acted sooner.

Wei Guixian, as identified by *The Wall Street Journal*, was selling shrimps at the Huanan Seafood Market on December 10 when she developed a cold. Believing she had the common flu, Wei went to a local clinic for treatment where she was given an injection, the *Mirror UK* reported.

However, Wei continued to feel weak and visited Eleventh Hospital in Wuhan a day later.

The feeling of lethargy persisted and Wei visited one of the biggest medical facilities in the region — Wuhan Union Hospital — on December 16.



A temperature check facility in Wuhan, Hubei, Saturday. Reuters

At the Union Hospital, Wei was told her sickness was "ruthless" and that many from Huanan Market had visited the hospital with matching symptoms.

At the end of December, Wei was quarantined when doctors related the emergence of the coronavirus with the seafood market, the *Mirror* quoted Chinese news outlet *The Paper*.

The article in *The Paper* concluded that the new coronavirus is likely to become the fifth endemic coronavirus in humans. "Coronaviruses clearly have the ability to cross species boundaries and adapt to new hosts, which al-

lows us to more directly predict more coronaviruses in the future."

Wei regained her health in January. The COVID-19 'patient zero' believes she got the disease from a toilet she shared with meat sellers in the market. She said several vendors trading close to her also contracted the killer disease.

In a release, Wuhan Municipal Health Commission confirmed Wei was among the first 27 patients to test positive for COVID-19 and one of 24 cases directly related to the market.

Wei said the virus death toll could have been lower if the government had "acted sooner."