

World faces new 'Great Depression'

IMF anticipates the worst economic fallout since the 1930s; 17 million workers lose jobs in U.S.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

World powers scrambled on Thursday to build a global response to the human tragedy and once-in-a-century economic collapse caused by the coronavirus epidemic, as death tolls in the U.S. and Europe soared higher.

In a locked-down New York, the UN Security Council was to meet on the pandemic for the first time. And, by video conference, EU Finance Ministers are wrangling over how to bail out their worst hit members Italy and Spain.

"We anticipate the worst economic fallout since the Great Depression," said IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva, warning that all but a handful of countries will see incomes fall and urging governments to provide "lifelines" to businesses and households alike.

The U.S. Federal Reserve tossed out just such a rescue to Americans, with chairman Jerome Powell announcing financing facilities of \$2.3 trillion "to provide as much relief and stability as we can during this period of constrained economic activity".

He warned, however, that

COVID-19

the U.S. economy is moving "with alarming speed" towards "very high unemployment". Another 6.6 million U.S. workers filed for unemployment benefits last week, new data showed on Thursday, meaning that nearly 17 million workers have lost their jobs since mid-March.

On the spiritual front, Pope Francis was preparing to celebrate Maundy Thursday with the Mass of the Lord's Supper, but he was to be unable to perform the tradition of washing the feet of the faithful in case of infection.

Meanwhile, the number of



Keeping safe: A woman putting cloth masks for drying before distributing them for free in Tangerang, on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia, on Thursday. • REUTERS

Boris Johnson's health 'improving'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's health "continues to improve" on his fourth day in COVID-19 intensive care, his spokesman said on Thursday, while the government prepared to extend a nationwide lockdown.

"The Prime Minister had a good night and continues to improve in intensive care at St Thomas' Hospital. He's in good spirits," the spokesman said, adding that Mr. Johnson was not working.

While much of the focus in Britain has been on Mr.



Boris Johnson

Johnson's health, there is also concern over the numbers of people infected with the virus.

worldwide cases of the novel coronavirus since it spread from China earlier this year topped 1.5 million, according to an AFP tally. More than 88,981 people have died.

Worst recession

Alongside the personal tragedies and the pressure on overburdened hospitals, there has been a stark economic toll, with the World

Trade Organization warning of the "worst recession of our lifetimes."

The worst-hit countries in Europe – are Italy and Spain, where daily death tolls are now down from their peaks but still running high, despite strict lockdowns.

In Italy, the country's youngest COVID-19 patient, a two-month-old baby girl,

country's total toll to 7,978. The total number of cases stood at 61,516.

Senior Ministers were to discuss extending strict social distancing measures rolled out on March 23, during a daily coronavirus response meeting.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who is standing in for Mr. Johnson, will lead the "war cabinet".

However, Ministers have made it clear no announcement on the status of the lockdown – rolled out for an initial three weeks – would be made until that period has ended on Monday, at the earliest.

was reportedly released from hospital, a moment of hope in a country with 17,669 dead.

Madrid and Rome are seeking assistance from EU partners to rebuild their economies. EU finance ministers were to meet later Thursday by videoconference for crisis talks to try to agree terms to allow hard-hit members to access funds.

100 doctors dead in Italy

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ROME

One hundred Italian doctors have died of the coronavirus so far, FNOMCeO health association said.

The toll includes retired doctors the government began calling in a month ago to help fight the virus that has claimed 17,669 lives in Italy. Media reports estimate that 30 nurses and nursing assistance have also died of COVID-19.

Spain sees drop in deaths

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Spain's daily death toll fell to 683 on Thursday, after rising for two days. The toll was down from 757 on Wednesday.

The country, one of the worst hit by the pandemic, has now recorded 15,238 deaths. The number of daily new cases also dropped slightly, bringing the total to 1,52,446.

'New cases drop in Iran'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

Iran's Health Ministry on Thursday said 117 new deaths took the total to 4,110. But spokesman Kia-noush Jahanpour said there was a downward trend in the number of new coronavirus infections.

"We have identified 1,634 new cases, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 66,220."

Google must pay news firms for content, says France

Regulator tells tech giant to negotiate with publishers

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

France's competition regulator said on Thursday that Google must start paying media groups for displaying their content, ordering it to begin negotiations after refusing for months to comply with Europe's new digital copyright law.

The agency said it "requires Google, within three months, to conduct negotiations in good faith with publishers and news agencies on the remuneration for the re-use of their protected contents".

"This injunction requires that the negotiations effectively result in a proposal for remuneration from Google" that must be applied retroactively to October 2019, when France became the first country to ratify the EU law.

The new rule on so-called "neighbouring rights" is designed to ensure news pu-



Google was told to conduct talks within three months.

lishers are compensated when their work is shown on websites, search engines and social media platforms.

But Google, which effectively has a lock on Internet searches in Europe, refused to comply, saying that snippets of articles, pictures and videos would be shown in search results only if media groups consent to let the tech giant use them at no cost.

If they refuse, only a headline and a bare link to the content will appear, Google said, almost certainly result-

ing in a loss of visibility and potential ad revenue for the publisher.

Media groups and news agency Agence France-Presse lodged a complaint with the competition regulator last November.

The regulator said on Thursday that "Google's practices... were likely to constitute an abuse of a dominant position, and caused serious and immediate harm to the press sector".

Google said that since the new European copyright law came into force in France last year it had been "engaging with publishers to increase our support and investment in news".

Google's vice-president for News, Richard Gingras, said in a statement: "We will comply with the (French competition regulator's) order while we review it and continue those negotiations".

Oil producers put heads together over output cuts

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Top oil producers started a crucial meeting on Thursday to discuss a possible cut in output after a collapse in demand due to the coronavirus and a Saudi-Russian price war caused the market to crash.

The videoconference meeting began between OPEC, its OPEC+ allies, including Russia and other key non-members.

Oil prices rose sharply as the meeting opened, extending earlier big gains, but then fell back again later to post more modest gains as nervous traders took profits.



The headquarters of the OPEC in Vienna. • REUTERS

The meeting is seen as the best chance of providing support to prices which have been wallowing near two-decade lows.

Experts warn that without concerted action the commodity risks a steep sell-off.

Last week U.S. President Donald Trump claimed Russia and Saudi Arabia would step back from their standoff and agree to slash output.

Then OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia called for an urgent meeting of producers "to try to reach a fair deal" to "stabilise the oil market" following a phone call between its Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Mr. Trump.

Thursday's meeting intends to conclude an agreement to cut production by between 10 and 15 million barrels per day, Kuwait's Oil Minister Khaled al-Fadhil said in an interview with the *Kuwaiti Al-Rai* daily.

ELSEWHERE



Space station crew dock at ISS

ALMATY

A three-man crew docked successfully at the International Space Station on Thursday. Anatoly Ivanishin and Ivan Vagner of Roscosmos and NASA's Chris Cassidy reached the ISS at 1413 GMT, just over six hours after blasting off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, where COVID-19 caused changes to pre-launch protocol. The departing crew neither faced questions from a large press pack nor were waved off by family and friends. AFP

'Half a billion people face poverty due to virus'

Richer countries should help: Oxfam

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

Around half a billion people could be pushed into poverty as a result of the economic fallout from the pandemic unless richer countries take "urgent action" to help developing nations, a leading aid organisation warned on Thursday.

Oxfam has urged richer countries to step up their efforts to help the developing world. Failing to do so, it added, could set back the fight against poverty by a decade and by as much as 30 years in some areas, including Africa and West Asia.

"The devastating economic fallout of the pandemic is being felt across the globe," said Jose Maria Vera, Oxfam International interim executive director. "But for poor people in poor countries who are already struggling to survive there are almost no safety nets to stop them falling into poverty."

The report, which is based on research at King's College London and the Australian National University, warns that between 6% and 8% of the global population could be forced into poverty.

Spy chief Kadhemi named Iraq's third PM-designate this year

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BAGHDAD

Iraqi President Barham Saleh nominated spy chief Mustafa Kadhemi on Thursday as the country's third Prime Minister-designate this year, moments after his predecessor ended his bid to form a government.

Mr. Kadhemi, the 53-year-old head of the National Intelligence Service, has ascended to the role as Iraq faces a budget crisis brought on by the collapse in world oil prices and the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"This is a huge responsibility, and a difficult task," said Mr. Saleh in his nomi-

nating speech, describing Mr. Kadhemi as someone with integrity and reason.

Widespread support

His nomination was attended by Ministers, political rivals and even the UN representative in Iraq, indicating widespread support for Mr. Kadhemi that neither of the previous PM-designates had enjoyed.

Moments before the ceremony, his predecessor Adnan Zulfī announced he was withdrawing his candidacy due to "internal and external reasons". Mr. Zulfī had been staunchly opposed by hardline Shiite factions with

close ties to Iran, which enjoys vast influence in Baghdad. Any candidate for the premiership, observers say, must have a green light from Iraq's Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni communities – as well as Iran and its rival, the U.S.

Mr. Kadhemi was able to secure that support after weeks of lobbying that peaked in a flurry of meetings in Baghdad over the last week, sources said. Among them were gatherings attended by Iranian General Ismail Qaani, who has headed the Quds Force foreign operations unit since a U.S. drone strike killed his predecessor Qasem Soleimani.

Saudi-led ceasefire in Yemen's long war begins

No decision yet from Houthi leadership

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RIYADH

The Saudi-led coalition began a unilateral ceasefire in Yemen's long war on Thursday, saying it hoped the initiative to prevent coronavirus would lead to a wider political solution.

The Iran-backed Houthi rebels have not formally responded to the coalition's declaration of a two-week pause in the five-year conflict. However Yasser Al-Hourī, secretary of the Houthis' political council, poured cold water on the idea, saying that the Saudis "are dishonest and violate

every truce they announce".

"The announcement of this truce is to evade the true national vision that offers real solutions," he said, referring to a roadmap for peace that the rebels unveiled on Wednesday.

If the ceasefire does hold, it would be the first breakthrough since the warring parties agreed to a UN-brokered truce in Hodeida during talks in Sweden in late 2018. The UAE, a key ally in the coalition which drew down its troops last year, applauded the Saudi move as "wise and responsible".

Most New York virus cases came from Europe

CARL ZIMMER

New research indicates that the coronavirus began to circulate in the New York area by mid-February, weeks before the first confirmed case, and that travellers brought in the virus mainly from Europe, not Asia.

"The majority is clearly European," said Harm van Bakel, a geneticist at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, who co-wrote a study awaiting peer review.

A separate team at NYU Grossman School of Medicine came to strikingly similar conclusions, despite studying a different group of cases. Both teams analysed genomes from coronaviruses taken from New Yorkers starting in mid-March.

The research revealed a previously hidden spread of the virus that might have been detected if aggressive testing programmes had been put in place. On January 31, President



People at a makeshift hospital under construction at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. • AFP

Donald Trump barred foreign nationals from entering the country if they had been in China during the prior two weeks.

It would not be until late February that Italy would begin locking down towns and cities, and March 11 when Mr. Trump said he would block travellers from most European countries.

But New Yorkers had already been travelling home with the virus. "People were just oblivious," said Adriana Heguy, a member of the NYU team. NY TIMES

What's next for Bernie Sanders's 'revolution'?

The Vermont Senator continues to push Democratic politics to the Left

STANLY JOHNY

Bernie Sanders, the insurgent American politician who pushed the Democratic Party to the left on several issues, on Wednesday dropped out of the race for party nomination. This was the second straight election Mr. Sanders is ending up as a runner-up in the Democratic nomination contest. The 78-year-old Senator from Vermont may not get another chance to bid for the White House, but the movement he launched, which he calls a political revolution, has already shaken up the Democratic Party.

Historical parallels

There were a few politicians in the U.S. who left lasting imprints on the political system despite their failure to win the top office. Historian Michael Kazin has compared Mr. Sanders to the late 19th century Democratic insur-

gent William Jennings Bryan and the 1972 Democratic candidate George McGovern. Bryan, who first won the Democratic party nomination in 1896, was a critic of the gold standard, a champion of inflationary policies and a consistent critic of "American imperialism". Bryan lost all three White House bids – in 1896, 1900 and 1908. Despite these failures, writes Mr. Kazin, the Democratic Party "embraced the pro-regulation, anti-monopoly, pro-union stand of this eloquent politician called 'the Great Commoner'".

In 1972, McGovern defeated the establishment favourites to win the nomination, but lost to incumbent Richard Nixon in the presidential election. When McGovern was running a high-spirited liberal campaign, he was called by critics a "communist apologist". Despite his massive loss to



Bernie Sanders

Nixon, his anti-war positions would resonate through the American people in the years that followed. President Nixon himself would end the Vietnam war that had been lost for years.

Political legacy

Like Bryan and McGovern, Mr. Sanders also built a movement at the grassroots level. While the former two made it to the presidential race, Mr. Sanders could not reach that milestone, partly because he failed to broaden his support base through the diverse Democratic voters. He also faced a combative

party establishment, which threw its weight behind its favourites, Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Joe Biden this year.

But the impact of the Sanders campaign on the Democratic politics is already visible. Most Democrats who joined the 2020 race supported restructuring America's healthcare system. They also supported doubling the minimum wage, fighting climate change more vigorously and taxing the rich more. Support for Medicare for all, one of Mr. Sanders's top promises, is rising across party

NEWS ANALYSIS

lines. According to a WSJ/NBC poll, the support for the proposal among all registered voters stood at 43% in March. About 73% support an option to buy into a Medicare system. Among the Democratic voters, 67% voters supported Mr. Sanders' proposal, while the support for the public option stood at 81%. And at a time when the U.S. is facing an unpre-

cedented healthcare crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak and its economic impacts, the focus of the political debate could further shift to healthcare and inflationary policies. The Democratic Party also has a host of young leaders, including New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who are taking forward the Sanders-style leftist politics.

Unsurprisingly, in a statement issued after Mr. Sanders announced his decision to drop out, Mr. Biden has reached out to the leftist leader's base. "We will confront income inequality in our nation. We will make sure healthcare is affordable and accessible to every American. We will make education at our public colleges and universities free. We will ease the burden of student debt. And, most important of all, we will defeat Donald Trump," said Mr. Biden. Mr. Sanders may have dropped out of the race to win the Democratic nomination, but he continues to shape the Democratic politics.

Taliban slams release of prisoners

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

The Afghan government said it would release another 100 Taliban inmates on Thursday, even though the insurgents have walked out of talks over a comprehensive prisoner swap and dismissed Kabul's piecemeal freeing of captives as "unacceptable".

The administration of President Ashraf Ghani on Wednesday released 100 low-risk Taliban prisoners who had vowed never to return to the battlefield.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the step was inadequate. A Taliban team came to Kabul last week to meet the government to discuss a comprehensive prisoner swap that was initially supposed to see 5,000 Taliban released in return for 1,000 Afghan security forces. But they abandoned the "fruitless" meetings on Tuesday and returned to Kandahar.