

British PM Boris Johnson out of intensive care

Hundreds of millions of people around the world to spend Easter holidays at home as COVID-19 death toll nears 1,00,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON/ROME

Prime Minister Boris Johnson was recovering in a hospital ward on Friday after ending three days in intensive care for COVID-19.

The 55-year-old leader left intensive care at London's St. Thomas' Hospital on Thursday evening and will now be monitored closely during what Downing Street called "the early phase of his recovery". "He is in extremely good spirits," a No. 10 spokesman said.

Mr. Johnson's improving condition came as the government continues to impose an unprecedented nationwide lockdown to try to stem the spread of the deadly coronavirus. It announced



Mass burial: Workers wearing personal protective equipment burying bodies in a trench on Hart Island, in the Bronx borough of New York on Thursday. •AP

navirus pandemic, with the global death toll rapidly approaching 1,00,000.

The U.S. is now emerging as the global hotspot of the virus. More than 1,700 people died on Thursday from almost 5,00,000 cases, bringing its total death toll to the second highest in the world after Italy. It also has the largest number of cases anywhere in the world by far.

More than 1.6 million infections have been recorded

globally, according to an AFP tally. Europe remains the hardest-hit continent in terms of cases, with 826,389 and 67,247 deaths. Italy has the highest death toll at 18,279 followed by Spain with 15,843.

Improving figures

However, across Europe and the United States, officials sought solace in slightly improving figures.

Spain, the third hardest-

hit country, saw its lowest day toll in 17 days, and Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Thursday the "fire started by the pandemic is starting to come under control".

France also reported that fewer people were in intensive care for COVID-19, the first fall since the pandemic broke out.

Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top pandemic expert, said the United States was "going in the right direc-

Recovered patients test positive in South Korea

REUTERS
SEOUL

South Korea on Friday reported that 91 patients thought to be cured of the new coronavirus had tested positive again.

Jeong Eun-kyeong, director of the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the virus may have been "reactivated" rather than the patients being re-infected.

Health officials said it remains unclear what is

behind the trend, with epidemiological investigations under way.

Nearly 7,000 South Koreans have been reported as recovered from COVID-19.

False test results could also be at fault, other experts said, or remnants of the virus could still be in patients' systems but not be infectious or of danger to the host or others.

South Korea on Friday reported 27 new cases, taking the total to 10,450.

COVID-19

another 980 deaths in the past 24 hours, the highest daily toll yet, taking the U.K. total to nearly 8,000, with more than 65,000 cases so far confirmed.

Hundreds of millions of people around the world will spend the Easter holiday at home as lockdown measures intensify to combat the coro-

War-torn Yemen reports its first case

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DUBAI

Yemen reported its first case of COVID-19 on Friday in a southern government-controlled province, raising fears of an outbreak in the war-torn country as air strikes blamed on the Saudi-led coalition tested a unilateral truce.

The announcement came on the second day of the two-week ceasefire declared by the military coalition supporting the government in

what it said was a move to help fight the pandemic.

"The first confirmed case of coronavirus has been reported in Hadramawt province," Yemen's supreme national emergency committee for COVID-19 said on Twitter.

Broken system

Aid groups have warned that when the coronavirus hits Yemen's broken healthcare system, the impact is likely to be catastrophic for a country already in the grip

of what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. "This is a moment we all feared, and were hoping to avoid, because Yemen is critically under-equipped to face this virus," said Xavier Joubert, country director for Save the Children in Yemen.

"Only half of Yemen's health facilities are still fully functional. There are 700 intensive care unit beds, including 60 for children, and 500 ventilators for a population of about 30 million."

Pakistan extends ban on flight operations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Friday extended the ban on domestic and international flight operations up to April 21 as the country stepped up efforts to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 4,500 people in the country, authorities said.

The total number of cases in Pakistan has sharply increased to 4,601, with more than 280 fresh infections, while the death toll reached 66, Health officials said on Friday.

The government has announced various measures to meet the challenge of COVID-19 pandemic, including cash payments to the most needy, which started on Thursday.

stood empty on Friday, shorn of the customary Easter holiday hustle. Even such hallowed traditions as the pope's Easter message are being revamped — Pope Francis will live-stream from the seclusion of his private library.

"We have to respond to our confinement with all our creativity," the pontiff said. "We can either get depressed and alienated... or we can get creative."

Easter pilgrimage sites across Europe and Asia

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EU strikes €500 billion rescue deal

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

After weeks of wrangling, EU member states on Thursday buried their differences and agreed to a 500-billion-euro (\$550 billion) emergency plan for a European economy knocked to its knees by the coronavirus outbreak.

EU Finance Ministers agreed in late-night talks to the rescue package aimed at reducing pain across the 27-nation bloc, especially hardest-hit Italy and Spain.

"Europe has decided and is ready to meet the gravity of the crisis," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire tweeted after the talks.

He warned earlier in the day that France's economy is expected to shrink 6% this year, even with the country's own 100-billion-euro relief plan.

Ministers put aside proposals by France and Italy for pooled borrowing. The Netherlands relented and let

the deal come through after pushing hard for Italy and other affected countries to undertake economic reforms.

"Today we answered our citizens' call for a Europe that protects," Eurogroup chief Mario Centeno said.

"This response contains bold and ambitious proposals that didn't seem possible just weeks ago," added Mr. Centeno, who is also the Portuguese Finance Minister.

Pak. seeks extradition of IS leader from Afghanistan

Farooqi was arrested last week

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has asked Afghanistan to extradite a leader in the local Islamic State group affiliate who was arrested in southern Afghanistan earlier this month.

Aslam Farooqi, whose real name is Abdullah Orakzai, is a Pakistani national wanted in connection with attacks claimed by the IS in Pakistan. The Afghan government accuses Farooqi of involvement in last month's attack in Kabul on a Sikh house of worship that killed 25 worshippers.

In a statement late on Thursday, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said the Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan, Atif Mashal, had been summoned and told of Pakistan's worries about the activities of the Islamic State affiliate, known as the IS-Khorazan, headquartered

in eastern Afghanistan.

"Since Aslam Farooqi was involved in anti-Pakistan activities in Afghanistan, he should be handed-over to Pakistan for further investigations," the Ministry statement said Farooqi was arrested last weekend along with 19 other IS operatives, according to Afghanistan's intelligence agency.

The upstart Islamic State affiliate has taken credit for attacks in Pakistan, including one in January in the southwestern Baluchistan provincial capital of Quetta that killed 15 worshippers.

In recent months, Afghan and American officials claim the IS has been weakened as a result of relentless U.S. bombing raids in eastern Afghanistan as well as military operations by the Afghan National Security Forces and attacks by their rivals, Taliban insurgents.

Alone in prayer



Testing times: A pilgrim standing at the closed door of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, believed by many Christians to be the site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, in Jerusalem, on Friday. •AP

Angry crowd destroys UN base in Central Africa

A road accident provoked the attack

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BANGUI

Villagers in Central African Republic attacked a forward base used by UN peacekeepers after a civilian was killed in a road accident, the UN force said Friday.

The incident happened on Thursday in Beboura, in the northwest of the troubled country, said Vladimir Monteiro, spokesman for MINUSCA, the UN mission in the CAR.

"There was an accident involving a UN vehicle which led to the death of an individual. Local people then decided to attack the forward military post," he said.

"Between 10 and 20 (UN) troops were there at the time. We evacuated them. Two were injured," he said.

"While we regret this accidental death, which we will investigate thoroughly,

we condemn this reaction. It's not by destroying this base that people will be protected," Mr. Monteiro said.

Incidents of this kind involving MINUSCA, which deployed in the CAR in 2014, are rare, although the force is facing criticism from some politicians and the public at a time when the country is struggling to implement a February 2019 peace deal.

Deeply impoverished despite mineral wealth, the CAR has been in the grip of violence since 2013.

More than two-thirds of the former French colony lies in the hands of armed groups, who typically claim ethnic or religious affiliations and often fight over resources.

According to the UN, 1.6 million people out of a population of 4.7 million are "extremely vulnerable."

Russia probe was started 'without basis'

Attorney-General Barr says it amounted to an effort to 'sabotage the presidency'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Attorney-General William Barr believes the Russia investigation that shadowed President Donald Trump for the first two years of his administration was started without any basis and amounted to an effort to "sabotage the presidency".

Mr. Barr offered no support for his assertion that the FBI lacked a basis for opening the investigation and made no mention of the fact that the bureau began its probe after a Trump campaign adviser purported to have early knowledge that Russia had dirt on Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton.

Mr. Barr, who has appointed a U.S. attorney to lead an investigation into the origins of the Russia probe, said the Justice Department has evi-

dence there was "something far more troubling" than just mistakes during the investigation that eventually morphed into special counsel Robert Mueller's probe.

"I think the President has every right to be frustrated, because I think what happened to him was one of the greatest travesties in American history," Mr. Barr said in the interview with Fox News.

The Attorney-General said the FBI launched its counter-intelligence investigation into ties between the Trump campaign and Russia "without any basis."

"Even more concerning, actually, is what happened after the campaign, a whole pattern of events while he was President," Mr. Barr said.

"To sabotage the presidency, and I think that — or



William Barr

at least have the effect of sabotaging the presidency."

Security threat

The Justice Department's Inspector General found the FBI was justified in opening an investigation into ties between the Trump presidential campaign and Russia — to protect against a national security threat — and found the bureau didn't act with political bias.

Mr. Trump and his supporters are counting on dif-

ferent conclusions from the separate investigation led by John Durham, the U.S. attorney Mr. Barr selected to examine the early days of the Russia probe. Mr. Durham's investigation is going on.

Mr. Barr has been a loyal supporter of Mr. Trump since becoming Attorney-General, though their positive relationship showed signs of fraying earlier this year when Mr. Barr said in an interview that Mr. Trump's tweets about ongoing Justice Department cases made it "impossible" for him to do his job.

Mr. Mueller concluded that the Russian government interfered in the 2016 poll, but his probe didn't find sufficient evidence to establish a criminal conspiracy between Mr. Trump's campaign and Russia.

S. Korea goes to the polls despite virus

To make the voting run smoothly, govt. has mobilised armies of public servants

CHOE SANG-HUN
SEOUL

They came wearing masks and stood in line at 3-foot intervals. They were required to have their body temperatures taken, to rub their hands with sanitiser and to put on disposable plastic gloves handed out by officials. Then they entered the booths and voted, as South Korea pressed ahead with its first election in a time of epidemic.

The coronavirus pandemic is disrupting political calendars around the world, causing delays and triggering electoral chaos in the U.S. It has provoked voter ire in Wisconsin, where many absentee ballots failed to arrive in time and voters were afraid to put their health at risk by going out to cast their ballots. In South Korea, the



Vote of confidence: Resident casting ballots during early voting at a polling station in Seoul on Friday. •AFP

parliamentary election is proceeding relatively seamlessly so far. The government is trying to assure its 44 million eligible voters that it is safe to leave their homes to go to the polls.

To make the voting run

smoothly, South Korea has mobilised armies of public servants. They have disinfected 14,000 voting stations across the country.

South Koreans were also allowed to vote in advance on Friday and Saturday at

any of the 3,500 balloting stations opened for that purpose. Anyone showing temperature readings higher than 37.5 Celsius (99.5 Fahrenheit) would be stopped at the gates of polling stations and escorted to a separate area to vote. The voter would then be sent for testing and the voting booth disinfected.

Officially, the election for South Korea's 300-member National Assembly is scheduled to take place Wednesday. But nearly 5 million people cast ballots on Friday and more were expected to vote on Saturday. The advance voting system, introduced in 2013, is serving as a dress rehearsal of sorts for the extraordinary plan disease-control officials have designed for an epidemic-era election. NYTIMES

A ND-NDE