12 THE () UTBREAK THE WORLD

PANDEMIC WATCH



SRI LANKA President calls for financial support

Colombo: Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa is requesting that international financial organisations provide debt moratorium or debt deferment facilities to developing nations such as Sri Lanka, which are adversely affected due to the new coronavirus.

Rajapaksa made the request on Wednesday during a telephone discussion with WHO **Director-General Tedros** Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Sri Lanka has imposed a curfew since March 20, locking down the whole country and banning nonessential travel. Two people have so

far died due to COVID-19 while there are 142 positive cases.

IRAN Floods leave 21 dead

Tehran: Flooding in Iran caused by heavy rainfall has left 21 people dead and one missing, an services emergency spokesman said Wednesday.

Mojtaba Khaledi told Iran's ISNA news agency that 22 people had also been injured, with most of the casualties in southern or central provinces.

He said 11 people had died in Fars province, three each in Hormozgan and Qom, two in Sistan and Baluchistan province, and one each in Bushehr and Khuzestan.

AFGHANISTAN

Govt, Taliban discuss prisoner swap

Kabul: Afghan government representatives have met with the Taliban in Kabul for the first time to discuss a prisoner swap aimed at jump-starting a peace process, officials said Wednesday.

The two sides met Tuesday and would meet again Wednesday for further talks being observed by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Afghanistan's Office of the National Security Council said on

It was the first time the Islamists had been invited to Kabul to meet directly with government officials since they were toppled in the US-led invasion of 2001.

Europe hits grim milestone, UN warns of humanity's worst crisis since WWII

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PARIS. APRIL 1

THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic has claimed more than 30,000 lives in Europe alone, a global tally showed Wednesday, in what the head of the United Nations has described as humanity's worst crisis since World War II.

Italy and Spain bore the brunt of the crisis, accounting for three in every four deaths on the continent, as the grim tally hit another milestone even though half of the planet's population is already under some form of lockdown in a battle to halt contagion.

For UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the extraordinary economic and political upheaval spurred by the virus presents a real danger to the relative peace the world has seen over the last few decades.

The "disease... represents a threat to everybody in the world and... an economic impact that will bring a recession that probably has no parallel in the recent

"The combination of the two facts and the risk that it contributes to enhanced instability, enhanced unrest, and enhanced conflict are things that make us believe that this is the most challenging crisis we have faced since the Second World War," he said.

As companies shut down for undetermined periods and entire workforces are forced to stay home to halt the spread of COVID-19, scenes of economic desperation and unrest were emerging across the globe.

In Italy, queues were lengthening at soup kitchens while some supermarkets were re-

PAKISTAN PRIME Minister Imran

Khan on Wednesday assured

doctors and nurses to provide

them necessary protective equip-

ment to ensure their safety in the

battle against coronavirus, as the

number of the COVID-19 patients

ports about shortages of protec-

tive gear for the medical staff and

some doctors and nurses getting

infected by the novel coron-

avirus that has killed over 43,000

CHINA, WHERE the coronavirus

outbreak first emerged in

December, reported dwindling

new infections on Wednesday

and for the first time disclosed the

number of asymptomatic cases,

which could complicate how

trends in the outbreak are read.

new cases involved arrivals from

overseas, the National Health

Commission said, taking total in-

tagious disease who do not show

fections to 81,554.

Almost all of Tuesday's 36

But that figure excludes 130 new sufferers of the highly con-

China reports fewer

coronavirus infections

people worldwide.

REUTERS

BEIJING, APRIL 1

The assurance came amid re-

rose to 2,112 in the country.

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, APRIL 1

Half a million more people now need help to afford meals, Italy's biggest union for the agriculture sector Coldiretti said, adding to the 2.7 million already in need last year.

The economic pain of lockdowns is especially acute in the developing world.

In Tunisia several hundred protested a week-old lockdown that has disproportionately hit Africa's biggest city Lagos

was set for its second full day of lockdown on Wednesday - but with some of the world's biggest slums, home to millions who live hand-to-mouth, containment will be difficult. Wary of a collapse of the

world's economy with shops shuttered and millions forced into shorter working hours or losing their jobs completely, the globe's leading central bankers have pumped billions of liquidity into the system. Last week, G20 leaders said

they were injecting \$5 trillion into the global economy to head off a feared deep recession.

In the European Union, however, battle lines have been drawn over the terms of a rescue plan.

Worst-hit Italy and Spain are leading a push for a shared debt instrument - dubbed "coronabonds". But talk of shared debt is a red line for Germany and other northern countries, threatening to divide the bloc.

The tone sharpened this week, with Italian politicians even taking out an advertisement in a major German newspaper to remind Europe's biggest economy of WWII debts in a bid to jolt it into action.

Pakistan PM Imran Khan

"Doctors, nurses and other

medical staff are in the frontline

of battle against coronavirus and

they will be provided with the

necessary protective equipment

to ensure their safety and

symptoms, its statistics showed.

tomatic carriers comes from

screening and tests of suspected

cases and tens of thousands of

people with whom they have had

contact. As of Tuesday, there were

about 20,000 people under ob-

servation, the commission said.

South China Morning Post said

China had found more than

43,000 cases of asymptomatic in-

fection through contact tracing.

Asymptomatic infections would

not cause a major outbreak if the

transmission chain was cut, the

Chinese government's senior

medical adviser, Zhong Nanshan,

told state-run Shenzhen TV.

Citing classified data, the

The identification of asymp-



Spain's death toll crosses 9,000 but epidemic passes peak

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MADRID, APRIL 1

SPAIN'S DEATH toll surged over 9,000 Wednesday as infections passed the 100,000 mark, but the rate of new cases continued to slow, suggesting the epidemic had peaked, health chiefs said.

Spain has the world's second-highest death toll after Italy, with the virus so far claiming 9,053 lives after a record 864 people died over the past 24 hours, while the number of confirmed cases reached 102.136.

But on a day-to-day basis, the

rate of new infections continued

health," Khan said while inaugu-

rating the upgradation of the

Cantonment General Hospital in

the pandemic in Pakistan would

become clear in about a week.

He said he was satisfied that the

country was not seeing the sort

of escalation of cases as seen in

providing protective equipment

and ventilators to Pakistan on

priority basis after controlling

the virus in its own worst-af-

coronavirus cases in Pakistan

Meanwhile, the number of

Boris Johnson under fire

for low number of tests

He also said that China was

the Western countries.

fected Hubei province.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WHEN PRIME Minister Boris

Johnson developed a cough and

fever, he got a test for the new

coronavirus. Most other Britons

ernment was under fire

Wednesday for failing to keep its

promise to increase the amount

of testing being done for COVID-

19, even as the country saw its

biggest day-to-day rise yet in

deaths among people with the

cipient political crisis for

The issue has become an in-

Johnson's Conservative gov-

LONDON, APRIL 1

won't be offered one.

virus, to 2,352.

Khan said that the trend of

Rawalpindi.

Imran vows to provide PPE to medical staff

its week-long downward trend. And most importantly, the

those in intensive care was falling, working. suggesting the epidemic had reached its peak, Fernando Simon, head of the health ministry's emergency coordination unit. "This is important," said

Simon who himself was diagnosed with the virus this week. "Right now the central issue is not whether we have reached the peak or not, it seems we're already there, and the numbers are going down."

Officials said the figures gave a "very positive" indication that the unprecedented lockdown

rose to 2,112 on Wednesday, in-

dicating an upward trend de-

spite efforts by the government

According to reports, Punjab

province had 748 cases, Sindh

709, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa 253,

Balochistan 158, Gilgit-Baltistan

184, Islamabad 54 and Pakistan-

due to the virus and 82 have re-

covered, while another 10 are in

critical condition. The increase

in the number of cases showed

that there was little impact of the

measures, including partial lock-

down, taken so far to reduce the

Johnson, who has mild symp-

toms and is working from isola-

tion in the prime minister's

ical journal *The Lancet*, said

Britain's handling of the COVID-19

crisis was "the most serious sci-

ence policy failure in a generation".

to hospitalized patients, leaving

people with milder symptoms

unsure whether they have had

the virus. Many scientists say

wider testing — especially of

health care staff — would allow

negative, and would give a better

picture of how the virus spreads.

The UK has restricted testing

Richard Horton, editor of med-

Downing Street apartment.

So far, 26 people have died

to contain the pandemic.

occupied Kashmir 6.

spread of the disease.

put in place on March 14, confining Spain's population of nearly number of people in hospital and 47 million to their homes, was Crunching the numbers,

Wednesday's figures showed new cases increasing by just over 8.0 per cent, compared with nearly 11 per cent on Tuesday and 20 percent a week ago.

They also showed the death rate increasing at a rate of 10.6 per cent compared with 27 per cent a week ago, with Dr Maria Jose Sierra from the emergencies coordination unit saying the recent fatalities were those "who were infected two or three weeks ago"

Coronavirus having little impact on climate, says **UN** agency

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE GENEVA. APRIL 1

THOUGH FACTORIES have shut, planes have been grounded and cars left in the garage, the coronavirus pandemic is having very little impact on climate change, the World Meteorological Organization said Wednesday.

Any reductions in pollution and carbon dioxide emissions are likely to be temporary, said Lars Peter Riishojgaard, from the infrastructure department of the WMO, a United Nations agency based in Geneva.

"It does not mean much for climate," he told a virtual press conference.

While in the short term, carbon dioxide emissions would go down as cars stay put and aircraft remain on the ground, "we expect the impact will be fairly

short-lived," Riishojgaard said. "The pandemic will be over at some point and the world will start going back to work and with that, the CO2 emissions will pick up again, maybe or maybe not to quite the same level."

He said visibility in cities such as New Delhi had improved bemedics who are off work with cause there were fewer trafficsymptoms to return if they are emitting fumes, but cautioned that it was only down to an "artificial halt" to normal activity.

Trump: US headed for very tough, painful two weeks

LALITKJHA WASHINGTON, APRIL 1

THE US is headed for a "very tough two weeks", President Donald Trump has warned, advising people to be prepared for the "hard days" ahead, as the country was at war with a deadly coronavirus pandemic that the White House projects could claim one to two lakh lives during the next fortnight.

Trump's remarks came as Deborah Bix, a member of White House Task Force on coronavirus, based on a model from actual data from the ground, said the death toll in the US could be between 100,000 to 200,000, with the strict implementation of the existing mitigation measures including social distancing till April 30. If no steps were to be taken,

the death toll could range between 1.5 million and 2.2 million, Brix said on a day when the confirmed number of coronavirus infections in the US, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center website, zoomed to over 189,500, adding more than 25.000 new cases in a single day and the fatalities rose to over 4,000. "I want every American to be

prepared for the hard days that lie ahead," Trump told reporters on Tuesday.

"We're going to go through a very tough two weeks and then, hopefully, as the experts are predicting, as I think a lot of us are predicting after having studied it so hard, we are going to start seeing some real light at the end of the tunnel. But this is going to be a very painful, very, very, very painful two weeks," Trump said.

Campaigning has come to a standstill and it is unlikely to revive in the next few months. The social distancing measures now have



Donald Trump

Virus deaths in NYC top 1,000

New York: Deaths from the coronavirus topped 1,000 in New York City as officials warned that the worst of the virus' toll is yet to come.

The city's Health Department reported late Tuesday that nearly 1,100 people have died of the virus in the city. More than 1,500 deaths from COVID-19 have been recorded across New York state. AP

been extended for another 30 days till April 30. The country is expected to face the peak in coronavirus around middle of April.

"We're going through the worst thing that the country has probably ever seen. Look, we had the Civil War, we lost 600,000 people, right? Here's a thing, had we not done anything, we would have lost many times that. But we did something, so it's going to be, hopefully, way under that, Trump said.

"But you know, we lose more here potentially than you lose in world wars as a country. So there's nothing positive, there's nothing great about it, I want to get people in this country hope. I think it's very important," he

TABLIGHI JAMAAT

18 Nepalis who attended congregation quarantined

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KATHMANDU. APRIL 1

EIGHTEEN NEPALI Muslims. who recently returned from India after participating in a Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Nizamuddin area in New Delhi, have been identified and kept in a quarantine facility in southern Nepal's Saptari district, authorities said on Wednesday.

Indian authorities have launched a nationwide search for participants of the huge religious gathering amid fears that thousands present there could have carried the infection to the length and breadth of the country.

Various nationals, particularly from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan come for Tabligh activities in Delhi.

Nepali authorities on

Wednesday said that 18 local Muslims, who recently returned from the Indian capital after participating in the religious gather ing, have been quarantined in Saptari district in Southern Nepal

According to spokesperson of Kanchanpur municipality Raj Kumar Shah, the India returnees have been quarantined at a newly constructed building of Lakshmi Naryan Secondary

Meanwhile, around 400 Indian nationals, who gathered from different parts of Nepal to return to India, have been stranded in Birgunj area in Parsa due to the closure of the India-Nepal border.

According to Parsa's Superintendent of Police (SP) Ganga Panta, the huge mass of Indian citizens heading towards India via border in Parsa have been kept in an education faculty

building.

Nepal cancels contract with group to import testing kits, masks from China

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE KATHMANDU. APRIL 1

THE NEPAL government on Wednesday cancelled a contract with a private business group to import necessary coronavirus testing kits, masks and medical equipment from China following allegations of large-scale corruption in the deal, and of the goods being much below the standards specified by the World

Health Organization (WHO). The OMNI Tech group had been awarded the contract on the condition that it would import the goods within five days after the Health Department terminated the tender process that it had started more than two

months ago. Public Health Department Director General Mahendra Shrestha said the contract signed with the OMNI group has been canceled, and that "the government has also confiscated a Nepal Rs 50 million deposit

amount for the over deal that was worth over a billion rupees" The cancellation of the con-

tract comes four days after the OMNI Tech group, which has alleged connections with the Prime Minister's secretariat, had brought ten tonnes of goods from China and had chartered another flight for Guangzhou to ferry a second consignment for Thursday. The government's decision

also means that there could be acute shortage of equipment and testing kids Nepal, which has been put under a two-week lockdown as a preventing measure against the spread of coronavirus. Dr Madhu Ghimire, a senior

physician said, "In spite of our constant advise for more than two months, the government made a last-minute decision to procure essentials in the last minute, with a purpose that was well-served by paying three times the actual market price in the pretext of urgency and difficulty in availing.'

EXPERT IN MICROBICIDE RESEARCH, VACCINE DEVELOPMENT

Indian-origin virologist in South Africa dies of coronavirus London, from where she is susbut her breathing worsened by

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA MUMBAI. APRIL 1

PROFESSOR GITA Ramjee, a renowned virologist known for her research work on HIV, died in Durban, South Africa on Tuesday evening due to complications from COVID-19.

Born in Uganda, Ramjee (63) later moved to UK to study at the University of Sunderland. She was involved in HIV prevention and treatment clinical trials in South Africa, was an expert in microbicide research, vaccine development, and has over 170 research articles under

She was the chief scientific officer at The Aurum Institute. She was also the chief specialist scientist and director of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) on HIV Prevention.

The Aurum Institute took to Twitter to post the news of her death on Tuesday. Its group CEO Gavin Churchyard described her as "a bold and compassionate leader in the response to HIV".

SAMRC president and CEO Glenda Gary also issued a statement: "We are deeply saddened to inform you the tragic passing of Prof Gita Ramjee in hospital



Gita Ramjee was known for her research work on HIV

Ramjee had visited Mumbai two months ago for a family vacation. In March, she travelled to

pected to have picked up the virus. A few days after her return to South Africa, she felt unwell and went to a doctor. "Her first test came negative or inconclusive for COVID-19. Then her breathing got worse. Last Tuesday, she was hospitalised. None of us suspected she had coronavirus," her younger sister Asmita Parashar told The Indian Express in Mumbai. Last week, a second test for

COVID-19 came positive. Ramjee did not have any co-

morbidity like diabetes, hypertension or blood pressure problems. Her condition briefly

March 26. On March 28, she was put on ventilator support. Her husband, Pravin Ramjee has no symptoms and remains

Ramjee's funeral will be conducted under strict vigilance

with very few people. Her two sons live in UK, but are unable to fly to South Africa due to a 21-day lockdown in that country. Parashar, who lives in

Mumbai, too is unable the funeral. "Nobody from the family could meet her in her final days. Our entire family is shocked at her demise," she said.

"All these years, I never realised the stellar work my sister

dressed, with "not a hair out of place" and a red lipstick always adorning her lips. In 2018, the European

epidemic.

did, until today. I am receiving

messages from all over the world

about her. She never spoke about

how popular she was in the sci-

entific community." On Twitter, her colleagues described Ramjee as a woman who would be immaculately

Development Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) awarded her outstanding female scientist award for her work in HIV prevention methods. Her focus was on women health who she felt were badly hit by the HIV

improved during hospitalisation,