

# 11 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

## PANDEMIC WATCH



People wear masks in Pyongyang. AP

### NORTH KOREA

#### Free of virus, insists official in Pyongyang

Seoul: North Korea remains totally free of the coronavirus, a senior health official in Pyongyang has insisted, despite mounting scepticism. The North quickly shut down its borders after the virus was first detected in China in January, and imposed strict containment measures. Pak Myong Su, director of the anti-epidemic department of the North's Central Emergency Anti-epidemic Headquarters, insisted the efforts had been successful. "Not one single person has been infected with the novel coronavirus in our country so far," Pak told AFP.

# 6.6 mn file for US jobless benefits; Trump doubts China's virus figures

AGENCIES  
APRIL 2

THE TENDRILS of the coronavirus pandemic reached deeper into the American economy last week, leaving millions more people out of work as the damage spread to jobs and industries that were spared at the outset of the crisis.

More than 6.6 million people filed new claims for unemployment benefits last week, the Labor Department said Thursday, setting a grim record for the second straight week.

The latest claims brought the two-week total to nearly 10 million. The speed and scale of the job losses is without precedent. Until last month, the worst week for unemployment filings was 695,000 in 1982.

Meanwhile, America continues to wage an all-out war to defeat the "horrible" coronavirus, President Donald Trump has said, as the US reported over 5,000 deaths and more than 200,000 infections, the highest in the world.

According to Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, the number of Americans to have been infected by coron-



US President Donald Trump addresses the daily coronavirus response briefing in Washington. Reuters

avirus stood at 214,000, and 5,093 had lost their lives by Wednesday night.

Globally, more than 930,000 people have been infected and 46,809 people have died.

Trump cast doubt Wednesday on the accuracy of official Chinese figures on its coronavirus outbreak after US lawmakers, citing an intelligence report, accused Beijing of a cover up. "How do we know" if they are accurate, Trump asked at a press conference. "Their numbers seem to be a little bit on the light side," Trump insisted that "the relationship with China's a good one" and that he remained

close to President Xi Jinping.

However, controversy around Beijing's transparency has strained ties, adding to bad feelings triggered by a conspiracy theory in China that the US military was to blame for the virus.

Republicans, pointing to a report by Bloomberg citing US intelligence, expressed outrage that Beijing apparently misled the international community on China's infections and deaths.

China's reporting has been intentionally incomplete, with some intelligence officials describing Beijing's numbers as fake, reported Bloomberg.

## CORONAVIRUS DEVELOPMENTS

### RUSSIAN PLANE LANDS IN U.S. WITH SUPPLIES

Washington: A Russian cargo plane carrying 60 tonnes of medical supplies, including ventilators, masks and other protection gear, needed to treat the patients with COVID-19 landed in the US as the country wrestles with the coronavirus pandemic that the White House has warned could kill up to two lakh people during the next fortnight. The Permanent Mission of

Russia to NATO on Thursday tweeted a video of the cargo aircraft Ruslan AN-124-100 arriving at the John F Kennedy airport in New York.

The move comes after a telephonic conversation between US President Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin on March 30. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that it was a time to work together to overcome a common enemy.

### SIX-WEEK-OLD BABY DIES OF COVID-19

New York: A six-week-old baby girl has died of coronavirus in the US state of Connecticut, Governor Ned Lamont said on Thursday, stressing that the death is a reminder that "nobody is safe with this virus," Lamont said.

"Testing confirmed last night that the newborn was COVID-19 positive. This is absolutely heartbreaking. We believe this is one of the youngest lives lost anywhere due to COVID-19," he said.

youngest person ever to die of COVID here in Connecticut. That baby was a less than seven weeks old. And it just is a reminder that nobody is safe with this virus," Lamont said.

"Testing confirmed last night that the newborn was COVID-19 positive. This is absolutely heartbreaking. We believe this is one of the youngest lives lost anywhere due to COVID-19," he said.



An elderly woman in Barcelona, Spain. Reuters

# Spain's deaths top 10,000; officials see 'glimpse of hope'

EMMA PINEDO & INTILANDAURO  
MADRID, APRIL 2

# 95%

SPAIN'S DEATH toll from the coronavirus rose above 10,000 on Thursday after a record 950 people died overnight, but health officials saw a glimmer of hope with the epidemic slowing in terms of proportional daily increases in infections and deaths.

Spain has the world's second-highest death toll after Italy at 10,003. The number of registered coronavirus cases rose about 8% from Wednesday to 110,238, the ministry said. The total deaths rose by just over 10%, about the same rate as the previous day.

"There's light at the end of the tunnel," Health Minister Salvador Illa told parliament. "A glimpse of hope: the curve has stabilised. We have reached ... the peak of the curve and we have started the slowdown phase."

Spain has been in a lockdown since March 14, allowing residents to leave their homes only for essential trips. This week it tightened the measures, with only employees in key sectors permitted to travel to and from work.

The daily increase in infections in percentage terms has

■ More than 95% of those who have died of coronavirus in Europe have been over 60 but young people should not be complacent, the head of the WHO's office in Europe said Thursday. Dr Hans Kluge said age is not the only risk factor for getting a severe case of the virus. "The very notion that COVID-19 only affects older people is factually wrong," he said in Copenhagen. "Young people are not invincible."

been slowing gradually since March 25, when reported cases rose by just over 20%.

Laying bare the scale of the outbreak's economic impact, data showed that Spain has shed an unprecedented 900,000 jobs since it went into lockdown, with temporary layoffs affecting at least a further 620,000.

Social security data also showed that around 80,000 workers are off sick with coronavirus, while another 170,000 are on sick leave because they are isolated after coming into contact with someone with the virus. REUTERS

### GREECE

#### Govt seals off migrant camp with cases

Athens: Greece on Thursday sealed off a migrant camp near Athens after 21 of its residents tested positive for the coronavirus — beginning with a new mother at an Athens hospital. "From today the facility is placed under sanitary isolation for two weeks," the migration ministry said in a statement. Hours before the cases were announced, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis had praised safeguards at Greek camps. "I think we're pretty good at contact tracing, and you can actually do contact tracing at the very beginning of an outbreak," Mitsotakis told CNN.

### BELGIUM

#### COVID-19 cases top 1,000

Brussels: The number of deaths attributed to the epidemic in Belgium passed the 1,000 mark on Thursday, health officials said. The official toll in the country of 11.4 million has doubled in three days, in part because figures have been updated with a backlog of fatalities from retirement homes. There have now been 1,011 deaths and 15,348 recorded cases since the start of the outbreak, officials said. "Ninety-three percent of deaths involve an elderly person of more than 65," said Dr Emmanuel Andre, the government health spokesman.



## ON THE JOB, WITH A PRAYER

Workers in protective suits pray before a disinfection operation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Reuters

# EU chief apologises to Italy, balks at joint debt

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ROME, APRIL 2

EUROPEAN COMMISSION chief Ursula von der Leyen told Italy on Thursday that European nations were ready to help it deal with the coronavirus after initially focusing on "their own home problems".

But the EU leader stopped short of agreeing to Rome's request for the bloc to start issuing joint debt — dubbed "coronabonds" — that could let countries address the crisis more cheaply.

"Today Europe is mobilising alongside Italy. Unfortunately, this has not always been the

## EXPLAINED

### Concerns over time delay in taking decision

AT THE last EU meeting, leaders failed to agree on a course of action regarding the sharing of debt in the fight against the virus. They pushed the discussion to two weeks later, though even then, there is no guarantee of an agreement being reached. This is seen as cause for concern by some member nations and analysts, as two weeks is considered a long time given that some countries are seen exponential jumps in their virus figures.

case," von der Leyen wrote in Italy's La Repubblica newspaper.

"It must be recognised that in the early days of the crisis, in the face of the need for a common

European response, too many have thought only of their own home problems." Von der Leyen's letter read.

Von der Leyen said the EU

"will allocate up to 100 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) to the hardest hit countries, starting from Italy, to compensate for the reduction in the wages of those working on shorter hours." She said the newly agreed initiative provides "loans guaranteed by all member states — thus demonstrating European solidarity".

Von der Leyen concluded by proposing that "every euro still available in the EU's annual budget be spent on tackling the crisis". "In the past month, the European Commission has left no stone unturned to help Italy," she wrote. Spain and France have backed Italy's plea for the new common debt instrument.

## UK set to massively ramp up testing: Boris

ADITI KHANNA  
LONDON, APRIL 2

BORIS JOHNSON, who remains in self-isolation after his COVID-19 diagnosis last week, posted a new video message on social media as a health update and also to stress that he was determined to "massively ramp up" the government's testing for coronavirus.

In his message posted on Twitter in the wake of the UK logging a 563 day-on-day leap in death toll to hit 2,352 on Wednesday, the British Prime Minister described it as a "sad, sad day" with a record number of deaths in a single day.

"I want to say a special word about testing because... this is how we will unlock the coronavirus puzzle," said Johnson, seen dressed slightly less formally without a tie and looking visibly unwell.

"This is how we will defeat it in the end. What we need to do is massively ramp up not just tests so that you can know whether you have had the disease in the past, the so-called antibody test... [also] to know whether they haven't got it, rather than isolating themselves at home for no reason, and that's very, very important above all for our NHS staff," he said.

The focus on testing came as the government has come under increasing pressure over the low levels of tests being conducted, especially to National Health Service (NHS) workers required on the front-line of the pandemic in hospitals and clinics. PTI

# Pak locks down Raiwind after Tablighi Jamaat members test positive

M ZULQERNAIN  
LAHORE, APRIL 2

PAKISTAN AUTHORITIES have placed the entire city of Raiwind under quarantine, shutting down all general and medical stores, and completely restricted the mobility of people within or outside the city after at least 40 Tablighi Jamaat preachers tested positive, officials said Thursday.

Similarly, some 50 members of the Jamaat, including five Nigerian women, suspected to be carriers of coronavirus, are admitted to a quarantine centre in Kasur, some 50 km from Lahore. In Hyderabad city of Sindh province, 38 coronavirus cases of local transmission among members of the Tablighi Jamaat were reported on Thursday.

There are reports that the Sindh and Punjab police have picked some members of the Jamaat from the mosques and its Raiwind Markaz (headquarters of the Pakistani faction of

Jamaat) and locked up in the police stations in connection with violation of the lockdown.

According to the government, in March the Tablighi Jamaat went ahead with its annual congregation in Raiwind, Lahore against its 'advice' that the gathering might spread the virus. Pakistani authorities had urged the cancellation of the five-day Tablighi congregation, which was attended by thousands of people from several countries.

"The government's apprehensions stood true as several Tablighi Jamaat activists have tested positive for coronavirus and they caused spread of it," Lahore Deputy Commissioner Danish Afzaal said in a statement.

He said the Raiwind Tablighi Jamaat Markez is presently housing approximately 600 preachers. "The health teams have so far sent samples of around 110 of them for lab analysis and of them 41 preachers have been tested positive for COVID-19," he said. PTI

# 2002 killing of Daniel Pearl: Pak court overturns conviction of top Al-Qaeda leader, three others

SALMAN MASOOD  
ISLAMABAD, APRIL 2

A PAKISTANI court on Thursday overturned the murder conviction and death sentence of Ahmed Omar Sheikh, a British-born militant who had been convicted of masterminding the 2002 abduction and killing of the American journalist Daniel Pearl, lawyers said.

The court also overturned the convictions of three other men who had been serving life sentences in the case. All four men were expected to be freed soon, lawyers said.

Pearl, a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, was abducted in January 2002 in the city of



Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh was found guilty on a lesser charge of kidnapping. AP

Karachi, while working on an article about Pakistani militant groups with links to Al Qaeda. He was later beheaded.

A two-member bench of the Sindh High Court in Karachi,

headed by Justice Mohammad Karim Khan Agha, found that there had been sufficient evidence to convict Sheikh of kidnapping, but not of murder, said Sheikh's lawyer, Khawaja Naveed Ahmed. "The court ruled that the charge of abduction was proven," he said.

The court reduced Sheikh's sentence to seven years. Because he has been imprisoned for 18 years, he was expected to go free along with Fahad Saleem, Syed Salman Saqib and Sheikh Muhammad Adil, the three other men whose convictions were overturned, Ahmed said.

Lawyers said the court had not yet issued a detailed ruling, only a brief order.

Soon after Pearl's killing,

Pakistan's government, then led by President Pervez Musharraf, moved quickly to arrest Sheikh and the other men, amid a global outcry and pressure from the United States.

But a 2011 report, based on investigative work by students and faculty at the journalism program of Georgetown University and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, cast doubt on the four men's convictions. It found that Sheikh and the three other men had been involved in the plot to abduct Pearl but were not responsible for his murder.

American officials have said that they believed Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the accused mastermind of the attacks of

September 11, 2001, had personally carried out Pearl's murder.

Sheikh, a British national who was trained in camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, belonged to the militant group Jaish-e-Muhammad at the time of his 2002 arrest. Pakistani investigators said Sheikh lured Pearl by offering him an interview with an Islamic cleric who had ties to Richard C Reid, the so-called shoe bomber.

Sheikh has made headlines from his cell over the years. In 2008, soon after Pakistani militants carried out terror attacks in Mumbai, Sheikh managed to place a call to then-President Asif Ali Zardari, pretending to be the Indian foreign minister and warning of an attack by India. NYT

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 2

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump has said that Tehran should expect a bold US response if Iran or Iranian-backed groups attack American forces or assets in Iraq.

US-Iran tensions soared following the January 3 Washington-directed strike that killed Iranian General Qasim Soleimani outside Baghdad airport. Trump said at a briefing that his administration has received intelligence that Iran is planning a strike, but did not provide additional details.

Iran has been blamed for an uptick in rocket attacks targeting Iraqi military bases hosting US

## IRAN ONLY ACTS IN SELF-DEFENCE, SAYS ZARIF

Tehran: Iran said on Thursday it "only acts in self-defence" after President Donald Trump warned it and its allies against attacking US troops in Iraq. "Unlike the US — which surreptitiously lies, cheats & assassinates — Iran only acts in self-defence," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif

troops. Three separate attacks in a week struck Camp Taji and Basmaya bases, killed three coalition servicemen, including two Americans.

Earlier in the day, Trump

tweeted. "Don't be misled by usual warmongers, AGAIN," he wrote, also cautioning "Iran starts no wars, but teaches lessons to those who do".

Iran and the US are in a tense battle for influence in Iraq, where Tehran has powerful allies and Washington has close ties to the government. AFP

tweeted: "Upon information and belief, Iran or its proxies are planning a sneak attack on US troops and/or assets in Iraq. If this happens, Iran will pay a very heavy price, indeed!"