

10 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

PANDEMIC WATCH



Leo Varadkar

IRELAND
Indian-origin PM Varadkar rejoins medical register

London: Ireland's Indian-origin Prime Minister, Leo Varadkar, has rejoined the country's medical register to take on his former role as a doctor on the frontlines of the Irish health service tackling the COVID-19 crisis. According to 'The Irish Times', the Taoiseach - as the Irish Prime Minister is known - rejoined the medical register back in March, just as the pandemic hit Ireland. Varadkar, 41, is set to work within the country's Health Service Executive (HSE), providing essential over-the-phone assessments to anyone who thinks they may have been exposed to coronavirus.

SINGAPORE
Govt to close airport terminal for 18 months

Singapore: Singapore will suspend operations of Changi Airport's terminal 2 for 18 months starting next month following a sharp drop in passenger traffic. Changi Airport is Singapore's main civilian airport and is one of the largest transportation hubs in Asia. It has four terminals. "We will save on running costs for the airport operator, retail tenants, airlines and ground handlers," Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan said Monday. One terminal is enough to handle current traffic at the airport, he said.

IRAN
'Gradual decline' in virus: Govt

Tehran: The trajectory of coronavirus infections in Iran appears to have started a "gradual" downward trend, the government said Monday, but it warned the disease is far from being under control. The COVID-19 outbreak claimed 136 deaths in the past 24 hours, bringing Iran's overall death toll to 3,739, health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told a televised news conference. "Due to intensification of social distancing, we have seen a gradual and slow decline in the number of new cases in recent days," a spokesperson said.

'Peak death week': US braces for fight

With worst to come, govt report flags chaos, shortage of key gear; NY governor extends lockdown

DOINA CHIACU & SUSAN HEAVEY
WASHINGTON, APRIL 6

US OFFICIALS on Monday girded the country for a "peak death week" from the coronavirus pandemic as the accelerating American death toll closed the gap with Italy and Spain, the countries with the most fatalities to date.

"It's going to be the peak hospitalisation, peak ICU week and unfortunately, peak death week," Admiral Brett Giroir, a physician and a member of the White House coronavirus task force, told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Monday.

Giroir raised particular alarm for New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Detroit. Confirmed US coronavirus cases topped 336,000 on Sunday, roughly twice as many people a day are dying in the United States versus Spain and Italy, according to the latest data. The American death toll rose by 1,144 on Sunday, pushing the total to 9,573.

Hospitals report chaotic shortages of beds, ventilators and protective gear as patients isolated from their families die alone. Meanwhile, more than 90 percent of Americans are under



A nearly-empty Park Avenue in Manhattan. Reuters

stay-at-home orders issued by state governors.

In the US government's first review of the ability of hospitals to cope with the coronavirus outbreak, investigators on Monday confirmed that facilities nationwide faced "substantial challenges," including shortages of equipment and staff.

In terms of testing and treating patients, hospitals have insufficient capacity to handle the surge, which is taking an emotional toll on doctors and nurses, the US Department of Health and Human Services inspector general said in a report based on 323 hospitals surveyed from March 23-27.

"Hospitals reported that widespread shortages of PPE put staff and patients at risk," HHS inspectors said, referring to personal protective equipment. "Additionally, hospitals reported frequently waiting seven days or longer for test results," requiring them to keep patients longer and use up more critical supplies.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo on Monday extended a shutdown in the city until near the end of the month, as per a PFI report.

Cuomo said the COVID-19 death rate in New York was "effectively flat" for the past two days but announced that schools

TIGER TESTS POSITIVE

A TIGER at the Bronx zoo has COVID-19, in what is believed to be what one official called "human-to-cat transmission." "This is the first instance of a tiger being infected with Covid-19," as per to the US Department of Agriculture, which noted that although only one tiger had been tested, the virus appeared to have infected other animals as well. "Several lions and tigers at the zoo showed symptoms of respiratory illness," according to a statement by the Agriculture Department

US denies diverting masks bound for Berlin

Berlin: The US embassy in Germany on Monday denied a claim that a Berlin-bound shipment of protective masks had been "confiscated" by the United States, calling it disinformation designed to stoke division.

"The US Government did not take any action to divert any... supplies that were destined to Germany nor did we have any knowledge of such a shipment," an embassy spokesman said. "We remain concerned about pervasive attempts to divide international efforts through un-sourced, unattributed disinformation campaigns," he added.

Berlin's regional minister of the interior Andreas Geisel on Friday said 200,000 FFP2 masks, destined for use by Berlin police, were "confiscated" in Bangkok.

He accused the US of using "methods from the Wild West" and of carrying out an "act of modern-day piracy". Geisel doubled down on the accusations on Monday morning, insisting that the masks had been redirected to the US. AFP

TOLL TOPS 5,000; QUEEN RALLIES UK

Boris in hospital after symptoms persist for 10 days



At the hospital where PM Boris Johnson is admitted. Reuters

AGENCIES
LONDON, APRIL 6

PRIME MINISTER Boris Johnson was hospitalised on Sunday evening after 10 days of battling the coronavirus, unnerving a country that had gathered to watch Queen Elizabeth II rally fellow Britons to confront the pandemic and reassure them that when the crisis finally ebbed, "we will meet again."



I'd like to say thank you to all the brilliant NHS staff taking care of me and others in this difficult time. You are the best of Britain. Stay safe everyone, and please remember to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives" - BORIS JOHNSON

Johnson messaged from his hospital bed on Monday that he was in "good spirits" and staying in contact with his ministers to oversee the UK's fightback. "Last night, on the advice of my doctor, I went into hospital for some routine tests as I'm still experiencing coronavirus symptoms. I'm in good spirits and keeping in touch with my team, as we work together to fight this virus and keep everyone safe," Johnson said in a Twitter post.

More than 5,000 people who tested positive for coronavirus have now died in Britain, official figures showed Monday. Earlier, UK housing and communities secretary Robert Jenrick said, "This wasn't an emergency admission. It was a planned admission to undergo some routine tests. He is doing well, I am told,

and we look forward to him being back at No 10 soon." But the uncertainty generated by his persistent illness underscored the sense of crisis that led the queen to address the country in a rare televised speech that evoked the darkest days of World War II.

Threat looms largest at home: UN chief urges govts to protect women

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
UNITED NATIONS, APRIL 6

UN SECRETARY General Antonio Guterres has urged governments to include the protection of women in their response to the novel coronavirus pandemic. Reports of domestic violence have surged globally in the wake of massive lockdowns imposed to contain the spread of the disease. "Violence is not confined to the battlefield," said Guterres in a statement and video released in multiple languages, days after his call for a worldwide ceasefire in the wake of the outbreak. "For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where

they should be safest. In their own homes," he said. Describing the rise in domestic violence as "horrifying," he urged all governments "to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19." India reported double the usual number of domestic abuse cases in the first week of nationwide movement restrictions, according to the country's National Commission for Women. Cases in France rose by a third in the week after that country's lockdown, authorities said, while Australia reported a 75 percent increase in internet searches relating to support for domestic violence victims.

Japan PM proposes emergency, \$1-trillion aid

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO, APRIL 6

JAPAN'S PRIME minister on Monday proposed a state of emergency for several major regions seeing a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, as well as a stimulus package worth \$1 trillion to cushion the impact on the world's third-biggest economy.

The official declaration of the state of emergency would likely come as soon as Tuesday, Shinzo Abe said, as the country grapples with a recent spike in cases.

"Currently, we are seeing rapid increases of new infections particularly in urban areas like Tokyo and Osaka," said Abe.

The declaration hands regional governors the power to ask residents to stay inside, seek the closure of businesses that attract large crowds and commandeer land and buildings for medical purposes. But it falls far short of the sort of lockdown measures imposed in parts of Europe, where police have patrolled the streets and fined offenders.

"We envision, for a period of about one month, that we will ask further cooperation of the Japanese people to reduce person-to-person contacts that lead to infections," said Abe.



Japan PM Shinzo Abe. AP



20,000 WORKERS QUARANTINED

Workers from Bangladesh and India at a dormitory in Singapore on Monday. Two dormitories, housing over 20,000 foreign workers, were gazetted as isolation facilities after they became clusters of coronavirus cases. Combined, they have so far seen over 90 cases. Workers under quarantine will continue to be paid salaries, the government has said. Reuters

Toll tops 50,000; Europe sees signs of hope

AGENCIES
APRIL 6

EUROPE'S HARDEST-HIT nations saw some tentative signs of hope in the fight against the coronavirus on Monday.

There was cause for cheer in some European hotspots, with Italy reporting its lowest death toll in two weeks, Spanish fatalities dropping for the third straight day and France seeing its fewest dead in a week.

"The curve has started its descent and the number of deaths has started to drop," said top Italian health official Silvio Brusaferro, adding the next phase could be a gradual easing of a strict month-long lockdown.



A winding queue outside a supermarket in Italy. Reuters

In Spain, deaths and new infections dropped again Monday. The country's health ministry reported 637 new deaths, the lowest fatality toll in 13 days, for a total of over 13,000 dead since the pandemic hit. New recorded infections were also the lowest in

two weeks. "The growth rate of the pandemic is decreasing in almost all regions," Health Ministry official Maria José Sierra said.

However, Italy's daily coronavirus death toll shot up to 636 on Monday, just one day after dropping to its lowest level in over two weeks, the civil protection service said. The number of fatalities had fallen to 525 on Sunday, the lowest since March 19.

Meanwhile, Germany has drawn up a list of steps, including mandatory mask-wearing in public, limits on gatherings and the rapid tracing of infection chains, to help enable a phased return to normal life after its coronavirus lockdown is set to end on April 19.

EXPLAINED
The next step

AMID CAUTIOUS optimism over the decline in death tolls, some nations have begun planning for what comes after their full lockdowns. Spain is looking at easing the restriction on all non-essential workers having to stay home. Germany, with one of the lowest tolls in Europe, is planning a phased return to normal life - with rules such as limits on gatherings and compulsory use of masks in place.

Pak cancels Baisakhi fest at Gurdwara Punja Sahib

M ZULQERNAIN
LAHORE, APRIL 6

PAKISTAN HAS cancelled the Baisakhi celebrations at Gurdwara Punja Sahib in Punjab province from April 14, in which around 2,000 Sikhs from India were to participate, due to the coronavirus pandemic in the country, authorities said on Monday.

The number of the coronavirus cases in Pakistan on Monday reached 3,277 with the infections in the worst-hit Punjab province approaching 1,500. The deadly virus which originated in China's Wuhan city has infected more than 1.2 million people globally.

"The government has cancelled both Baisakhi and Sadhu Bela festivals scheduled to be held in April and May, respectively, because of coronavirus," Mir Hashmi, the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) spokesman, told PTI.

He said the Pakistan government was to issue over 2,000 visas to Indian Sikhs for the Baisakhi festival but it has stopped the process earlier because of the pandemic. "Instructions have also been issued to the management of the Gurdwara Hasan Abdal not to open it for local Sikhs for the Baisakhi festivities either," he said.

Thousands of local Sikhs in addition to pilgrims from India and other parts of the world participate in it every year. The ETPB looks after the holy places of the minority community in the country. In 2019, over 2,200 Sikhs from India visited Pakistan to celebrate Baisakhi. PTI

'GERMS DON'T RESPECT CENSORSHIP' Autocrats' COVID-19 dilemma: You can't arrest a virus

DECLAN WALSH
CAIRO, APRIL 6

WHEN THE virus hit, the strongmen hit back as they know best.

For Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, that meant deploying chemical warfare troops, clad in protective suits and armed with disinfectant, to the streets of Cairo, in a theatrical display of military muscle projected via social media.

Russia's leader, Vladimir V Putin, donned the plastic suit himself, in canary yellow, for a visit to a Moscow hospital for coronavirus patients. Then he dispatched to Italy 15 military planes filled with medical supplies and emblazoned with the slogan "From Russia with Love."

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, a jailer of journalists, locked up a few reporters who criticised his early efforts to counter the virus, then sent a voice message to the phone of every citizen over 50, stressing he had everything under control.

And in Turkmenistan, one of the world's most repressive countries, where not a single infection has been officially declared, the president for life, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, promoted his book on medicinal plants as a possible solution to the pandemic.

In responding to the pandemic, the world's autocrats are turning to their tried-and-tested tool kits, employing a mixture of propaganda, repression and ostentatious shows of strength.



Temperature check on a bus near Istanbul. Reuters

In the immediate term, the crisis offers the autocrats an opportunity to taunt rivals or en-

trench their already vast powers with little risk of censure from a distracted outside world, where