

U.S., U.K. face hard time as deaths spike

American official compares the crisis to Pearl Harbor, 9/11 attacks; Britain sees over 600 deaths a day

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

The U.S. and Britain braced for what could be one of their bleakest weeks in memory on Monday as the human and financial toll of the coronavirus outbreak mounted. But new deaths and infections appeared to be slowing in Italy, Spain and France, suggesting that lockdowns and social distancing are working.

Much of Europe saw glimmers of hope – deaths and new infections appeared to be slowing in much of the three hardest-hit countries, as well as in the Netherlands and Germany. Leaders cautioned, however, that any gains could easily be reversed if people did not continue to adhere to strict social distancing measures and national lockdowns.

COVID-19

In Washington, U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams offered a stark warning about the surge of coronavirus deaths the nation is facing. “This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment,” he told “Fox News Sunday.” More than 9,600 people have died of the virus in the U.S., and it leads the world in confirmed infections at more than 3.37,000.

President Donald Trump suggested the hard weeks ahead could foretell the turning of a corner. “We’re starting to see light at the end of the tunnel,” Mr. Trump claimed at a briefing.

Italy still has, by far, the world’s highest coronavirus death toll – almost 16,000 – but the pressure on northern Italy’s intensive care units has eased. In Spain, deaths and new infections dropped again on Monday. The Health



Heroes in the battle: People in Barcelona, Spain, playing musical instruments and dancing on their balconies, in support of the country’s medical staff, on Sunday. • AP

Ministry reported 637 new deaths, the lowest in 13 days, for a total of over 13,000 dead. New recorded infections were also the lowest in two weeks. Britain reported more than 600 deaths on Sunday, surpassing Italy’s daily increase for the second day in a row.

‘Rise to the occasion’

In a rare televised address, Queen Elizabeth II appealed to Britons to rise to the occasion, while acknowledging they face enormous disruptions, grief and financial difficulties. Lacking enough for protective gear against the virus, British doctors and nurses were wearing goggles from school science classes, holding their breath when close to patients, and repeatedly reusing single-use masks, Dr. Rinesh Parmar, head of Doctors’ Association UK, told Sky News.

Worldwide, more than 1.2 million people have been confirmed infected and over 70,000 have died, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Now, China sees rise in asymptomatic cases

REUTERS
BEIJING

Mainland China reported 39 new COVID-19 cases as of Sunday, up from 30 a day earlier, and the number of asymptomatic cases also surged as the government vowed tighter controls at land borders.

The National Health Commission said on Monday that 78 new asymptomatic cases had been identified as of the end of Sunday, compared with 47 the day before.

Imported cases and asymptomatic patients, who show no symptoms but can still pass the virus on, have become China’s chief concern after draconian containment measures succeeded in slashing the overall infection rate.

Hubei province, the original epicentre, accounted for

almost half the new asymptomatic cases. A total of 705 people with asymptomatic cases were under medical observation around mainland China. The surge in asymptomatic cases, which China only began reporting last week, poses a worry as Hubei’s capital Wuhan prepares to allow people to leave the city on April 8 for the first time since it was locked down in late January.

Wuhan officials revoked the “epidemic-free” status of 45 residential compounds due to the emergence of asymptomatic cases and other unspecified reasons, according to a report on Monday by the official Xinhua news agency.

“Epidemic-free” status allows people living in Wuhan compounds to leave their homes for two hours at a time.

Doctors seeking PPEs held in Pak.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
QUETTA

More than 50 doctors protesting the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) were arrested on Monday in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta, police and physicians said. The arrests occurred after more than 100 doctors and paramedics rallied near the city’s main hospital and then moved to protest in front of the Chief Minister’s residence, according to a reporter. “We have taken 53 doctors into custody for violating the law,” said Abdul Razzaq Cheema, a senior police official. He said police held the doctors for several hours before the provincial government ordered them to release the group.

Pak. puts off Baisakhi events

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAORE

Pakistani authorities have cancelled the Baisakhi celebrations at Gurdwara Punja Sahib in Punjab province from April 14, in which around 3,000 Sikhs from India were to participate, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The number of coronavirus cases in Pakistan on Monday reached 3,277.

The celebrations were scheduled to begin at the revered Gurdwara in Hasan Abdal city of Punjab province on April 14, Dawn reported. Now only a symbolic event would be held.

British PM Johnson in hospital with persistent virus symptoms

He will undergo ‘routine tests’ and continue to run govt.

REUTERS
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was undergoing hospital tests on Monday after suffering persistent coronavirus symptoms for more than 10 days, but the government said he was in good spirits and still in charge.

Mr. Johnson, who had been isolating in Downing Street after testing positive for the virus last month, was taken to St Thomas’ Hospital in central London on Sunday night.

His office and Ministers said Mr. Johnson, 55, continued to run the government, that he was doing well, and that he would undergo routine tests as a precaution. Downing Street declined to say what check-ups he would have.

“On the advice of my doctor, I went into hospital for some routine tests as I’m still experiencing coronavirus symptoms,” Mr. Johnson said on Twitter. “I’m in good



Prime Minister Boris Johnson washing his hands at a laboratory in March. • AP

spirits and keeping in touch with my team, as we work together to fight this virus and keep everyone safe.”

Under observation

Mr. Johnson’s spokesman said the Prime Minister had a comfortable night in the hospital and remained there under observation. He described Mr. Johnson’s symptoms as “persistent”. These included a high temperature and a cough. The spokes-

man urged caution about media reports that Mr. Johnson was receiving oxygen treatment but refused to answer directly if he had pneumonia.

Mr. Johnson continues to receive his ministerial box of government documents, he added.

It was not clear how an ill Prime Minister could lead the government’s response to the outbreak from a hospital.

Some medics said it was unclear what was meant by precautionary tests for COVID-19 complications.

Britain has no formal succession plan should the Prime Minister become incapacitated. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, 46, chaired the government’s emergency COVID-19 meeting on Monday.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Mr. Johnson was a “strong man” and that all Americans were praying for him.

Abe proposes state of emergency

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

Japan’s Prime Minister on Monday proposed a state of emergency for several major regions seeing a sharp rise in COVID-19 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 on Tuesday, Shinzo Abe told reporters, as the country grapples with a recent spike in virus cases, especially in the capital Tokyo. “Current-

ly, we are seeing rapid increases of new infections particularly in urban areas like Tokyo and Osaka,” said Mr. 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.

“We envision, for a period of about one month, that we will ask further cooperation of the Japanese people to re-

duce person-to-person contacts that lead to infections,” said Mr. Abe. The measure does not include legal powers to enforce requests for people to stay inside, or punishments for people who fail to do so. “In Japan, even if we declare a state of emergency, we will not close cities as seen in foreign countries. Experts have told us that there is no need for such a step,” said Mr. Abe.

Tokyo’s Governor Yuriko Koike has already urged residents to avoid non-essential outings and to work from home during the week.

Venezuelans stream home from Colombia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BOGOTA

Hundreds of Venezuelans who fled to neighbouring Colombia during their country’s economic crisis are now returning home, pushed by the deadly novel coronavirus and Colombia’s own pandemic woes.

Colombian migration officials said on Sunday that 600 people – including 35 children and 167 women – crossed the border point at the Simon Bolivar International Bridge in the north-eastern city of Cucuta, into Venezuela one day earlier.

Another group of 160 departed Bogota on Sunday, officials said.

Although the border is officially closed as a measure taken to halt the spread of the coronavirus, Colombia has opened a “humanitarian corridor” to allow Venezuelans to return home.

In recent years Colombia has welcomed 1.8 million Venezuelans.

Sudan ‘finalises’ deal to settle USS Cole case

Al-Qaeda attack in 2000 had killed 17

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KHARTOUM

Sudan’s Justice Ministry said on Monday that it has finalised a settlement with families of the victims of the USS Cole bombing.

Khartoum agreed in February to compensate the families of 17 American sailors who were killed in a suicide bombing targeting their Navy destroyer in Yemen’s Aden harbour in 2000, an attack that was later claimed by al-Qaeda.

A U.S. court held Sudan responsible for the attack and ordered compensation, finding that the bombers were trained in the country. In March 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the ruling on procedural grounds.

On Monday, Sudan’s Justice Ministry said it had submitted on Friday a petition alongside families who pursued the case with the relevant U.S. court to end pending lawsuits against Sudan



A damaged portion of the USS Cole. • AFP

regarding the USS Cole. “The settlement procedures have now been completed in such a way that would permanently scrap lawsuits,” said the Ministry.

Khartoum has denied the charges but by agreeing to a settlement, Sudan has fulfilled a key condition set by the U.S. to remove it from state sponsors of terrorism list. Sudan has been on Washington’s blacklist since 1993 over its alleged support of Islamist groups.

New York zoo tiger tests positive for virus

An asymptomatic caretaker could have passed on the infection to the big cat

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW YORK

A tiger at New York’s Bronx Zoo has tested positive for COVID-19, the institution said Sunday, and is believed to have contracted the virus from a caretaker who was asymptomatic at the time. The four-year-old Malayan tiger named Nadia along with her sister Azul, two Amur tigers and three African lions all developed dry coughs and are expected to fully recover, the Wildlife Conservation Society that runs the city’s zoos said in a statement.

“We tested the cat out of an abundance of caution and will ensure any knowledge we gain about COVID-19 will contribute to the world’s continuing understanding of this novel coronavirus,” said the statement. “Though they have experienced some decrease in appetite, the cats at the Bronx Zoo are otherwise doing well under veterinary care and are bright, alert, and interactive with their keepers,” it said. “It is not



Humans to cats: The New York-based Bronx Zoo where Nadia (right) the Malayan tiger, tested positive. • REUTERS, AP

known how this disease will develop in big cats since different species can react differently to novel infections, but we will continue to monitor them closely and anticipate full recoveries.”

All zoos closed

All four of the zoos and the aquarium in New York – where the virus death toll has topped 4,000 – have been closed since March 16. The zoo emphasised that there is “no evidence that

animals play a role in the transmission of COVID-19 to people other than the initial event in the Wuhan market, and no evidence that any person has been infected with COVID-19 in the U.S. by animals, including by pet dogs or cats.”

Chinese disease control officials have previously identified wild animals sold in a Wuhan market as the source of the pandemic that has infected well over one million people worldwide.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture website, there had “not been reports of pets or other animals” in the U.S. falling ill with COVID-19 prior to news of tiger Nadia. “It is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus,” the department’s website says.

In late March, a pet cat was discovered infected with the virus in Belgium, following similar cases in Hong Kong where two dogs tested positive. All of those animals are believed to have contracted the virus from the people they live with. The Bronx zoo said preventative measures were in place for caretakers as well as all cats.

Sarah Caddy, veterinarian and clinical research fellow at the University of Cambridge, said that since domestic cats had been shown to be potentially susceptible to the virus, the tiger becoming infected was “not wholly unexpected”.

Deal near a breaking point: Taliban

Militants warn of more attacks if provisions are breached

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISLAMABAD

The Taliban said its peace deal with the U.S. was nearing a breaking point, accusing Washington of violations that included drone attacks on civilians, while also chastising the Afghan government for delaying the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners promised in the agreement.

The Taliban said it had restricted attacks against Afghan security forces to rural outposts, had not attacked international forces and had not attacked Afghan forces in cities or military installations. The Taliban’s statement issued on Sunday warned of more violence if the U.S. and the Afghan government continue alleged



U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar signing a peace deal on February 29. • AP

violations of the deal. U.S. military spokesman Col. Sonny Leggett in a tweet overnight denied the Taliban allegation, saying the U.S. forces in Afghanistan has “upheld and continues to uphold the military terms of the U.S.-TB (Taliban) agreement; any assertion otherwise is baseless.” In his tweet, Col. Leggett called for Taliban to reduce violence and said the U.S. military

will continue to come to the aid of Afghanistan’s security forces if attacked.

Meanwhile, the militants said they had reduced their attacks compared to last year, but said continued violations would “create an atmosphere of mistrust that will not only damage the agreements, but also force mujaheddin to a similar response and will increase the level of fighting.”

U.S. gives ‘terrorist’ label to white supremacist group

Russia-based ultra-nationalist movement is the first such organisation to be given the designation

ADAM GOLDMAN
ERIC SCHMITT
WASHINGTON

The Trump administration on Monday designated an ultra-nationalist group based in Russia as a terrorist organisation, according to officials. It is the first time the government applied the label to a white supremacist group.

While the label of specially designated global terrorist has been frequently used for Islamist extremists, there have been growing concerns among U.S. officials about violent white supremacists with transnational links over the past five years. In 2018, the White House added that threat to the government’s National Strategy for Counterterrorism.

The State Department’s



Threat of different nature: A training session of the Russian Imperial Movement in St. Petersburg in 2015.

designation for the organisation, the Russian Imperial Movement, sets up the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control to block any American property or assets belonging to the group. It will also bar Americans from financial dealings with the organisation and make it easier to ban its

members from travelling to the U.S.

The U.S. is also designating three of the group’s leaders – Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev, Denis Valliullovich Gariev and Nikolay Nikolayevich Trushchalov – as individual terrorists who will face similar sanctions, officials said.

The authority for either the Treasury Department or the State Department to deem a group or an individual a specially designated global terrorist traces back to an executive order issued by President George W. Bush after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Signing of order

President Donald Trump in September signed an executive order expanding that authority to cover groups that provide training for terrorists even if the groups are not directly linked to any attack.

The Russian Imperial Movement is not considered to be sponsored by the Russian government, officials said, although President Vla-

dimir Putin has tolerated its activities and it has helped advance the Russian government’s external goals by recruiting Russian fighters to aid pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. The group has also helped support neo-Nazi groups in Scandinavia.

Ambassador Nathan A. Sales, the State Department’s counterterrorism coordinator, said the group operated two facilities in St. Petersburg, that offered paramilitary training to neo-Nazis and white supremacists. Although a Russian Imperial Movement member has visited the U.S., the organisation does not appear to have domestic members. It is not clear if the group has provided training to U.S.-based neo-Nazis. NY TIMES

ELSEWHERE



Nigerian actor held for bash during lockdown

A popular Nigerian actor has been arrested for throwing a birthday party during a lockdown in economic hub Lagos to curb the spread of SARS-CoV-19. Funke Akindele, a Nollywood film star, is charged with hosting guests at the bash for her husband in their upscale residence on Saturday. AFP

20 Mali soldiers killed in jihadist attack

Around 20 Malian soldiers were killed on Monday in an apparent jihadist attack, officials said, in the latest bout of violence to hit the war-torn West African state. Early on Monday morning, militants attacked a military base in the northern town of Bamba, according to a local government official. AFP