

10 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

PANDEMIC WATCH



PM Shinzo Abe. Reuters

JAPAN

State of emergency declared

Tokyo: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared a month-long state of emergency for Tokyo and six other prefectures on Tuesday to ramp up defenses against the spread of the coronavirus as the number of infections surges. But the move came in the form of a stay-at-home request — not an order — and violators will not be penalised. The announcement follows surges in new cases in Tokyo, including consecutive rises exceeding 100 over the weekend. By Tuesday there were 1,196 confirmed cases in the metropolitan region of 14 million people. AP

ISRAEL

Wearing masks in public made compulsory

Jerusalem: The Israeli government issued orders on Tuesday making the wearing of masks in public compulsory to try to stem the spread of the coronavirus. It also approved a timeline for tightened travel restrictions for the Passover holiday, which begins on Wednesday when Jewish families gather for a festive meal commemorating the Biblical exodus from slavery in Egypt. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that this year the dinner should be a small affair, limited to household members, in a bid to keep infection rates in check. REUTERS

TAIWAN

Govt agencies told to not use Zoom

Reuters: Taiwan's cabinet has told government agencies to stop using Zoom Video Communications Inc's conferencing app. Zoom's daily users ballooned to more than 200 million in March, as coronavirus-induced shutdowns forced employees to work from home and schools switched to the company's free app for conducting and coordinating online classes. However, the company is facing a backlash from users worried about the lack of end-to-end encryption of meeting sessions and "zoom bombing", where uninvited guests crash into meetings.

New York records its highest single-day toll, overtakes Italy in corona cases

In sign of optimism, Governor says state nearing plateau in patients hospitalised

REUTERS
NEW YORK, APRIL 7

NEW YORK is nearing a plateau in the number of coronavirus patients hospitalised, a sign of optimism even though the number of the deaths in the state hit a single-day high, Governor Andrew Cuomo said on Tuesday.

Cuomo said his state was "projecting that we are reaching a plateau in the total number of hospitalizations" due to the coronavirus.

In New York state, the death toll rose by 731 to 5,489 over the past day, Cuomo said, though he called that a "lagging indicator" illustrating past trends.

The state overtook Italy on Tuesday, reporting overall coronavirus cases second in the world only to Spain, according to a Reuters tally.

The tally showed New York has 138,836 reported cases compared with Italy at 135,586; Spain has the most cases at 140,510. In total, the United States has recorded 380,000 cases and 11,800 deaths.

Cuomo said it was time to start planning for the eventual restarting of the economy, but added it was not time to let up on mitigation efforts to enact "social distancing" to curb the spread of the virus.

President Donald Trump a day earlier said the economy would be able to reopen "sooner than people think."

"Let's not get complacent,"



A man in a wheelchair crosses a nearly empty 7th Avenue in Times Square, Manhattan in New York City on Tuesday. Reuters

Cuomo told a news conference. "Social distancing is working... That's why you see those numbers coming down."

"This is not a light switch that we can just flick one day and everything goes back to normal," the governor said. "We're going to have to restart that economy, we're going to have to restart a lot of systems that were shut down abruptly. And we need to start to plan for that."

Encouraging signs came to light elsewhere as well. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot told a news briefing that her city has gone

from coronavirus cases doubling every one to two days to doubling every nine to 10 days because residents have complied with the state's stay-at-home order. The city has documented 5,043 cases and 118 deaths.

"It's obviously progress," Lightfoot said. "But we are not near the peak so I don't want to raise false expectations that it's coming sometime soon based on the modeling that we have seen."

Authorities have championed "social distancing" and other mitigation policies, saying they were having a positive effect in fight-

ing the spread of the pathogen in the United States but warned against complacency. More than 90 per cent of Americans are under stay-at-home orders issued by state governors.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said it was too early to declare that a corner had been turned in the fight against the coronavirus but he pointed to some encouraging developments. "I can say in the last couple of days, something is starting to change. We don't know if it will be sustained but it is meaningful now," de Blasio said.

Iran reopens Parliament as virus infections drop for 7th day

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN, APRIL 7

IRAN'S PARLIAMENT convened on Tuesday for the first time since the coronavirus outbreak forced its doors to close, as the country reported a drop in new infections for the seventh straight day.

More than two-thirds of the legislature's 290 members gathered in the absence of speaker and veteran politician Ali Larijani, who tested positive for COVID-19 last week.

At least 31 members of the Parliament, or Majlis, which had been shut since February 25, have contracted the disease.

State television footage of the opening session showed some MPs huddling together despite guidelines on social distancing to stop the spread of the virus.

Parliament debated and eventually blocked an urgent bill to totally lock down the country for a month, with those against arguing it would damage the economy.

"This plan is against jobs and growing productivity. Who's going to pay for implementing it?" MP Shadmehr Kazemzadeh said, according to the semi-official news agency ISNA.

But Abdolkarim Hosseinzadeh, who drafted the bill, said Iran had been "confused" about how to contain the virus. "We must urgently make a decision, as history will judge us," he said.

China reports no new corona deaths as cases decline

REUTERS
BEIJING, APRIL 7

MAINLAND CHINA on Tuesday reported no coronavirus deaths for the first time since the pandemic began and a drop in new cases, a day before the central city of Wuhan, where the virus emerged late in December, was set to lift its lockdown.

China had 32 new infections by Monday, down from 39 a day earlier, the National Health Commission said.

For the first time since the commission began publishing nationwide data in late January, Hubei's provincial capital of Wuhan saw no new deaths, joining the rest of mainland China, which has recorded none since March 31.

Wuhan, a city of 11 million that reported only two new infections in the past fortnight, is due to allow residents to leave the city on Wednesday for the first time since it was locked down on January 23 to curb the spread of the virus.

From midnight, traffic control checkpoints in Wuhan will be dismantled, and normal operation of railways, airports, waterways, highways and buses will resume.

But zero new cases do not mean zero risks, the provincial counter-epidemic authority said in a statement. Wuhan residents are urged not to leave

'China-centric' WHO 'blew it' on coronavirus, says Trump

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, APRIL 7

UNITED STATES President Donald Trump sharply criticised the World Health Organization on Tuesday, accusing it of being too focused on China and issuing bad advice during the coronavirus outbreak.

"The W.H.O. really blew it," Trump said in a Twitter post.

"For some reason, funded largely by the United States, yet very China centric. We will be giving that a good look. Fortunately I rejected their advice on keeping our borders open to China early on. Why did they give us such a faulty recommendation?"

The WHO did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

On January 31, the WHO advised countries to keep borders open despite the outbreak, although it noted that countries had the right to take measures to try to protect their citizens. That same day, Trump's administration announced restrictions on travel from China.

US conservatives have increasingly criticized the WHO during the global pandemic, saying it relied on faulty data from China about the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

their neighbourhood, their city and even the province unless necessary, according to the statement.

Zhejiang, a populous province in the east, will conduct all the necessary tests on people arriving from Wuhan over the next 14 days.

The move aims to step up targeted screening of asymptomatic infections, the Zhejiang provincial government told a media briefing on Tuesday.

With mainland China well past February's peak of infections, authorities have turned their attention to imported cases and asymptomatic patients, who show no symptoms but can still pass on the virus.

Total infections in mainland China stood at 81,740 on Monday with 3,331 deaths, the commission said. It reported 30 new asymptomatic cases, nine involving incoming travellers. Of the new asymptomatic cases, 18 were in Hubei.

By the end of Monday, 1,033 asymptomatic patients were under medical observation.

Overseas arrivals made up all 32 of the new cases with symptoms, down from 38 a day earlier. Total imported infections stand at 983, the commission said.

China faces the "dual risks" of imported infections and domestic cluster outbreaks, a commission spokesman told a briefing on Tuesday.



Police officers outside St Thomas' Hospital, London, where British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was moved to intensive care after his coronavirus symptoms worsened. Reuters

Boris Johnson 'stable' in ICU, required oxygen

REUTERS
LONDON, APRIL 7

BRITISH PRIME Minister Boris Johnson was stable in intensive care on Tuesday after receiving oxygen support to help him battle COVID-19, while his foreign minister Dominic Raab led the government's response to the outbreak.

"He (Johnson) remained stable overnight. He's receiving standard oxygen treatment and breathing without any assistance. He has not required any mechanical ventilation or non-invasive respiratory support," Raab told a daily news conference.

Johnson's personal battle with the virus has shaken the government just as the United Kingdom, now in its third week of virtual lockdown, enters what scientists say will be the deadliest phase of its coronavirus epidemic, which has already killed at least 6,159 people.

Johnson, 55, was admitted to St Thomas' Hospital, across the River Thames from parliament, late on Sunday after suffering symptoms, including a fever and a cough, for more than 10 days.

But his condition rapidly deteriorated, and he was moved on Monday to an intensive care unit in case he needed to be put on a ventilator.

"He remains in good spirits and ... his progress continues to be monitored in critical care," Raab said.

The absence of Johnson, the first leader of a major power to

be admitted to hospital with COVID-19, has raised questions about who is truly in charge at such a crucial time.

While Britain has no formal succession plan if a prime minister is incapacitated, Johnson asked Raab, 46, to deputise for him "where necessary", Downing Street said.

If Raab is incapacitated, finance minister Rishi Sunak would stand in.

"I'm confident that he'll pull through because, if there's one thing I know about this prime minister, he's a fighter," Raab said. "He'll be back at the helm leading us through this crisis in short order."

Queen Elizabeth wished Johnson a full and speedy recovery and sent a message of support to his pregnant fiancée, Carrie Symonds, and his family.

Raab chaired the government's COVID-19 emergency response meeting on Tuesday, though ministers refused to say who now had ultimate control over Britain's nuclear weapons.

"There are well-developed protocols," said Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove, who himself went into self-isolation on Tuesday after a family member displayed coronavirus symptoms.

Government scientists see Britain's daily death toll rising until at least April 12, and the government is due to decide early next week whether to start easing a near-total economic and social lockdown.

Tuesday's daily death toll of 786 was the biggest to date.

Spain's death toll nears 14,000 as pace picks up

REUTERS
MADRID, APRIL 7

SPAIN'S PACE of coronavirus deaths ticked up for the first time in five days on Tuesday, with 743 people succumbing overnight, but there was still hope the national lockdown might be eased soon.

Tuesday's toll from the health ministry compared to 637 deaths registered during the previous 24 hours, taking the total to 13,798, the second highest in the world after Italy. Still, the proportional daily increase of 5.7 per cent was about half that reported a week ago.

"It's normal to have some oscillations ... What matters is to see the trend and the cumulative data," said Maria Jose Sierra, deputy chief of health emergencies, adding that latest data included some delayed notification

tions from the weekend. Total cases rose to 140,510 — the highest in Europe and second in the world after the US.

For lockdown restrictions to be lifted, officials say testing has to be widened, to find carriers who may have mild or no symptoms.

The government is planning mass, quick antibody tests in coming days. Cadena Ser radio said about 62,000 people would be tested twice with an interval of 21 days to see the effect of any easing of measures on contagion.

Some Spanish media have reported in recent days that insufficient testing means the real death toll could be much higher. Asked about that, government spokeswoman Maria Jesus Montero told a news conference it was possible there could be time lags between the report of a death and its attribution to the virus, but that she had no further information. REUTERS

Bangla ex-military man, convicted of killing Bangabandhu, arrested

ANISUR RAHMAN
DHAKA, APRIL 7

A FORMER Bangladeshi military captain, who was convicted for killing the country's founder Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was arrested by the police in Dhaka on Tuesday.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal confirmed ex-captain Abdul Majed's arrest and said he had been sent to court to "exhaust legal options".

Majed was one of the six absconding ex-Army officers who were handed down capital punishment after their trial in absentia. Kamal said previous reports indicated Majed was hiding in India and he was arrested from Dhaka upon his return.



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman AP File

The minister said Majed, a "self-confessed killer", was not

only involved in Bangabandhu's killing on August 15, 1975 at his private Dhanmandi residence but was also involved in the subsequent murder of four national leaders in high security Dhaka Central Jail on November 3 in 1975.

Legal experts said a report on his arrest would now be sent to the Dhaka District Judge's Court, which originally tried the killers of Bangabandhu. "The stipulated time for appeal against death penalty expired long ago. Majed now can just seek Presidential mercy unless the Supreme Court decides to consider any plea on his part," a Supreme Court lawyer said. PTI

China knocks US from top spot in global patent race

STEPHANIE NEBEHAY
GENEVA, APRIL 7

CHINA WAS the biggest source of applications for international patents in the world last year, pushing the United States out of the top spot it has held since the global system was set up more than 40 years ago, the UN patent agency said on Tuesday.

The World Intellectual Property Organization, which oversees a system for countries to share recognition of patents, said 58,990 applications were filed from China last year, beating out the United States which filed 57,840. REUTERS

China's figure was a 200-fold increase in just 20 years, it said. The United States had filed the most applications in the world every year since the Patent Cooperation Treaty system was set up in 1978.

More than half of patent applications — 52.4 per cent — now come from Asia, with Japan ranking third, followed by Germany and South Korea.

WIPO's head, Francis Gurry, told a news conference China's success was "down to a very deliberate strategy on the part of Chinese leadership to advance innovation and to make the country a country whose economy operates at a higher level of value".

Former Vatican treasurer acquitted of sex offence charges

SONALI PAUL
MELBOURNE, APRIL 7

AUSTRALIA'S HIGHEST court acquitted former Vatican treasurer George Pell on Tuesday of sexually assaulting two teenage choirboys in the 1990s, freeing the 78-year-old cardinal after 404 days in jail.

The Vatican welcomed the decision and praised Pell for having "waited for the truth to be ascertained".

In a statement it said it always had confidence in Australian justice, that Pell had always maintained his innocence and that the Holy See reaffirmed its "commitment to preventing and pursuing all cases of abuse against minors".



Cardinal George Pell Reuters File

firmed its "commitment to preventing and pursuing all cases of abuse against minors". The High Court, ruling from Brisbane, ordered Pell's convictions be quashed and verdicts of acquittal be entered in their

place. The seven judges of the High Court agreed unanimously that the jury in the cardinal's trial "ought to have entertained a doubt" about his guilt. Pell, who has maintained his innocence throughout the lengthy court process, cannot be retried on the charges.

A few hours after Pell's acquittal, Pope Francis offered his morning Mass for those who suffer from unjust sentences. Francis did not mention Pell by name. "I would like to pray today for all those people who suffer unjust sentences resulting from intransigence (against them)," Francis said, at the start of the Mass. REUTERS