

10 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

PANDEMIC WATCH



Boris Johnson

UNITED KINGDOM
Boris' condition improving, says Sunak

London: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's condition is improving and he is able to sit up in bed and engage with clinical staff, finance minister Rishi Sunak said Wednesday as Johnson remained in intensive care. Johnson, who tested positive nearly two weeks ago, was admitted to St Thomas' hospital on Sunday evening with a high temperature and cough but his condition deteriorated and he was taken into intensive care Monday. The leader has received oxygen support but was not put on a ventilator and his designated deputy, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, said he would soon be back at the helm.

BANGLADESH
Govt seeks Chinese help as toll hits 20

Dhaka: Bangladesh on Wednesday sought China's medical assistance to handle its worsening coronavirus crisis as the healthcare officials said the infection has killed three more people in the last 24 hours, taking the toll to 20. The Foreign Ministry said that Bangladesh has urged China to send an expert team comprising doctors, nurses and technicians to help the country handle the situation and train its own health professionals. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called up his counterpart AK Abdul Momen and the two leaders discussed the situation.

USA
Singer John Prine dies at 73

Los Angeles: Grammy-winning singer John Prine, who wrote his early songs in his head while delivering mail and later emerged from Chicago's folk revival scene in the 1970s to become one of the most influential songwriters of his generation, died on Tuesday. He was 73. Prine was hospitalised in Nashville on March 26 suffering from symptoms of COVID-19, according to his wife, Fiona Whelan Prine. "We join the world in mourning the passing of revered country and folk singer/songwriter John Prine," the Recording Academy said in a written statement.

Trump threatens to freeze WHO funding

WHO denies being 'China-centric'; says Washington, Beijing need to join forces to fight COVID-19

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON, GENEVA, APRIL 8

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump has threatened to put a "very powerful" hold on US' funding to the World Health Organisation, accusing the UN agency of being "very China centric" and criticising it for having "missed the call" in its response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump slammed the global health agency for its early guidance aimed at countering the international spread of the coronavirus. "We're going to put a hold on money spent to the WHO. We're going to put a very powerful hold on it and we're going to see. It's a great thing if it works. But when they call every shot wrong, that's no good," Trump told reporters at his daily White House news conference on Tuesday.

Responding, the WHO on Wednesday urged the United States and China to join forces to fight the pandemic, saying there would be "many more body bags" without international unity. "The United States and China should come together and fight this dangerous enemy," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

WHO officials also denied that it was "China-centric" and said the acute phase of a pandemic



Messages of thanks written outside a hospital in New York City, New York. Reuters

was not the time to cut funding. "We are still in the acute phase of a pandemic so now is not the time to cut back on funding," Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, told a virtual briefing in response to a question about Trump's remarks. Dr Bruce Aylward, senior advisor to the WHO Director-General, also defended the UN agency's relationship with China, saying its work with Beijing authorities was important to understand the outbreak

which began in Wuhan. US contributions to WHO in 2019 exceeded \$400 million, almost double the 2nd largest member state contribution. China contributed \$44 million. "We pay for a majority or the biggest portion of their money. They actually criticised and disagreed with my travel ban at the time I did it. They were wrong. They've been wrong about a lot of things. They had a lot of information early and they didn't want to - they're very - they seem to be

very China centric," Trump said. The president said his administration was going to look into the US funding to the WHO. "But we want to look into it, WHO, because they called it wrong. They called it wrong. They missed the call. They could've called it months earlier. They would have known and they should have known and they probably did know. So, we'll be looking into that... and we're going to put a hold on money spent to the WHO," Trump said.

AFRICAN AMERICANS 'MORE SUSCEPTIBLE'

■ The African American community are more susceptible to COVID-19, the latest testing data from the ground reflects, US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday.

■ "It is a tremendous challenge, is terrible and provide support to African-American citizens... but it has been disproportional," Trump said

■ Experts say the community is impacted by underlying conditions, face discrimination in medical care, and are more likely to work jobs that require them to leave their home

■ Dr Anthony Fauci, Director National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, said the community has been afflicted by diseases like diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and asthma

Looking to have fewer deaths than originally thought, says Trump

PTI & REUTERS
WASHINGTON, NEW YORK, APR 8

THE NUMBER of deaths in the US due to coronavirus on Tuesday crossed 12,700, with a record 1,900 fatalities in a single day, as President Donald Trump sought to assure a grieving nation that new data projections reveal fewer deaths than originally thought.

"We're looking to have far fewer deaths than originally thought. I think we're heading in that direction, but it's too early to talk about it," Trump told reporters at his daily White House news briefing.

New York, the epicentre of COVID-19 in the United States, alone accounts for 5,400 deaths and 1,38,000 cases, followed by adjoining New Jersey with 1,200 deaths and 44,416 cases.

The national number of both fatalities and cases of infections are expected to jump during the next week, officials believe, but they exuded confidence that strict enforcement of social mitigation measures

EXPLAINED
Some caveats to estimations

WHILE PREDICTIVE models play a vital role in virus responses, they face issues ranging from difficulty in predicting the peak to questions about accuracy. A big caveat is that the model may change at any time depending on the data, just as it did now, say experts. A key fear is that laxity about social distancing may lead to second and third waves of infection, pending any predictions.

would help bring things under control in the next few weeks. "We are seeing light at the end of the tunnel," Trump said during a White House meeting on Small Businesses.

CASES TOP 750,000

Top EU scientist quits; finance ministers split on coronabonds

NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, APRIL 8

THE EUROPEAN Union's top scientist has quit after failing to persuade his superiors to set up and finance a major collective scientific program to confront the new coronavirus.

Dr Mauro Ferrari, an Italian-American who began a four-year appointment as president of the European Research Council in January, resigned on Tuesday in a letter to Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president.

"I have been extremely disappointed by the European response to Covid-19," he said in a statement to The Financial Times. "I arrived at the ERC a fervent supporter of the EU," he wrote, but "the Covid-19 crisis completely changed my views."

Ferrari said that he began to press for a special virus program in early March when the extent of the pandemic became clear. But his proposal was rejected because by rule the bloc is supposed to fund only research proposed by scientists, not programs initiated in Brussels.

The news came after another upset as European finance ministers broke off a marathon overnight teleconference without reaching an agreement on measures to counter the pandemic's economic effects.

The 16-hour meeting was meant to produce a clear list of recommendations to be presented to European leaders. These measures would be in addition to the policies enacted by



In Pamplona, Spain. AP

SPAIN DAILY VIRUS DEATHS 757, 2ND SUCCESSIVE RISE

Madrid: Spain recorded Wednesday a second successive daily rise in coronavirus-related deaths with 757 fatalities, lifting the total toll by 5.5 percent to 14,555. The number of new infections rose by 4.4 percent to 146,690, the health ministry said, as Spain has ramped up its testing for the disease. The number of daily deaths, which peaked on Thursday at 950, rose for the first time on Tuesday after falling for four straight days. AFP

individual countries to shore up their own economies.

Analysts foresee a recession and a contraction of roughly 13 percent this year in the eurozone, the group of 19 EU nations that share the same currency.



Medical workers hug at the Wuhan airport after travel restrictions to leave the city were lifted, on Wednesday. Reuters

Masked crowds swarm Wuhan's streets, trains as 76-day lockdown comes to end

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WUHAN, APRIL 8

AMID STREETS newly bustling with cars and pedestrians, Wang Chun celebrated the lifting of a virus lockdown on her hometown of Wuhan on Wednesday with a dance outdoors after 2 1/2 months cooped up at home.

"I'm so happy Wuhan has defeated the virus," Wang said after recording a K-Pop-inspired duet with a male partner for posting on the internet. Neither wore face masks, at least for a few minutes.

After she put on the mask again, Wang confronted the question many of the city's 11 million residents are asking



Vehicles leave Wuhan via a toll station. Reuters

themselves: When will they be going back to work?

"That's a very good question," Wang responded with a giggle.

Wuhan ended its 76-day lockdown Wednesday morning,

allowing residents to again travel in and out of the city without special authorisation through the use of a mandatory smartphone app powered by a mix of data-tracking and government surveillance showing they are healthy and have not been in recent contact with anyone confirmed to have the virus.

Long lines formed at the airport and train and bus stations as thousands streamed out of the city to return to their homes and jobs elsewhere. Yellow barriers that had blocked off some streets were gone, although the gates to residential compounds remained guarded.

After more than two months indoors, Wuhan resident Tong

Zhengkun was one of millions of enjoying a sense of freedom.

"Being indoors for so long drove me crazy," an emotional Tong said as he watched a celebratory midnight light display from a bridge across the broad Yangtze River.

Tong said his apartment complex was shut down after residents were found to have contracted the coronavirus. Neighbourhood workers delivered groceries to his door.

Such measures won't be entirely abandoned following the end of Wuhan's closure. Schools are still closed, people are still checked for fevers when they enter buildings, and masks are strongly encouraged.

Hospitals may not be able to cope, warns Imran

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, APRIL 8

PAKISTAN'S CORONAVIRUS cases rose to 4,183 on Wednesday, as Prime Minister Imran Khan expressed concern that the situation "can further deteriorate" and "our hospitals may not be able to cope" with the increasing number of patients.

The Ministry of National Health Services in its evening update said 42,159 tests, including 3,076 in the last 24 hours, have been conducted so far. The total number of COVID-19 patients now stands at 4,183, it said.

So far 58 patients have died, including four in the last 24 hours, while 467 have recovered. Another 25 were reported to be in critical condition. Private media and official sources reported that patients in Punjab have risen to 2,108, followed by Sindh at 1,036, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa 527, Gilgit-Baltistan 212, Balochistan 206, Islamabad 83 and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir 28.

Pakistan is making frantic efforts to tackle the pandemic. Prime Minister Khan once again warned the people to follow official guidelines on self-isolation or the virus would spread further. Addressing a media briefing, Khan warned that the situation "can further deteriorate" and "our hospitals may not be able to cope with the patients".

He, however, defended his decision to not impose total lockdown, saying over 50 million were below the poverty line in the country and they could die of hunger if such step is taken. PTI

OTHER TOP GLOBAL STORIES

Syrian air force behind chemical attacks, finds investigation team

ANTHONY DEUTSCH
APRIL 8

SYRIAN ARAB Air Force pilots flying Sukhoi Su-22 military planes and a helicopter dropped bombs containing poisonous chlorine and sarin nerve gas on a village in the country's western Hama region in March 2017, a new team at the global chemical weapons watchdog has concluded in its first report.

The special investigative unit was established by members of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in 2018 to identify perpetrators of illegal attacks. Until now the OPCW had only been authorised to say whether chemical attacks occurred, and not who perpetrated them.

Officials in the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and its military backer Russia have repeatedly denied using chemical weapons and accuse insurgents of staging attacks to implicate Syrian forces.

Syria's mission to the United Nations in New York did not immediately respond to a request for comment, while there was no immediate reaction from Damascus to the report. REUTERS

Bernie Sanders drops out of Democratic race for president, paving road for Biden



Bernie Sanders

five years ago in relative obscurity but ultimately elevated him as a champion of the working class, a standard-bearer of American liberalism and the leader of a self-styled political revolution.

Sanders' exit from the race establishes former Vice President Joseph R Biden Jr, as the presumptive nominee to challenge President Trump, and leaves the progressive movement without a prominent voice in the 2020 race.



Bernie Sanders

In a race reshaped, and eclipsed, by the escalating coronavirus crisis, Sanders faced no realistic path to the nomination after a series of lopsided losses to Biden, beginning in South Carolina in late February.

Though Biden had been careful not to pressure Sanders, he had begun to move ahead as if the race were over, taking steps, for example, to begin his search for a running mate. Sanders championed and

popularised liberal policies like "Medicare for all" and free four-year public colleges aimed at lifting up America's working class, but he faced opposition from many party leaders, elected officials and major donors.

Sanders had vowed to do everything he could to beat Trump in November, and his departure, though not what he had envisioned, amounted to an acknowledgment that continuing to battle against Biden would preclude the kind of party unity necessary for the general election fight ahead. Sanders has repeatedly said he would support the former vice president if he were the nominee. NYT

Bangabandhu assassination: Death warrant issued against former military captain

ANISUR RAHMAN
DHAKA, APRIL 8

A BANGLADESHI court on Wednesday issued a death warrant against a former military captain for his involvement in the 1975 coup in which the country's founder Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated.

Abdul Majed, who was arrested in Dhaka on Tuesday after hiding in India for nearly two-and-a-half decades, was brought before the court from the jail in heavy security.

Dhaka's District and Sessions Judge Helaluddin Choudhury is-

sued the death warrant with Supreme Court's special permission during the ongoing COVID-19 holiday, public prosecutor Abdulah Abu told reporters.

"The judge read out the charges and original judgment issued in 1998 in line with the legal procedures ahead of issuing the death warrant, meaning clearance for jail authorities to hang him," he said.

The court officials and police said Majed was immediately brought back to the Kashimpur Central Jail on the outskirts of Dhaka where he would await the hangman's noose, exhausting subsequent legal procedures under jail code. PTI