



Pakistanis crowd markets as virus lockdown eased

## Seoul closes bars, clubs over fears of virus 2nd wave

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DUBAI: Emirati officials present roses to members of an Indian medical team upon their arrival at Dubai International Airport on Saturday. — AFP

# Global virus cases top 4 million

## France, Spain move toward reopening

PARIS: The number of coronavirus cases worldwide topped four million as some of the hardest-hit countries readied to lift lockdown restrictions, despite concerns about a second wave of infections. Governments around the world are trying to stop the spread of the disease while scrambling for ways to relieve pressure on their economies, which are facing a historic downturn with millions pushed into unemployment.

But with the death toll already past 280,000, nations are keen to avoid second waves of infections that could overwhelm their healthcare systems, with a new cluster of cases in South Korea raising fears about the virus hitting back rapidly. Amid the barrage of deaths, some European countries have cited signs of progress that they said justified cautious steps towards a sense of normality. Officials in France on Saturday said the day's death toll of 80 was the lowest since early April, while nursing home fatalities also fell sharply as the nation prepared to relax curbs on public movement imposed eight weeks ago.

The easing, to begin Monday, has brought mixed reactions. "I've been scared to death" about the reopening, said Maya Flandin, a bookshop manager from Lyon. "It's a big responsibility to have to protect my staff and my customers." French health officials have warned that "the epidemic remains active and

evolving", and that social distancing must be kept up even as restrictions are eased. In Spain, about half the population will be allowed out on Monday for limited socialization, and restaurants will be able to offer some outdoor service as the country begins a phased transition set to last through June.



Death toll exceeds 280,000

Fears lingered, however, of a resurgence, and authorities excluded Madrid and Barcelona - two COVID-19 hotspots - from the first phase. Belgium is also easing some restrictions on Monday, and in some parts of Germany, bars and restaurants reopened on Saturday with further easing set for today. Overall, the situation in Europe was still far from normal. Britain is

reportedly planning to announce on Sunday that all overseas visitors will face a mandatory two-week quarantine, and the European Union warned against opening borders to travellers from outside the bloc.

Across Europe, commemorations marking 75 years since Nazi Germany's surrender were cancelled or scaled down. And Poland's election on Sunday will be one for the history books as polling stations remain closed and turnout will clock in at zero due to a political crisis set off by the pandemic — the presidential ballot is formally neither postponed nor cancelled because the government and opposition were unable to agree on a constitutional and safe solution.

### 'Phenomenal' recovery?

South Korea's capital Seoul shut all bars and clubs on Saturday after a burst of cases were tracked to one of the city's busiest nightlife districts. Even as the country eased virus restrictions, officials warned against carelessness after the new cluster of infections, highlighting the challenge of containing the spread of the deadly disease while pursuing an economic revival. Global economic figures are pointing to the most acute downturn in nearly a century with businesses forced to shut and supply lines badly disrupted, and pressure is growing on leaders around the world to

find a way out.

In the United States, the country with the world's highest death toll, President Donald Trump faced sharp criticism from his predecessor Barack Obama, who said on a leaked tape that Trump's handling of the crisis was an "absolute chaotic disaster". Facing re-election in November, Trump has insisted that next year would be "phenomenal" for the US economy, urging reopening in a country where the virus continues to claim well over 1,000 lives daily. The United States lost an unprecedented 20.5 million jobs in April, driving the unemployment rate to 14.7 percent — the highest level since the Great Depression.

### 'Life costs money'

Health experts have cautioned that while the growth of cases may be slowing in some European and Asian countries, other nations - many of them impoverished - are only in the first phases of their outbreaks. In Iran, the Middle East's virus epicenter, many were taking advantage of loosened restrictions despite worries about a spike in infections. "Life costs money," said Hamed, a 22-year-old out on the streets of the capital Tehran without a mask. "People have to go to work since this virus has been with us for about three months now." — AFP

## Brazil tops 10,000 deaths from COVID

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil, the hardest-hit Latin American country in the coronavirus pandemic, has surpassed 10,000 deaths, according to figures released Saturday by the Ministry of Health. While Brazil's numbers are high - 10,627 deaths and 155,939 confirmed cases - scientists think the real figures could be 15 or even 20 times worse, given the country's inability to carry out widespread testing. Congress and the Supreme Court decreed an official mourning period of three days and lawmakers asked Brazilians to follow health authorities' recommendations to reduce infection rates while the country prepares for "a safe and definitive return back to normal."

Meanwhile President Jair Bolsonaro, who opposes stay-at-home measures due to their impact on the country's economy, was seen jet skiing on Lake Paranoa in Brasilia, according to the Metropoles news website. Officials told AFP he did not plan to make a statement on the country reaching 10,000 deaths. In the last 24 hours alone, the nation saw 10,611 new cases and 730 fatalities, Brazil's second-highest daily death toll, after a record set on Friday (751 deaths).

### 'Situation is dire'

Resisting pressure from Bolsonaro, the governors of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro states have said they will extend the partial quarantine measures in force since March until the end of May. The pandemic has given rise to ongoing governmental clashes, pitting the president against governors and



MANAUS, Brazil: A man carries a coffin out of a ship upon arrival to attend to the high demand due to the high number of deaths related to the new coronavirus at Manaus Port on May 8, 2020. — AFP

mayors who have implemented social distancing and confinement measures to contain the virus' spread — efforts supported by the country's Supreme Court. In announcing that his state's lockdown would be prolonged, Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria said Friday: "We are at the height of this pandemic. The situation is dire." His southeastern state of almost 46 million inhabitants has seen more than 3,600 deaths and over 44,400 cases.

Neighboring Rio de Janeiro state, home to more than 16 million people, follows with 1,653 deaths and 16,929 infections. Less populated states such as Ceara, Pernambuco and Amazonas already have around a thousand dead each. Amazonas, home to a number of indigenous tribes that are extremely vulnerable to the virus, has recorded 232 deaths per million inhabitants,

almost three times the rate in Sao Paulo state. While Brazil's coronavirus peak is not expected for several more weeks, seven states have already seen their intensive care units fill to 90 percent capacity.

Bolsonaro, who has compared the coronavirus to a "little flu," tweeted Saturday that the country's "army of unemployed continues to grow" in reference to a factory closure in the northeast, before asking "is chaos coming?" On Thursday the country's economy minister, Paulo Guedes, said Brazil could face "economic collapse" in a month's time due to stay-at-home measures. According to the IMF, Brazil risks a 5.3 percent contraction in GDP this year. Worldwide the virus has claimed more than 277,000 lives and the number of coronavirus cases has surpassed four million, according to an AFP tally. —AFP

## US Supreme Court to take on Trump taxes, immunity

WASHINGTON: Can Donald Trump refuse to turn over his tax returns and financial records to Congress and New York prosecutors? The Supreme Court takes up this politically charged question on Tuesday, and it may use the occasion to better define the limits of presidential immunity. The high court's nine justices, confined at home by the novel coronavirus pandemic, will question lawyers for both sides by telephone in a highly anticipated session to be broadcast live.

The hearing, initially set for late March, is being held now to allow time for the justices to render a decision before the presidential election in November, as Trump seeks a second term. The former real estate magnate, who used his fortune as an argument in his 2016 election campaign, is the first president since Richard Nixon in the 1970s to refuse to release his tax returns - prompting speculation about his true worth and his possible financial entanglements.

"There is clearly something in these documents that the president does not want us to see," Steven Mazie, an author and educator, said during a webinar. Since retaking control of the House of Representatives in midterm elections in 2018, the Democratic opposition has been eager to find out just what that "something" might be. Several congress-

sional committees have issued subpoenas to Trump's longtime accounting firm, Mazars, as well as to Deutsche Bank and Capital One bank, demanding Trump's financial records for the 2011-2018 period.

Manhattan prosecutor Cyrus Vance, a Democrat, meantime made a similar demand to Mazars as part of an investigation into payments to the porn actress known as Stormy Daniels to buy her silence about an alleged liaison with the billionaire. Trump immediately sued to block the documents' release. "What they are doing is not legal," he said on Twitter, adding, "the Witch Hunt continues." Having lost his argument in the lower courts, Trump turned to the nation's highest legal body. With two conservative Trump appointees on the nine-justice panel, the high court has taken a clear turn to the right.

### 'To torment the president'

The justices will devote the first hour of Tuesday's oral arguments to the congressional subpoenas, highlighting a fierce battle over the legislature's investigative powers. "Unleashing each and every House committee to torment the president with legislative subpoena after legislative subpoena is a recipe for constitutional crisis," the president's lawyers said in a brief to the court. Yet such requests are nothing new. House lawyers responded in their own brief, citing examples involving presidents Richard Nixon, a Republican, and Jimmy Carter, a Democrat. "What is unprecedented," they added, "is the extraordinary breadth of the arguments that President Trump and the solicitor general make about the supposed power of a president to thwart investigations." The high court may be tempted to sidestep the central issue. — AFP