

International

India locks down capital to battle virus as US hits vaccine milestone

Kejriwal says Delhi's 'health system is at a tipping point'

NEW DELHI: India has locked down its capital New Delhi for a week from yesterday night to try and control a raging coronavirus outbreak, as the hard-hit United States passed a hopeful milestone of giving at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose to half its adults. There was good news from Australia and New Zealand as well as the two neighbors opened a travel bubble that would allow people to travel without a mandatory quarantine.

Infections are skyrocketing in India, however, with hospitals running out of beds and the government forced to reimpose economically painful restrictions again. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the capital's "health system is at a tipping point". "If we don't impose a lockdown now, we will be looking at a bigger disaster," Kejriwal said businesses would be shut and movement around the city of 20 million limited to essential services.

The Delhi lockdown came after the vast nation of 1.3 billion people reported a record high of 273,810 infections yesterday — the fifth consecutive day of more than 200,000 cases. The restrictions followed similar measures in other parts of India, including in the western state of Maharashtra, home to financial capital Mumbai. The surge has overwhelmed the healthcare infrastructure in many parts of India, and authorities are scrambling to free up hospital beds and secure additional supplies of oxygen and treatment drugs.

India has the world's second-highest caseload with more than 15 million known infections. Health workers are bracing for yet another spike as millions of pilgrims attend a religious festival and ongoing regional elections draw huge rallies. The UK government said yesterday Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to India has been cancelled over the COVID-19 surge there.

US in 'precarious position'

The coronavirus has killed more than 3 million people, devastating the world economy and upending daily life since emerging in China in late 2019. The United States remains the hardest-hit nation, with more deaths and known infections than anywhere else, but it passed a major vaccine milestone on Sunday with roughly 130



NEW DELHI: People make their way along a street in the old quarters of New Delhi yesterday as the megacity struggles to contain a huge surge in COVID-19 cases with hospitals running out of beds and oxygen supplies low. — AFP

Americans — half its adult population — receiving at least one dose. The country is a world leader in vaccinations, and all its over-18s will be eligible for a shot from Monday. But its top pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci warned Sunday that the United States remains in a "precarious position". "We're having a seven-day average of over 60,000 new infections per day. That's a place you don't want to be," he said. "We also have to make sure that people don't throw caution to the wind and declare victory prematurely. That's not the time to do that."

Neighboring Canada illustrated the threat of a fresh coronavirus wave, as authorities scrambled to funnel additional health staff and equipment into virus-hit Ontario to battle a surge in infections. Ontario is Canada's most populous province, and record cases are threatening to overwhelm its healthcare system.

'Cry, hug, kiss'

Some countries have started to ease restrictions

despite concerns about new outbreaks, hoping to resume some social activities and kickstart their economies. Portugal was set to allow restaurants, shopping centers, high schools and universities reopened from yesterday. Switzerland was also set to start the week with a step towards normality, with outdoor seating permitted at restaurants and bars and cinemas, sports facilities, and in-person classes at universities re-opening. And in Australia and New Zealand, there was joy and celebration as a long-awaited quarantine-free travel bubble opened across the Tasman Sea. Family members tearfully reunited at airports in Sydney and Wellington, while others readied for their first outbound flights in more than a year.

"(I'll) yell, scream, cry, hug, kiss, (feel) happy — all of these emotions at once," Denise O'Donoghue, 63, told AFP as she prepared to board her plane in Sydney. "What normal is going to be from now on I don't know, but I'm just really, really excited today." — AFP

Assembly of people of Kazakhstan

An important element of the political system of Kazakhstan, strengthens interests of all ethnic groups, to ensure the strict observe of the rights and freedoms of citizens irrespective of their ethnic affiliation became the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, created March 1st, 1995 on the initiative of the President of the country N A Nazarbayev.

The idea of creation was announced by the President of Kazakhstan in 1992 at the first Forum of People of Kazakhstan. Activities of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is aimed at implementation of the state national policy, ensuring socio-political stability in the country and improving the efficiency of cooperation between state institutions and civil society in the sphere of interethnic relations. The Assembly today is a constitutional body headed by its Chairman - the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan - Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev. This determines its special high status. The legal status of the Assembly defined the special Law "About the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan," "Regulations of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan," which regulates the procedure for the formation, structure and controls, defined objectives, main tasks, activities of the authority of the APK, and features of the organization of interaction with the public bodies and public associations, mechanisms for participation in the development and implementation of state policy in the sphere of interethnic relations.

The highest authority is the Assembly session, which passes by the President of the country. All its decisions are binding for consideration by public authorities and civil society institutions. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan - a constitutional body. One of the main features of the Assembly is the representation of the interests of ethnic groups in the highest legislative body - the Parliament of the country as a guaranteed representation. Assembly elects nine deputies of Mazhilis of the Parliament. Elected Assembly deputies represent its interests, as a set of interests of all the ethnic groups of the country.

The working body is the Secretariat of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan in the structure of the Presidential Administration as a separate department. This is an effectiveness, and efficiency of its participation in government and public relations. Also the structure of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan includes: Scientific-Expert Council of the APK; Club of journalists and experts on ethnic relations in the APK; Public Fund "Fund of the APK"; Methodical center of innovative technologies of language training "Tildaryn"; Association of Entrepreneurs of the APK. Operates 88 schools where teaching is conducted entirely in Uzbek, Tajik, Uighur and Ukrainian languages. In 108 schools the languages of 22 ethnic groups of Kazakhstan are taught as a separate subject. In addition, there are

195 specialized linguistic centers, where not only children but also adults can learn languages of 30 ethnic groups. In all regions functioning The House of Friendship, which are located in regions with a multiethnic composition of the population. In Almaty city there is a "House of Friendship", in Astana - The Palace of Peace and Accord, which is built on the instructions of the Head of country. It hosts the annual session of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, Congresses of World and Traditional Religions, landmark events. Besides Kazakh and Russian theaters, the country has four national theaters - Uzbek, Uighur, Korean and German.

A special place in the field of ethno-cultural relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan devoted to supporting the development of information and communication resources of ethno-cultural associations. In the information field are actively working for more than 35 ethnic newspapers and magazines. The largest ethnic 6 national newspapers operate under government support. Newspapers and magazines are available for 11 different languages, radio programs - on 8, and TV shows on the 7 languages. The following advantages of the Kazakhstan model to strengthen social harmony and national unity were formed.

Firstly, due to the purposeful policy of the First President of the country - Elbasy N. Nazarbayev - mechanisms for the realization of civil equality were created and improved, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation. Secondly, the representation and realization of the interests of Kazakhstan's ethnic groups are carried out at the highest state level - the President of the Assembly is the First President of the country - Elbasy.

The decisions of the highest body of the Assembly - the Session - are obligatory for consideration by all state bodies. Thirdly, the guaranteed representation of the interests of ethnic groups in the Parliament of the country is ensured by the election of 9 deputies of the Majilis by the Assembly.

Fourthly, a value basis has been formed, based on general civil principles, common spiritual and cultural values and national historical consciousness. Fifthly, the state has created conditions and it provides support for the development of traditions, languages and culture of the people of Kazakhstan.

Sixthly, the Kazakhstan model of social harmony and national unity is developed on the basis of civil initiative and a constructive dialogue between the institutions of civil society and the state. Seventhly, the principled position of Kazakhstan is that the use of ethnic issues for political purposes is unacceptable. In Kazakhstan, generally accepted norms in the sphere of inter-ethnic relations have been introduced. Effective interaction of state bodies and civil society institutions was ensured. The efforts of ethno-cultural associations in achieving the goals and objectives of the Assembly were integrated. At present, the Kazakhstan model of social harmony and national unity of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan - Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev is recognized as one of the most successful in the world. — Embassy of Kazakhstan, Kuwait



Terror threat has 'moved' from Afghanistan: US

WASHINGTON: Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday defended the US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, saying the terror threat had moved elsewhere and that Washington needed to refocus resources on challenges such as China and the pandemic. President Joe Biden announced last week that the United States would withdraw all forces from the country before this year's 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. The unconditional withdrawal-four months later than a deadline agreed with the Taliban last year comes despite a deadlock in peace talks between the insurgents and the Afghan government.

CIA head William Burns and US generals including the former armed forces chief David Petraeus have argued that the move could plunge the country deeper into violence and leave America more vulnerable to terror threats. "The terrorism threat has moved to other places. And we have other very important items on our agenda, including the relationship with China, including dealing with everything from climate change to COVID," Blinken told ABC's "This Week."

"And that's where we have to focus our energy and resources." Blinken met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as well as senior US officials in Kabul last week and briefed them on Biden's announcement Wednesday that he was ending "the forever war," which began in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Blinken told ABC the United States had "achieved the objectives that we set out to achieve." "Al-Qaeda has been significantly degraded. Its capacity to conduct an attack against the United States now from Afghanistan is not there," he said.

The Pentagon has around 2,500 troops in Afghanistan from a high of more than 100,000. Thousands more serve as part of a 9,600-strong NATO force, which will withdraw at the same time. The delay in withdrawal-even by just over four months-has angered the Taliban, who have threatened to resume hostilities against US forces. Blinken said, however, that Washington would be able to see any move by the Taliban "in real time" and take action. —AFP

Johnson visit to India cancelled due to COVID-19

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cancelled his delayed trip to India next week, his first major foreign visit since taking power in 2019, his office said yesterday, as coronavirus cases surge in India. "In the light of the current coronavirus situation, Prime Minister Boris Johnson will not be able to travel to India next week," it said. The statement added that the two countries' leaders would instead speak later this month "to agree and launch their ambitious plans for the future partnership between the UK and India".

"They will remain in regular contact beyond this, and look forward to meeting in person later this year," it said. Johnson's office had last week announced the visit would be shortened. It was originally organized to span three days and set to begin on April 26. It had initially been scheduled for January and heralded as an opportunity for Britain to refocus its international trade policy in the wake of Brexit as it pursues a so-called "global Britain" strategy.

News in brief

12 die in Nigeria fuel tanker fire

LAGOS: Twelve people were killed and dozens of houses burnt when a fuel tanker overturned, spilled its contents and caught fire in central Nigeria, the emergency services said yesterday. The accident, which occurred on Sunday in the Agatu area of Benue state, is the latest to hit the oil-rich West African nation in recent months. "Twelve bodies were recovered from the scene of the carnage yesterday, while over 50 houses and shops were burnt," said Emmanuel Shior, the executive secretary of the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA). He said many people were also injured following the fire from the crashed tanker, fearing that the death toll might rise. — AFP

Greek ship quarantined

ATHENS: A Greek cargo ship sailing from Egypt has been quarantined in Crete after a sailor was found dead and 10 others tested positive for coronavirus, the coastguard said yesterday. The Heroic arrived in southern Crete from Port Said in Egypt on Sunday. "A sailor was found dead in his cabin by the captain... and one of the mechanics contaminated by COVID-19 has been hospitalized in Rhodes," a coastguard official said. Nine others tested positive for coronavirus. The crew comprises 13 Filipinos and eight Greeks. — AFP

Portugal further eases COVID curbs

LISBON: Portugal yesterday rolled back coronavirus measures, including reopening shopping centers, high schools and universities and allowing indoor dining, after new infections eased off. This is the third step of four in a gradual lifting of restrictions that began in mid-March, following two months of lockdown that helped stem a third wave of the pandemic. The lifting of measures began with the reopening of primary schools a month ago, followed at the start of April by secondary schools and outdoor service for cafes and restaurants. Eateries are now allowed to serve indoors, and auditoriums in the country can also open. — AFP

Canada to send support to Ontario

TORONTO: Canada will funnel additional health staff and equipment into virus-hit Ontario as the province battles a worrying spike in COVID-19 infections, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Sunday. The government will mobilize health professionals from different federal departments and deploy them to Ontario, particularly the Toronto region, where "the situation is most critical," Trudeau said in a video posted on Twitter. Ontario, Canada's most populous province with 14 million people, has for several days struggled with record coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and intensive care patients, all of which are threatening to overwhelm its health system. — AFP

Ukrainian soldier killed in east

KIEV: A Ukrainian soldier was killed and one more wounded in the conflict-ridden east, the military said yesterday, hours before high-profile talks aimed at de-escalating tensions between Kiev and Moscow. Clashes with Ukrainian forces and Moscow-backed separatists have flared in the east in recent weeks, shredding a ceasefire brokered last year. Kiev has been battling pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions since 2014, following Moscow's annexation of the Crimean peninsula. — AFP



Boris Johnson

But spiking coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and deaths in Britain earlier this year led to its delay. Now, surging infections in India—where officials have recorded five consecutive days of more than 200,000 cases—have led to its entire cancellation. The visit was aimed at strengthening trade ties, investment and cooperation in various areas, including defense, security, health and climate change.

It followed an invitation from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who took part in a climate summit hosted by London earlier this year. Johnson has highlighted the two countries' burgeoning trade and investment relationship, worth an estimated £24 billion (\$32 billion, 26 billion euros) annually. — AFP