

CORONAVIRUS  
EVACUATION  
EFFORTS

These are the plans so far by foreign governments to evacuate their citizens from the epicentre of the outbreak:

**AUSTRALIA:** The foreign ministry said it was working on a plan to transport home all Australian nationals.

**INDIA:** The foreign ministry said it has now requested permission to operate two flights to remove some 250 to 300 nationals from China.

**INDONESIA:** Jakarta is still not decided whether to bring more than 230 Indonesians in China home.

**JAPAN:** A second plane chartered by the Japanese government left China and landed in Tokyo, bringing the total number of people repatriated to 400.

**MALAYSIA:** Kuala Lumpur says waiting signal from Beijing to evacuate some 78 Malaysians from Wuhan.

Philippines: Manila said it is ready to evacuate some 150 Filipinos in Wuhan and another 150 in other parts of Hubei.

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore flew home 92 of its citizens from Wuhan.

**SRI LANKA:** Colombo said they are ready to fly out roughly 860 Sri Lankan students.

**SOUTH KOREA:** Seoul yesterday sent chartered planes to Wuhan to return hundreds of its citizens.

**THAILAND:** Bangkok is waiting for Beijing's signal to evacuate its citizens, especially from Wuhan. Sixty-five Thais are in Wuhan.

**UNITED STATES:** 240 Americans, including consular staff, were flown out of Wuhan.

**FRANCE:** A plane was scheduled to land in Wuhan yesterday. About 500 to 1,000 French citizens are eligible for repatriation there.

**EUROPEAN UNION:** The block said flights are planned to evacuate more than 100 nationals from EU nations. Germany: Berlin is planning to fly out some 90 citizens on Saturday.

**ALGERIA:** Government is taking all measures needed to bring home 36 Algerians living in Wuhan.

**MOROCCO:** About 100 people, mostly students in Wuhan, will be evacuated.

# Stranded in Wuhan

Foreigners, particularly from countries with less diplomatic clout, plead for help

AFP, Wuhan

Pregnant, newlywed and now trapped at the Chinese epicentre of a global health crisis, Thai national Aphinya is among thousands of foreigners desperate to escape -- and watching helplessly as the US and Japan fly their citizens home.

Hundreds were flown to safety this week to Tokyo, Singapore and California on government-chartered flights, but those from countries with less diplomatic clout fear they are being left behind.

"I feel hurt that they don't care about us," Aphinya Thasripech, 32, told AFP.

"Either I could starve or I'll get infected and die," said the factory worker, who is two months pregnant.

So far 170 people have been killed by the virus since it emerged from a market in Wuhan, and more than 7,700 people have been sickened.

The illness has also spread around the world, with cases being recorded as far away as the United Arab Emirates, Finland and the United States, but all of the deaths have been in China.

China has imposed transport bans in and around Wuhan -- effectively trapping tens of millions of people -- including



People dressed in protective clothes disinfect an area in Wuhan, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

thousands of foreigners -- in a bid to contain the virus.

Aphinya arrived in China on two weeks ago to marry her Chinese husband in Xiantao -- about 200 kilometres from Wuhan.

Now the city is a virtual ghost town, with restaurants and shops shuttered.

Aphinya said she is worried for the health of her unborn baby, and desperate for the Thai government to get her out.

For days, the government in Bangkok has said they are awaiting "permission" from China to evacuate 65 citizens known to be at ground zero.

But the wait is taking its toll.

"Sooner or later, it will get to us," said Aphinya, adding she had heard that a man had collapsed in a restaurant near her.

Thai medical student Badeephak Kaosala has barricaded himself in his dorm room with a dwindling supply of food and water.

He has watched with disbelief as wealthy nations have mounted mercy flights for their stricken citizens, with no word from home on when -- or if -- he might get out.

South Korea, France and Britain have all announced preparations to evacuate their citizens. Japan has already brought out two plane-loads.

But "fear, frustration and panic" is mounting among those still trapped, said Pakistani Ruqia Shaikh, 33, who was visiting friends when the city was locked down.

There are around 500 Pakistani students in Wuhan. Currently four have been diagnosed with the coronavirus, an official in Islamabad has said.

Those with families are eager to leave, said Ruqia, though some students prefer to remain where they are -- happier to take their chances against the disease than run the gauntlet of Pakistan's poor health facilities.

But Fadil, an Indonesian doctoral student in Wuhan, said he and his friends are desperate to leave -- even if only to another Chinese city.

"The key thing is that we want to get out of here," he said. "Only fools would want to stay in Wuhan."

## Three Japan evacuees test positive for coronavirus

REUTERS, Tokyo

Two of three Japanese people evacuated from China and found to be infected with a new coronavirus had not shown symptoms, the health ministry said yesterday, adding to worries about the fast-spreading virus and its economic fallout.

The three cases were among 206 Japanese people who were evacuated to Tokyo on Wednesday from the Chinese city of Wuhan, the epicentre of the epidemic that has killed 170 people in China and infected nearly 8,000.

While the vast majority of cases have been in China, more than 100 cases have also appeared in about 15 other countries. Later yesterday, a Chinese man in his 50s, who had previously stayed in Wuhan, was found to be infected in the western prefecture of Mie, Kyodo news agency reported.

A Chinese woman in her 20s, who had previously stayed in Wuhan and was studying in Kyoto, was also found to be infected, broadcaster NHK said.

That brought the total number of cases in Japan to 13 including the three evacuees.

The two people who were confirmed as infected but had not shown symptoms were the first such cases in Japan, though suspicion has been rising elsewhere that people who have the virus but no symptoms can infect others.

That would make the virus much more difficult to control.

Japan on Tuesday classified the virus a "designated infectious disease", which would allow compulsory hospitalisation and the use of public funds for treatment.

But the designation - which takes effect on Feb 7 after ordinances are issued - does not apply to people without symptoms.

Asked about concern over transmission of the virus from people who have not shown symptoms, a health ministry official said it was not clear whether that had happened.



(From top left, clockwise) The Costa Smeralda cruise ship is docked in the Civitavecchia port 70km north of Rome yesterday. More than 6,000 tourists were under lockdown aboard the cruise ship after two Chinese passengers were isolated over fears they could be carrying the coronavirus; people from Myanmar, Thailand and US wear protective facemasks. China reported its biggest single-day jump in novel coronavirus deaths yesterday, as global fears deepened with more infections confirmed overseas.

PHOTO: AFP



# Israel 'doesn't have to wait'

Questions raised after US's ambassador to Israel says, according to Trump's plan, the Jewish state can annex parts of West Bank immediately

AFP, Jerusalem

Questions surfaced yesterday over whether Israel would immediately seek to annex parts of the West Bank, after US President Donald Trump's controversial peace plan called for extending Israeli sovereignty to the area.

The plan, seen as overwhelmingly supportive of Israeli goals, has been firmly rejected by the Palestinians.

It gives the Jewish state a US green light to annex key parts of the occupied West Bank, including in the strategic Jordan Valley.

But uncertainty was mounting over Israel's next moves. After Trump unveiled his long-awaited plan in Washington on Tuesday, his ambassador to Israel David Friedman said the Jewish state "does not have to wait at all".

Israeli officials then said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a staunch Trump ally, would seek cabinet approval on Sunday to annex settlements and territory that would be part of Israel under the US plan.

But Jared Kushner -- Trump's adviser and son-in-law who spearheaded the Middle East

initiative -- said that Washington does not want any moves made before Israel's March 2 election.

The international community views Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank as illegal and an attempt to formally place them under Israeli sovereignty would likely trigger further

Netanyahu tells Putin Trump's ME plan a 'new opportunity'

Palestinian president to visit UN in next two weeks

Israel boosts army presence in West Bank, near Gaza

global uproar.

At the start of his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Netanyahu said Trump's initiative offered "a new and perhaps unique opportunity," without mentioning annexation.

The Russian leader did not mention the peace

plan at all in his public remarks.

Meanwhile, Israel's army announced that it had deployed extra troops to the West Bank and around the Gaza Strip ahead of any further Palestinian demonstrations against the Trump plan.

The protests have been relatively muted since the Trump announcement, with only isolated clashes reported. But one rocket was fired from the Hamas-controlled Gaza strip on Wednesday evening. In response, Israeli aircraft struck a "number of Hamas terror targets" in the southern Gaza Strip, the army said.

An Israeli military official told AFP the decision to deploy extra troops to the West Bank and the Gaza border was made "to minimise the risk of a flareup".

Meanwhile, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas will visit the UN within two weeks to address the Security Council on his rejection of the new US Mideast plan, his ambassador to the body said Wednesday.

Trump's plan prompted a lukewarm response from Europe and the UN, and a furious rebuke from key Muslim countries who denounced it as betrayal of the Palestinians.

## UK eyes future after EU divorce

US trumpets Brexit 'benefits' on eve of Britain's EU departure

AFP, London

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo predicted Thursday that Brexit would bring "enormous benefits" to the United States and the UK, during a visit to Britain on the eve of its historic departure from the European Union.

Ahead of talks with Prime Minister Boris Johnson about a post-Brexit trade deal and other key issues, Pompeo said he was optimistic about Britain's nearly half a century of EU membership ending today.

Britain will enter a new chapter when it becomes the first country to quit the EU's institutions at midnight Brussels time (2300 GMT) today.



"It is a great moment for our country... a moment of hope and opportunity," Johnson said Wednesday, as he prepared to address the nation at 2200 GMT-- an hour before Brexit.

Although Britain will remain under most EU rules during an 11-month transition period, it is then likely to lose privileged access to the single European market -- the world's largest and most important for UK trade.

Johnson has argued he can negotiate ambitious free trade agreements with both his 27 former partners and the US, but has seen recent strains in the so-called "special relationship" with Washington.

Britons narrowly backed departing the EU in a 2016 referendum that left the country locked in political crisis and acrimonious division.

Johnson, who headed the pro-Leave campaign, won a thumping election victory in December on the mantra "get Brexit done".

That is now finally happening, with Britain's departure set in European law Wednesday, amid emotional scenes, as the bloc's parliament voted to ratify the divorce papers.

"We will always love you and we will never be far," said EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, adding: "Long live Europe."

RAMPUR GREYHOUND

1 Male 16 months  
2 Females 12 months

Mobile: 01711547878



## China virus could create US jobs

Says US commerce secretary Ross

AFP, Washington

US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross yesterday said that the virus that has killed 170 people in China and sparked global health fears could help create jobs in America.

Ross said the virus, which has spread to at least 15 countries, was "very unfortunate" but that it was also a "risk factor" for businesses weighing up whether to operate in China.

"I don't want to talk about a victory lap over a very unfortunate, very malignant disease but the fact is, it does give businesses yet another thing to consider," he told the Fox Business TV channel.

"So I think it will help to accelerate the return of jobs to North America, some to (the) US, probably some to Mexico as well."

His comments triggered immediate criticism on social media and from health experts.

"You have somebody of that stature who makes an irresponsible comment, speaking on matters in which he has no expertise," Georges Benjamin, of the American Public Health Association, told the Washington Post.

Many governments have urged their citizens not to visit China, while some have banned entry for travellers from Wuhan.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has said the SARS-like coronavirus poses a risk to the world economy.

## 'It's never too late'

If you stop smoking, your lung can heal itself

AFP, Tokyo

Smokers can effectively turn back time in their lungs by kicking the habit, with healthy cells emerging to replace some of their tobacco-damaged and cancer-prone ones, a new study shows.

Smokers have long been told their risk of developing diseases like lung cancer will fall if they can quit, and stopping smoking prevents new damage to the body.

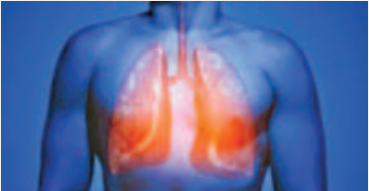
But a study published yesterday in the journal Nature found that the benefits may go further, with the body appearing to draw on a reservoir of healthy cells to replace smoke-damaged ones in the lungs of smokers when they quit.

The study's joint senior author, Peter Campbell of the Wellcome Sanger Institute, said the results should give new hope to smokers who want to quit.

"People who have smoked heavily for 30, 40 or more years often say to me that it's too late to stop smoking -- the damage is already done," he said in a statement issued by the institute. "What is so exciting about our study is that it shows that it's never too late to quit."

Some of the people in the study had smoked more than 15,000 packs of cigarettes in their life, he said.

The precise mechanism by which that replacement occurs is not yet clear, but the study's authors believe there may be a sort of reservoir of cells, waiting for a chance to emerge.



## Declare 'emergency' for people and the planet

Activists urge leaders on global goals

REUTERS, London

Nobel peace laureate Malala Yousafzai and environmentalist Jane Goodall are among more than 2,000 activists who declared a state of "emergency" for people and the planet yesterday, in a letter demanding urgent action from world leaders.

"We need you to act faster", read the open letter, addressed to world leaders who in 2015 signed up to a series of UN global goals to tackle poverty, inequality and climate change by 2030.

"There are not just a few of us - there are millions with one voice and one question. How will you keep your promise and deliver dramatic progress towards the global goals this year?"

"Love, Actually" director Richard Curtis, who has campaigned for the global goals and was among the letter's signatories, said there had been "nothing like enough progress" in the five years since the goals were set.

But he said growing public awareness of issues ranging from climate change to modern slavery was forcing companies and governments to change their behaviour, citing Microsoft's recent pledge to remove all the carbon it has ever emitted.

A United Nations assessment last year found that progress has been made on the goal of ending extreme poverty, but in other areas, "progress has been slow or even reversed".

