



## Trump tests negative for coronavirus

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump has tested negative for the novel coronavirus, his physician said, following concerns over his exposure to a disease that has paralyzed the globe.

Trump agreed to the test after coming in contact with several members of a Brazilian presidential delegation visiting his Florida resort who have since tested positive for the virus.

"This evening I received confirmation that the test is negative," the president's physician Sean Conley said in a Saturday memo.

Trump, 73, had dismissed concerns over his exposure to the disease which has killed at least 51 Americans and upended the rhythm of daily life across the country, with millions working from home and schools shut.

New York, the most populous US city, saw its first coronavirus death on Saturday, as store shelves were stripped bare after days of panic buying.

Across the Hudson River in Teaneck, New Jersey, Mayor Mohammed Hameeduddin called for a citywide self-quarantine after 18 cases were confirmed in the township.

"What we are saying is that we are ground zero," Hameeduddin said. "Expect or act as though you're going to infect somebody or somebody is going to infect you."

Vice President Mike Pence announced further curbs on travel to the United States, saying a ban imposed on European nations over the pandemic would be extended to the United Kingdom and Ireland Tuesday.

The restrictions threw airports across the country into disarray, with incoming travelers forced to wait hours for medical screenings before passing through customs.



A member of forest staff sprays disinfectant on a toy train, as a precautionary measure against the spread of COVID-19 novel coronavirus, at the Bengal Safari Park on the outskirts of Siliguri in India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## China tightens curbs

Beijing to send all international arrivals to quarantine facilities as imported cases tick up

REUTERS, Shanghai

China has tightened checks on international travellers at Beijing airport and said it will centrally quarantine all arrivals at its capital, after new imported coronavirus cases surpassed locally transmitted infections for a second day.

China, where the epidemic began in December, appears to now face a greater threat of new infections from outside its borders as it continues to slow the spread of the virus domestically.

Mainland China reported 20 new cases of infections on March 14, up from 11 cases a day earlier, data from by the National Health Commission (NHC) showed yesterday.

Of those, 16 were imported, including 5 in the capital Beijing. Three of the cases in Beijing involved travellers from Spain while one came from Italy and the other from Thailand.

Against this background, the Beijing government has said anyone arriving from abroad will be transferred to city quarantine facilities for 14 days, starting today.

All expenses during the period will be borne by those in quarantine, city deputy secretary general Chen Bei said.

Some may be allowed to quarantine themselves at home after strict evaluation, Chen added, without offering details.

People who falsely report information, conceal a disease or cause the spread of the epidemic will be punished according to the regulations, she cautioned.

Pang Xinghuo, deputy director of the Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention, urged Beijing residents to not travel abroad to reduce the chances of infection.

Those currently abroad who have been in contact with infected people or show signs of infection should seek treatment where they are and not return with symptoms, she said.

Beijing has redirected all international flights that were scheduled to land at its new Daxing International Airport to Beijing Capital International Airport, and as of yesterday has cordoned off a special area to process these passengers, the state-backed Beijing News reported.



## Malaysia tally hits highest in S-E Asia

190 new cases surface, most linked to mosque event

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia reported 190 new coronavirus cases yesterday, with most linked to a religious event at a mosque that was attended by 16,000 people from several countries.

The new cases bring the total number of infections in the country to 428, the health ministry said, making it the worst affected in Southeast Asia.

A total of 243 cases have been linked to the mosque gathering with 9 cases critically ill in intensive care, the ministry said, adding that all event participants and their close contacts will be placed under mandatory quarantine for 14 days.

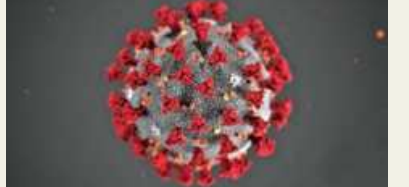
About 14,500 Malaysians and 1,500 foreigners attended the religious gathering between Feb. 27 and March 1 at a mosque near Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian health authorities have said.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said on Friday that the country was facing a "second wave" of infections, and warned of an impact on economic growth.

In neighbouring Brunei, 45 of the total 50 cases have been linked to the religious gathering, the health ministry said yesterday.

The ministry also said Bruneians and foreign residents are barred from leaving the country due to the coronavirus outbreak.

## CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



### India cases jumps to 107

India yesterday reported that the number of coronavirus infections had risen to 107, an increase of 23 from the day before, with a western state home to the country's financial capital the worst hit. Data from India's federal health ministry showed that there were now 31 confirmed coronavirus cases in Maharashtra state, where local authorities have closed down schools, colleges and malls in most cities, including in the financial hub of Mumbai. The number could go up as more test reports of people who were in close contact with patients are pending, a state health official said. India, a country of 1.3 billion people, has so far fared better than elsewhere in Asia, Europe and North America, with only two deaths because of the virus. But experts say India's already overstretched medical system would struggle to deal with a major rise in serious cases.

### Chile quarantines 1,300 aboard two cruise ships

Chile has quarantined more than 1,300 people aboard two cruise ships after an elderly Briton aboard one of them tested positive for the coronavirus, the health ministry announced Saturday. Both ships are cruising the Chilean fjords in Patagonia. The 85-year-old man showed symptoms of the virus after getting off the Silver Explorer ship in the far southern port of Caleta Tortel, 2,400 kilometers from Santiago. The man was later transferred to a hospital in the city of Coyhaique where he tested positive for the virus. The other ship, the Azmar Pursuit -- with 665 passengers and nearly 400 crew -- had earlier crossed into Chilean waters from the southern Argentine port of Ushuaia. The number of coronavirus cases in Chile reached 61 on Saturday, 18 more than on Friday.

### Indonesian minister in ICU after testing positive

Indonesia's transport minister is in intensive care after testing positive for the novel coronavirus, an official said Saturday, as schools and tourist attractions were ordered to close over the health threat. Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi was receiving treatment at an army hospital in Jakarta, according to State Secretary Pratikno. A hospital spokesman said Sumadi was encountering difficulty breathing but that his condition was improving. Cases of the virus in Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous country, have jumped from zero two weeks ago to 96, with five deaths. The virus has spread outside Greater Jakarta to Bandung in West Java, Solo in Central Java, Manado in North Sulawesi, Pontianak in West Kalimantan, as well as holiday havens Yogyakarta and Bali.

SOURCE: AFP



## Israel defers Netanyahu graft trial over virus

AFP, Amman

An Israeli court yesterday postponed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's graft trial over coronavirus, as the premier relaunched his appeal for an emergency unity government to tackle the crisis. Netanyahu, the first Israeli prime minister ever indicted in office, had been scheduled to stand trial from Tuesday over alleged bribery, fraud and breach of trust -- charges which he denies. Jerusalem's District Court said in a statement that the trial had been postponed the first hearing until May 24, the court said. Israel has 200 confirmed cases of the virus, and tens of thousands of people in home quarantine.

## Biden, Sanders to face off in one-on-one debate

Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders meet on Sunday for the first one-on-one debate of the Democratic presidential primary campaign, now overshadowed by the spread of the new coronavirus. Both men have cancelled rallies and two state contests have been postponed in the wake of the outbreak, which has killed at least 57 Americans and upended daily life across the country. They will face off for two hours from 8:00 pm (0000 GMT Monday), but Democratic officials have shifted the venue from Arizona to a TV studio in Washington DC with no live audience because of infection fears. The debate comes ahead of key electoral contests on Tuesday in Florida, Ohio, Illinois and Arizona. Officials in all four states said they would work to make conditions safe for voters.

## Afghan govt delays Taliban prisoner release plan

The Afghan government has postponed its plan to release Taliban prisoners, a senior official said Saturday, throwing a precarious peace process between the insurgents and Kabul into deeper crisis. President Ashraf Ghani earlier this week announced that the authorities would free 1,500 insurgents as a "gesture of goodwill" before negotiations begin, in an attempt to resolve one of the long-running disputes that had roiled talks. The insurgents had earlier rejected the offer and demanded that up to 5,000 captives are released ahead of talks. On Saturday Javid Faisal, spokesman for the National Security Council, told AFP that "the prisoners' release has been delayed" to allow more time to review their identities.

SOURCE: AFP

## 4.8m children born as Syrian refugees

Says UN as brutal war enters 10th yr

AFP, Amman

At least 4.8 million children were born since Syria's war began nine years ago while 9,000 others have been killed or wounded in the conflict, the UN children's agency said yesterday.

An additional one million children were born as refugees since the conflict erupted on March 15, 2011, Unicef said.

"The war in Syria marks yet another shameful milestone today," said Unicef executive director Henrietta Fore, who was in Syria last week.

"As the conflict enters its 10th year, millions of children are entering their second decade of life surrounded by war, violence, death and displacement."

Citing data from 2014 when official monitoring began, Unicef said that "more than 9,000 were killed or injured in the conflict".

During the same time "close to 5,000 children -- some as young as seven -- were recruited into the fighting (and) nearly 1,000 education and medical facilities came under attack".

The agency warned that the "true impact of this war on children is likely to be more profound".

Ted Chaiban, Unicef regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said an ongoing offensive by government forces on the last rebel stronghold in northwestern Syria was having "severe consequences on children".

Fighting there since December 1 has displaced more than 960,000 people, including over 575,000 children, according to Unicef.



A man covers his face with a plastic bag in response to the spreading coronavirus (COVID-19) in Caracas, Venezuela, Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Children less sick from COVID-19, but still spread virus: experts

AFP, Paris

For reasons unknown, children rarely have severe symptoms when infected by COVID-19 and may even be a bit less likely to get the disease in the first place, experts told AFP.

But that doesn't mean infants, toddlers and teens are not carriers for the new coronavirus, which jumped from animals to humans in central China at the end of last year.

As of Friday, there were over 140,000 confirmed cases in 124 countries, with more than 5,000 deaths.

Experts estimate that the true number of infections -- many with mild or no symptoms -- is far higher.

"We know children get infected with the virus, but they don't appear to get very sick or die," said Justin Lessler, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"What we don't know is how much these asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic kids transmit," he told AFP. "This is key to understanding their role in the epidemic."

In a study from mid-February of 44,000 confirmed cases in and around the city of Wuhan, where the pandemic began, the 10-to-19 age bracket made up one percent of infections and a single

death.

Patients under 10 comprised less than one percent, with no deaths reported.

"We are still trying to wrap our heads around the deficit of cases among those under 20," said Cecile Viboud, an epidemiologist at the US National Institute of Health's Fogarty International Centre.

There are several theories as to why kids, especially young ones, are less prone to serious symptoms.

"Children see so many illnesses in the first years of life that their immune systems are tuned up and respond nicely to novel infection," commented Sharon Nachman, head of paediatric infectious disease at Stony Brook Children's Hospital in New York state.

Whatever the reason, how easily children transmit the disease despite their relative imperviousness to illness "is directly relevant to the idea of closing schools," according to Viboud.

So far, 29 countries -- including Ireland, China, Italy, Poland and Japan -- have suspended classes nationwide, affecting nearly 400 million kids, according to Unesco. Another 20 nations having taken partial measures.

REUTERS, London

Britain will isolate older people "within weeks" and force into quarantine anyone diagnosed with coronavirus, the government said as it stepped up measures that have so far been less stringent than elsewhere in Europe.

The British Health Secretary Matt Hancock said people aged over 70 would be shielded from the virus by self-isolating for up to four months, with an announcement "in the coming weeks".

Britain has taken a distinctly different approach to tackling coronavirus from European countries such as Italy, Spain and France which have imposed stringent lockdowns to try to slow the spread of the disease.

"We will be setting it out with more detail when it's the right time to do so because we absolutely appreciate that that is a very big ask of the elderly and the vulnerable and it's for their own self-protection," he told Sky News yesterday.

The government will legislate this week to force people into quarantine if they are diagnosed with the virus, he said, and was also ready to ban mass gatherings.

"We are going to take the powers to make sure that we can quarantine people if they are a risk to public health," Hancock said. "I doubt we will need to use it very much because people are being very responsible and people need to be responsible."

Britain is aiming to delay the peak of infection to prevent health services from being overwhelmed when they are less able to cope.

Britain had 1,140 confirmed cases and 21 deaths from coronavirus.

Hancock said Britain's approach was underpinned by scientific evidence, which it would publish in the coming days, and it was aimed solely at saving lives.

"The goal here is to protect life, the measures have to be sustainable. We will stop at nothing to fight this virus," he told the BBC.

