Stay home for three months

UK tells 1.5m people most at risk AFP, London

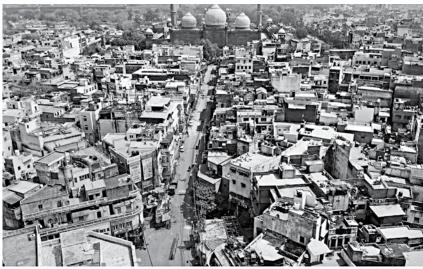
Up to 1.5 million vulnerable people in Britain, identified as being most at risk from the coronavirus epidemic, should stay at home for at least 12 weeks, the government said yesterday.

Those with underlying health conditions such as bone or blood cancers, cystic fibrosis, or who have had an organ transplant have been advised by health officials to do all they can to shield themselves from the virus, including confining themselves at home for a long period.

"People should stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives," Communities secretary Robert Jenrick said in a statement.

He added that the government was asking "extremely vulnerable individuals" to take "extra steps to shield themselves".

Paul Johnstone, director of Public Health England, said those contacted should "not go out for shopping, for leisure or for travel".







This combination of pictures taken yesterday shows deserted areas during a one-day nationwide Janata (civil) curfew imposed as a preventive measure against the Covid-19 coronavirus (clockwise) near the Jama Masjid mosque in New Delhi, JJ bridge in Mumbai, the Haji Ali Dargah in Mumbai and the statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Amritsar.

Asia steps up efforts

Tighter travel restrictions imposed in several countries as second wave of infections strike

Thailand cases rocket to

600 as crisis fears grow

3 doctors die in Indonesia

Pakistan bans int'l flights

after shutting borders

AGENCIES

Authorities across Asia ramped up efforts this weekend to stem the coronavirus amid fears of a second wave of infections in places where outbreaks had appeared under

Tighter travel restrictions were imposed in several countries while Malaysia deployed its army to enforce a lockdown as the number of cases in the region soared past 95,000 -- a third of the world's infections, an AFP tally shows.

Outside China -- where the virus was first detected in December and infected more than 80,000 people -- South Korea is the hardest-hit country in Asia with over 8,500

number of domestically transmitted cases - the one reported yesterday was the first in four days - Lanka's north after they tried to break out in protest it is seeing a steady rise in imported cases, mostly over a ban on family visits to prevent spread of virus. Frestrictions to fight the new coronavirus, get out and do what we need to do now."

from Chinese people returning from overseas.

Cases rose by roughly a third in Thailand overnight to nearly 600, fuelling scepticism about claims in neighbouring Myanmar and Laos of zero

Three doctors treating virus patients in Indonesia died, taking China scrambles to curb the country's death toll to 48 with rise in imported cases 514 confirmed infections. Pakistan

suspended international flights in a desperate bid to prevent the virus spreading in a country with more than 300 reported cases. Millions of people in India were in lockdown yesterday as the government tests the country's ability to fight the pandemic.

In Hong Kong the number of cases has nearly doubled in the past

While China says it has drastically reduced the week as more people fly back to the financial hub. Prison guards opened fire on inmates in Sri

Lockdowns not enough to defeat coronavirus: WHO

Calls for health measures to avoid resurgence

REUTERS, London

Countries can't simply lock down their societies to defeat coronavirus, the World Health Organization's top emergency expert said yesterday, adding that public health measures are needed to avoid a resurgence of the virus later on.

"What we really need to focus on is finding those who are sick, those who have the virus, and isolate them, find their contacts and isolate them," Mike Ryan said in an interview on the BBC's Andrew Marr

"The danger right now with the lockdowns ... if we don't put in place the strong public health measures now, when those movement restrictions and lockdowns are lifted, the danger is the disease will jump back up.

Much of Europe and the United Asian countries and introduced drastic with most workers told to work from home and schools, bars, pubs and restaurants being closed.

Ryan said that the examples of China, Singapore and South Korea, which coupled restrictions with rigorous measures to test every possible suspect, provided a model for Europe, which the WHO has said has replaced Asia as the epicentre of the pandemic.

we've suppressed "Once transmission, we have to go after the virus. We have to take the fight to the virus," Ryan

Ryan also said that several vaccines were in development, but only one had begun trials in the United States. Asked how long it would take before there was a vaccine available in Britain, he said that people needed to be realistic. "We have to make sure that it's absolutely

States have followed China and other safe... we are talking at least a year," he said. "The vaccines will come, but we need to

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

LATEST UPDATES

MORE THAN 13,000 DEAD

At least 13,444 deaths have been recorded since the virus first emerged in December, according to an AFP tally compiled at 1200 GMT yesterday based on official sources. There have been more than 308,130 infections reported in 170 countries and territories. Italy has recorded 4,825 deaths out of 53,578 cases, with more than 6,000 recoveries. China has 81,054 cases, including 3,261 fatalities and 72,244 people recovered. The worst affected countries after Italy and China are Spain with 1,720 deaths, Iran with 1,685 deaths, France with 562 deaths, and the US with 340 deaths.

TOUGHENING MEASURES

Italy stops all non-essential production to guarantee the supply of essential goods, and tightens the rules of confinement with the closure of all its green spaces. Australia, having already shut its borders to foreigners and non-residents, tells citizens to cancel their domestic travel plans. In France more traffic restrictions are imposed and curfews are issued in several southern cities. In Thailand the government steps up its efforts, shuttering most public spaces, from shopping malls and beauty parlours to golf courses and swimming pools. Millions of Indians go into lockdown as the country experiments with a curfew. In also slapped a transportation ban. Nigeria tightens its rules, restricting religious and social gatherings in some places to 50 people.

MORE BORDERS SHUT

The Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso close their borders this weekend, as do Rwanda and the Republic of Congo. Brazil will shut its borders as of Monday to all visitors from Europe, Australia and several Asian countries. Cuba will close its borders to non-residents on Tuesday. Romania bars most foreigners from entering the country. Pakistan and Singapore ban all international flights.

RUSSIA SENDS MEDICS TO ITALY Russia sends the first of nine military planes

which are to take a total of 100 army virus experts and medics to Italy to help fight the coronavirus pandemic there. The Russian defence ministry said the aid mission was agreed by President Vladimir Putin and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. They spoke on the phone Saturday evening, the Krémlin said.

CHINA STARTS CLINICAL TRIAL FOR VACCINE

China has started the first phase of a clinical trial for vaccine. It comes after US health officials said last week they had started a trial to evaluate a possible vaccine in Seattle. The Chinese effort began on March 16 -- the same day as the US announcement -- and is expected to continue until the end of the year, according to a filing in the country's Clinical Trial Registry, dated March 17. The 108 participants, aged between 18 and 60, will be tested in three groups and given different dosages. They are all residents of the central city of Wuhan.

OBLIGATORY CONFINEMENT IN LATAM

A host of countries across Latin America have started obligatory confinement -- Venezuela, Argentina, El Salvador and Bolivia. On Tuesday Colombia will do the same. In Brazil the state of Sao Paulo as of Tuesday will be under 15-day quarantine.

SOURCE: AFP



Personal ties not enough, **North Korea tells US**

Donald Trump has sent a letter to Kim Jong Un detailing a plan to develop ties, state media reported citing the North Korean leader's powerful sister, but she warned their good personal relationship is not enough, as a hiatus in disarmament talks drags on. "In the letter, he (Trump)... explained his plan to propel the relations between the two countries and expressed his intent to render cooperation in the anti-epidemic work," an apparent reference to the coronavirus pandemic, Kim Yo Jong said in the statement. If the US continued to pursue its "unilateral and greedy intention", she said, relations between the two countries would continue to deteriorate.

Infections jump across Africa

Rwanda imposed a nationwide shutdown and border controls to combat the coronavirus at the weekend in some of the strictest measures taken in Africa, as infections spread across the continent and authorities warn healthcare systems are ill-equipped to cope. Africa has lagged behind the global curve for coronavirus infections and deaths, but in the past few days has seen a significant rise in cases. The continent has now reported more than 1,100 infections -more than 1,000 of them in sub-Saharan Africa -- as the World Health Organization expresses concern that poor sanitation, urban crowding and the lack of intensive-care units, equipment and trained staff could hamper any response.



US help offer baffles Iran

The offer by the United States to help Iran fight the coronavirus pandemic is strange, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech yesterday, rejecting the offer. Despite heightened tensions between the longtime foes, Washington has offered humanitarian assistance to Iran while it struggles with the coronavirus outbreak. Iran is the most-affected country in the Middle East with over 1,500 coronavirus deaths and 20,610 infected people. Khamenei said the Islamic Republic had the capability to overcome

Is China a model for the world?

AFP, Beijing

The head of the World Health Organization believes China's battle with the coronavirus offers a beacon of hope, but others question whether Beijing's strategy can be followed by other countries -- particularly Western democracies.

China has reported only one new local infection over the past four days, a seemingly remarkable turnaround given the chaos that surrounded the initial outbreak in the city of Wuhan. While some experts caution against

accepting Beijing's figures at face value, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted China's success "provides hope for the rest of the world". But China is a particular case -- a centrally-controlled, one-party

authoritarian state that allows no dissent and can mobilise vast resources on a single issue.

CLOSE DOWN AND CONTAIN In January, China effectively shut

AFP, Washington

down Wuhan and placed its 11 million residents in effective quarantine -- a move it then replicated in the rest of



people in mass isolation.

Across the rest of the country, residents were strongly encouraged to stay at home. Hundreds of millions of Chinese live in closed residential complexes where neighbourhood committees can police movement in and out -- meaning compliance could be closely monitored.

"Containment works," Sharon Lewin, professor of medicine at the University of Melbourne, told AFP.

Extreme social distancing and

differing degrees by a rising number of European countries, with some US states following suit.

MASS MOBILISATION

At least 42,000 doctors and medical personnel were sent to Hubei province to shore up the province's health services which had, according to public health professor Zheng Zijie from Peking University, essentially "collapsed" under the strain of the fast-spreading epidemic.

Hubei province, putting 50 million home quarantines have been used to armies of medical workers did not come form even after the pandemic subsides.

with protection from contagion. More than 3,300 medical staff were infected across the country and 13 have died from Covid-19, according to health ministry figures published early March.

Government efforts in China were backed by an arsenal of propaganda calling on citizens to be hygienic and stay home.

MASKS AND CHECKS

Widespread mask use may have helped slow the spread of the disease, "particularly when there are so many asymptomatic virus carriers", Zheng said. During the crisis China produced up to 1.6 million N95 respirator masks per day. These are considered the most effective protection, but need to fit correctly and be changed often.

To boost detection rates, temperature checkpoints were installed outside buildings and shops, or in public places. Many localities require citizens to show a QR code on their phone that rates them as "green", "yellow" or "red".

This assessment is now an entrance requirement for many businesses. Government announcements made clear China's ability to mobilise small coding system will remain in use in some

two cases AFP, Gaza City

Gaza confirms first

Authorities in yesterday confirmed the first two cases of novel coronavirus, identifying them as Palestinians who had travelled to Pakistan and were being held in quarantine since return. The United Nations has warned that a Covid-19 outbreak in Gaza could be disastrous, given the high poverty rates and weak health system in the coastal strip under Israeli blockade since 2007.



India to test for virus at 111 labs

IANS, New Delhi

At least 111 labs will conduct test for diagnosis of coronavirus across India, the ministry of health and family welfare said on Saturday. These testing labs include both government private and sectors. However, the capping the prices of the tests is still discussion. The under testing labs have been designated by the apex research body in India, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

China sends millions of masks to Czechs

AFP, Prague

A giant cargo plane carrying over 100 tons of medical material from including millions of face masks, has landed at a Czech airport, the defence ministry said yesterday. The Czech Republic, which by yesterday had 1,047 confirmed cases including six cured patients and no deaths, has been grappling with a shortage of face masks and disinfectants.

Air quality improving Virtual supercomputer revs up virus research AFP, Paris

Gamers, bitcoin "miners" and companies large and small have teamed up for an unprecedented data-crunching effort that aims to harness idle computing power to accelerate research for a coronavirus treatment.

The project led by computational biologists has effectively created the world's most powerful supercomputer that can handle trillions of calculations needed to understand the structure of the virus.

More than 400,000 users downloaded the application in the past two weeks from "Folding@Home," according to its director Professor Greg Bowman. The "distributed computing" effort ties together

thousands of devices to create a virtual supercomputer. The project originally launched at Stanford University 20 years ago was designed to use crowdsourced computing power for simulations to better understand diseases, especially "protein folding" anomalies that can make

pathogens deadly. The massive analysis looks for "pockets" or holes in the virus where a drug can be squeezed in. The powerful: computing effort can test potential drug therapies, a technique known as computational drug design.

Bowman said he is optimistic about this effort because : the team previously found a "druggable" target in the imid March. Ebola virus and because Covid-19 is structurally similar to

Air quality is improving in countries under coronavirus quarantines, experts say, but it is far too early to speak of long-term change.

Images taken by by the US space agency Nasa in February showed the concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) fell dramatically in Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic.

mainly NO2 produced by vehicles, industrial sites and thermal power stations.

As China moves past the peak of its crisis, however, recent images by the European Space Agency (ESA) show a resurgence n NO2 emissions.

A striking reduction has also been observed by the ESA in northern : Italy, which has been locked down to fight a spread

of the novel coronavirus, which causes COVID-19. The European Environment Agency (EEA) reports similar change in Barcelona and Madrid, where Spanish authorities issued confinement orders in

In northern Italy, "average NO2 concentration the SARS virus which has been the subject of many studies. Elevels have been almost halved on average," Peuch

As for other countries or regions that have told inhabitants to remain confined at home, notably Argentina, Bavaria, Belgium, California, France and Tunisia, specialists are poring over the data to see if the trend is similar.

Meanwhile, less NO2 does not necessarily



to the presence of fine particles and NO2 even though the population had already been confined at home for three days. Confinement measures protect in two ways, by reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection and by :

reported.

easing pollution from road traffic, according to a group of French doctors known as Air-Sante-climate. It is nonetheless hard to know how much benefit the world's population will actually experience. According to the health experts, that will depend

on how long the meaures will last.

mean purer air. Beijing

experienced episodes of

pollution owing to fine

particles in February, Nasa's Earth Observatory

The air in Paris was

also rated as moderately

polluted Friday owing