



KILLER CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Privacy rights may become next victim

AFP, Washington

Digital surveillance and smartphone technology may prove helpful in containing the coronavirus pandemic -- but some activists fear this could mean lasting harm to privacy and digital rights.

From China to Singapore to Israel, governments have ordered electronic monitoring of their citizens' movements in an effort to limit contagion. In Europe and the United States, technology firms have begun sharing "anonymized" smartphone data to better track the outbreak.

These moves have prompted soul-searching by privacy activists who acknowledge the need for technology to save lives while fretting over the potential for abuse.

"Governments around the world are demanding extraordinary new surveillance powers intended to contain the virus' spread," the Electronic Frontier Foundation said in an online post.

"Many would invade our privacy, deter our free speech and disparately burden vulnerable groups of people. Governments must show that such powers would actually be effective, science-based, necessary, and proportionate."

The measures vary from place to place. Hong Kong ordered people arriving from overseas to wear tracking bracelets, and Singapore has a team of dedicated digital detectives monitoring those living under quarantine.

Israel's security agency Shin Bet has begun using advanced technology and telecom data to track civilians.

In perhaps the strictest move, China gave people smartphone codes displayed in green, yellow, and red, determining where citizens can and cannot go.

China is also among the countries enhancing censorship about the crisis, human rights watchdog Freedom House said, while others are blocking websites or shutting off internet access.

"We have observed a number of concerning signs that authoritarian regimes are using COVID-19 as a pretext to suppress independent speech, increase surveillance, and otherwise restrict fundamental rights, going beyond what is justified by public health needs," said Michael Abramowitz, president of the group.

Some activists cite the precedent of the September 11, 2001 attacks, which opened the door to more invasive surveillance in the name of national security.

"There is a risk these tools will become normalized and continue even after the pandemic slows," said Darrell West, who heads the Brookings Institution's Center for Technology Innovation.

But even some digital privacy defenders say it may be prudent to use some of the available data to help control the outbreak.

"I'm not against fighting this epidemic with data or tech," said Ryan Calo, a University of Washington researcher affiliated with Stanford's Center for Internet and Society. "The problem with implementing surveillance in an emergency is that it might acclimate people to that."

PM apologises to India's poor

Says lockdown the only option to prevent epidemic; states told to seal borders

AGENCIES

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked the nation's poor for forgiveness yesterday, as the economic and human toll from his 21-day nationwide lockdown deepens and criticism mounts about a lack of adequate planning ahead of the decision.

Modi on Tuesday announced a three week-lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus. But, the decision has particularly stung millions of India's poor, leaving many hungry and forcing tens of thousands of jobless migrant labourers to walk hundreds of kilometres from cities to their native villages.

"I would firstly like to seek forgiveness from all my countrymen," Modi said in a nationwide radio address.

"The poor 'would definitely be thinking what kind of prime minister is this, who has put us into so much trouble,' he said, urging people to understand there was no other option.

"Steps taken so far... will give India victory over corona," he added.

Modi, whose government on Thursday

announced a \$22.6 billion economic stimulus plan to provide direct cash transfers and food handouts to India's poor, however, did not offer any clarity on future plans.

In an op-ed published on Sunday, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Dufo - two of the three winners of the Nobel Prize in Economics in



2019 - warned that even more aid for the poor is needed.

"Without that, the demand crisis will snowball into an economic avalanche, and people will have no choice but to defy orders," they wrote in the Indian Express.

Police said four migrants were killed on Saturday when a truck ran into them in the

western state of Maharashtra.

On Saturday, a migrant collapsed and died in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh while on a 270 kilometre (168 miles) walk home, according to a police official.

"We will die of walking and starving before getting killed by corona," said migrant worker Madhav Raj, 28, as he walked by the road in Uttar Pradesh.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in India rose to 979 yesterday, including 25 deaths.

Meanwhile, New Delhi yesterday told states to seal their borders and encourage migrant labourers to stay where they are by providing food and shelter.

The terminuses and the packed buses - where people even sat on the roof - went against the government's efforts to ensure social distancing, the only way to slow down the progress of the highly infectious coronavirus.

The states have been asked to stop incoming buses at the border and place the occupants on a mandatory 14-day quarantine. Food and other essentials should be made available to the people during this period, the order said.



Migrant workers travel on crowded buses as they return to their villages, during a 21-day nationwide lockdown to limit the spreading of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Ghaziabad, on the outskirts of New Delhi, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SOURCE: AFP

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

LATEST UPDATES

DEATH TOLL PASSES 31,000

At least 31,412 people have died worldwide from the coronavirus -- some 22,260 of those in Europe -- since the epidemic started in China in December, according to an AFP tally compiled at 1000 GMT Saturday based on official sources.

With 10,023 deaths, Italy alone accounts for almost a third of the world death toll. The next countries with the highest official deaths are Spain (6,528), mainland China (3,295), Iran (2,640) and France (2,314).

RECORD DEATHS IN SPAIN

Spain tightens measures, ordering a halt to all non-essential activities and telling workers to stay home for two weeks. The country has the world's second-highest toll and confirmed another 838 deaths in the last 24 hours, a new daily record. The number of confirmed cases reached 78,797 on Sunday, a one-day increase of 9.1 percent.

TRUMP BACK-FLIPS ON NY LOCKDOWN

Some eight hours after stunning the New York metropolitan region with a proposal to place it under quarantine, US President Donald Trump decides against imposing a broad lockdown. His reversal comes on the same day as the US death toll tops 2,100, more than doubling in just three days. The US has the most confirmed cases in the world.

FOOD COUPONS IN ITALY

Italy announces it will send food vouchers to those who cannot afford groceries. The novel coronavirus has claimed more than 10,000 lives across the Mediterranean country, about a third of the world's total, creating the worst emergency Italians have known since World War II.

UK SITUATION TO 'GET WORSE'

In a leaflet being sent to more than 30 million households in the UK, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warns "things will get worse before they get better". The government says the lockdown could last a "significant" time, as infection rates spiral and the death toll passes 1,000. Russia, which has not imposed a full lockdown, will close its borders on Monday and next week will be a week off from work.

AUSTRALIA LIMITS GATHERINGS

Gatherings will be restricted to just two people in Australia from today -- down from the current limit of 10 -- and playgrounds, outdoor gyms and skateparks will be closed across the country. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said all over-70s as well as indigenous people over 50, who are more susceptible to diseases, are now being strongly advised to self-isolate at home. Australia has recorded almost 4,000 cases of COVID-19, with the death toll reaching 16 yesterday. Meanwhile New Zealand reported its first novel coronavirus death.

TRUDEAU'S WIFE RECOVERS

Sophie Gregoire-Trudeau, the wife of Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, has recovered from the novel coronavirus, she said Saturday. "I am feeling so much better and have received the all clear from my physician and Ottawa Public Health," she wrote on her Facebook page. She had tested positive for the virus on March 12 after returning from Britain.

Chaos emerging amid lockdowns

Anger grows out of uncertainty around the world 'amid new way of life'

AGENCIES

As countries began enforcing strict lockdowns to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the uncertainty over future, specially among the poor, is beginning to spark anger and chaos.

Unprecedented measures by governments to tackle the coronavirus pandemic has forced more than 3 billion people to remain home. But without clarification and a timeframe when the situation will improve, some of the most vulnerable groups have already begun to express dissent.

President Hassan Rouhani yesterday warned that "the new way of life" in Iran was likely to be prolonged, as its declared death toll from the novel coronavirus rose to 2,640.

"We must prepare to live with this virus until a treatment or vaccine is discovered, which has not yet happened to date," President Hassan

Rouhani said in a cabinet meeting.

In Sicily, police with batons and guns have moved in to protect supermarkets on the Italian island of Sicily after reports of looting by locals who could no longer afford food.

The novel coronavirus has claimed more than 10,000 lives across the Mediterranean country, about a third of the world's total, creating the worst emergency Italians have known since World War II.

Simultaneously, it has eroded the economy, which had been the third-largest in the European Union before the new illness reached Italian shores from China last month.

A lockdown designed to curb contagion has shut almost everything across the country since March 12, depriving millions of steady incomes.

The building sense of desperation reportedly boiled over on Thursday

in Sicily, long one of Italy's least developed regions.

According to La Repubblica daily, a group of locals ran out of one of Palermo's supermarkets without paying.

"We have no money to pay, we have to eat," someone reportedly shouted at the cashiers.

In other Sicilian towns, small shops owners that are still allowed to stay open have been pressured by the locals to give them free food, Il Corriere della Sera said.

The paper wrote of a ticking "social time bomb" in the region.

"I am afraid that concerns shared by much of the population -- about health, income, the future -- will turn into anger and hatred if this crisis continues," Giuseppe Provenzano, Italy's minister overseeing southern regions, told La Repubblica.

In Thailand, dozens of prisoners broke furniture and smashed windows during a riot in a Thai jail yesterday sparked by fears of a coronavirus outbreak in the facility. During the violence some convicts escaped from the Buriram prison where 2,000 are held, the justice ministry said. Seven have been arrested.

Justice Minister Somsak Thepsutin confirmed that a group of inmates sentenced to life had started "agitating" other prisoners with rumours of a virus outbreak.

In India's cities, too, anger was rising. "We have no food or drink. I am sat down thinking how to feed my family," said Amirbee Shaikh Yusuf, 50, in Mumbai's sprawling Dharavi slum.

"There is nothing good about this lockdown. People are angry, no one is caring for us."

Six held for spreading rumours

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people last week for spreading rumours regarding covid-19," Najmul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of social media monitoring and cyber security crime division, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are only arresting those who are spreading rumours on social media," he said.

As a part of the arrest, police are also providing counselling for those who are unintentionally getting involved with spreading rumours about the virus.

"We have detained five people two days ago for spreading rumours and they were released after proper counselling so that they do not get involved again," said ADC Najmul.

Najmul further said that they are also blocking some pages and groups on social media after it found spreading rumours regarding the virus. "We have a special 20-member team, who is monitoring social media to take action against those who are spreading rumours," he added.

According to officials, they have found different professionals' involvement in spreading rumours, including a doctor, followers of pir and private university students.

On March 25, the secondary and higher education divisions suspended two government college teachers,

following their "critical" Facebook posts over the shortage of PPE for doctors.

The suspended teachers are Kazi Zakia, an assistant professor of Gafargaon Government College in Mymensingh, and Shahadat Ullah Kayser, a lecturer at Barishal Government Women's College.

A doctor was arrested in Chattogram and a Jamaat-e-Islami leader in Chandpur for spreading rumours recently, said police.

Police also arrested six people from different areas in Dhaka on Saturday on charges of spreading rumours and misleading information on the coronavirus outbreak.

They are Awkad Hossain, 53, Ferdous Hasan Titu, 25, Tawhidul Islam, 25, Muslim Uddin, 23, Mofizul Islam, 20, and Farid Hossain, 20.

Police also recovered a large quantity of leaflets containing misleading and false information and seized a pick-up van from their possessions.

SM Shamim, assistant commissioner (Ramna Zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said a police team first arrested Awkad while he was distributing leaflets in front of Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Saturday evening.

Based on his information, five others were arrested from Dhaka's

Mouchak area, said Shamim.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that different groups on 32 pick-up vans are distributing such leaflets in the city and they are all followers of "Rajarbagi Pir", added the officer.

The arrestees claimed that the Rajarbagi Pir gave the money to them but police are trying to find more information about the funding, added the official.

"The other teams went into hiding after their arrests. We informed the Motijheel Division police to take steps against the Pir," Shamim said.

The cyber police bureau of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is also working closely with other police units to deal with the spread of rumours on Covid-19.

Shah Alam, deputy inspector general of CID's cyber police bureau, told The Daily Star yesterday that they are on high alert and are monitoring every activity on social media.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Javed Patwary, inspector general of police, warns of taking strict action against anyone found spreading misleading information and rumours on social media about coronavirus.

The police chief said law enforcers are regularly monitoring social media platforms, including Facebook.

The IGP came up with the remark

while addressing reporters at the end of a handover programme of personal protective equipment (PPE), waxes, hand gloves and sanitizers in the police headquarters yesterday.

Overseas Chinese Association of Bangladesh (OCAIB) handed over the equipment to Bangladesh Police to prevent the spread of coronavirus. OCAIB president Zhuang Lifeng, vice president Feng Xiaorong, executive director Chen Qihua were also present in the programme among others.

The IGP further urged all to stay at home following the government-directed hygiene measures to prevent the spread of the infection.

The police chief said no one would leave the house without urgent or special reasons. "If you need to get out of the house when there is an urgent need, you must follow the hygiene protocols."

The IGP further said police members have been instructed to treat the people professionally, tolerantly and humanely.

He added that all police units has been working together to prevent the transmission of coronavirus. Police personnel who attended the funeral processions and burials of those who were coronavirus positive were provided with special PPE and other protective equipment, he added.

Ctg admin

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materials, including rice, lentil, salt, and other grocery items, among poor and low-income people in the city's Muhuripara area.

"In Muhuripara area, around 280 families were given a packet of 10kg rice, one kg lentil, one kg salt, one litre edible oil, and half kg noodles, maintaining social distance," he added.

Masudur said after distributing the food items, DC Elias went to Khulshi area to see the present situation of some foreign returnees, who are now quarantined at home.

According to the DC office, 70 foreign returnees are now kept in home quarantine in Khulshi area. Some 947 foreign returnees are in home quarantine in the port city and different upazilas of the district.

Meanwhile, the CMP's north zone also distributed food items among the poor yesterday.

Ashkur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner (admin) of the north zone, told The Daily Star that wearing Personal Protective Equipment, police distributed food items to 200 families who live from hand to mouth in the city's GEC, Prabartak, Khulshi, and its adjacent areas.

He added that they would provide the relief aid to another 250 such families.

Apart from that, different persons and organisations are helping the poor across the city.

US diplomats

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"Those leaving for the US want to be with their families. Many are choosing to stay here," the diplomat said.

The US embassy will remain open and the officials will have a tele-work arrangement.

Asked how the US and Bangladesh can cooperate to fight Covid-19, the officials said the US on March 11 announced that it would provide a \$2.5 million grant for Bangladesh.

The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention of the US is providing technical expertise to Bangladesh to tackle the virus, he added.



North Korea fires two short-range missiles

North Korea fired what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast yesterday, the fourth such launch this month as the world battles the coronavirus outbreak. The string of weapons drills come as a prolonged hiatus in disarmament talks with the United States drags on, and despite recent overtures from Washington offering help to contain the pandemic. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North fired the two projectiles, presumed to be ballistic missiles, from the port city of Wonsan into the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea. Tokyo's defence ministry said the projectiles fell short of Japanese waters and the country's exclusive economic zone. The nuclear-armed North has conducted 3 more launches this month.

Taliban says no to Afghan negotiators

The Taliban on Saturday rejected an Afghan government negotiation team set up to hold talks with the insurgent group in a bid to end the country's 18-year-old conflict. After months of delays, the government on Friday announced a 21-member team -- including five women -- to take part in the upcoming talks, a crucial step in bringing the warring parties to the table and getting a floundering, US-led peace process back on track. But the Taliban in a statement said the government had failed to put forward an "inclusive" team. Under a deal signed by the US and the Taliban last month, the insurgents agreed to resume talks with the Afghan government and discuss a possible ceasefire. In return, the US and foreign partner forces agreed to withdraw from Afghanistan over the next 14 months.

Saudi intercepts missiles fired from Yemen

Saudi air defences intercepted ballistic missiles over Riyadh and a city on the Yemen border late Saturday, leaving at least two civilians wounded in the capital that is under curfew in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Multiple explosions shook Riyadh in the attack, which the Saudi-led military coalition blamed on Yemen's Iran-aligned Huthi rebels who have previously targeted Saudi cities with missiles, rockets and drones. It was the first major assault on Saudi Arabia since the Huthis offered last September to halt attacks on the kingdom after devastating twin strikes on Saudi oil installations. Missiles interception sent shrapnel raining on residential neighbourhoods in the cities, leaving two civilians injured in Riyadh, a civil defence spokesman said in a separate statement released by SPA.

SOURCE: AFP