



Virus threat for global peace: UN

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned the UN Security Council that the coronavirus pandemic threatens international peace and security - “potentially leading to an increase in social unrest and violence that would greatly undermine our ability to fight the disease”.

Guterres, who called for a ceasefire in all global conflicts on March 23, said the coronavirus pandemic had hindered all regional, national and international conflict resolution efforts “exactly when they are needed most”.

“A signal of unity and resolve from the Council would count for a lot at this anxious time,” Guterres told the divided body holding its first meeting on the crisis.

“The engagement of the Security Council will be critical to mitigate the peace and security implications of the COVID-19 pandemic,” Guterres added.

He cited other pressing risks to global security from the pandemic: armed groups seeing an opportunity to strike, potentially with a biological attack; the erosion of trust in public institutions; economic instability; political tensions from postponing elections; uncertainty sparking further division and turmoil in some countries; and COVID-19 “triggering or exacerbating various human rights challenges”.

India ramps up coronavirus tests

More than 16,000 tests detects 320 cases, lockdown extension likely

REUTERS, New Delhi/Islamabad

India yesterday said it ramped up coronavirus testing as documented cases there rose above 6,700 and topped 12,000 across South Asia.

The epidemic has killed 206 in India, data shows, with its capital Delhi and financial hub Mumbai emerging as hotspots, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is under pressure to extend a 21-day nationwide lockdown beyond Tuesday, when it is due to end.

CASES AND DEATHS IN SOUTH ASIA
India has 6761 cases, 206 deaths
Pakistan has 4,601 cases, 66 deaths
Afghanistan has 521 cases, 15 deaths
Sri Lanka has 190 cases, 7 deaths
Maldives has 19 cases and no deaths
Nepal has 9 cases and no deaths
Bhutan has 5 cases and no deaths

In neighbouring Pakistan, where the official tally climbed to 4,601 cases and 66 deaths, a crowd of worshippers attacked police enforcing lockdown rules outside a Karachi mosque when the officials tried to stop them from offering a congregational prayer, said city police chief Ghulam Nabi Memon.

Authorities earlier warned of tough penalties if people went to mosques for Friday prayers. The lockdown rules allow only five people to pray at a time.

Pakistan announced a cash transfer scheme worth \$900 million for 12 million families to receive 12,000 rupees a month for the next three months, in the largest such scheme in its history.

India's lockdown of 1.3 billion people has left millions out of work and forced an exodus of migrant workers from the cities to their homes in the hinterland.

The concern is especially grave in Mumbai, where more than 1,100 people have tested positive for the virus, including a growing number from the slums, where a total lockdown is impossible to enforce.



The government yesterday said it had increased daily tests for COVID-19 on Thursday to more than 16,000 people - from a previous daily average of 5,000-6,000 - but only 320 people were found to be carrying the disease.

“We are not finding many positives,” senior health ministry official Lav Agarwal told reporters.

An internal assessment by a government body, the Indian Council of Medical Research, forecast the number

of virus cases would have hit 820,000 by mid-April without the 21-day lockdown.

Meanwhile, The World Health Organisation (WHO) yesterday admitted an error in its “situation report” on the coronavirus spread in countries that showed India at the stage of community transmission. The organization has told NDTV that the error has been fixed. India has a cluster of cases and not community transmission, WHO has said.

‘You can’t relax’

Vigilance urged as NY sees signs of progress

REUTERS, New York

Americans must resist the impulse to ease social-separation measures at the first glimpse of progress now being seen in the coronavirus battle, state government and public health leaders warned on Thursday, as the US death toll surpassed 16,500.

Calls for heightened vigilance, countering talk from the Trump administration of reopening the economy next month, came as new evidence emerged that stay-at-home restrictions were working to flatten the arc of infections in New York state, the US epicenter of the pandemic.

The number of newly hospitalized patients in New York dropped for a second day, to 200. Governor Andrew Cuomo said it was a sign that social distancing was succeeding, even though the number of coronavirus-related deaths in the state rose by 799 on Wednesday, a record high for a third day.

“You can’t relax. The flattening of the curve last night happened because of what we did yesterday,” Cuomo said, referring to the slope of data when plotted on a graph.

The apparent progress in efforts to slow the spread of the highly contagious virus were also reflected in fresh computer models scaling back the projected nationwide death toll to 60,000, down from earlier forecasts of at least 100,000.

New York state has now recorded more than 7,000 deaths from COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus.

New York state alone has accounted for nearly half the total loss of life in recent days across the United States, which leads the world in total number of known infections at more than 465,000.

Recovered patients testing positive again in S Korea

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korean officials yesterday reported 91 patients thought cleared of the new coronavirus had tested positive again.

Jeong Eun-kyeong, director of the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC), told a briefing that the virus may have been “reactivated” rather than the patients being re-infected.

South Korean health officials said it remains unclear what is behind the trend, with epidemiological investigations still under way.

The prospect of people being re-infected with the virus is of international concern, as many countries are hoping that infected populations will develop sufficient immunity to prevent a resurgence of the pandemic.

“The number will only increase, 91 is just the beginning now,” said Kim Woo-

joo, professor of infectious diseases at Korea University Guro Hospital.

South Korea on Friday reported 27 new cases, its lowest after daily cases peaked at more than 900 in late February, according to KCDC, adding the total stood at 10,450 cases. The death toll rose by seven to 211, it said.

WUHAN TO KEEP TESTING RESIDENTS
Meanwhile, China’s Wuhan city, where the global coronavirus pandemic began, is still testing residents regularly despite relaxing its tough two-month lockdown, with the country wary of a rebound in cases even as it sets its sights on normalising the economy.

The country reported 42 new cases on Thursday, down from 63 a day earlier. Of the daily total, 38 were imported, down from 61 on Wednesday.



A distribution volunteer gestures as people in need queue to receive free food packets during a nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of new coronavirus, in Bangalore, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Yemen reports first case

REUTERS, Aden

Yemen reported its first case of the novel coronavirus yesterday as aid groups try to prepare for an outbreak in a country where war has shattered the health system and spread hunger and disease.

The news came after a nationwide ceasefire prompted by the virus pandemic began on Thursday. A Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen’s Houthi movement announced it would halt military operations for two weeks, though the Houthis have yet to agree.

The case was diagnosed in the southern oil-producing region of Hadhramout.

If the virus spreads in Yemen, the impact would be “catastrophic”, as the health status of at least half the population is “very degraded” and the country does not have sufficient supplies, capabilities or facilities, its UN humanitarian coordinator, Lise Grande, told Reuters.

100 doctors died in Italy epidemic

AGENCIES

One hundred Italian doctors have died after contracting coronavirus since the pandemic reached the Mediterranean country in February, Italy’s FNOMCeO health association said on Thursday.

“The number of doctors who have died because of COVID-19 is 100 - perhaps even 101 at the moment, unfortunately,” a spokesman for the association told AFP. Italian media reports estimate that 30 nurses and nursing assistants have also died of COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus.

“We can no longer allow our doctors, our health workers, to be sent to fight without any protection against the virus,” FNOMCeO president Filippo Anelli said on the association’s website. “It is an unfair fight.”

Rome’s ISS public health institute estimates that 10 percent of those infected with the novel coronavirus in Italy work in healthcare.

UK APPLAUSE HEALTH WORKERS

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab led a nationwide show of appreciation for health service workers on Thursday, standing in for his boss, Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

In what has become a weekly event, organised largely on social media via the hashtag #ClapForCarers, people across Britain gave a round of applause at 8 pm for the National Health Service (NHS). The public display of support has become a moment of national unity and emotional release during the anxiety of Britain’s lockdown.

Around 150 Saudi Royals infected with coronavirus

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Dozens of members of the ruling Saudi royal family, as many as 150, have been infected with coronavirus in recent weeks, a news report said.

Saudi Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz Al Saud - the governor of the capital Riyadh who is in his 70s - is in intensive care after contracting the virus, according to The New York Times, which cited hospital communications, doctors in the country and sources familiar with the family.

King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) have retreated into isolation to avoid the outbreak.

Doctors at an elite hospital that treats royals are preparing 500 more beds for an expected influx of patients.

There are thousands of Saudi princes. Many travel regularly to Europe and some are believed to have contracted the virus abroad and brought it back to Saudi Arabia, the report said.

The kingdom of about 33 million people has reported 2,932 cases and 41 deaths.

The country, home to Islam’s holiest sites Makkah and Madina, banned the year-

round Umrah pilgrimage and sealed off the areas in early March.

Travel in and out of the country, as well as between provinces, has since been largely restricted, and four governors and five major cities have been placed under 24-hour lockdown.

Authorities have yet to announce whether they will proceed with this year’s Hajj, scheduled for the end of July. Last year, about 2.5 million people travelled to Saudi Arabia to take part in the Hajj, which all Muslims must perform at least once in their lives if able.

So far, mostly members of lower branches of the royal family have been infected, a source familiar with the situation told the Times. The vast majority of cases in the country have been in migrant labour camps and slums around Makkah and Madina.

A Saudi health minister on Tuesday warned the outbreak in the country may only be beginning.

“Within the next few weeks, studies predict the number of infections will range from a minimum of 10,000 to a maximum of 200,000,” Tawfiq al-Rabiah said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

The Saudi royal family is estimated to have about 15,000 members.

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