

Trump deploys emergency beds, global pandemic deaths surge

March 23 2020



Nearly a third of all Americans are under a lockdown to stop the spread of the coronavirus

US President Donald Trump ordered thousands of emergency hospital beds set up at American coronavirus hotspots but a trillion-dollar

economic rescue package crashed, as pandemic deaths soared across the globe.

A deadly prison riot in Columbia triggered by concerns over the virus highlighted the deepening sense of panic around the world as unprecedented government containment efforts have failed.

The death toll from the virus has surged to more than 14,400, according to an AFP tally, with Europe the epicentre but the situation worsening from Pacific islands to Africa and the United States.

"We're at war, in a true sense we're at war," Trump said on Sunday as he ordered emergency medical stations with 4,000 beds to be deployed to California and other worst-hit areas.

More than a third of Americans are under various forms of lockdown, including in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, but the number of infections in the United States has continued to climb.

Highlighting the desperation inside the world's biggest economy, the mayor of New York said his city was just 10 days away from running out of ventilators.

And a trillion-dollar Senate proposal to revive the US economy crashed Sunday after receiving zero support from Democrats, further traumatising investors who are watching [stock markets](#) implode worldwide.



Police and other security forces gather outside the Bellvitge hospital near Barcelona to applaud and cheer healthcare workers

Great Depression fears

Markets in Asia began Monday in the red as they absorbed the failed US stimulus effort and the barrage of other bad news from across the world over the weekend.

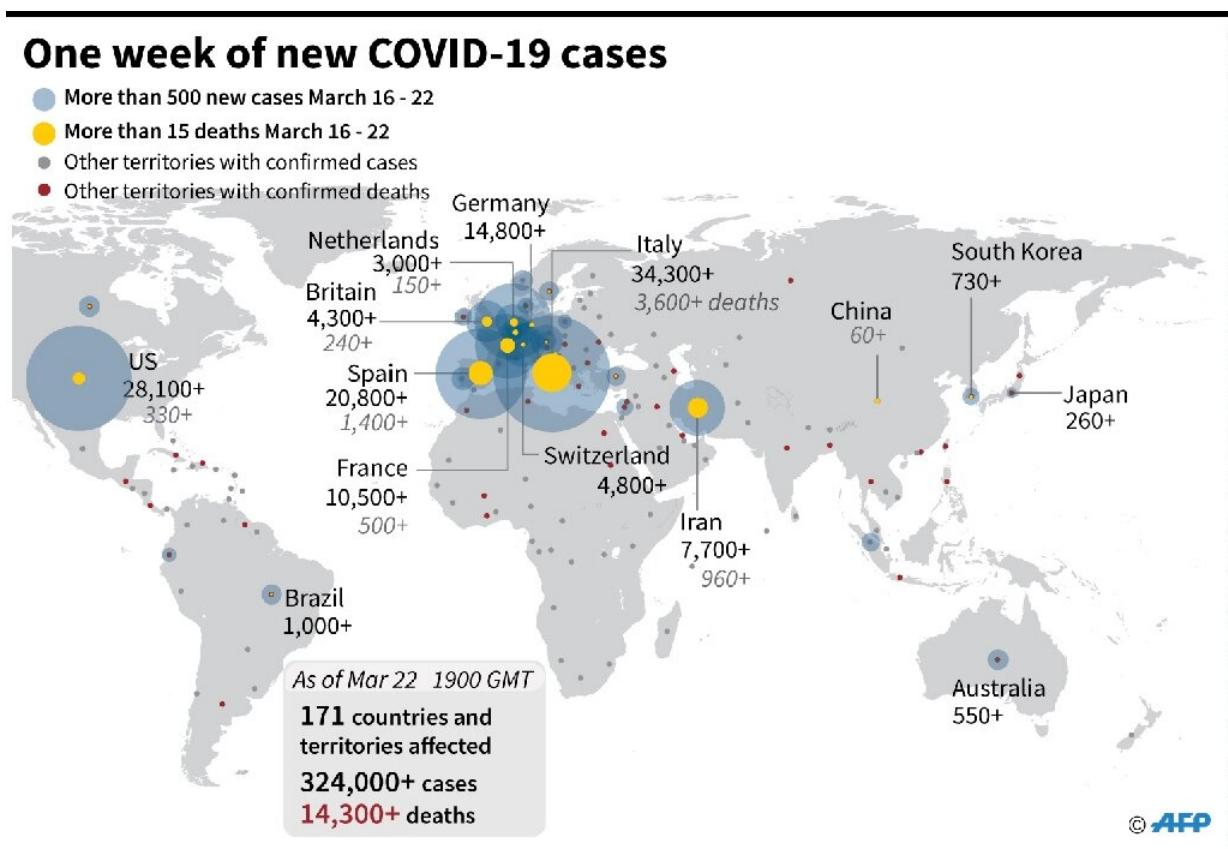
"This is the biggest economic shock our nation has faced in generations," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said as he warned the pandemic could lead to a crisis akin to the 1930s Great Depression.

In Europe, Greece imposed a national lockdown and Germany banned

gatherings of more than two people.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel went into quarantine at home after being treated by a doctor who had since tested positive for the virus.

Italy's world-worst toll from the pandemic approached 5,500 with another 651 deaths reported on Sunday, a day after it surpassed China with the highest number of fatalities.



Graphic showing summary of the largest number of daily cases of COVID-19 from March 16-22.

Pope plea

Police patrolled the deserted streets of Rome, while checks were carried out on Italian beaches after local officials complained people were defying isolation orders by catching some time in the sun.

In his weekly prayer, streamed online to avoid attracting crowds, the Pope urged all Italians to follow isolation measures "for the good of us all."

Spain's prime minister said he would ask parliament to extend a 15-day state of emergency, which bars people from leaving home unless absolutely essential, until April 11.

The country recorded close to 400 new fatalities Sunday, bringing the total to 1,720, suggesting the lockdown was failing to be effective. Opera star Placido Domingo said he had tested positive.

Residents across France, where the death toll jumped to 562, remained shut in their homes.

A curfew was imposed in some regions and the mayor of Paris called for even more drastic confinement measures in a city under lockdown.

Britain inched toward similar measures as Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned the country was a couple of weeks behind registering similar numbers to Italy.



A curfew was imposed in some areas of France with police patrolling the streets

Moral burden

As the pandemic overwhelms hospitals, doctors are having to quickly prioritise patients based on their chances of survival, inflicting a huge moral burden.

"We go into medicine to heal people. Not to make choices about who can live," said Philippe Devos, an anesthesiologist in Belgium.

The virus emerged in China late last year, after first being detected at a market that sold wild animals for human consumption in the central city

of Wuhan.

China has since sought to sow doubts over whether the virus began in Wuhan, while portraying itself as a saviour in the global fight and a role model for quarantines.

China on Monday reported no new local cases of the virus, but confirmed another 39 infections from overseas.

However, Beijing's communist leaders have also been criticised at home and abroad for a perceived lack of transparency, particularly at the start of the outbreak.



Roughly one billion people around the world are enduring quarantines

Trump has been among those critics and angered China by branding it the "Chinese virus".

On Sunday he complained again about a lack of information and transparency from Beijing.

"They should have told us about this," Trump said. "I'm a little upset with China. I'll be honest with you."

Second wave

There are fears across Asia of "imported" cases from Europe and other hotspots.

Thailand reported its highest daily rise in cases on Sunday, taking its total to nearly 600.

Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia have also reported a spike after numbers had plateaued earlier, prompting an escalation in quarantine efforts and travel restrictions.

New Zealand has yet to be hit hard but on Monday Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced a four-week lockdown to prevent a Europe-style crisis.

"The worst-case scenario is simply intolerable," Ardern said. "It would represent the greatest loss of New Zealand lives in our history and I will not take that chance."



International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach said postponing the 2020 Games was an option but that cancellation was "not on the agenda"

Olympic postponement

The strongest signals emerged on Monday that the Tokyo Olympics, slated to start in July, would be postponed.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said postponing the games may become "inevitable", while Canada's Olympic committee said it would not send athletes if they were held this summer.

And Australia's Olympic committee told athletes to prepare for a northern-hemisphere summer Olympics in 2021.

"It's clear the Games can't be held in July," Australian chef de mission Ian Chesterman said.

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