

# World at war on virus as China offers ray of hope

March 19 2020, by Mariëtte Le Roux With Dmitry Zaks In Rome and Afp Bureaus

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In Colombia, where the government has declared as state of emergency over COVID-19, youngsters take part in an awareness campaign against the spread of the virus

The world stepped up its war on coronavirus as deaths soared again in

Europe on Thursday, despite a sign of hope from China where zero new domestic cases were reported for the first time.

Spain's [death toll](#) jumped by almost a third overnight while Italy and France were set to extend the lockdowns that are keeping tens of millions of people trapped in their homes.

Countries around the globe have tightened [border controls](#) and unleashed nearly a trillion dollars to prop up the teetering world economy, only to see the once-in-a-century pandemic seemingly spiral further out of control.

Across the planet, the death toll from the virus whose main symptoms are a dry cough and fever has risen to over 9,000 with more than 217,000 infections reported, according to an AFP tally based on official sources.

One major milestone came in China which listed no new domestic infections for the first time since the outbreak first erupted in the central city of Wuhan in December, before spreading worldwide.

It appeared to have staunched the virus with strict measures including a complete quarantine of Wuhan since January, meaning the number of infections and deaths in the rest of the world have surpassed those in China.

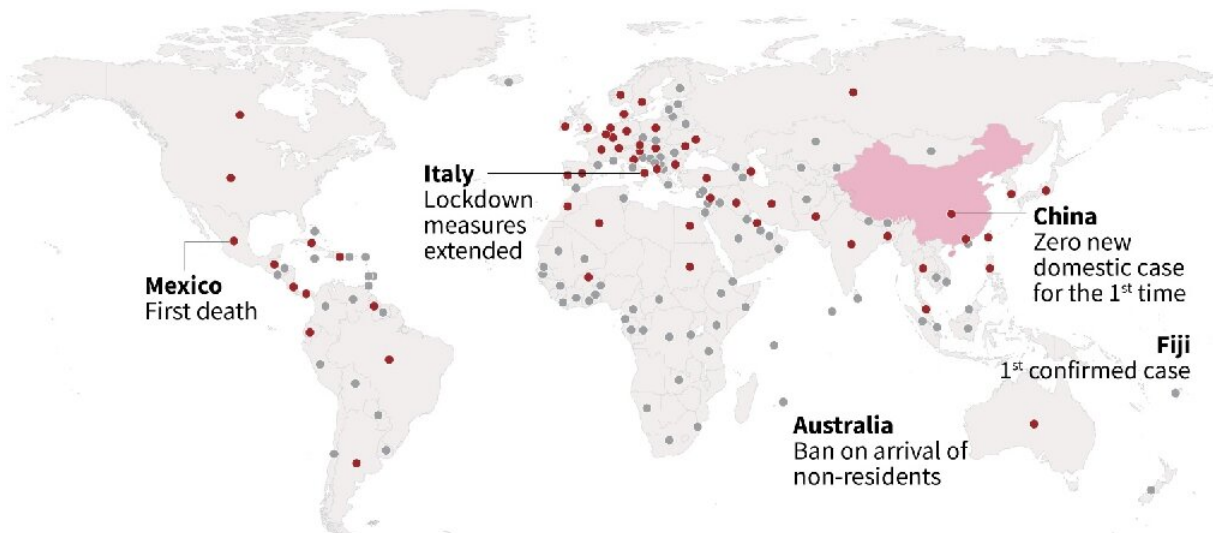
But there were fears that Asia faces a second wave of cases imported from abroad, with 34 new cases reported in China Thursday, the highest figure for two weeks.

## COVID-19: new developments

Global death toll from new coronavirus tops 9,000

As of March 19

• Deaths • Cases confirmed



### COSTA RICA



First death

AFP Photos

### SPAIN



Death toll hits over 700, 30% jump in 24 hours

### SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



First death in Burkina Faso

### GERMANY



Cases soar past 10,000

### RUSSIA



First death

© AFP

## COVID-19: new developments

### Italy worsens

The pandemic is worsening elsewhere, with Italy appearing set to overtake China as the country where the most people are confirmed as having died from the COVID-19 disease.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said Italy's national lockdown, which has been copied around Europe, would be prolonged to April 3,

shattering hopes of a quick end to the crisis.

"We will not be able to return immediately to life as it was before," he said.

France also mooted extending the two-week lockdown ordered this week by President Emmanuel Macron, as the interior minister blasted "idiots" who flout home confinement rules and put others at risk.

Spain, where coronavirus deaths jumped by nearly 30 percent over the past 24 hours, is one of several countries that have begun requisitioning hotels for use as hospitals.

Hard-hit Iran also announced new fatalities and said it was granting early release to 10,000 prisoners to reduce numbers in jails.

The disease continued to hit high-profile figures with EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier and Monaco's Prince Albert II among those testing positive.



Locked down residents in Paris applaud healthcare employees from their windows

## Bank bazooka

With countries paralysed by the pandemic and [stock markets](#) imploding, policymakers this week unleashed a wave of measures to shore up the global economy.

The European Central Bank late Wednesday announced a 750-billion-euro bond-buying scheme dubbed the "big bazooka".

"Extraordinary times require extraordinary action. There are no limits to our commitment to the euro," ECB chief Christine Lagarde said.

US President Donald Trump signed a \$100 billion emergency aid package to provide free coronavirus testing for those who need it, sick pay and paid [family leave](#).

Trump said he viewed himself as a "wartime president", even as his administration faced growing criticism over a lack of testing for [coronavirus](#) and for the speed of its response.

The US has so far shied away from the sweeping restrictions used in China and many European countries, although the streets of many of its major cities have emptied as local curbs come into effect.



Venice is enjoying crystal clear waters in its canals due to a lack of debris from tourists and near-zero boat traffic under Italy's virus lockdown

European and US stocks staged a rebound on the stimulus news, although Asian markets took another beating.

But the sense of impending doom continues to cast a pall over the world economy with airlines, carmakers and others all warning of bleak times ahead.

## **'Enemy against humanity'**

The battle is only just beginning across the rest of the world, with the shadow of the virus lengthening across Africa.

The Nigerian mega-city of Lagos announced it would shut its schools while Burkina Faso confirmed the first death in sub-Saharan Africa.

Russia reported its first death and even the Pacific nation of Fiji said it had its first case.

The UN warned meanwhile that as nations bring in shutdowns and travel bans, some three billion people lack even the most basic weapons to protect themselves from the virus: soap and running water.



Public transport services in London were reduced in an effort to delay the spread of the novel coronavirus

World Health Organization head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged countries to "come together as one against a common enemy: an enemy against humanity".

Countries are taking increasingly drastic steps to stem infections, with Australia and New Zealand banning non-residents from arriving, and India imposing a one-day nationwide curfew.

Britain, where Prime Minister Boris Johnson had initially chosen a different path, closed dozens of London Underground stations and shut down schools, although his government denied reports it was about to

lock down the capital.

## **'Like a psychosis'**

While the EU has closed its borders to outsiders, in many countries bars, restaurants and most shops have closed their doors until further notice, bringing life in Europe's normally bustling cities to a halt.

The virus also continues to hit sports and cultural events, with Greece handing over the Olympic flame to Tokyo 2020 organisers at a ceremony held behind closed doors amid calls for the games to be postponed.

English football also extended its shutdown until at least April 30.



Thousands of Muslims in Bangladesh attend a prayer session amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus

Countries are also working to combat hoarding.

As others stockpiled toilet paper and pasta, the French are thronging bakeries for their famed baguettes.

"We've seen people come in who want to buy 50 baguettes at a time," said Matthieu Labbe of France's Federation of Bakeries. "There's something like a psychosis in some people,"

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