

Europe reopens widely; China gives \$2 billion to virus fight

May 18 2020, by Geir Moulson and Derek Gatopoulos



Two girls have breakfast served at a bar in front of the gothic Cathedral in Milan, Italy, Monday, May 18, 2020. Italy is slowly lifting sanitary restrictions after a two-month coronavirus lockdown. (Claudio Furlan/LaPresse via AP)

Europe reopened more widely on Monday, allowing people into the

Acropolis in Athens, high-fashion boutiques in Italy, museums in Belgium, golf courses in Ireland and beer gardens in Bavaria. China announced it will give \$2 billion to the fight against the coronavirus.

As nations carved out a new normal amid the pandemic, Chinese President Xi Jinping told the World Health Organization's annual meeting that the money will be paid out over two years to help respond to COVID-19, which has killed hundreds of thousands and devastated national economies. He said the funds will especially support efforts in developing countries.

Xi's address came amid sharp tensions between Beijing and President Donald Trump, who has suspended U.S. funding to WHO and accused it of failing to stop the virus from spreading when it first surfaced in China. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar represented the U.S. at the meeting, held online this year.

WHO announced it will evaluate the response to the outbreak "at the earliest appropriate moment," after a watchdog body found possible shortcomings in the U.N. agency's handling of the crisis.

New infections and deaths have slowed considerably in Europe, where some countries started easing lockdowns a month ago. Many nations are preparing to open their borders next month, trying to sketch out the rules for a highly unusual summer tourist season.



Hairdressers work in a salon with face shields and masks during the partial lifting of coronavirus, COVID-19, lockdown regulations in Antwerp, Belgium, Monday, May 18, 2020. Belgium is taking the next step in its relaxation of the coronavirus lockdown on Monday, with more students going to school, markets and museums reopening and the snip of a barber's scissors filling the air again. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

Germany's foreign minister was discussing the options with colleagues from 10 largely southern European countries.

"This vacation this year won't be like the ones we know from the past," Heiko Maas told ZDF television. "The pandemic is still there, and we must at least have safety precautions for the worst case that the figures get worse again."

More than 4.7 million people worldwide have tested positive for the coronavirus and over 315,000 deaths have been reported, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Those figures are believed to understate the true dimensions of the outbreak because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments.

The U.S. has reported almost 90,000 deaths, and Europe has seen over 160,000 dead.

Greece reopened the Acropolis and other ancient sites, along with high schools, shopping malls and mainland travel. Paving stickers were used to keep visitors apart. Tourists were local, for the country still has a 14-day quarantine for arrivals, and travel to Greek islands remains broadly restricted.



A visitor has her temperature checked in St. Peter's square at the Vatican in the day of the reopening of the Basilica, Monday, May 18, 2020. Italy is slowly lifting sanitary restrictions after a two-month coronavirus lockdown. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

Authorities are keen to reopen Greece's vital tourism sector, following a warning that the country is likely to suffer the worst recession in the 27-nation European Union this year.

Greece's beaches reopened over the weekend during a heat wave with strict social distancing, but buses from Athens to the coast were crowded.

In Belgium, more students returned to school, hairdressers began clipping locks again, and museums and zoos reopened, all with strict reservation systems to avoid overcrowding. Hoping to make the most of the sunny weather, open-air markets started selling spring fruit and vegetables.

Golf courses and garden stores reopened in Ireland, but Health Minister Simon Harris said he is nervous because the virus hasn't gone away.

If Ireland can get the next three weeks right, "we as a country will find a way to live safely alongside the virus," Harris told RTE radio.



A migrant family from another state trying to return to their villages waits in bus to be transported to a railway station in New Delhi, India, Monday, May 18, 2020. India has recorded its biggest single-day surge in new cases of coronavirus. The surge in infections comes a day after the federal government extended a nationwide lockdown to May 31 but eased some restrictions to restore economic activity and gave states more control in deciding the nature of the lockdown. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

Churches in Italy and at the Vatican resumed public Masses. Guards in hazmat suits took the temperatures of the faithful entering St. Peter's Basilica, where Pope Francis celebrated an early morning Mass in a side chapel to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of St. John Paul II.

Across town, the Rev. Jose Maria Galvan snapped on latex gloves and a face mask before distributing Communion to a dozen parishioners at his Sant'Eugenio parish.

"Before I became a priest I was a surgeon, so for me gloves are normal," he joked.

In Milan, the Montenapoleone district of luxury boutiques reopened, but few if any shoppers were in sight. The area is home to such fashion houses as Armani, Versace, Ferragamo, Fendi and Bottega Veneta, but its customers are mostly foreigners, and travel to Italy remains severely restricted.



A man wearing a face mask to protect against coronavirus, waits on the platform at Monument underground station, in London, Monday, May 18, 2020. Britain's

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced last Sunday that people could return to work if they could not work from home. (AP Photo/Alberto Pezzali)

At Milan's City Hall, hundreds of open-air vendors protested the failure of the city to come up with rules for non-food stands to reopen.

"They haven't worked for three months. What are they going to do if they can't reopen—steal, go ask charity?" said Nicola Zarrella, vice president of Euroimprese, which represents 22,000 market vendors in the Lombardy region. "They want to work, not get handouts."

Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa took his morning coffee at a Lisbon cafe and was having lunch at a restaurant with the speaker of parliament as officials encouraged people to support local businesses. Costa told reporters "we can't return to our old life as long as the virus is around" but said the economy must come back to life.

In France, authorities were concerned after about 70 infections popped up in the country's schools since they started reopening last week. France reopened about 40,000 preschools and primary schools last week, with classes capped at 15 students.



Students stand next to cones to mark social distancing as they wait in line before entering the classroom at Les Magnolias primary school during the partial lifting of COVID-19, lockdown regulations in Brussels, Monday, May 18, 2020. Belgium is taking the next step in its relaxation of the coronavirus lockdown on Monday, with more students going to school, markets and museums reopening (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

The WHO has been drawn into a blame game between the U.S. and China over the spread of the virus. Trump claims China mishandled the outbreak early on, but China has defended its record. The EU and other countries have called for an independent evaluation of the WHO's response to the pandemic "to review experience gained and lessons learned."

Xi said that China had provided all relevant outbreak data to WHO and other countries, including the virus's genetic sequence, "in a most timely fashion."

"We have shared control and treatment experience with the world without reservation," Xi said. "We have done everything in our power to support and assist countries in need."

Xi said he also supports the idea of a comprehensive review of the global response to COVID-19, which "should be based on science and professionalism, led by WHO and conducted in objective and impartial manner."



United Auto Workers return for the first work shift at the FCA Warren Truck Plant, Monday, May 18, 2020, in Warren, Mich. Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV

along with rivals Ford and General Motors Co., restarted the assembly lines on Monday after several week of inactivity due to the corona virus pandemic. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)



Students, wearing face masks and paying attention to social distancing, study at Les Magnolias primary school during the partial lifting of coronavirus, COVID-19, lockdown regulations in Brussels, Monday, May 18, 2020. Belgium is taking the next step in its relaxation of the coronavirus lockdown on Monday, with more students going to school, markets and museums reopening and the snip of a barber's scissors filling the air again. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)



A man takes a picture next the ancient Parthenon temple at the Acropolis hill of Athens, on Monday, May 18, 2020. Greece reopened the Acropolis in Athens and other ancient sites Monday, along with high schools, shopping malls, and mainland travel in the latest round of easing pandemic restrictions imposed in late March. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)



Customers drink coffee at the Versailles restaurant and pastry shop in Lisbon, Monday, May 18, 2020. Some cafes and restaurants are reopening in Portugal on Monday. The government is gradually easing measures introduced to stem the spread of the new coronavirus. (AP Photo/Armando Franca)



A worker wearing protective gear disinfects as a precaution against the coronavirus ahead of school reopening in a class at a high school in Sejong, South Korea, Monday, May 18, 2020. (Kim Ju-hyung/Yonhap via AP)



A customer uses a mobile phone while sitting with a cartoon dragon dolls the restaurant uses as space keepers for social distancing to help curb the spread of the coronavirus at shopping mall in Bangkok, Thailand, Monday, May 18, 2020. Thai authorities allowed department stores, shopping malls and other businesses to reopen from May 17, selectively easing restrictions meant to combat the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Employees of the Public Order Office in protective suits leave the refugee accommodation in the Central Accommodation Facility ZUE Sankt Augustin I in Sankt Augustin, Germany, Monday 18, 2020. In a refugee home in the city, about 130 people were infected with the corona virus according to current test results. (Oliver Berg/dpa via AP)



A woman looks at her smart phone outside of her home in the San Agustin neighborhood of Caracas, Venezuela, Sunday, May 17, 2020. President Nicolas Maduro is relaxing quarantine measures over the weekend by allowing children and older adults out of their homes for a few hours each day. (AP Photo/Matias Delacroix)



Employees wearing protective masks and face shields to help curb the spread of the coronavirus at the Takashimaya department store gather as it partially reopens in Tokyo Monday, May 18, 2020. Japan's prime minister has announced the end of the state of emergency for most regions of the country, but restrictions are being kept in place in Tokyo and seven other high-risk areas, including Osaka, Kyoto and Hokkaido. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



People exercise along the promenade at sunrise in Sea Point, Cape Town, South Africa, Monday, May 18, 2020 as the country marked day 53 of a government lockdown in a bid to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The Western Cape province which includes the city of Cape Town, has emerged as the country's coronavirus hotspot, accounting for more than half of the nation's confirmed cases. (AP Photo/Nardus Engelbrecht)

The 11-page review of the WHO's response by an independent oversight body raised questions of whether its warning system for alerting the world to outbreaks was adequate, and it suggested member states might need to "reassess" WHO's role in providing travel advice to countries.

China reported just seven new cases on Monday but kept tighter social-distancing rules in parts of the northeastern province of Jilin after a cluster of cases of unknown origin turned up.

Moscow health officials said 77 people died of the virus in the Russian capital in the past 24 hours, the highest daily total so far. With over 290,000 infections, Russia is second only to the U.S. in the number of cases, but international health officials question Russia's low official death toll of about 2,700.

In India, people trickled outdoors after the government extended a nationwide lockdown to May 31 but eased many restrictions. Small shops and other businesses reopened in places, including the capital, New Delhi. At the same time, India recorded its biggest single-day coronavirus surge with over 5,200 new cases, along with 157 deaths.

In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro greeted hundreds of supporters—and joined some in performing push-ups—who gathered to back his open-the-economy drive. Bolsonaro has played down the virus even as it has swept through Latin America's most populous country, leaving over 16,000 dead.

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