

## Bolsonaro's disapproval rating rises amid virus havoc



Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro

Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's disapproval rating has surged as the far-right leader has taken a vocal stance against coronavirus containment measures, two polls out Friday found.

Bolsonaro, who has compared COVID-19 to a "bit of sniffles" and criticised the "hysteria" around it, has found himself increasingly isolated on the issue as the pandemic advances.

Thirty-nine percent of Brazilians disapprove of his handling of the crisis, up six points from two weeks ago, polling firm Datafolha found.

That was similar to the result reported by polling firm XP Ip Espe, which found Bolsonaro's disapproval rating hit its highest level since he took office in January 2019.

Forty-two percent of Brazilians said the president's overall performance was "bad" or "terrible," up six points in a month, it said.

Both polls found the president's approval rating was essentially stable: 33 percent, in the Datafolha poll, which asked specifically about his handling of the coronavirus pandemic; and 28 percent, according to XP, which focused on overall performance.

## Kuwait reports first death from coronavirus outbreak

Reuters | Dubai

Kuwait recorded yesterday its first death from the coronavirus outbreak, state news agency KUNA reported, citing a health ministry spokesman.

The total number of people diagnosed with the disease increased by 62 in the past 24 hours to 479 cases, he said, according to KUNA.

## Trump fires intelligence official

Washington

President Donald Trump announced Friday he was firing a senior intelligence official who had a central role in the complaint last August that sparked the impeachment trial of the US leader.

In a letter to the Senate Intelligence Committee, Trump said he had lost confidence in Michael Atkinson, the independent inspector general of the broad US intelligence community.

# Indian officials warn of lockdown extensions

Reuters | Mumbai

The number of confirmed new coronavirus cases in South Asia neared 6,000 yesterday, even as authorities in some cities tightened restrictions on movement and warned lockdowns could be extended in a bid to rein in the pandemic.

"If people don't obey the rules seriously and cases continue to rise, then there may be no option but to extend the lockdown," Rajesh Tope, the health minister of Maharashtra, said. "It could be extended in Mumbai and urban areas of Maharashtra by two weeks."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said this week the country will pull out of the planned three-week lockdown in a phased manner. India has been hardest hit by the disease in South Asia with some 2,902 cases, of which 68 have died.

Maharashtra has 516 confirmed cases of COVID-19 - the disease caused by the coronavirus - and 26 people have died.

While the government does plan to review the lockdown, set to end on April 14, three senior officials said this will depend on an assessment of the situation in each state, and lockdowns and restrictions would be extended in districts where the coronavirus case spread has continued.

Public transport in large metros such as Mumbai, Bengaluru and Delhi, may only be restored in a phased manner days after the lockdown ends, said the officials, who asked not to be named as the plans were still under discussion.

## Restrictions tightened

The number of COVID-19 cases have more than doubled in South Asia in the last week. Health experts warn an epidemic in the region, home to a fifth of the world's population, could overwhelm its already

## Indian power grid operators scramble to prepare for Modi's 'lights off' plan

Reuters | Chennai/Mumbai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to citizens to switch off lights across India today to mark the coronavirus fight is generating a lot more work and some tough challenges for India's power sector workers.

On Friday, Modi appealed to Indians to turn out their lights for nine minutes at 9 pm on Sunday to show solidarity amid the coronavirus lockdown with a show of lamps, candles and flashlights.

The appeal, however, set off alarm bells for those in charge of India's power grid, prompting a flurry of orders to officials manning generation plants and managing grid load, amid concerns that a surge in voltage due to a steep dip in demand could harm the grid and cause widespread outages.

India's Power System Operation Corp (POSOCO), which oversees the national power grid, ordered all senior officials to be present at generating stations, substations and load despatch centres across India between 6 pm and 10 pm today.

It advised engineers to start reducing output from baseload plants such as coal-fired power stations just ahead of 9 pm and ramp up generation from hydro and gas plants, typically used to address peak power demand, to manage the anticipated gyration in demand.

POSOCO expects consumption to dip by over 10pc when Indians switch off lights, it said in an advisory sent to grid operators across the country, calling the expected reduction in load and rapid recovery, "unprecedented".

POSOCO's parent body, Power Grid Corp of India, asked regional electricity transmission centre employees to be on "high alert," as the lights out plan could "lead to outage of grid elements due to grid constraints".

India's Ministry of Power sought to allay concerns though, and said in a statement, "The Indian Electricity grid is robust and stable and adequate arrangements and protocols are in place to handle the variation in demand."

Modi has ordered India's 1.3 billion people indoors to avert a massive outbreak of coronavirus infections.

weak public health systems.

But Muslim-majority Pakistan and Bangladesh, and India, home to the world's largest Muslim minority, have struggled to convince conservative religious groups to maintain social distancing.

On Friday, Pakistani Muslims at a Karachi mosque clashed with baton-wielding police trying to enforce new curbs on gatherings to prevent Friday prayers and contain coronavirus infections, officials said.

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This came after the government in the southern province of Sindh, home to the financial hub of Karachi, enforced a three-hour curfew on Friday afternoon, in a bid to persuade worshippers to pray at home.

Pakistan has so far reported 2,547 coronavirus infections, fuelled by a jump in cases related to members of the Tablighi Jamaat, an orthodox Muslim proselytising group.



## UAE extends coronavirus curfew and Saudi Arabia locks down parts of Jeddah

Reuters | Dubai/Riyadh

The United Arab Emirates has extended a de facto overnight curfew indefinitely to disinfect public areas to fight the spread of coronavirus and Saudi Arabia has locked down parts of the Red Sea city of Jeddah.

The UAE's disinfection drive, which consists of spraying streets, parks and public transport facilities, runs from 8 p.m. (1600 GMT) to 6 a.m. and people must stay at home during those hours, state-run news agency WAM said late on Friday.

The curfew came in on March 26 and was extended last week until April 5.

"The Ministry of Health Prevention and the Ministry of Interior have announced the continuation of the National Disinfection Programme," WAM said, without saying when the operation would end.

The oil-rich federation has



A man wearing a protective face mask walks through the deserted Barajeel Souq, following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in old Dubai, United Arab Emirates

reported an uptick in coronavirus cases with several hundred people diagnosed since April 1. The UAE recommends that people wear masks when leaving home, a health ministry spokeswoman told a news conference broadcast on TV.

Yesterday, UAE reported 241 infections and one death over the past 24 hours, taking the total confirmed cases to 1,505 and the death toll to 10, according to government tweets.

In neighbouring Saudi Ara-

bia, the authorities announced a lockdown and a partial curfew in seven neighbourhoods of Jeddah starting on Saturday as part of measures to contain the outbreak, the interior ministry said in a statement.

The interior ministry said residents in the seven Jeddah neighbourhoods could only go out for grocery shopping and medical care between 6 a.m. (0300 GMT) and 3 p.m. and movement in and out of the areas will be restricted.

## Latest developments

Passengers from a virus-hit cruise ship and its sister vessel, also struck with a handful of cases, started heading home Friday from Florida, after being stranded at sea for days. The Zaandam, operated by Holland America Line, began its stranger-than-fiction journey on March 7 in Buenos Aires -- before international restrictions to curb the spread of the coronavirus were in full force. It was meant to dock two weeks later in Chile, but when passengers aboard fell ill, several countries refused to let the ship dock.



The Falklands Islands government has confirmed the territory's first case of the new coronavirus. A patient tested positive after being admitted to hospital with symptoms on March 31, according to a statement released on Friday that said they were in isolation and in "stable condition".

South African public healthcare workers dispersed into the buzzing streets of Johannesburg's Yeoville neighbourhood as Africa's worst virus-hit country rolled out mass door-to-door testing for COVID-19. Armed with screening questionnaires and testing kits, medics and volunteers set up their testing station on the front porch of a block of flats in the gritty business neighbourhood.

South Korea has expanded a social distancing campaign by another two weeks to April 19 to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

## Four acquitted in Daniel Pearl murder

rearrested pending appeal. Daniel Pearl was the South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal when he was abducted in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about Islamist militants. Three alleged accomplices also had their convictions overturned.



Medical staff in Varese, northern Italy, with Ivo the robot who helps them treat seriously ill coronavirus patients and reduce the risk of them getting infected. The country's medical association said Friday that at least 70 medics have died from various causes since Italy recorded the first official COVID-19 death on February 21

A gas explosion at a residential block near Moscow killed at least one person and injured four on Saturday, destroying several floors of the building housing 80 apartments, Russia's emergency ministry said.

Spain overtook Italy for the first time for the number of confirmed cases, but the overnight death toll fell from the previous day. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will ask parliament to extend lockdown measures by 15 more days until April 26.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he was remaining in isolation with mild symptoms, seven days after he was confirmed to be infected. Britain's health minister said the curve of deaths could peak on Easter Sunday. Queen Elizabeth will make an extremely rare address to the nation on Sunday.

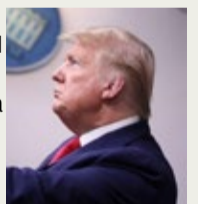
The top official in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the virus was first identified, warned residents to stay vigilant and avoid going out.

More than 120,000 people have signed a petition calling on the U.S. Navy to reinstate the captain of a coronavirus-stricken aircraft carrier a day after he was relieved of his command for a letter sent to superiors urging stronger measures to halt the outbreak.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi postponed the launch of mega-projects including the Grand Egyptian Museum and moving civil servants to a planned new capital city to 2021 from 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak, the presidency said

A man armed with a knife attacked people out shopping in the southeastern French town of Romans-sur-Isere on Saturday, killing two and wounding four, the mayor said. The town is currently under a coronavirus lockdown, although people are allowed out to buy essentials.

US President Donald Trump said he would ask Congress for more money to make loans to small businesses struggling with the economic fallout from the coronavirus outbreak if the original \$349 billion allocated in a fiscal stimulus bill runs out. "I will immediately ask Congress for more money to support small businesses under the @pploan if the allocated money runs out," Trump wrote in a post on Twitter.



## 28 feared dead after Solomons ferry ignores storm warning

Reuters

At least 28 ferry passengers were swept overboard in a powerful storm off the Solomon Islands, reports said Saturday, with the captain unaware he had lost anyone until the boat docked. The



passengers were heading from the capital Honiara to West A'are, more than 120 kilometres (75 miles) away, under a government programme to evacuate people to their home villages during the global coronavirus epidemic. The MV Taimareho set sail on Thursday night as tropical cyclone Harold bore down on the Solomons, and with weather forecasters warning against any unnecessary voyages. But the captain ignored advice not to sail, the nation's leader said, as survivors reported dozens of people were swept overboard by huge waves and strong winds. Local media put the death toll at 28. But police said it was impossible to verify the number.