

### Morocco to free over 5,000 prisoners to slow virus spread



A Moroccan health ministry worker disinfects a street in the capital Rabat to combat the spread of coronavirus

Rabat

Morocco's King Mohammed VI yesterday pardoned more than 5,600 prisoners and ordered their release in stages to avoid contagion in the country's overcrowded jails.

The justice ministry said the 5,654 detainees that would be freed were selected based in their age, health, good conduct and length of detention.

They would be released in stages due to "exceptional circumstances linked to the emergency health situation and necessary precautions" against the virus, it said in a statement.

The decision came as the COVID-19 illness has officially killed 66 people and infected 960 in the North African country.

### Trump says he had 'absolute right' to fire intelligence official

Reuters | Washington

US President Donald Trump said on Saturday he had every right to fire the inspector general of the U.S. intelligence community who was involved in triggering an impeachment probe of the president last year.

In a daily briefing with reporters, Trump said the official, Michael Atkinson, did a "terrible" job.

"That man is a disgrace ..., he's a total disgrace," Trump said during a daily briefing with reporters.

### Olive branches handed out on Palm Sunday in near-deserted Jerusalem



Reuters | Jerusalem

Franciscan friars wearing surgical masks and gloves made house calls in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, delivering olive branches to Christians who are self-isolating as a precaution against the coronavirus.

One of the friars used a loud-hailer in the streets of the walled Old City to summon people to their front doors and windows, where they received branches and blessings.

## US police bust Pink Floyd 'corona party'

New York

Partygoers at a Pink Floyd tribute night have been scolded for shouting abuse at New Jersey police after defying social distancing rules brought in to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

Around 30 people gathered to watch an acoustic rendition of the British rock band's greatest hits on the front lawn of a home in Rumson, a seaside community south of New York City, that was also broadcast live over social media.

Police were called to end the revelry, but met a hostile crowd on arrival.

"When we informed everyone that they must leave... we were met with well wishes of 'F-the police' and 'Welcome to Nazi Germany,'" said the town's police department on Facebook late Saturday.

Officers then instructed the band to cut the night short as they were halfway through a performance of Pink Floyd's 1975 anthem "Wish You Were Here" -- fittingly, a song often



A man wearing gloves and a face mask walks by a mural reading "Cancel Plans Not Humanity" in Los Angeles, California

played as an anthem for absent friends.

"The Rumson Police Department takes no enjoyment in ruining anyone's fun," the police statement said. "However we ALL have a responsibility to take this pandemic SERIOUSLY and adhere to the social distancing requirement."

New Jersey governor Phil Murphy ordered residents to stay home and

non-essential businesses to shutter indefinitely last month.

He has since taken to social media to rebuke residents for ignoring the lockdown rules after several news reports of social gatherings.

Can't believe I have to say this at all," he tweeted last week. "But here we are. NO CORONA PARTIES. They're illegal, dangerous, and stupid."

### Fishing boat takes 202 Rohingya migrants to Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia yesterday detained 202 suspected Rohingya Muslims who arrived illegally by boat, a top official said, raising fears that people smugglers are back in action despite the coronavirus pandemic.

Zulinda Ramly, deputy director with the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, said a large fishing boat ferried the suspected Rohingya migrants to the northern resort island of Langkawi.

"Authorities are investigating complaints by the migrants that three individuals -- a boat



Some 202 Rohingya were aboard a fishing boat intercepted by Malaysian authorities off Langkawi island

captain and two crew members smuggling ring," Ramly said in -- were operatives of a human a statement.

## Italian mayor fights for mass virus blood testing

Robbio | Italy

The mayor of a pandemic-hit Italian town is trying to get everyone's blood tested in a controversial attempt to end weeks of confinement and finally get people back to work.

Most Italian authorities wish he would stop.

The story of Robbio mayor Roberto Francese has generated a fair bit of interest in a Mediterranean country where people's primary mission is to not catch COVID-19.

No one is sure how the old way of life can resume without setting off a second pandemic wave.

Into this debate stepped Francese -- a self-confident mayor of a town of 6,000 in Italy's northwest that primarily grows rice.

"We can never improve the situation without separating the healthy from the sick," Francese said. "That is what the blood test is for."

#### Antibodies

Separating the healthy from the sick in a 21st century Western democracy might strike some as a mad idea from a bad science fiction film.

The Robbio mayor has no such qualms and wants everyone immediately tested for antibodies.



People in the small north Italian town of Robbio are having their blood tested to see if they have developed immunity to the coronavirus which has ravaged the region. If they have, it could be key to ending crippling restrictions on daily life

The idea is that people who get infected with the new disease and survive develop at least some immunity against it.

These are the antibodies that show up in blood tests -- akin to a tell-tale scar from a wound.

But COVID-19 is a new disease and the science is not there yet to confirm whether coronavirus antibodies will actually make us safe.

The private blood tests are also fairly expensive -- around 45 euros (\$50) each -- and are still undergoing certification in most countries to make sure they actually work.

Italy's ISS public health institute clearly states that "there are currently no commercial

kits to confirm the diagnosis" of the novel coronavirus through blood tests.

Francese is not deterred by any of this.

"I will pay for all those who cannot afford it," he said at a town gym where the blood tests were being given by nurses in green coveralls.

"My citizens know it, they come here and say, 'The mayor is paying for it.'"

Francese also brushes off the regional authorities' decision to ban laboratories from accepting the town's tests for processing.

He is getting a private company to process the 1,000 blood samples taken in the past three days.

### Latest developments

Some 143 more cases of the novel coronavirus have been reported in Tokyo, the city's governor said yesterday, with the highest daily jump bringing the number of cases in the Japanese capital to more than 1,000.

UK will tighten coronavirus restrictions if people flout rules: health minister.

"I don't want to have to take away exercise as a reason to leave home... if too many people are not following the rules," he told the BBC's Andrew Marr programme. "At the moment the vast majority of people are. But people should not break the rules because that would mean that the virus spreads more and we then might have to take further action."



British Health Secretary Matt Hancock on Sunday denied there was any disagreement with Finance Minister Rishi Sunak about when lockdown restrictions to fight the coronavirus could be lifted.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Saturday postponed moving civil servants to a planned new administrative capital city to 2021 from 2020 due to the coronavirus epidemic, a blow to a flagship project for Sisi that has already faced delays. Sisi also postponed the launch of some other big projects including the Grand Egyptian Museum and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization to next year, the presidency said in a statement.

Janon yesterday started repatriating nationals stranded abroad in its first flight in weeks since it closed its international airport to stem the novel coronavirus. The first of four planes touched down at the Beirut international airport late Sunday morning bringing in 78 passengers from Riyadh, local television reported.

A gang battle in Mexico has left at least 19 people dead in the northern state of Chihuahua, officials said Saturday. At least five armed clashes have occurred in the Madera community so far this year, local authorities have said.



A woman carries a disabled man wearing a protective face mask in the Sabra refugee camp in Lebanon where vulnerable Syrian and Palestinian refugees are bracing for the coronavirus

A Sudanese refugee went on a knife rampage in a town in southeastern France on Saturday, killing two people in what is being treated as a terrorist attack. The attack in broad daylight, which President Emmanuel Macron called "an odious act", took place with the country on lockdown in a bid to stem the spread of the deadly coronavirus. Counter-terrorism prosecutors have launched an investigation into "murder linked to a terrorist enterprise" after the rampage in a string of shops in Romans-sur-Isere, a riverside town with a population of about 35,000. The assailant, identified only as Abdallah A.-O., a refugee in his 30s from Sudan who lives in the town, was arrested under a fight by police.

Ecuador's vice president Otto Sonnenholzner has apologized after scores of bodies were left on the streets of Guayaquil as the coronavirus ravages the horror-struck port city. Residents had published videos on social media showing abandoned bodies in the streets in the Latin American city worst hit by the pandemic. Authorities collected at least 150 corpses from streets and homes earlier this week, but did not confirm how many of the dead were victims of the outbreak.



A scene showing abandoned bodies in the streets in the Latin American city worst hit by the pandemic. Authorities collected at least 150 corpses from streets and homes earlier this week, but did not confirm how many of the dead were victims of the outbreak.

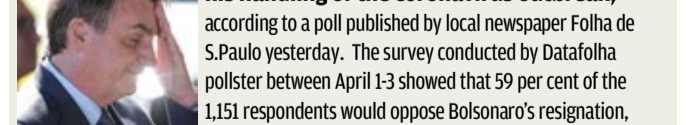
Australian police yesterday launched a criminal investigation after thousands of passengers were allowed to disembark a coronavirus-stricken cruise ship in Sydney and 10 later died of the illness. The government last month allowed 2,700 passengers to walk off the Carnival Australia-owned Ruby Princess and travel to their homes around the country -- despite a ban on cruise ships docking in Australia being announced just days earlier.



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Singapore reported 120 new coronavirus cases yesterday, by far its highest daily rise, and quarantined nearly 20,000 migrant workers in their dormitories.

Most Brazilians are against President Jair Bolsonaro's potential resignation despite mounting criticism toward his handling of the coronavirus outbreak, according to a poll published by local newspaper Folha de S.Paulo yesterday. The survey conducted by Datafolha pollster between April 1-3 showed that 59 per cent of the 1,151 respondents would oppose Bolsonaro's resignation, while 37pc would approve such move and 4pc could not give an opinion. The margin of error was three percentage points, the newspaper said. On Friday, the same pollster said Bolsonaro's coronavirus performance has been "bad" or "awful" for 39% of respondents surveyed, up from 33pc last month. Those who consider his response to the health crisis "good" or "great" slipped to 33pc from 35pc.



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