

International

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Mount Merapi erupts, spewing ash 6 km high

Virus fears fuel bicycle sales in congested Bangladesh cities

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TULSA, Oklahoma: US President Donald Trump arrives for a campaign rally at the BOK Center on Saturday. — AFP

Latam virus cases pass two million

Trump rally defies virus • Spain reopens to tourists

TULSA: Coronavirus infections in Latin America surged past two million on Saturday, with worst-hit Brazil home to nearly half of the cases as the virus accelerates its spread in the region. Europe, which has endured months of lockdowns to slow the virus but at a crippling economic cost, was set to further ease restrictions with Spain reopening to tourists yesterday and Italy enjoying its first Serie A football match in 103 days.

In the US, which has been taking stuttering steps to reopen even as 20 states have reported a rebound in infections, President Donald Trump Saturday claimed his measures had "saved millions of lives" as he addressed his first rally in months. "Now it's time to open up, get back to work," he told the crowd in Tulsa, Oklahoma, even as six members of his advance team tested positive for COVID-19.

The world's largest economy is taking a beating in a year when Trump seeks re-election. Trump had downplayed the risk that the evening rally might trigger a coronavirus outbreak, ignoring danger warnings by

Tulsa health and municipal officials. After the president had boasted on Twitter that "almost one million people" had requested tickets for the rally, the 20,000-capacity arena was far from full, with many upper deck seats empty.

The United States remains the country hardest-hit by the pandemic with 119,719 deaths out of 2,254,630 official cases, according to a tally Saturday by Johns Hopkins University. With nearly 50,000 deaths and more than one million cases, Brazil is the second worst-affected. In total Latin America and the Caribbean have 2,007,621 confirmed cases, according to an AFP tally based on official tallies. The figures were particularly alarming in Chile, where the death toll nearly doubled to more than 7,000 under a revised tallying method, and passed 20,000 in Mexico.

Spain reopens to tourists

Europe meanwhile chalked up more than 2.5 million cases. Although the spread has slowed, Europe is still

the worst-affected continent. The continent is easing its way out of strict lockdowns, even as the World Health Organization warns against giving in to isolation fatigue. Spain yesterday reopened its borders to European Union countries in a bid to get its tourism industry back up and running after lifting its state of emergency.

British tourists will also be allowed in without having to quarantine, the Spanish foreign minister said. As his country emerges from a 14-week lockdown, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez warned that Spain remained vulnerable to the virus, which has claimed more than 28,000 lives there. "We must remain on our guard and strictly follow hygiene and protection measures," he warned hours before the borders opened.

In France, millions more children were preparing to return to school today after three months away. "I cried with joy when I got the confirmation from the teacher that my two children would be going back to school full time," said Noemie from the southern city of Nice.

France is also reopening cinemas from land stadiums for team sports, and in another sign of returning normality, actors have also started kissing again on film shoots.

A vaccine remains months off at best despite several trials, and scientists are still learning more about the virus, its symptoms and the extent to which it may have spread before being identified. "The world is in a new and dangerous phase," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned Friday. "Many people are understandably fed up with being at home... but the virus is still spreading fast." The virus has now killed more than 461,000 people and infected 8.7 million worldwide.

The Palestinian Authority announced Saturday it was temporarily closing the cities of Hebron and Nablus in the occupied West Bank after a sharp rise in infections. Only goods will be allowed in, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayeh told journalists. Authorities have reported a total of 687 cases in the West Bank, including two deaths so far. — AFP

3 killed in Britain stabbing rampage

READING, United Kingdom: Three people were killed and three seriously injured when an assailant went on a stabbing rampage in a park filled with people relaxing in the southern English city of Reading on Saturday, police said. The Thames Valley Police said they had launched a murder investigation and were not treating the incident as terror-related after making one arrest at the scene.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson condemned the "appalling incident" and other leading politicians expressed sympathies for those hurt at the Forbury Gardens park in the historic centre of the city of 220,000. "This is not currently being treated as a terrorism incident, however officers are keeping an open mind as to the motivation for the incident and are being supported by colleagues from Counter Terrorism Policing South East," the police said in a statement.

They confirmed arresting a 25-year-old man but made no reference to media reports suggesting he was Libyan. "My thoughts are with all of those affected by the appalling incident in Reading and my thanks to the emergency services on the scene," Johnson tweeted. Home Secretary Priti Patel called it "a senseless attack on people enjoying a Saturday evening with friends".

A Black Lives Matter protest took place at the park earlier but police said there was no indication the two incidents were connected. "In terms of the protest and the people who attended from Black Lives Matter, we're all safe," the Reading BLM event organiser Nieema Hassan said on Facebook. "None of us are affected. We had all left by the time this happened."

Witnesses reported seeing two air ambulances and several police cars rush to the park on Saturday evening. One witness described a lone assailant walking through a park filled with people relaxing on the grass and stabbing them at random. "The park was pretty full. A lot of people sat around drinking with friends," Lawrence Wort told the Press Association. "One lone person walked through, suddenly shouted some unintelligible words and went around a large group of around



READING: A delivery rider talks to a police officer securing a police cordon in central Reading on Saturday following a stabbing incident at Forbury Gardens park. — AFP

10, trying to stab them."

Wort said he saw three people being stabbed "in the neck and under the arms". The assailant then lunged at another group and "got one person in the back of the neck", Wort said. "Then when he realized everyone was starting to run, he ran out the park," said the witness.

Officials said two people were being treated in the emergency department of Reading's Berkshire Hospital. "An horrific, dreadful incident," policing minister Kit Malthouse tweeted. The main opposition Labour party's leader Keir Starmer called the incident "very concerning". Media reports said police conducted a search of the property where the suspect is believed to have lived.

Britain has witnessed two terror-related attacks in the past year. A convicted jihadist who was out on parole after serving a sentence for terror offences was shot dead by police after stabbing five people — two fatally — by London Bridge in the heart of the British capital in November. Police killed another assailant who injured three people in another London stabbing attack in February.

An overwhelming majority of Britain's serious crimes are committed with knives and other stabbing weapons because of the country's very strict gun ownership laws. Johnson's Conservative government promised to toughen up penalties for terror-related crimes after winning a sweeping mandate in a December general election. — AFP



KOLKATA: Indian citizens of Chinese origin holding placards and Indian flags shout slogans in support of the Indian army during an anti-China demonstration in Kolkata's Chinatown on Saturday. — AFP

Indian minister claims China lost 40 soldiers

MUMBAI: China lost at least 40 soldiers in a clash with India at their disputed border this week, a federal government minister has said, as the nuclear-armed countries remained locked in confrontation on the frontline yesterday. China has not said anything about any losses in the hand-to-hand combat that took place in the heavily contested Galwan Valley in the western Himalayas, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed and at least 76 injured. "If 20 were martyred on our (Indian) side, then there would have been at least double the casualties on their (China) side," V K Singh, the minister for roads and transport, told TV News24 in an in-

terview broadcast late on Saturday. Singh, who is a former army chief, did not provide any evidence to support his statement. He said China historically never accepted any war casualties including in the 1962 conflict with India.

China's state controlled Global Times said earlier there had been casualties on the Chinese side but did not elaborate. Singh said the Indian side had handed over Chinese troops who had strayed into Indian territory after the violent standoff. India's defense ministry spokesman Bharat Bhushan Babu refused to comment on Singh's interview.

The nuclear-armed Asian neighbors traded accusations on Saturday that the other had violated their shared de facto border, an area that this week became the site of their deadliest clash in half a century. Troops remain locked in a face-off at several locations along the poorly defined Line of Actual Control, despite talks between local commanders to de-escalate. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has criticized China for escalating border tensions with India. — Reuters