



REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK / NIGERIA

Everyday life in the time of Boko Haram

More than a decade after the violence began, a photojournalist reflects on the importance of images of celebration taken in the midst of crisis.



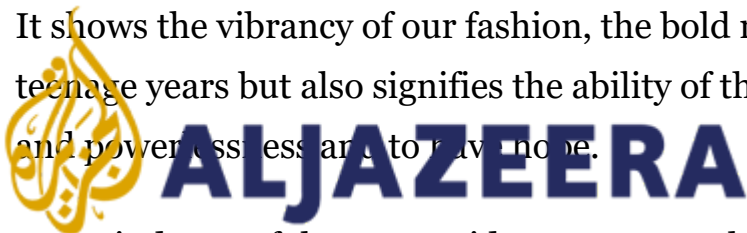
by **Fati Abubakar**
14 Feb 2020



Two girls celebrating Eid in Borno State in 2016, during a brief lull in the fighting [Fati Abubakar]

I took this photo on Eid 2016 at a zoo in my hometown of Maiduguri, Nigeria. Whenever I look at this image, it gives me both joy and sadness.

It shows the vibrancy of our fashion, the bold makeup one experiments with in their teenage years but also signifies the ability of the human spirit to fight a feeling of despair and powerlessness and to have hope.



It reminds me of the many Eids I spent as a child and takes me back to a time when our town lived without fear.

I was born and raised in Maiduguri, a town of about two million people in Borno State in northeast Nigeria. I had a happy childhood, surrounded by extended family, living in a compound that my grandfather built for his sons and their wives. There were fights, but we depended on each other.

Eid was the occasion that always brought us together.

Families prepared for weeks. Tailors would be swamped with requests for elaborate dresses, fitted designs in lace and atampa. My sister and I wore colour-coordinated Eid outfits for most of our youth. On Eid morning, children roamed the streets, wearing their best clothing, bringing food to neighbours.

They also took photos with their friends at the photography studios, wanting to eternalise these memories. My cousin still has an old studio picture of us and two other cousins, all with 90s-style thin eyebrows and shiny lip-gloss.

Over the three days of Eid, Sanda Kyarimi, the zoo, became the place to be for young people from certain communities to meet and mingle. It is one of the few attractions in town, although there are few animals to see - an elephant, some monkeys, a snake and an antelope.

The groups of friends at the zoo were famous for dressing up. The boys emulated rappers, and the girls wore more traditional designs. They would go to outshine each other, meet their potential "catches", have picnics and ice creams.

There were durbars for public entertainment at the palace of the Shehu, the well-respected traditional ruler, and music and dancing in many neighbourhoods. The royal entourage would ride through the neighbourhoods of Maiduguri in a decadent display of

horsemanship on their way to the mosque for Eid prayers.



We were a quiet town and Eid was the holiday we looked forward to, with its dancing, dresses, and friends. We could never have imagined it would all but stop for nearly eight years - a period laced with fear, killings, and trauma.

Everything changed

On a quiet morning in June 2009, I woke to what sounded like fireworks. I went out to the compound of our family home to find everyone watching the frenzy of neighbours leaving, fearful of violence that had broken out. Boko Haram, a group of young violent conservatives whose members I had watched preaching in the neighbourhood on a late-night walk, had attacked the prison next to our home, releasing their members.

A clash between their fighters and the Nigerian police, which I thought would last one day, escalated with the killing of the group's leader Mohammed Yusuf to a ten-year conflict that would devastate our hometown and state. Boko Haram has been far more destructive than anyone could have imagined.

They have burned parts of Borno and neighbouring states to the ground. They have attacked hospitals, churches, mosques and major roads connecting Borno to other northern states. Suicide bombers would trickle into markets and detonate. Village schools were stormed and children abducted.

More than three million people have been displaced across West Africa, tens of thousands killed, and communities continue to flee across Nigeria and to neighbouring Chad, Niger and Cameroon.

In Maiduguri, we were in limbo for almost eight years. Eid celebrations, weddings, funerals, sporting activities and many other events stopped or continued quietly, full of tension. The photo studios became almost extinct. People were trying to survive bombs and bullets.

As the project assistant with a local non-profit, I met children in camps for internally displaced people and in clinics to treat malnutrition. Many had lost parents and other family members. I was hard to see children marked by suffering, such a sharp contrast to my own idyllic upbringing.

In 2013, I moved to London to study public health. I hovered between guilt for being privileged enough to leave, and sadness as I obsessively watched my hometown in the news. Long walks took me to the Imperial War Museum, where the experiences of ordinary people in conflict are documented. At the Tate Modern, I saw the power of storytelling through Richard Sandler's documentary photography on New York subways.

Following a class on using media for health, I bought a camera. In late 2015, I came home to document our stories.

Children followed

I photographed Maiduguri, the places, the people and their stories. I walked around with my camera in an atmosphere of insecurity.

And everywhere I went, children followed. They wanted to be photographed. Many were displaced in camps or on the streets but were happy, exuberant, despite the hardship. I focused my lens on their experiences, on being a child in this crisis and yet able to find moments of joy.

In 2016, we were finally able to celebrate Eid without fear of attacks, which subsided when military efforts increased with the swearing-in of Muhammadu Buhari as president. The studios reopened. Many came out to celebrate, although it was no longer the Eid we had known with durbars and a royal parade.

The zoo, after being quiet for many Eids, drew crowds once again. I went there wanting to photograph the groups of friends dressed in matching colours, and others influenced by boybands such as Westlife. Young people dressed to impress their friends, girlfriends and boyfriends.

In this photo, two young girls in brightly coloured dresses, 60s-style head wraps and bold makeup strike a pose. It is one of many portraits which I took for a series called Eid Fashion.



The girls in this photo are reminiscent of my younger years - the bright colours, matching outfits and free-spiritedness of youth. They remind me of the photo I took with my cousins.

This picture breaks my heart and mends it at the same time. Everyone, rich or poor, has been affected by the conflict. Many children I see in Borno are grappling with missing parents, interrupted schooling, and endless stories of abduction and torture.

Children have only a few days over Eid to momentarily forget the many tragedies inflicted by an endless conflict. This photo illustrates how we celebrate being alive in the spirited way that we observe a prominent Islamic holiday. This picture tells me not only to live for the present but to enjoy it - well dressed and to the fullest - because who knows what tomorrow will bring?

Every Eid, I go to the zoo to photograph childhood. I want to eternalise these moments like we did when I was growing up. But I walk away crippled by sadness and always think to myself: When will this conflict end? This is not what childhood should be.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA

NEWS / HEALTH

WHO warns coronavirus to 'be with us for long time': Live updates

WHO chief Tedros warns against relaxing containment measures, says there is still 'a long way to go'.

by **Kate Mayberry, Saba Aziz & Ramy Allahoum**

22 Apr 2020 21:00 GMT



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The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said there were "worrying upward trends" in early epidemics in parts of Africa and central and South America, warning that the "virus will be with us for a long time".

- More than 2.5 million people around the world have been diagnosed with the coronavirus. At least 178,000 have died, with the US accounting for about a quarter of all deaths, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.
- The United Nations is warning global hunger could double as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, putting 265 million people at risk.
- Australia is trying to build support internationally for an independent review of the origins and spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Here are the latest updates:

Wednesday, April 22

19:18 GMT - How Jordan is flattening its COVID-19 curve

Experts say preemptive steps and drastic containment measures appear to be paying off in Jordan's fight against coronavirus.

The country has so far recorded 435 cases, including 297 recovers and seven deaths

Read more [here](#).

19:00 GMT - WHO chief says he hopes US reconsiders decision to cut funding

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the WHO, said he hoped the Trump administration would reconsider its suspension of funding, but that his main focus was on ending the pandemic and saving lives.

"I hope the freezing of the funding will be reconsidered and the US will once again support WHO's work and continue to save lives," Tedros said.



"I hope the US believes that this is an important investment, not just to help others but for the US to stay safe also."

Mike Ryan, WHO's top emergencies expert, said that it was important to understand the animal origins of the new coronavirus which jumped the species barrier to humans in China late last year, adding: "It can be breached again."

18:30 GMT - Turkey's coronavirus cases reach 98,674, total deaths 2,376

Turkey recorded 3,083 new coronavirus cases, bringing its total number of infections to 98,674, according to Health Minister Fahrettin Koca.

He added that the death toll rose by 117 to 2,376 in the past 24 hours. A total of 16,477 people have recovered from the virus so far, while the number of tests carried out over the past 24 hours stood at 37,535.

18:20 GMT - Sudden lifting of UK lockdown unlikely: Chief medical officer

Chris Whitty, England's chief medical officer, said it was unrealistic to expect a sudden lifting of all lockdown restrictions, even as ministers say Britain has reached the peak of the coronavirus outbreak.

"If people are hoping that it's suddenly going to move from where we are now, in lockdown, suddenly into 'everything's gone', that is a wholly unrealistic expectation," Whitty told reporters.

"We're going to have to do a lot of things for really quite a long period of time."

17:40 GMT - WHO chief warns 'virus will be with us for a long time'

Tedros said that there were "worrying upward trends" in early epidemics in parts of Africa and central and South America, while also warning that opening up global travel needed to be managed carefully.



"Most countries are still in the early stages of their epidemics and some that were affected early in the pandemic are starting to see a resurgence in cases," he told Geneva journalists in a virtual briefing.

"Make no mistake, we have a long way to go. This virus will be with us for a long time," he added, while noting progress in Western Europe.

Ryan, the WHO's top emergencies expert, warned against opening up global travel too quickly, saying it would require "careful risk management".

17:30 GMT - Coronavirus-free Turkmenistan: 'We are not hiding anything'

Turkmenistan, one of the few nations in the world that has reported no cases of the new coronavirus, has insisted its official data is true and it is not hiding anything.

"If there was a single confirmed coronavirus case, we would have immediately informed ... the World Health Organization in line with our obligations," Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov told a briefing on Wednesday.

"We are not hiding anything," he added, speaking alongside United Nations officials.

Read more [here](#).

17:20 GMT - Tarawih amid coronavirus: Scholars call for home Ramadan prayers

From Mecca and Jerusalem to London and New York, Muslim scholars across the world have called on people to "stay home and stay safe" this Ramadan, keeping mosques closed and congregational prayers on hold to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Muslims observe Ramadan by fasting during daylight hours, but also essential to this holy month are gatherings to share meals and take part in communal prayers, known as Tarawih, or night prayers.



"Congregational prayers are a big part of the lives of many Muslims generally, but even more so during Ramadan with Tarawih prayers held daily at many mosques across the country," said Harun Khan, secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB).

Read more [here](#).

17:00 GMT - Pakistan's Imran Khan tests negative for coronavirus

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has tested negative for the coronavirus, after coming into contact with a philanthropist last week who subsequently tested positive.

"Prime Minister Imran Khan was tested today for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus strain that causes the coronavirus disease 2019 [COVID-19]). The test used was a polymerase chain reaction (PCR). I am happy to report that his test is NEGATIVE," said de facto Pakistani health minister Zafar Mirza in a tweet.

16:50 GMT - UK should see slow decrease in number of coronavirus cases

Britain should expect to see only a slow decrease in cases and deaths from the coronavirus, given the experience of other countries that are further along in their outbreaks, the government's chief medical adviser said.

"Even in those countries which started their epidemic curve earlier than the UK, and which are still ahead, the downward slope from the point where we change is a relatively slow one," Chris Whitty, who is the Chief Medical Officer for England, said at a news conference, referring to a graph showing the seven-day rolling average of deaths in different countries.

"We should anticipate the same situation in the UK," he said. "We should not expect this to be a sudden fall away of cases."

16:40 GMT - US to review if WHO is run the way it should

The United States will assess whether the World Health Organization (WHO) is being run in the way that it should, USAID's Acting Administrator John Barsa said.

The announcement came after President Donald Trump last week suspended US funding for the UN agency, accusing it of failing to adequately obtain and share information on the coronavirus pandemic "in a timely and transparent fashion".

Barsa told a news conference Washington was also looking for alternative partners outside the WHO to carry out work such as on vaccines.

16:25 GMT - Second coronavirus wave poses 'greatest risk' for UK

British Foreign Minister Dominic Raab has warned that a second wave of the coronavirus poses the greatest risk for his country, necessitating another period of lockdown.

"The greatest risk for us now if we eased up on our social distancing rules too soon is that we would risk a second spike in the virus, with all the threats to life that would bring and then the risk of a second lockdown, which would prolong the economic pain that we are all going through," Raab told reporters.

16:10 GMT - Italy's coronavirus death toll climbs by 437 to 25,085

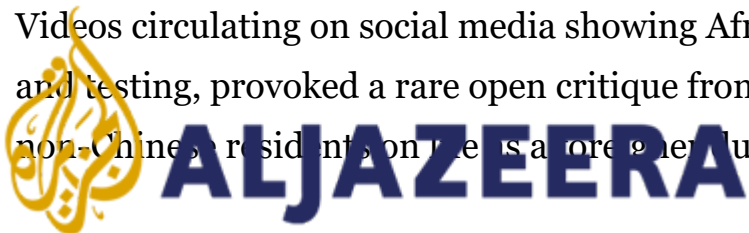
The death toll from the coronavirus in Italy climbed by 437 to 25,085, against 534 the previous day, according to the Civil Protection Agency.

Meanwhile infections increased by 3,370 to 187,327, the third-highest global tally behind the US and Spain.

16:00 GMT - In China, fear of a second wave - and foreigners

As China's coronavirus lockdown recedes, it has left fear in its wake. Foreigners are now on the receiving end of heightened public scrutiny and discrimination as the government says it is trying to prevent importing new cases.

Videos circulating on social media showing Africans in Guangzhou facing forced evictions and testing, provoked a rare open critique from African leaders. The Take hears from non-Chinese residents on the is a more open during the pandemic.



15:45 GMT - Canada coronavirus death toll reaches 1,871, total cases 38,932

Canada's death toll from the coronavirus rose to 1,871 from 1,728 the previous day, according to official data posted by the public health agency.

It said the number of infections climbed to 38,932.

15:35 GMT - US believes China failed to disclose pandemic to WHO in timely manner: Pompeo

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said his country strongly believes that China's ruling Communist Party failed to report the outbreak of the new coronavirus in a timely manner to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Speaking at a State Department news conference, Pompeo also accused China of failing to report human-to-human transmission of the virus "for a month until it was in every province inside of China".

15:20 GMT - Doctor's note: Why are smokers more vulnerable to coronavirus?

Smoking is one of the leading causes of death in the world, killing more than eight million people a year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Now, it is thought that smoking may also make people more vulnerable to developing serious complications if they catch coronavirus.

In the United Kingdom, the health secretary, Matt Hancock, has said: "It is abundantly clear from the research into previous coronaviruses that smoking makes the impact of a coronavirus worse."

Read more [here](#).

15:00 GMT - In Central African Republic, a colossal struggle against COVID-19

Before dawn in a suburb recovering from war, Fanny Balekossi awakes and heads into the centre of Bangui.

A radio broadcaster specialising in health issues, Balekossi survived years of sectarian fighting in the Central African Republic (CAR) during which her older sister and close friends perished.

Now, she is facing a new struggle to pull her country back from the brink.

Read more [here](#).

14:45 GMT - UK coronavirus death toll reaches 18,100

Britain's daily death toll from the coronavirus rose by 763 to 18,100, down from 828 the previous day, according to the health ministry.

The number of infections reached 133,495, it added.

14:30 GMT - Mexico social programmes, critical project budgets to increase by \$25.6bn

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said his government will increase the budget for social programmes and critical projects by 622.6 billion Mexican pesos (\$25.6 billion) in order to address the coronavirus crisis.

"Efficiency, honesty and austerity will allow us to increase the budget to strengthen social programmes and critical projects by 622.556 billion de pesos", Lopez Obrador said at his regular morning press conference.

14:20 GMT - UK to roll out large-scale contact tracing

British health minister Matt Hancock said on Wednesday the government would bring in large-scale contact tracing once the number of new cases of the coronavirus falls.

"As we have reached the peak, as we bring the number of new cases down, so we will introduce contact tracing at large scale," Hancock told Parliament.



14:10 GMT - Netherlands coronavirus cases rise by 708 to 34,842

The Netherlands has recorded 708 coronavirus cases, taking its total number of infections to 34,842, health authorities said.

Meanwhile, the death toll rose by 138 to 4,054, the Netherlands Institute for Public Health said.

14:00 GMT - France's Macron says time not right for international coronavirus probe

French President Emmanuel Macron told the Australian prime minister that time was not opportune for an international investigation into the coronavirus pandemic, saying the urgency was to act in unison before looking for who was at fault, an official said.

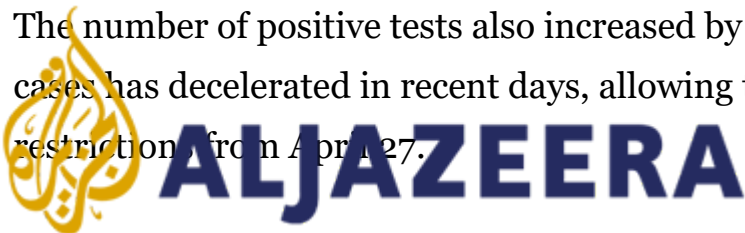
"He says he agrees that there have been some issues at the start, but that the urgency is for cohesion, that it is no time to talk about this, while reaffirming the need for transparency for all players, not only the WHO," an Elysee official told Reuters news agency.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has sought support for an international investigation into the pandemic in phone calls with US President Donald Trump and the German and French leaders overnight, the government said.

13:45 GMT - Swiss death toll surges past 1,200, total cases 28,268

The Swiss death toll from the coronavirus rose to 1,217 from 1,187 the previous day, the country's public health ministry said.

The number of positive tests also increased by 205 to 28,268, it added. The rise in new cases has decelerated in recent days, allowing the government to start relaxing restriction from April 27.



12:15 GMT - India plans wristband patient surveillance

India plans to manufacture thousands of wristbands that will monitor the locations and temperatures of coronavirus patients, help perform contact tracing and aid health workers delivering essential services.

Broadcast Engineering Consultants India, a government-owned company, will present wristband designs to hospitals and state governments next week and work with Indian start-ups to manufacture them.

George Kuruvilla, the company's chairman, said the wristbands are likely to be rolled out in May.

12:00 GMT - South African police arrested for flouting lockdown orders

Scores of government officials, including 89 police officers, have been arrested for flouting South Africa's coronavirus regulations, many of them for selling confiscated liquor, the police minister said.

"Altogether 131 people including officials, councillors, health officials, correctional services, have been arrested," Police Minister Bheki Cele told the media in Durban.

More than 20,000 police officers have been deployed along with the military to enforce a five-week lockdown under which alcohol sales are prohibited.

11:50 GMT - Indonesian capital extends restrictions to May 22

The governor of Indonesia's capital Jakarta said he would extend large-scale social restrictions for an extra month to May 22 and also ensure residents prayed at home during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan which is due to start later this week.

"This year's Ramadan will be different. Usually we pray in the mosque, but this year we will stay at home," Governor Anies Baswedan told a streamed news conference.



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While Jakarta has not imposed a full lockdown, Baswedan said he would increase enforcement of the restrictions in place which include limiting public gatherings.

11:45 GMT - Qatar reports 608 new coronavirus cases

Qatar's health ministry reported 608 new cases of coronavirus, taking its total number of infections to 7141.

The ministry also confirmed the recovery of 75 COVID-19 patients and one death over the last 24 hours.



11:30 GMT - 69 NHS staff members have died of coronavirus

A total of 69 people who worked for Britain's National Health Service (NHS) have died of COVID-19, while the number of staff in care homes for the elderly who have died from the disease is not known, Foreign Minister Dominic Raab said.

The government is under pressure over accusations it has failed to deliver personal protective equipment to all the medical and care staff who require it.

"We've delivered 1 billion items of personal protective equipment and tens of millions have been distributed via the devolved administrations (semi-autonomous governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)," Raab told parliament.

Read [more](#) about why PPE is important.

11:20 GMT - Trump to sign executive order on immigration today

President Donald Trump said in a tweet he would sign an executive order later on Wednesday "prohibiting immigration" that he has said would protect United States workers amid the economic fallout from the coronavirus outbreak.

As of late Tuesday, some questions remained unanswered as the Trump administration continued to work on the order, which the Republican president has said would temporarily suspend immigration to the US.



Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

I will be signing my Executive Order prohibiting immigration into our Country today. In the meantime, even without this order, our Southern Border, aided substantially by the 170 miles of new Border Wall & 27,000 Mexican soldiers, is very tight - including for human trafficking!

143K 7:00 AM - Apr 22, 2020

[44.7K people are talking about this](#)

11:15 GMT - Pandemic to drive carbon emissions down 6 percent: WMO

The coronavirus pandemic is expected to drive carbon dioxide emissions down by six percent this year, the head of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said, in what would be the biggest yearly drop since World War II.

"This crisis has had an impact on the emissions of greenhouse gases," WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas told a virtual briefing in Geneva.

"We estimate that there is going to be a six percent drop in carbon emissions this year because of the lack of emissions from transportation and industrial energy production."

11:00 GMT - Stephen Hawking's ventilator donated to UK hospital

The family of the renowned British physicist Stephen Hawking has donated his ventilator to help treat hospital patients with novel coronavirus, it said.

Hawking died in 2018 aged 76 after a glittering career dedicated to unlocking the secrets of the universe, despite a life-long battle with a severe form of motor neurone disease.

His daughter, Lucy, said the ventilator he used has been given to the Royal Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, eastern England, where he received medical care during his life.

10:30 GMT - Ukraine extends coronavirus quarantine until May 11

Ukraine extended strong quarantine measures till May 11, hoping then to ease restrictions if there is a reduction in coronavirus cases, Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said.

Ukraine reported a total of 6,592 people infected as of April 22, including 174 deaths and 424 recovered.

10:20 GMT - Israel stops testing samples coming from Gaza

Israel's defence minister has cancelled an initiative taken by the army for coronavirus testing on samples coming from the blockaded Gaza Strip, an Israeli newspaper reported.



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The Israeli army recently announced an initiative to perform 50 coronavirus tests a day on samples from the Gaza Strip.

But the Israeli government cancelled the initiative, the daily Maariv reported, adding Defence Minister Naftali Bennett was not aware of the army's initiative due to a "lack of communication".

10:10 GMT - 'Un-American': 400,000 N95 masks 'just sitting' on loading dock

A US medical supply company is questioning the legality of federal seizures of N95 respirator masks destined for medical workers amid the coronavirus pandemic.

George Gianforcaro, owner of Delaware-based Indutex USA, told the New York Daily News the Federal Emergency Management Agency confiscated 400,000 masks in two imported shipments meant for his US customers.



Al Jazeera English

@AJEnglish

"Keep your voice down."

President Trump berated a female CBS reporter when questioned over his [#coronavirus](#) response.



1,100 4:30 AM - Apr 22, 2020

[647 people are talking about this](#)

He said the masks, which arrived in separate shipments on April 6 and April 19, are still being held at John F Kennedy International Airport, apparently stranded in limbo as federal officials work out where they should go next.

"The product is just sitting on a loading dock at JFK. They want to charge me \$3,000 a day to store it there. I said, 'I'll just come pick it up then.' They said, 'No, it's not released.' It's un-American. It's horrible," Gianforcaro said.

10:05 GMT - Germany approves first trial of COVID-19 vaccine candidate

Germany's vaccines regulator approved human testing of a potential vaccine against the COVID-19 virus developed by German biotech company BioNTech.

The trial, only the fourth worldwide of a preventive agent targeting the virus behind the global pandemic, will be conducted on 200 healthy people aged between 18 and 55 in the first stage, and on further people, including those at higher risk from the disease, in a second stage.

BioNTech said it was developing the vaccine candidate, named BNT162, together with its partner, pharma giant Pfizer.

10:00 GMT - 'Big divide' between member states on recovery aid, EU official says

There is a "big divide" between EU member states on whether any coronavirus recovery aid should be handed out to member states as subsidies or loans, an official with the bloc said.



National EU leaders are meeting via videoconference on Thursday to lock horns over how to kickstart growth after the coronavirus pandemic.

"For some member states it is important to have grants or subsidies, while for others it can only be loans. There is a big divide and we need to find the right balance," said the official on condition of anonymity.

More:

- [**Coronavirus: What sporting events are affected by the pandemic?**](#)
- [**Domestic abuse against Palestinian women soars**](#)
- [**Buhari asks Nigeria's chief judge to free prisoners**](#)

09:50 GMT - Coronavirus second wave may be even worse: US health chief

A second wave of the novel coronavirus in the United States could be even more destructive because it will likely collide with the beginning of the flu season, one of the country's top health officials have said.

Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), called on Americans to use the coming months to prepare - and get their flu shots.

"There's a possibility that the assault of the virus on our nation next winter will actually be even more difficult than the one we just went through, and when I've said this to others, they kind of put their head back, they do not understand what I mean," he was [quoted as saying](#) in an interview with the Washington Post.

Read [here](#).

09:35 GMT - US state sues China over coronavirus economic losses

Missouri became the first US state to sue the Chinese government over its handling of the coronavirus, saying China's response to the outbreak that originated in the city of Wuhan brought devastating economic losses.

In Beijing, a spokesman for China's foreign ministry dismissed the accusation as "nothing short of absurdity" and lacking any factual or legal basis.

"The Chinese government lied to the world about the danger and contagious nature of COVID-19, silenced whistleblowers, and did little to stop the spread of the disease," Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt, a Republican, said in a statement. "They must be held accountable for their actions."

09:25 GMT - Spain reports 435 coronavirus deaths overnight

Spain's death toll from the new coronavirus climbed by 435 in the past 24 hours, the health ministry said, roughly in line with the two percent increases reported in the past few days.

The cumulative death toll now stands at 21,717, while the number of confirmed infections rose by 4,211 to 208,389, according to the ministry.

09:15 GMT - Spanish refugee rescuers now helping in nursing homes

They are used to saving refugees from the seas, but now, Spanish rescuers are using their expertise to help in the coronavirus pandemic.

Volunteers from Spanish NGO Proactiva Open Arms are taking patients who have tested positive with the novel coronavirus to hospitals and helping staff in care homes, where thousands of frail elderly residents have died.

Read more [here](#)

09:05 GMT - Lack of virus testing stokes fears in world's refugee camps

More than 10 million people worldwide have been driven from their homes by war and unrest, up to 10 million are packed into refugee camps and informal settlements, and almost none have been tested for the coronavirus.

While the relative isolation of many camps may have slowed the virus's spread, none is hermetically sealed. Without testing, the virus can spread unchecked until people start showing symptoms. Then, there will be few if any intensive care beds or ventilators. There might not even be gloves or masks.

"Testing is in short supply even in New York and Norway, but it is non-existent in most of the countries in the [global] south for the people we try to help," said Jan Egeland, the head of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

08:30 GMT - Philippines records nine new coronavirus deaths, 111 more cases

The Philippines' health ministry reported nine new coronavirus deaths and 111 new confirmed infections.

In a bulletin, the health ministry said total deaths have increased to 446 while infections have risen to 6,710. But 39 more patients have recovered, bringing the total number of recoveries to 693.

08:10 GMT - Refugee camp in Lebanon on lockdown after first case

A Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon has been put under lockdown after the United Nations announced the first confirmed case of coronavirus in one of the country's numerous and crowded camps.

The patient, a Palestinian refugee from Syria, has been taken to the state-run Rafik Hariri hospital in Beirut, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said in a statement.

Medical experts were due to visit the Wavel camp in the eastern Bekaa Valley later on Wednesday to carry out tests, the agency added.



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08:00 GMT - Pope urges EU unity over coronavirus

Pope Francis has urged Europe to remain united in overcoming the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, speaking on the eve of an EU summit to discuss a huge but divisive economic stimulus package.

"In these times in which we need so much unity among us, among nations, let us pray today for Europe," Francis said at the start of his daily morning mass, which he dedicates each day to a different theme related to the global crisis.

He asked for prayers "so that Europe manages to have this unity, this fraternal unity of which the founding fathers of the European Union dreamed".

07:45 GMT - UK's Johnson under fire over handling of virus crisis

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a call for an inquiry into his government's handling of the coronavirus crisis after failing to fully explain partial death data, limited testing and the lack of equipment for hospitals.

Ed Davey, acting leader of the opposition Liberal Democrats, called for an independent inquiry to review the government's response to the pandemic.

"The inquiry must have the strongest possible powers given the shocking failures on protective equipment for staff and the slow response of the government - to get to the truth and to give Boris Johnson the opportunity to answer the increasingly serious questions."

More:

- [Timeline: How the new coronavirus spread](#)
- [How will the coronavirus pandemic change Ramadan for Muslims?](#)

▪ Doctor's Note: Coronavirus and the tuberculosis vaccine



07:36 GMT - Russia records more than 5,000 new cases

Russia recorded 5,236 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, bringing its nationwide tally to 57,999, the Russian coronavirus crisis response centre said.

Fifty-seven people with the virus died in the past 24 hours, pushing the death toll to 513, it said.

07:30 GMT - Spain aims to ease lockdown in second half of May

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said his government plans to begin winding down its coronavirus lockdown measures in the second half of May.

Restrictions will be eased slowly and gradually to ensure safety, Sanchez said at a parliamentary session where he will ask legislators to extend Spain's state of emergency until May 9.

The lockdown was first enforced in Spain on March 14.

07:15 GMT - Japan cuts 100,000 tulips to keep physical distance

Flower lovers in Japan will have to wait until next year to tip-toe through the tulips after a park razed more than 100,000 stems to comply with social-distancing rules to help control the coronavirus.

Officials in the city of Sakura, 50km east of Tokyo, mowed the tulip beds at Sakura Furusato Hiroba and cancelled an annual tulip festival to discourage people from congregating after a coronavirus emergency was declared last week.

"Many visitors came on the weekend when the flowers were in full bloom. It became a mass gathering so we had no choice but to make the decision to cut the flowers," said Sakiho Kusano, a city tourism official.

07:00 GMT - More than 2,700 coronavirus deaths in US in 24 hours

The coronavirus death toll in the United States - the country with the most fatalities in the pandemic - has climbed by 2,751 in the past 24 hours, according to the latest tally from Johns Hopkins University.

The US has recorded more than 800,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, according to the Baltimore-based university, with 44,845 deaths.

Nearly 40,000 new cases were reported between Monday at 8:30pm local time, and Tuesday at the same time, the university said.

06:45 GMT - Tokyo 'orphanage' for babies reports 8 cases: Media

A residential care facility in Tokyo for babies and toddlers reported eight cases of coronavirus infections, local media said.

One staff member at the institution had tested positive for the virus on April 16, prompting a test of its residents, Kyodo News said.

None of the eight children who tested positive were showing major symptoms such as a fever, Kyodo said.

06:30 GMT - Pakistan PM Imran Khan undergoes coronavirus test

Al Jazeera's Asad Hashim sent this update from Islamabad.

"Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has undergone a test for the coronavirus after he came into contact with an infected prominent philanthropist Faisal Edhi on Wednesday, his physician has said. Khan's results are expected to be released on Wednesday.

Edhi announced on Tuesday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus, after exhibiting some symptoms over four days before they subsided.

He had flown to the capital Islamabad to hand over a 10 million Pakistani rupee (\$62,250) cheque for the prime minister's coronavirus relief fund."



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06:15 GMT - Fauci to 7-year-old girl: Tooth fairy won't catch virus

Top US health and infectious disease specialist Anthony Fauci has assured a young girl that the tooth fairy is not at risk of infection during the coronavirus pandemic.

The doctor will appear on Wednesday as a guest on actor Will Smith's Snapchat show Will From Home.

In a preview clip of their interview, posted to YouTube, a seven-year-old girl called in from Los Angeles with a very pressing question.

"Can the tooth fairy still come if I lose my tooth because of the coronavirus?" asked the girl, who introduced herself as Ava. "And can she catch the virus?"

Fauci was quick to reassure her: "I don't think you need to worry about the tooth fairy," he said, smiling.

Hello, this is Saba Aziz in Doha. I'll be taking over the blog from my colleague Kate Mayberry in Kuala Lumpur.

05:00 GMT - Australia seeks backing for international investigation into coronavirus

Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison has sought support for an international investigation into the coronavirus pandemic, speaking overnight to US president Donald Trump, as well as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Australia is calling for an independent review of the origins of the virus and its spread. China earlier accused Australia of parroting the US, which has been critical of China and the World Health Organization (WHO), withdrawing its funding for the UN health body.



04:40 GMT - Japan's Nagasaki confirms 33 cases on cruise ship docked for repair

Officials in Japan's western prefecture of Nagasaki say they have confirmed 33 cases of coronavirus on an Italian cruise ship docked there for repairs.

Tests were positive in 33 of 56 close contacts of a single member of the Costa Atlantica's 623 crew.

"There are a lot of infections on board, and we don't have the medical system to confirm the health situation and to separate" those testing positive and negative, said Nagasaki governor Hodo Nakamura.

The governor has requested help from the government in Tokyo and the rest of the crew are being tested. The Italian-owned ship has been in the shipyard in Nagasaki since the end of February.

03:50 GMT - Southeast Asian governments urged to step up climate change commitments

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights are calling on Southeast Asian governments to commit to more ambitious climate and environmental targets to lower the risk of future health emergencies.

APHR noted that the number of emerging infectious diseases had increased since the 1940s alongside deforestation and increasing urbanisation.

"Our governments have to act swiftly against deforestation by increasing protected areas and environmental safeguards against investment projects if we want to reduce the risk of re-living COVID-19 like epidemics," Sarah Elago, an MP from the Philippines MP said in a statement to coincide with Earth Day.

03:20 GMT - Saudi king approves Tarawih at two holy mosques

Saudi king Salman has approved performing the Tarawih at the two holy mosques, but entry for pilgrims will remain suspended, the Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques Affairs said in a statement on Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia is planning to ease curfew hours imposed in several cities because of coronavirus during the fasting month of Ramadan, which is due to start this week.

Find out more about this year's unprecedented Ramadan [here](#).

02:20 GMT - China says Australia parroting Trump with coronavirus criticisms

China is accusing Australia of taking instructions from the US in its criticism of China's response to the coronavirus, after home affairs minister Peter Dutton called on China to be more transparent about the outbreak.

"It is well known that recently some people in the US including high level officials have been spreading an anti-China 'information virus'," a spokesperson from China's embassy in Canberra said in comments posted to its website.

"These days, certain Australian politicians are keen to parrot what those Americans have asserted and follow them in staging attacks on China."

01:30 GMT - China, South Korea update coronavirus situation

China and South Korea have both reported their latest data on the coronavirus.

China reported 30 new cases on the mainland, 23 of which involved people returning from overseas. The National Health Commission also said the number of asymptomatic cases rose to 4, from 17 the previous day.



In South Korea, the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the country had 11 new cases, the fourth day in a row where the number has been below 15. Six of the cases were among overseas travellers.

00:15 GMT - Captive audiences fuel Netflix boom

Netflix says it has more than doubled its own projections for new customers as people living under lockdowns turned to the streaming giant to keep them entertained.

Netflix says subscribers jumped by 15.8 million in the three months from January to March. It earlier predicted the number of paying customers would rise by seven million.

00:00 GMT - Cuomo says Trump agrees to help New York double testing

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo says he had a "productive" meeting with US President Donald Trump and that the state was aiming to double its coronavirus testing to 40,000 tests a day.



Andrew Cuomo
@NYGovCuomo

I had a productive meeting with President Trump today.

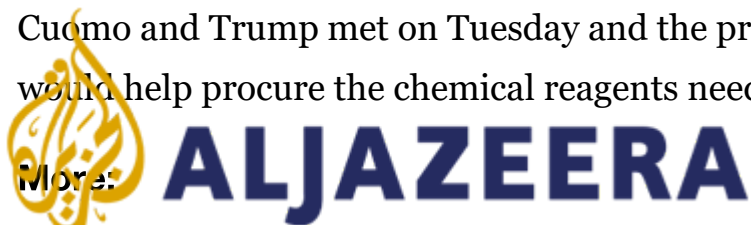
We agreed that the state will be responsible for managing the actual tests in our laboratories.

The federal government will take on the responsibility of supply chain issues that are beyond states' control.

28.4K 7:31 PM - Apr 21, 2020

[4,538 people are talking about this](#)

Cuomo and Trump met on Tuesday and the president agreed the federal government would help procure the chemical reagents needed to ramp up testing.



- **Coronavirus: All you need to know about the symptoms and risks**
- **Dispelling the myths around the new coronavirus outbreak**
- **How to make sense of the coronavirus numbers and charts**

Hello and welcome to Al Jazeera's continuing coverage of the coronavirus pandemic.

I'm Kate Mayberry in Kuala Lumpur.

Read all the updates from yesterday (April 21) here.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES