

## Coronavirus cases on Japan cruise ship Diamond Princess hits 136



**CHINA:** China reported a rise in new virus cases Monday, possibly denting optimism that disease control measures including isolating major cities might be working, while the operator of a cruise ship in Japan reported dozens of new cases.

The mainland death toll rose by 97 to 908 in the 24 hours through midnight Sunday and 3,062 new cases were reported. That was up 15% from Saturday and broke a string of daily declines. A government spokesman had said Sunday those declines showed containment measures were successful.

The operator of a cruise ship quarantined in Yokohama, near Tokyo, said an additional 66 cases were found aboard. That is in addition to 70 reported earlier.

Health Minister Katsunobu Kato said the Japanese government was considering testing all 3,711 passengers and crew on the Diamond Princess, which would require them to remain aboard until results are available. Health authorities are scrambling to deliver medicine requested by more than 600 passengers.

"We are doing the utmost to keep everyone in good health," Kato said.

The fatality toll from the new virus has passed the 774 people believed to have died in the 2002-03 epidemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome, another viral outbreak that originated in China. The total of 40,171 cases on the mainland of the new virus vastly exceeds the 8,098 sickened by SARS.

More than 440 cases have been confirmed outside mainland China, including two deaths in Hong Kong and the Philippines.

The British government declared the virus a "serious and imminent threat to public health," which it said gives authorities powers to forcibly detain infected people if necessary. The change comes after a British man who caught the virus in Singapore in January appeared to be linked to at least seven other confirmed cases in Europe.

China has built two hospitals and sent thousands of extra doctors, nurses and other health care workers to Wuhan, the city of 11 million people in central China that is the epicenter of the outbreak. Most access to Wuhan was suspended Jan. 23. Restrictions have spread to cities with a total of 60 million people.

Businesses are gradually reopening following the Lunar New Year holiday, which was extended to discourage travel in an attempt to contain the virus, but they face heavy losses.

Zhang Peng, who works for a livestreaming company in Beijing, went to the office for the first time since the holiday. The company checked employees for fever and handed out masks.

"I thought the situation is fairly good now," Zhang said. "I went to work by subway today and underwent various checks in the station. And my company did a good job of prevention and control."

Iris Ke, who works for an advertising company, said she plans to wait until next week to go back to the office.

"We just need to have a little more sense of self protection," said Ke. "Life goes on anyway. How come we stop going outside or stop working simply because of fear of disease? We can't do that."

At the Sanyuanli market in Beijing, the Chinese capital, shoppers in face masks mixed with delivery drivers who were collecting orders of meat, fruit and vegetables. Stalls were stocked with pork, mutton, seafood and vegetables.

"The number of customers here is down a lot, maybe by more than half," said Liu Ying, who sells walnuts, cashews and other specialties. "But you can see a lot of people calling in orders, so we're slowly getting busy again."

Global stock markets slid Monday following warnings that investor optimism the disease and its economic impact were being brought under control might be premature. Market indexes in London, Frankfurt, Tokyo and Hong Kong declined. Shanghai closed higher after spending most of the day in negative territory.

China's central bank announced a 300 billion yuan (\$43 billion) fund to make low-interest loans to producers of medicine and medical supplies or other companies involved in fighting the virus.

Over the weekend, the government promised tax cuts and subsidies to farmers, supermarkets, producers of medical supplies and companies that contribute to anti-disease work. China's leaders are trying to keep food flowing to crowded cities despite the anti-disease controls and to quell fears of possible shortages and price spikes following panic buying after most access to Wuhan and nearby cities was cut off.

Consumer inflation spiked to an eight-year high of 5.4% over a year earlier in January, driven by a 4.4% rise in food costs, the government reported Monday. Food prices



## Plea In SC Against Trial Of WhatsApp Payment Service In India

Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI :** A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking stay on the alleged trials of WhatsApp payment service being carried out by the instant messaging app on one million users in India, saying they cannot be "reduced to guinea pigs".

An NGO, Centre for Accountability and Systemic Change (CASC), which had earlier approached the apex court claiming that WhatsApp has not fully complied with RBI's circular which prescribed data localisation norms, told the apex court that WhatsApp is still not following the norms.

"WhatsApp is in violation of data localisation norms as per RBI (but) is clandestinely continuing beta testing of its Payments Systems on one million Indian users. Moreover, it has now been reported that WhatsApp Pay will be rolled out to more customers, despite there being no report submitted to this court about WhatsApp's full compliance with RBI Data localization norms," it said.

Financial and other sensitive personal data of one million Indians cannot be stored outside India, it said. "One million Indians cannot be reduced to guinea pigs. Their sensitive personal data, including financial data cannot be stored outside India in contravention to the RBI circular," it said, adding that the US-based firm has not appointed its Grievance Officer in India.

WhatsApp had earlier told the apex court that it is conducting a trial run of its payment

service and will comply with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) norms on data localisation before launching the full service.

It had also told the court that it will not launch payments services without fully complying with RBI norms.

The Centre had said that WhatsApp was not complying with data localisation norms which was evident from the affidavit filed by the RBI. To this, the bench had said that if norms laid down by RBI are not followed by WhatsApp, then it can be prosecuted.

In its petition filed through advocates Vanya Gupta and Archana Pathak Dave, the NGO has sought direction to restrain the instant messaging platform from proceeding with its payment service unless it fully complied with the provisions of the RBI.

The Centre and WhatsApp had earlier told the court that a grievance officer for India has been appointed by the instant messaging service company. However, the NGO has claimed that grievance officer has been appointed in the United States of America, which is "preposterous and against the sovereignty of India".

It has referred to IT (Intermediary) Rules of 2011 and IT (reasonable security practices and procedures and sensitive personal data or information) Rules 2011 wherein provision is made for appointment of grievance officer. It has also said in its affidavit that it would be a paradox if data localisation norms are prescribed in India but companies are allowed to keep data officers in USA.

The apex court had earlier agreed to ex-

amine the plea which alleged that WhatsApp does not comply with the Indian laws including the provision for appointing a grievance officer. WhatsApp reportedly has over 200 million users in India and almost one million people are "testing" its payments service. India is one of the largest bases for the Facebook-owned company that has over 1.5 billion users globally.

In its plea, the CASC said that to open a bank account, a customer needs to comply with KYC norms laid down by the RBI and various other formalities.

"WhatsApp is a foreign company with no office or servers in India. To run Payments Service in India, WhatsApp is obligated to have its office and payments in India," it said.

"Moreover, it is also required to have a Grievance Officer for users in India. Yet, it is being allowed to continue with its payments and other services, without any check," the plea claimed.

The petition also alleged that the social media giant does not comply with tax and other laws of India, but its reach was such that it is used by everyone, be it a commoner or even the judges of the apex court.

It said every user has a number on WhatsApp but the messaging platform has no number through which its user can contact it for any grievance redressal.

Pointing to alleged cases of internet-based crimes, it has claimed that the growth of such incidents was directly proportional to the growth of the user base of messaging services like WhatsApp.

### SHORT TAKES

#### Dr Samoon reviews road safety measures

**JAMMU :** Principal Secretary, Transport Department, Dr Asgar Hassan Samoon today chaired a high level meeting of senior officers of Traffic Police, National Highway Authority of India and Transport Department to review the road safety measures taken to avoid road mishaps.

The meeting was attended by Inspector General of Police, Traffic, T Namgyal, Transport Commissioner J&K, Pradeep Kumar, DG Finance Mahesh Dass, Director State Motor Garages, Zakir Choudhary, SSP, Traffic, J S Johar, SSP Udhampur, Rajiv Pandey, SE R&B Udhampur, Er Hem Raj Langleh, Project Director NHAI Division Jammu, Ajay Kumar Rajak, Deputy Manager (Tech) NHAI, Ish Gupta, ARTO Udhampur, Rachna Sharma and other senior officers of concerned departments.

Threadbare discussions were held about the safety measures taken along Jammu Srinagar Highway and identification of black spots, besides monitoring, operation and management of traffic, setting up of Operation Control Centres and adopting Intelligent Transport Management System (ITMS).

IG Traffic gave a power point presentation regarding road safety analysis and other steps being taken to reduce the accidents on the national highway.

Dr Samoon directed the Project Director NHIA to submit a report regarding putting up of crash barriers along the left out areas and identification of black spots on Udhampur, Ramban and Banihal sections of National Highway. He also directed for installing a sign board, depicting speed limit near DPS School Udhampur, the spot witnessing frequent traffic jam in the Township.

Project Director NHAI apprised about the measures being taken and assured that all directions would be followed on priority basis.

The meeting also discussed mobility strategy to provide a clean, safe, comfortable, affordable, energy efficient and environment-friendly option of transportation to the people of the union territory.

"There is a need for a Mobility plan which shall satisfy the mobility needs of people of all sections of the society and enhance their quality of life, irrespective of geographical location" Dr Samoon stressed. The meeting also observed that old vehicles need to be replaced by modern fleet, while stressing on the need for adopting a suitable policy and having a centralized control centre for managing public transport system to ensure reliability of services.



## Parasite creates history at Oscar, wins best picture at 92nd Academy Awards

**NEW DELHI :** In a milestone win that instantly expanded the Oscars' horizons, Bong Joon Ho's masterfully devious class satire "Parasite" became the first non-English language film to win best picture in the 92-year history of the Academy Awards.

"Parasite" took Hollywood's top prize on Sunday night, along with awards for best director, best international film and best screenplay. In a year dominated by period epics — "1917," "Once Upon a Time ... In Hollywood," "The Irishman" — the film academy instead went overseas, to South Korea, to reward a contemporary and unsettling portrait of social inequality in "Parasite."

True to its name, "Parasite" simply got under the skin of Oscar voters, attaching itself to the American awards season and, ultimately, to history. The win was a watershed moment for the Academy Awards, which has long been content to relegate international films to their own category. But in recent years, to diversify its membership, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences has invited many more overseas voters.

Multiple standing ovations greeted Bong's several wins. "I am ready to drink tonight," Bong said, prompting roars from the crowd. Unexpectedly called up again for best director, Bong saluted his fellow nominees, particularly Martin Scorsese, and concluded: "Now I'm ready to drink until tomorrow."

After the Dolby Theatre had emptied out, the "Parasite" team still remained on the stage, soaking in their win. Backstage, Bong was still gobsommed. "It's really f—ing crazy," he told reporters, clutching his awards.

The victory for "Parasite" — which had echoes of the surprise win by "Moonlight" over "La Land" three years ago — came in a year when many criticized the lack of diversity in the nominees and the absence of female filmmakers.

But the triumph for "Parasite," the Palme d'Or-winner at last year's Cannes Film Festival, enabled Hollywood to flip the script and signal progress, nevertheless. No Korean film had ever won an Oscar before.

In doing so, the film academy turned away another history-making event, again denying Netflix its first best-picture win despite two contenders in "The Irishman" and "Marriage Story," and a big-spending awards campaign blitz.

Mendes' audaciously conceived World War I film "1917," made to



seem one continuous shot, had been the clear favorite heading into Oscars, having won nearly all the precursor awards, including top honors from the Producers Guild, the Directors Guild, the Golden Globes and the BAFTAs. In the end, "1917" went home with three awards for its technical virtuosity: Roger Deakins' cinematography, visual effects and sound mixing. All of the acting winners — Brad Pitt, Renée Zellweger, Joaquin Phoenix and Laura Dern — went as expected. While Pitt, notching his first acting Oscar, had regaled audiences with one-liners in the run-up to Sunday, he began his comments on a political note.

"They told me I have 45 seconds to speak, which is 45 seconds more than the Senate gave John Bolton this week," Pitt said, alluding to the impeachment hearings before mentioning director Quentin Tarantino. "I'm thinking maybe Quentin does a movie about it."

Pitt said the honor had given him reason to reflect on his fairytale journey in the film industry, going back to when he moved to Los Angeles from Missouri. "Once upon a time in Hollywood," said Pitt. "Ain't that the truth."

Zellweger completed a comeback, winning her second Academy Award for her fragile but indomitable Judy Garland in "Judy." Dern won for her performance as a divorce attorney in Noah Baumbach's "Marriage Story." Accepting her first Oscar, Dern thanked her

attendees' clothing. Natalie Portman wore a cape lined with the names of female filmmakers who weren't nominated for their direction, including Lulu Wang ("The Farewell"), Greta Gerwig ("Little Women") and Mati Diop ("Atlantics").

Coming on a rare rainy day in Los Angeles, the ceremony was soggy and song-heavy. Some performances, like Eminem's performance of "Lose Yourself," were unexpected (and drew a wan response from Scorsese). All of the song nominees performed, including Elton John who won with his longtime songwriting partner Bernie Taupin for their "Rocketman" tune.

The hostless ceremony opened on a note of inclusion, with Janelle Monae performing "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" and her own song, "Come Alive," with an assist from Billy Porter. "I'm so proud to be standing here as a black queer artist telling stories," Monae said. "Happy Black History Month."

Two former Oscar hosts, Chris Rock and Steve Martin, provided the opening monologue. "An incredible demotion," Martin called it. Martin also reminded that something was missing from this year's directing nominees. "Vaginas!" Rock replied. There were milestones beyond "Parasite." In winning best adapted screenplay for his Nazi satire "Jojo Rabbit," the New Zealand filmmaker Taika Waititi became the first indigenous director ever to win an Oscar. He dedicated the award to "all the indigenous kids in the world who want to do art, dance and write stories."

"We are the original storytellers," Waititi said. "Joker" composer Hildur Guðnadóttir became only the third woman to ever win best original score. "To the girls, to the women, to the mothers, to the daughters who hear the music opening within, please speak up," said Guðnadóttir.

## Freedom fighter moves SC challenging legality of execution of death penalty by hanging



Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI :** An 88-year-old freedom fighter has moved the Supreme Court seeking quashing of a provision in the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) which provides for execution of death row convict by hanging him by the neck saying it a "colonial hangover".

Kerala-based S Parameswaran Nampoothiri has challenged the legality and validity of section 354 (5) of the CrPC which stipulated that "when any person is sentenced to death, the sentence shall direct that he be hanged by the neck till he is dead".

Nampoothiri has claimed in his plea that section 354 (5) of CrPC is against the "letter and spirit" of the Constitution and is violative of the fundamental rights, including under Article 14 (equality before the law) and 21 (protection of life and personal liberty).

"The present writ petition is maintainable as it is an issue concerning the life of the citizens, an issue touching the basic features and basic structure of the Constitution. The petitioner is challenging a practice followed, which is in conflict with the ideals and objectives of the Constitution," said the plea, settled by advocate Wills Mathews.

The plea said that such a way of executing convict is "not Indian and a continuation of the colonial hangover" and almost all democratic countries have stopped this practice.

It said that "sentencing a person to 'death' invoking section 354(5) CrPC...is in conflict with the basic structure of the Constitution of India and also the basic features of the Constitution of India, its ideals, values, philosophies enshrined in the Constitution, the Fundamental Rights, the Directive principles of the State policy, the Preamble, including the DNA of the Constitution..."

It further said, "Whether in a state where attempt to commit suicide is an offence, whether the state can take the life of its citizens under any circumstances, resulting in violation of its own laws?" PTI ABA MNL