

Iran's Deputy Health Minister Tests Positive For Coronavirus

Releases video after isolating himself

Agencies

Tehran: On the day Iran announced that the death toll due to the coronavirus COVID-19 in the country had risen to 16, the nation's deputy health minister revealed he had tested positive and had isolated himself at home.

Iraj Harirchi, who was head of country's counter-coronavirus task force, put out a video on social media announcing that he had tested positive for the virus.

"I too have been infected with coronavirus... I had a fever as of last night and my preliminary test was positive around midnight," he said in the video.

"I've isolated myself in a place since. A few minutes ago, I was told that my test was final, and now I am starting medication. I wanted to tell you that... we will definitely be victorious against

At the conference, Harirchi denied a lawmaker's claim that 50 people have died from the virus in the Shiite shrine city of Qom, saying he would "resign" if the number was true.

He also appeared on a talk show on a state-run television channel in which he spoke about the spread of the virus. In the clip, Harirchi was asked about his cough and reportedly said that "maybe I should cover my mouth like this".

Another lawmaker also tested positive for the virus, but wasn't as hopeful as the deputy health minister.

"My corona test is positive... I don't have a lot of hope of continuing life in this world," Mahmoud Sadeghi, the parliamentarian from Tehran, wrote on Twitter.

The announcement of the two lawmakers declaring they



'Time Is Everything' World Braces For Spread Of Coronavirus

Agencies

Beijing: China's massive travel restrictions, house-to-house checks, huge isolation wards and lockdowns of entire cities bought the world valuable time to prepare for the global spread of the new virus.

But with troubling outbreaks now emerging in Italy, South Korea and Iran, and US health officials warning Tuesday it's inevitable it will spread more widely in America, the question is: Did the world use that time wisely and is it ready for a potential pandemic?

"It's not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will happen — and how many people in this country will have severe illness," said Dr. Nancy Messonnier of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some countries are putting price caps on face masks to combat price gouging, while others are using loudspeakers on trucks to keep residents informed. In the United States and many other nations, public health officials are turning to guidelines written for pandemic flu and discussing the possibility of school closures, telecommuting and cancelling events.

Countries could be doing even more: training hundreds of workers to trace the virus' spread from person to person and planning

to commandeer entire hospital wards or even entire hospitals, said Dr. Bruce Aylward, the World Health Organization's envoy to China, briefing reporters Tuesday about lessons learned by the recently returned team of international scientists he led.

"Time is everything in this disease," Aylward said. "Days make a difference with a disease like this."

The US National Institutes of Health's infectious disease chief, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said the world is "teetering very, very close" to a pandemic. He credits China's response for giving other nations some breathing room.

China locked down tens of millions of its citizens and other nations imposed travel restrictions, reducing the number of people who needed health checks or quarantines outside the Asian continent.

It "gave us time to really brush off our pandemic preparedness plans and get ready for the kinds of things we have to do," Fauci said. "And we've actually been quite successful because the travel-related cases, we've been able to identify, to isolate" and to track down those they came in contact with.

With no vaccine or medicine available yet, preparations are focused on what's called "social distancing" — limiting opportunities for people to gather and spread the virus.

That played out in Italy this

week. With cases climbing, authorities cut short the popular Venice Carnival and closed down Milan's La Scala opera house. In Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called on companies to allow employees to work from home, while the Tokyo Marathon has been restricted to elite runners and other public events have been canceled.

Is the rest of the world ready?

In Africa, three-quarters of countries have a flu pandemic plan, but most are outdated, according to authors of a modeling study published last week in The Lancet medical journal. The slightly better news is that the African nations most connected to China by air travel — Egypt, Algeria and South Africa — also have the most prepared health systems on the continent.

Elsewhere, Thailand said it would establish special clinics to examine people with flu-like symptoms to detect infections early. Sri Lanka and Laos imposed price ceilings for face masks, while India restricted the export of personal protective equipment.

India's health ministry has been framing step-by-step instructions to deal with sustained transmissions that will be circulated to the 250,000 village councils that are the most basic unit of the country's sprawling administration.



this virus in the next few weeks," Harirchi said.

After Harirchi announced he had tested positive, past videos of him emerged on social media where he attended a press conference on Monday. In the video, the deputy health minister coughed occasionally and appeared to be sweating while standing with government spokesman Ali Rabieei.

were positive came even as Iran confirmed the highest number of coronavirus deaths outside China.

"Among those who had been suspected of the virus, 35 (new cases) have been confirmed and two died of the coronavirus infection," said Health Ministry spokesman Kianush Jahanpour. He said 95 people had been infected across Iran.

Yemen says Saudi tried to eliminate pilots of downed jet

Agencies

Sanna: A senior Houthi official says Yemen will reveal "in due course" information about the fate of two Saudi pilots whose Britain-made Tornado was shot down in Sa'ada province earlier this month.

A statement carried by the Saudi state news agency SPA after the downing said that the kingdom had conducted a special operation to evacuate the pilots who allegedly survived the incident, but no more information has emerged since then.

On Sunday, Houthi politburo member Mohammed al-Bukhaiti revealed in an interview with London-based al-Mayadeen TV that the Saudi air force had tried to eliminate the two pilots after their aircraft was shot down on Feb. 14.

"The Saudis intended to kill the pilots with their airstrikes on the wreckage of the downed fighter jet," he said.

"Saudi fighters targeted every movement in the area where the aircraft had been shot down,

which resulted in the martyrdom of dozens of Yemeni civilians," Bukhaiti added.

According to the United Nations, 31 civilians were killed in Saudi airstrikes that hit al-Hayjah area in al-Jawf province. Yemeni officials said the bombings took place as local people gathered to have a look at the wreckage of the downed plane.

Saudi Arabia conceded the "possibility of collateral damage" during a "search and rescue operation" at the site of the downing, which left the fate of its crew uncertain.

Yemen's Houthis released footage of what they called the launch of their "advanced surface-to-air missile" and the moment it struck the warplane in the night sky, sending it crashing down in a ball of flames.

"The downing of a Tornado in the sky above al-Jawf is a major blow to the enemy and an indication of remarkable growth in Yemeni air defense capabilities," Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdelsalam tweeted.

Should I Stop Hugging To Fight Coronavirus?

Agencies

London: King Henry VI of England banned kissing in 1439 to battle the plague. As the world confronts the coronavirus spreading from China, some health authorities are again urging people to refrain from physical displays of affection.

Epidemiologists say limiting contact could help slow the march of a disease that's turned up in dozens of countries in just two months and killed more than 2,700 people.

Americans ought to think twice about bro hugs and high fives, they say, while the French and Italians might want to reconsider their traditional pecks on the cheek.

"If coronavirus is circulating in your community, it's a very prudent thing to do," said Michael Osterholm, an expert on infectious diseases at the University of Minnesota. "It's one of the few things you can do yourself to actively reduce your risk."

In Italy, where infections are surging and 11 have died from a vi-

rus that spreads through droplets contained in coughs and sneezes, people are starting to embrace the advice. Georgia Nigri, a 36-year-old economist in Rome, said people have become less willing to pucker up.

"People in groups have started suggesting we don't give each other the double kiss on the cheek as a greeting or goodbye anymore," Nigri said. "I was caught off guard and upset by that at first. But I suppose in larger groups, especially with strangers, it makes sense."

Nawaz Sharif Declared 'Absconder' by Pak Govt

Agencies

Dubai: In a major political development, former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been declared 'absconder' as the government decided not to extend his bail.

Sharif was declared 'proclaimed offender' for not meeting the bail requirements by not presenting his medical report before a board formed on the order of the Islamabad High Court. However, the court still has to issue a formal verdict on Sharif to be declared 'absconder'.

The decision to declare Sharif 'absconder' was taken at a meeting of the federal cabinet presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Medical report rejected

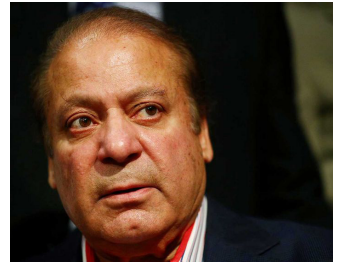
"After Nawaz Sharif failed to submit his medical report of any hospital in London, the medical board rejected a medical certificate sent by him and [the government] declared him an absconder. From today Nawaz Sharif is an absconder according to the law of land and if he does not return to the country he will be declared a proclaimed offender," Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan said at a post-cabinet meeting press conference.

She said the Punjab government, which was authorised by the IHC to decide Nawaz Sharif's case on medical grounds, had written several letters asking the self-exiled former premier to sub-

mit his medical report from any hospital in London, but he failed to do so and only sent a certificate which was not accepted by the medical board.

Sharif's conviction

Sharif who is the supreme leader of Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) was convicted and dis-



qualified in corruption cases. The IHC granted him bail for eight weeks on medical grounds on Oct 29 last year. He left the country for London on Nov 19, 2019 for medical treatment there. His younger brother and Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif also went to London and stayed with him, Dawn news reported.

"The medical board wants to know exactly about ailment of Nawaz Sharif and its treatment and due to his lack of response the Punjab government has decided not to accept Sharif's application regarding extension in his eight-week bail [that expired on Dec 24, 2019]," Dr Awan added.

Mahathir In Driver's Seat Again To Pick New Malaysia Leader

Agencies

Kuala Lumpur: After a wild day that saw the collapse of Malaysia's ruling coalition, one thing is clear: Mahathir Mohamad holds the key to forming the next government.

Mahathir, 94, abruptly resigned as prime minister on Monday after a longstanding rift within his alliance over who would succeed him boiled over. By the end of the day, he was the only one left in charge after the king appointed him interim prime minister and dismissed the cabinet.

Most parties in his ruling coalition pledged to continue supporting him as leader, and he also met with the heads of the opposition alliance on Tuesday. Reuters reported that he invited lawmakers from rival factions to join together in a unity government.

"Whether or not it was strategic or planned is a matter of debate," Bridget Welsh, an associate professor at John Cabot University in Italy who writes frequently about Malaysian politics, told Bloomberg Television. "But ultimately what has happened is he's put himself in a much stronger position in terms of being able to choose who he wants to be in government and the process ahead."

While the outcome of the power struggle is unclear, the events mark another twist in the decades-long rivalry between Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim. The distrust between them dates back to the 1990s, when Anwar was ousted from Mahathir's cabinet and ar-



rested for sodomy.

The re-emergence of political instability threatens the economy at a time when the global coronavirus epidemic and trade wars are hurting growth. Malaysian assets continued their declines after getting pummeled a day earlier, with the ringgit weakening to a two-year low while palm oil futures in Kuala Lumpur slumped toward bear territory. The benchmark stock index rebounded after entering a bear market on Monday.

Mahathir and Anwar joined hands ahead of elections in 2018 for a stunning victory that ousted the previous coalition, which had ruled Malaysia for six decades. But Mahathir soon backtracked on a promise to hand over power shortly after the vote, and he has been similarly vague about giving Anwar the premiership after two years — an anniversary coming up in May.

The lack of clarity increased tensions in Anwar's party, and his deputy — Azmin Ali — emerged as a potential rival to succeed Mahathir. Azmin officially left Anwar's party in the Monday shakeup, and remains a potential leadership option.

NEWSMAKERS

Greta met Malala: Young activists pictured together in Oxford

Teen climate activist Greta Thunberg met Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai at Britain's University of Oxford on Tuesday and posed for a photo together.

Yousafzai, widely known by her first name, Malala, is a student at the University of Oxford. The 22-year-old posted a photo on Instagram of herself and Thunberg sitting on a bench with their arms around each other, with a caption "Thank you, @gretathunberg" and a heart emoji.

In a tweet, Malala said Thunberg is "the only friend I'd skip school for". Thunberg, 17, is in the United Kingdom to join a school strike in Bristol on Friday.

"So... today I met my role model. What else can I say?" Thunberg tweeted with a couple of pictures of the duo.

Both women shot to worldwide fame after standing up for major global issues: climate



change and women's education.

Thunberg became a household name after skipping school in Sweden to protest against climate change, while Malala was shot in the head by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Swat for campaigning for girls to be allowed to go to school.

In 2014, Malala became the youngest recipient of the Nobel

Peace Prize for her advocacy of education. She became a global symbol of the resilience of women in the face of oppression.

Thunberg was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 and 2020.

The pair met to discuss their activism at Lady Margaret Hall, Malala's Oxford college. Thunberg also talked to some of the students about climate change and protest.

World's oldest man, who said secret was smiling, dies at 112

A Japanese man who received his certificate as the world's oldest man with a raised fist and big smiles earlier this month has died at 112.

Guinness World Records had given the certificate to Chitetsu Watanabe on Feb. 12. The organization and the funeral home handling his services confirmed Tuesday he had died Sunday. No cause was given.

He had not been able to eat recently and developed a fever and difficulty breathing a couple of days before his death, Japan's nationally circulated newspaper Mainichi reported, citing family sources.

Watanabe is survived by his five children, 12 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild, Mainichi said.

Watanabe's family did not immediately answer calls to their home.

Watanabe was born in 1907 and worked in Taiwan for 18 years. After returning to Niigata, northern Japan, he worked for the prefectural government until retirement.



Watanabe is survived by his five children, 12 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild, Mainichi said.

He grew fruit and vegetables on the family farm and loved cream puffs and bonsai, the Japanese traditional art of raising small sculpted trees.

He used to say the secret to longevity was to keep smiling. Guinness in Japan offered its condolences to his family.

The oldest living person is also Japanese, Kane Tanaka, a 117-year-old woman.

Assange stripped and handcuffed, lawyer tells court

LONDON: A lawyer for Julian Assange on Tuesday accused the United States of "boldly and blatantly" misstating facts about the Wikileaks founder's conduct, on the second day of his extradition hearing in Britain.

Lead defence lawyer Edward Fitzgerald also complained that Assange had been stripped naked twice and handcuffed 11 times coming and going from court the previous day.

He warned that his treatment could "impinge on these proceedings" and asked the judge to give "an indication to prison authorities" that the regime should be relaxed.

Baraitser said it was a matter for prison officials, saying she did not have the authority to instruct them on how to treat detainees.

Assange faces charges under the US Espionage Act for the 2010 release of a trove of secret files detailing aspects of US military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

