

## **Trump's Dig at China over Pandemic Rattles World Markets**

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump's new threat of tariffs against China over the coronavirus sent a shudder through global markets on Friday, as India warned the world's biggest lockdown would continue for two more weeks.

In New York, Wall Street opened sharply down after Trump alleged on Thursday that the virus might have come from a Chinese lab and raised the prospect of more US trade tariffs.

Asked if he had seen anything to make him think the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China was the source of the outbreak, Trump replied: "Yes, I have."

When asked about reports that he could cancel US debt obligations to China, Trump said he could "do it differently" by "just putting on tariffs".

But he refused to give details about the origin of the virus and Secretary of State Pompeo indicated he had not seen definitive evidence. "We don't know if it came from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. We don't know if it emanated from the market or yet some other place. We don't know those answers," he said.

## **India extends lockdown by two weeks**

European countries and some parts of the United States have begun to ease the social and economic restrictions that have shut in half the world, joining those Asian countries that feel they have already turned a corner.

But India, where stringent restrictions on 1.3 billion people have been credited with keeping virus cases low at the cost of hardship for millions, said it would renew the lockdown in many regions for two more weeks.

The home ministry said there would be "considerable relaxations" in some areas but that zones at risk would have intensified contact tracing, house-to-house surveillance and no movement except for medical emergencies and essential goods and services.

The global markets have also been following the economic impact of the epidemic, and tech giants Apple and Amazon became the latest firms to announce worrying results as corporations around the world shed staff and slash profit forecasts.

The economic mood darkened further with the release of a manufacturing survey that pointed to a historic decline in US output in April. The Institute for Supply Management's (ISM) index is now at its lowest level since 2009, in the wake of the global financial crisis.

Trump's unproven claim — which followed stern Chinese denials — will stir tensions even as the World Health Organisation (WHO) asked to be allowed to take part in a Chinese investigation into the “animal origins” of the pandemic.

In more positive signs, South Africa and Austria allowed some businesses to reopen from Friday, and hard-hit Spain's latest daily death toll confirmed that the pandemic there was slowing.

“The road ahead will be long and hard, and we will make mistakes,” warned South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa.

While death rates are slowing in most of Europe, the global toll from the pandemic has now topped 233,000, according to a tally of official sources.

More than 3.2 million infections have been recorded globally, likely a gross underestimate with many countries only testing the most serious cases.

Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, emerging in China late last year, possibly from a market in Wuhan selling exotic animals for meat. But speculative theories have swirled about the top-secret lab in the central Chinese city.

In Geneva, a WHO spokesman said several investigations into the source of the virus were going on, adding that the global agency was “not currently involved in the studies in China”.

“WHO would be keen to work with international partners and, at the invitation of the Chinese government, to participate in investigation around the animal origins,” Tarik Jasarevic said.

Beijing has denied the lab was the source of the virus. Last month, foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said WHO officials “have repeatedly stated that there is no single evidence that the new coronavirus was produced in a laboratory”.

British Health Minister Matt Hancock announced that the UK has hit its target of conducting 100,000 coronavirus tests a day, a step towards eventually lifting lockdown rules in the country that this week overtook Spain to record the world's third highest death toll.

Germany has accelerated plans to lift its lockdown, preparing to ease curbs on public life and reopen churches, museums and zoos — having restarted shopping last week.

Neighbouring Austria followed suit on Friday with people allowed to go out again freely and gather as long as the group does not exceed 10 people — or 30 for funerals.

And in Belgium, doctors and recovering patients said that many of those who had survived the virus and emerged from a coma were still too weak to leave hospital.

**Courtesy: Dawn news**

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