VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

The World Health Organization has boosted its risk assessment of the coronavirus spreading worldwide to "very high" at global level with the number of nations hit nearing five dozen.

The virus has now reached sub-Saharan Africa, Mexico, New Zealand and Iceland among other nations reporting their first cases on Friday, some appearing with no obvious source with governments scrambling to contain the virus.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says that breaking the chain of transmission is key to stopping the spread of the disease.

"We still have a chance of containing this virus, if robust action is taken to detect cases early, isolate and care for patients and trace contacts."

Late Friday, President Donald Trump said his action to order borders closed to some countries as the virus outbreak spread is the reason why there are so few cases in the United States. So far, 63 cases of the virus have been diagnosed in the United States, including three new cases.

Stock markets around the world continued their downward trend Friday on spreading fears over the economic impact of the coronavirus. AP's Mike Gracia reports.

The worst week on Wall Street since October, 2008 and it was more declines for the Dow Jones Industrial Average and the S&P 500.

The Dow gave up another 357 points, or 1.4 percent, to close at 25,409. In one week, the Dow lost 3,583 points. It was part of a global sell-offs marked by worries about coronavirus.

White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow tried again to calm jittery investors. "... people should not overreact."

In the final 15 minutes of trading, there was a rally of sorts after the Federal Reserve said it stands ready to help the economy if needed.

I'm Mike Gracia.

This is VOA news.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says the United States is considering ways to assist NATO ally Turkey after 33 Turkish soldiers were killed in a Syrian air raid in northwestern Syria.

As Edward Yeranian reports, the statement comes as tensions ratcheted up between Ankara, Damascus and Moscow.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg offered the groups "condolences" to member state Turkey in a press conference Friday after an urgent meeting requested by Ankara following the deaths of 33 Turkish soldiers in Idlib. Stoltenberg stopped short, however, of offering any NATO military support to Ankara.

Russia claims that Turkish forces were working alongside "terrorist groups" in rebel-controlled Idlib province when they were hit by a Syrian government airstrike. Turkey denies the claim. The Russian Foreign Ministry repeated Friday that "terrorist groups will not be tolerated" in Idlib.

Edward Yeranian, for VOA news, Cairo.

President Donald Trump will send Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to witness the signing of a deal aimed at ending America's longest war. AP's Sagar Meghani reports.

The president says Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will be on hand to see an agreement signed with the Taliban who are responsible for the deaths of thousands of America troops in Afghanistan.

It's unclear where the deal will be signed but earlier reporting indicates it'll be tomorrow in Doha, Qatar. The signing comes after a week where U.S.-led forces and the Taliban committed to a reduction in violence. The deal calls for the U.S. to draw down from 13,000 troops in Afghanistan to about 8,600.

The president says defense chief Mark Esper will also issue a joint declaration with Afghanistan's government.

Sagar Meghani, at the Pentagon.

Climate activist Greta Thunberg denounced politicians and the media on Friday for failing her generation. Reuters' Francesca Lynagh has details.

"We will not be [silence] silent because we are the change and change is coming whether you like it or not."

The world is on fire and politicians and the media are ignoring it. That was Greta Thunberg's message for young climate change protesters on Friday.

Several thousand people attended a rally in the southwestern English city of Bristol to see the world's most prominent climate activist speak.

Thunberg has been in Britain since last weekend. On Tuesday, she visited the University of Oxford where she met Malala Yousafzai, the 22-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner and campaigner for girls' education who is studying there.

That's Francesca Lynagh reporting.

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