VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

The coronavirus continued to spread Saturday amid growing concern over the possibility it could trigger a global recession. Reuters' Soraya Ali has more.

Fears of a pandemic rose on Saturday as coronavirus cases spread to new countries and death tolls jumped.

Europe's worst outbreak remains in Italy, with officials saying several more people died on Saturday, bringing the country's total number of fatalities to at least 21.

Also on Saturday, Qatar reported its first cases of the coronavirus, a man who had recently returned from Iran. The Islamic republic is the Gulf's most affected country, with authorities announcing over 40 dead, the highest number of death outside of China.

Saudi Arabia is currently the only state in the region that has not reported any coronavirus cases.

The outbreak has sent governments around the globe into frenzied attempts to contain the spread whether they have cases or not.

That's Reuters' Soraya Ali.

President Donald Trump said additional coronavirus cases in the United States were likely but that the country was prepared for any circumstance. AP's Shelley Adler has more.

"This is no reason to panic."

President Trump at a Saturday news conference says the country was ready.

"We moved very early. That was one of the decisions we made that really turned out to be a lifesaver, in a sense."

The president added that more cases in this country are likely but points out "If you are healthy, you will probably go through a process and you'll be fine."

Shelley Adler, Washington.

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The United States and the Taliban signed a landmark agreement Saturday in Doha, Qatar, setting the stage for the end of a nearly 19-year-old war in Afghanistan and the return of thousands of American troops deployed there. AP's Julie Walker has more.

Under the deal signed in Doha, the U.S. draws down its forces from 13,000 to 8,600 in the next 3-4 months and pulls out the remaining forces in 14 months depending on the Taliban meeting their commitments to prevent terrorism.

If they don't, Secretary of State Mark Pompeo says, "Trump and his team will not hesitate to do what we must do to protect American lives."

Meanwhile in Afghanistan, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper told U.S. troops their sacrifices were what let this start deal.

"This is the best chance Afghanistan has had in 19 years to achieve peace."

More than 2,400 U.S. troops have been killed during the conflict.

I'm Julie Walker.

Speaking at the White House, President Donald Trump praised the Afghan deal, saying it was the result of a lot of hard work and sacrifice by many people.

The president thanked the families of those killed, those wounded in the war and the American public for the expenditure of "blood and treasure."

Trump said it was time for the United States to leave and he hopes the Taliban will hold up its end of the deal.

"... it's time. So I just wanna thank everybody. I wanna congratulate everybody. I really believe the Taliban wants to do something to show that we're not all wasting time. If bad things happen, we'll go back."

The president said it's been a long journey for everyone but the Taliban and surrounding countries need to help bring peace to Afghanistan.

As tensions continued to simmer between Turkey and Russia in northern Syria, Ankara said another Turkish soldier was killed. We get more from Edward Yeranian.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called on Russia to get out of Turkey's way in Syria and allow it to deal with President Bashar al-Assad.

In a speech to supporters Saturday, Turkey, he said, has "entered Syria at the demand of the Syrian people and not at the demand of Assad."

Erdoğan added that Turkey has retaliated against Syrian forces for killing 34 of its soldiers.

Talks between Turkish and Russian military advisers during the past several days apparently have failed to reach a cease-fire. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu told journalists Saturday that President Erdoğan will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 5.

Edward Yeranian, for VOA news, Cairo.

And the polls have just closed in South Carolina in the Democratic primary. It offers a handful of candidates another opportunity to slow the surge of current frontrunner Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

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