VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

U.S. President Donald Trump sought to reassure Americans his administration is working to fight the coronavirus outbreak, [including up] including ramping up, that is, the manufacture of protective gear for medical professionals. AP's Sagar Meghani reports.

In a now daily appearance in the White House briefing room, the president said it's a time of shared national sacrifice.

"... we're all one beautiful big American family," which will celebrate a great victory in the not so distant future.

Amid his optimism, New Jersey's Phil Murphy became the latest governor ordering residents to stay home. He's urging other states to keep the virus from going across their borders.

"It becomes even more vital that we all speak with one voice."

As the president spoke, flights to New York City area airports were suspended for about a half hour due to virus-related staffing issues at an air traffic control center.

The Senate, meantime, is in a rare weekend session, racing toward a mammoth economic stimulus bill.

"... and I think we're getting very close ...."

Sagar Meghani, Washington

North Korea on Saturday welcomed what it said was a letter from U.S. President Donald Trump to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, saying it was a sign of the special and very firm personal relations between the two leaders.

North Korea's state media said Kim had received a letter from Trump, in which the U.S. president said he was impressed by Kim's efforts to defend his people from the coronavirus.

A senior Trump administration official confirmed the president sent the letter and called it "consistent with his efforts to engage global leaders during the ongoing pandemic."

Since Trump held a third summit with Kim last June and briefly stepped into North Korea from the demilitarized zone with South Korea, no progress has been made on the U.S. president's bid to get Pyongyang to give up its nuclear and its missile programs.

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Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said Saturday that all Italian businesses must close until April 3 with the exception of those essential to maintaining the country's supply chain.

As Reuters' Matthew Larotonda reports, Conte's statement came after Italy closed all parks and banned citizens from going out except for necessities.

All parks will be closed, people cannot leave their homes even for exercise now, and in the worst hit region the military is now joining police to enforce it.

People can only venture outside for essential needs like food.

To make matters worse, the death toll may actually be far higher than official tallies.

The mayor of the most badly hit city, Bergamo in the country's north, has reportedly said that he believes it may be as much as four times as high in his town.

The mayor told the Huffington Post that elderly are dying at home without testing, so the true numbers may be underreported.

Other town mayors in the area have told him the same.

In Genoa, also in the country's north, a cruise ship is being repurposed as a hospital ship to offset the overflowing medical wards.

That's Matthew Larotonda of Reuters.

Air raid sirens sounded in Jordan Saturday while Iran's death toll continued to rise as countries across the Middle East sought to stem the outbreak of the coronavirus.

In one of the strictest measures yet, Jordan ordered all shops to close and all people to stay off the streets until at least Tuesday when it plans to announce specific times for shopping.

More people died of COVID-19 in Iran, bringing the country's overall toll to more than 1,500. Egypt announced that all museums and archaeological sites including the famed pyramids at Giza would be closed from Monday until the end of March. And Syria said it was suspending all recruitment to the army as well as penalties for those of avoiding [mandatory con ...] mandatory conscription, that is, until April 22.

He was known for songs like "Islands in the Stream" and "The Gambler," but Kenny Rogers has died. AP correspondent Julie Walker reports.

Kenny Rogers dies at home in Georgia of natural causes, according to his representative.

The performer with a husky voice and silver beard sold tens of millions of records, won three Grammys and was the star of TV movies based on "The Gambler."

In 2015, he told AP about his course of music "I could never be better than Johnny Cash or Willie or Waylon at what they did. So I found something that I could do that didn't invite comparison to them. And I think people thought it was my desire to change country music. But that was never my issue."

I'm Julie Walker.

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