VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. Reporting by remote, I'm David Byrd.

The World Health Organization says the pandemic of COVID-19 is clearly still a global health emergency and is of particular concern as it spreads more widely in countries with weak health systems.

Three months after the WHO's emergency committee first advised its Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus to declare a public health emergency over the Coronavirus, Tedros said he had grave concerns about the potential impact of the disease as it starts to accelerate in countries that don't have sophisticated health care systems.

"The COVID-19 crisis has illustrated that even the most sophisticated health systems have struggled to cope with a pandemic."

The WHO's head of emergencies Mike Ryan said while the organization recognized that some countries are beginning to consider easing lockdown measures, it was important that they "constantly look out for a jump in infections" and be ready to put some measures back in place if needed.

U.S. government regulators will allow emergency use of an experimental drug that appears to help some coronavirus patients recover faster. AP Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

In normal times, the Food and Drug Administration requires "substantial evidence" of a drug's safety and effectiveness. In a public health emergency, though, it can simply require that a drug's potential benefits outweigh its risks. That's what it's doing with Gilead Sciences's remdesivir, the first drug shown to help fight COVID-19.

President Trump announced the emergency authorization in the Oval Office alongside Gilead's CEO Daniel O'Day, who says the company's donating its current stock and ramping up production.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

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After a wave of news reports that he was gravely sick or even dead, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reappeared in public Saturday for the first time in 20 days at a fertilizer factory.

North Korean state radio said Kim attended the completion ceremony for a phosphate fertilizer plant in Sunchon, a city north of the capital, Pyongyang.

Rumors about Kim's health began to swirl after he skipped a major political North Korean anniversary on April 15. The reason he did not attend is still not clear.

The *Daily NK*, a Seoul-based website, reported that he was recovering from heart surgery. Several U.S. media said the United States had been monitoring intelligence that Kim was in grave danger.

The U.S. military said Friday its withdrawal from Afghanistan is continuing and that it expects troop levels to drop to 8,600 by mid-July under terms of a peace-building deal with the Taliban.

The "conditions-based" military withdrawal began within days after the signing of a landmark agreement with the Islamist insurgency on February 29, when the number of total American troops in the country stood at around 13,000.

The agreement also calls for the withdrawal of all American personnel from Afghanistan, along with coalition partners, by July 2021.

The Islamist insurgent group is obliged under the accord to prevent terrorist groups from using Afghan soil for international terrorism and to halt attacks on U.S.-led international forces.

Madrid on Friday closed a makeshift hospital located at the biggest convention center in the Spanish capital after assisting more than 1,500 coronavirus patients. Reuters Emer McCarthy has more.

The 1,350-bed hospital treated about 4,000 patients and will remain equipped and ready to reopen in the event of a new outbreak.

Spain has been one the worst affected countries by the pandemic but the number of hospital admission has drastically reduced.

According to the Health Ministry, Spain's death toll rose by 281 overnight, a small rise from the previous day but still one of the lowest daily tolls in weeks.

On Saturday, Spaniards will also be able to go out for the first time since March 15 to walk or play individual sports, putting an end to one of the strictest confinement policies in Europe.

That's Reuters Emer McCarthy.

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