

PARIS (Reuters) -- A major fire was ongoing on Friday in the area of the Gare de Lyon railway station in south-eastern Paris.

French police said on Twitter that the railway station was being evacuated, without elaborating on the causes of the fire. A Reuters witness saw huge clouds of black smoke billowing over the station and several fire trucks were in the area.

TEHRAN (Tasnim) -- A senior official at Iran's International Imam Khomeini Airport said Friday that at the behest of Iranian Immigration and Passport Police Office, the Chinese citizens have been banned from entering the Islamic Republic.

Ali Kashani said as soon as the Health Ministry confirmed the coronavirus outbreak in Iran, Imam Khomeini Airport City Company established a task force on the fight against coronavirus in the company with law enforcement agencies stationed in the airport.

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Viewpoint

Turkey Ought to Join Syria in Rooting Out Terrorists From Idlib

Iranian Animation Wins Big in Russia



Six AFC Champions League Games Postponed



Fifty Former European Leaders: Trump's Middle East Plan Akin to Apartheid



WHO Warns Coronavirus Could Spread Worldwide

GENEVA/BEIJING (Reuters) -- The rapid spread of coronavirus raised fears of a pandemic on Friday, with five countries reporting their first cases, the World Health Organization warning it could spread worldwide and Switzerland cancelling the giant Geneva car show.

World share markets crashed again, compounding their worst week since the 2008 global financial crisis and bringing the global wipeout to \$5 trillion.

Hopes that the epidemic that started in China late last year would be over in months, and that economic activity would quickly return to normal, have been shattered as the number of international cases has spiraled.

"The outbreak is getting bigger," WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier told a news briefing in Geneva.

"The scenario of the coronavirus reaching multiple countries, if not all countries around the world, is something we have been looking at and warning against since quite a while."

Switzerland joined countries banning big events to try to curb the epidemic, forcing cancellation of next week's Geneva international car show, one of the automotive industry's most important gatherings.

The United States asked its military in Saudi Arabia to avoid crowded venues including malls and cinemas.

Mainland China reported 327 new cases, the lowest since Jan. 23, taking its tally to more than 78,800 cases with almost 2,800 deaths.

China's three biggest airlines restored some international flights and the Shanghai fashion show, initially postponed, went ahead online. But as the outbreak eases in China, it is surging elsewhere.

Five more countries have reported their first case of COVID-19, all with travel history connected to Italy. They were Nigeria, Estonia, Denmark, Netherlands and Lithuania, Lindmeier said.

Countries other than China now account for about three-quarters of new infections.

Bulgaria said it was ready to deploy up to 1,000 troops and military equipment to the border with neighboring Turkey to prevent illegal migrant inflows. It said it would not allow massive inflows at a time when it is stepping up preventive measures against the coronavirus. It has not reported any cases.

Ratings agency Moody's said a pandemic - usually taken to mean a disease spreading quickly in different places - would trigger global and U.S. recessions in the first half of the year.

Mongolia, which has yet to confirm a case, placed its president, Battulga Khaltmaa, in quarantine as a precaution after he returned from a trip to China, state media reported.

A Chinese official called the epidemic the most difficult health crisis in the country's modern history. Another said some recovered patients had been found to be infectious, suggesting the epidemic may be even harder to eradicate than previously thought.

In addition to stockpiling medical supplies, governments ordered schools shut and cancelled big gatherings to try to halt the flu-like disease known as COVID-19.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration was considering invoking special powers to expand production of protective gear.

In Europe, France's reported cases doubled, Germany warned of an impending epidemic and Greece, a gateway for refugees from the Middle East, announced tighter border controls.

The death toll in Italy, Europe's worst-hit country, rose to 17 and those testing positive increased by more than 200 to 655.

Germany has nearly 60 cases, France about 38 and Spain 23, according to a Reuters count.

Iran, Italy and South Korea were at a "decisive point" in efforts to prevent a wider outbreak, the WHO said.

South Korea has the most cases outside China. It reported 571 new infections on Friday, bringing the total to 2,337. The outbreak, which has killed 13 people in South Korea, has also dented President Moon Jae-in's popularity, a poll showed.

Japan is scheduled to host the 2020 Olympics in July but Ryan said discussions were being held about whether to go ahead.

Organizers will decide next week on the ceremonial torch relay, due to arrive on March 20 for a 121-day journey past landmarks including Mount Fuji and Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park.

As of Friday, confirmed cases in Japan had risen above 200, with four deaths, excluding more than 700 cases and five more deaths from a quarantined cruise liner, Diamond Princess.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had called for schools to close and vowed to prevent a severe blow to an economy already teetering on the brink of recession.

Chinese-ruled Hong Kong, where the coronavirus has killed two people and infected more than 90, quarantined a pet dog of a coronavirus patient after its nasal and oral samples tested "weak positive", though authorities had no evidence the virus can be transmitted to pets.

West Scrambles to Prevent Rout of Terrorists in Syria



This picture purportedly shows Turkish military forces in Idlib province in Syria.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia on Friday said it was sending two warships armed with cruise missiles to waters off the Syrian coast and blamed Ankara for the killing of 33 Turkish soldiers in Syria's Idlib region the previous day.

The killing of the Turkish soldiers on Thursday and the wounding of 32 others, announced by the governor in Turkey's Hatay province bordering Syria, raised the Turkish military death toll in the region to 54 this month.

Turkey has sent thousands of troops and heavy military hardware into Syria and Erdogan has warned that Turkey will launch a

full-scale offensive to repel Syrian forces unless they pull back from Turkish observation posts in the region.

Though trying to coordinate their efforts on Syria, Russia backs Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while Turkey backs terrorists.

Responding to Thursday's killings, a senior Turkish official said on Friday that Ankara would no longer stop Syrian refugees from reaching Europe. Turkey blamed an airstrike by Syrian government forces for the deaths.

Russia's Defense Ministry was cited by the RIA news agency on Friday however as saying that the

Turkish troops had been hit by artillery fire from Syrian government forces who were trying to repel an offensive by terrorists.

It was quoted as saying that Ankara had failed to notify Moscow of the presence of Turkish troops in the area hit by shelling despite being in regular communication with the Russian military.

The Turkish troops had been deployed directly alongside terrorists, the ministry was cited as saying. Russia said that Turkish forces "shouldn't have been there."

Moscow did everything it could to help once it learnt of the Turkish troop presence, the ministry

was cited as saying. That included ensuring Syrian forces stopped shelling to allow Turkey to evacuate its dead and wounded.

A State Department representative said in a statement, "We stand by our NATO Ally Turkey and continue to call for an immediate end" to the Syrian offensive against terrorists.

NATO ambassadors were to meet in Brussels at Turkey's request on Friday to hold consultations about developments in Syria.

Separately, and as tensions between Ankara and Damascus rose, Russia's Black Sea Fleet was cited by the Interfax news agency on Friday as saying it was sending two warships equipped with Kalibr cruise missiles to waters off the Syrian coast.

A senior Russian lawmaker said on Friday that any full-scale Turkish military operation in Idlib region would end badly for Ankara itself, the Interfax news agency reported.

Interfax cited Vladimir Dzhabarov, first deputy head of the Russian upper house of parliament's international affairs committee, as issuing the warning.

Syria's army will not allow Western states and their proxies to prolong "terrorist" control in Syria, a foreign ministry source cited by state news agency SANA said on Friday.

The source said Syria's army would continue its campaign to

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Leftist Lawmakers Sue Merkel Government

Germany Had a Role in Gen. Soleimani Assassination

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- Eight German lawmakers from the country's Left Party have filed a criminal complaint against German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her government for complicity in U.S. assassination of Iran's General Qassem Soleimani.

The complaint claims that the U.S. Air force's Ramstein base in western Germany, believed to be used to control drones over Africa and the Middle East, was part of the operation that led to the general's assassination.

"The control signals for the drone attack can only have been transmitted via a satellite relay station on German territory, the U.S. airbase in Ramstein," MP Alexander Neu said in a statement.

"We cannot continue to accept that the federal government itself breaks international law by enabling and supporting the ille-

gal U.S. drone war," Neu added.

The Left Party accused the Merkel government of "abetting" the U.S. operation by its "negligence" on the matter.

A copy of the complaint posted on the website of Neu specifically targets Merkel along with Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer and "other members of the federal government".

In the early hours of January 3, General Soleimani was assassinated by a U.S. drone strike shortly after arriving at Baghdad International Airport on a formal visit to the country.

Washington's unprovoked and illegal targeting of the senior Iranian official, who was also the Middle East's most popular anti-terror commander, greatly

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Nigerian Troops Kill Teenage Boy at Zakzaky Protest

KADUNA (Dispatches) -- A teenage boy has been killed after Nigerian police used live ammunition to disperse protesters demanding the release of jailed Muslim cleric Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky in the country's northwestern state of Kaduna.

The Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), in a post published on its official Twitter page on Thursday, announced that dozens of people staged a rally in the state capital city of Kaduna, located 198 kilometers northeast of the capital Abuja, the previous day when police assaulted the participants and opened fire at them indiscriminately.

A 15-year-old secondary school student, identified as Muhammad Jawwad Liman, was shot and killed as a result.

Zakzaky, who is in his mid-60s, has been in detention since December 2015 after his residence

in the city of Zaria was raided by Nigeria's forces, during which he was beaten and lost vision in his left eye.

During the brutal arrest, three of his sons were also killed, his wife sustained serious wounds, and more than 300 of his followers were killed.

Last July, Sheikh Zakzaky's son, Muhammad, said he was shocked by his father's worsening medical condition after visiting him, stressing that he needed to be immediately hospitalized as "large and dangerous quantities of lead and cadmium have been found in his blood."

A month later, the couple was transferred to India to receive medical care. However, they were forced to leave India after a few days in protest against the Nigerian government's "obstruction" of his medical treatment and after they

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