

ROME JUNE 01, (Net): The first day of June saw coronavirus restrictions ease from Asia to Europe on Monday, even as U.S. protests against police brutality sparked fears of new outbreaks. The Colosseum opened its ancient doors in Rome, ferries restarted in Bangladesh, golfers played in Greece, students returned in Britain and Dutch bars and restaurants were free to welcome hungry, thirsty patrons.

Countries around the Mediterranean Sea tentatively kicked off a summer season where tourists could bask in their famously sunny beaches while still being protected by social distancing measures from a virus that is marching relentlessly around the world.

"We are reopening a symbol. A symbol of Rome, a symbol for Italy," said Alfonsina Russo, director of the Colosseum's archaeological park. "(We are) restarting in a positive way, with a different pace, with a more sustainable tourism."

Greece lifted lockdown measures Monday for hotels, campsites, open-air cinemas, golf courses and public swimming pools, while beaches and museums reopened in Turkey and bars, restaurants, cinemas and museums came back to life in the Netherlands.

"Today, we opened two rooms and tomorrow three. It's like building an anthill," Athens hotel owner Panos Betis said as employees wearing face masks tidied a rooftop restaurant and cleaned a window facing the ancient Acropolis. "We can't compare the season to last year. We were at 95% capacity. Our aim now is to hang in there till 2021."

A long line of masked visitors snaked outside the Vatican Museums, which include the Sistine Chapel, as they reopened for the first time in three months. Italy is eager to reboot its tourism industry, which accounts for 13% of its economy.

The Vatican Museums' famous keyholder — the "clavigero" who holds the keys to all the galleries on a big ring on his wrist — opened the gate in a sign both symbolic and literal that the Museums were back in business.

Still, strict crowd control measures were in place at both landmarks: visitors needed reservations to visit, their temperatures were taken before entering and masks were mandatory. "Having the opportunity to see the museums by making a booking and not having to wait in line for three hours is an opportunity," said visitor Stefano Dicozzi.

The Dutch relaxation of coronavirus rules took place on a major holiday with the sun blazing, raising immediate fears of overcrowding in popular beach resorts. The new rules let bars and restaurants serve up to 30 people inside if they keep social distancing, but there's no standing at bars and reservations are necessary.

Britain, which with over 38,500 dead has the world's second-worst death toll behind the United States, eased restrictions despite warnings from health officials that the risk of spreading COVID-19 was still too great. Some elementary classes reopened in England and people could now have limited contact with family and friends, but only outdoors and with social distancing.

In Asia, Bangladesh restarted bus, train, ferry and flight services Monday, hoping that a gradual reopening revives an economy in which millions have become jobless. Traffic jams and crowds of commuters clogged Manila as the Philippines tried to kickstart its economy.

Around 6.19 million infections have been reported worldwide, with over 372,000 people dying, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. The true death toll is believed to be significantly higher, since many died without ever being tested.

In the U.S., the often-violent protests over the death of George Floyd, a black man pinned at the neck by a white Minneapolis police officer, are raising fears of new outbreaks in a country that

has more confirmed infections and deaths than any other.

The U.S. has seen nearly 1.8 million infections and over 104,000 deaths in the pandemic, which has disproportionately affected racial minorities in a nation that does not have universal health care.

Protests over Floyd's death have shaken the U.S. from New York to Los Angeles.

Demonstrators are packed cheek by jowl, many without masks, many shouting or singing. The virus itself is dispersed by microscopic droplets in the air when people cough, sneeze, talk or sing.

"There's no question that when you put hundreds or thousands of people together in close proximity, when we have got this virus all over the streets ... it's not healthy," Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan said.

Some efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus are being upended by the protests. In contact tracing, newly infected people list everyone they've interacted with over several days in order to alert them that they may have been exposed. That may be a daunting task if someone has been to a mass gathering.

The process also relies on something that may suddenly be in especially short supply: Trust in government.

South Korea and India offered cautionary tales Monday about just how hard it is to halt the virus.

South Korea reported a steady rise in cases around Seoul. Hundreds of infections have been linked to nightspots, restaurants and a massive e-commerce warehouse near Seoul. The resurgence is straining the country's ability to test patients and trace their contacts.

"We have been seeing an increased number of high-risk patients who have been infected through family members or religious gatherings," said Jeong Eun-kyeong, director of the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "There's a particular need for people over 65, pregnant women and those with chronic medical conditions to be alert."

Incheon, a port city west of Seoul, said Monday it's considering banning gatherings at 4,200 churches and other religious facilities.

In India, cases increased rapidly but it still eased restrictions Monday on shops and public transport in more states. Subways and schools remain closed as experts said India is still far from reaching the peak of its outbreak. The government eased the lockdown to help millions of day laborers who have lost their jobs and are unable to feed their families.

China, where the global pandemic is believed to have originated late last year, reported 16 new cases Monday, all travelers from abroad. Much of China has already reopened for business and Monday saw classes restart in middle and high schools. Kindergartners and fourth- and fifth-graders will be allowed back next week.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa says China has pledged to make available 30 million COVID-19 testing kits per month to African countries, which are facing a shortage.

Japan started blood tests Monday to check what percentage of its people have developed antibodies, a sign of past coronavirus infections. The tests will be conducted on 10,000 randomly selected people in three areas including Tokyo and results are expected at the end of the month.