

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC LATEST UPDATES

MORE THAN 302,000 DEAD The coronavirus has killed at least 302,489 people worldwide since it surfaced in China late last year, according to an AFP tally on Friday at 1100 GMT based on official sources. There have been more than 4,454,090 officially recorded cases in 196 countries and territories. The United States has recorded the most deaths at 85,906. It is followed by Britain with 33,614, Italy with 31,368, Spain with 27,459 and France at 27,425.

LOOMING RECESSION The coronavirus pandemic could cut up to 9.7 percent off the global economy, the Asian Development Bank said yesterday. Meanwhile, Europe's economic powerhouse Germany tipped into a recession in the first quarter, with its economy shrinking by 2.2 percent due to the pandemic. Portugal's gross domestic product dropped 3.9 percent in the first quarter. The British government is to pump up to 1.6 billion pounds (\$1.9 billion) into London's public transport system to restore services and help prevent overcrowding as people return to work.

BRAZIL, MEXICO CASES SURGE Brazil and Mexico on Thursday reported a record one-day rise in new coronavirus cases, just as leaders of both countries intensified attempts to reopen their economies. Brazil, the hardest-hit country in Latin America, registered a daily record of 13,944 new cases, bringing its total to 202,918 confirmed cases of the virus and 13,933 deaths since the outbreak began, according to health ministry data. Mexico, the second most impacted nation in the region, reported 2,409 new infections on Thursday, to bring its total confirmed coronavirus cases to 42,595. An additional 257 coronavirus deaths brought total fatalities to 4,477.

RUSSIA PROBES FT, NYT Russia on Thursday launched a probe into the Financial Times and the New York Times after the newspapers said local authorities could be vastly under-reporting deaths from the coronavirus in the country. Russia has the world's second-highest number of coronavirus cases but has registered 10 times fewer deaths than Britain, France, Italy and Spain. As of yesterday the country had 262,843 confirmed coronavirus infections and 2,418 deaths.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



A medical worker takes a swab sample from a staff member from the AOC computer monitor factory to be tested for the COVID-19 coronavirus in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province, yesterday. Wuhan, the original epicentre of the new coronavirus outbreak in China, has tested over 3 million residents for the pathogen since April, and will now focus its testing efforts on the rest of its 11 million population, according to state media.

PHOTO: AFP

Mortality rates hint at higher death toll

AFP, Paris

The coronavirus has now taken 300,000 lives globally, according to official figures. But depending on the way deaths are counted, the real human cost could be far greater.

The official figures include only those deaths attributed to coronavirus, but experts are increasingly looking at data comparing this year's death rates with previous years -- regardless of the official cause.

This "excess deaths" metric raises the spectre of a much higher toll, as it includes fatalities indirectly related to the virus -- for example, people suffering from other illnesses who could not access treatment because of the strain the pandemic has placed on hospitals.

Throughout the crisis, methods of data compilation have differed widely between nations, making direct comparisons difficult.

In Italy, between February 20

and March 31, 12,428 people were recorded as having died of the coronavirus. But in the same period, authorities noted 25,354 "excess deaths" compared with the average of the five previous years.

For the United States, the difference is even more striking: according to data for March, before the country was hit by the worst of the pandemic, the number of excess deaths reached 6,000 -- more than triple the official COVID-19 toll.

Even in Germany, widely considered by experts to have handled the outbreak better than other EU countries, 3,706 deaths more than the average were noted in March, even as the official virus toll was 2,218.

Even without a standardised counting method, excess mortality data is the best indicator of how the virus has impacted different countries, said professor Yvonne Doyle, the medical director of Public Health England.

Virus may kill 190,000 in Africa

Warns WHO; ADB says world economy may shrink 9.6pc

AFP, Washington

The coronavirus could infect a quarter of a billion Africans and put intolerable pressure on the continent's fragile health system, a new report said yesterday, as the pandemic's global death toll topped 300,000.

Despite fears of a second wave of infections, borders began opening up in Europe and lockdowns continued to ease as governments try to get stalled economies moving again, with experts warning world output could shrink by 10 percent.

The nexus of poverty and risk was also laid bare by a World Health Organization report that warned Africa is a hotspot waiting to happen, despite so far having escaped the worst of the disease.

Researchers say fragile health systems on the world's poorest continent could quickly be overwhelmed, with modeling suggesting 231 million people could become infected.

Up to 190,000 of them could die, the study published in the journal BMJ Global Health suggested.

With large populations living in slums, social distancing is all but impossible for many on the continent, and health experts say only a vaccine will prevent widespread infection.

Despite scientists working flat out towards that aim, experts say it could still be many months -- or even years -- away. And without a robust roll-out plan, even highly developed countries could struggle to take advantage of any breakthrough.

Meanwhile, the Asian Development Bank yesterday doubled its previous estimate of the cost of the pandemic, saying the world economy would shrink by \$8.8 trillion -- almost a tenth of global output.

Up to 242 million jobs will vanish due to the virus, the Manila-based bank said.

Advertisement for Belcrest 3 Bedroom Apartments at Block-D, Bashundhara. Includes contact information for Asset Developments & Holdings Ltd, 91 Gulshan Avenue. Call on 16687. Or Mobile: 01713 018408, 01713 046689, 01713 331201.



Residents try to salvage belongings amongst their houses destroyed at the height of Typhoon Vongfong in San Policarpio town, Eastern Samar province yesterday, a day after the typhoon hit the town. Tens of thousands of people were forced into cramped shelters by the powerful storm, making social distancing nearly impossible as the nation battles the coronavirus pandemic.

PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar denounced at UNSC for violence

AFP, United Nations

UN Security Council European member states and Britain on Thursday denounced violence in Myanmar and expressed concern over the coronavirus pandemic in the country, in a document China refused to endorse, diplomatic sources said.

Britain, which initiated the session, said it was concerned about "the heavy toll" an escalation of violence between the Myanmar military and the insurgent Arakan Army was "taking on civilians at the time of COVID-19 crisis."

The country's northwest has been embroiled in an increasingly brutal civil war between the military and Arakan Army rebels demanding more autonomy for the region's ethnic Rakhine Buddhists.

"The conflict has already led to a spike in internal displacement, additional restrictions on humanitarian access," Britain said in a statement.

EU members Belgium, Estonia, France and Germany expressed the same concern, calling for "an immediate, comprehensive and nationwide ceasefire."

1,000 Rohingyas stranded at sea

Says Amnesty as Southeast Asia shuts borders for the persecuted minority

REUTERS, Jakarta

At least 1,000 Rohingyas are stranded at sea as Southeast Asian nations tighten their borders to keep out the new coronavirus, Amnesty International said on Friday, urging action to ensure they were not buried in an "invisible graveyard" at sea.

Rights groups believe at least two boats carrying Rohingyas, members of a Muslim minority from Myanmar, are off the coast of the Indonesian province of Aceh, but officials said they had no clear information.

Spokesmen for the Western Fleet of the Indonesian navy as well as Aceh's disaster mitigation agency and search and rescue team told Reuters they were trying to confirm the location of the vessels.

Refugees from two other boats have landed in Bangladesh since mid-April, many starving and emaciated after weeks at sea. Survivors from one said dozens died on board.

Saad Hammadi, from the South Asia Regional Office of Amnesty International, said the refugees could have been sailing for several weeks or even months without food or water, citing information from humanitarian agencies and local news reports.

In a virtual news conference he urged Indonesia and Australia, who chair an anti-people smuggling and trafficking forum known as the Bali Process, to ensure the refugees are allowed to land safely "so that we don't see the sea become an invisible graveyard."

The Australian foreign ministry said it could not immediately comment and a spokesman for the Indonesian foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Rohingyas have made perilous voyages to Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia for years, fleeing persecution in Myanmar and poverty in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

The vast majority fled a military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 that the UN has said was executed with genocidal intent. The Myanmar authorities deny genocide, saying it was a legitimate response to attacks by Rohingya militants.

Senate okays bill to pressure China over Uighur rights

REUTERS, Washington

The US Senate approved legislation on Thursday calling on President Donald Trump's administration to toughen its response to China's crackdown on its Uighur Muslim minority, the latest push in Washington to punish China as Trump blames Beijing for worsening the coronavirus pandemic.

The Republican-led Senate passed the bill by unanimous consent, without a roll-call vote.

Passage sends the measure to the Democratic-led House of Representatives, which must approve it before it is sent to the White House for Trump to sign into law or veto.

The House approved its own legislation late last year responding to the treatment of the Uighurs. That measure called for sanctions against senior Chinese officials responsible for the crackdown on Muslims in the Xinjiang province, angering China.

The United Nations estimates more than a million Muslim Uighurs have been detained in camps in Xinjiang in recent years. China denies mistreatment of Uighurs.

Official notice from the Bangladesh government regarding the suspension of the 2019-2020 budget. The notice lists various government departments and their respective budget allocations, along with the names of the officials responsible for each. It is signed by the Minister of Finance, Dr. Anwarul Haque.