

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

KEY UPDATES

MORE THAN 355,000 DEAD

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 355,736 people since the outbreak first emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT yesterday. At least 5,705,890 cases of coronavirus have been registered in 196 countries and territories. The United States the worst-hit country with 100,442 deaths from 1,699,933 cases. After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Britain with 37,460 deaths, Italy with 33,072, France with 28,596 deaths and Spain with 27,118 deaths.

86M CHILDREN AT POVERTY RISK

The economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic could push as many as 86 million more children into poverty by the end of 2020, a joint study by Save the Children and UNICEF showed Wednesday. That would bring the total number of children affected by poverty worldwide to 672 million, an increase of 15 percent over last year, the two aid agencies said in a statement. Nearly two-thirds of those children overall live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

208 ATTACKS ON HEALTH WORKERS

The Red Cross said Wednesday that more than 200 violent attacks on health workers connected with the COVID-19 crisis had been reported across more than a dozen countries since the pandemic began. The International Committee of the Red Cross joined 12 other global medical and humanitarian organisations, representing more than 30 million medical professionals, to issue a declaration condemning growing attacks on health workers and facilities.

EU GOVTS BAN MALARIA DRUG

European governments moved on Wednesday to halt the use of anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 patients, and a second global trial was suspended, further blows to hopes for a treatment promoted by US President Donald Trump. The moves by France, Italy and Belgium followed a World Health Organization decision on Monday to pause a large trial of hydroxychloroquine due to safety concerns.

US LAWMAKERS VOTE BY PROXY

US lawmakers cast proxy votes for the first time ever on Wednesday, in a contentious coronavirus-era procedure that has drawn sustained criticism from congressional Republicans. Some 70 Democrats in the House of Representatives voted remotely on a measure condemning China's human rights violations. The new rules, passed this month along party lines, will remain in place only for the duration of the coronavirus crisis.

CASES IN GULF TOPS 200,000

The number of coronavirus cases in the six Gulf Arab states doubled in less than a month to surpass 200,000 on Wednesday, according to a Reuters' tally, at a time the region's two biggest economies move to resume activity. Coronavirus infections in the energy producing region, which crossed the 100,000 mark on May 11, had initially been linked to travel but then spread among low-income migrant workers in overcrowded quarters, prompting authorities to increase testing.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



(From top, anti-clockwise) Police use pepper spray as protesters demonstrate against the killing of an African-American man in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Wednesday; demonstrators react in front of police in downtown Los Angeles; a group of protesters in Minneapolis demonstrate; a shop burns in Minneapolis; and a still image from a video shows a police officer on Monday arresting George Floyd, whose death sparked the protests.

PHOTO: AFP

POLICE BRUTALITY
Outrage in US
over racially charged killing

REUTERS, Minneapolis

Protesters clashed with riot police firing tear gas for a second night in Minneapolis on Wednesday in an outpouring of rage over the death of a black man seen in a widely circulated video gasping for breath as a white officer knelt on his neck.

The video, taken by an onlooker to Monday night's fatal encounter between police and George Floyd, 46, showed him lying face down and handcuffed, groaning for help and repeatedly saying, "please, I can't breathe," before growing motionless.

The second day of protests accompanied by looting and vandalism, began hours after Mayor Jacob Frey urged prosecutors to file criminal charges against the white policeman shown pinning Floyd to the street.

Floyd, who was unarmed and reportedly suspected of trying to pass counterfeit bills at a corner eatery, was taken by ambulance from the scene of his arrest and pronounced dead the same night at a hospital.

The policeman shown kneeling on Floyd's neck and three fellow officers involved were dismissed from the police department on Tuesday as the FBI opened an investigation.

Hundreds of protesters thronged streets around the Third Precinct police station late on Wednesday, about half a mile from where Floyd had been arrested. Police used tear gas, plastic bullets and concussion grenades to keep the crowds at bay.

Outrage at Floyd's death also triggered a rally in downtown Los Angeles.

The case was reminiscent of the 2014 killing of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man in New York City who died after being put in a banned police chokehold. Garner's dying words, "I can't breathe," became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement calling attention to a wave of killings of African-Americans by police using unjustified lethal force.

MOVE TO REGULATE SOCIAL MEDIA

Trump to sign executive order

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump is expected to sign an executive order yesterday after threatening to shutter social media platforms following Twitter's move to label two of his tweets misleading.

After long resisting calls to censure Trump over his truth-defying posts, Twitter on Tuesday accused the president for the first time of making false claims.

Trump had tweeted -- without any evidence -- that more mail-in voting would lead to what he called a "rigged election" this November.

Twitter's slap on the wrist was enough to drive Trump into a tirade -- on Twitter -- in which he claimed that the political right in the United States was being censored.

Trump would sign an executive order "pertaining to social media" on Thursday, his aides said, without offering any details.

But an undated draft version of the order obtained by The Washington Post on Wednesday said "we cannot allow a limited number of online platforms to hand-pick the speech that Americans may access and convey online."

The order would make it easier for federal regulators to argue that the companies are "suppressing free

speech when they move to suspend users or delete posts," The New York Times reported, citing two senior administration officials.

Both newspapers also reported that the order, which they said had not yet been finalized, could see tech companies such as Twitter, Facebook and Google held legally responsible for content posted on their platforms.

Twitter's move to tag the president's tweets comes after years of being accused of ignoring the president's violation of platform rules with his daily, often hourly barrages of personal insults and inaccurate information sent to more than 80 million followers.

Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg waded into the row, telling Fox News that his social network -- still the biggest in the world -- has a different policy.

"I just believe strongly that Facebook should not be the arbiter of truth of everything that people say online," Zuckerberg said in a snippet of the interview posted online Wednesday by Fox.

"I think, in general, private companies, especially these platform companies, shouldn't be in the position of doing that."

Twitter founder and CEO Jack Dorsey fired back on Wednesday night, saying that his platform's effort to point out misinformation did not make it an "arbiter of truth."

"Our intention is to connect the dots of conflicting statements and show the information in dispute so people can judge for themselves," he tweeted.

Kate Ruane, at the American Civil Liberties Union, said that Trump has no power to regulate Twitter.

The constitution "clearly prohibits the president from taking any action to stop Twitter from pointing out his blatant lies about voting by mail," she said.

For all his protests, Trump is a political giant on social media. By contrast, his Democratic election opponent, Joe Biden, has only 5.5 million Twitter followers.

Social media suits Trump's unorthodox communications style and his penchant for conspiracy theories, rumors and playground-style insults.

The claim that Twitter is biased against conservatives fits the White House narrative that the billionaire president is still an outsider politician running against the elite.

The row is also a useful smokescreen when Biden is homing in on widespread dissatisfaction with Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, which has left more than 100,000 Americans dead.

Polls consistently show Biden in a strong position, despite barely having left his home during weeks of social distancing measures -- and his relatively meager social media presence.

HEATWAVE, WATER WOES, LOCUST INVASION AND CORONAVIRUS
India facing perfect storm

AGENCIES

Bollywood stars and political leaders have urged Indians to wash their hands to protect against coronavirus but that's a pipe dream for slum-dwellers like Bala Devi, now sweltering through a summer heatwave.

The 44-year-old widow and her family of eight are among tens of millions of people facing months of torrid weather while stuck at home, in lockdown, without regular access to clean water to keep cool and wash.

"It is so hot the children keep asking for water to drink. How can I give them water for washing their hands when we don't have even enough water to drink?" Devi said at her cramped home in New Delhi.

Outside it is around 45 degrees Celsius but her one-bedroom tenement house has just an improvised ceiling fan to keep its occupants cool.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, water was in short supply for the 100 million people living in India's urban slums.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has listed water infrastructure as a key priority, promising to reach 145 million rural households by 2024.

But currently roughly a third of the country's 1.3 billion people cut back on washing and bathing during summer as taps run dry.

Last year the southern city of Chennai ran out of water entirely.

Heatwaves are increasing in frequency, and this week the mercury hit 50 Celsius in western Rajasthan state. Parts of Delhi



recorded their hottest May temperatures in almost 20 years.

Heat stress has killed around 3,500 people around the country since 2015, according to government figures, while farmers have killed themselves because of droughts ravaging their crops.

Meanwhile India is facing another problem as massive swarms of desert locusts are destroying crops across western and central India, seeping into Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab now, after Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana.

Locust containment measures and sprinkling operations have been conducted in 303 locations spread over more than 47,000 hectares till Wednesday in 20 districts of Rajasthan, nine in Madhya Pradesh, two in Gujarat and one each in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, sources in the Agriculture Ministry said.

The government is using specialised spraying machines and has set up 11 control rooms to coordinate the response.

US ends waivers for nations in Iran nuke deal

AFP, Washington

The United States said Wednesday it was ending waivers in its sanctions for nations that remain in the Iran nuclear accord, bringing the deal further to the verge of collapse.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he was responding to Iran's "brinkmanship" -- its series of small but defiant nuclear steps, aimed at pressuring the United States to remove sanctions as called for by the 2015 accord.

"These escalatory actions are unacceptable and I cannot justify renewing the waiver," Pompeo said.

The United States will notably do away with the waivers that allowed the modification of the heavy water reactor in Arak, which prevented it from using plutonium for military use, as well as the export of spent and scrap research reactor fuel.

Pompeo said that the United States was issuing a final 60-day waiver to allow companies involved in the projects to wrap up operations.

Huawei exec loses battle in extradition fight

AFP, Vancouver

An executive for Chinese tech giant Huawei suffered a legal setback Wednesday when a Canadian judge ruled that proceedings to extradite her to the United States will go ahead.

The decision on so-called double criminality, a key test for extradition, found that bank fraud accusations against Meng Wanzhou would stand up in Canada.

The interim ruling denying Meng's attempt to gain her freedom means she will continue to live in a Vancouver mansion under strict bail conditions while her case plays out.

It also effectively dashed hopes for a quick mending of Canada-China relations, which soured following her arrest on a US warrant in 2018 during a stopover in Vancouver.

Prosecutors accused Meng of committing fraud by lying to a bank, in this case an American one. That is a crime in both Canada and the United States.

During four days of hearings in January, the court heard that Meng lied to the HSBC bank about Huawei's relationship with its own Iran-based affiliate Skycom in order to secure nearly US\$1 billion in loans and credit, putting the bank at risk of violating US sanctions.

Huawei said in a statement it was "disappointed" by the ruling, adding that it looked forward to Meng ultimately being exonerated.

China's Embassy in Ottawa, meanwhile, accused the United States of trying "to bring down Huawei" and Canada of being "an accomplice."

Beijing has long signaled that her repatriation was a precondition for improved bilateral ties and its release of two Canadians detained on espionage suspicions.

The arrests of former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor nine days after Meng was taken into custody have been widely decried as retribution.

China has also blocked billions of dollars' worth of Canadian agricultural exports.



Bad weather delays SpaceX, Nasa ISS mission

After a day of suspense, SpaceX's landmark launch to the International Space Station -- the first crewed mission to blast off from US soil in almost a decade -- was scrubbed Wednesday due to fears of a lightning strike. With NASA astronauts Bob Behnen and Doug Hurley strapped into the Crew Dragon capsule, the launch pad platform retracted and rocket fueling underway, SpaceX made the call to abort. The delay means a wait of at least a few more days for the first crewed launch on an American rocket since the space shuttle program ended in 2011. They will try again on Saturday. If successful, the launch will be the first time the feat has been performed by a privately owned company.

Russia postpones BRICS, SCO summits in July

Russia announced on Wednesday that the coronavirus pandemic has forced it to postpone two international summits set for Saint Petersburg in July. Officials responsible for the BRICS and SCO summits "decided to postpone" both events scheduled for July 21-23 in Russia's second city, according to a statement on the Kremlin website. The summits would have brought together leaders of BRICS countries, an association of five emerging economies -- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. It would have also convened leaders of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation countries, which include Russia, China, India, Pakistan and several Central Asian countries. The Kremlin said new dates would be decided depending on the virus situation of countries participating in the summits "and in the world as a whole."

Congress authorises sanctions against China over Uighurs

The US Congress on Wednesday authorized sanctions against Chinese officials over the mass incarceration of Muslim Uighurs, ramping up pressure on another front in the troubled relationship between the Pacific powers. The House of Representatives voted with just one dissent in favor of the Uighur Human Rights Act, hours after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo took a major step to press China on another major issue -- the autonomy of Hong Kong. Rights groups say at least one million Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China's northwestern Xinjiang region have been incarcerated in camps in a massive brainwashing campaign with few modern parallels. China initially denied the mass incarceration but has since described the camps as vocational training centers aimed at discouraging Islamic radicalism. Trump can veto the legislation. But Congress could easily override his veto.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

NCC Bank NATIONAL CREDIT AND COMMERCE BANK LIMITED
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Notice
Postponement of recommendation of dividend, Record Date and date of AGM of National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited (NCCBL).
In order to comply with the DOS Circular No. 03 dated 11th May 2020 of Bangladesh Bank regarding declaration and distribution of dividend of the banks for the year 2019, the Board of Directors of National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited (NCCBL) in its 428th meeting held on May 18, 2020, among others, postponed its earlier decision about i) Recommendation of cash dividend (17.00%); ii) Record Date (June 01, 2020) and iii) Date of Annual General Meeting (July 27, 2020) which was published in different newspapers & online portal on April 28, 2020.
The new recommendation of dividend, Record Date and date of AGM for the year 2019 will be decided in due course and to be disclosed in time.
Dated: Dhaka May 18, 2020
Sd/- Md. Monirul Alam, FCS EVP & Company Secretary



This aerial photo taken on Wednesday shows trucks driving on the Hutong Yangtze River Bridge during a load test in Nantong, in China's eastern Jiangsu province.

PHOTO: AFP