

# US logs record virus caseload

India to start inoculation on Jan 16

AGENCIES

India yesterday said it will start vaccinating 1.3 billion people from January 16 as the United States logged a record new daily virus caseload and millions in Asia woke up to new lockdowns.

Almost 1.9 million people have now died from the virus, with new variants sending cases soaring and prompting the re-introduction of curbs on movement even as some countries begin mass inoculation campaigns.

Almost 290,000 new cases were reported in the US within 24 hours Friday according to Johns Hopkins University, a day after the world's worst-hit country recorded a daily record of nearly 4,000 deaths.

India yesterday said it will prioritize about 30 million healthcare and frontline workers for vaccination. India hopes to inoculate 300 million of its 1.35 billion people free of charge in the first six to eight months of this year.

After healthcare and frontline workers, the vaccines will be given to "those above 50 years of age and the under-50 population groups with co-morbidities, numbering around 2.7 million," the statement said.

With the highest number of infections in the world after the United States, India is developing two indigenous Covid-19 vaccines. On Saturday it reported 18,222 new coronavirus cases, taking the total to 10.43 million.

India's drug regulator has approved two coronavirus vaccines for emergency use, Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University and Covaxin by local company Bharat Biotech and a state-run institute.

Yesterday, the streets of the Australian city of Brisbane were quiet as its more than two million residents were ordered back into lockdown after authorities detected a single infection of a new strain from Britain, which is thought to be more infectious.

In China, where the original coronavirus first emerged in late 2019, authorities also tightened restrictions on two cities near Beijing to stamp out a growing cluster.

The new week-long stay at home orders affecting about 18 million people in Shijiazhuang and Xingtai. Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei province which surrounds Beijing, suspended service on the city's subway, then extended the ban to all public transport, including taxis.

China also yesterday said that preparations were still ongoing for a WHO mission to Wuhan to investigate the origins of Covid-19, following a rare rebuke from the UN body over a delay to the long-planned trip.

In Japan, Osaka and its surrounding prefectures asked Tokyo to expand a state of emergency to the western cities in an effort to contain the latest outbreak, while Tokyo's new daily infections keep above 2,000 cases yesterday.



US sees 290,000 infections in 24-hours  
Millions in lockdowns in Asia  
China says WHO Wuhan visit preparations ongoing



A man takes pictures while walking his dog amid a heavy snowfall in Madrid, yesterday. Snowstorms across much of Spain left three people dead and caused chaos across much of the country, trapping motorists and closing the capital's air and rail links, with more falls to come Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Hospital fire kills 10 babies in India

AFP, Bombay

Ten babies were killed in a maternity unit in the Indian state of Maharashtra early yesterday when fire tore through a major hospital, a doctor said.

Staff rescued seven of the newborn infants at the Bhandara district hospital but were beaten back before they could get to the 10 others, Pramod Khandate, a senior doctor, told AFP.

All of those who died were aged between a few days and three months, according to reports.

The cause of the fire is not known yet.

## US 'our biggest enemy'

Says N Korea leader Kim ahead of Biden inauguration

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for more advanced nuclear weapons and said the United States is "our biggest enemy," state media said yesterday, presenting a stark challenge to President-elect Joe Biden just days before he takes office.

Washington's hostile policies would not change regardless of who occupies the White House but dropping those policies would be key to North Korea-US relations, Kim said, according to state news agency KCNA.

"Our foreign political activities should be focused and redirected on subduing the US, our biggest enemy and main obstacle to our innovated development," Kim said during nine hours of remarks over several days at a rare party congress in Pyongyang.

"No matter who is in power in the US, the true nature of the US and its fundamental policies towards North Korea never change," Kim said, vowing to expand ties with "anti-imperialist, independent forces."

North Korea would not "misuse" its nuclear weapons, Kim said but the country is expanding its nuclear arsenal, including "preemptive" and "retaliatory" strike capabilities and warheads of varying sizes.

Kim called for developing equipment including hypersonic weapons, solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), spy satellites, and drones.

North Korea is preparing for the test and production of various new weapons, including a "multi-warhead rocket" and "supersonic gliding flight warheads for new type ballistic rockets," while research on a nuclear submarine is nearly complete, he said.

There was no immediate comment from the US State Department. A spokesman for the Biden campaign declined to comment.

Biden, who was vice president under President Barack Obama, called Kim a "thug" during the election campaign. In 2019 North Korea called Biden a "rabid dog" that needed to be "beaten to death with a stick."

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### India detains Chinese soldier at flashpoint border

Indian forces have detained a Chinese soldier on the disputed Himalayan frontier of Ladakh where the world's two most populous countries fought a deadly battle last year, the military said yesterday. It is the second detention on the high altitude border since the pitched battles in June in which 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese troops were killed. The Indian army said in a statement that the People's Liberation Army soldier was "apprehended" on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control in the early hours of Friday and taken into custody. The People's Liberation Army Daily, which is run by China's military, said the soldier went missing in "the darkness and complicated terrain" and insisted India was informed.

#### Qatar-Saudi border reopens

Qatar and Saudi Arabia reopened their land border yesterday, Qatar sources told AFP, as they restore ties following a landmark deal to end a three and a half year rift. Saudi shut its side of Qatar's only land border in June 2017 as part of a package of sanctions it said was a response to Doha's backing for radical Islamist groups and closeness to Iran. Qatar always denied the charges. Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt which also imposed an embargo on travel and trade, agreed to lift the restrictions at a Gulf Cooperation Council summit in the kingdom on Tuesday.

#### Pakistan protesters end blockade over deaths of miners



Thousands of mourners gathered in Pakistan yesterday for the burial of 10 miners who were killed in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group after calling off their six-day protest. Shia Hazara protesters numbering up to 3,000 had blocked a road on the outskirts of Quetta demanding personal assurances by Prime Minister Imran Khan. On late Friday they reached an agreement with the provincial government of Balochistan after receiving assurance of better protection of their community, compensations for the victims and arrests of culprits. The 10 miners from the minority community were kidnapped by gunmen from a remote colliery on Sunday before being taken to nearby hills where most were shot dead, while some were beheaded.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

### TRUMP'S IMPEACHMENT

#### How it could play out

US Congressional Democrats plan to introduce misconduct charges on Monday that could lead to a second impeachment of President Donald Trump. The following is a primer on what a second impeachment proceeding of Trump could look like.

#### How it works?

A misconception about impeachment is that it refers to the removal of a president from office. In fact, impeachment refers only to the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of Congress, bringing charges that a president engaged in a "high crime or misdemeanor" - similar to an indictment in a criminal case. If a simple majority of the House's 435 members approves bringing charges, known as "articles of impeachment," the process moves to the Senate, the upper chamber, which has a trial. The Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the Senate to convict and remove a president.

#### 2024 bid at risk?

Yes. Two historical precedents, both involving federal judges, make clear that only a simple majority of the Senate is needed to disqualify Trump from holding future office. Legal experts said this lower standard means Democrats, who will take control of the Senate later in January, have a realistic chance of barring Trump from running for president in 2024.

#### Impeachment after January 20?

No court has yet definitively ruled on the matter, but many scholars believe the impeachment proceeding would not be rendered moot by Trump leaving office, since disqualification from future office would remain a potential penalty.

#### How quickly it can be done?

Impeachment experts said that, in theory, it could be done very quickly, within days even, because both chambers have wide latitude to set the rules as they see it. But the current rules, which could be revisited, would make it difficult to complete the process in less than a week.

SOURCE: REUTERS

## US president has sole power to launch a nuclear strike

AFP, Washington

Concerns over US President Donald Trump's mental state have drawn focus on his power to unleash a nuclear attack.

Two days after Trump supporters, under his encouragement, stormed the US Capitol and shut down Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she had contacted the Pentagon's top general, Mark Milley, to understand how to prevent "an unhinged president" from using the secret nuclear launch codes to order a nuclear strike.

As Milley presumably told her, the US constitution gives the president the sole power to launch a nuclear weapon. Congress cannot interfere, and the leaders of the Pentagon, the generals and civilians, are bound to transmit his order, whether they agree with it or not.

Everywhere he travels, the president is accompanied by an aide carrying the "nuclear football", a bag containing instructions, attack plans and codes for initiating a nuclear strike that only the president can use.

Given the need to consider the justification, what equipment to use and what targets are chosen, such a decision would normally be done in consultation with defense chiefs.

But once the president decides -- whether

after much deliberation or in a fit of anger -- "neither the military nor Congress can overrule these orders," said a December report on nuclear command and control from the Congressional Research Service.

The only restriction on the US leader in this case is the legality of the strike. The laws of war would allow a military official to refuse to execute an order to do something illegal.

If the president decides, he would make use of a card of codes unique to himself, called the "biscuit", to certify his identification as the commander-in-chief empowered to order a launch.

The launch order would then be transmitted to the US Strategic Command, where an officer would confirm it came from the president and execution would take place. It could be as little as two minutes from order to the launch of a ground-based nuclear-tipped missile, or 15 minutes from a submarine.

There are no exceptions in the system of nuclear command and control for a scenario in which the president is seen to be mentally unstable and ignores the advice of his generals.

The power of US president on nuclear launch issue is absolute and it will be hard to refuse an order of the commander-in-chief for any official.



## AFTERMATH OF CAPITOL RIOT Majority of Americans want Trump removed

REUTERS

Fifty-seven percent of Americans want Republican President Donald Trump to be immediately removed from office after he encouraged a protest this week that escalated into a deadly riot inside the US Capitol, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll.

Most of them were Democrats, however, with Republicans apparently much more supportive of Trump serving out the final days of his term, which ends on Jan 20.

The national public opinion survey, conducted Thursday and Friday, also showed that seven out of 10 of those who voted for Trump in November opposed the action of the hardcore supporters.

Nearly 70% of Americans surveyed also said they disapprove of Trump's actions in the run-up to Wednesday's assault. At a rally earlier in the day, Trump had exhorted thousands of his followers to march to the Capitol.

Just two in ten Republicans wanted Trump to leave office before his term ends.

Some 30% said the president should be removed using provisions in the 25th Amendment of the US Constitution. Another 14% said Congress should impeach and remove Trump from office, and 13% said Trump should simply resign. A small minority of the American public -- 12% -- said they supported the actions of those people who took part in the riot. Seventy-nine percent of adults, including two-thirds of Republicans and Trump voters, described the participants as either "criminals" or "fools." Nine percent saw them as "concerned citizens" and 5% called them "patriots."

## Justice dept charges 15

AFP, Washington

The US Justice Department announced Friday that it has charged 15 people involved in the assault on Congress, including one man accused of possessing bombs.

Washington US attorney's office said they did not expect to charge anyone with "incitement" or "insurrection" in Wednesday's violence.

The department unveiled the cases against 13 people, including Richard Barnett, who invaded the office of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Most of the 13 were charged with illegal entry into restricted buildings of Congress, and violent or disorderly conduct. More charges and arrests were expected.

Around 40 people were arrested and charged by local Washington police, mostly for curfew violations, weapons offenses and unlawful entry.

## JOB OPPORTUNITY

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