

# U.S. reports record 1,169 virus fatalities

Worldwide, confirmed new coronavirus infections surged past 1 million and deaths topped 54,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

The U.S. recorded 1,169 COVID-19 fatalities in the past 24 hours, the Johns Hopkins University tracker showed on Thursday, the highest one-day death toll recorded in any country since the global pandemic began.

The toll reflected figures reported by the university between 8:30 p.m. local time on Wednesday and the same time on Thursday. The grim record was previously held by Italy, where 969 people died on March 27.

The U.S. has now recorded 6,069 coronavirus deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Globally, Italy has the highest total death toll, with 13,915 dying of the disease there, followed by Spain at 10,003.

The U.S. also recorded more than 30,000 new cases of COVID-19 in the same 24-hour period, bringing the total number of officially reported cases in the country to more than 2,43,000, according to Johns Hopkins.

The outbreak has snapped the U.S.' record-breaking hiring streak of nearly 10 years, while U.S. and European medical workers struggling to save ailing patients on Friday watched supplies of medicine, protective equipment and breathing machines dwindle by the hour.

## Swift end

Jobs numbers released in the U.S. showed the virus dealt a swift end to the nation's 50-year-long unemployment rate, with employers reporting hundreds of thousands of job cuts in March.

The true picture, though, is far worse, because the government figures do not include the last two weeks, when nearly 10 million

thrown-out-of-work Americans applied for unemployment benefits.

Worldwide, confirmed infections surged past 1 million and deaths topped 55,500, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Europe's three worst-hit countries – Italy, Spain and France – surpassed 30,000 dead, or over half of the global toll. From those countries, the view remained almost unrelentingly grim, a frightening portent for places like New York, the epicentre of the U.S. outbreak, where bodies are being loaded by forklift into refrigerated trucks outside overwhelmed hospitals.

Shortages of critical equipment led to fierce competition among buyers from Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere. A regional leader in Paris described the scramble to

## COVID-19

find masks a "worldwide treasure hunt." Governor Andrew Cuomo warned that New York could run out of ventilators in six days.

With infections spreading, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has asked the Pentagon for 1,00,000 more body bags.

In Florida, hundreds of passengers on a cruise ship where four people died were finally being allowed to disembark after a days-long stand-off. More than a dozen critically ill patients were taken to hospitals, while people healthy enough to travel were taken to the airport for chartered flights home.

One Spanish hospital turned its library into an intensive care unit. In France, space was set aside for bodies in a vast food market. The French prime minister



In short supply: Healthcare workers at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York demanding critical Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for personal safety and effective patient care. ■ REUTERS

## Spain reports 900 deaths

REUTERS  
MADRID

Spain's COVID-19 death toll rose to a total of 10,935 from 10,003 on the previous day, the Health Ministry said on Friday, but showed the first fall in a daily death toll since March 26. A total of 932 people died from the disease in 24 hours, down from 950 people in the previous daily toll, the figures showed. The number of cases rose to 1,17,710 on Friday up from 110,238 on Thursday, the Ministry added.

said he is "fighting hour by hour" to ward off shortages of essential drugs used to keep COVID-19 patients alive.

France cancelled its high-school exit exam known as the Baccalaureat, a first in the 212-year history of the test.

Some glimmers of hope emerged that Italy, as well as

## 'German curbs are working'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BERLIN

Measures taken by German officials to slow the spread of the coronavirus are starting to show effect, Lothar Wierler, the president of Robert Koch Institute for disease control said on Friday. He stressed that restrictions on public life "need to be maintained." He explained that each person who had caught the virus was now infecting only one person on average, where previously that number had been as high as seven.

Spain and France might be flattening their infection curves and nearing or even passing their peaks in daily deaths.

Elsewhere in Europe, officials began talking tentatively about how to lift lockdowns that have staved off the total collapse of strained health systems but also bat-

## China releases \$56 bn to banks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BEIJING

China's central bank said on Friday it would cut the reserve requirements for smaller banks to release around 400 billion yuan (\$56.3 billion) in liquidity, a move to counter the COVID-19's impact on enterprises. The People's Bank of China said it will also slash the interest it pays on financial institutions' excess reserves to encourage them to use the cash rather than store it with the central bank.

tered economies.

Austria said it will set out a timetable next week for what could be "a slow start-up" of closed parts of the economy. The head of Germany's national disease control centre said he expects that any easing of the lockdown, which this week was extended to April 19, will be staggered.

# Google publishes data on people's movements

Users travel information in 131 countries to aid health officials

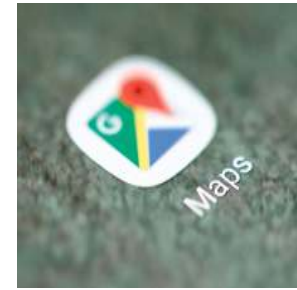
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
REUTERS  
PARIS

Alphabet Inc's Google has published charts showing how the coronavirus has brought hard-hit Italy to a standstill, led to runs on grocery stores around the world and prompted a stark drop in movement of people.

The analysis of location data from billions of Google users' phones is the largest public dataset available to help health authorities assess if people are abiding with government orders issued to rein in the virus.

The reports on users' movements in 131 countries will be made available on a special website and will "chart movement trends over time by geography", according to a post on one of Google's blogs.

Trends will display "a percentage point increase or decrease in visits" to locations like parks, shops, homes



In India, visits to retail and recreation locations dropped by 77%. ■ REUTERS

and places of work, not "the absolute number of visits," said the post, signed by Jen Fitzpatrick, who leads Google Maps, and the company's chief health officer Karen DeSalvo.

For example, in France, visits to restaurants, cafes, shopping centres, museums or theme parks have plunged by 88% from their normal levels, the data showed.

Italy and Spain, two of the hardest-hit countries, both saw visits to retail and re-

creation locations such as restaurants and movie theaters plunge 94%. The U.K. had declines of more than 80% while India, which went into a sudden 21-day lockdown on March 25, was also notable at 77%.

"We hope these reports will help support decisions about how to manage the COVID-19 pandemic," the Google execs said.

Like the detection of traffic jams or traffic measurement Google Maps, the new reports will use "aggregated, anonymised" data from users who have activated their location history.

## 'No identifiable data'

No "personally identifiable information," such as an individual's location, contacts or movements, will be made available, the post said.

The reports will also employ a statistical technique that adds "artificial noise" to raw data, making it harder for users to be identified.

# Pak. mosques remain open as cases rise to nearly 2,500

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
ISLAMABAD

Several mosques remained opened on Friday across Pakistan and people offered prayers there despite a government ban on big congregational gatherings in order to curb the spread of SARS-CoV-19 that has killed 37 people and infected nearly 2,500 others in the country.

The Sindh government had announced curfew like restriction from 12 noon to 3

p.m. to stop people from visiting mosques, while the Punjab government had issued fatwa for people to offer prayer in their homes.

The mosques made an announcement urging people to pray at home, but some people defied the instruction and visited mosques, according to reports. Some clerics also encouraged people to attend prayers in mosques.

"The government and

police are making statements to create a sense of fear. Nothing will happen. Karachi is a city of 20 million, the government cannot implement its decision in every nook and cranny, the prayer leader of the Jamia Mosque Quba told *The Express Tribune*.

Majority of mosques in Karachi followed government orders. However, some continued to hold regular prayers.

## IN BRIEF



### Corona beer producer halts brewing

MEXICO CITY  
The Mexican brewer of Corona beer said on Thursday it was suspending production because of the health emergency in the country over the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mexican government has ordered the suspension of all non-essential activities until April 30 to slow the spread of coronavirus. AFP

### Israel arrests Palestinian official in east Jerusalem

JERUSALEM  
Israeli police arrested the Palestinian minister for Jerusalem affairs on Friday for allegedly violating an Israeli ban on Palestinian political activities in east Jerusalem. Fadi al-Hidimi's office circulated surveillance camera footage showing police searching his home with dogs. AP

# Democrats postpone convention

It will be held in mid-August, a week before the event to renominate Trump

REID J. EPSTEIN  
KATIE GLUEC  
WASHINGTON

The Democratic National Committee on Thursday postponed its presidential convention because of the COVID-19 outbreak, moving it from mid-July to mid-August, and making it the largest political event to be upended by the public health crisis sweeping the country.

The convention will still be held in Milwaukee, as planned, the week of August 17, officials said, a week before Republicans plan to gather in Charlotte, North Carolina, to renominate President Donald Trump. The adjacent dates mean that both parties will be using expert health data from the same time frame to assess the safety of bringing together thousands of people at one event – and, ultimately, deciding whether the benefit



Safety comes first: A file photo of Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden at a campaign rally in Detroit. ■ AP

of staging the conventions outweighs the medical risks.

The timing sets the stage for a high-stakes test of wills and judgment over the next four months between Mr. Trump and former Vice-President Joe Biden, the likely Democratic nominee, as the public health crisis paralyses the country through the summer. Neither will want to be the first to cancel his convention.

The decision to postpone the Democratic convention was made over the previous two days, officials involved in the planning said, but the issue was amplified on Wednesday night by Mr. Biden, who called for rescheduling the convention during an appearance on "The Tonight Show."

Tom Perez, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, said he did not

consider moving the event to September, after the Republicans', and was averse to conducting a virtual convention that would be less likely to attract hours of television coverage.

## Safe convention

"We're going to hold a very exciting and safe convention in Wisconsin to highlight our nominee and to make sure that people know the values of the Democratic Party and what we're fighting for," he said in a telephone interview.

"There are things you can do online, but there is something about the communal spirit that is important and people feed off of," said David Axelrod, a senior official in Barack Obama's presidential campaigns. "From a TV standpoint it's hard to have the same impact if you're cobbling together a series of remotes." ■ NY TIMES

# President's family firm faces financial woes

It is seeking to delay loan repayments

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
NEW YORK

U.S. President Donald Trump's family company is asking creditors such as Deutsche Bank if it can delay loan payments as the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic deepens, *The New York Times* reported on Thursday.

The Trump Organization – the conglomerate of companies created by Mr. Trump and now run by his sons – is, like many others, losing money as the restrictions put in place to lessen the spread of the deadly COVID-19 bring the U.S. to a grinding halt.

The *NYT* said the company contacted Deutsche Bank, seen as the only major lender willing to do business with the company, at March-end for extension of some repayment deadlines. "These days, everybody is



Donald Trump

working together," Mr. Trump's son Eric, the Organization's executive vice-president, said.

The Trump Organization still owes Deutsche Bank several hundred million dollars, according to the *Times*.

The group also contacted Palm Beach County to see if it could suspend rent payments on the Trump International Golf Club, a 27-hole course and clubhouse on more than 120 hectares.

# Statue of Soviet Gen. removed in Prague

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
PRAGUE

A district in the Czech capital, Prague, went on Friday ahead with a plan to remove the statue of a Soviet Second World War commander.

The Russian Embassy in Prague condemned the move, saying it sent a protest note to the Czech Foreign Ministry about the "demolition."

General Ivan Stepanovic Konev led the Red Army forces that liberated Prague and large parts of Czechoslovakia from the Nazi occupation in 1945. His monument, unveiled in the Prague 6 district in 1980 when the country was occupied by Soviet troops, has been a source of controversy.

On Friday morning, a crane at the site lifted the statue from its place.

# Cuban doctors fighting virus around world

Havana has deployed 593 doctors to at least 14 countries to fight the disease, despite U.S. opposition

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Labelling the doctors and nurses as both exploited workers and agents of communist indoctrination, the U.S. has notched a series of victories as Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia sent home thousands after leftist governments allied with Havana were replaced with ones friendlier to Washington.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought a reversal of fortune for Cuban medical diplomacy, as doctors have flown off on new missions to battle COVID-19 in at least 14 countries, including Italy and the tiny principality of Andorra on the Spanish-French border, burnishing the island's international image in the middle of a global crisis.



Medical diplomacy: Cuban doctors and medical professionals prepare to leave for Italy to fight the pandemic. ■ AP/FILE

"I am aware of the position of the United States, but we are a sovereign country and we can choose the partners with which we are going to have cooperation," Andorra's Foreign Minister Marta Ubach said.

In the city of Crema in the hard-hit Lombardy region of

northern Italy, 52 Cuban doctors and nurses set up a field hospital with 32 beds equipped with oxygen and three ICU beds.

## Symbolic moment

"This is a strongly symbolic moment because the Crema hospital has been going

through an extremely complicated situation from the start," Lombardy's top social welfare official, Giulio Gallera, said at the inauguration last week. "The number of patients who have filled and continue to fill the emergency room and departments has truly put the medical personnel to a hard test."

The U.S. has sought to cut off income to Cuba as part of a tightening of sanctions. And it continues to discourage countries from contracting Cuban medical workers despite the pandemic.

"The government of Cuba keeps most of the salary its doctors and nurses earn while serving in its international medical missions while exposing them to egregious labour conditions," the State Department said on

Twitter last week. "Host countries seeking Cuba's help for COVID-19 should scrutinize agreements and end labour abuses."

Cuba currently has about 37,000 medical workers in 67 countries, most in long-standing missions.

The most recent deployments of at least 593 doctors have also been to Suriname, Jamaica, Dominica, Belize, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, Venezuela and Nicaragua, some of them reinforcing existing medical missions.

All have been billed as tied to the coronavirus epidemic, even though some of the countries have few confirmed cases so far. None of the agreements or financial terms have been made public.

# Bill Withers, who sang 'Ain't No Sunshine', dies at 81

Three-time Grammy winner succumbed to heart problems

DERRICK BRYSON TAYLOR

Bill Withers, the legendary soul singer behind 1970s hits like *Lean on Me*, *Lovely Day* and *Ain't No Sunshine*, died on Monday in Los Angeles, his family said. He was 81.

The soulful singer and three-time Grammy winner died from heart complications, his family said.

"We are devastated by the loss of our beloved, devoted husband and father," the family's statement said.

"A solitary man with a heart driven to connect to the world at large, with his poetry and music, he spoke honestly to people and connected them to each other," it added.



Bill Withers

The family added, "in this difficult time, we pray his music offers comfort and entertainment as fans hold tight to loved ones."

Mr. Withers was well into his 30s when he began recording music, after growing up in a segregated coal-min-

ing town in West Virginia, serving in the Navy and working as an aircraft mechanic. But during his 14-year recording career, starting with the album *Just As I Am* in 1971, he wrote and performed songs that have become anthems around the world, drawn from gritty blues, R&B and the era's confessional style of lyrics.

Long after his de facto retirement from recording – he released his last album in 1985, after many battles with music industry executives – Withers entered the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1999. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2015 by Stevie Wonder. ■ NY TIMES