

World virus cases top 6 mln as leaders disagree on pandemic response

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The number of coronavirus cases worldwide topped six million Sunday, with Brazil registering another record surge in daily infections as divisions deepened on how to deal with the pandemic.

Latin American countries are bracing for difficult weeks ahead as the disease spreads rapidly across the region, even as much of the world exits lockdowns that have wrecked economies and stripped millions of their jobs.

In Brazil—the epicenter of South America's outbreak with nearly 500,000 confirmed cases, lagging only behind the United States—disagreement among leaders over lockdown measures has hampered efforts to slow the virus as the number of fatalities in the country nears 30,000.

President Jair Bolsonaro, who fears the economic fallout from stay-at-home measures will be worse than the virus, has berated governors and mayors for imposing what he calls "the tyranny of total quarantine."

As the global death toll from the pandemic surpassed 368,000, US President Donald Trump's decision to permanently cut funding to the World Health Organization has been broadly criticized.

The number of confirmed cases worldwide is more than six million, according to an AFP tally.

"Now is the time for enhanced cooperation and common solutions," the European Union said in a statement, adding: "Actions that weaken international results must be avoided."

Trump initially suspended funding to the WHO last month, accusing it of not doing enough to curb the early spread of the virus and being too lenient with China, where COVID-19 emerged late last year.

On Friday he moved to make that decision permanent in a major blow to the agency. The US is the WHO's biggest contributor, supplying \$400 million last year.

German Health Minister Jens Spahn said the "disappointing" decision was a setback for global health, while Chancellor Angela Merkel declined to attend an in-person G7 summit that Trump had suggested he would host.

Richard Horton, editor of The Lancet medical journal, said it was "madness and terrifying both at the same time."

Lockdowns ease

As the virus progresses at different speeds around the globe, there has been pressure in many countries to lift crippling lockdowns, despite experts' warnings of a possible second wave of infections.

In Britain, which is set to begin lifting its lockdown on Monday, senior advisors to the government warned that it was moving too quickly.

"COVID-19 spreading too fast to lift lockdown in England," tweeted Jeremy Farrar, a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

India said Saturday it would begin relaxing the world's biggest lockdown in stages from early June, even as it marked another record daily rise in infections.

Iran meanwhile announced that collective prayers would resume in mosques, despite infections ticking back upwards in the Middle East's hardest-hit country.

Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound—the third-holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia—reopened to worshippers on Sunday.

With infection numbers falling in many of Europe's most affected countries, the push to restart economies was gaining steam.

Italy's Leaning Tower of Pisa reopened on Saturday, while in Paris, parks and the famed Galeries Lafayette department store flung open their doors.

In Austria, hotels and cinemas were allowed to take in customers, provided they wear masks.

"It is very important that things return to normal," film buff Rotraud Turanitz said at Vienna's historic Admiral Kino cinema on trendy Burggasse.

Across the Atlantic, the US capital Washington resumed outdoor dining, while on the West Coast, restaurants and hair salons in Los Angeles reopened.

New York City, the worst-hit American city with about 21,500 coronavirus deaths, is on track to begin reopening the week of June 8.

The overall US death toll has topped 103,000 out of more than 1.7 million cases of the virus.

Global sport has also started to rev back into action, with Austria announcing it will host Formula One's delayed season-opener on July 5, and the NBA eyeing a July 31 return.

Britain approved the return of domestic competitive sport on June 1—with no fans present.

Sri Lanka's cricket team will resume training Monday under strict health measures.

Economies shattered

But the economic damage from weeks of lockdowns continues to pile up, with Chile and Peru securing credit lines worth billions from the IMF.

India's economy grew at its slowest pace in two decades in the first quarter, while Canada, Brazil, France and Italy also saw their GDP figures shrink ahead of an expected worldwide recession.

As the virus hits the world's poor particularly hard, Pope Francis called for a "more just and equitable society" in the post-coronavirus world and for people to act to "end the pandemic of poverty."

"Without food donations, I'll have to fight harder for my family to survive," said motorcycle taxi driver Thanapat Noidee in the tiny hut he shares with his wife and children in Bangkok.

Even the animal world has not been left untouched by the pandemic.

Gibraltar has banned tourists from touching the British enclave's famous Barbary macaques over fears they could spread [coronavirus](#).

Singapore's beloved otters meanwhile have been popping up in unexpected places during the city-state's lockdown, but their increasingly daring antics have angered some and even sparked calls for a cull.

"I simply don't understand anyone who could not like them. They are really cute," said 35-year-old Singaporean Pam Wong.

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