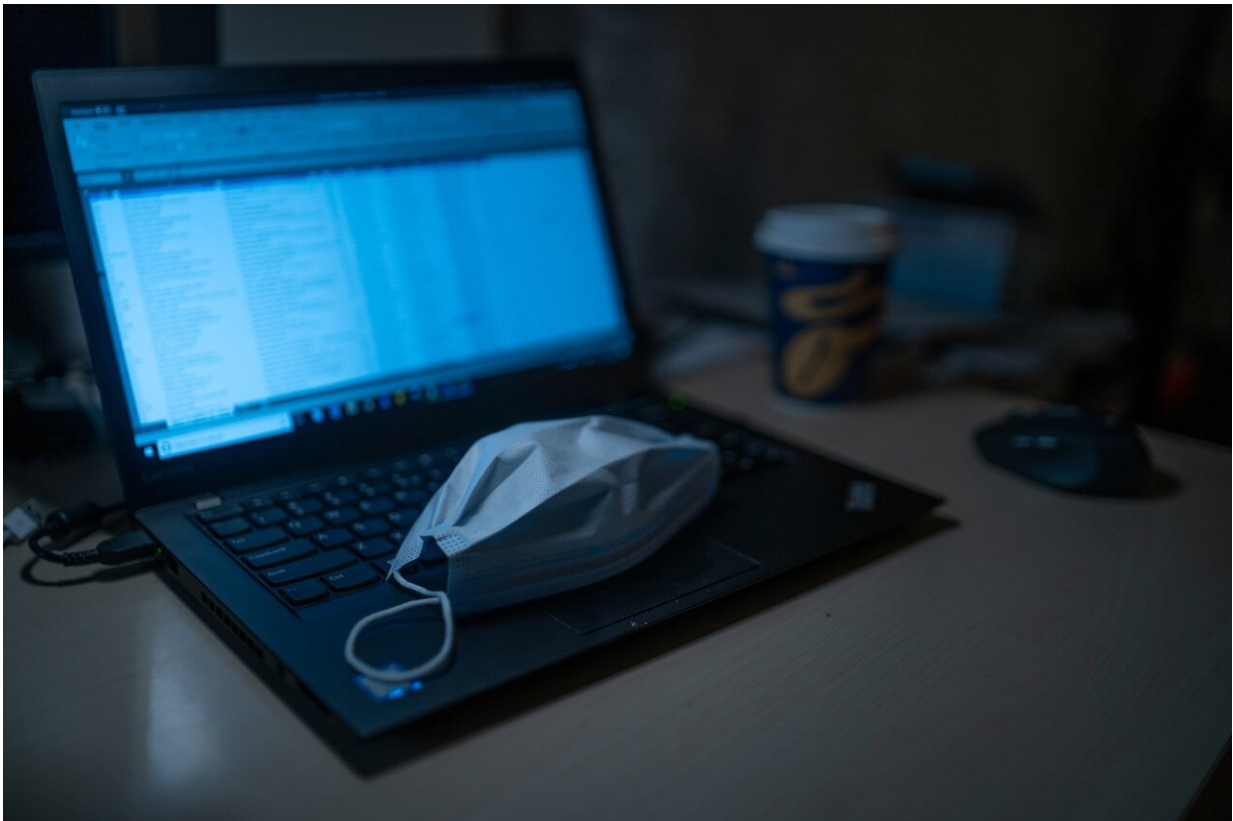


India deaths top 4,000 as Macron urges end to vaccine export limits

May 8 2021



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New COVID-19 deaths surged past 4,000 for the first time in India on Saturday in one of the world's worst outbreaks, as EU pressure mounted on Washington to end vaccine export limits and offer a concrete plan to

lift patents.

"I call very clearly on the United States to put an end to export bans not only on vaccines but on vaccine ingredients, which prevent production," Macron told reporters at an EU summit in Porto. He was referring to a de facto US ban on the export of vaccine raw materials.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the EU had exported much of its own production and the United States should follow suit.

"I do not think that a patent waiver is the solution to make more vaccines available to more people," she said in Berlin.

"Rather, I think that we need the creativity and the power of innovation of companies—and to me, that includes patent protection."

Earlier, Pope Francis had focused on his desire to see patent waivers to "allow universal access to the vaccine."

He called for the temporary suspension of intellectual property rights, condemning the "virus of individualism" that "makes us indifferent to the suffering of others".

The call for waivers has gained momentum after the United States announced surprise support for such a scheme to enable adequate vaccine supplies to fight COVID-19.

EU pushes for exported doses

By Saturday the global pandemic had killed more than 3.2 million people since emerging in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP.

Adding to Macron and Merkel's appeals, European Council chief Charles Michel said the bloc was "ready to engage" and to discuss a US offer to suspend [patent protection](#) on vaccines "as soon as a concrete proposal" emerges.

But Michel, speaking in Porto, added the EU doubted the idea could be a short-term "magic bullet" and encouraged "all the partners to facilitate the export of doses".

Madagascar received its first batch of vaccines through the Covax global sharing scheme, one of the last African countries to obtain supplies after months of resistance by President Andry Rajoelina.

Rajoelina has promoted a locally brewed herbal drink as the only required coronavirus "cure".

But a surge in infections last month forced Rajoelina to bow to growing criticism of his handling of the pandemic and agree to a vaccine rollout. A first shipment of 250,000 Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs arrive Saturday.

India, which reported more than 400,000 new infections on Saturday—experts fear official data are a gross underestimate—now accounts for nearly half of the world's new known cases.

Its coronavirus death toll now stands at 238,270,

India's eastern neighbour Pakistan began a nine-day shutdown Saturday targeting travel and tourist hot spots, mobilising its military to help enforce the restrictions.

The aim is to stop its outbreak from snowballing during the upcoming Eid celebrations at the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Greece tests the water

In Greece, thousands of people hit private beaches, which reopened for the first time this year Saturday.

There were strict spacing requirements in place, regular disinfection of deck chairs and toilets and no music at beach bars to limit the spread of airborne particles any crowds that might gather.

"We've been waiting very long to be able to receive here all the tourists and citizens that want to sunbathe and enjoy the sea," Andreas Kondylis, mayor of the southern Athens suburb of Alimos told AFP.

"All required measures are taken," he added. The tourism-dependent country hope to launch its summer season next week.

The global arsenal against the coronavirus expanded as the [vaccine](#) from China's Sinopharm became the first fully non-Western shot to get the green light from the World Health Organization.

The WHO has already given emergency use authorisation to vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, and AstraZeneca.

Sinopharm is already in use in 42 territories around the world, including Pakistan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Serbia.

Despite the increasing rollout of vaccines concerns remain about the upcoming Tokyo Olympics, with Japan's vaccination programme moving slowly.

A [coronavirus](#) state of emergency in parts of Japan, including Tokyo, was extended Friday with authorities warning of some hospitals being overwhelmed.

But International Olympic Committee vice-president John Coates was adamant Saturday that the Games, slated to start on July 23, will go ahead.

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Citation: India deaths top 4,000 as Macron urges end to vaccine export limits (2021, May 8) retrieved 11 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-05-india-deaths-macron-urges-vaccine.html>

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