

International

Hundreds of bodies recovered from Bolivian streets, homes

Mexico's coronavirus death toll passes 40,000

LA PAZ: Bolivian police said they recovered more than 400 bodies from streets and homes over a five-day period, with 85 percent of the dead believed to have had coronavirus. A total of 191 bodies were recovered in the Cochabamba metropolitan area alone from July 15-20, with another 141 collected in La Paz, national police director Coronel Ivan Rojas told journalists.

In the country's biggest city, Santa Cruz, authorities recovered 68 bodies. The Santa Cruz metropolitan area is the worst affected by coronavirus in Bolivia and accounts for almost half of the country's more than 60,000 cases. Some 85 percent of the bodies were "positive cases for COVID-19 and cases with COVID symptoms, so they will be recorded as suspected cases," said Rojas.

The rest died of "other causes, meaning death from an illness or a violent cause," he added. According to the national epidemiological office, the western regions of Cochabamba and La Paz are experiencing a "very rapid increase" in coronavirus cases. Andres Flores, director of the Forensic Investigations Institute, said

that between April 1 and July 19 more than 3,000 bodies that were recovered outside of hospital settings had been identified as either confirmed or suspected coronavirus cases. Bolivia has recorded more than 2,200 confirmed coronavirus deaths among its 11 million population.

Mexico's virus death

Meanwhile, Mexico has passed 40,000 deaths from the novel coronavirus pandemic as the country, which has the fourth-highest COVID-19 death toll in the world, struggles to contain the disease. A daily technical report recorded a total of 40,400 deaths from the virus, after adding 915 more fatalities in the last 24 hours. The first case in Mexico was detected on February 28. This week President Manuel Lopez Obrador

More than 400 bodies from the streets, homes



vowed to improve health standards in the nation to help its combat the virus threat.

He pledged to protect those vulnerable to COVID-19, including tackling "diseases caused by hunger and poverty," launching "a permanent campaign" to promote healthier eating and lifestyles,



COCHABAMBA: Health workers carry the coffin of a COVID-19 victim from the San Jose nursing home in Cochabamba, Bolivia. — AFP

and treating hypertension, diabetes and obesity as a priority. "We want to remember those who died from the COVID-19 pandemic, and send a loving, fraternal hug to their relatives, to their friends,"

Lopez Obrador said in a video released on social media. Mexico, with 127 million inhabitants, has the second-highest death toll in Latin America after Brazil, which has 80,000 deaths. — Agencies

Federal crackdown in Portland reenergizes protesters

PORTLAND: Standing in front of a huge crowd, 21-year-old Teal Lindseth marches briskly through downtown Portland shouting into a bullhorn. "Tell me what democracy looks like," she cries out as more than a thousand demonstrators respond: "This is what democracy looks like." Their voices boom through blocks of high-rises and boarded-up storefronts in the city located in the western US state of Oregon.

Earlier protests in Portland—and much of the United States—to denounce racism and police brutality following the death of African-American man George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer, began losing steam at the start of July. But then reports emerged of camouflaged federal officers snatching up Portland protesters in unmarked vehicles. Now, the demonstrations have ramped up, with thousands showing up daily to face off with police well into the night.

The agents, deployed from the Department of Homeland Security, have used tear gas, rubber bullets, flashbangs, and other munitions to

disperse the nightly crowds. "Right or left, I think here in the Pacific Northwest, we're all very much opposed to the federal government taking over our streets," said Carlos, a demonstrator marching late Monday who asked to be identified only by his first name. "When you send federal troops here, you're incensing the entire region."

Carlos, like Lindseth, is an African American in his early 20s who carried a megaphone to whip up the crowd. "I'm hesitant to call myself a leader," he told AFP. "I just speak up whenever the crowd seems directionless." The nightly protests begin with assemblies and marches and often end with participants getting trampled, beaten, and pepper-sprayed by local police. The Portland Police Bureau says it is responding to criminal activity—namely demonstrators chucking rocks and water bottles at officers, as well as shining flashlights and lasers at them.

President Donald Trump for his part says the federal law enforcement forces are there to restore order, describing the protesters as "anar-



PORTLAND: Teal Lindseth reacts to tear gas after federal officers dispersed protesters from in front of the Mark O Hatfield US Courthouse in Portland, Ore. — AFP

chists and agitators" and threatening to send federal officers to more US cities. One video posted to social media July 12 shows a protester being shot in the face with a rubber bullet and bleeding profusely. The protester had to undergo reconstructive surgery and is making a full recovery, according to The Oregonian.

'Feds go home'

A few days later, another video on social media emerged of two federal

agents jumping out of an unmarked minivan and snatching up a protester as he backed away with his hands up. Perhaps the most surreal image was that of a naked woman—dubbed "Naked Athena"—who wore only a hat and face mask several nights ago as she faced off with police who responded by shooting pepper balls at her feet. The unidentified woman performed some ballet moves and sat briefly on the ground, in front of a police line, before disappearing. — AFP

Trump shifts rhetoric; urges mask-wearing, warns of 'the worst'

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump, in a shift in rhetoric and tone, encouraged Americans on Tuesday to wear masks if they cannot maintain social distance and warned that the coronavirus pandemic would get worse before it got better. In his first press briefing in months focused on the outbreak, Trump urged young people to avoid going to crowded bars and maintained that the virus would disappear at some point.

Trump's remarks were a change in strategy from his robust emphasis on reopening the U.S. economy after its long, virus-induced shutdown and represented his first recent acknowledgement of how bad the problem has become. "It will probably, unfortunately, get worse before it gets better - something I don't like saying about things, but that's the way it is," Trump told reporters.

Nearly 142,000 people have died in the United States from the highly contagious respiratory illness COVID-19, the most of any country. The Republican president, who downplayed the virus in its early stages and once referred to mask-wearing as politically correct, has been reluctant to wear a face covering himself. He wore one for the first time in public during a recent visit to a military hospital but has otherwise eschewed putting one on in front of the press.

Mask-wearing has become a partisan issue, with some supporters of the president arguing that requirements to wear one infringe on their civil liberties. Few people wore masks at Trump's first rally since the pandemic in Tulsa, Oklahoma, earlier this summer. As coronavirus cases skyrocket across the country, including in politically important states such as Florida, Texas and Arizona, Trump, who is trailing Democrat Joe Biden in opinion polls ahead of the Nov. 3 election, on Tuesday showcased a new position on the importance of covering mouths and noses.

"We're asking everybody that when you are not able to socially distance, wear a mask, get a mask. Whether you like the mask or not, they have an impact. They'll have an effect. And we need everything we can get," he said. Trump said he was getting used to masks and would wear one himself in groups or when on an elevator. "I will use it, gladly," he said. "Anything that potentially can help ... is a good thing."



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump holds a mask as he speaks during the renewed briefing of the Coronavirus Task Force in the Brady Briefing Room of the White House. — AFP

A Biden campaign spokeswoman said Trump's assertion that his administration has had a "relentless focus" on COVID-19 was preposterous.

US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, said in an interview with CNN that Trump's new embrace of mask-wearing was a recognition of his mistakes in dealing with the coronavirus. "This is not a hoax - it is a pandemic that has gotten worse before it will get better because of his inaction, and in fact clearly it is the Trump virus," Pelosi said. Trump referred to the virus as the "China virus." The novel coronavirus outbreak began in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

Strategy change

Trump conducted the briefing on his own, without doctors or other members of the White House Coronavirus Task Force. His subdued tone contrasted with his previous calls to reopen the economy along with praise for Republican governors who did so and criticism of Democratic governors who implemented tough restrictions in their states. The strategy shifts come amid tension within his senior staff about the best way to discuss the virus with the American public and frustration among doctors on the task force that their advice is not being heeded. The reopening has gone too quickly in some states, leading to spikes in cases and an ever-increasing number of deaths. Following Trump's initial lead, some Republican governors have also resisted rules requiring that their populations wear masks. — Reuters

US presence cause of insecurity: Khamenei tells visiting Iraq PM

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader told Iraq's visiting premier on Tuesday that Tehran will not interfere in Baghdad's relations with Washington, but warned that the US presence next door to the Islamic republic was a cause of insecurity. Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi of Iraq met Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the Iranian capital during his first trip abroad since taking office. "Iran will not interfere in Iraq's relations with America but expects Iraqi friends to know America and realize that their presence in any country causes corruption, ruin and destruction," the Iranian leader said, according to his official website.

"The Islamic republic expects... (the Iraqi) parliament's decision to expel the Americans to be adhered to since their presence is a cause of insecurity," Khamenei pointed to the US killing of Iran's top general Qasem Soleimani in a January drone strike in Baghdad, after which parliament voted to expel US troops. "They killed your guest in your house and blatantly confessed to it." Iran "will never forget this and will certainly deal a reciprocal blow to the Americans", Khamenei said.

Iran retaliated for Soleimani's death days after by firing a volley of missiles at US troops stationed in Iraq, but US President Donald Trump opted against responding militarily. While the attack on the western Iraqi base of Ain Al-Asad left no US soldiers dead, dozens suffered brain trauma. According to Khamenei, Iran was opposed to "whatever may weaken the Iraqi government" in contrast to the US, which he said did not want "an independent, strong Iraqi government elected by popular vote".

Kadhemi had been scheduled to visit Iran's regional rival Saudi Arabia as his first trip abroad, then quickly follow it up with a trip to Tehran, in a carefully calibrated balancing act. The Saudi leg was postponed after King Salman was hospitalized on Monday. Baghdad has often found itself caught in the tug-of-war between Riyadh, Tehran and Washington, which Kadhemi is also set to visit within weeks. Kadhemi rose to the premiership in May after serving as head of Iraq's National Intelligence Service for nearly four years. — AFP

News in brief

Shootout at Chicago funeral

CHICAGO: A shootout outside a funeral parlor left 14 people wounded Tuesday in Chicago, as President Donald Trump threatens to send federal agents to a handful of US cities led by Democratic mayors. The incident started when occupants of a vehicle "began firing at attendees of a funeral. At that time the attendees of the funeral exchanged fire," Chicago deputy police superintendent Eric Carter told reporters. Shootings have become breathtakingly normal this summer across the United States. A total of 63 people were shot and 12 killed over the weekend in Chicago in ongoing gun violence, according to local media. Carter said 14 people were wounded in Tuesday's shooting, but did not specify the degree of severity. — AFP

Colombia helicopter crash

BOGOTA: The Colombian army said nine soldiers were killed and six wounded after a military helicopter went down Tuesday in the country's southeast during an operation against guerrillas. The Black Hawk helicopter went down with 17 people aboard on a stretch of the Inirida River, in the country's southeastern Guaviare jungle region. "Unfortunately, we have found the bodies of nine of our personnel," a military spokesperson said on Twitter. The military did not say if the helicopter crashed or was shot down. Neither did it say anything about the other two soldiers who had been aboard the helicopter. President Ivan Duque lamented on Twitter what he described as "an accident," and said the soldiers aboard the helicopter were supporting "operations against illegals." — AFP

US' Esper to visit China

WASHINGTON: US Defense Secretary Mark Esper plans to visit China for talks on how to improve two-way communications in a crisis as geopolitical tensions between the superpowers rise and concerns mount over a potential South China Sea flashpoint. Esper said Tuesday that he hopes to make the trip before year-end to "establish the systems necessary for crisis communications and reinforce our intentions to openly compete in the international system in which we all belong." Last week, the United States formally declared Beijing's pursuit of territory and resources in South China Sea as illegal, explicitly backing the territorial claims of Southeast Asian countries against China's. It has also downgraded relations with Hong Kong after China implemented a new security law in violation of its promises of autonomy for the territory. — AFP

Egypt dissident fights extradition

BARCELONA: Cairo is seeking the extradition from Spain of an Egyptian businessman and dissident, the justice ministry said Tuesday, on grounds of fraud and money-laundering that he claims are politically motivated. The Egyptian embassy had in 2019 filed a request for the extradition of Mohamed Ali, who has been living in Barcelona for two years, with his case "pending resolution" at Spain's National Court, the ministry said. According to court documents seen by AFP, Egyptian prosecutors say he is guilty of tax fraud to the tune of 135 million Egyptian pounds (\$8.4 million/7.4 million euros) and of laundering some 4.0 million Egyptian pounds. The allegations relate to the purchase and sale of property and vehicles between 2006 and 2018. — AFP