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COVID death toll passes 3 million as cases surge

Countries impose new lockdowns to fight spiraling infection numbers



PARIS: Medical interns and families lay flowers below a banner reading 'The hospital is killing his interns, help us live' as they pay homage to colleagues and relatives during a demonstration in front of the French Health Ministry to denounce the heavy workload yesterday. — AFP

PARIS: The global COVID-19 death toll passed three million yesterday as the pandemic continues to speed up despite vaccination campaigns, leading countries like India to impose new lockdowns to fight spiraling infection numbers.

It is the latest grim milestone after the novel coronavirus surfaced in central China in December 2019 and went on to infect more than 139 million people, leaving billions more under crippling lockdowns and ravaging the global economy. An average of more than 12,000 deaths were recorded globally every day in the past week, shooting the overall toll past three million at around 8.30 am yesterday, according to an AFP tally.

For comparison, three million people is more than the population of Jamaica or Armenia, and three times the death toll of the Iran-Iraq war which took place from 1980-1988. And the pandemic is showing no sign of slowing down: the 829,596 new infections reported worldwide on Friday is the highest number yet, according to AFP's tally.

The daily average of 731,000 cases registered over the last week is also close to being a record. India's capital New Delhi went into a weekend lockdown yesterday as the world's second-most populous nation recorded 234,000 new cases and 1,341

deaths. India now has three times the daily cases of the United States, the world's worst-hit nation, and families are clamoring for drugs and hospital beds.

Hopes that South Asian countries might have seen the worst of the pandemic have been dashed, with India recording over two million new cases this month alone and Bangladesh and Pakistan imposing new shutdowns. Udaya Regmi of the international Red Cross said the "truly frightening" South Asian surge was a "wake-up call to the world".

"Vaccines must be available to everyone, everywhere, rich and poor to overcome this terrible pandemic," Regmi added. Richer countries that have waged mass inoculation efforts have seen their virus numbers plummet. Britain, which has given 60 percent of the population at least one vaccination dose, now records around 30 deaths a day-down from 1,200 in late January.

Thailand recorded its fourth consecutive day of more than 1,000 new cases yesterday, with spiraling infections linked to a nightlife district of the capital Bangkok earlier this month. Alcohol sales will be banned in Bangkok restaurants from today, while entertainment venues will be shuttered across the country for two weeks. In Japan, rising virus cases

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Ramadan Kareem

Charity in different forms

By Hassan T Bwambale

Islam teaches us all beautiful and beneficial things through the Noble Quran and Sunnah (sayings, actions and approvals of Prophet Muhammad - PBUH), and giving charity is one of them. Charity is one's way to show compassion towards the needy. It acts as a reminder to try fulfilling the needs of others for the sake of Allah (swt) showing compassion with our fellow human beings.

Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) says what can be translated as: "The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed (of grain) which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies (His reward) for whomever He wills. And Allah is All-Encompassing and Infinitely Knowing. (Al-Baqarah 2:261)

Note that the greater the sincerity, the efficacy with which you give charity, and the intensity of the intention to spend for the sake of God, the greater will be God's reward. It is not difficult at all for God, Who blesses a grain so that out of it seven hundred grains grow, to allow one's charity to grow in like manner so that the unit of money one spends will return seven hundred fold and even more. (Refer to www.quran7m.com)

Charity in Ramadan: The auspicious month of Ramadan is the month when Muslims should give more charity and/or contribute to charity work and donations for the less fortunate.

Abdullah bin Abbas (ra) narrated that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the most generous of all the people, and he used to be more generous in Ramadan when Gabriel met him. Gabriel used to meet him every night during Ramadan to rehearse the Noble Qur'an with him. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) was then more generous than the fast wind. (Al-Bukhari # 3, 554)

Angels supplicate for those who give charity: Abu Huraira (ra) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Not a day comes when the people get up

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Prince Philip laid to rest

WINDSOR, UK: Queen Elizabeth II yesterday bid farewell to her late husband, Prince Philip, at a royal funeral like no other, restricted by coronavirus rules but reflecting his long life of military and public service. The Duke of Edinburgh, who died on April 9 at age 99, was interred in the Royal Vault at St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle after a 50-minute service attended by just 30 guests.

The Queen, 94, seen for the first time since his death, was dressed in mourning black, with a white-trimmed, black

face mask. Close family, also masked, sat socially distanced in the historic 15th-century Gothic chapel. Philip — described by royals as "the grandfather of the nation" — was Britain's longest-serving royal consort and was married to the Queen for 73 years.

He was an almost constant presence at her side during her record-breaking reign that began in 1952 as Britain rebuilt from World War II, and as its global empire began to unravel. His death, which the family said had left a "huge void" in the Queen's life, has robbed her of the man she called her "strength and stay" and closes a remarkable chapter for Britain's most famous family, and in the country's history.

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WINDSOR, UK: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (left) watches as pallbearers lay the coffin in St George's Chapel during the funeral of Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh in Windsor Castle in Windsor, west of London, yesterday. — AFP

Palestinians hold prayers at Al-Aqsa

JERUSALEM: Thousands of Palestinians streamed to Al-Aqsa mosque in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem on the first Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, in the largest such gathering since the coronavirus pandemic. Sheikh Azzam Al-Khatib, head of the Waqf Islamic affairs council, told AFP an estimated 70,000 worshippers came in from Jerusalem, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and from Arab communities inside Israel.

Last Ramadan, "they (Israeli authorities) did not allow anyone to enter Al-Aqsa except for me", he said. COGAT, Israel's military body that administers the West Bank, said 10,000 vaccinated Palestinians had been issued permits this year to enter Jerusalem for prayers.

Police shut down roads around Jerusalem as busses loaded with pilgrims drove in. Inside Al-Aqsa mosque, Palestinian men and women sat on the carpeted floor, reading the holy Quran. As the prayers ended, worshippers walked out of the holy compound with folded prayer rugs slung over their shoulders.

Daoud Salhab, a 67-year-old from east Jerusalem, called it "a golden day" after last year's Ramadan non-event.

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Palestinians take part in the first Friday prayers of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, in Jerusalem's Old City, Friday. — AFP

Ex-employee kills 8 at US FedEx facility

INDIANAPOLIS, US: A former FedEx employee fatally shot eight people and wounded several others at the delivery company's facility in the US city of Indianapolis before killing himself, authorities said Friday after the latest mass shooting to jolt the country. Four of the dead were followers of the South Asian Sikh religion, a Sikh organization confirmed, raising questions about whether the gun-

man's motivation was in any way racially or ethnically motivated.

The Thursday night slayings came a week after President Joe Biden branded US gun violence an "epidemic" and an "international embarrassment" as he waded into the tense debate over firearms control, a sensitive American political issue.

After this latest tragedy he again ordered flags flown at half staff at the White House and other public buildings. Police in Indiana's capital city identified the gunman as 19-year-old Brandon Hole.

"FedEx officials have confirmed that Mr Hole was a former employee at the facility, and he was last

employed in 2020," deputy police chief Craig McCart told reporters. Authorities searched multiple locations and seized evidence in their effort to learn more about the shooter and a possible motive.

The Sikh Coalition, which announced "that at least four of those killed" were members of the Indianapolis Sikh community, said it expected "authorities will conduct a full investigation-including the possibility of bias as a factor." "While we don't yet know the motive of the shooter, he targeted a facility known to be heavily populated by Sikh employees," said the coalition's executive director Satjeet Kaur.

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