



## NOTICE

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# Eid

MUBARAK



# Latam new virus epicenter; Trump seeks US reopening

## Donated plasma benefits COVID-19 patients • Remdesivir effective against virus

**WASHINGTON:** The World Health Organization declared Latin America “a new epicenter” of the coronavirus pandemic as US President Donald Trump ramped up pressure on state and local governments to speed up the reopening of the reeling American economy. Surges in infections across much of Central and South America have driven the global case count to nearly 5.2 million, with more than 337,000 deaths, even as hard-hit Europe and the United States cautiously move into a recovery phase.

The death toll in Brazil has soared past 20,000, and with 310,000 reported cases, it has the third-biggest caseload in the world behind the United States and Russia. “In a sense, South America has become a new epicenter for the disease,” WHO emergencies director Mike Ryan said on Friday. “We’ve seen many South American countries with increasing numbers of cases... but certainly the most affected is Brazil at this point.”

Unlike in Europe and the United States, where the elderly were hardest-hit, a significant number of deaths in Brazil have been younger people, who are often driven by poverty to work despite the threat of infection. “Since Brazil has a younger population, it’s normal for the number of cases to be higher among under-60s,” said Mauro Sanchez, an epidemiologist at the University of Brasilia. “What’s perverse is that a lot of the people who are exposing themselves to the virus are doing it because they don’t have a choice.”

As the toll mounted, gravediggers at a cemetery outside Sao Paulo scrambled to keep up. “We’ve been working 12-hour days, burying them one after the other,” said one worker at Vila Formosa, wearing a white protective suit, mask and face shield. “It doesn’t stop.”

In Washington, Trump, keen to find a way out of the crisis and facing an uphill re-election battle,

ramped up pressure on state and local governments to ease lockdown measures. The pandemic has hammered the American economy and led to calls for an end to virus restrictions, despite the COVID-19 numbers still rising in the United States – the worst-hit country in the world with 1.6 million infections and 96,000 deaths.

Trump demanded state governors classify churches, synagogues and mosques as “essential services” on the same level as food and drug stores, and immediately allow them to hold services despite curbs on public gatherings. “The governors need to do the right thing and allow these very important essential places of faith to open right now, for this weekend,” said the president, who counts religious conservatives as a core of his electoral base.

“If they don’t do it, I will override the governors. In America, we need more prayer, not less,” added Trump, who has previously expressed support for

street protests against lockdowns. It was not clear whether he had any authority to override the governors. There was pushback from the mayor of Los Angeles after the Trump administration warned that the continued lockdown in the city could be illegal. “We are not guided by politics in this – we are guided by science, we are guided by collaboration,” said Mayor Eric Garcetti.

In the latest step to restart the economy, the Trump administration said Friday it would exempt from entry bans foreign professional athletes competing in the top leagues for several sports, including basketball, tennis and golf. “In today’s environment, Americans need their sports,” Chad Wolf, acting secretary of the Homeland Security department, said in a statement announcing the order. “It’s time to reopen the economy and it’s time we get our professional athletes back to work.”

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## Survivor recalls horror of crash that killed 97

**KARACHI:** One of the two people to survive a plane crash in Pakistan that killed 97 people has described jumping from the burning wreckage of the aircraft after it hurtled into a residential neighborhood. The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) plane came down among houses on Friday afternoon after both engines failed as it approached Karachi airport, the airline said.

Its wings sliced through rooftops, sending flames and plumes of smoke into the air as it crashed onto a street, sparking a rescue operation that lasted into the night. Commercial flights in the country resumed only days ago, ahead of the holiday of Eid al-Fitr, after planes were grounded during a lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic.

“After it hit and I regained consciousness, I saw fire everywhere and no one was visible,” Mohammad Zubair, 24, said from his hospital bed in a video clip circulated on social media. “There were cries of children, adults and elderly. The cries were everywhere and everybody was trying to survive. I

undid my seat belt and I saw some light and tried to walk towards it. Then I jumped out.”

Zubair had suffered burns but was in a stable condition, a health ministry official said. The airline named the other survivor as the president of the Bank of Punjab, Zafar Masud. The health ministry for Sindh province, where the southern port city of Karachi is located, yesterday confirmed that all 97 bodies recovered from the crash site had been on the plane. At least 19 had been identified so far, while DNA testing was being carried out at the University of Karachi to help name the rest of the victims. A local hospital earlier reported it had received the bodies of people killed on the ground.

The disaster comes as Pakistanis prepare to celebrate the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and the beginning of Eid, with many travelling to their homes in cities and villages. A PIA spokesperson said air traffic control lost contact with the plane travelling from Lahore to Karachi just after 2:30 pm (0930 GMT). The pilot made a desperate mayday call after announcing “we have lost engines”, according to an audio recording confirmed by the airline.

PIA chief executive Arshad Mahmood Malik described the Airbus A320 as one of the safest planes. “Technically, operationally everything was in place,” he said, promising an investigation.

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KARACHI: Security personnel search for victims in the wreckage of a Pakistan International Airlines aircraft after it crashed in a residential area on Friday. — AFP

## Iran slams ‘tumor’ Israel, lauds arms to Palestinians

**TEHRAN:** Iran’s supreme leader said it was an “Islamic duty” to fight for the “liberation of Palestine” in a landmark speech Friday amid rising tensions with regional arch-enemy Israel. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei denounced Israel as a “tumor” to be removed and hailed Tehran’s supply of arms to Palestinians. He lashed out at Western governments and their Arab “puppets” for supporting the Jewish state, in his first ever address marking Quds (Jerusalem) Day.

The remarks came at the end of a week that saw Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launch a Twitter tirade against Khamenei and reports that the two sides carried out cyber attacks on each other. Khamenei suggested global attention on the coronavirus crisis had helped obscure wrongs done to Palestinians. “The long-lasting virus of Zionists will be eliminated,” he added.

“The aim of this struggle is the liberation of the entire Palestinian land” and “the return of all Palestinians to their country,” Khamenei said in the speech broadcast live on state television. “The policy of normalizing the presence of the Zionist regime in the region is one of the major policies of the United States of America,” he said.



Ali Khamenei

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## Dubai prison: Virtual visits and hearings

**DUBAI:** Behind a glass, soundproof door, an inmate speaks with someone on a computer screen after visits to the Dubai prison were suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. In a separate room of the same compound located in the emirate’s desert, about 35 km from the city center, another inmate appeared for a virtual court hearing, while a third was questioned by a prosecutor online.

The use of video conferencing sys-

tems is one of the ways authorities are trying to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 respiratory disease in the prison. “We are trying to eliminate all direct contact with prisoners... heavily depending on modern technology,” Brigadier Ali Al-Shamali, director-general of punitive and correctional institutions, told AFP during a tour of the Al-Awir central prison.

“We can guarantee the health of the inmate, but how can we know whether someone from outside is carrying the virus?” Prisoners in the Dubai jail can now talk to their families using the Skype telecommunications application. Shamali declined to say how many prisoners had caught

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DUBAI: Inmates wearing protective gear read in seats respecting distancing measures amid the COVID-19 pandemic at the library of Dubai’s Al-Awir central prison on May 21, 2020. — AFP

## Pak goes wild for blockbuster Turkish drama

**ISLAMABAD:** Dubbed the Muslim “Game of Thrones”, a drama about the makings of the Ottoman Empire has sent Pakistan wild this Ramadan, smashing television records but exposing the country’s lack of original content. The Turkish-made series has earned praise for its focus on historical figures from the Muslim world who have been framed as role models for Pakistani youths, and the Urdu-language version of the show has racked up more than 240 million views on YouTube alone.

“I prefer to watch it with kids, so they can have real-life superheroes instead of fictional ones,” said Hassam

Mustafa as he settled down at his Islamabad home to watch the series with his nieces and nephews after breaking his fast. Resurrection: Ertugrul has gripped audiences with its daring protagonist, cliffhangers and high production values since it began broadcasting on the first day of the Islamic holy month, which is due to end Sunday or Monday.

Usually state broadcaster PTV fills its Ramadan programming with live charity fundraisers, quiz shows and religious content. But with the virus stifling television studios, Prime Minister Imran Khan issued special instructions to the broadcaster to air the series in a bid to boost Islamic culture and values among young people. “Over here, we go to Hollywood then Bollywood and back again – third-hand culture gets promoted this way,” Khan told a group of YouTubers recently, referring to the influence of foreign shows.

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ISLAMABAD: In this picture taken on May 9, 2020, a family watches Turkish drama series “Dirilis: Ertugrul” telecast on Pakistan’s state-run channel PTV Home during the holy month of Ramadan. — AFP