

## International

# More COVID aid lands in India as Canada, Brazil grapple with surges

## Virus toll approaching 3.2 million even as nations ramp up vaccination drives

**NEW DELHI:** India struggled to contain one of the world's worst coronavirus outbreaks with nearly 400,000 new infections reported yesterday, as more international aid arrived in the South Asian nation to help end the crisis.

Surges in Brazil and Canada also highlighted the persistent threat of the pandemic, with the COVID-19 death toll approaching 3.2 million even as many nations ramp up vaccination drives.

India expanded its vaccination program to all adults on Saturday, but many of its states are struggling with shortages despite an export freeze for shots produced in the country. Long queues were seen at vaccination centres in cities across the nation at the weekend, with people desperate to be inoculated against a disease that has overwhelmed the healthcare system and even crematoriums and graveyards.

"We are here early in the morning to get vaccinated... I left my three-year-old at home to get vaccinated," said Megha Srivastava, 35, at a private immunization center in the capital New Delhi.

"It is a necessity now. We are seeing so many people testing positive." Social media platforms have been flooded with desperate pleas from people looking for oxygen cylinders, medicines and hospital beds as the COVID-19 wave causes widespread shortages. India reported more than 392,000 new cases and nearly 3,700 COVID-19 deaths yesterday. The dire situation prompted many nations including the United States, Russia and Britain to send emergency supplies including oxygen generators, face masks, and vaccines. Aid from France reached India on Sunday, including eight oxygen generator plants and 28 ventilators, adding to the 120 ventilators from Germany that arrived a day earlier.

New Delhi, one of the hardest-hit parts of the country, extended its lockdown by a week on Saturday, and the eastern state of Odisha has also ordered a shutdown. Anthony Fauci, the top US pandemic advisor, said in comments published Saturday that the whole of India should go into

lockdown to fight this wave.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has resisted imposing a national shutdown but many states have imposed heavy restrictions. A growing list of countries have cut flights from India, with Nigeria on Sunday banning entry to all travellers who have been in the country in the last two weeks, though Nigerians and those transiting in India will be exempt.

Alarm bells are also ringing in other countries in densely populated South Asia. In Sri Lanka daily infections hit a record on Saturday, with authorities imposing further curbs on movement and activities in parts of the island nation. "We could face an India-type crisis very soon unless we arrest the current trend of infections," chief epidemiologist Sudath Samaraweera said.

### 'We're tired and exhausted'

Known global infections are approaching 152 million, and fresh waves have also shaken many countries in the Americas. Brazil, the worst-hit Latin American nation, has crossed 400,000 Covid-19 deaths—second only to the United States—with many of its hospitals pushed to the brink of collapse.

And in Canada, the epicenter is in the most populous province Ontario, where the surge has been so intense that the government sent in the military and the Red Cross to help care for critical patients.

Ontario's healthcare system is near breaking point, said intensive care nurse Fariel Faquary at Toronto's Humber River Hospital. "We're stretched thin," Faquary told AFP.

"We're tired and exhausted. Just exhausted." Many health professionals and caregivers are also frustrated with citizens who have not followed precautions. "I think we all feel we have been let down a little bit by society," said physician Jamie Spiegelman. Canada's vaccine roll-out has also stumbled because of supply issues, unlike its southern neighbor the United States which has given at least one dose to more than half its adult popula-

Local media reported that security forces were chasing protesters down and arresting them. "They are arresting every young person they see," a source in Yangon told AFP, adding that he was hiding at the time. "Now I am trapped." Bomb blasts also went off across different parts of Yangon yesterday. Explosions have been happening with increasing frequency in the former capital, and authorities have blamed it on "instigators".

### Bloodshed across the country

So far, security forces have killed 759 civilians, according to local monitoring group the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. The junta—which has labelled the AAPP an unlawful organization—says 258 protesters have been killed, along with 17 policemen and seven soldiers. Violence erupted again on Sunday by 10 am in Shan state's Hsipaw township, when security forces opened fire on protesters, killing at least one.

"He was shot in the head and died immediately," said one protester, who said he rushed to hide his friend's body in case authorities tried to take it away. "They are asking for his dead body, but we will not give them... We will have his funeral today," he said.

In northern Kachin state, security forces also fired on protesters, even flinging grenades into the crowd. A 33-year-old man was shot in the head, a fellow

## At a Toronto hospital, staff exhausted, angry

**TORONTO:** Intensive care nurse Fariel Faquary says the health care system in Canada's Ontario province is nearing the breaking point as it fights a fast-moving new wave of COVID-19 infections.

The 29-year-old caregiver at Toronto's Humber River Hospital is looking after two patients in their 60s who are on ventilators. "We're overwhelmed," Faquary told AFP, conveying the feelings of her peers who often say they feel powerless against a tidal wave of new cases, and angry at times—especially with the Ontario government's arguably slow response and with Ontarians who do not following public health orders to contain the coronavirus.

"We're stretched thin. We're tired and exhausted. Just exhausted." Ontario is now the epicenter of the outbreak in Canada, led by more virulent variants. The latest surge in the number of cases was so big that authorities this week despatched the military and the Red Cross to help care for critical patients.

"It's the worst wave I've ever seen," says head

## Astronauts splash down off Florida on SpaceX craft

**WASHINGTON:** A SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule carrying four astronauts back to Earth splashed down off Florida early yesterday in NASA's first nighttime ocean landing in more than 50 years. The crew reported they were feeling well after their arrival back on Earth following a nearly six-month mission aboard the International Space Station, NASA said.

The capsule splashed down at 2.56 am (0656 GMT) in the dark in the Gulf of Mexico off Panama



**MUMBAI:** People sit in an observation area after getting inoculated with a dose of Covishield vaccine against the COVID-19 at the BKC Jumbo vaccination center in Mumbai yesterday on the second day of India's vaccination drive to all adults. —AFP

tion. But concerns are growing there too about the inoculation program hitting a wall—the people most eager to get their shots have already done so.

### Protests against restrictions

Despite the COVID-19 threat in sharp focus because of the outbreaks in Brazil and India, populations in many parts of the world are growing weary of virus measures. Anti-restriction protesters gathered in several European countries on Saturday, including Finland, Sweden, Belgium and Germany.

Many protesters are worried about the effect of

curbs on the economy, with the tourism and hospitality industries particularly hard hit. Several countries have tried to jumpstart battered tourism sectors by setting up travel bubbles with other locations that are relatively COVID-free. But keeping them alive as virus cases re-emerge has proved a challenge.

New Zealand yesterday agreed to reopen a bubble with Western Australia, 24 hours after grounding flights when three people in Perth tested positive. It was the second disruption to the ground-breaking arrangement in the two weeks since it opened. —AFP

## Thousands call for 'spring revolution' in Myanmar

**YANGON:** Thousands of anti-coup protesters marched in Myanmar yesterday, calling for a "spring revolution" with the country in its fourth month under a military regime. Cities, rural areas, remote mountainous regions and even rebel-controlled border territories have been in uproar since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a February 1 coup.

The junta has aimed to suppress dissent through a brutal crackdown involving mass arrests and an escalating death toll. Demonstrations kicked off early in commercial hub Yangon as activists called for a show of force and a "spring revolution". Youths gathered on a street corner before marching swiftly down the streets in a flash mob—dispersing soon after to avoid clashing with authorities.

"To bring down the military dictatorship is our cause!" they chanted, waving a three-finger salute of resistance. In eastern Shan state, youths carried a banner that read: "We cannot be ruled at all."

## N Korea says Biden has a 'hostile policy'

**SEOUL:** North Korea yesterday accused US President Joe Biden of pursuing a hostile policy, dismissing "spurious" American diplomacy and warning of a response. Biden had said Wednesday that his administration would deal with the threat posed by Pyongyang's nuclear program "through diplomacy as well as stern deterrence".

The White House said Friday that the president was open to negotiations with North Korea on denuclearization following the completion of a policy review, but Pyongyang said Biden had made a "big blunder". "His statement clearly reflects his intent to keep enforcing the hostile policy toward the DPRK as it had been done by the US for over half a century," Kwon Jung Gun, a foreign ministry official, said in a statement released by the official KCNA news agency. "The US-claimed 'diplomacy' is a spurious signboard for covering up its hostile acts, and 'deterrence' touted by it is just a means for posing nuclear threats to the DPRK," Kwon added, using the official name of North Korea.

"Now that what the keynote of the US new DPRK policy has become clear, we will be compelled to press for corresponding measures." The White House said Friday that its goal remains "the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula". Biden's press secretary Jen Psaki gave little indication of what kind of diplomatic initiative this could entail, but suggested that the president had learned from the experience of his predecessors, who struggled to deal with North Korea's leadership and its nuclear weapons program.

But Psaki said Washington would not "focus on achieving a grand bargain", apparently referring to the kind of dramatic over-arching deal that former president Donald Trump initially suggested was possible when he met with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un. Neither would the White House follow the more stand-offish approach espoused by Barack Obama, she added.

In a separate statement through KCNA Sunday, North Korea also accused the United States of insulting its leadership and its anti-coronavirus measures, referring to a State Department press release on April 28. —AFP



**YANGON:** Protesters making the three-finger salute as they take part in a flash mob as part of demonstrations against the military coup on "Global Myanmar Spring Revolution Day" in Yangon yesterday. —AFP

demonstrator told AFP, adding that many others were wounded in the attack.

"They all had to be treated at a hidden area. They could not go to the hospital for treatment or they would have been arrested," the protester said. Urban centers have become hotspots for unrest, especially in Yangon, where residents share videos of security forces beating up civilians on the streets. —AFP



**TORONTO:** Respiratory Therapist Flor Guevara adjusts ventilator tubes as healthcare workers reposition a patient suffering from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) at Humber River Hospital's Intensive Care Unit, in Toronto, Canada, Saturday. —AFP

nurse Kimisha Marshall. "We have younger patients coming in, sicker and lots more patients coming in." "We're short of nurses. We had some nurses that left, but also we have nurses that are getting sick, too," she adds. At the week's end, there were more than 2,200 people hospitalized with COVID-19 in the province of 14 million. Nearly 900 patients were listed in critical condition. —AFP

City after a six-and-a-half-hour flight from the ISS, night-vision images relayed by NASA's WB-57 high-altitude research aircraft showed. Teams aboard the Go Navigator recovery ship retrieved the capsule and hoisted it onto the deck about half an hour later.

It was the first nighttime splashdown for NASA since the crew of Apollo 8 arrived in the Pacific Ocean on December 27, 1968. Commander Michael Hopkins was the first to emerge after the hatch was opened, doing a little jig as he set foot on deck, followed shortly after by fellow NASA astronaut Victor Glover.

"On behalf of Crew-1 and our families, we just want to say thank you ... It's amazing what can be accomplished when people come together. You're all changing the world. Congratulations. It's great to be back," Hopkins said in a NASA tweet. NASA astronaut Shannon Walker and Japan's Soichi Noguchi were the other two aboard. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Gunman kills two at US casino

**WASHINGTON:** A gunman killed two people and seriously wounded another at a casino in the northern US state of Wisconsin on Saturday night before being shot dead by police, authorities said. Police said they first received a call at 7:28 pm about a shooting at a restaurant at the Oneida Casino/Radisson Hotel and Conference Center complex near Green Bay, which is operated by the Oneida Nation. "The suspect is deceased, the police have shot the suspect so there's no threat to the public," Lieutenant Kevin Pawlak of the Brown County Sheriff's office told reporters after midnight. Pawlak said it appeared to be a "targeted event not a random shooting." The intended target was an employee who was not there at the time but the gunman decided to shoot some of their friends or acquaintances, he said. —AFP

#### Berlin police slam May Day violence

**BERLIN:** Berlin police yesterday said they had arrested more than 250 people after May Day rallies descended into "unacceptable" violence that saw protesters pelt officers with stones and bottles and set fire to bins. Around 30,000 people from across the political spectrum took part in several marches in the German capital on Saturday as part of the traditional Labor Day workers' rights demonstrations. Most of the demonstrations passed off peacefully, police said. —AFP

#### Brussels police arrest 132 in crackdown

**BRUSSELS:** Belgian police arrested 132 people as they used tear gas and water cannon to break up a banned anti-lockdown party in a Brussels park on the weekend, an official report said yesterday. One partygoer was knocked out by a water cannon and 14 others were slightly injured—including one struck by a police horse—as riot police brutally dispersed the party on Saturday in scenes echoing a similar gathering in the park a month before. Five of those arrested were taken into police custody, the police said. Three officers were hospitalized and a dozen slightly injured during clashes with the protesters. —AFP

#### Burundi president sacks minister

**NAIROBI:** Burundi's President Evariste Ndayishimiye has sacked his commerce minister because she risked "compromising the country's economy," as sources in the ruling regime alleged she had embezzled airline funds. "Considering the acts of the person concerned risk compromising the country's economy and the image of Burundi... the honourable Immaculee Ndbaneze is dismissed from her functions as minister of commerce, transport, industry and tourism," the presidency said in a statement posted Saturday on the state house's official Twitter account. The statement did not provide further details. —AFP

#### Nigeria restricts air passengers

**ABUJA:** Nigeria will ban entry to non-Nigerian passengers who have been in Brazil, India or Turkey in the last fortnight due to concerns over the spread of coronavirus in those three nations, health authorities said yesterday. The travel ban does not apply to passengers who have transited through those countries, the presidential steering committee on COVID-19 said in a statement. "These precautionary measures are a necessary step to minimize the risk of a surge in COVID-19 cases introduced to Nigeria from other countries," the statement said. —AFP