

# world

## Donald Trump warns 'toughest week' ahead

AFP | Washington

US President Donald Trump warned Americans to brace for a "very horrendous" number of coronavirus deaths in the coming days. Global deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic have soared past 60,000, with Europe continuing to bear the brunt of the virus which has left roughly half the planet confined at home.

There are now more than 1.2 million confirmed cases across the globe, and around 65,000 people have died since the virus first emerged in China late last year, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally.



US President Donald Trump warned Americans to expect a "tough week" ahead

Trump said the United States was entering "a time that's going to be very horrendous" with "some really bad numbers." "This will probably be the toughest week," he said at the White House. "There will be a lot of death."

At the same time, the president stressed the US -- where infections have surpassed 300,000 -- cannot remain shut down forever.

"Mitigation does work but again, we're not going to destroy our country," he said. "I've said it from the beginning -- the cure cannot be worse than the problem."

Over 45,000 global deaths have been in Europe, with Britain reporting a new daily high in fatalities, taking the overall toll to 4,300 out of nearly 42,000 cases.

Tide turning in Italy? Worst-hit Italy cheered after seeing its number of intensive

care virus cases drop for the first time -- from 4,068 on Friday to 3,994 on Saturday.

Even some of the most cautious Italian health officials seized on the figures as evidence that the tide may be turning in the deadliest disaster the country has faced since World War II.

"This is a very important data point," said civil protection service chief Angelo Borrelli, adding that it "allows our hospitals to breathe."

The daily rise in new infections across Italy has also slowed. It reported 681 new deaths on Saturday, down from a peak of almost 1,000 just over

a week ago.

Spain, which is under a near-total lockdown, saw a second successive daily fall in coronavirus-related deaths with 809 fatalities.

The total number of deaths in Spain now stands at 11,947, second only to Italy.

Although the number of new cases also slowed, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced an extension of the country's lockdown until April 25.

At a field hospital in Madrid set up at a conference centre, staff applauded whenever a patient was healthy enough to be discharged.

## Drive-by blessings in virus-hit Philippines

Manila

Priests delivered blessings from the back of trucks and motorised tricycles in the Philippine Sunday, adapting the deeply Catholic nation's traditions to the battle against the coronavirus pandemic.

Locals lined up in front of their homes in a district of Manila, which is entering its fourth week of a lockdown that has brought the frenetic metropolis nearly to a halt.

The priests made signs of the cross as they rolled past waving residents marking Palm Sunday, the start of the week that culminates with the observance of Easter.

"This celebration will continue despite the spread of the virus," said Bong Sosa, who attended



Roman Catholic priest Pepe Quitonio delivers blessing from a motorised tricycle in Borongan in the central Philippines

wearing a mask crafted from a water cooler bottle.

The blessings come as the Philippines recorded a total of 144 deaths and 3,094 confirmed virus cases, numbers that are expected to keep rising as the nation ramps up testing.

The quarantine that has shuttered schools and businesses and halted all

social and religious events across most of the nation will likely be extended beyond mid-April, authorities have said.

Easter is a major holiday in the Philippines when millions typically return to their family homes outside the capital, but heavy restrictions on movement will disrupt those trips this



A Roman Catholic priest blesses the faithful from the back of a pick-up truck in Manila



People lined up with palm fronds as the priests drive by

year.

Bans on large public events will also mean that typically thronged churches will be empty save for priests performing mass that will be live-streamed into tens of millions of homes.

## Pope livestreams Palm Sunday mass due to virus 'tragedy'

Vatican City

Pope Francis called for courage in the face of the coronavirus pandemic as he delivered Palm Sunday mass by livestream instead of before Saint Peter's Square crowds.

The Vatican is abandoning centuries of tradition and refraining from public celebrations of the official start of the Catholic world's Holy Week.

Pope Francis called the pandemic a tragedy on Sunday that must be faced with courage and hope.

"Today, in the tragedy of a pandemic, in the face of the many false securities that have now crumbled, in the face of so many hopes betrayed, in the sense of abandonment that weighs upon our hearts, Jesus says to each one of us: 'Courage, open your heart to my love'," the pope said.



Pope Francis celebrated Palm Sunday mass behind closed doors at St Peter's on Sunday

Palm Sunday marks the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem before his crucifixion. Easter Sunday on April 12 celebrates his resurrection from the dead.

But many of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics are observing the sacred days under home confinement -- just like the 83-year-old pontiff.

Pope Francis has been communicating with the outside world by video so that crowds do not gather to see and hear him in one of the world's most famous squares.

Vatican City itself has been closed to tourists for nearly a month as part of global efforts to stop the spread of a disease that has

officially killed more than 65,000 people worldwide.

The Argentine-born pontiff went on to call on the faithful to overcome their fears and remember that they are not alone.

"When we have our back to the wall, when we find ourselves at a dead end, with no light and no way of escape, when it seems that God himself is not responding, we should remember that we are not alone," the pope said in his prayer.

Pope Francis himself went down with a cold in late February and was reportedly tested for COVID-19 twice as a precaution because seven people in the Vatican have caught the virus.

The Vatican says the pope is now in good health. Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter a week later on April 19.

