

Most nations to miss UN target on chronic diseases

Cancers, heart and blood-vessel disease, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease combined to kill 12.5 million people in 2016, researchers say

● Only 35 nations are on track to meet UN Sustainable Development Goal

● The United States ranked 53rd for men, and 44th for women

AFP | Paris, France

More than half of all countries will likely fail to hit the UN target of reducing premature deaths from a quartet of chronic diseases by a third before 2030, researchers said yesterday.

Cancers, heart and blood-vessel disease, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease combined to kill 12.5 million people aged 30 to 70 worldwide in 2016, they reported in a major study.

"The bottom line is this: a set of commitments were made, and most countries are not going to meet them," lead author Majid Ezzati, a professor at Imperial School London's School of Public Health, said.

Only 35 nations are on track to meet UN Sustainable Development Goal 3.4 -- launched in 2015 -- for women, and even less for men, the study revealed.



Technicians are at work on September 21, 2018, at Sanofi Genzyme site in Lyon, southeastern France

"International donors and national governments are doing too little to reduce deaths from non-communicable diseases," Ezzati said.

The good news, he added, is that most countries are at least moving in the right direction.

But around 20 states -- 15 for women, 24 for men -- are either stagnating or backsliding.

That select group of failure includes only one wealthy nation: the United States.

A much-noted study last year in the American Journal of Public Health showed that the rise in premature deaths was especially sharp among white, rural Americans, described by the authors as gripped by an "epidemic of despair".

"It comes down to weak public health, weak health care system, high levels of inequality," Ezzati said.

Weak public health

Across all age groups, non-communicable diseases kill more than 40 million people a year worldwide, accounting for seven in ten deaths.

Of these, 17 million are classified as "premature," or before the age of 70.

"We are sleepwalking into a sick future because of severely inadequate progress on non-communicable diseases," said Katie Dain from the NCD Alliance.

The "NCD Countdown 2030" report, published in The Lancet ahead of next week's UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs in New York, "will assist in holding governments and donors accountable", she added.

Only four countries -- South Korea, Japan, Switzerland and Australia -- ranked among the top ten for lowest NCD mortality rates for both men and women.

Spain, Singapore, Portugal, Italy, Finland and France rounded out the good health podium for women.

For men, the other countries were Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Bahrain, Canada and New Zealand.

The United States ranked 53rd for men, and 44th for women, with Chinese men and women placed 80th and 76th, respectively.

China is not on track to meet the goal but its NCD rates are declining, even as levels of obesity and high blood pressure are on the rise, the study revealed.

Austrian student in jail on terror charges in Turkey

Ankara, Turkey | AFP

Austrian student and journalist to be kept in jail ahead of a trial on terror charges following his detention last week, his lawyer said yesterday.

Max Zirngast, who writes for the far-left German-language magazine Re:volt, was detained in Ankara on September 11 and formally arrested by the Ankara court late Thursday, his lawyer Tamer Dogan said. Zirngast, 29, was

charged with being a member of an extreme leftist terror organisation, Dogan added.

He had previously published articles on the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency inside Turkey since 1984.

The PKK is blacklisted as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies. The Austrian has been in Turkey for three years and was a masters student at Middle East Technical University (ODTU) in the political sciences department.

Toll jumps to 29 in Philippine landslide

Manille, Philippines

The death toll from a landslide in the central Philippines has risen to 29, police said Friday, as rescuers frantically dug for survivors of the latest tragedy in the storm-hit nation.

Dozens were still missing as authorities probed whether a nearby rock quarry could have played a role in the massive hillside collapse Thursday that hit rural communities in Naga on the tourist island of Cebu.

The rescue effort came as the nation was still reeling from

Typhoon Mangkhut, whose toll hit 95 dead on Thursday, mostly from a massive landslide in the country's mountainous north.

Rescuers on Cebu have pulled 29 corpses from the debris, the Philippine National Police said, as people living in homes spared from the landslide were evacuated as a precaution.

Hundreds of police, firemen, and specialists using heavy equipment were looking for about 50 people, provincial disaster office spokesman Julius Regner said.

Authorities are not sure whether the limestone quarry

near the slide-hit area contributed to the disaster, but they have ordered a temporary 15-day halt to quarry operations around the country as a precaution.

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu told a press conference the government will conduct a national review "to determine the safety of quarry operation areas, most especially the surrounding communities."

The Philippines has a poor record of regulating mining, with tunnel collapses and landslides regularly killing people in other areas in recent years.

Japan space probe drops rovers towards asteroid

Tokyo, Japan

Japanese space probe Friday released a pair of exploring rovers towards an egg-shaped asteroid to collect mineral samples that may shed light on the origin of the solar system.

The "Hayabusa2" probe jet-tisoned the round, cookie tin-shaped robots toward the Ryugu asteroid, according to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). If the mission is successful, the rovers will conduct the world's first moving, robotic observation of an asteroid surface.

Taking advantage of the asteroid's low gravity, they will jump around on the surface -- soaring



Researchers and employees work at a control room to operate the Hayabusa2 mission in Sagamihara

as high as 15 metres (49 feet) and staying in the air for as long as 15 minutes -- to survey the asteroid's physical features with cameras and sensors.

So far so good, but JAXA must wait for the Hayabusa2 probe to send data from the rovers to Earth in a day or two to assess whether the release has been a success, officials said.

"We are very much hopeful. We don't have confirmation yet, but we are very, very hopeful," Yuichi Tsuda, JAXA project manager, told reporters.

"I am looking forward to seeing pictures. I want to see images of space as seen from the surface of the asteroid," he said.

The cautious announcement came after a similar JAXA probe in 2005 released a rover which failed to reach its target asteroid.

Next month, Hayabusa2 will deploy an "impactor" that will explode above the asteroid, shooting a two-kilo (four-pound) copper object into the surface to blast a crater a few metres in diameter.

From this crater, the probe will collect "fresh" materials unexposed to millennia of wind and radiation, hoping for answers to some fundamental questions about life and the universe, including whether elements from space helped give rise to life on Earth.

India probes death of 12 endangered lions

New Delhi, India

Indian authorities yesterday ordered a probe into the deaths of a dozen endangered wild Asiatic lions, half of them cubs, over the last 10 days, officials said.

One lioness died after preying on a poisoned boar while eight other lions died of an infection in the lungs and liver.

Three cubs were killed in infighting while other three passed away in the course of treatment.

Gujarat officials have sent the lions' carcasses to a veterinary hospital for further analysis into the cause of infection.

"Primarily the deaths appear due to natural causes or some infection," Vijay Chaudhary, forest department official, told AFP.

Listed as critically endangered in 2000, wild Asiatic lions reside only in one Indian forest -- the Gir Sanctuary spread over 1,400 square kilometres (545 square miles) in the western state of Gujarat.

The lions, a major tourist attraction in the state, have been a target of poachers in the past.

Bishop arrested for rape of nun: report

Berlin, Germany

An Indian bishop accused by a nun of raping her was arrested yesterday, in a high-profile abuse case that had triggered angry protests by clergy over police inaction, Press Trust of India reported.

Bishop Franco Mulakkal was arrested on Friday evening, a day after Pope Francis relieved him from duty over the scandal, according to PTI who quoted local police official Vijay Sakhare.

The nun, who has not been named, first accused Mulakkal in late June of raping her 13 times between 2014 and 2016.

Pope Francis relieved Mulakkal from duty on Thursday and appointed another bishop in his stead.

Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang dead at 61

Hanoi, Vietnam

Vietnam's President Tran Dai Quang, a former police chief known as a tough politician and committed communist with little tolerance for dissent, died Friday at age 61 after a serious illness. His death is not likely to dramatically alter politics in a country where the powerful communist government oversees almost every facet of society -- although the death of a sitting leader is rare. Coverage on media was sombre Friday, with a Vietnam Television anchor in dark clothing announcing the news of the leader's death.