

News in brief

Thai PM revokes emergency decree despite protests ◆ Thailand's premier revoked an emergency decree that had been intended to quell pro-democracy rallies despite it failing to stamp out daily protests demanding he resign and for reforms of the unassailable monarchy. The student-led pro-democracy movement has been gaining momentum since mid-July, with mostly young demonstrators calling for Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha's removal and a rewrite of a 2017 military-scripted constitution. Some protest leaders have also issued controversial demands to reform the ultra-powerful and wealthy monarchy, whose influence permeates every aspect of Thai society.

Pope backs civil unions for gay couples ◆ Pope Francis voiced support for same-sex couples, calling them "children of God" and saying they should be allowed to have legally recognised civil unions, in a radical shift from previous pontiffs. The pope, whose opposition to gay marriage remains unchanged, said in a documentary premiered at the Rome Film Festival: "These are children of God, they have the right to a family."

Trudeau wins backing of opposition to avoid snap election ◆ Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau survived a confidence vote after a key opposition party backed his ruling Liberals, averting the chance of a snap election as a coronavirus outbreak worsens. Legislators voted 180-146 against a motion from the Conservatives, Trudeau's main rivals, to set up a committee with wide-ranging powers to probe whether the government improperly handed contracts to friends as it battled the pandemic earlier this year.

Snowden granted permanent residency in Russia ◆ Fugitive US whistleblower Edward Snowden has been granted permanent residency in Russia, his lawyer said. Snowden, the former US intelligence contractor who revealed in 2013 that the US government was spying on its citizens, has been living in exile in Russia since the revelations. The 37-year-old has said he would like to return to the United States.

China and Vatican renew historic deal on bishops ◆ A secretive 2018 agreement between Beijing and the Vatican was renewed, despite strident US condemnation and warnings from underground Chinese priests loyal to Rome that they have only become more marginalised since it was signed. The deal allows both Beijing and the Holy See a say in appointing bishops in an attempt to close a schism in China's 12-million-strong Catholic community. Washington had put intense pressure on the Vatican to scrap the agreement, saying it has failed to shield Chinese Catholics from persecution.

◆ The investigation into the murder of a French teacher for showing cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in class turned to Syria on Thursday, where the killer had a jihadist contact, a source close to the case said. Seven people have been charged with being complicit in a "terrorist murder" after 18-year-old Chechen Abdulkh Anzorov beheaded Samuel Paty on the outskirts of Paris on Friday, including two teenagers who helped him identify the teacher.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	8,630,545	227,961
2 India	7,759,252	117,330
3 Brazil	5,303,520	155,500
4 Russia	1,463,306	25,242
5 Spain	1,090,521	34,521
6 Argentina	1,037,325	27,519
7 France	999,043	34,210
8 Colombia	981,700	29,464
9 Peru	876,885	33,937
10 Mexico	867,559	87,415
11 UK	810,467	44,347
12 South Africa	710,515	18,843
13 Iran	550,757	31,650
14 Chile	497,131	13,792

Global tally
41,863,839
Deaths
1,140,490
Recovered:
31,085,125
New cases
+376,915
New deaths
+4,793

Middle East Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	105,883		6,155		98,516	1,212
Saudi Arabia	343,774	+401	5,250	+15	330,181	8,343
UAE	120,710	+1,578	474	+2	113,364	6,872
Kuwait	119,420	+889	730	+9	110,714	7,976
Oman	111,484	+451	1,137	+15	97,367	12,980
Qatar	130,462	+252	228	+3	127,328	2,906

Nigeria's president tells security to respect law

Gunfire has erupted and jailbreaks have been reported in Nigeria, as unrest over the shooting of protesters in its biggest city continues

● Violence has escalated since Wednesday as groups of young men and armed police clashed in some neighbourhoods

Reuters | Lagos

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has told security forces to act lawfully, the national security adviser said yesterday, as authorities in Lagos struggled to enforce a curfew imposed to contain anger over a crackdown on anti-police protesters.

Gunshots rang out and smoke rose from at least two fires in the commercial capital's affluent Ikoyi neighbourhood yesterday, witnesses said. A fire broke out in the district's prison, the state government said. Video footage showed a blaze in a shopping mall in another part of Lagos.

Violence in Lagos, Africa's biggest city, has escalated since Wednesday as groups of young men and armed police clashed in some neighbourhoods fol-



Smoke rises from a prison in Ikoyi neighbourhood of Lagos

lowing a shooting on Tuesday night in Lekki district.

Rights group Amnesty International said soldiers and police killed at least 12 protesters in Lekki and Alausa, another Lagos district. The army has denied soldiers were at the site of the shooting, where people had gathered in defiance of the curfew.

National Security Adviser Ba-

bagana Monguno, speaking to reporters in the capital Abuja after a meeting with Buhari, said the president had directed all security agencies to operate within "the confines of legality" and "not to do anything that will aggravate the situation".

"Mr. President is very concerned about this development and does not want a situation in which everything breaks

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The unrest has become a political crisis for Buhari, a former military leader who came to power at the ballot box in 2015 and is commander-in-chief of the armed forces

down and results in anarchy, in lawlessness and people taking the law into their own hands," Monguno said.

Monguno said Buhari was expected to "come up with certain solutions" in the coming hours.

In addition to flashpoints in Lagos - where witnesses have reported seeing young men, some armed with machetes, walking in Lagos - a number of southern states have imposed curfews to restore order.

S Korea sticks to flu vaccine plan despite safety fears after 25 die

Reuters | Seoul

South Korean officials refused to suspend a seasonal influenza inoculation effort, despite growing calls for a halt, including an appeal from a key group of doctors, after the deaths of at least 25 of those vaccinated.

Health authorities said they found no direct links between the deaths and the vaccines. At least 22 of the dead, including a 17-year-old boy, were part of a campaign to inoculate 19 million teenagers and senior citizens for free, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said.

"The number of deaths has increased, but our team sees low possibility that the deaths resulted from the shots," the agency's director, Jeong Eun-kyeong, told parliament.

Japan researchers show masks do block coronavirus, but not perfectly

Reuters | Tokyo

Japanese researchers showed that masks can offer protection from airborne coronavirus particles, but even professional-grade coverings can't eliminate contagion risk entirely.

Scientists at the University of Tokyo built a secure chamber with mannequin heads facing each other. One head, fitted with a nebuliser, simulated coughing and expelled actual coronavirus particles. The other mimicked natural breathing, with a collection chamber for viruses coming through the



A mail carrier delivers cloth masks under a government program in Tokyo

airway.

A cotton mask reduced viral uptake by the receiver head by up to 40 per cent compared to no mask. An N95 mask, used by medical professionals, blocked up to 90pc. However, even when the N95 was fitted to the face with tape, some virus particles still sneaked in.

When a mask was attached to the coughing head, cotton and surgical masks blocked more than 50pc of the virus transmission.

"There was a synergistic effect when both the virus receiver and virus spreader wore masks," the researchers wrote in a study published on Wednesday.

There has been a growing consensus among health experts that the COVID-19 virus can be spread through the air. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revised its guidance this month to say the pathogen can linger in the air for hours.

40 pc
of the viral uptake by the receiver was reduced on wearing a cotton mask, while an N95 mask blocked up to 90%

North Korea's Kim lauds Chinese war dead on anniversary

AFP | Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has paid tribute to the millions of Chinese troops who fought a US-led coalition to a standstill and saved his country from defeat in the Korean War, state media reported yesterday.

The 1950-53 conflict was the first and so far only time Chinese and US forces have engaged in large-scale direct combat, and with tensions running high between Beijing



Kim Jong Un (R) offering flowers at the cemetery of the martyrs of the Chinese People's Volunteers

and Washington, China is making much of the 70th anniversary of its forces entering the fight.

China is North Korea's longtime ally and economic benefactor, with Mao Zedong -- whose eldest son Mao Anying was among those killed -- having described relations as "close as lips and teeth".

Ties have fluctuated over the years due to Pyongyang's growing nuclear ambitions, but with negotiations between North Korea and the US at a standstill, both sides have moved to strengthen their alliance.