VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. Reporting by remote, I'm David Byrd.

The Justice Department says it is dropping the criminal case against President Donald Trump's first national security adviser, Michael Flynn. AP's Sagar Meghani reports from the White House.

It's a stunning reversal for one of special counsel Robert Mueller's signature cases. Prosecutors had maintained for three years that Michael Flynn lied to the FBI during a 2017 interview about his talks with Russia's ambassador to Washington.

Flynn himself admitted it. But the department says the interview was conducted with no legitimate investigative basis. The case against Flynn was a rallying cry for President Trump and his backers in bashing FBI's Russia probe.

The reversal comes as Attorney General William Barr increasingly challenges the Russia investigation, which could add to Democratic concerns that Barr's excessively loyal to the president.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

The U.S. Department of Labor says an additional 3.2 million Americans filed for unemployment benefits last week, taking the total to more than 33 and a half million since the start of shutdowns intended to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The number of laid off workers receiving aid is now equal to 15 and a half percent of the workforce eligible for unemployment benefits.

PNC Bank's Gus Faucher says the pandemic has drastically multiplied those seeking benefits.

"Before the coronavirus pandemic hit initial claims about 200,000 per week, so there are now about 16 times higher than what we saw."

The Labor Department reports the lay-offs are steadily declining after sharp spikes in late March and early April.

On Friday, the government releases its monthly jobs report, with the unemployment rate expected to hit at least 16 percent, the highest rate since the Great Depression.

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Officials in India say a leak at a chemical plant that killed nearly a dozen people has been plugged. We get details on what happened from AP's ???.

Officials said the chemical styrene used to make plastic and rubber leaked from the plant in the city of Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh state while workers were preparing to restart the facility after a coronavirus lockdown was eased.

Videos and photos from the area showed dozens of people, including women and children, lying unconscious in the streets, arms open wide with white froth trailing from their mouths.

Hundreds of people fled from the gas leak, some on motorbikes and others carried in open trucks.

I'm ???.

Black people and those of Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnicity have a significantly higher chance of dying from COVID-19 than white people even when adjusting for deprivation.

As Soraya Ali reports, that's what the British statistics office said on Thursday.

The Office for National Statistics found the black males were 4.2 times more likely to die from a COVID-19-related death and black females were 4.3 times more likely when compared to white men and women.

But those figures come without adjusting for variety of factors, like deprivation, education and health. The adjusted model showed that black males and females were still 1.9 times more likely to die.

Males of Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnicity are 1.8 times more likely to die when using the adjusted model.

And this isn't the first time race has been called into question. Data from the United States showed that African-Americans were more likely to died from COVID-19, highlighting the inequalities in access to medical care and the long-standing disparities in health.

That's Reuters Soraya Ali.

An expert cautions there will be a return of the new coronavirus later this year. AP correspondent Mike Gracia reports.

A return of COVID-19 in the fall is all but certain.

"We know the coronaviruses in general accelerate their spread when it gets colder, when it's less sunny, when the humidity is, is less."

Dr. Amesh Adalja is a senior scholar and infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

"What will be difficult is at the same time we're contending with the novel coronavirus, influenza will also be coming back."

On the plus side, Adalja tells the AP he is encouraged that many trials are already underway on a vaccine for the new coronavirus.

"I suspect when we get a vaccine that this drug will be taken off the table, coronaviruses don't mutate no evidence influenza does."

I'm Mike Gracia.

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