VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. Via remote, I'm Marissa Melton.

The University of Washington has updated its COVID-19 mortality projection for the United States, saying now that some 147,000 people could die [by the] of the illness by August 4.

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation bumped its projection up by 10,000 over the past two days. The institute said the higher numbers are based on states easing social distancing mandate and new data acquired about people's movement.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, said Tuesday the coronavirus death toll in the United States is "almost certainly higher" than the reported 81,000. He warned of serious consequences if cities and states reopen too quickly.

Fauci told a Senate panel investigating the U.S. response to the pandemic that unaccounted numbers of coronavirus victims, especially in the New York City area, have died at home without being officially counted in the national death toll. He declined to speculate how many more.

Fauci warned it is "entirely possible" that the pandemic "could become worse" in the U.S. in the fall months from September to November, but he said he hoped by then the country "could deal with it" better than it has so far.

President Donald Trump has been prodding businesses and state governors to reopen the world's biggest economy and all but a few of the 50 governors have issued orders in recent days to allow some stores, restaurants and offices to resume operations on a limited basis if precautions are taken.

But Fauci, testifying remotely from his home outside Washington D.C., said there "is a real risk you will trigger an outbreak that you will not be able to control" if government guidelines calling for a steady decline in the number of cases over a two-week period are ignored.

From Washington D.C., you're listening to VOA news.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani ordered his armed forces to resume offensive operations against the Taliban Tuesday in a brief nationally televised speech Tuesday night.

Ghani justified the decision by saying the Taliban has ignored calls for a reduction in violence or cease-fire and instead intensified insurgent attacks.

The order came after a deadly day of violence with militant attacks on a hospital where [16 laid ... there were] 16 were dead [included] including nurses, new mothers and new born children. There was a hospital in Kabul, and on a funeral in the province of Nangarhar, where a suicide bomber killed 24 people and injured dozens more.

Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing but not the hospital attack. The Taliban has also disavowed the hospital attack.

Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Aryan told reporters Tuesday that security forces quickly engaged the assailants at the hospital and ended the siege after a gun battle that lasted for hours.

In Washington, the State Department said the dual attacks during the holy month of Ramadan and amid the threat of coronavirus pandemic are particularly appalling.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a massive package of more than $265 billion to revive an economy battered by a seven-week lockdown enforced to contain the coronavirus pandemic. The long-awaited stimulus package amounts to about 10 percent of India's gross domestic product.

In a televised address to the nation, the prime minister said the country must turn crisis into opportunity and emphasized that the main goal of the package is to build a self-reliant India.

Modi also indicated that India would undertake economic reforms that economists and business leaders have long clamored [to] for to attract investment and give a boost to industry.

The announcement came amid a growing chorus for a monetary stimulus to ease the deep pain inflicted by the shutdown on an economy that was sputtering even before the pandemic.

Economists say unemployment has reached 24.7 percent as millions of jobs have been lost across many fields since the lockdown was enforced on March 25. Tens of thousands of migrant workers have fled shuttered cities amid the widespread losses.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence is distancing himself from President Donald Trump out of an abundance of caution, according to the White House.

A White House press secretary told reporters Tuesday the vice president has chosen to keep his distance for a few days after his press secretary tested positive for coronavirus.

Pence was notably absent Monday when Trump held a news conference in the White House Rose Garden to promote the administration's record on coronavirus testing.

The United States has recorded more than 81,000 fatalities from the novel coronavirus - the most of any country.

Via remote, I'm Marissa Melton, VOA news.