VOA NEWS

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

President Donald Trump has defied a threat from Michigan's top law enforcement official by going maskless inside a Ford automobile plant outside Detroit. AP's Sagar Meghani has more.

The president toured a factory now making ventilators. All the Ford executives giving the tour wore masks per company policy. The president alone did not, at least not where reporters and cameras could see him.

"I had one on before. I wore one in this back area but I didn't wanna give the press the pleasure of seeing it."

At one point, pulling a White House-branded mask from his pocket, "I think I look better in the mask."

Asked what kind of example it set for the public not to see him wearing it, "I think it sets an example both ways."

Michigan's attorney general earlier told CNN state law requires masks be warn in enclosed facilities and if the president refused to wear one, he'd be banned from those spaces again.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

President Donald Trump said Thursday he is pulling the United States out of the 18-year-old international Open Skies Treaty allowing surveillance flights over other countries because Russia has been violating it.

At the White House, Trump accused Moscow of ignoring terms of the treaty. He told reporters that the United States would not adhere to it, either, but he did hold out hope that a new agreement might be reached.

"But when we have an agreement, when we have a treaty, and the other side doesn't adhere to it - in many cases, they're old treaties, old agreements - then we pull out also."

The treaty has allowed 34 countries to conduct surveillance flights over each other's territory to look at military installations, an effort aimed at international peacekeeping.

But the U.S. contends that Moscow has been violating the treaty. Russia has denied that charge.

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More than 2.4 million people applied for unemployment benefits last week in the latest wave of layoffs from the coronavirus pandemic. AP correspondent Shelley Adler reports.

The number of people out of work has grown to over 38 million although the flood of layoffs is slowing.

"We see claims decline for seven straight weeks, so it's obvious that the pace of layoffs is slowing."

And while the job losses happen so quickly, PNC chief economist Gus Faucher thinks rehiring will take a lot longer.

"Even if consumers are spending, the level of spending is still much lower than it was in February and in early March. And so businesses may not see the need to rehire even if the economy is growing."

Shelley Adler, Washington.

British health care workers will participate in an Oxford University-led international trial of two anti-malarial drugs to see if they can prevent COVID-19.

As Reuters Olivia Chang reports, one of the drugs is the one President Donald Trump says he has been taking.

The "COPCOV" trial is an international study led by the University of Oxford with support of a Tropical Medicine Unit in Bangkok. It will open to British participants who are in close contact with patients with proven or suspected COVID-19.

With a total of 25 study sites expected to open in the UK by the end of June, plans have been put in place for further test sites in Southeast Asia, Italy, Portugal, Africa and South America. Forty thousand frontline healthcare workers will be involved.

So far, the COPCOV team says lab evidence showed these drugs might be effective in preventing or treating coronavirus. But there was no conclusive proof. The best way to find out its effectiveness is in a randomized clinical trial.

The results are expected by the end of this year.

That's Reuters Olivia Chang.

Wide swaths of coastal India and Bangladesh are flooded and millions are without power as Cyclone Amphan, the most powerful storm to hit the region in more than a decade, has cut a path of destruction that is still being assessed. AP's Zaria Shaklee reports.

Many parts of the Indian metropolis of Kolkata, home to more than 14 million people, are under water and its airport has closed briefly by flooding. Roads are littered with uprooted trees and lamp posts, electricity and communication lines are down and centuries-old buildings are damaged.

Officials in both countries say the full extent of the damage caused by the cyclone is not known because communications to many places are cut. Hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated ahead of the storm, a process complicated by the coronavirus pandemic.

I'm Zaria Shaklee.

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