VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. Via remote, I'm Diane Roberts.

The country hit hardest by the new coronavirus has surpassed a sobering number. More than 100,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the United States. That's according to data collected by Johns Hopkins University.

Worldwide, the number of dead from the respiratory illness is more than 350,000. There are more than 5.6 million confirmed cases globally and nearly 1.7 million of them are in the United States.

Brazil has emerged as the latest epicenter in the pandemic.

The Health Ministry said it had confirmed a daily toll exceeding 1,000 for the fifth time since the crisis accelerated in Brazil last week.

The country has more confirmed cases of COVID-19 than any other country except the United States.

Experts say under-testing means the real figures are probably much higher.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Wednesday the European Union should take more global responsibility in the coronavirus crisis, especially as ties with the United States were currently what she called "difficult."

In a speech outlining Germany's priorities when it takes over the EU's rotating presidency in July, President Merkel said the economic and social upheaval from the pandemic has turned the world upside down.

She welcomed the European Commission's proposed $824 billion coronavirus recovery fund for the bloc but said more should be done to help other countries.

In Spain, a 10-day mourning period began Wednesday to honor the more than 27,000 people in the country who have died from COVID-19.

Meanwhile, Spanish bullfighters protested the shutdown of the controversial industry and cultural tradition.

Bull rings have remained empty and the Running of the Bulls festival which attracts tens of thousands from around the world every July was canceled this year.

From Washington, this is VOA news.

White House officials said U.S. President Donald Trump will sign an executive order on social media companies Thursday. This comes after the president threatened to shut down the platform he accused of stifling conservative voices.

The officials, who spoke to reporters traveling with Mr. Trump to Washington from Florida aboard Air Force One, gave no further details.

With two NASA astronauts aboard the SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft and the hatch closed, Wednesday's mission to the International Space Station was scrubbed due to bad weather.

It was to be the first launch of its kind in nearly a decade and is considered the final part of the testing phase of NASA's work with private companies to return the launching Americans into space.

SpaceX is billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk's private rocket company.

The launch is postponed until Saturday.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told Congress Wednesday Hong Kong no longer qualifies for its special status under U.S. law, potentially dealing a crushing blow to its status as a major financial hub.

China had undermined Hong Kong's autonomy so fundamentally, Pompeo said, that he could not support its recertification for its special pre-1997 trading status.

China's plan for [new secretary le...] new security legislation triggered protests in the territory, and now falls to President Donald Trump to decide to end some, all or none of the U.S. economic privileges the territory enjoys.

Firing tear gas, water cannon and pepper pellets, Hong Kong police made 360 arrests Wednesday as thousands of people protested against the bill.

Protesters were still cramming sidewalks late into the evening, chanting for full democracy and for Hong Kong to seek independence from China.

European governments moved Wednesday to halt the use of anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 patients. A second global trial also was suspended, furthering blows to hopes for a treatment promoted by U.S. President Donald Trump.

A U.K. regulator said Wednesday a separate trial was also being put on hold less than a week after it started. The study being led by the University of Oxford and partly funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was expected to involve as many as 40,000 health care workers.

The World Health Organization launched a new foundation Wednesday for private donations as President Trump threatens to pull the plug over its handling of the pandemic.

The U.N. health agency launched the independently-run WHO Foundation, which the organization hopes will give it greater control to direct philanthropic and public donations toward pressing problems such as the coronavirus crisis.

Via remote, Diane Roberts, VOA news.