

## ***China revises up Wuhan death toll as US plots re-opening***

*The Chinese city at the origin of the coronavirus outbreak revised up its death toll by 50 percent Friday, as global criticism mounted over China's handling of the deadly pandemic.*

*Since emerging from Wuhan late last year, the coronavirus has embarked on a deadly march across the planet, killing more than 140,000 people and wrecking the global economy as half of humanity is trapped indoors.*

*While President Donald Trump announced a phased re-opening of the United States, the economic devastation was clear to see in China where gross domestic product slammed into reverse for the first time since records began.*



*And Wuhan's city government added 1,290 deaths to its toll, bringing the total to 3,869 after many dead were "mistakenly reported" or missed entirely, adding to growing global doubts over China's transparency.*

*Leaders in France and Britain joined Trump's broadsides against China, as two US media outlets reported suspicions the virus accidentally slipped out of a sensitive Wuhan laboratory that studied bats.*

*President Emmanuel Macron told the Financial Times it would be "naive" to think China had handled the pandemic well, adding: "There are clearly things that have happened that we don't know about."*

*Beijing hit back on Friday, insisting there had been no cover-up. "There has never been any concealment, and we'll never allow any concealment," a foreign ministry spokesman said.*

*Life and death balance*

*World leaders are grappling with the question of when to re-open society, seeking a life-and-death balance between unfreezing stalled economies and preventing a deadly second coronavirus wave.*

*While Trump declared Thursday that the time had come for the "next front in our war" with a phased reboot of the US economy, others took the opposite path Japan, Britain and Mexico all expanded current restrictions.*

*Despite the United States suffering a staggering 4,500 deaths in the last 24 hours taking the national toll to almost 33,000 Trump proclaimed: "We're opening up our country."*

*The president's approach was more cautious than previous hopes for a sudden re-opening however, with state governors given the lead.*

*Lightly affected states can open "literally tomorrow", said Trump, while others would receive White House "freedom and guidance" to achieve that at their own pace.*



*In New York state for example where more than 11,500 have died Governor Andrew Cuomo extended a shutdown order until May 15.*

*Top US government scientist Anthony Fauci said: "Light switch on and off is the exact opposite of what you see here."*

*New Yorker Jamie O'Reilly, owner of a dog-walking business, summed up the agonizing predicament world leaders face.*

*"Why does the economy matter if we're not around to spend any money because we're all sick?" the 31-year-old told AFP.*

*Lost decade*

*Meanwhile, there were more signs the global economy is imploding. China reported Friday its GDP shrank 6.8 percent in the first quarter, the first contraction since quarterly growth data started in the early 1990s.*

*In the US, another 5.2 million workers lost their jobs, bringing the total number of newly unemployed to a staggering 22 million since mid-March.*

*John Williams, a top Federal Reserve official, predicted it would take "a year or two" if not longer for the US to recover from what the International Monetary Fund has termed the "Great Lockdown" battering the global economy.*



*The virus could spark another "lost decade" in Latin America, the IMF warned, while experts cautioned that freezing debt for poor countries will not save many developing world economies.*



*In Europe, automobile sales shrank 55 percent in March, according to the industry's trade association.*

*Sri Lankan health officials collect swab specimen from a suspected COVID-19 case in a residential neighborhood, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on April 16. Sri Lankan authorities claim they have largely managed to prevent community spreading through*

*proper identification and isolation of people who came into contact with infected patients.*



*It's awful*

*Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte threatened a typically muscular approach to lockdown, suggesting a martial law-style crackdown to enforce social distancing.*

*But some European countries such as hard-hit Spain and Italy were embarking on a long road back to normality, with Venice residents strolling around quiet canals stripped of their usual throngs of tourists.*

*Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and Finland were among those gradually re-opening shops and schools.*

*Germany said Friday its outbreak was "under control"*

*But Britain, which shut down later than continental Europe, extended its lockdown for at least three more weeks.*

*In Poland, new rules requiring everyone to wear a mask outside received decidedly mixed reviews.*

*"It's awful," postal worker Natalia told AFP, towing a large wheeled letter-bag behind her.*

*"My glasses are fogging up and I can't see a thing. But you have to wear it," she added.*



*Around the world, people have come up with ingenious ways to bring back some semblance of normality to their upended lives.*

*Luciano Romoli, 80, runs a stretching class every day at noon for his senior neighbors who join him from their balconies in the northern Italian city of Turin.*



*"We got the idea, since we have to be stuck at home, to do some exercise, otherwise when it's over we'll be stiff, and a bit rigid," the energetic pensioner told AFP.*