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John Robbins 281-965-6390
Jun Gai 281-498-4310



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Make Today Different

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Publisher: Wea H. Lee
President: Catherine Lee
Editor: John Robbins

Address: 11122 Bellaire Blvd., Houston, TX 77072
E-mail: News@scdaily.com

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Belarus faces sanctions threat over ‘state piracy’, some airlines avoid its airspace

Matthias WilliamsGabriela

Several airlines said on Monday they would avoid Belarusian airspace after Belarus scrambled a warplane to intercept a Ryanair jetliner and arrest a dissident journalist in an act denounced by Western powers as “state piracy”.

European Union leaders meeting on Monday evening were set to ban Belarussian airlines from their bloc’s airspace and call on EU-based carriers to avoid flying over the former Soviet republic, according to a draft statement seen by Reuters.

The leaders of the 27 member states will also consider widening the list of Belarussian individuals they already sanction and call on the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to urgently investigate Sunday’s incident, when Belarus forced a Ryanair plane to land.

“The reaction should be swift and be severe,” Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croo told journalists ahead of the EU summit that began at 1700 GMT.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney, using language that was echoed by a number of other EU countries, said: “This was effectively aviation piracy, state sponsored.”

A spokesman for U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was “deeply concerned” by the incident and called for a full investigation.

The three Baltic states said Belarusian airspace should be declared “unsafe” and - as regional tensions mounted - Belarus and Latvia said they were expelling each other’s ambassadors.

Some airlines and countries did not wait for guidance on how to respond to the flight from Greece to Lithuania being diverted as it flew through Belarusian air space.

Britain said it was issuing a notice to instruct British airlines to cease flights over Belarus and that it would suspend the air permit for Belarus’s national carrier Belavia with immediate effect.

Latvian airline airBaltic and Scandinavian airline SAS said they would stop using Belarusian airspace, and Cyprus-registered Avia Solutions said its Lithuania-based airlines would follow suit.

Lithuania’s transport minister, Marius Skuodis, said Poland’s LOT and Hungarian airline Wizzair would also not use Belarusian airspace and said all flights to and from Lithuanian airports must from midnight GMT avoid Belarusian airspace.



CRACKDOWN ON DISSENT

Countries also called for the release of 26-year-old Roman Protasevich, who was detained when the plane was forced to land in Minsk, the Belarusian capital.

His social media feed from exile has been one of the last remaining independent outlets for news about Belarus since a mass crackdown on dissent last year. Sophia Sapega, a 23-year-old student travelling with him, was also detained.

NEXTA, a news service where Protasevich worked before setting up his own widely followed blog, ran an interview with his mother, who said that as soon as she heard reports of a bomb scare on a flight, she knew it was a plot to capture him

A Ryanair aircraft, which was carrying Belarusian opposition blogger and activist Roman Protasevich and diverted to Belarus, where authorities detained him, lands at Vilnius Airport in Vilnius, Lithuania May 23, 2021. REUTERS/Andrius Sytas

“I just want to say that my son is simply a hero, simply a hero,” Natalia Protasevich said, weeping. “I truly hope that the international community will wake up for him.”

Belarus says it acted in response to a bomb threat on the flight, which turned out to be a false alarm. It said on Monday its ground controllers had given guidance to the flight but had not ordered it to land. State media said the intervention was ordered personally by President Alexander Lukashenko.

Ryanair (RYA.I) boss Michael O’Leary, who referred to the incident as a state-sponsored hijacking, said he

believed security agents had been on the flight.

Lithuanian authorities said five passengers never arrived, suggesting three others besides detainees Protasevich and Sapega had disembarked in Minsk.

Russia, which has provided security, diplomatic and financial backing to Lukashenko, accused the West of hypocrisy.

Given the security ties between Minsk and Moscow, some European politicians openly speculated whether Russia may have played a role, which would escalate an incident involving a small European pariah state into one involving a superpower.

NEW SANCTIONS

EU summit chairman Charles Michel said the incident was “an international scandal”, and the statement drafted for the meeting said new sanctions would be imposed as soon as possible.

EU countries could ban Belavia from European airports and was considering other unspecified measures regarding ground transport links, an EU official said. Still, the options for Western retaliation appear limited.

The Montreal-based ICAO has no regulatory power, and the EU has no authority over flights taking off and landing in Belarus or flying over its airspace, apart from direct flights that originate or land in Europe.

The EU and the United States imposed several rounds of financial sanctions against Minsk last year, which had no effect on the behaviour of Lukashenko, who withstood mass demonstrations against his rule after a disputed election.

Lukashenko denies election fraud. Since the disputed vote, authorities rounded up thousands of his opponents, with all major opposition figures now in jail or exile.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

05/24/2021



Wea H. Lee
Wealee@scdaily.com

Chairman of International District Houston Texas

Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

Southern News Group Chairman / CEO
Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center
Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas



The Dynamic City Of Austin, Texas

Austin is the state capital of Texas home of the University of Texas campus. The city has many parks and lakes that are popular for biking, swimming, boating and hiking.

Austin was recently voted the No. 1 place to live in America for the third year. It was based on living affordability, job opportunity and quality of life.

There are so many tech companies that have moved to Austin. Apple announced that it will spend \$1 billion dollars to build a campus there.

Facebook is turning Austin into the third largest U.S. hub outside of the company's Silicon Valley headquarters.

Tesla, the maker of electric vehicles, is building a \$1.1 billion manufacturing plant at highway 130 on about 2,100 acres of land there.

Austin has a natural beauty full of lovely outdoor wonders and places for sports and



recreation as well as an arts community with people doing creative work.

Today there are many reasons why so many people want to move to Texas, especially to Austin. Austin has 70 degree weather almost year round. Texas doesn't have a personal state tax and has a very friendly attitude toward business. Most importantly, is that we have very low real estate prices compared with the east and west coasts.

When I traveled to North Lamar street and visited Chinatown again, we found out the whole center was fully occupied with a supermarket and restaurants full of customers. I am so glad the economy is recovering

Many of our Asian Americans are working so hard to manage their businesses. Even in Austin, the capital of Texas, we have so many proud citizens They are a very important part of this great nation.



Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



Phil Mickelson poses with the Wanamaker Trophy after he wins the PGA Championship golf tournament in Kiawah Island, South Carolina. David Yeazel-USA TODAY Sports



Drake, accompanied by his son Adonis, accepts the award for Artist of the Decade at the 2021 Billboard Music Awards outside the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, California. REUTERS/Mario Anzuoni



A view shows shallow sand graves of people, some of which are suspected to have died from the coronavirus, on the banks of the river Ganges in Phaphamau on the outskirts of Prayagraj, India. REUTERS/Ritesh Shukla



People walk near destroyed homes by lava deposited during the Mount Nyiragongo volcanic eruption near Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. REUTERS/Djaffar Al Katanty



Family members of a victim of the coronavirus pray at a hospital mortuary before burial, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. REUTERS/Lim Huey Teng



Migrants from Central America are detained by U.S. Border Patrol agents after crossing the Rio Grande river into the United States from Mexico in La Joya, Texas. REUTERS/Adrees Latif

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

The Next Big COVID Disaster Could Be Here



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

With India's dramatic surge in COVID-19 cases continuing to devastate the country, wary epidemiologists are trying to forecast where the novel coronavirus will strike next. Some experts are casting a wary glance toward another vast, developing country that—like India—suffers huge health disparities and uneven access to vaccines: Nigeria. With 200 million people, it's the most populous country in West Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world. "Nigeria is actually quite vulnerable," Ngozi Erondui, a senior research fellow at the Chatham House Center for Global Health Security in the United Kingdom, told The Daily Beast. "It has a lot of similarities to India." The world isn't powerless to stop COVID from devastating Nigeria the way it's doing India. More equitable distribution of vaccines across borders could build a firewall against a surge in cases in Nigeria, as well as in other less developed countries. But that would require the world's richer countries to share lifesaving resources with

their poorer neighbors. And if India's tragic example proved anything, it's that the world's vaccine "haves" are in no hurry to help out the "have-nots" on distant continents. That said, "African" is not synonymous with "poor." The continent is huge and diverse. Its 54 countries with their 1.2 billion people run the gamut from big to small, rich to poor, powerful to weak, democratic to authoritarian.



Likewise, the African countries' pandemic experiences have varied. South Africa—one of the richer countries on the continent—got hit hard last summer, and then again in January. Officials there

have logged more than 54,000 deaths. That's 93 fatalities per 100,000 people, a rate that's much lower than the 175 deaths per 100,000 population the U.S. has registered, but much higher than the global average of 38 fatalities per 100,000 people. Many of the less industrialized African countries have, so far, managed to avoid the catastrophic surges in infections that have driven up death tolls in richer countries. A total of 580,000 Americans have died of COVID; only 1,600 Nigerians have died. But that doesn't mean COVID isn't coming for Nigeria and other African countries—it might just mean it hasn't gotten there yet. "I see raging COVID-19 fires breaking out across the world in the coming weeks and months," Lawrence Gostin, a Georgetown University global health expert, told The Daily Beast. "And I am most concerned about Africa."



"I see the crisis in India as a leading indicator of what is to come in other low and middle-income countries," Gostin added. Bear in mind, India—despite its teeming cities, limited public health measures and patchwork health care—was relatively lucky until recently. The country of 1.37 billion counted just 160,000 fatal cases through March, for a rate of 11 per 100,000. Then in April, a new and more transmissible variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, known to geneticists as "B.1.617," spread across the country, driving cases and deaths through the roof. In a span of just a couple of weeks, India added nearly 50,000 deaths. The fatality rate jumped to 15 per 100,000.

The Frustrating Reason We're Flying Blind on New COVID Variants India's COVID surge is ongoing as of this writing, but the trends are encouraging. The daily rates of new cases and deaths are flattening. While every indication is that tens of thousands more Indians will die before the surge ends, at least the pandemic isn't still getting worse there.



But the novel coronavirus is an opportunist. It looks for densely packed, unprotected populations. Spreading via aerosols from one person to the next, it sets up a proverbial laboratory in each body it infects. Every individual SARS-CoV-2 infection mutates every two weeks for as long as it's active, looking for evolutionary pathways that might produce a new increasingly transmissible variant. New variants help the virus spread even faster in a self-reinforcing cycle that ends

only when strong social-distancing mandates, vaccinations, the antibodies of survivors—or, more likely, a combination of all three—cut off its transmission pathways. The harder it is to socially-distance, and the lower the vaccine uptake, the longer the pathogen has to run amok. It's no accident SARS-CoV-2 thrived in India this month. Popular religious festivals drew huge, maskless crowds. Meanwhile, India's vaccination effort has been abysmal. The country has fully vaccinated just 3 percent of its population, compared to more than 30 percent in the United States. The global average for full vaccination is slightly more than 3 percent. Nigeria, with its teeming cities, deep poverty and ramshackle health system is, from an epidemiological standpoint, a lot like India—except worse, in some aspects. Where India at least has some domestic vaccine-manufacturers, Nigeria has none. It must import all of its doses. That helps to explain why the country has partially vaccinated just 1 percent of its population—and fully vaccinated almost no one. The government in Lagos expects to receive 84 million vaccine doses from AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson in coming weeks.

(Article Continues Below)



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COMMUNITY

(Article Continues From Above)

The Next Big COVID Disaster Could Be Here

plus—they're useless. Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

But that's enough to fully vaccinate just one out of five Nigerians. Vaccinating three-quarters of the population—the proportion experts say could result in "herd immunity" that blocks most transmission pathways—could take until 2022. To help Nigeria and other unprotected countries, the world's rich countries should stop hoarding excess doses. More jabs isn't a panacea, of course—even a country with plenty of vaccines can have trouble administering it.



But while logistics, as well as hesitancy among wary citizens, could slow inoculations, a shortage of doses definitely will slow it. "The only way to know for sure how well Nigeria will administer vaccines is to ship it. Once they have a larger supply of doses, then we can see how things like distribution and hesitancy are impacting their vaccination campaign," Shaun Truelove, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, told The Daily Beast. Global supply isn't the biggest problem. The U.S. alone, a country with multiple competing vaccine-producers, is sitting on a stockpile of more than 60 million unused doses even as more vials arrive from factories and the vaccine-uptake rate ticks downward, especially among Republicans. It wasn't until weeks into India's ongoing COVID surge that the administration of President Joe Biden promised to ship some of its extra vaccines to the country. The spare jabs, from AstraZeneca, aren't even authorized for use in the United States. To Americans, those doses aren't just sur-



What's particularly egregious about the delay in releasing surplus vaccines is that health officials anticipated this problem a year ago. Last spring, the U.N.'s World Health Organization, along with several international public-private partnerships, worked together to set up the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access initiative, or COVAX. The idea was for rich countries to pay for vaccines for poor countries. COVAX's goal was to deliver 100 million doses by March. It actually delivered fewer than 40 million. "This has set Nigeria and many countries up to fail," Erondu said. The United States is part of the problem. The Trump administration refused to sign on to COVAX, a move that reflected its narrow "America-first" philosophy. The Trump White House either didn't understand—or didn't care—that vaccinating poor countries helps protect rich countries, too. Viruses don't respect borders, after all. The Biden White House reversed the decision back in February. The administration pledged \$4 billion in cash, making the U.S. COVAX's biggest financial donor, albeit belatedly. In a parallel move, Biden signalled support for a controversial proposal for the World Trade Organization to suspend patent protections for COVID vaccines, in theory allowing any manufacturer in any country to produce doses.



But experts are divided on whether suspending patents would result in more doses reaching the countries that need it. Meanwhile, many richer countries have been late to fulfill their COVAX pledges, piling delay on delay as the novel coronavirus targets one unprotected population after another. To help Nigeria and other unprotected countries, the world's rich countries should stop hoarding excess doses. More jabs isn't a panacea, of course—even a country with plenty of vaccines can have trouble administering it. But while logistics, as well as hesitancy among wary citizens, could slow inoculations, a shortage of doses definitely will slow it. "The only way to know for sure how well Nigeria will administer vaccines is to ship it. Once they have a larger supply of doses, then we can see how things like distribution and hesitancy are impacting their vaccination campaign," Shaun Truelove, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, told The Daily Beast. Global supply isn't the biggest problem. The U.S. alone, a country with multiple competing vaccine-producers, is sitting on a stockpile of more than 60 million unused doses even as more vials arrive from factories and the vaccine-uptake rate ticks downward, especially among Republicans.



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ing COVID surge that the administration of President Joe Biden promised to ship some of its extra vaccines to the country. The spare jabs, from AstraZeneca, aren't even authorized for use in the United States. To Americans, those doses aren't just surplus—they're useless. What's particularly egregious about the delay in releasing surplus vaccines is that health officials anticipated this problem a year ago. Last spring, the U.N.'s World Health Organization, along with several international public-private partnerships, worked together to set up the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access initiative, or COVAX. The idea was for rich countries to pay for vaccines for poor countries. COVAX's goal was to deliver 100 million doses by March. It actually delivered fewer than 40 million. "This has set Nigeria and many countries up to fail," Erondu said. The United States is part of the problem. The Trump administration refused to sign on to COVAX, a move that reflected its narrow "America-first" philosophy. The Trump White House either didn't understand—or didn't care—that vaccinating poor countries helps protect rich countries, too. Viruses don't respect borders, after all. The Biden White House reversed the decision back in February. The administration pledged \$4 billion in cash, making the U.S. COVAX's biggest financial donor, albeit belatedly. In a parallel move, Biden signalled support for a controversial proposal for the World Trade Organization to suspend patent protections for COVID

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Nigeria is ripe for infection. But the West African country doesn't have to suffer the same fate as India. Vaccines are available. Mechanisms exist to get it to countries that need it most. What's lacking is a sense of urgency in the countries that have more than enough, and don't seem to appreciate the importance of sharing it. (Courtesy <https://news.yahoo.com>)

