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Make Today Different

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Italy pushing for special G20 meeting on Afghanistan as its last evacuation flight leaves Kabul

ROME/BRUSSELS, Aug. 27 (Xinhua) -- Italy, which holds the rotating presidency of the Group of 20 (G20), is still pushing for a special G20 meeting on Afghanistan as its last evacuation flight leaves Kabul on Friday.

Italy's last airlift flight, carried out by a military C-130 plane, is expected to land in Rome early on Saturday, bringing back "all the Italians who asked to be repatriated," Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said.

The minister confirmed that some 4,900 Afghan nationals who wanted to leave the Asian country have been evacuated by Italian forces during the operation.

At a joint press conference held here on Friday after meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, Di Maio reiterated the country's plan to hold an extraordinary G20 summit on Afghanistan in September to outline a global strategy.

"Afghanistan has been at the core of our talks today... in this context, we see the dialogue with Russia as essential," Di Maio explained.

He added that Italy's push to organize a special G20 meeting on Afghanistan stemmed from the belief that only "a comprehensive, coherent and shared action can be effective with the new authorities in Kabul."

"We believe Moscow is a key player in dealing with the current crisis and, in a longer perspective, in achieving a unified international approach," he noted.

"We deem that the G20 could be the right platform for a common management of the crisis, which has to be shared with the countries that will bear the largest migrant influx, that is the neighbouring countries."

NEIGHBORS' CONCERNS OVER BORDER SECURITY

Lavrov, who paid a two-day visit in Italy, said that the security of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries should be a key priority after all evacuation operations are completed.

He also urged for speeding up support for the Afghan people in order to facilitate the formation of an inclusive executive as soon as possible.

"Common solutions are never easy and, in our opinion, the most important thing in the current situation is the security of our borders," said the top Russian diplomat, who also discussed the issue with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi earlier in the day.

Russia is ready to discuss the proposal of the G20 special summit, but "we want to better understand what role our Western partners would see for Russia in the G20 context," Lavrov said.

Lavrov recalled that Russia has kept open a dialogue with the Taliban leaders, together with China and Paki-



Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi (R, front) meets with visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (L, front) in Rome, Italy, on Aug. 27, 2021. Italy, which holds the rotating presidency of the Group of 20 (G20), is still pushing for a special G20 meeting on Afghanistan as its last evacuation flight leaves Kabul on Friday. Lavrov recalled that Russia has kept open a dialogue with the Taliban leaders, together with China and Pakistan, and asked for the possible G20 summit on Afghanistan to be opened to countries that are not members of the group but nonetheless directly affected by the Afghan crisis, such as Pakistan and Iran. (Xinhua)

stan, and asked for the possible G20 summit on Afghanistan to be opened to countries that are not members of the group but nonetheless directly affected by the Afghan crisis, such as Pakistan and Iran.

EU CONDEMNS "BARBARIC" ATTACK

Two suicide bomb attacks rocked the Kabul airport on Thursday, killing at least 103 people, including 13 U.S. service members, while injuring 158 others.

Condemning "the cowardly and inhuman attacks," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Twitter late Thursday that: "The international community must work closely together to avoid a resurgence of terrorism in Afghanistan and beyond."

European Council President Charles Michel voiced his concern about the explosion, saying his thoughts were with the victims and their families. "Securing safe passage to the airport remains vital. We need to ensure the current instability cannot give rise to a resurgence of terrorism," he tweeted.

Josep Borrell, high representative of the European Union (EU) for foreign affairs and security policy, tweeted: "The EU stands in solidarity with the Afghan citizens. We will continue fighting terrorism together with international partners."

On Friday, David McAllister, Maria Arena and Petras Austrevicius, the chairs of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan, respectively, strongly condemned the "barbaric" terrorist attack, saying "this barbaric act against innocent people is unforgivable."

In a joint statement, they called upon those in power to hold to account those responsible for the attack, and urged EU member states and partner nations to continue the safe and orderly evacuation of foreign nationals and Afghans who wish to leave the country.

"We reiterate our call to all sides in Afghanistan to abstain from any form of violence, to put in place an immediate and permanent ceasefire and to pursue peace negotiations. International humanitarian law and basic human rights, in particular the rights of women, girls and minorities must be respected," they said in the statement.



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UN Security Council condemns attacks near int'l airport in Kabul

UNITED NATIONS, Aug. 27 (Xinhua) -- The United Nations Security Council on Friday strongly condemned the attacks near the Kabul airport on Thursday with dozens of civilians and military personnel killed and injured.

Through a press statement, the members of the Security Council condemned "in the strongest terms the deplorable attacks," which were claimed by the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, an Afghan affiliate of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

They expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, and wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured.

The members "recalled that all parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law in all circumstances, including those related to the protection of civilians," the statement said.

They reaffirmed that terrorism in all forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, said the statement. "Deliberately targeting civilians and personnel assisting in the evacuation of civilians is especially abhorrent and must be condemned."

They underlined the need to hold perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice, and urged all states, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with all relevant authorities in this regard.



UN mission hails joint Libyan security force to protect water network

TRIPOLI, Aug. 26 (Xinhua) -- The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) on Thursday hailed Libya's creation of a joint security force to protect the country's water supply system.

The UNSMIL said in a statement that the joint force, from both sides of the demarcation lines,

comprises the 166 Battalion for Protection and Security and the Tareq Bin Ziyad Brigade.

It is tasked with securing the Great Man-Made River, a major network of pipelines and aqueducts supplying fresh water to parts of Libya, according to the statement.

Jan Kubis, special envoy of the UN secretary-general for Libya, said that the step "paves the way for further confidence-building measures."

Editor's Choice



Taliban fighters patrol in Farah, Afghanistan. REUTERS/Stringer



Feathers from a grouse float in the air during the opening day of the grouse shooting season, in Byrecleugh Farm, Longformacus, Duns, Scotland. REUTERS/Scott Heppell



Nurse Alisa Ellis-Balogun, from Sphere, tests 7-year-old Thomas Byrd for coronavirus at Seneca High School a day before returning to school in Louisville, Kentucky. REUTERS/Amira Karaoud



U.S. service members assist at a checkpoint during an evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul, August 26, 2021. U.S. Marine Corps/Staff Sgt. Victor Mancilla/Handout via REUTERS



Wounded Afghan men receive treatment at a hospital in Kabul, August 27. REUTER/Stringer



People carrying an injured person to a hospital after an attack at Kabul airport, August 26. REUTERS TV/ITV

Delta Variant Will Cause A Steep Rise In U.S. COVID Deaths, A New Model Shows

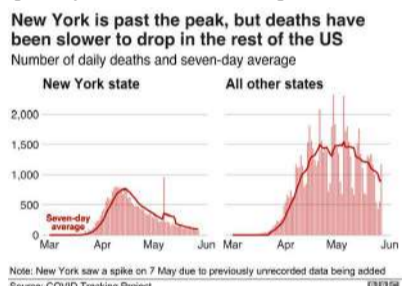


Front-line workers at a medical center in Aurora, Colo., gather for a COVID-19 memorial on July 15 to commemorate the lives lost in the coronavirus pandemic. (Photo/Hyoung Chang/MediaNews Group/Denver Post via Getty Images)

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

The current COVID-19 surge in the U.S. — fueled by the highly contagious delta variant — will steadily accelerate through the summer and fall, peaking in mid-October, with daily deaths more than triple what they are now. That's according to new projections released Wednesday from the COVID-19 Scenario Modeling Hub, a consortium of researchers working in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help the agency track the course of the pandemic. It's a deflating prospect for parents looking ahead to the coming school year, employers planning to get people back to the workplace and everyone hoping that the days of big national surges were over. "What's going on in the country with the virus is matching our most pessimistic scenarios," says Justin Lessler, an epidemiologist at the University of North Carolina who helps run the modeling hub. "We might be seeing synergistic effects of people becoming less cautious

in addition to the impacts of the delta variant. "I think it's a big call for caution," he adds. The group's latest projections combine 10 mathematical models from various academic teams to create an "ensemble" projection. It offers four scenarios for its projections — varying based on what percent of the population gets vaccinated and how quickly the delta variant spreads. **New York is past the peak, but deaths have been slower to drop in the rest of the US** Number of daily deaths and seven-day average. **New York state** **All other states** **Seven-day average** Note: New York saw a spike on 7 May due to previously unrecorded data being added. Source: COVID Tracking Project. In the most likely scenario, Lessler says, the U.S. reaches only 70% vac-



cination among eligible Americans, and the delta variant is 60% more transmissible. In that scenario, at the peak in mid-October, there would be around 60,000 cases and around 850 deaths each day, Lessler says. Each scenario also includes a range of how bad things could get — the very worst end of the range for the most likely scenario shows about 240,000 people getting infected and 4,000 people dying each day at the October peak, which would be almost as bad as last winter. Lessler notes that there's a lot of uncertainty in these projections and that how things actually plays out depends on lots of factors, including whether the vaccination campaign picks up steam and whether other mitigation measures are put back into place. "Changes in behavior that we didn't predict and big shifts in vaccination could very much change these results," Lessler says. But overall, the main projection shows a steady slope upwards to the peak in October, and then a steady slope back down.



"By the time you get to October, these resurgent epidemics have burned through a lot of the people who are susceptible," Lessler explains. At that point, "herd immunity starts kicking in a little more aggressively and we start to see things going down again." By January 2022, the model shows deaths coming back down to around the current level of about 300 per day. The take-home message of this latest model is that the pandemic isn't over yet and "we're not going to be able to land the plane without turbulence," says William Hanage, an epidemiologist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "How much turbulence will track with how many people are vaccinated in a given community." "I also strongly suspect that delta is highly prone to superspreading — if I am right, it might go off like a bomb in

some undervaccinated communities," Hanage adds. Public policy and behavior could still move the dial toward milder outcomes, Lessler says. "I think states should maybe be rethinking the speed at which they're removing mask mandates or social distancing," Lessler says. "That is something that — if you want to keep cases under control — certainly would have an impact."



CDC Director Rochelle Walensky Those measures would have to come from state or local leaders. Despite calls for the CDC to issue new mask guidelines, at a briefing Thursday, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky once again held firm. She emphasized that the guidelines have always said that unvaccinated people should wear masks indoors. She added that even vaccinated people could wear masks indoors, too, if they want extra protection, especially in places where the virus is surging and there are a lot of unvaccinated people. But her main message was the same: Get vaccinated. With that, Lessler agrees. "If we got enough people vaccinated, we could even stop the delta variant in its tracks," he says. (Courtesy <https://www.npr.org/>)

Related
Delta Variant Danger Zones – The ICU Hospitalizations Map Shows Most Vulnerable States States including Texas, Georgia, and Florida have more than 92% of their ICU beds occupied—and most of America isn't doing much better. Talk to any healthcare workers working on the front lines in the fight against COVID-19 and they'll likely tell you one of their worst fears is running out of physical space to treat those infected as the delta variant continues to rage across the U.S. Specifically, many are worried the country could run out of intensive care unit (ICU) beds if delta continues its spread unchecked. A lack of ICU beds means doctors may have

to be in the position of deciding which patients receive in-hospital treatment and which are left to deal with the disease at home. And if the latest data from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) is anything to go by, healthcare workers have a right to worry. America is running out of ICU beds.



The worry is that as delta spreads and cooler weather is around the corner, the number of COVID-19 patients needing an ICU bed could skyrocket. It would take less than a mere doubling of today's COVID-19 patients in ICU beds to fill the remaining free ones hospitals that report to the HHS still have. And if that happens, not only would COVID-19 patients needing ICU beds be out of luck, but so too could patients with other health conditions needing ICU beds.



Of course, ICU bed availability varies by state, and the HHS map shows how each state is faring on the individual level. Sadly, a majority of U.S. states have more than 70% of their ICU beds already taken up—and some of those are much more than 70%. Missouri, for example, has 88.5% of its ICU beds taken while Florida has a whopping 93% of all ICU beds already taken. Texas and Georgia also have over 92% of ICU beds occupied. (Courtesy <https://www.fastcompany.com/>)

In 1957 A Flu Pandemic Hit The U.S., But Maurice Hilleman Was Ready With A Vaccine He Mass Produced In Only Months The Virologist Who Saved Millions Of Children—And Stopped A Pandemic



Virologist Maurice Hilleman with his research team at the Walter Reed Army Medical Research Institute in 1957. That year Hilleman and his team would identify and develop 40 million vaccine doses to combat a flu virus from Hong Kong. (PHOTO/ ED CLARK, LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY)

By Guest Writer Sydney Combs

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

In April 1957, a mysterious illness was making its way through Hong Kong. Medical workers encountered throngs of children with "glassy-eyed stares," and more than 10 percent of the city's population was infected with influenza. The scientific community stayed quiet, but American virologist Maurice Hilleman recognized the threat: A pandemic was brewing. Hilleman thought the disease was a new strain of influenza capable of spreading around the world. By the time the virus arrived in the U.S. in fall 1957, he was ready with a vaccine. His work prevented millions from contracting the deadly virus—and that's a small fraction of the people Hilleman would save over the course of his career.



Students sick with the 1957 "Asian flu" lie in

temporary cots set up in the student union building at the University of Massachusetts. More than 100,000 people in the U.S. died from the virus. (PHOTO/ BETTMANN, GETTY) Born in August 1919, at the height of the Spanish flu, Hilleman was raised on a farm near Miles City, Montana. During the Depression, he managed to get a job as an assistant manager at a J.C. Penney store and planned to spend the rest of his professional career with the company—until his older brother convinced him to apply to college. He went to Montana State University on a full scholarship, graduated first in his class in 1941—and was accepted to every graduate school he applied to. As a doctoral student in microbiology at the University of Chicago, Hilleman proved that chlamydia was actually a bacteria instead of a virus, a discovery that helped doctors treat the disease. Against his professor's wishes, Hilleman went into the pharmaceutical industry instead of academia because he believed

he'd be better positioned there to bring the benefits of his research to patients. By the end of his career, he would develop more than 40 vaccines that prevented disease and death throughout the world.



The Father Of Modern Vaccines, Maurice Hilleman.

Heading off a pandemic After four years with the E.R. Squibb pharmaceutical company in New Jersey, Hilleman transferred to the Walter Reed Army Medical Research Institute in Washington, D.C., to study respiratory illnesses and influenza outbreaks. There he proved that influenza viruses undergo mutations that allow them to bypass antibodies previously developed to the strain. This explained why one influenza vaccine didn't protect a person for life, as a smallpox or polio vaccine could. **FLU VIRUS 101**The influenza virus is a recurring nightmare, killing thousands of people each year. Learn how the virus attacks its host, why it's nearly impossible to eradicate, and what scientists are doing to combat it. Through this research, Hilleman became convinced that the virus in Hong Kong could be substantially different from existing strains, and thus could be deadly if it came to the United States or other nations. When he picked up a copy of The New York Times on April 17, 1957 and read about the situation in Hong Kong, he exclaimed, "My God. This is the pandemic. It's here!" The next day he asked the military to collect virus samples there. A month later, he received gargled saltwater from an ill Navy serviceman who had been to Hong Kong. Hilleman began incubating the virus and testing it against antibodies from hundreds of soldiers and civilians. He couldn't find a single person with antibodies to this strain of influenza. Hilleman sent samples of the new virus to other research organizations, which confirmed that only a few elderly citizens who had survived the 1889-1890 influenza pandemic had any antibody resistance. That meant nearly everyone was at risk of catching

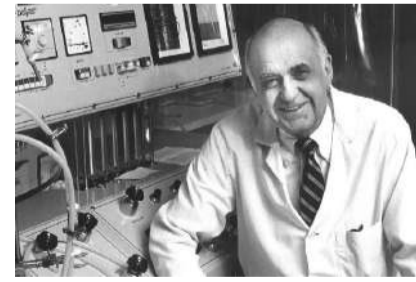
the new strain. "In 1957 we all missed it. The military missed it and the World Health Organization missed it," Hilleman later said in an interview.



Boxes of Hilleman's vaccines for the 1957 flu are rushed by helicopter throughout the (PHOTO/WALTER SANDERS/LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY)

Realizing how little time the country had to prepare, Hilleman contacted pharmaceutical manufacturers directly and asked them to make a vaccine from his samples. He also demanded that roosters that would otherwise have been killed be kept alive to fertilize enough eggs to prepare the vaccine. Even though his work had not yet been reviewed by the main U.S. vaccine regulatory agency, the Division of Biological Standards, the pharmaceutical companies agreed. Because regulations now are far tighter this type of workaround would be impossible today. Because of Hilleman's perseverance, 40 million doses of the vaccine had been created by the time the flu hit American shores in fall 1957. Ultimately, the virus killed 1.1 million people worldwide and an estimated 116,000 people in the United States. But the U.S. surgeon general at the time, Leonard Burney, said the virus would have infected millions more Americans had there been no vaccine. The U.S. military awarded Hilleman a Distinguished Service Medal for his work. "That's the only time we ever averted a pandemic with a vaccine," Hilleman recalled. **Out of the spotlight** Hilleman's success was in part due to his po-

sition at Merck, the pharmaceutical company he worked at for 47 years. He was given direct control over his research there, and with Merck's ample financial resources at their disposal, Hilleman and his team developed more than 40 vaccines for humans and animals. "There was money to spend to do what you needed to do [at Merck]. Money wasn't an object. You could do your research," Hilleman's second wife Lorraine Witmer once told Hilleman's biographer. By working in the private sector—the "dirty industry" as Hilleman joked—he was able to guide his research from the lab to the marketplace with his signature brashness. The pharmaceutical industry had its drawbacks, though, and at times prevented Hilleman from gaining public recognition for his work. "I thought that if my name appeared on the paper, or if I was the one put in front of the television cameras or radio microphones, people would think that I was selling something," Hilleman explained after his name was not included on the paper proving his hepatitis B vaccine was effective.



Virologist Maurice Hilleman. In the end, Hilleman didn't name a single discovery after himself. Hilleman and his team developed eight of the 14 vaccines currently recommended for children: measles, mumps, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, chickenpox, meningitis, pneumonia, and Haemophilus influenzae (Hib vaccine). The WHO estimates that the measles vaccine alone prevented 20.3 million deaths worldwide between 2000 and 2015. At the time of Hilleman's death, scientists in the field credited him with likely saving more people than any other scientist in the 20th century. "The scientific quality and quantity of what he did was amazing," Dr. Anthony Fauci told The New York Times in 2005. "Just one of his accomplishments would be enough to have made for a great scientific career." (Courtesy <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/>)