

India COVID-19 deaths could hit one million by August



India's COVID-19 deaths rose by more than 4,000 for a second consecutive day on Sunday as calls for a nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the virus mounted [File: Adnan Abidi/Reuters] (Reuters)?

New Delhi, May 9 (RHC)-- COVID-19 deaths in India could potentially reach a “staggering” one million by August 1 this year, an editorial published in medical journal the Lancet said citing an estimate by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation – an independent global health research centre of the University of Washington.

“The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimates that India will see a staggering 1 million deaths from COVID-19 by August 1st. If that outcome were to happen, [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi’s government would be responsible for presiding over a self-inflicted national catastrophe,” it said.

India’s health ministry reported on Sunday 4,092 fatalities over the past 24 hours, taking the overall death toll to 242,362. New cases rose by 403,738, just shy of the record and increasing the total since the start of the pandemic to 22.3 million. India has seen 10 million cases in the last four months.

New Delhi has struggled to contain the outbreak, which has overwhelmed its healthcare system, and many experts suspect the official death and case numbers are a gross underestimate.

Earlier this month, Reuters reported that a forum of scientific advisers set up by the government had warned Indian officials in early March of a new and more contagious variant of the coronavirus taking hold in the country. Four of the scientists told Reuters that the federal government did not seek to impose major restrictions to stop the spread of the virus despite their warnings.

The government allowed Hindu religious festivals participated in by millions while Prime Minister Modi, leader of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and opposition politicians held political rallies for regional elections. These events, experts said, turned out to be “super-spreaders.”

The editorial called on the Indian government to adopt a “two-pronged” strategy to fight against the epidemic by speeding up nationwide vaccination and reducing transmission of the deadly virus. “The success of that effort will depend on the government owning up to its mistakes, providing responsible leadership and transparency, and implementing a public health response that has science at its heart.”

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