

## Pandemic sidelines other important news

by MARK PAVILONS

Many average citizens will say they're fed up with daily reports on COVID-19.

It's headline news here, and, in fact, in every major city around the world. Everywhere you look, there's news about the pandemic.

From my point of view in the news business, it's important that residents have the best information available so they can make informed decisions. And yes, this is unprecedented, and yes, it commands a huge chunk of our daily serving of information.

At the moment, it dominates our lives.

But is it too much? What about other world events and happenings?

Has media coverage of COVID-19 put everything else on the back-burner?

To some extent, yes.

Given the overwhelming coverage of the pandemic, we have indeed missed out on discussing many important topics and issues. Our lives haven't returned to normal just yet, but our brains haven't shut off.

The anniversary of the Ukrainian air disaster is one such event. Just over a year ago, the Iranian military shot down Flight 752, killing all 176 people on board, including some 85 Canadians. Families of victims are still reeling because they don't have any closure. There's been little in the way of compensation and talks with the Iranian government have been less than fruitful.

These families want justice, in fact they demand it. Democratic countries ??n particular all countries who lost citizens on that flight ? should be actively pushing for action, and a resolution. Ukraine, Canada, Britain, Afghanistan and Sweden should all be leading the charge.

It's the right thing to do.

Sure, the wheels of justice can turn slowly and international cases like this can prove quite challenging and problematic. But does that mean we simply give up, throw our hands in the air and move on?

A Sriwijaya Air jetliner carrying 62 people on board crashed shortly after taking off from Jakarta, January 10, killing everyone on board.

Disasters like this are often headline news for weeks, yet there's been little in the way of reporting on this.

It was likely overshadowed by events in the U.S. leading up to President Biden's inauguration.

Following the official ceremonies in Washington, U.S. celebrities put on a Vegas-style show to mark the occasion. One would think it was the 4th of July.

What about post-EU?Britain? The Myanmar military overthrew their government. Who knew?

Apparently, there's a rise in neo-Nazi organizations, which has caught the attention of the UN. Who knew?

UN secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged coordinated global action to build an alliance against the growth and spread of neo-Nazism and white supremacy and the resurgence of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and hate speech sparked partly by the COVID-19 pandemic.

He said the pandemic ?has exacerbated longstanding injustices and divisions.?

Our emphasis on battling COVID-19 has sucked up almost all of our resources.

The opioid crisis is worse than ever before. Homelessness is on the rise. Youth mental health has been hard hit, and suicides continue to climb. The number of domestic disputes have skyrocketed. There's little mention of systemic racism. World food prices have reached their highest level in years. Have all of these issues magically disappeared, and been solved behind the scenes? Not on your life.

But all most of the matters receive is a small post, a footnote or paragraph somewhere.

Pressure to stay current, and whirlwind changes, have created havoc for journalists and newspaper editors. With daily announcements and updates, COVID-related issues change hourly. What was earth-shattering news Monday morning becomes moot by Tuesday afternoon. We dished out vaccines, then they stopped, then started again.

Water cooler conversations are so limited, people are running out of things to say.

Sports is still somewhat curtailed and everyone has watched everything on Netflix or Amazon Prime.

Even locally, budget deliberations centre around staff re-allocation and more online services, again in response to the pandemic.

A?recent report by RBC said spending was up this past holiday season. Whether in-person or online, total spending for average Canadians rose slightly.

It's difficult to know exactly the source of such giving. Maybe it was the amount of CERB that residents received. Maybe they simply wanted to feel better and spread joy over the holidays. Perhaps they wanted to make themselves feel better.

Hopefully the stay-at-home order will be lifted as planned. Schools are reopening.

And then, slowly, things can begin to move again. But still, our activities and gatherings will be severely limited. News of the day will centre around businesses, large and small, who reopen or close for good. News will still be filled with updates on travel bans, vaccinations and outbreaks. It has been a long haul so far and our work is far from over. Valentine's Day will be spent at home.

March Break events are up in the air at this point.

We will remain vigilant to report the news on the latest COVID stories, as well as highlighting local achievement. But until things fully open and life resumes, success stories may still be few and far between.

Fingers crossed. Good news is on its way!