

News in brief

◆ **China yesterday denied accusations by Taiwan that a ban on pineapples from the island was about politics, saying it was purely a matter of biosecurity, in an escalating war of words that has added to existing tensions.** China announced the ban last week, citing "harmful creatures" it said could come with the fruit, threatening China's own agriculture. While Taiwan is best known internationally for exporting semiconductors, the sub-tropical island has a thriving fruit industry developed when it was a Japanese colony, and last year more than 90% of its exported pineapples went to China.



China says Taiwan pineapple ban not about politics

◆ **The Czech Republic tightened lockdown measures on Monday, beefing up police presence to restrict movement throughout the country as the government battles the world's worst surge in COVID-19 infections.** Prime Minister Andrej Babis announced the

stricter measures last week, saying hospitals were nearing collapse as the number of patients in serious condition jumped to records. The country of 10.7 million has the highest per capita infection rate in the world over the last week, according to the Our World in Data website, 11 times higher than Germany.

◆ **Dozens of Thai protesters and police were injured in violent clashes at an anti-rally on Sunday, an emergency medical centre started last year. Police also used tear gas and water cannon against protesters who marched on a military base in Bangkok, calling for King Maha Vajiralongkorn to give up direct command of the army unit housed there. Protesters threw bottles at police near barricades.**

◆ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blamed Iran yesterday for an explosion aboard an Israeli-owned ship in the Gulf of Oman last week, an accusation rejected by Tehran.** The vehicle-carrier MV Helios Ray was hit between Thursday night and Friday morning by a blast above the water line that a U.S. official said ripped holes in both sides of its hull. An Israeli official said limpet mines were used. "This was indeed an operation by Iran. That is clear," Netanyahu told Kan radio. Asked if Israel would retaliate, he said: "You know my policy. Iran is Israel's biggest enemy. I am determined to fend it off. We are striking at it all over

the region." Iran denied involvement. Iran said in November it would make a "calculated" response to the killing of its top nuclear scientist, which it blamed on Israel.



Czechs start stricter lockdown to curb record COVID surge

Dozens hurt at weekend Thai protest



Netanyahu blames Iran for blast on Israeli-owned ship

First UAE ambassador arrives in Israel, eyes Tel Aviv embassy

Reuters | Jerusalem

The first United Arab Emirates ambassador to Israel arrived yesterday pledging to build up new bilateral relations and officials said he would scout for an embassy location in the Tel Aviv area.

Mohamed Al Khaja, former chief of staff to the UAE foreign minister, was due to present his credentials to Israeli President Reuven Rivlin at the start of a three-day visit.

Meeting Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi in Jerusalem, Al Khaja, 40, said he was "very proud and honoured to be the first Emirati ambassador" to Israel, where, he said, he and his hosts were discussing "the model of how we operate".

"My mission here is to foster and develop this relationship... and we hope this will bring peace and prosperity to the people in the Middle East," he



said. The UAE and Israel formalised ties in a Washington ceremony on Sept. 15, brought together by shared concern about Iran.

The "Abraham Accords", joined by Bahrain, have uncorked tourism and commerce between Israel and Gulf Arab countries.

Israel opened an embassy in Abu Dhabi in January.

The UAE would follow Jordan and Egypt in setting up an embassy in or near coastal metropolitan Tel Aviv.

According to the UAE Foreign Ministry, Al Khalja has experience in the energy, disarmament, business development and oil investment sectors.

Ukraine thrives on COVID-19 vaccine

Reuters | Kyiv

Ukrainian medical facilities have thrown away some unused COVID-19 vaccines after doctors failed to show up for their own appointments to be vaccinated, ruling party lawmakers said yesterday.

Ukraine has just begun vaccinating its 41 million people against COVID-19 after receiving a first batch of 500,000 doses of Indian-made AstraZeneca shots last week, but faces a battle against vaccine scepticism that predates the pandemic.

The government has prioritised giving shots to frontline medical workers but cited statistics showing that 47% of Ukrainians do not want the vaccine.

"It is important for us to understand how all the processes are set up, why doctors refuse to be vaccinated," Oleksandr Korniyenko, the head of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Servant of the People

Modi leads the way



Mask, gloves & cake

Hungarians bake to keep ambulance staff going

Reuters | Szentendre, Hungary

Hungarians are baking for ambulance workers across the country coping with a new surge in COVID-19 infections after the founder of an online cookery group asked a friend in the service how she could help.

"Before I could finish she said 'oh we would love some cakes'," Eszter Harmath said of the conversation that launched the nationwide movement. "They often do rounds dressed in full protective gear and they can hardly sit down to eat in a normal way but the cakes are something they can take on the road." The initiative, born out of a modest kitchen in the small town of Szentendre, mirrors other efforts around the world where people have made face masks and hung them on trees or prepared hot meals for people struggling to make ends meet.

"It is not a shiny and perfect kitchen and I often cook with my son Gellert on my back," Harmath said, her son watching eagerly as she kneaded dough for cheese scones. Her "My Quarantine Kitchen" Facebook group now has 8,000 members, who exchange ideas and recipes that are not confined to baking.



COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	29,259,111	525,795
2 India	11,122,229	157,250
3 Brazil	10,551,259	255,018
4 Russia	4,257,650	86,455
5 UK	4,182,009	122,953
6 France	3,755,968	86,454
7 Spain	3,188,553	69,142
8 Italy	2,938,371	97,945
9 Turkey	2,701,588	28,569
10 Germany	2,451,822	70,718
11 Colombia	2,251,690	59,766
12 Argentina	2,107,365	51,965
13 Mexico	2,086,938	185,715
14 Poland	1,711,772	43,793

Global tally
114,816,302

Deaths
2,545,315

Recovered:
90,402,267

New cases
+134,956

New deaths
+2,488

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	182,424		10,688		140,892	
Saudi Arabia	377,700	+317	6,500	+6	368,640	2,560
UAE	394,050	+2,526	1,238	+17	382,332	10,480
Kuwait	190,852		1,083		179,209	10,560
Oman	141,808	+312	1,577	+7	132,685	7,546
Qatar	164,137	+473	259	+1	154,061	9,817

'Please mystery'

Reuters | London

Britain yesterday detected a highly transmissible variant of the coronavirus with a highly transmissible zilian variant of the virus, which is more positive but fail to contact details.

Britain said it detected of the identified in the Manauas, again, vaccines appear to be effective. Two were identified in the Shire in England and Scotland.