

News in brief

Japanese asked to save power as country's east sizzles

The highest temperatures in at least 147 years have scorched much of eastern Japan for a week as of yesterday, with the government asking citizens to cut power use as much as possible, while still running air conditioners to stay safe. The region around Tokyo was set for its seventh straight day of temperatures above 35 Celsius (95 Fahrenheit) and faced a hot weekend as well, and the western city of Nagoya was predicted to hit a sizzling 40C. Slightly cooler temperatures and possibly rain could bring relief on Monday.

India imposed a ban on many single-use plastics yesterday in a bid to tackle waste choking rivers and poisoning wildlife, but experts say it faces severe headwinds from unprepared manufacturers and consumers unwilling to pay more.

The country generates around four million tonnes of plastic waste per year, about a third of which is not recycled and ends up in waterways and landfills that regularly catch fire and exacerbate air pollution.

Peru's Machu Picchu threatened by wildfire

Peruvian firefighters were fighting to contain a forest fire near the Incan ruins of Machu Picchu, as the blaze threatened to close in on the ancient city high in the Andean mountains. The fire, which had engulfed an area about half the size of Vatican City, was started on Tuesday by farmers burning grass and debris to prepare to sow new crops. As of Wednesday, about 20 hectares (49 acres) had been affected by the fire, the mayor of the nearby city of Cusco said.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos appointed career diplomat Enrique Manalo as foreign affairs secretary, the president's press secretary said yesterday.

Before the appointment, Manalo served as the Philippine Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. Prior to that, he was undersecretary for policy at the Department of Foreign Affairs. Manalo has asked for a few days before he takes over the position previously held by Teodoro Locsin so he could wind up affairs in his previous post, press secretary Trixie Cruz-Angelanes said in a text message.

Turkey cuts access to US, German public broadcasters

Turkey has cut access to public broadcasters from Germany and the United States, threatening to stoke new diplomatic tensions during Russia's invasion of Ukraine. An Ankara court banned access to Deutsche Welle and Voice of America on Thursday night, after both failed to apply for local broadcasting licences required by regulations introduced this year.

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

	Country	Total cases	Total deaths	
1	USA	89,441,903	1,042,945	Global tally
2	India	43,471,282	525,139	
3	Brazil	32,358,451	671,466	
4	France	31,208,925	149,585	Deaths
5	Germany	28,293,960	141,189	
6	UK	22,741,065	180,417	Recovered:
7	Italy	18,610,011	168,425	528,162,270
8	Russia	18,433,394	381,165	
9	S. Korea	18,368,857	24,555	New cases
10	Turkey	15,123,331	99,032	+515,700
11	Spain	12,734,038	107,906	
12	Vietnam	10,747,397	43,087	New deaths
13	Argentina	9,367,172	129,070	+773
14	Japan	9,329,520	31,281	

Middle East						
Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	515,645		24,613		442,182	48,850
Saudi Arabia	795,811	+625	9,209	+1	777,925	8,677
UAE	947,588	+1,788	2,317	+1	927,789	17,482
Kuwait	643,004		2,555		635,767	4,682
Oman	390,244		4,260		384,669	1,315
Qatar	382,635		679		376,869	5,087

Figures as of closing

In Hong Kong, Xi says 'one country, two systems' is here to stay

John Lee sworn in as new Hong Kong leader by Xi Jinping

Reuters | Hong Kong

There is no reason to change Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" formula of governance, Chinese President Xi Jinping said on a rare visit to the global financial hub after swearing in the city's new leader, John Lee, yesterday.

Britain returned Hong Kong to Chinese rule on July 1, 1997, with Beijing promising wide-ranging autonomy, unfettered individual rights and judicial independence at least until 2047.

China's critics accuse authorities of trampling on those freedoms, unavailable on the authoritarian mainland, with a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing on the city in 2020 after mass pro-democracy protests the year before.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday that China had failed to meet its handover commitments.

China and Hong Kong reject the accusations, saying the law "restored order from chaos" so that the city could prosper.

Xi said the "one country, two systems" formula was successful under China's "comprehensive jurisdiction."

"For this kind of good system, there is no reason at all to change it. It must be maintained over the long term," Xi said.

"After experiencing wind and rain, everyone can painfully feel that Hong Kong cannot be chaotic, and must not become chaotic again ... Hong Kong's development cannot be delayed again, and any interference must be eliminated"

Xi Jinping

development cannot be delayed again, and any interference must be eliminated."

Xi added China would support Hong Kong's role as an international finance and trade hub.

At the swearing-in ceremonies, all officials, including Xi, wore masks and did not shake hands. Former police officer Lee, sanctioned by Washington over his role in implementing the security law, takes charge



Hong Kong's new Chief Executive John Lee, left, walks off the stage with China's President Xi Jinping following a swearing-in ceremony

For this kind of good system, there is no reason at all to change it. It must be maintained over the long term. After experiencing wind and rain, everyone can painfully feel that Hong Kong cannot be chaotic, and must not become chaotic again ... Hong Kong's development cannot be delayed again, and any interference must be eliminated

BETTER YOU KNOW

Xi did not attend the traditional flag-raising ceremonies yesterday, with media reporting he stayed overnight across the border in Shenzhen after arriving in Hong Kong on Thursday

North Korea blames 'alien things' near border with South for COVID outbreak

Reuters | Seoul

North Korea claimed yesterday that the country's first COVID-19 outbreak began with patients touching "alien things" near the border with South Korea, apparently shifting blame to the neighbour for the wave of infections in the isolated country.

Announcing results of an investigation, the North ordered people to "vigilantly deal with alien things coming by wind and other climate phenomena and balloons in the areas along the demarcation line and borders," the official KCNA news

The agency did not directly mention South Korea, but North Korean defectors and activists have for decades flown balloons from the South across the heavily fortified border, carrying leaflets and humanitarian aid



Former North Korean defectors living in South Korea, release balloons containing one dollar banknotes, radios, CDs and leaflets denouncing the North Korean regime, towards the north

According to KCNA, an 18-year-old soldier and a five-year-old kindergartner who contacted the unidentified materials "in a hill around barracks and residential quarters" in the eastern county of Kumgang in early April showed symptoms and later tested positive for the coronavirus.

The KCNA said all other fever cases reported in the country until mid-April were due to other diseases, but it did not elaborate.

Russia Odesa

Thirty-eight injured at

Zelenskiy hails victory at Snake Island

Reuters | Kyiv

Russia flattened part of an apartment building while residents slept yesterday in missile attacks near Ukraine's Black Sea port of Odesa that authorities say killed at least 21 people, hours after Russian troops abandoned a nearby outpost at Snake Island.

Neighbours in the resort village of Serhiivka helped workers comb through the rubble of the nine-storey apartment block, a section of which had been completely destroyed at 1:00 a.m.

Walls and windows of a neighbouring, 14-storey apartment block had also been damaged by the blast wave. Nearby holiday camps were also hit.

"We came here to the site, assessed the situation together with emergency workers and locals, and together helped those who survived. And those who unfortunately died. We helped to carry them away," said Oleksandr Abramov, who lives nearby and had rushed to the scene when he heard the blast.

Serhiy Bratchuk, spokesman for the Odesa regional administration, said 21 people had been confirmed killed, including a 12-year-old boy. Authorities said

'Stop interfering in

Taliban leader hails Afghan victory at gathering to forge national unity

AFP | Kabul

The Taliban's reclusive supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada called yesterday for the world to stop telling them how to run Afghanistan, insisting sharia law was the only model for a successful Islamic state.

Akhundzada, who has not been filmed or photographed in public since the Taliban returned to power in August, hailed the group's 2021 takeover of Afghanistan during a major gathering of religious scholars in the Afghan capital called to rubber-stamp the hardline Islamist group's rule.

Over 3,000 clerics have gathered in Kabul since Thursday for the three-day men-only meeting, and Akhundzada's appearance had been rumoured for days -- although media are barred from covering the event.

"Why is the world interfering in our affairs?" he asked in an hour-long speech broadcast by state radio.

"They say 'why don't you do this, why don't you do that?' Why does the world interfere in our