

News in brief

◆ **Turkey and Egypt could negotiate and sign a maritime demarcation deal in the eastern Mediterranean if their ties, which have been strained, allow for such a move, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said yesterday.** Cavusoglu told a news conference that Egypt's exploration bids had respected Turkey's continental shelf in the region and Ankara viewed this positively. "As the two countries with the longest coastlines in the eastern Mediterranean, if our ties and the conditions allow it, we can also negotiate a maritime demarcation deal with Egypt and sign it amongst ourselves," Cavusoglu said.



Turkey says it may negotiate maritime demarcation with Egypt

◆ **The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for an attack that killed three female media workers in eastern Afghanistan.** The militant group, which has a presence in Afghanistan, said its fighters had targeted the three female

Islamic State says it killed female media workers in east Afghanistan



employees of a television station in the eastern city of Jalalabad on Tuesday evening, according to the SITE Intelligence group. The women, who worked for local broadcaster Enikas TV, were aged between 18 and 20 and were shot on their way home from work, according to Afghan officials. Their burials took place on Wednesday after prayer ceremonies, according to a provincial council member.

◆ **South Korean authorities are investigating the deaths of two people, both with pre-existing conditions, who died within days of receiving AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine.** AstraZeneca said it was aware of the investigation by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA), but the safety of the vaccine has been extensively studied in clinical trials with data confirming it is generally well tolerated.

South Korea investigates deaths of two who received AstraZeneca vaccine



◆ **Australian conservationists yesterday unveiled plans to build the world's first refuge for the platypus, to promote rehabilitation as mammal faces to climate change.**



Australia building world's first platypus sanctuary

breeding and the duck-billed extinction due
The Taronga Conservation Society Australia and the New South Wales State government said they would build the specialist facility, mostly ponds and burrows for the semiaquatic creatures, at a zoo 391 km (243 miles) from Sydney, by 2022, which could house up to 65 platypuses.

No mystery, top American pandemic expert lists nine govt actions behind plummeting Covid cases in India

News 18

There has been a global puzzlement at how India has managed to dramatically lower the spread of Covid-19 cases and fatality rates over the last few months, with some experts calling it a "mystery", but American scientist Yaneer Bar-Yam has said credit should go to the government for being able to identify and leverage its strengths to limit the spread of the infection.

Bar-Yam, who specialises in quantitative analysis of pandemics, said underlying factors such as previous successful response efforts in pandemics, less urbanisation that limits travel and rates of community transmission, limited travel and localised tourism were all important in mitigating the impact of Covid-19.

But he pointed out that swift government action of "restricting/regulating movement to increasing public health capacity to meet the increasing demands of the pandemic" were equally essential as India seems to have done enough to emerge successful in limiting the impact of the virus.

In September last year, India was confirming nearly 1 lakh cases a day, but that figure has dropped to approximately 12,000 as the country has effectively flattened the curve. The case fatality rate has also dropped sharply.

Highlighting steps taken by the government, Bar-Yam said that in particular decisions to impose severe restrictions on travel, stop gatherings, targeted localised lockdowns, school closures, had proven effective in controlling the outbreak. Other major steps like effective public communication, improvements in case identification, rapid ramping of industrial production of masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing capacity, have also contributed, he added.

Bar-Yam said that India's success showed that time and



travel are key to controlling pandemics. "The message to go out from India therefore is 'restrict travel in areas wherein cases are there, isolate cases and don't allow them to transmit infection'," he wrote.

In a paper published on his website endcoronavirus.org, he listed the nine major government actions because of which India had managed to tame the infection as well as it has:

◆ He described the zoning of the country into three zones - red, orange and green - for localised lockdowns as probably the most effective step taken by the government last April. While severe restrictions were imposed in affected districts, there was partial lifting of restrictions in unaffected districts, along with the opening up of some sectors to meet the economic challenge.

◆ Restriction on travel was the second most important step, as travel was regulated through issue of e-pass with checks on state borders across the country. The regulation of travel continues into 2021 as travel has not been fully de-regulated, he said.

◆ Isolation and contact tracing of individuals who test positive to Covid-19, and quarantining of primary high-risk contacts has been an effective strategy.

◆ The government shut down all colleges and schools for an extended period, and

the recent reopening has been partial and only in the context of the very low number of cases recently.

◆ Bar-Yam said highlighted the contribution of the Indian industry, which he said responded like never before by producing masks and personal protective equipment at great pace not only to meet the country's requirements, but also to supply to the world.

◆ India has gone from a single lab that could perform RT-PCR tests for Covid-19 to over 2300 in a short span of time, and this number has reduced the test result return time and also strengthened isolation and quarantine strategy.

◆ From cautionary call-er tunes on phones to heavy fines for not wearing masks, spreading public awareness about Covid-19 risks has been a major initiative of the government, and this has meant the population more willingly accepted restriction guidelines.

◆ The American scientist also praised the response in high-density urban areas, which posed the greatest challenge, but the refinement of lockdowns, travel restrictions, rapid case identification, and communication found in other locations, has helped limited the spread.

◆ He said that the vaccination drive, which is the largest in the world, is also expected to have an increasingly significant impact on the outbreak control in India.



Protesters lie on the ground after police action

Deadly

● **The security forces resorted to live fire with little warning in several towns and cities**

● **The heaviest toll was in the central town of Monywa**

Reuters

Myanmar security forces opened fire on protesters against military rule on Wednesday, killing at least 13 people, witnesses and media reported, a day after neighbouring countries called for restraint and offered to help Myanmar resolve the crisis.

The security forces resorted to live fire with little warning in several towns and cities, witnesses said, as the junta appeared more determined than ever to stamp out protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. "It's horrific, it's a massacre. No

Pregnant woman, five others killed as ambulance hits land mine in Burkina Faso

Reuters | Ouagadougou

A pregnant woman and five other people died when an ambulance carrying them hit a land mine in northern Burkina Faso, in an area that has come under repeated militant attacks, the government said.

The ambulance was carrying the woman, her husband, a girl and two other women between the towns of Gaskindé and Namissiguia, near Burkina Faso's border with Mali on Tuesday, the government said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for laying the land mine.

Attacks in Burkina Faso by fighters linked to Al Qaeda and Islamic State have risen sharply over the last three years, displacing more than a million people. Last month, Burkina Faso's government for the first time said that it was open to talks with Islamist militants to try to end the insurgency, a position echoed by authorities in neighbouring Mali.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	29,372,918	529,265
2 India	11,152,127	157,447
3 Brazil	10,647,845	257,562
4 Russia	4,278,750	87,348
5 UK	4,188,400	123,296
6 France	3,783,528	87,220
7 Spain	3,130,184	69,801
8 Italy	2,955,434	98,288
9 Turkey	2,723,316	28,706
10 Germany	2,462,061	71,325
11 Colombia	2,259,599	59,972
12 Argentina	2,118,676	52,192
13 Mexico	2,097,194	187,187
14 Poland	1,735,406	44,360

Global tally

115,451,672

Deaths

2,563,182

Recovered:

91,229,393

New cases

+251,631

New deaths

+3,623

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	183,591		10,778		141,655	31,158
Saudi Arabia	378,333	+331	6,510	+5	369,277	2,546
UAE	399,463	+2,692	1,269	+16	385,587	12,607
Kuwait	193,372		1,092		181,119	11,161
Oman	142,527	+358	1,583	+3	133,138	7,806
Qatar	165,071	+471	260	+1	154,752	10,059

UK's Prince Philip 'slightly improving'

Reuters | London

Britain's Prince Philip, the 99-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth who is in hospital for tests for a heart condition and treatment for an infection, is "slightly improving", Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall said yesterday.

Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, has been in hospital for over two weeks since he was admitted having felt unwell, and on Monday moved hospitals to one specialising in cardiac treatment, for tests and observation for a pre-existing heart condition.



Rockets land at Iraqi air base hosting US forces

Reuters | Baghdad

At least 10 rockets landed on Wednesday at Iraq's Ain al-Asad air base that hosts United States, coalition and Iraqi forces, the Iraqi military said.

It was the second rocket attack in Iraq this month and came two days before Pope Francis is due to visit the country.

The attack caused no significant losses, Iraqi's military said without going into further detail.

A Baghdad Operations Command official told Reuters earlier that about 13 rockets were launched from a location about 8 km (5 miles) from the base, which is in western Anbar province.

Another Iraqi security



Military vehicles of U.S. soldiers are seen at Ain al-Asad air base in Anbar province, Iraq