

News in brief

◆ **Foreign ministers of the G7 rich countries gather in London on Monday for their first in-person meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic began**, with British host Dominic Raab opening with talks with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The week is billed by Britain, which holds the group's rotating presidency, as a chance to reassert the West's influence and address issues such as the coronavirus recovery, climate change and how to deal with China and Russia. The ministers will lay groundwork for U.S. President Joe Biden's first scheduled trip abroad since taking office: a G7 summit in Britain next month meant to revive cooperation with traditional allies after years of friction under Donald Trump.



Britain hosts first G7 foreign ministers meeting since start of pandemic

◆ **The Democratic Republic of Congo yesterday declared the end of an Ebola outbreak that infected 12 people in the eastern province of North Kivu and killed six of them.** The outbreak was contained using Merck's (MRK.N) Ebola vaccine, which was given to more than 1,600 of the patients' contacts and contacts of contacts, the aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), said. The cases were genetically linked to the 2018-20 Ebola epidemic that killed more than 2,200 people, the second-highest toll recorded in the disease's history.



Congo declares end of Ebola outbreak that killed six

◆ **The European Union summoned Russia's ambassador to the bloc yesterday to condemn Moscow's decision to bar eight officials from entering the country**, which the Kremlin said was in retaliation for sanctions imposed on Russian citizens by the EU. The protest is the latest in rising diplomatic tensions since the start of 2021, when Moscow expelled European diplomats during an official visit by the EU's high representative. The EU has in turn angered Moscow by demanding that Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny should be released from prison, while blacklisting more Russian officials for human rights abuses.



EU summons Russian envoy over travel bans on Brussels officials

◆ **Malaysia will begin a parallel COVID-19 inoculation programme this week for people who chose to receive the AstraZeneca (AZN.L) vaccine**, after it was removed from an ongoing rollout due to public fears over its safety, a minister said yesterday. Reports of possible links to very rare blood clots have dented confidence in the shot in Malaysia and elsewhere. AstraZeneca has pointed to regulator recommendations that the vaccine is safe and effective, though some countries have suspended its use due to rising unease or limited it to certain age groups. Malaysia, which received its first 268,000 AstraZeneca vaccine doses in April, said it would allow people to choose to receive the jab on a first-come, first-serve basis. The decision was made after around 8,000 people cancelled online vaccination registrations following the government's announcement that the shot would be part of the nationwide rollout.

Malaysia makes AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine optional amid safety fears

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	33,181,941	591,071	153,818,528
2 India	20,129,183	220,571	
3 Brazil	14,754,910	407,775	
4 France	5,652,247	104,819	3,220,251
5 Turkey	4,875,388	40,844	Recovered: 131,116,584
6 Russia	4,831,744	111,198	
7 UK	4,420,201	127,538	New cases +338,236
8 Italy	4,044,762	121,177	
9 Spain	3,524,077	78,216	New deaths +4,081
10 Germany	3,431,028	83,904	
11 Argentina	3,005,259	64,252	
12 Colombia	2,893,655	74,700	
13 Poland	2,805,756	68,105	
14 Iran	2,555,587	72,875	

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	229,635		13,469		172,342	43,824
Saudi Arabia	419,348		6,979		402,664	9,705
UAE	525,567	+1,772	1,596	+3	506,020	17,951
Kuwait	276,586		1,578		260,008	15,000
Oman	196,900	+1,093	2,053	+10	178,052	16,795
Qatar	206,948		472		192,551	13,925

Ardern says differences with China becoming harder to reconcile



Jacinda Ardern and China's Premier Li Keqiang attend a welcome ceremony in Beijing

Reuters | Wellington

Differences between New Zealand and its top trading partner China are becoming harder to reconcile as Beijing's role in the world grows and changes, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Monday.

The comments come as New Zealand faces pressure from some elements among Western allies over its reluctance to use the Five Eyes intelligence and security alliance to criticise Beijing.

In a speech at the China Business Summit in Auckland, Ardern said there are things on which China and New Zealand "do not, cannot, and will not agree", but added these differences need not define their relationship.

"It will not have escaped the attention of anyone here that as China's role in the world grows and changes, the differences between our systems – and the interests and values that shape those systems – are becoming harder to reconcile," Ardern said.

"This is a challenge that we, and many other countries across the Indo Pacific region, but also in Europe and other regions, are also grappling with," she added.

In comments that sparked

some reaction among Western allies, Foreign Affairs Minister Nanaia Mahuta said last month she was uncomfortable expanding the role of Five Eyes, which includes Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States.

"This speech appears to be crafted to deflect surprisingly sharp and severe criticism from commentators after Mahuta's remarks last month," said Geoffrey Miller, international analyst at the political website Democracy Project.

However, the comments do not change New Zealand's overall shift to a more China-friendly, or at least more neutral position, he said.

"Ardern and Mahuta are selling the new stance as New Zealand advancing an 'independent foreign policy' that is not loyal to any major bloc," he added.

China, which takes almost one-third of New Zealand's exports, has accused the Five Eyes of ganging up on it by issuing statements on Hong Kong and the treatment of ethnic Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

New Zealand's parliament on Tuesday is set to look at a motion put forward by a smaller party to declare the situation in Xinjiang as a genocide.

Germany smashes online child porn network with 400,000 members

◆ **The darknet forum allowed users to communicate with others and share graphic image and video content which included "serious sexual abuse of toddlers"**



AFP News

German police said yesterday they had shut down "one of the biggest darknet child pornography platforms in the world" and arrested four of its members in a series of raids in mid-April.

The platform, named as "Boystown", had existed since 2019, counted over 400,000 members and was "set up for the worldwide exchange of child pornography, in particu-

lar images of the abuse of boys", federal police said in a statement.

The darknet forum allowed users to communicate with others and share graphic image and video content which included "serious sexual abuse of toddlers", the statement said.

Three men between the ages of 40 and 64 were arrested in seven raids in Germany, while a further suspect was detained in Paraguay on the request of German authorities.

The suspect in Paraguay's Concepcion region, also a German citizen, is to be extradited back to Germany on the basis of

Russian military in Armenia reinforce areas near Azeri border

Reuters

Russia's military set up two new military sites in the south of Armenia near the Azeri border as an "additional security guarantee" following last year's conflict, Russian news agencies reported, citing Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Russia is a close ally of Armenia, an impoverished former Soviet republic, and has a military base in the northwest of the country.

"Two strongholds of the 102nd Russian military base were established in the Syunik region," the Interfax news agency cited Pashinyan as saying in an address to the Armenian parliament.

At least 7 killed in Taliban attack on southwest Afghanistan army outpost

Reuters

Taliban insurgents attacked an army outpost in Afghanistan's southwestern Farah province killing at least seven soldiers, local officials said on Monday, as the country braces for violence after May 1, a previously agreed deadline for foreign troop withdrawal.

In a video message to media, Farah Governor Taj Mohammad Jahid said the Taliban had blown up an army outpost after digging a 400-metre (0.25 miles) tunnel to access it from a nearby house. He added that one soldier had also been captured by the insurgents.

Two local officials, one speaking on condition of anonymity, said dozens of military including elite commando forces had been killed. Provincial council member Khayer Mohammad Noorzai said that around 30 had died in the attack.

26 killed in

● **Police said the speedboat carrying about three dozen passengers from the town of Mawa rammed into the other vessel**

● **Five people were rescued and sent to hospital**

AFP News

At least 26 people were killed when a speedboat packed with passengers collided with a vessel transporting sand on Monday in the latest maritime disaster to hit Bangladesh.



Relatives mourn for victims after an overcrowded speedboat carrying about three dozen passengers from the town of Mawa rammed into the other vessel on Padma River, in Madaripur, Bangladesh

Police said the speedboat carrying about three dozen passengers from the town of Mawa rammed into the other vessel on Monday in the latest maritime disaster to hit Bangladesh.

Philippines faced tweet (

Reuters | Manila

The Philippine foreign minister yesterday demanded in an expletive-laced message on Twitter that China's vessels get out of disputed waters, marking the latest exchange in a war of words with Beijing over its activities in the South China Sea.

The comments by Teodoro Loacin, known for making blunt remarks at times, follow Manila's protests for what it calls the "illegal" presence of hundreds of Chinese boats inside the Philippines 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

"China, my friend, how politely can I put it? Let me see... O...GET THE F*** OUT," Loacin said in a tweet on his personal account.

"What are you doing to our friendship? You. Not us. We're trying. You. You're like an ugly oaf forcing your attentions on a handsome guy who wants to be a