

News in brief

Britain's Prince Philip has successful heart procedure, palace says

◆ Britain's Prince Philip, the 99-year-old husband of



Queen Elizabeth, underwent a successful procedure for a pre-existing heart condition on Wednesday, Buckingham Palace said in a statement. Philip was admitted to hospital on Feb. 16 after he felt unwell, to receive treatment for an unspecified, but not COVID-19-related, infection. On Monday, he was transferred to a different hospital in central London, with the palace saying at the time that he would have heart tests and continue to be treated for the infection.

◆ Former US president Donald Trump will be allowed back on YouTube but only when the threat of his inciting violence abates, the head of the popular online video sharing platform said.

Trump to be allowed back on YouTube when 'risk of violence' falls

YouTube in late January suspended Trump's channel, joining other social media platforms in banning his accounts following the deadly January 6 Capitol riot.



Blinken, Austin to visit Japan and South Korea this month

◆ US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin



plan to visit Japan and South Korea this month for foreign policy and security talks, three government sources with direct knowledge of the matter said. The visits will be the first to the Asian allies by the top US foreign policy and defence officials since the Biden administration took office in January and reflect growing concerns about the challenge posed by a rising China and North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

◆ A new earthquake hit central Greece near the city of Larissa, the same region where an even stronger tremor left 11 people injured the day before, the Athens seismological observatory said.

Greece rocked by new quake near city of Larissa

The quake, which the US Geological Survey said was of 5.6 magnitude, caused rock falls close to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Meteora orthodox monasteries in Kalabaka, emergency services said.



Australian PM plays down Italy vaccine blockade

◆ Australia's prime minister played down the impact of Italy's landmark decision to block the export of 250,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses due to be delivered.



Scott Morrison insisted the blocked shipment of the AstraZeneca jabs was understandable and would not affect Australia's vaccine programme. "This particular shipment was not one we'd counted on for the rollout, and so we will continue unabated," Morrison said.

Italy explained the export ban as necessary due to a shortage of vaccines in virus-hit Europe and the lack of urgent need in relatively virus-free Australia.

Fresh bloodshed in Myanmar as UN urged to hear 'desperate pleas'



Demonstrators block a road during an anti-coup protest in Yangon

Reuters | Yangon

Another anti-coup protester was shot dead in Myanmar on Friday as a UN envoy urged the Security Council to hear the nation's "desperate pleas" and take swift action to restore democracy.

Despite an increasingly brutal crackdown by the military authorities that has seen more than 50 people killed, protesters took to the streets again in towns around the country to denounce the February 1 coup.

In Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, hundreds of engineers took to the streets crying "Free our leader" in reference to ousted State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, detained by the military since the first night of the takeover.

A 26-year-old man helping at barriers set up in the city to slow security forces died after being shot in the neck, medical officials told AFP.

The killing follows the deadliest day of the crackdown so far on Wednesday, when the UN said at least 38 people were killed as graphic images showed security forces firing into crowds and bloodied bodies dragged away.

Police also fired tear gas at demonstrators in the southern city of Dawei while protesters in the

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Indian police said nine people had crossed the 1,600-kilometre (1,000-mile) frontier -- three of whom were police officers who had refused to take part in putting down protests

commercial capital Yangon were defiant despite the danger.

"Scared, yeah, I'm very scared to stay on the frontline. But we believe in our comrades and we promise to protect each other if someone is injured," protester Didi, 27, said.

The generals have shown no sign of heeding calls for restraint despite mounting international pressure, including targeted sanctions by Western powers.

The Security Council took up the escalating crisis on Friday and heard from the UN special envoy on Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, who warned against any moves to grant legitimacy to the junta.

'Silence the a to violence'

Pope arrives in Baghdad on a first-ever Mesopotamia

◆ Thousands of security personnel deployed to protect 84-year-old on first trip outside Italy since 2019

Reuters | Baghdad

Pope Francis called for an end to extremism and violence in his opening address yesterday on the first-ever papal visit to Iraq, long scarred by war and now gripped by coronavirus. The 84-year-old is defying a second wave of the global pandemic and renewed security fears to make a "long-awaited" trip to comfort one of the world's oldest Christian communities, while also deepening his dialogue with Muslims.

"May there be an end to acts of violence and extremism, factions and intolerance!" urged Francis in the stirring address, his first after arriving in Iraq.

Francis landed in the afternoon at Baghdad's International Airport, where he was greeted by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi, as well as groups showcasing Iraq's diverse folklore music and dance.

He then met with President Barham Saleh -- who had extended the official invitation to the pontiff in 2019 -- as well as other government and religious figures.

At the imposing presidential palace, the head of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics gave a moving address, stressing the deep roots of Christianity in Iraq.

"The age-old presence of Christians in this land, and their contributions to the life of the nation, constitute a rich heritage that they wish to continue to place at the service of all," said Pope Francis.

He also urged Iraqi officials to "com-



Pope Francis is received in plane in Baghdad

I am happy to trips again. emblematic duty towards has been many

POPE FR

but the scourge of c of power and disre country consistently most graft-tainted by ternational.

The Pope, a prom interfaith dialogue, devastated Iraqi min

"Here, among so n ferred, my thoughts t innocent victims of s atrocities," he said.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	29,535,608	533,850
2 India	11,190,651	157,689
3 Brazil	10,796,506	261,188
4 Russia	4,301,159	87,823
5 UK	4,201,358	124,025
6 France	3,835,595	87,835
7 Spain	3,142,358	70,501
8 Italy	3,023,129	99,271
9 Turkey	2,757,460	28,901
10 Germany	2,489,818	72,163
11 Colombia	2,262,646	60,189
12 Argentina	2,266,211	52,644
13 Mexico	2,112,508	188,866
14 Poland	1,766,490	44,912

Global tally

116,448,383

Deaths

2,585,057

Recovered:

92,040,158

New cases

+235,584

New deaths

+4,160

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	New cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	184,755		10,871		142,610	31,274
Saudi Arabia	379,092	+384	6,519	+5	369,922	2,651
UAE	405,277	+3,072	1,296	+10	389,304	14,677
Kuwait	198,110	+1,613	1,113	+8	184,239	12,758
Oman	142,896		1,583		133,491	7,822
Qatar	166,015	+469	261	+1	155,407	10,347

Modi congratulates NSIL and ISRO on launch of PSLV-C51



Narendra Modi  
TDT | New Delhi

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has congratulated NSIL and ISRO on the success of the 1st dedicated commercial launch of PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 Mission.

In a tweet, the Prime Minister said, "Congratulations to NSIL and @isro on the success of the 1st dedicated commercial launch of PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 Mission. This ushers in a new era of Space reforms in the country. 18 co-passengers included four small satellites that showcase dynamism and innovation of our youth."

Modi also congratulated President of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro on the successful launch of Brazil's Amazonia-1 satellite.

Biden wasn't calling Republicans 'Neanderthals': White House

AFP | Washington

So it's official: The US president does not think opposition Republicans belong to an extinct human species. They just behave like them.

"Behaviour of a Neanderthal," Joe Biden's press secretary, Jen Psaki said Thursday. "Just to be very clear: the behaviour."

Psaki was circling back on Biden's earlier bashing of Republican governors in Texas and Mississippi who defied federal coronavirus experts and dropped mask-wearing mandates in their states.



US President Joe Biden speaks during a meeting

Biden's barbed comment Wednesday about "Neanderthal thinking" from the governors when the country is fighting to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic drew howls of outrage from some on the right.

"First we were 'deplorables.' Then 'chumps.' Then 'spineless cowards,'" tweeted Representative Jim Jordan. "And now? We're 'neanderthals.' Not smart enough to make decisions for ourselves. This is what the Democrats think of us."

A Republican senator, Marsha Blackburn, suggested on Fox Business that Neanderthals -- an ancient species of human that became extinct about 40,000 years ago -- are something like models of the can-do, small-government voters her party says it represents.

"Neanderthals are hunter-gatherers, they're protectors of their family, they are resilient, they're resourceful, they tend to their own. So, I think Joe Biden needs to rethink what he is saying," she said.

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Neanderthals are an ancient species of human that became extinct about 40,000 years ago