

News in brief

Russia, Belarus to press ahead with military drills criticised by Ukraine

Russia and Belarus will hold

large-scale crossborder military drills next month, Belarus' defence ministry said, which Ukraine has described as a threat to its own security and that of NATO. The "West-2021" drills will involve thousands of servicemen, including those from Moscow-led defence bloc member Kazakhstan, as well as tanks, artillery and aircraft, the ministry said in a statement.

Nicaraguan authorities have detained a former

Nicaraguan police detain former beauty queen aiming to contest elections

beauty queen bidding to contest the November presidential elections, her party said, as the government of President Daniel Ortega shows no sign of ending a crackdown against the opposition.

For months Ortega's government has been detaining political adversaries, including presidential hopefuls, ahead of an election. Berenice Quezada, who was Miss Nicaragua in 2017, was detained at her home late on Tuesday night and placed under house arrest, her Citizens Alliance for Liberty (ACXL) party said



South Sudan's Machar says 'peace spoilers' backed his removal as party leader

South Sudan's first Vice

President Riek Machar has accused rival military leaders who announced he had been deposed as party and armed forces leader of trying to block the country's peace process.

The military wing of his SPLM/A-IO movement said on Wednesday it had removed Machar, who helped push his partner, President Salva Kiir, to a peace deal in 2018 and the subsequent

President Joe Biden picked Mark Brzezinski,

Biden picks diplomat with Polish ties to manage key NATO relationship

a Democratic-aligned foreign policy official with ties to Poland, as his ambassador to the European country regarded as a key Western bulwark against Russia. Biden has been eager to strengthen partnerships in Europe to counter both Russia's and China's assertive posture given cool relations between Washington and those countries. Poland and the United States are both members of the NATO military alliance.



Lions kill three children near Tanzania wildlife reserve

Three young children were killed by lions near Tanzania's world-renowned

Ngorongoro wildlife reserve as they went to look for lost cattle, police said. The youngsters aged between nine and 11 had arrived home from school on Monday and gone into a forest near the Ngorongoro Conservation Area to search for the missing animals, Arusha police chief Justine Masejo said. "That is when the lions attacked and killed three children while injuring one," he added.

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	36,210,818	631,468	201,459,884
2 India	31,855,725	426,782	
3 Brazil	20,026,533	559,715	Deaths
4 Russia	6,379,904	162,509	
5 France	6,233,876	112,098	4,276,662
6 UK	5,982,581	130,086	
7 Turkey	5,846,784	51,875	Recovered:
8 Argentina	4,975,616	106,747	
9 Colombia	4,815,063	121,695	181,313,834
10 Spain	4,566,571	81,931	
11 Italy	4,377,188	128,163	New cases
12 Iran	4,057,758	92,628	
13 Germany	3,788,907	92,255	+523,145
14 Indonesia	3,568,331	102,375	
			New deaths
			+7,618

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	105,705		6,142		98,413	1,150
Saudi Arabia	530,981	+986	8,297	+13	512,373	+1,055
UAE	688,489	+1,508	1,967	+2	665,593	+1,463
Kuwait	401,697	+718	2,356	+5	389,798	+918
Oman	298,020	+296	3,906	+17	282,763	+1,039
Qatar	227,055	+181	601		224,384	+99

Belarus Olympic athlete 'happy to be in safety' in Poland

Reuters | Warsaw

Belarusian Olympic sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya said she was "happy to be in safety" in Warsaw on yesterday, a day after arriving in Poland where she took refuge after saying she feared for her life if forced to return home.

The 24-year-old athlete has been at the centre of a diplomatic drama in the middle of the Games since seeking the protection of Tokyo 2020 staff on Sunday, saying her team was trying to bundle her onto a plane after she publicly criticised her coaches.

"I am also happy to be here, happy to be in safety," she told reporters in the Polish capital where she arrived from Tokyo via Vienna.

Tsimanouskaya said she was "surprised that the situation became such a political scandal because it started out as a sporting issue", and revealed that "she was "not thinking about political asylum" in EU member Poland, which has granted her a humanitarian visa.

"I just want to pursue my sporting career," she said, adding that her husband, Arseny Zdanevich, was "already on the road to Poland - he will be here today".

The Polish government said Zdanevich had also been given a humanitarian visa after he fled to Ukraine on Wednesday.

"I hope we can stay here and I can pursue my career and he can find work," Tsimanouskaya said, adding that she was "willing to return to Belarus once I'm sure that I will be safe there."

Saying she hoped to compete at two more Olympic Games, Tsimanouskaya vowed to do "everything to get back in shape and continue my career."



Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya attends an interview in Warsaw

"I'm a sportsperson and I didn't understand anything in political life. I try not to do anything other than a sport in my life and I try my best to not be distracted by politics"

KRYSYNA TSIMANOUSKAYA

'Messages of support'

Before leaving Tokyo, the sprinter spent two nights sheltering in the Polish embassy after calling for international help.

Belarus has been wracked by political upheaval and a crackdown on dissent after disputed elections that returned strongman Alexander Lukashenko to power last year. Tsimanouskaya was one of more than 2,000 Belarusian sports figures who signed an open letter calling for new elections and for political prisoners to be freed.

But her trouble in Tokyo came after she posted on her Instagram, criticising her coaches for entering her into a race without informing her first.

"My parents told me that they're saying bad things about me on television... I got a lot of bad messages but I got even more messages of support," Tsimanouskaya told reporters.

"I'm very worried about my parents, particularly since my dad has a heart condition and it has got worse in recent days," she said.

The International Olympic Committee has said it will investigate Belarus's Olympic team, as activists call for the country's Olympic committee to be suspended and its athletes to compete as neutrals.

Lukashenko and his son Viktor have been banned from Olympic events over the targeting of athletes for their political views.

Shortly before the Tokyo Games, Lukashenko warned sports officials and athletes that he expected results in Japan.

"Think about it before going," he said. "If you come back with nothing, it's better for you not to come back at all."

The alleged attempt to return Tsimanouskaya to Belarus has prompted condemnation, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken accusing Minsk of "another act of transnational repression".

Wildfire town as

Indian Valley settleme

The blaze is so big that it has been generating its own weather system

AFP | Washington

The largest wildfire in California has razed a small town in the state's parched northeast, warping street lights and destroying historic buildings hours after residents were ordered to flee.

Greenville, an Indian Valley settlement of a few hundred people dating back to the mid-1800s Gold Rush era, was engulfed by flames as winds whipped the inferno towards the community, turning the sky orange.

"I'd say the majority of downtown Greenville is completely destroyed," tweeted wildfire photographer Stuart Palley, sharing images of the devastation.

"My heart is broken for this beautiful little town."

The Dixie Fire has been raging in the forests of northern California since mid-July, part of a climate crisis that has brought sweltering heat and an alarming drought.

Authorities had earlier issued evacuation alerts to residents, as high winds fanned the fire which, at 500 square miles (1,300 sq km), has grown to more than seven times the size of the US capital, Washington.

The blaze is so big that it has been generating its own weather system.

"We did everything we could," California Fire spokesman Mitch

Indonesia says 'Jurassic Park' project on track despite UNESCO warnings

Reuters | Jakarta

Construction on an Indonesian tourism project dubbed "Jurassic Park" on social media will continue, the Southeast Asian country's environment ministry said yesterday, despite UNESCO warnings the plans could have a negative environmental impact.

Work on a series of tourism projects in Indonesia's Komodo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, began last year, sparking concerns about threats to the local economy and the fragile habitat of the park's namesake, the Komodo dragon.

Last month, officials from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) told a World Heritage Committee conference that the project required a new environmental impact assessment over illegal fishing concerns and the potential risk to the Komodo dragon's natural habitat.

"This project will proceed... it's been proven to have no impact," Wiratno, a senior official at Indonesia's environment ministry, told Reuters.

UNESCO officials told last month's meeting that they had requested an updated assessment



A general view of Indonesia's Komodo National Park

from the Indonesian government but received no response. Wiratno said a new assessment was being drafted and could be sent in September.

It was not clear exactly what the project, centred on the island of Rinca, entails. Last year, the government said it was building a "premium tourism spot" on the island.

In a separate statement, Wiratno said the project mainly included renovation work on existing structures and did not pose any danger to the rare Komodo drag-

ons. Rima Melani Bilaut of the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI), an environmental group, said the project could impact the local community, as well as disturb the dragons.

"We urge the government to develop tourism that's based on the people. There are people living there," she said.

Last year, social media users likened the project to one on a dinosaur island featured in the "Jurassic Park" films after photos of a dragon standing in front of a



Komodo National Park is inhabited by a population of around 5,700 giant lizards, whose appearance and aggressive behaviour have led to them being called 'Komodo dragons'. They exist nowhere else in the world and are of great interest to scientists studying the theory of evolution

big vehicle were widely shared online.