

News in brief

◆ **An Indonesian volcano was active again yesterday, spewing out hot clouds of ash, two days** after a powerful eruption killed at least 22 people and left dozens missing. Mt. Semeru, the tallest mountain on the island of Java, erupted dramatically on Saturday, shooting a towering column of ash into the sky that blanketed surrounding villages. Aerial footage showed roofs jutting out of an ashen landscape, while on the ground, military officers, police and residents dug through mud with their hands to pull out victims. The death toll had risen to 22 by Monday, while 27 were missing. Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency said.



At least seven killed in blast at Pakistan religious school

◆ **Twenty people, including two French nationals,** were charged on Monday with plotting to kill Madagascar's president and other offences as their trial began in the Indian Ocean island nation. Madagascar has a history of political

Twenty charged with plotting to kill Madagascar president as trial begins



violence. Former coup leader Andry Rajoelina, 44, was sworn in as president in 2019 after a hard-fought election and a constitutional court challenge from his rival. The suspects, all of whom

were present in court, were formally charged with counts including criminal conspiracy, criminal association, rebellion against the president and possession of illegal weapons.

◆ **Namibia has detected the Omicron coronavirus variant** in 18 of 19 samples sequenced between Nov. 11-26, its health ministry said yesterday. Although the southern African country has

Namibia detects Omicron coronavirus variant in 18 of 19 samples



sequenced relatively few samples, the finding suggests the variant first flagged by neighbouring South Africa and Botswana late last month, and since labelled "of concern" by the World Health Organization, is also highly prevalent in Namibia. Namibia's Omicron cases were detected predominantly in and around the capital Windhoek, a region that recorded 536 out of 695 new infections countrywide in the first five days of December.

◆ **Cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant** have risen to 21 in India over the weekend and people must step up for vaccination, officials said yesterday. The western state of Rajasthan reported the most number of Omicron cases with nine, followed by eight in Maharashtra, two in Karnataka and one each in Gujarat and the capital New Delhi. "The people of Delhi must get fully vaccinated, wear a mask and maintain social distancing," its health minister Satyendar Jain said on Twitter. He said the city's first Omicron patient was being treated at a state-run hospital. Some 94% of its adults had received at least one dose, he added. The country has fully vaccinated 51% of its 944 million adults and given at least one dose to 85%.



Omicron spreads in India, full vaccination in focus

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

| Country | Total cases | Total deaths | Global tally |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 USA | 49,969,856 | 808,763 | 266,308,226 |
| 2 India | 34,641,561 | 473,537 | |
| 3 Brazil | 22,143,091 | 615,674 | |
| 4 UK | 10,464,389 | 145,605 | 5,274,100 |
| 5 Russia | 9,833,749 | 282,462 | |
| 6 Turkey | 8,901,117 | 77,830 | 239,913,977 |
| 7 France | 7,917,264 | 119,535 | |
| 8 Germany | 6,187,499 | 103,643 | +170,205 |
| 9 Iran | 6,137,821 | 130,277 | |
| 10 Argentina | 5,340,676 | 116,646 | +3,200 |
| 11 Spain | 5,202,958 | 88,159 | |
| 12 Italy | 5,109,082 | 134,195 | |
| 13 Colombia | 5,081,064 | 128,780 | |
| 14 Indonesia | 4,257,815 | 143,876 | |

Middle East

Figures as of closing

| Country | Total cases | new cases | Total deaths | New Deaths | Total recovered | Active cases |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Egypt | 363,162 | | 20,727 | | 301,308 | 41,127 |
| Saudi Arabia | 549,955 | +43 | 8,845 | +1 | 539,082 | 2,028 |
| UAE | 742,376 | +48 | 2,149 | +1 | 737,400 | 2,827 |
| Kuwait | 413,491 | | 2,465 | | 410,723 | 303 |
| Oman | 304,612 | +9 | 4,113 | | 300,047 | 452 |
| Qatar | 244,223 | | 611 | | 241,459 | 2,153 |

Next pandemic could be more lethal than COVID, vaccine creator says

Reuters | London

Future pandemics could be even more lethal than COVID-19 so the lessons learned from the outbreak must not be squandered and the world should ensure it is prepared for the next viral onslaught, one of the creators of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine said.

The novel coronavirus has killed 5.26 million people across the world, according to Johns Hopkins University, wiped out trillions of dollars in economic output and turned life upside down for billions of people.

"The truth is, the next one could be worse. It could be more contagious, or more lethal, or both," Sarah Gilbert said in the Richard Dimpleby Lecture, the BBC reported. "This will not be the last time a virus threatens our



A woman receives an Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine at a COVID-19 vaccination centre at Cwmbryn Stadium in Cwmbryn, South Wales, Britain

lives and our livelihoods." Gilbert, a professor of vaccinology at the University of Oxford, said the world should make sure

it is better prepared for the next virus. "The advances we have made, and the knowledge we have

gained, must not be lost," she said. Efforts to end the COVID-19 pandemic have been uneven and fragmented, marked by limited access to vaccines in low-income countries while the "healthy and wealthy" in rich countries get boosters, health experts say.

A panel of health experts set up by the World Health Organization to review the handling of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has called for permanent funding and for greater ability to investigate pandemics through a new treaty.

One proposal was for new financing of at least \$10 billion a year for pandemic preparedness. The COVID-19 outbreak was first detected in China in late 2019. Vaccines were developed against the virus in record time.

Gilbert said the Omicron variant's spike protein contained mutations known to increase the

Putin and Modi discuss trade, humanitarian situation in Afghanistan



Russia's President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of their meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi, India

Reuters | New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Russian President Vladimir Putin in New Delhi yesterday, with trade and the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan both on the agenda.

Afghanistan's takeover by the Taliban earlier this year has led to a humanitarian crisis in the country, which New Delhi and Moscow have both previously said risks destabilising the region.

"The fight against terrorism is also a fight against drug trafficking and organised crime," Putin said in introductory

remarks broadcast by Indian media. "In that regard, we are concerned about developments of the situation in Afghanistan."

Earlier yesterday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said a deal to supply India with S-400 air defence missile systems was being implemented despite what he said were US efforts to undermine the accord.

India and Russia are expected to cement several trade and defence pacts at the summit.

"The relation between India and Russia is truly a unique and reliable model," Modi said.

UAE security of ties, resolve

● UAE, Iran say they're keen to resolve longtime disputes

● Improving ties with neighbours a priority - Iran's Raisi

● Saudi Arabia began direct talks with Iran in April

● UAE began engaging with Iran after attacks on Gulf tankers

Reuters | Dubai

The United Arab Emirates' senior national security adviser met his Iranian counterpart and hardline President Ebrahim Raisi in a rare visit to Iran yesterday.

Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan's visit took place days after Tehran and world powers broke off talks in Vienna as Western officials voiced dismay about Iran's sweeping demands for salvaging the 2015 nuclear pact,



Saudi Arabia began direct talks with Iran in April

which the United States abandoned three years ago, reimposing harsh sanctions on Tehran.

"Improving ties with the regional countries is my government's priority, therefore we welcome improving ties with the UAE," Raisi told Sheikh Tahnoon, according to Iranian state television.

"The security of the regional countries is intertwined, and Iran supports the security of the Persian Gulf states."

With business ties to Iran stretching back over a century, the emirate of Dubai, 150 km (100

Ukraine marks army day with US hardware and vehicles

Reuters | Kyiv

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine's armed forces were capable of fighting off any attack from Russia as the country marked its national army day on Monday with a display of US armoured vehicles and patrol boats.

US President Joe Biden has pledged his "unwavering support" to Ukraine in its standoff with Moscow and will hold talks



Ukrainian servicemen attend a rehearsal of an official ceremony to hand over tanks, armoured personnel carriers and military vehicles to the Ukrainian Armed Forces

with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday to try to defuse the crisis. Ukraine has accused Russia of massing tens of thousands of troops near its border in preparation for a possible large scale military offensive, raising the prospect of open war between the two neighbours.

"The servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine continue to fulfil their most important mission - to defend the freedom and