

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"THE HUMAN RACE HAS ONE REALLY EFFECTIVE WEAPON, AND THAT IS LAUGHTER"
MARK TWAIN

News in brief

◆ **Judges at the International Court of Justice examining Armenian allegations** that Azerbaijan breached a convention against racial discrimination on Tuesday ordered Azerbaijan to prevent incitement of racial hatred against Armenians and protect Armenian prisoners of war. The court has yet to rule on a similar case from Azerbaijan's side, who filed a countersuit alleging violations of the same UN anti-discrimination treaty. In October last year, Azeri troops drove ethnic Armenian forces out of swathes of territory they had controlled since the 1990s in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region, before Russia brokered a ceasefire.



World Court orders Azerbaijan to prevent incitement of racial hatred against Armenians

◆ **Up to one million COVID-19 vaccines are estimated to have expired in Nigeria last month** without being used, two sources told Reuters, one of the biggest single losses of doses that shows the difficulty African nations have getting shots in arms. In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and home to more than 200 million people, fewer than 4% of adults have been fully vaccinated, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). A recent surge in supply has caused a new problem, however: many African countries are finding they do not have the capacity to manage the shots, some of which come with a short shelf life.



Up to 1 million COVID vaccines expired in Nigeria last month

◆ **The Saudi man arrested on Tuesday at a Paris airport** over suspected links to the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi was released yesterday after officials concluded it was a case of mistaken identity, Paris prosecutors said.

France frees man who was held over suspected Khashoggi link



French law enforcement sources on Tuesday named the man as Khaled Aedh Al-Otaibi, the same name as a former member of the Saudi Royal Guard listed in U.S. and British sanctions documents and a U.N.-commissioned report as having been involved in Khashoggi's killing in Turkey. The Saudi Embassy in Paris had said late on Tuesday the arrested person "has nothing to do with the case in question."

◆ **The probe into last year's deadly Beirut port blast has been cleared** to resume after being suspended for more than a month on legal claims against its lead investigator, Judge Tarek Bitar, a judicial source said.

Beirut blast probe judge cleared to continue investigation



A Beirut court rejected the last of the suits preventing Bitar from questioning top officials on Tuesday. "They have reversed the decision that had led to the suspension of the probe and he can now resume his work for sure," Nizar Saghieh, head of the Legal Agenda, a research and advocacy organisation, told Reuters. The resumption could be temporary should further legal complaints be filed, he said.

Scholz takes over as German chancellor, ending Merkel era

● **Social Democrat receives clear majority in parliament**

● **Scholz takes oath of office after nomination by president**

● **Merkel hands over chancellery amid various challenges**



Newly elected German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is sworn-in by Parliament President Baerbel Bas (not in picture)

Reuters | Berlin

German lawmakers elected Social Democrat Olaf Scholz as chancellor yesterday, ending 16 years of conservative rule under Angela Merkel and paving the way for a pro-European government that has promised to boost green investment.

Scholz, 63, who over the past four years served as vice chancellor and finance minister in coalition with Merkel, got a clear majority of 395 votes from lawmakers in the lower house of parliament, Bundestag President Baerbel Bas said.

Wearing a black face mask, Scholz waved as he received a standing ovation from lawmakers and lavish bouquets of flowers and a basket of apples from the leaders of the parliamentary parties.

Scholz was formally nomi-

nated by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in the nearby Bellevue Palace before returning to parliament to take the oath of office in front of lawmakers and become Germany's ninth chancellor since the end of World War Two.

Scholz swore, among other things, to devote his energies to the welfare of the German people. But he did not ask for God's help, a phrase that is usually included in the oath of office and was spoken by Merkel.

Back in Bellevue Palace, the ministers of the new cabinet received their appointment certificates from the president.

In the afternoon, Merkel will officially hand over the chancellery to Scholz as the country faces a brutal fourth wave of coronavirus infections and challenges to its democratic order from authoritarian governments.

Japanese billionaire Maezawa blasts off into space



The Soyuz MS-20 spacecraft carrying Roscosmos cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin

Reuters | Baikonur, Kazakhstan

Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa set out to become the first space tourist in more than a decade to travel to the International Space Station (ISS) when he blasted off on Wednesday, a voyage he sees as a dry run for his planned trip around the moon with Elon Musk's SpaceX in 2023.

The 46-year-old fashion magnate and art collector successfully launched from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan along with his assistant Yozo Hirano, who will document the journey, as well as Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin.

Maezawa, a space enthusiast who has been training for the journey for months, has become a household name in Japan thanks to his penchant for private jets, celebrity girlfriends and cash giveaways to



Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa

Twitter followers, in a country known for its conformist corporate culture.

Maezawa plans to upload footage of his flight to his YouTube channel, which has 795,000 followers. He has called on his supporters to give him 100 ideas of things to do in space, and said he plans to play badminton aboard the ISS.

The cost of Maezawa's trip was not disclosed but some reports have put the price tag for tourist space flights as high as \$50 million.

Maezawa is also set to become the first private passenger on the SpaceX moon trip and has begun searching for eight people to join him, requiring applicants to pass medical tests and an interview.

India armed 13 dead in he

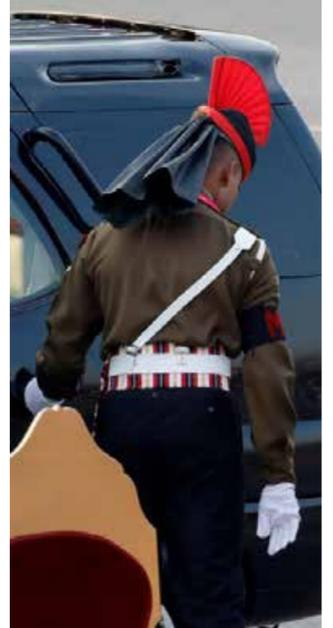
● **They were en route from an air force base to a hillside military college in the southern state of Tamil Nadu**

● **Local television footage showed rescuers and army personnel carrying bodies up steep slopes from the mangled wreckage**

● **Modi said he was deeply saddened by Rawat's death.**

● **India has dozens of Mi-17s in service.**

Reuters | New Delhi



Indian Army chief General Bipin Rawat arri

The head of India's armed forces, General Bipin Rawat, was among 13 people killed yesterday when the military helicopter they were travelling in crashed, the air force said.

They were en route from an air force base to a hillside military college in the southern state of Tamil Nadu when the Russian-made

Mi-17V5 helicopter came down near the town of Coonoor.

Local television footage showed rescuers and army personnel carrying bodies up steep slopes from the mangled wreckage. Only one of the 14 people on board survived and was in hospital with injuries.

"With deep regret, it has now

Pfizer, BioNTech Omicron varia

Reuters

BioNTech and Pfizer said yesterday a three-shot course of their COVID-19 vaccine was able to neutralise the new Omicron variant in a laboratory test and they could deliver an Omicron-based vaccine in March 2022 if needed.

In the first official statement from vaccine manufacturers on the likely efficacy of their shot against Omicron, BioNTech and Pfizer said that two vaccine doses resulted in significantly lower neutralising antibodies but that a third dose of their vaccine increased the neutralising antibodies by a factor of 25.

Blood obtained from people that had their third booster shot a month ago neutralised the Omicron variant about as effectively as blood after two doses fought off the original virus first identified in China.

"Ensuring as many people as possible are fully vaccinated with the first two dose series and a booster remains the best course of action to prevent the spread of COVID-19," Pfizer boss Albert Bourla said in the statement.

Though the necessity remains unclear, the companies said they would continue their effort to bring an Omicron-specific COVID-19 vaccine to market, which



A healthcare worker administers the Pfizer vaccine to Simphiwe, 13, amidst the spread Johannesburg, South Africa



T-cells a mune re and an disease

they kick-started when the new lineage first raised global concern among scientists on Nov. 25.

A planned output of 4 billion doses of the Comirnaty vaccine in 2022 was not expected to change if an adapted vaccine was required, they added.

The findings are broadly in line with a preliminary study pub-

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	50,270,136	812,205	267,630,772
2 India	34,656,822	473,952	
3 Brazil	22,157,726	616,067	
4 UK	10,560,341	145,826	5,290,948
5 Russia	9,895,597	284,823	
6 Turkey	8,943,837	78,215	Recovered: 241,045,279
7 France	7,987,591	119,899	
8 Germany	6,297,345	104,639	New cases +243,980
9 Iran	6,144,644	130,446	
10 Argentina	5,346,242	116,703	New deaths +4,501
11 Spain	5,246,766	88,237	
12 Italy	5,134,318	134,386	
13 Colombia	5,084,466	128,874	
14 Indonesia	4,258,340	143,909	

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	364,922		20,821		303,368	40,733
Saudi Arabia	550,043	+46	8,849	+2	539,205	1,989
UAE	742,438		2,149		737,481	2,808
Kuwait	413,555		2,465		410,768	322
Oman	304,654	+23	4,113		300,057	484
Qatar	244,708	+163	611		241,797	2,300