

News in brief

◆ **Thousands of Spaniards protested in Madrid on Sunday against government plans to pardon 12 Catalan politicians** who were convicted over the region's failed independence bid in 2017, a move the demonstrators see as a threat to national unity. Spain's Deputy Prime Minister Carmen Calvo gave the clearest indication yet that the pardons of the Catalan separatists were "close" in an interview published on Sunday with La Vanguardia newspaper, but the issue has bitterly divided Spaniards. Around 63% of Spaniards oppose granting the pardons while some 25% backed it and about 6% were indifferent, according to a poll published on Sunday for niusdiario.es, an online newspaper.



Thousands protest against Spain's possible pardons for jailed Catalan leaders

◆ **At least 12 people were killed and nearly 140 others**

Gas blast in China kills 12, rescue operation



injured when a gas line exploded in a residential compound in central China's Hubei province yesterday, local officials said. Rescue workers are

uncertain how many people may still be trapped under the debris, according to a statement from the disaster management bureau in the city of Shiyan. Videos shot by witnesses and verified by Beijing News show several buildings reduced to rubble and rescuers carrying shocked survivors on stretchers.

◆ **Saudi Arabia will bar people from entering its shopping malls unless they have been vaccinated against COVID-19**, state TV reported

Saudi shopping malls open only to vaccinated people from August



on Sunday, citing a decision by the trade ministry that will come into effect on Aug. 1. "Having received at least one vaccine shot will be a condition for entering commercial facilities," the ministry said. Saudi Arabia has administered 15.7 million vaccine doses so far, enough to have inoculated 23% of the population, according to the Reuters COVID-19 tracker.

◆ **Jordan's military court will start the trial next week** of a



Jordan ex-royal court chief faces trial

former royal court chief and a minor royal on charges of agitating to destabilise the monarchy, state media said yesterday. Prosecutors last week referred to court the case of Bassem Awadallah, an ex-royal court chief and finance minister who played a big role in the drive to liberalise Jordan's economy, and Sherif Hassan Zaid, a distant relative of King Abdullah. They were arrested in early April when former heir to the throne Prince Hamza was placed under house arrest over allegations that he had liaised with foreign parties over a plot to

destabilise Jordan, a close U.S. ally in the Middle East. Proceedings against Prince Hamza, who along with Awadallah had been under investigation for some time, were later dropped after he pledged allegiance to King Abdullah.

Two thirds of eligible people in Dubai fully COVID vaccinated



A man receives a dose of a vaccine against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Reuters

About two-thirds of people eligible for inoculation against COVID-19 have now received two doses of the vaccine in Dubai, the tourist and business hub of the United Arab Emirates, Dubai Health Authority (DHA) said.

Dubai is the most populous of the seven emirates that make up the UAE and has one of the world's busiest airports.

For six months the UAE has been running one of the world's fastest vaccination campaigns against COVID-19, initially using a vaccine developed by the China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm) and then adding the Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca shots and Russia's Sputnik V.

DHA deputy director general Alawi Alsheikh Ali told Dubai Television late on Saturday

that 83% of people aged over 16 - or about 2.3 million people - had now received at least one dose of a vaccine and that 64% had received two doses in the emirate.

The UAE recently said nearly 85% of its total eligible population had received at least one dose of a vaccine, without saying how many people had had both doses.

The UAE, which does not break down the number of cases by emirate, has seen a rise in the number of infections in the past month. It recorded 2,281 new cases on Saturday, bringing the total so far to around 596,000 cases. Daily cases peaked at almost 4,000 a day in early February.

DHA said 90% of the COVID-19 patients admitted to intensive care units in Dubai hospitals were unvaccinated, without specifying when that statistic was recorded.

Netanyahu

New Israeli government

● **Parliament convened at 4 p.m. (1300 GMT) to approve the government in a confidence vote**

● **Palestinians are unmoved by the change of administration, saying Bennett will likely pursue the same right-wing agenda as Netanyahu**

● **Netanyahu, 71, the most dominant Israeli politician of his generation, pledged he would soon return to power**

● **Under a coalition deal, Bennett will be replaced as prime minister by centrist Yair Lapid, 57, in 2023.**

Reuters

Benjamin Netanyahu's 12-year run as Israel's prime minister ended yesterday with parliament approving a new "government of change" led by nationalist Naftali Bennett.

Heading into opposition, Netanyahu, 71, the most dominant



Party leaders of the proposed new coalition leader Merav Michaeli, Blue and White party leader Bennett, New Hope party leader Gideon Sa'ar, Horowitz pose for a picture at the Knesset, coalition government, in Jerusalem

Israeli politician of his generation, pledged he would soon return to power.

In a raucous session in which Netanyahu's right-wing and ultra-Orthodox supporters shouted "shame" and "liar" at Bennett, parliament voted confidence in his new administration by a razor thin 60-59 majority.

A former defence minister and a high-tech millionaire, Bennett, 49, was due to be sworn in shortly after the vote.

His alliance includes for the first time in Israel's history a party that represents its 21% Arab

Myanmar's anti-junta movement shows viral spread

AFP | Yangon

Anti-junta protesters flooded Myanmar's social media with pictures of themselves wearing black Sunday in a show of solidarity for the Rohingya, a minority group that is among the most persecuted in the country.

Since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power in a February 1 coup, an anti-junta movement demanding a return to democracy has grown to include fighting for ethnic minority rights.

The mostly Muslim Rohingya -- long viewed as interlopers from Bangladesh by many in Myanmar -- have for decades been denied citizenship, rights, access to services and freedom of movement. Activists and civilians took to



Myanmar has been rocked by mass protest since the military ousted civilian leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi in February

social media on Sunday to post pictures of themselves wearing black and flashing a three-finger salute of resistance, in posts tagged "#Black4Rohingya". "Justice must (be) served for each of you and each of us in Myanmar," said prominent rights activist Thinzar Shunlei Yi on

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	34,316,178	614,972	176,553,298
2 India	29,485,374	371,271	
3 Brazil	17,376,998	486,358	
4 France	5,737,810	110,407	
5 Turkey	5,325,435	48,668	
6 Russia	5,208,687	126,430	
7 UK	4,558,494	127,896	
8 Italy	4,244,872	127,002	
9 Argentina	4,111,147	85,075	
10 Spain	3,733,600	80,501	
11 Colombia	3,724,705	95,192	
12 Germany	3,722,606	90,456	
13 Iran	3,028,717	82,098	
14 Poland	2,877,469	74,573	

Middle East Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	272,491		15,582		200,273	56,636
Saudi Arabia	465,797	+1,017	7,572	+19	448,093	10,132
UAE	597,986	+1,969	1,726	+2	577,234	19,026
Kuwait	326,451		1,817		308,829	15,805
Oman	234,634	+1,482	2,513	+24	210,952	21,169
Qatar	219,730	+117	577	+1	216,944	2,209

Drought-hit Jordan to build Red Sea desalination plant

AFP | Amman

Jordan said yesterday it plans to build a Red Sea desalination plant operating within five years, to provide the mostly-desert and drought-hit kingdom with critical drinking water.

The cost of the project is estimated at "around \$1 billion", ministry of water and irrigation spokesman Omar Salameh told AFP, adding that the plant would be built in the Gulf of Aqaba, in southern Jordan.



Jordan is facing one of the most severe droughts in its history

The plant is expected to produce 250-300 million cubic meters of potable water per year, and should be ready for operation in 2025 or 2026, Salameh said.

"It will cover the need for drinking water (in Jordan) for the next two centuries," he said, adding that the desalinated water would be piped from Aqaba on the Red Sea to the rest of the country.

Jordan is one of the world's