

News in brief

◆ A small plane crashed into the Mediterranean on Wednesday off the Lebanese coast and rescue workers were searching for the two people on board, a statement by the cabinet said. The small training aircraft belongs to the Lebanese aviation club and the civil defence team is conducting search and rescue operations, Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said on Twitter.



Training plane crashes off Lebanon, search ongoing for two people

◆ Alibaba Group founder Jack Ma, largely out of public view since a regulatory clampdown started on his business empire late last year, is currently in Hong Kong and has met business associates in recent days, two sources told Reuters. The Chinese billionaire has been keeping a low profile since delivering a speech in October last year in Shanghai criticising China's financial regulators.

Billionaire Alibaba founder Jack Ma reappears in Hong Kong



That triggered a chain of events that resulted in the shelving of his Ant Group's mega IPO. While Ma made a limited number of public appearances in mainland China after that, as speculation

swirled about his whereabouts, one of the sources said the visit marked his first trip to the Asian financial hub since last October.

◆ The United States will open its land borders with Mexico and Canada in early November to non-essential travelers who are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, a senior White House official announced Tuesday. The official said the administration would give the "precise date very soon" -- both for land crossings as well as international air travel, which would be timed to "go together."

US to open land borders to vaccinated travelers in November



The United States had already announced in September that it would lift bans in November on all vaccinated air passengers who undergo testing and contact tracing.

◆ Afghanistan's new Taliban government has warned US and European envoys that continued attempts through sanctions will undermine security and could trigger a wave of economic refugees.



Taliban warn US, EU of refugees if Afghan sanctions continue

Acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi told Western diplomats at talks in Doha that "weakening the Afghan government is not in the interest of anyone because its negative effects will directly affect the world in (the) security sector and economic migration from the country", according to a statement published late Tuesday. The Taliban overthrew Afghanistan's former US-backed government in August after a two-decade-long conflict, and have declared an Islamic emirate governed under the movement's hardline interpretation of religious law.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

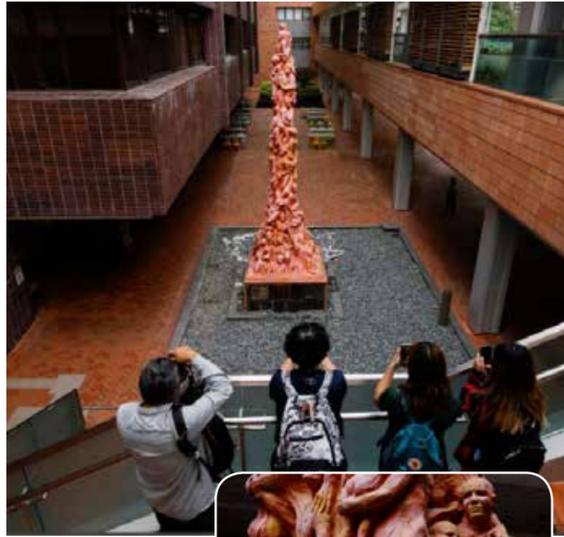
Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	45,431,167	737,589	239,617,015
2 India	34,001,743	451,220	
3 Brazil	21,590,097	601,442	
4 UK	8,231,437	137,944	4,884,533
5 Russia	7,861,681	219,329	Recovered:
6 Turkey	7,508,975	66,605	216,961,952
7 France	7,063,511	117,150	New cases
8 Iran	5,742,083	123,275	+163,692
9 Argentina	5,267,339	115,547	New deaths
10 Spain	4,977,448	86,827	+3,666
11 Colombia	4,974,400	126,692	
12 Italy	4,704,318	131,384	
13 Germany	4,342,178	95,183	
14 Indonesia	4,231,046	142,811	

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	314,116		17,765		264,764	31,587
Saudi Arabia	547,761	+57	8,753	+2	536,768	2,240
UAE	738,152	+126	2,116	+1	731,632	4,404
Kuwait	412,158		2,455		409,087	616
Oman	304,013	+14	4,103		299,351	559
Qatar	237,662	+83	607		236,089	966

Tiananmen statue creator accuses HK university of 'mafia' tactics



The eight-metre-high "Pillar of Shame" by Danish sculptor Jens Galschiot to pay tribute to the victims of the Tiananmen Square crackdown in Beijing on June 4, 1989 is seen before it is set to be removed at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) in Hong Kong, China

Reuters | Hong Kong

The Danish sculptor of a statue that commemorates pro-democracy protesters killed during China's Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 has accused a leading Hong Kong university of "mafia" style tactics over its order to have it removed.

Jens Galschiot loaned the eight-metre high, two-tonne copper sculpture called "Pillar of Shame" to a local civil society group, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China, in perpetuity.

After the group disbanded last month with some members accused of national security offences, the University of Hong Kong sent a letter to the alliance last week requesting it remove the statue from the campus by 5 p.m. (0900 GMT) on Wednesday.

"These people are in jail. And they say within four days you should take it down," Galschiot told Reuters via Zoom, referring to some of the group's members who are in prison over anti-government protests in 2019.

"So I think this is a warning, that we want to destroy this sculpture if you don't pull it down. So this is a kind of mafia. I am really shocked."

The University of Hong Kong said in an email response to Reuters it was still seeking legal advice regarding the management of the sculpture and was "working with related parties to handle the matter in a legal and reasonable manner".

US hopes Abraham help Israeli-Pales

● Blinken will first meet with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and United Arab Emirates Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan separately at the State Department

Reuters | Washington

The United States is working to expand normalisation agreements between Israel and Arab nations, known as the Abraham Accords, and hopes restoring such ties can be leveraged to advance progress on the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, senior State Department officials said on Tuesday.

In a briefing with reporters previewing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's meetings yesterday with his Israeli and Emirati counterparts, officials repeated that the Abraham Accords were not a substitute for the two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

"We continue to welcome the economic cooperation between



Emirati, Israeli and American flags fly at Abu Dhabi International Airport

Israel and all countries in the region. We hope that normalisation can be leveraged to advance progress on the Israeli-Palestinian tracks," a senior State Department official, speaking on the condition of anonymity said.

Blinken will first meet with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and United Arab Emirates Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan separately at the State Department on Wednesday. He will then host a trilateral meeting with both of them, the first of its kind.

The US officials did not say pre-

Turkey says it will do "wh

Reuters | Ankara

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said yesterday Turkey would "do what is necessary for its security" after what it said was a rise in cross-border attacks by Syrian Kurdish YPG militia.

President Tayyip Erdogan said

on Monday that an attack that Ankara blamed on the US-backed YPG that killed two Turkish police was "the final straw" and that Turkey was determined to eliminate threats originating in north Syria.

Turkey said police in northern Syria's Azaz region were hit in a

Christmas isn't cancelled despite choked port, Britain says

● People should buy normally for Christmas - minister

● Maersk diverts vessels from UK's biggest port

● PM Johnson is on holiday

Reuters | London

Britain said yesterday that people should buy normally for Christmas and there would be no shortage of gifts after shipping containers carrying toys and electrical goods were diverted from the country's biggest port because it was full.

Maersk, the world's largest container shipping company, has diverted some vessels from Felixstowe port in eastern England because a lack of truck drivers means there is nowhere left to stack containers at the port.

"I'm confident that people will be able to get their toys for Christmas," Conservative Party co-Chairman Oliver Dowden



A view of the Port of Felixstowe, as containers are seen aboard the container ship Ever Greet, in Felixstowe, Britain

told Sky. He said he was sure Christmas gifts would be delivered this year.

Dowden, who is a cabinet minister without portfolio in the Cabinet Office, said the issues at the port were easing and the supply chain problems facing the world's fifth largest economy were global - such as a shortage of truckers and port congestion.

"The situation is improving," Dowden said, referring to Felixstowe, which handles 36% of the country's containerised freight.

Asked whether people should start to buy now for Christmas, he said: "I would say just buy as you do normally."

He said Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is on holiday abroad, was very much engaged with domestic and international issues. "He's very much engaged with the job."

Britain is short of about 100,000 truckers, leading to queues at gas stations and worries about getting food into supermarkets, with a lack of butchers and warehouse workers also causing concern.

Man gets wife using

● Their marriage involved a big dowry including a new car and 500,000 rupees (around \$20,000)

● Sooraj's family was charged with conspiracy after some of Uthra's gold was found buried

● Sooraj had "inflicted pain on the reptile to provoke it to bite"

AFP News

An Indian man who used a cobra and a viper to murder his wife was sentenced to life in jail yesterday in what prosecutors called the "rarest of rare" cases.

Sooraj Kumar set loose a highly venomous Russell's viper snake on his wife Uthra that left her in hospital for almost two months, prosecutors said. While she re-