

News in brief

**Bomb found at Delhi flower market**



Indian bomb disposal experts cordoned off a busy flower market in the capital New Delhi yesterday after finding an improvised explosive device left in an abandoned bag, police said. Delhi Police commissioner said the bag was left behind by a customer who visited a shop to buy flowers at the Ghazipur wholesale flower market. Media reports said police carried out a controlled explosion.

**WHO adds new drugs to COVID treatments amid Omicron surge**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has added two more drugs to its guidelines for recommended treatments for COVID-19, as the more infectious Omicron variant of the coronavirus triggers an unprecedented surge in cases around the world. The drug baricitinib, which is also used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, is "strongly recommended" for patients with severe or critical COVID-19, in combination with corticosteroids, the UN agency's panel of international experts said in the guidelines which were published by the British Medical Journal yesterday.

**WHO adds new drugs to COVID treatments amid Omicron surge**



**Turkey, Armenia talk normalising ties after decades of animosity**



Envoys from Turkey and Armenia will hold the first round of talks aimed at normalising ties in Moscow, in a move Armenia expects will lead to the establishment of diplomatic relations and reopening borders after decades of animosity. Turkey and Armenia have had no diplomatic or commercial ties for 30 years and the talks are the first attempt to restore links since a 2009 peace accord. That deal was never ratified and ties have remained tense.

**Russia adds two close Navalny allies to list of 'terrorists and extremists'**

**Russia's state financial monitoring agency added**

Russia's state financial monitoring agency added jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's allies Leonid Volkov and Ivan Zhdanov to its list of "terrorists and extremists", the Interfax news agency reported. Both Volkov and Zhdanov are outside Russia. Moscow banned Navalny's political network as "extremist" last year during a sweeping crackdown.



**Two killed, 10 injured in Kuwait refinery fire**



Two people were killed and 10 others injured after a fire broke out yesterday at a gas liquefaction unit in Kuwait's largest refinery, the plant's operator said. The blaze "erupted during maintenance work" on the unit at Mina al-Ahmadi refinery, 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of Kuwait City, state-owned Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) announced on Twitter. Having initially said that 10 people were injured, it later updated its casualty toll, saying two workers "of Asian nationality" had been found dead at the site.

**COVID-19: Countries worst affected**

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	65,236,475	869,212
2 India	36,582,129	485,350
3 Brazil	22,815,827	620,609
4 UK	15,066,395	151,612
5 France	13,240,304	126,530
6 Russia	10,747,125	319,911
7 Turkey	10,271,240	84,278
8 Italy	8,341,898	140,548
9 Spain	8,093,036	90,759
10 Germany	7,877,788	116,076
11 Argentina	6,793,119	117,808
12 Iran	6,217,320	132,026
13 Colombia	5,440,981	130,625
14 Poland	4,281,482	101,841

**Global tally**

321,992,387

**Deaths**

5,542,511

**Recovered:**

264,723,401

**New cases**

+1,229,471

**New deaths**

+3,560

Figures as of closing

**Middle East**

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	396,699		22,063		330,714	43,922
Saudi Arabia	604,672	+5,628	8,903	+2	558,546	37,223
UAE	799,065	+3,068	2,185	+3	758,031	38,849
Kuwait	456,311	+4,881	2,474		417,414	36,423
Oman	310,338		4,119		301,458	4,761
Qatar	287,091		623		251,693	34,775

**UK PM Johnson's staff partied as queen mourned death of husband**

**Johnson's staff partied on night before Philip's funeral**

**Former spokesman apologies for the party**

Reuters | London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's staff partied in Downing Street last year as Queen Elizabeth mourned her husband, a time when mixing indoors was banned for people from different households.

Johnson is facing the gravest crisis of his premiership after revelations about a series of gatherings in Downing Street during COVID lockdowns, some at times when ordinary people were unable to bid farewell in person to dying relatives.

Johnson, who won a landslide election victory in 2019, on Wednesday apologised for a "bring your own booze" gathering at his official residence during Britain's first coronavirus lockdown. He admitted he attended.

The Telegraph said there were two other drinks parties held inside Downing Street on April 16, 2021 when social gatherings indoors and outdoors were limited. Johnson was at his Chequers country residence that day, the paper said.

The next day, Queen Elizabeth bade farewell to Philip, 99. Dressed in black and in a white trimmed black face mask, the 95-year-old Elizabeth stood alone, head bowed as her husband of 73 years was lowered into the Royal Vault of St George's Chapel.

Such was the revelry in Downing Street, the Telegraph said, that staff went to nearby supermarket to buy a suitcase



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson attends the weekly Prime Minister's Questions at the parliament in London

hypocrisy at the heart of the British state.

**Apologies**

One of the April 2021 parties in Downing Street was a leaving event for James Slack, a former director of communications, who yesterday said he wanted to "apologise unreservedly for the anger and hurt caused".

Slack said in a statement to PA Media that the gathering "should not have happened at the time that it did."

British police said on Thursday they would not investigate gatherings held in Johnson's residence during a coronavirus lockdown unless an internal government inquiry finds evidence of potential criminal offences.

Asked about the reports of parties the day before Philip's funeral, security minister Damian Hinds said he was shocked.

"I was shocked to read it," Hinds told Sky News. "We will have to see what comes out further in the investigation."

"This was a particularly sombre time for our whole country."

**"I wish to apologize unreservedly for the anger and hurt caused. I am deeply sorry, and take full responsibility"**

JAMES SLACK, A FORMER DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

**China says UK spy claims result of watching 'too many 007 movies'**

Reuters | London

China yesterday dismissed a rare public warning by British security services that a suspected Chinese agent was trying to influence lawmakers, saying it was the result of watching "too many 007 movies".

British authorities said Thursday that a London-based solicitor "knowingly engaged in political interference activities" inside parliament, citing Britain's counter-intelligence and domestic spy agency MI5.

Christine Lee had reportedly worked on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party to gain influence through donations, the office of House of Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle said.

China's foreign ministry denied engaging in "interference activities", blasting the accusations as "alarmist remarks based on some individuals' subjective assumptions".

"Perhaps some individuals have watched too many 007 movies, leading to unnecessary



Christine Lee speaks to former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn

**Former prime minister Theresa May presented Lee with an award in 2019 to recognise her contribution to Sino-British ties**

mental associations," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular press conference, referring to the James Bond book and movie franchise.

MI5's security notice said Lee was acting "on behalf of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party" and answered to figures in China and Hong Kong.

Academics and multiple foreign governments have long recognised the United Front as a tool for influencing organisations and politicians abroad.

The opaque party-controlled network covers issues such as minority rights within China to monitoring Chinese communities overseas.

**N Kore**

**North Korea launches action over US sanction**

**Launch comes as Pyongyang accused United States of intentionally escalating situation by calling for tougher sanctions**

Reuters | Seoul

North Korea fired at least two ballistic missiles yesterday, the third test in two weeks, just hours after criticising a US push for new sanctions over the previous launches as a "provocation" and warning of a strong reaction.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it had detected what it presumed were two short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) launched eastward from North Pyongan Province on the west coast of North Korea.

Japan's coast guard also reported that the North fired what could be a ballistic missile. The missiles appeared to have landed in the sea outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, broadcaster NHK reported, citing an unnamed Japanese defence ministry official.

The US military's Indo-Pacific Command said while it assessed that the launch does not pose an immediate threat to the United States or its allies, it highlights the "destabilizing impact of the (North Korea's) illicit weapons program."

The launch would be the third since New Year's day, an unusually high pace of missile tests. The previous two were of "hypersonic missiles," North Korean state media reported, capable of high speeds and manoeuvring after

**Indian court a of charge of rape**

AP | Kottayam

An Indian court yesterday acquitted a Roman Catholic bishop of charges of raping a nun in her rural convent, a case that became a major issue amid allegations of sexual harassment in the church.

Sessions Judge G. Gopakumar in a brief order said the bishop was not guilty of charges that he repeatedly raped the nun between 2014 and 2016.

Bishop Franco Mulakkal was

**BETTER YOU KNOW**

**In February 2019, Pope Francis for the first time publicly acknowledged the sexual abuse of nuns by priests and bishops and vowed to confront the problem**