

News in brief

Four killed, four badly injured in plane crash in Siberia



◆ Four people were killed and four badly injured when a small plane crashed in Russia's Kemerovo region in southwestern Siberia, the local emergency medical service said. TASS news agency earlier said at least seven people were killed when the twin-engine L-410 crashed near the Tanay aerodrome, which provides parachuting services. It also cited the local prosecutors' office as saying the crew had sent a distress signal about engine failure.

A 34-year old American woman who had been missing in Russia since Tuesday has been found dead and a Russian man has been arrested on suspicion of murder, the state Investigative Committee said.

Russia's RIA news agency said the woman, which it named as Catherine Serou, had been studying law at a university in the Nizhny Novgorod region 420 km (260 miles) east of Moscow since arriving from California three years ago.

Missing American woman found dead in Russia, suspect arrested



Australian police arrest man over alleged Islamic State membership



◆ A Sydney man who posted extremist rhetoric and possessed recipes for explosives has been arrested for allegedly being a member of the Islamic State group, Australian police said. "The man has been charged with membership of a terrorist organisation, namely Islamic State," after a seven-month investigation, the Australian Federal Police and the New South Wales police said in a joint statement.

Authorities in the Mexican border state of Baja California say they will include migrants in the new COVID-19 vaccination plan for border cities, which is aimed at accelerating the reopening of the shared land border with the United States.

The state, which lies just across from California, began vaccinating adults over the age of 18 this week as part of a new mass vaccination push across northern Mexico, which relies on over a million Johnson & Johnson doses donated by the United States.

Mexico to vaccinate migrants in Baja California under new border initiative



WHO declares an end to second Ebola outbreak in Guinea



◆ The World Health Organization officially announced the end of Guinea's second Ebola outbreak which was declared in February and claimed 12 lives. At 16 confirmed cases and seven probable infections according to WHO figures, the limited size of the latest flare-up has been credited to experience from the 2013-16 epidemic, which killed more than 11,300 people mostly in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Just 12 people died this time around.

Khamenei protege wins Iran election amid low turnout

Conservative judiciary head Ebrahim Raisi will take office in early August, replacing moderate President Hassan Rouhani

● Over 50pc of eligible voters stayed home

AFP | Baghdad

Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline judge who is under US sanctions for human rights abuses, secured victory as expected yesterday in Iran's presidential election after a contest marked by voter apathy over economic hardships and political restrictions.

With all 28.9 million ballots counted, Raisi was elected with a tally of 17.9 million, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said on state TV.

Turnout in Friday's four-man race was a record low of around 48.8 per cent and there were 3.7 million invalid ballots thought to be mostly blank or protest votes.

Appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to the high-profile job of judiciary chief in 2019, Raisi was placed under US sanctions a few months later over human rights violations.

Those included the role that human rights group say Raisi played in the executions of thousands of political prisoners in the 1988 and in the violent suppression of unrest in 2009. Iran has never acknowledged the mass executions, and Raisi himself has never publicly addressed allegations about his role.

Seen by analysts and insid-



Iran's outgoing President Hassan Rouhani and Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi speak to the media

ers as representing the security establishment at its most fearsome, Raisi, 60, had been widely tipped to win the contest, thanks to Khamenei's endorsement.

Iran's regional allies, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and militant Islamist group Hamas welcomed Raisi's election. Amnesty International's Secretary General Agnès Callamard said his victory was "a grim reminder that impunity reigns supreme in Iran".

"We continue to call for Ebrahim Raisi to be investigated for his involvement in past and ongoing crimes under international law, including by states that exercise universal jurisdiction," she said in a statement.

Outgoing pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani, barred by the constitution from seeking a

third term, visited Raisi at his office to congratulate him, and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he would lead Iran well.

"We will stand by and cooperate fully with the president-elect for the next 45 days, when the new government takes charge (in early August)," state media quoted Rouhani as saying.

Nuclear talks

Raisi's election comes at a critical time.

Iran and six major powers are in talks to revive their 2015 nuclear deal. Donald Trump, US president at the time, abandoned the deal in 2018 and reimposed crippling sanctions that have squeezed Iran's oil income.

However, with Iran's ruling clerics aware their political for-

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Ultimate power in Iran, since its 1979 revolution toppled the US-backed monarchy, rests with the supreme leader, but the president wields major influence in areas from industrial policy to foreign affairs

tunes rely on tackling worsening economic hardships, Raisi's win will not disrupt Iran's effort to revive the pact and break free of tough US oil and financial sanctions.

Nonetheless, some analysts predicted his hardline stances could deter foreign investors.

"Raisi's hardline political and economic beliefs will limit the scope for significant foreign investment if a deal is reached and further isolate Tehran from the West," said senior analyst Henry Rome at Eurasia Group.

Khamenei, not the president, has the last say on all issue of state such as Iran's foreign and nuclear policies.

"We will make every effort in the new government to solve the problem of people's livelihoods," state media quoted Raisi as saying.

US cutting forces, missile batteries in Middle East

AFP | Washington

The Pentagon said it was cutting the number of troops and air defence units deployed to the Middle East, confirming a Wall Street Journal report that eight Patriot batteries were being moved out from the region.

The move comes as President Joe Biden's administration seeks to ease tensions with Iran after they heated up in 2019 and saw a strong escalation in the US military presence across the region.

The Wall Street Journal said the Patriot anti-missile batteries were being removed from Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and that a separate anti-missile system, called THAAD, was being transferred from Saudi Arabia as well.

Each battery requires hundreds of troops and civilians to operate and support them.

Pentagon spokesperson Commander Jessica McNulty said that some of the units were being redeployed to other countries and some were returning to the United States for maintenance. She would not say where the redeployed units were being moved to.

"This decision was made in close coordination with host nations and with a clear eye on preserving our ability to meet



A Patriot missile battery near Prince Sultan Air Base at al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia

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This decision was made in close coordination with host nations and with a clear eye on preserving our ability to meet our security commitments. We maintain a robust force posture in the region appropriate to the threat and are comfortable that these changes do not negatively impact our national security interests

PENTAGON SPOKESPERSON COMMANDER JESSICA MCNULTY

our security commitments," she said in an email.

"We maintain a robust force posture in the region appropriate to the threat and are comfortable that these changes do not negatively impact our national security interests," McNulty said.

"We also retain the flexibility to rapidly flow forces back into the Middle East as conditions warrant."

The US military is rapidly adjusting its global footprint as it pulls out of Afghanistan entirely and sees a greater threat from China in the Asia-Pacific region. The Pentagon also slashed its troop presence in Iraq last year to 2,500, supporting Iraqi forces in their fight against the Islamic State group.

Myanmar protesters wear flowers to mark Suu Kyi's birthday



Men with flowers in their hair in support of Aung San Suu Kyi

AFP | Yangon

Anti-coup protesters in Myanmar donned flowers in their hair yesterday to mark the birthday of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains under house arrest and is due to face court again next week.

Suu Kyi's elected government was overthrown in a February 1 coup that sparked mass protests and renewed clashes between the military and ethnic rebel armies in border regions.

Flowers tucked into a bun have long been a signature look of Suu Kyi, who turned 76 yesterday.

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	34,393,652	616,929
2 India	29,853,870	385,815
3 Brazil	17,802,176	496,172
4 France	5,755,496	110,702
5 Turkey	5,359,728	49,071
6 Russia	5,281,309	128,445
7 UK	4,610,893	127,956
8 Italy	4,250,902	127,225
9 Argentina	4,222,400	87,789
10 Colombia	3,859,824	98,156
11 Spain	3,757,442	80,652
12 Germany	3,728,121	90,877
13 Iran	3,080,526	82,854
14 Poland	2,878,634	74,823

Global tally

178,765,626

Deaths

3,869,994

Recovered:

163,302,663

New cases

+177,181

New deaths

+3,199

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	275,601		15,760		203,802	1,150
Saudi Arabia	473,112	+1,153	7,663	+13	454,404	+1,145
UAE	610,179	+2,109	1,752	+5	589,235	+2,075
Kuwait	37,371	+1,497	1,862	+11	318,419	+1,388
Oman	242,723		2,626		213,880	12,980
Qatar	220,509	+184	582	+1	217,901	+143