

News in brief

◆ **Russian President Vladimir Putin will not attend** the G20 summit in Rome in person this month due to concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, but will take part in it via video link, the Kremlin said yesterday. The Kremlin said Putin informed Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi about his plans in a telephone call during which they also discussed the situation in Afghanistan and bilateral issues. Separately, the RIA news agency quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying that Putin's decision was driven by the epidemiological situation. Putin briefly self-isolated last month after dozens of people in his entourage were diagnosed with COVID-19. Last week, after coughing repeatedly at a government meeting, Putin said he had caught a cold.



Russia's Putin won't attend G20 summit in person

◆ **Lebanon's parliament voted yesterday to hold legislative elections on March 27, giving** Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government

Lebanon goes to polls in March



only a few months to try to secure an IMF recovery plan amid a deepening economic meltdown. Lebanon's financial crisis, which the World Bank labelled one of the deepest depressions of modern history, had

been compounded by political deadlock for over a year before Mikati put together a cabinet alongside President Michel Aoun.

◆ **US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin yesterday called on Moscow to stop prolonging** the war in eastern Ukraine, his second stop in Black Sea countries he said were threatened by Russian expansionism. "We again call on Russia to end its occupation of Crimea and to stop perpetuating the war in eastern Ukraine, to end its destabilising activities in the Black Sea and along Ukraine's borders," he said in a meeting with Ukraine Defence Minister Andriy Taran. "Russia started this war and Russia is the obstacle to a peaceful resolution," he added.

US Pentagon chief in Kiev says Russia 'obstacle' to peace



◆ **A group of 10 naval vessels from China and Russia sailed through** a strait separating Japan's main island and its northern island of



China, Russia navy ships jointly sail through Japan strait

Hokkaido on Monday, the Japanese government said, adding that it is closely watching such activities. It was the first time Japan has confirmed the passage of Chinese and Russian naval vessels sailing together through the Tsugaru Strait, which separates the Sea of Japan from the Pacific. While the strait is regarded as international waters, Japan's ties with China have long been plagued by conflicting claims over a group of tiny East China Sea islets. Tokyo has a territorial dispute with Moscow, as well. "The government is closely watching Chinese and Russian naval vessels' activities around Japan like this one with high interest," Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihiko Isozaki told a regular news conference on Tuesday.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

| Country | Total cases | Total deaths | Global tally |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 USA | 45,909,637 | 746,529 | 242,116,003 |
| 2 India | 34,106,510 | 452,626 | |
| 3 Brazil | 21,651,910 | 603,521 | |
| 4 UK | 8,541,192 | 138,852 | 4,924,506 |
| 5 Russia | 8,060,752 | 225,325 | |
| 6 Turkey | 7,683,517 | 67,837 | 219,417,460 |
| 7 France | 7,090,109 | 117,306 | |
| 8 Iran | 5,809,967 | 124,423 | +236,480 |
| 9 Argentina | 5,273,463 | 115,704 | |
| 10 Spain | 4,988,878 | 87,030 | New deaths |
| 11 Colombia | 4,982,575 | 126,886 | |
| 12 Italy | 4,722,188 | 131,655 | +4,006 |
| 13 Germany | 4,403,038 | 95,528 | |
| 14 Indonesia | 4,236,287 | 143,409 | |

Middle East

Figures as of closing

| Country | Total cases | new cases | Total deaths | New Deaths | Total recovered | Active cases |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Egypt | 319,339 | | 18,015 | | 269,482 | 31,842 |
| Saudi Arabia | 548,018 | +49 | 8,767 | +2 | 537,037 | 2,214 |
| UAE | 738,812 | +122 | 2,122 | +2 | 732,594 | 4,096 |
| Kuwait | 412,371 | | 2,458 | | 409,344 | 569 |
| Oman | 304,066 | | 4,106 | | 299,434 | 526 |
| Qatar | 238,079 | +83 | 608 | | 236,575 | 896 |

EU warns Poland it will pay for challenging common law

● **Polish prime minister warns of EU mission creep**

● **A 'direct challenge to EU's legal order', von der Leyen says**

● **Three options: legal, financial, suspending voting rights**

Reuters | Brussels



Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki delivers a speech during a debate on Poland's challenge to the supremacy of EU laws at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France

The European Commission's chief executive warned Poland yesterday that its challenge to the supremacy of European Union law called into question the very foundations of the 27-nation bloc and could not go unpunished.

Poland's Constitutional Tribunal ruled last week that parts of EU law are incompatible with the Polish constitution, undermining the legal pillar on which the union stands and raising fears that Poland

could eventually leave the bloc.

Poland's ruling nationalist Law and Justice party says it has no plans for a "Polexit" and - unlike Britain before its Brexit referendum in 2016 - popular support for membership of the EU remains high in Poland.

Nevertheless, other member

states have been dismayed by Warsaw's defiance of the EU, including Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's complaint in a letter on Monday of mission creep that he warned would lead to a "centrally managed organism, governed by institutions deprived of democratic control".

15 dead as heavy rains batter northern India

AFP | Dehradun, India

At least 15 people died and over a dozen were missing after landslides and flash floods triggered by several days of heavy rain hit northern India, officials said yesterday.

Forecasters have also warned of more heavy rains in the coming days in the southern state of Kerala where floods have already killed at least 27 people since Friday.

Officials in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand said 10 people were killed in fresh landslides on Tuesday after five died in similar incidents on Monday.

Five of the deceased were killed after a cloudburst -- an ultra-intense deluge of rain -- triggered a landslide, completely burying a house along with its inhabitants in the town of Nainital early Tuesday.

"We have recovered five bodies from the disaster site and a further search is on," local official Prateek Jain told AFP.

Another landslide in the northern Almora district left five people dead after huge rocks and a wall of mud demolished and engulfed their home.

The Indian Meteorological Department extended and widened its weather alert on Tuesday, predicting "heavy" to "very heavy" rainfall in the region for



A statue of Hindu god Lord Shiva is pictured amid rising water levels of River Ganga after incessant rains in Rishikesh in India's Uttarakhand state

the next two days.

The weather office said several areas were drenched by more than 400 mm (16 inches) of rainfall on Monday, causing landslides and flooding.

Authorities ordered the closure of schools and banned all religious and tourist activities in the state.

Television footage and social media videos showed residents wading through knee-deep water near Nainital lake, a tourist hotspot, and the Ganges bursting its banks in Rishikesh.

More than 100 tourists were also stuck inside a resort in

Ramgarh after the overflowing Kosi river deluged several localities.

Landslides are a regular danger in India's Himalayan north, but experts say they are becoming more common as rains become increasingly erratic and glaciers melt.

Experts also blame construction work on hydroelectric dams and deforestation.

In February, a ferocious flash flood hurtled down a remote valley in Uttarakhand, killing around 200 people. At least 5,700 people perished there in 2013.

North Korea launched

● **South Korean and US officials were investigating if the missile was a smaller, previously unseen version displayed last week at an exhibit in Pyongyang**

● **North Korea's last SLBM test was in October 2019**

Reuters | Seoul

North Korea fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile off its east coast yesterday, South Korea's military said, pulling Japan's new prime minister off the campaign trail and overshadowing the opening of a major arms fair in Seoul.

The US military's Indo-Pacific Command condemned the launch as destabilising, but judged it did not pose an immediate threat to the United States or its allies.

South Korean and US officials were investigating if the missile was a smaller, previously unseen version displayed last week at an exhibit in Pyongyang, a South Korean military source told Reuters, citing ongoing analysis.

They were also examining whether the missile was fired

YOU KNOW WHAT

Last month successfully coming out nuclear such a system fired a missile train

Nazi war crimes

Reuters | Berlin

A 96-year-old German woman who was caught shortly after going on the run ahead of a court hearing last month on charges of committing war crimes during World War Two appeared before a judge yesterday in the northern town of Itzehoe.

Irmgard Furchner, accused of having contributed as an 18-year-old to the murder of 11,412 people when she was a typist at the Stutthof concentration camp between 1943 and 1945, was taken into the sparse courtroom in a wheelchair.

Her face was barely visible behind a white mask and scarf

Israel approves West Bank residency for 4,000

Reuters | Jerusalem

Israel announced yesterday that it approved registration as West Bank residents for some 4,000 Palestinians who have been living for years in the Israeli-occupied territory without official status.

The decision affects 2,800 former inhabitants of the Gaza Strip who left the enclave after Ha-

mas Islamist militants seized it in internal Palestinian fighting in 2007, Israel's COGAT liaison office to the Palestinians said.

Some 1,200 other Palestinians, among them undocumented spouses and children of West Bank residents, will also receive official standing.

Inclusion in the Palestinian

Population Registry, which Israel controls, will enable the group to receive identification cards. The documentation will enable passage through Israeli military checkpoints in the West Bank, an area captured in a 1967 war.

Israel describes the roadblocks, condemned by Palestinians and rights groups as restricting free-

dom of movement, as a security necessity. On Twitter, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz said he approved the 4,000 residency registrations as a humanitarian gesture and "as part of my policy to strengthen the economy and improve the lives of Palestinians" in the West Bank.

Hussein Al Sheikh, a senior of-