

News in brief

◆ **The UK coronavirus strain has spread to at least 60 countries, the World Health Organization reported yesterday, after US President-elect Joe Biden led a moving tribute to American victims.** Covid-19 has claimed more than two million lives globally since it was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan more than a year ago, while the total number of reported cases is edging towards 100 million, according to an AFP tally. The arrival of mass inoculation drives in the United States, Europe and Asia had brought hope that the end of the epidemic was in sight.



**WHO says UK strain in over 60 countries**

◆ **US President Donald Trump on Tuesday ordered a halt to removal of certain Venezuelans from the United States for 18 months, citing conditions in the South American country.** "The deteriorative condition within Venezuela, which presents an ongoing national security threat to the safety and well-being of the American people, warrants the deferral of the removal of Venezuelan nationals who are present in the United States," Trump, on the eve of leaving the White House, said in a memo to secretaries of state and homeland security.

**Trump orders 18-month halt to removal of Venezuelans from the U.S**



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◆ **Iranian President Hassan Rouhani urged the incoming US administration yesterday to return to a 2015 nuclear agreement and lift sanctions on Tehran, while welcoming the end of "tyrant" President Donald Trump's era.** "The ball is in the US court now. If Washington returns to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal, we will also fully respect our commitments under the pact," Rouhani said in a televised cabinet meeting. "Today, we expect the incoming U.S. administration to return to the rule of law and commit themselves, and if they can, in the next four years, to remove all the black spots of the previous four years," he said.

**Iran's Rouhani says "ball in US court" over nuclear dispute**

◆ **Villagers from Kamala Harris's ancestral home in southern India made offerings of fruit, lit firecrackers and prepared hundreds of snacks in celebration of her swearing-in Wednesday as US vice president.** Thulasendrapuram, where Harris's grandfather was born, has been in party mode since November when Joe Biden and Harris won the American presidential election. Jubilant locals laid out hundreds of Chakkali -- a popular south Indian spiral snack -- shaping some to spell out "Kamala Harris", while bowls of sweets were passed around. Harris is already a trailblazer as California's first Black attorney general and the first woman of South Asian heritage elected to the US Senate.

**India villagers celebrate Kamala Harris**



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COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	24,830,045	412,109	96,852,173
2 India	10,606,215	152,802	
3 Brazil	8,575,742	211,511	Deaths
4 Russia	3,633,952	67,220	
5 UK	3,505,754	93,290	2,072,061
6 France	2,938,333	71,342	Recovered:
7 Italy	2,400,598	83,157	69,468,143
8 Turkey	2,399,781	24,328	New cases
9 Spain	2,370,742	54,173	
10 Germany	2,079,322	49,667	+242,536
11 Colombia	1,939,071	49,402	New deaths
12 Argentina	1,819,569	46,066	
13 Mexico	1,668,396	142,832	+7,755
14 Poland	1,450,747	34,141	

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	158,174		8,696		124,094	25,384
Saudi Arabia	365,563	+238	6,338	+3	357,177	2,048
UAE	263,729	+3,506	762	+6	235,421	27,546
Kuwait	159,264	+442	951	+1	152,420	5,893
Oman	132,317	+171	1,516		124,579	6,222
Qatar	148,000	+271	248		144,350	3,402

Trump reportedly considers forming his own party

Huff post

President Donald Trump is reportedly considering the launch of his own political party after leaving office yesterday, *The Wall Street Journal* reported.



The newspaper said it's not clear how serious he is about competing with the GOP under his own banner, but that he's already picked out a name: The Patriot Party.

The potential for a new party comes as Trump grows unhappy with Republican leaders, who he feels abandoned him after his supporters assaulted the Capitol on Jan. 6 when Congress met to certify the 2020 election results.

Even Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), a longtime supporter of the president, condemned Trump over the attack.

"They were provoked by the president and other powerful people and they tried to use fear and violence to stop a specific proceeding of the first branch of the federal government which they did not like," McConnell said on Tuesday.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), one of Trump's top supporters in Congress, joined the GOP's failed attempt to block the election results. However, Trump is reportedly angry with McCarthy for saying "the president bears responsibility" for the deadly assault on the Capitol and for offering a censure resolution instead of impeachment.

Trump is particularly angry at the 10 Republican members in the House who crossed party lines to vote in favor of impeachment.

Starting his own political party would be the ultimate revenge against Republicans as it would largely siphon voters from the GOP. Yet the move could also backfire by splitting the vote and giving Democratic candidates an advantage.

At least two dead after blast brings down building in central Madrid

Reuters | Madrid

At least two people died and several were injured when a building in a central Madrid belonging to the Catholic Church collapsed yesterday after an explosion, Mayor Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida told reporters.



Initial investigations suggested that the blast in Calle de Toledo, a street leading out from the city centre, had been caused by a gas leak, he said. Smoke billowed out of the

collapsed building and rescue workers evacuated elderly people from a nearby nursing home.

A Church official said one church volunteer was missing.

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◆ **Biden will sign 15 executive actions undoing policies put in place by outgoing President Donald Trump and making his first moves on the pandemic and climate change**

◆ **The actions include a mask mandate on federal property and for federal employees**

◆ **Biden will also begin the process of re-entering the Paris climate accord**

◆ **Will revoke the presidential permit granted to the controversial Keystone XL oil pipeline**

Reuters | Washington

During his presidential campaign, Joe Biden vowed to fight for the soul of America. As he formally assumed office as the next US president yesterday, Biden now faces the steep task of repairing a nation's soul in battered and desperate



Joe Biden President Harris, Vice

Donald Trump pardons rappers

Reuters | Washington

Rappers Lil Wayne and Kodak Black were among the beneficiaries of Donald Trump's wave of pardons in his last day in office yesterday, befitting a president who made his name in New York's tabloids and on reality TV.



Elliott Brody



Lil Wayne



Kodak Black



Alice Marie Johnson



Anthony Leva

While the more than 140 people granted clemency included former aide Steve Bannon and major Republican Party fundraiser Elliott Brody, Trump also used his wide ranging powers to clear people with little apparent ties to his administration.

Five-time Grammy Award winner Lil Wayne, whose legal name is Dwayne Carter Jr., appeared to support Trump on the campaign trail ahead of Trump's reelection

bid when Carter said he backed Trump's criminal justice reform program and economic plan for African Americans.

Carter, whose 2016 single "No Problem" won the Best Rap Performance Grammy, pleaded guilty last month to illegally possessing a loaded, gold-plated handgun when his chartered jet

landed in Miami in December 2019. He faced a sentence of up to 10 years in prison.

Black, 23, who was born Bill Kahan Kapri, is in federal prison for making a false statement to buy a firearm, and released the album "Bill Israel" from behind bars. Black pleaded guilty in August 2019, and three months later

er was sentenced to three years and 10 months in prison. He was seeking compassionate release and his commutation was supported by religious leaders, other rappers and athletes.

Despite speculation, the list did not include the subject of the Netflix series "Tiger King", Joe Exotic, who is serving a 22-