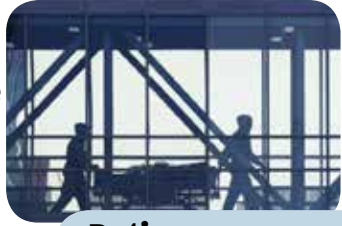


News in brief

◆ **Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday approved a government proposal** for a week-long workplace shutdown at the start of November to combat an alarming rise in COVID-19 cases and deaths. Speaking at a televised meeting with government officials, Putin said this period, from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7, could begin earlier or be extended for certain regions. Authorities across the country have made moves to curb the spread of the virus, reflecting a growing sense of urgency as they confront widespread public reluctance to get injected with the Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine.



Putin approves nationwide one-week workplace shutdown from Oct. 30

◆ **Russia scrambled two Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets to escort a pair of US B-1B strategic bombers over the Black Sea**, Russia's defence ministry said yesterday, an incident that coincided with a visit to the region by the U.S. secretary of defense.



Russia scrambles fighter jets to escort US strategic bombers over Black Sea

The supersonic US Cold War-era planes were originally designed to carry nuclear bombs and missiles but now carry conventional payloads. "Russian fighter crews identified the aerial targets as two U.S. Air Force supersonic strategic B-1B bombers, accompanied by two KC-135 refuelling planes, and escorted them over the waters of the Black Sea," the defence ministry said in a statement accompanied by video footage of the U.S. aircraft in flight.

◆ **North Korea test-fired a new, smaller ballistic missile from a submarine**, state media confirmed yesterday, a move that analysts said could be aimed at more quickly fielding an operational missile submarine. The statement from state media came a day after South Korea's military reported that it believed North Korea had fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) off its east coast, the latest in a string of North Korean missile tests. The White House urged North Korea to refrain from further "provocations", with spokeswoman Jen Psaki saying on Tuesday the United States remained open to engaging diplomatically with North Korea over its weapons programmes.

N.Korea confirms submarine launch of new ballistic missile



submarine, state media confirmed

◆ **Russia and Belarus plan to carry out large-scale military drills in 2023 and have prolonged a deal** under which Russian military facilities operate in Belarus, the Interfax news agency quoted Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu as saying yesterday.



Russia, Belarus plan large-scale military drills in 2023 - report

as saying yesterday, component of Russia's missile defence system as well as a radio station servicing Russia's navy, it said.

Japanese volcano spews plumes of ash

Reuters | Tokyo

A volcano erupted in Japan yesterday, blasting ash several miles into the sky and prompting officials to warn against the threat of lava flows and falling rocks, but there were no reports of injuries or casualties.

Mount Aso, a tourist destination on the main southern island of Kyushu, sent plumes of ash 3.5 km (2.2 miles) high when it erupted at about 11:43 a.m. (0243 GMT), the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

It raised the alert level for the volcano to 3 on a scale of 5, telling people not to approach, and warned of a risk of large falling rocks and pyroclastic flows within a radius of about 1 km (0.6 mile) around the mountain's Nakadake crater.

Local police said there were no reports of people injured or missing as of Wednesday evening, and that 16 people who had gone hiking on the moun-



A video grab from the Japan Meteorological Agency's live camera image shows an eruption of Mount Aso in Aso, Kumamoto prefecture, southwestern Japan

tain earlier on the day came back safely.

Television networks broadcast images of a dark cloud of ash looming over the volcano that swiftly obscured large swathes of the mountain.

Ash falls from the 1,592-metre (5,222-foot) mountain in

the prefecture of Kumamoto are expected to shower nearby towns until late afternoon, the weather agency added.

Mount Aso had a small eruption in 2019, while Japan's worst volcanic disaster in nearly 90 years killed 63 people on Mount Ontake in September 2014.

Russia calls for

◆ **Taliban join first major international conference since takeover** Russia takes lead in calling for humanitarian support

◆ **Moscow says it regrets US absence**

Reuters | Moscow

Russia called yesterday for international aid to support Kabul, as it hosted the Taliban at a major international conference on Afghanistan for the first time since the group took power in August.

Pakistan, China, Iran, India and former Soviet Central Asian states joined Taliban officials at the Moscow meeting. But the United States stayed away, citing technical reasons, while saying that it could attend such talks in the future.

"We are convinced that it is time to mobilise the resources of the international community to provide Kabul with effective financial humanitarian support, including to prevent a humanitarian crisis and reduce migration flows," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters before the meeting.

Russia's initiative in hosting the talks is part of an effort to boost its influence in the region after the United States withdrew its forces from Afghanistan and the Taliban took control of the country. Lavrov said he regretted the absence of the United States from the talks.

Moscow is mainly concerned

Bomb hits army bus in Damascus, shells target rebel-held northwest

Reuters | Damascus/Amman

A bomb attack on an army bus in Damascus yesterday killed at least 14 people, state media reported, the deadliest bombing in the Syrian capital in years, while army shelling in rebel-held Idlib killed 11 civilians, rescue workers said.

The attack on the rebel-held town of Ariha, which took place shortly after the Damascus bombing, had caused the biggest civilian death toll in the Idlib area since March, 2020, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

A decade of conflict in Syria has killed hundreds of thousands of people and fractured



Security forces inspect the site of an explosion in central Damascus, Syria

the country. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the Damascus bombing, which hit a bus carrying army personnel in the middle of the city at around 6:45 a.m. (0345 GMT), state television reported.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	46,002,053	748,827	242,586,837
2 India	34,122,920	452,796	
3 Brazil	21,664,879	603,902	Deaths
4 UK	8,589,737	139,031	
5 Russia	8,094,825	226,353	4,932,542
6 Turkey	7,714,379	68,060	
7 France	7,096,043	117,355	Recovered:
8 Iran	5,821,737	124,585	
9 Argentina	5,274,766	115,737	219,846,826
10 Spain	4,990,767	87,051	
11 Colombia	4,983,527	126,910	New cases
12 Italy	4,725,887	131,688	
13 Germany	4,421,098	95,636	+276,826
14 Indonesia	4,237,201	143,077	

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	320,207		18,058		270,193	31,956
Saudi Arabia	548,065	+47	8,770	+3	537,095	2,200
UAE	738,924	+112	2,124	+2	732,732	4,068
Kuwait	412,403		2,458		409,407	538
Oman	304,101	+13	4,107		299,480	514
Qatar	238,079		608		236,575	896

India floods block roads, sweep away bridge

Reuters | New Delhi

Floods unleashed by days of unseasonal heavy rain have wrecked crops, blocked roads and washed away bridges in northern India, killing at least 46 people, officials said yesterday, as they mounted rescue efforts for those stranded.

Aerial images gave glimpses of engorged rivers and partially submerged villages in affected areas in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, which is especially prone to flooding, although other areas have also suffered in this week's downpours.

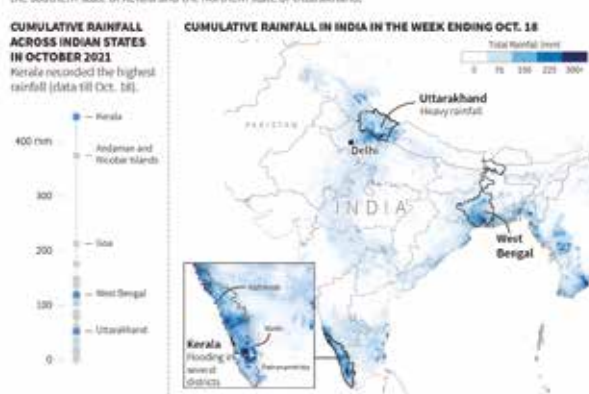
"There is huge loss due to the floods ... the crops have been destroyed," Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami told Reuters partner ANI after surveying the damage late on Tuesday.

"The locals are facing a lot of problems, the roads are waterlogged, bridges have been washed away."

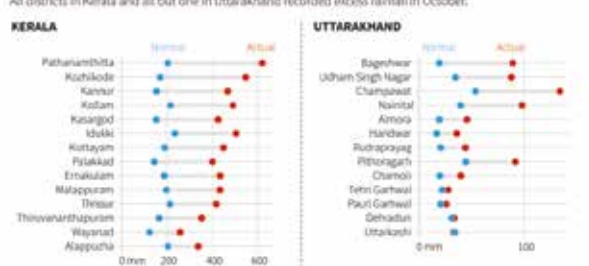
The death toll could rise

Excess rains cause floods in multiple states of India

Heavy unseasonal rains over the past four days caused floods and landslides in parts of India, killing dozens in the southern state of Kerala and the northern state of Uttarakhand.



NORMAL AND ACTUAL RAINFALL ACROSS DISTRICTS BETWEEN OCT. 1 AND OCT. 18



Note: Normal rainfall is based on long period averages of rainfall in a given region. Source: Indian Meteorological Department; NASA Global Precipitation Measurement. © Reuters



Members of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) evacuate Chhara village in Nainital district, in the northern state of Uttar

disaster management officials showed people being led to safety after being trapped in landslides.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was anguished at the loss of life, he said on Twitter. In February, more than 200 were feared killed

further, state disaster management official S A Murgesan told Reuters. Footage from national

floods swept away a highway electric dam. Other regions battling in the aftermath of the southern of Kerala, where more than 20 people died followed landslides, authorities