

News in brief

Japan court upholds ban on dual citizenship



A Japanese court upheld a ban on dual citizenship, rejecting a suit that challenged the measure's constitutionality and sought damages for those affected. Japan is one of around 50 countries internationally, including China and South Korea, that only permits its citizens to hold one nationality.

The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN aid coordinator halts Venezuela cash transfer programs

The UN office known as OCHA is asking the government of President Nicolas Maduro to establish clear rules regarding cash transfers. "We're working with pertinent authorities so that the (cash transfer programs) are in line with the country's financial/banking regulatory framework with the aim of reactivating them, guaranteeing the safety of humanitarian workers and continuing to support ... vulnerable people," OCHA said in an email.



Prosecutors accuse Bermuda's ex-premier Brown of graft, pocketing millions



Prosecutors in Bermuda charged former Premier Ewart Brown with participating in a wide-ranging corruption scheme, accusing the ex-leader of pocketing millions of dollars and unlawfully helping his center-left Progressive Labor Party. The charges follow a decade-long investigation and mark the first time in the island's modern history that a former leader has been charged with graft.

At least 43 migrants from West Africa perished in the first major shipwreck off the Libyan coast this year, the United Nations said, adding that 10 people were rescued.

Shipwreck off Libya leaves 43 dead: UN

The UN agencies for refugees and for migration said they were "deeply saddened" by the tragedy. The shipwreck, they said, happened Tuesday after a boat that set off from the city of Zawya capsized just a few hours after departure when its engine stopped in poor sea conditions.



Death toll in Madrid building blast rises to four



The toll from a powerful explosion caused by a gas leak that gutted a building in a residential part of Madrid rose to four after a priest died from his injuries. The 36-year-old, who was ordained a priest last June, was one of the 11 people who were injured during Wednesday's blast in the La Latina district. He died in hospital in the early hours of yesterday, the Madrid archdiocese said in a statement.

Rare twin suicide attack in Baghdad leave nearly 30 dead

The market had been teeming with people after the lifting of nearly a year of restrictions imposed across the country

There was no immediate claim of responsibility

AFP | Baghdad

A rare twin suicide bombing killed nearly 30 people at a crowded market in central Baghdad yesterday, Iraqi state media said, the city's deadliest attack in three years.

At least 28 people were killed and another 73 wounded in the attack amid stalls hawking second-hand clothes in the Iraqi capital's Tayaran Square.

The market had been teeming with people after the lifting of nearly a year of restrictions imposed across the country in a bid to halt the spread of Covid-19.

According to an interior ministry statement, the first suicide bomber rushed into the market, claiming to feel sick.

Once a crowd of people had gathered around him, he detonated his explosives.

As people then flocked around the victims, a second attacker detonated his bomb, the ministry said.

An AFP photographer at the scene said security forces had cordoned off the area, where blood-soaked clothes were strewn across the muddy streets.

Paramedics were working to remove casualties, and Iraq's health



Members of Iraqi security forces gather at the site of the blast

ministry said it had mobilised medics across the capital.

Yesterday's attack was the bloodiest incident in Baghdad since January 2018, when a suicide bomber killed more than 30 people in the same square.

Suicide bombings had been commonplace in Baghdad during the sectarian bloodletting that followed the US-led invasion of 2003.

Later on, as the Islamic State group swept across much of Iraq, its jihadists also targeted the capital.

But with the group's territorial defeat in late 2017, suicide bombings in the city became rare.

Baghdad's notorious concrete blast walls were dismantled and checkpoints across the city removed.

'Despicable act'

President Barham Saleh led

political figures in condemning yesterday's attack, saying the government would "stand firmly against these rogue attempts to destabilise our country."

United Nations' Iraq mission (UNAMI) also offered condolences to the victims.

"Such a despicable act will not weaken Iraq's march towards stability and prosperity," UNAMI said in an online statement.

Yesterday's attack comes as Iraqis prepare for an election, events often preceded by bombings and assassinations.

The 2018 attack took place just a few months before Iraq's last round of parliamentary elections.

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi had originally set this year's general election for June, nearly a year ahead of schedule, in response to widespread protests in 2019.

YOU KNOW WHAT

Suicide bombings had been commonplace in Baghdad during the sectarian bloodletting that followed the US-led invasion of 2003

But authorities are in talks over rescheduling them to October, to give electoral authorities more time to register voters and new parties.

Yesterday's twin attack was not immediately claimed but suicide bombings have been used by jihadist groups, most recently IS.

The jihadist factions seized a third of Iraq in 2014 and was dangerously close to the capital, but a ferocious three-year fight by Iraqi troops pushed them back.

Still, the group's sleeper cells have continued to operate in desert and mountain areas, typically targeting security forces or state infrastructure with low casualty attacks.

Still, the US-led coalition that had been supporting Iraq's campaign against IS has significantly drawn down its troop levels over the past year, citing the increased capabilities of Iraqi troops.

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	25,100,750	418,056
2 India	10,625,420	153,053
3 Brazil	8,655,512	213,180
4 Russia	3,655,839	24,952
5 UK	3,543,646	34,210
6 France	2,987,965	27,100
7 Spain	2,560,587	29,272
8 Italy	2,428,221	33,885
9 Turkey	2,412,505	33,875
10 Germany	2,102,196	86,893
11 Colombia	1,956,979	43,967
12 Argentina	1,831,681	18,656
13 Mexico	1,688,944	144,371
14 Poland	1,457,755	34,561

Global tally
97,859,856
Deaths
2,093,581
Recovered:
70,159,111
New cases
+468,827
New deaths
+11,724

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	158,963		8,747		124,605	25,611
Saudi Arabia	365,775	+212	6,342	+4	357,337	2,096
UAE	267,258	+3,529	766	+4	239,322	27,170
Kuwait	159,834	+570	951		152,826	6,057
Oman	132,486	+169	1,517	+1	124,730	6,239
Qatar	148,258	+258	248		144,478	3,532

Figures as of closing

Police discover first cannabis farm in London financial district

AFP | London

The first cannabis farm has been found in London's historic financial district, where office buildings have been emptied because of lockdowns to contain the spread of COVID-19, British police said.

The City of London Police said 826 cannabis plants were found in a building near the Bank of England. The police said there were reports of a "strong smell of cannabis", which led to the raid.

"This is the first cannabis factory in the City, no doubt being set up in response to fewer people being out and about during the pandemic who might have noticed any unusual activity," the police said in a statement.

The City of London, which is home to the world's largest commercial insurance market, banks and fund managers, has been largely deserted since March after most employees were asked to work from home.

Trapped China gold miners have to wait 15 days for rescue

AFP | Beijing

Workers trapped in a gold mine in China since Jan. 10 may have to wait another 15 days before they can be rescued because of a blockage on their intended escape route, officials said yesterday.

A total of 22 workers were trapped underground after an explosion at the Hushan mine in Qixia, a major gold-producing region under the administration of Yantai in Shandong province on the northeast coast.

One is confirmed to have died, while 11 are known to be alive. The remaining 10 are missing.

Rescuers were drilling new shafts yesterday to reach 10 of



Rescuers are seen at the site where workers were trapped underground

the men in the middle section of the mine, more than 600 metres from the entrance, who have been sent food and medical supplies. Another survivor has been found in a different section.

The shafts include one 711-mm (28-inch) diameter shaft that rescuers hope to use to bring the survivors to safety.

However, at least another 15 days may be needed to clear obstacles, Gong Haitao, deputy head of Yantai's propaganda depart-

ment, told a news conference at the headquarters of the rescue operation.

A "severe blockage" 350 metres down was much worse than feared, officials said, adding that it was about 100 metres thick and weighs some 70 tonnes.

Thick smog, reeking of chemicals, hung over the muddy road leading up to the mine site and a row of ambulances on standby in a carpark, reducing visibility to a few hundred metres.

22 workers were trapped underground in the Jan. 10 blast in the Hushan gold mine on the outskirts of Yantai, a major gold producing region in Shandong province on the northeast coast