

News in brief

◆ **India reported its highest death toll in a month on Wednesday - at nearly 4,000 - after its richest state reconciled its death count with 3,509 previously unreported fatalities, the health ministry said.** Maharashtra, home to the financial capital of Mumbai, has reported 130,753 of the country's 418,480 coronavirus deaths, and added 3,509 earlier deaths to its tally, the federal health ministry said on Wednesday. The ministry did not give a reason but authorities have in the past attributed other instances of deaths going unreported to administrative errors, before the mistakes are discovered and the numbers appear in official data.



India reports 3,998 COVID deaths after state corrects its data

◆ **The first test batch of Russian-developed Sputnik V vaccine against COVID-19** has been produced in Vietnam, Russia's sovereign wealth fund RDIF and Vietnamese pharmaceutical firm VABIOTECH said yesterday. The first validation samples

Vietnam produces first batch of Russian COVID-19 vaccine



taken from the produced batch will be shipped to the Gamaleya Center in Russia for quality control checks, the fund and the company said in a joint statement.

◆ **The Delta variant of the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 is now the main variant circulating in France, Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Wednesday, adding that 96% of cases reported the day before were**

Unvaccinated people account for 96% of new Covid-19 cases, says French PM

among the unvaccinated. "The Delta variant is the majority one, it is more contagious", Castex told TF1 television, speaking of the variant first detected in India. The French prime minister said the country was weathering a "fourth wave" of infections, with 18,000 new cases reported on Tuesday.



◆ **US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman will travel to China this weekend.** The State Department announced yesterday, making her the highest-ranking official under President Joe Biden to visit amid deep tensions. "These discussions are part of ongoing US efforts to hold candid exchanges with PRC officials to advance US interests and values and to responsibly manage the relationship," a State Department statement said, referring to the People's Republic of China. "The deputy secretary will discuss areas where we have serious concerns about PRC actions, as well as areas where our interests align," it said. The trip will still not have the trappings of a full-fledged official visit. Sherman will not go to Beijing but instead spend two days starting Sunday in Tianjin, the eastern port city.



State Dept number two to visit China, highest trip under Biden

◆ **City authorities said more than 500 people were pulled to safety from the flooded subway**

Saudi to ban unvaccinated people from entering public places from Aug 1



Al Arabia

Saudi Arabia will be banning all unvaccinated citizens and residents from entering public establishments, such as malls and restaurants, starting from August 1, the Kingdom's Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs announced on Tuesday.

Anyone who has not been inoculated against the coronavirus will not be allowed to enter malls, shopping centres, retail stores, and markets, according to the ministry. People will also need to show proof of vaccine to be allowed entry into restaurants, cafes, men's barbershops, beauty salons, wedding and party halls. "In continuation of the ministry's efforts to protect the public's health, it is required to vaccinate workers and visitors [who work in or will enter] a number of municipal establishments," the ministry said on Twitter.

Earlier this week, the interior ministry announced that starting from August 9, all Saudi Arabian citizens will be required to have taken two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine before traveling outside the Kingdom.

The announcement came "in light of the spread of new variants of the virus, the low effectiveness of a single dose of the vaccine against those new variants, and based on studies and scientific research, which show that receiving two doses will protect against complications of the virus variants," the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) quoted the Ministry of Health as saying.

At least 25 dead in Chinese pr heaviest rains in 1,000 years

◆ **City authorities said more than 500 people were pulled to safety from the flooded subway**

Reuters | Beijing

At least 25 people have died in China's flood-stricken central province of Henan, a dozen of them in a subway line in its capital that was drenched by what weather officials called the heaviest rains for 1,000 years.

About 100,000 people have been evacuated in Zhengzhou, the capital, where rail and road transport have been disrupted, while dams and reservoirs have swelled to warning levels while thousands of troops launched a rescue effort in the province.

City authorities said more than 500 people were pulled to safety from the flooded subway, as social media images showed train commuters immersed in chest-deep waters in the dark and one station reduced to a large brown pool. "The water reached my chest," a survivor wrote on social media. "I was really scared, but the most terrifying thing was not the water, but the diminishing air supply in the carriage."

The rain halted bus services in the city of 12 million people about 650 km (400 miles) southwest of Beijing, said a resident surnamed Guo, who had to spend the night



People wade through floodwaters on a road amid heavy rainfall in Zhengzhou, Henan

at his office. "That's why many people took the subway, and the tragedy happened," Guo told Reuters.

At least 25 people have died in the torrential rains that have lashed the province since last weekend, with seven missing, officials told a news conference on Wednesday.

Media said the dead included four residents of the city of Gongyi, located on the banks of the Yellow River like Zhengzhou, following the widespread collapse of homes and structures because of the rains.

More rain is forecast across He-

nan for the next three days, and the People's Liberation Army has sent more than 5,700 soldiers and personnel to help with search and rescue.

Many train services have been suspended across Henan, a major logistics hub with a population of about 100 million. Highways have also been closed and flights delayed or cancelled.

By Wednesday, media said food and water supplies had run out for hundreds of passengers stranded on a train that had stopped just beyond the city limits of Zhengzhou two days earlier.

Roads were severely flooded

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	35,082,232	625,402
2 India	31,219,374	418,623
3 Brazil	19,419,741	544,302
4 Russia	6,030,240	150,705
5 France	5,890,062	111,525
6 Turkey	5,546,166	50,650
7 UK	5,519,602	128,823
8 Argentina	4,784,219	102,381
9 Colombia	4,668,750	117,131
10 Italy	4,293,083	127,884
11 Spain	4,189,136	81,148
12 Germany	3,755,635	91,943
13 Iran	3,603,527	87,837
14 Indonesia	2,983,830	77,583

Global tally

192,433,634

Deaths

4,137,233

Recovered:

175,083,616

New cases

+203,958

New deaths

+3,893

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	283,813		16,457		225,068	42,288
Saudi Arabia	513,284	+1,142	8,115	+12	494,264	10,905
UAE	665,533	+1,506	1,907	+3	643,234	20,392
Kuwait	387,912		2,247		369,737	15,928
Oman	289,042		3,498		263,752	21,792
Qatar	224,638	+128	600	+1	222,478	1,560

US, Japan, South Korea send clear me

Reuters | Tokyo

The United States, Japan and South Korea are sending a clear message with their coordination on policy towards North Korea, a senior US official said on Wednesday, despite some recent friction between the two Asian allies. "That close coordination sends

a very critical message to North Korea in that we are together and shoulder-to-shoulder in our approach to this policy," US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman told reporters after meeting the vice foreign ministers of Japan and South Korea.

The three-way talks were held in Tokyo despite frayed relations between

Japan and South Korea, 1 of recriminations by bot ming from Japan's 1910- rule of Korea.

A new chapter of the hi that blew up in 2019 hit t the neighbours and the dermine their cooperati in the face of a common

Smart cards and rob

AFP | Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Thirty years ago, it took Egyptian pilgrim Ibrahim Siam several hours to track down his children when they went missing in crowds of worshippers during the hajj in Saudi Arabia.

Fast forward to the modern day and things are far simpler, meaning Siam, now 64, need not worry about losing track of his family and friends thanks to new technologies.

For this year's Hajj, the second to be staged under the shadow of the Covid pandemic, Saudi authorities have rolled out electronic "Hajj cards" allowing contactless access to religious sites, accommodation and transport.

"During the 1993 Hajj I lost my children and couldn't find them for seven hours," said Siam, brandishing a yellow smart card. "Today I'm not worried about losing my wife and the others who are with me."



A smart robot used for the first time at the Grand Mosque



A Saudi member of staff scans a pilgrim's

His fellow pilgrim Hazem Rihan, a 43-year-old veterinarian, had a similar experience at a previous hajj.

"Once I got lost in Mina and wasn't able to describe where I had been," he recounted. "All of the camps looked the same. I asked the organisers but they couldn't help me."

The plastic cards are available

in green, red, yellow and blue. The colours correspond to markings on the ground guiding pilgrims through the different stages of the Hajj.

The digital system also allows the authorities to guide the tens of thousands who attend the annual event, which in years past has at times been marred by deadly stampedes and accidents.

Pandemic-era pilgrimage

Each card contains basic information about each pilgrim including their registration number, exact location of their accommodation, mobile phone number and the ID number of their guide.

This year just 60,000 vacci-