

News in brief

**Blast hits western Afghan city of Herat, killing at least six**

◆ A blast ripped through a minivan in the western

Afghan city of Herat yesterday, killing at least six people, according to officials. Herat commander Mawlawi Ansari told Reuters that nine people had been injured. The cause of the blast was not clear. A health official in Herat, who asked not to be named, said an explosion hit a small van used for public transport just after 1800 local time and that three of the injured were in serious condition..



◆ Strong rains in the town of Machu Picchu, next to the Inca citadel of the same name that is Peru's top tourist draw, washed away

**Rains cause flood damage in Peru's Machu Picchu**

railroads and bridges, officials said. Flooding of the Alccamayo river interrupted train services, the regional government of Cusco department said. Houses near the river were flooded, and one person was injured with another missing, civil defense officials said. Peru Rail company, one of two that provides transport in the region, said in a statement that trains have been cancelled until further notice..



**Two Canadians die in shooting at Mexican Caribbean resort**

◆ Two Canadians died of gunshot wounds after an argument

turned violent at a resort near Cancun on Mexico's Caribbean coast, authorities said. Both guests at the upscale resort on the Riviera Maya of Quintana Roo state had criminal records, said Mexican officials, citing information from the Canadian police. Mexican police are searching for another person thought to have fired the shots who had a "long" criminal record in Canada.



◆ Former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad

**Malaysian ex-PM Mahathir stable after latest hospital admission**

is in a stable condition after being admitted to a specialist heart hospital for the third time in just weeks, his daughter said. The 96-year-old has been receiving treatment at the National Heart Institute in Kuala Lumpur for the past two days, Marina Mahathir said. Media descended on the hospital as news spread that Mahathir had been admitted again, and current Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob also paid him a visit.

**Twitter suspends hundreds of accounts promoting Philippines' Marcos Jr**

◆ Twitter has suspended hundreds of

accounts reportedly linked to supporters of Philippine presidential frontrunner Ferdinand Marcos Jr, which the social media giant said had violated its rules on manipulation and spam. The son and namesake of the country's former dictator



is drawing support from a massive social media campaign seeking to get him elected in May, which critics say is attempting to rewrite the family's history.

**US studies highlight the need for COVID boosters to fight Omicron**

Reuters | Washington

Three US studies show that a third dose of an mRNA vaccine is key to fighting the Omicron coronavirus variant, providing 90% protection against hospitalization due to COVID-19, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

The studies, led by the CDC, are among the first in the United States to look at the impact of booster doses against the fast-spreading Omicron variant,



A worker from Chicago Family Health Center prepares a COVID-19 booster shot

“Protection against infection and hospitalization with the Omicron variant is highest for those who are up to date with their vaccination, meaning those who are boosted when they are eligible”

CDC DIRECTOR DR. ROCHELLE WALENSKY

which now accounts for 99% of all new COVID cases.

Overall, they suggest that boosters helped protect against both infection and symptomatic disease. Adults aged 50 and older saw the most benefit from an extra dose of the vaccines made by BioNTech SE with Pfizer Inc or Moderna Inc.

“Protection against infection and hospitalization with the Omicron variant is highest for those who are up to date with their vaccination, meaning those who are boosted when they are eligible,” CDC Direc-

tor Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a White House briefing on Friday.

As has been shown in other countries, vaccine boosters performed better against the Delta variant than Omicron, a highly mutated version of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that has been able to evade immunity from vaccines and prior infections.

One of the studies, published on Friday in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, looked at rates of hospitalization, emergency department and urgent care visits in 10 states between Aug. 26, 2021, and Jan. 5, 2022.

It found that protection from two doses of vaccine fell to 57% in people who got their second shot at least six months earlier. Among those who received a booster, protection from hospitalization and urgent care visits was 90%.

In another study published in the JAMA medical journal, researchers reviewed data on 23,391 COVID-19 cases caused by either the Delta or Omicron

variant among people seeking testing between Dec. 10, 2021, and Jan. 1, 2022.

They found that among people seeking testing for COVID-like symptoms, those who had received three doses of an mRNA vaccine had the highest protection from infection compared with those who got two doses or were unvaccinated.

Because of the timing of U.S. booster recommendations, most people in the study had been vaccinated within a month of seeking testing, which likely contributed to the benefit.

Data from the UK has shown that the increased antibody protection gained from boosters wanes after 10 months, so it is unclear how long that benefit would hold.

Some countries have already started offering additional booster doses, but a recent study from Israel showed that while a fourth dose of an mRNA vaccine boosted antibodies, the level was not high enough to prevent infection by the Omicron variant.

**French pet care firm stops selling fish bowls - they drive fish mad**

Reuters | Paris

A leading French aquarium vendor has decided to stop selling round fish bowls because they drive fish mad and kill them quickly.

French pet care market leader AgroBiothers Laboratoire will no longer sell any aquariums with a capacity of less than 15 litres and only rectangular ones, as putting fish in small bowls without filtration and oxygenation is animal abuse, it said.

“People buy a goldfish for their kids on impulse, but if they knew what a torture it is, they would not do it. Turning round and round in a small bowl drives fish crazy and kills them quickly,” AgroBiothers CEO Matthieu Lambeaux told Reuters.

Gold fish can live up to 30 years and grow to about 25 cm in big aquariums or outdoor ponds, but in tiny bowls they often die within weeks or months.

He said gold fish are social animals who need the company of other fish, ample space and clean water, and that having an aquarium requires a minimum of equipment and expertise.

France is Europe's number one market for red aquarium



A woman brings a goldfish to Paris aquarium as part of an operation launched to take care of hundreds of goldfish abandoned by French holiday-makers, in Paris



Gold fish can live up to 30 years and grow to about 25 cm in big aquariums or outdoor ponds, but in tiny bowls they often die within weeks or months

fish, with about 2.3 million fish, Lambeaux said.

Germany and several other

European countries have long banned fish bowls, but France has no legislation on the issue.

“It is a French anachronism, that is why we decided to move. We cannot educate all our customers to explain that keeping fish in a bowl is cruel. We consider that it is our responsibility to no longer give consumers that choice,” Lambeaux said.

AgroBiothers, which has a French market share of about 27% in pet care products, sold about 50,000 fish bowls per year at about 20 euros a piece in previous years.

“There is demand for fish bowls, but the reality is that what we offer children is the possibility to see gold fish die slowly,” he said.

**Deadly IS, Kuwait**

Islamic State prison b

● US-led coalition carry out air strikes

Reuters | Damascus

Fighting raged for a third day yesterday between the Islamic State group and Kurdish forces in Syria after IS attacked a prison housing jihadists, in violence that has claimed over 70 lives, a monitor said.

The assault on the Ghwayran prison in the northern city of Hasakeh is one of IS's most significant since its “caliphate” was declared defeated in Syria nearly three years ago.

“At least 28 members of the Kurdish security forces, five civilians and 45 members of IS have been killed” in the violence, said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

IS launched the attack on Thursday night against the prison housing some 3,500 suspected members of the jihadist group, including some of its leaders, said the Observatory.

The jihadists “seized weapons they found” in the detention centre and freed several fellow IS fighters, said the Britain-based monitor, which relies on sources inside war-torn Syria for its information.

Hundreds of jihadist inmates had since been recaptured but dozens were still believed to be on the loose, the Observatory said.

With the backing of US-led coalition aircraft, Kurdish security

**WHO recon Pfizer COVID**

Reuters | London

The World Health Organization on Friday recommended extending the use of a reduced dosage of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to children aged 5 to 11 years old.

The recommendation comes after the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on immunisation held a meeting on Wednesday to evaluate the vaccine. It is currently recommended for use in people aged 12 years and above.

The recommended dosage for the younger population is 10 micrograms instead of 30 micrograms offered to those 12 years and older.

“This age group (5-11) is in the lowest priority use group for vaccination except, for children who have co-morbidities,” SAGE chairman Alejandro Cravioto said at a briefing.

Pfizer/BioNTech shots have already been authorised for use in the age group in several countries including the United States, Canada, Israel, and the European

**COVID-19: Countries worst affected**

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	8,526,027	226,319
2 India	7,670,537	116,068
3 Brazil	5,274,817	154,888
4 Russia	1,447,335	24,952
5 Spain	1,029,668	34,210
6 Argentina	1,018,999	27,100
7 Colombia	974,139	29,272
8 France	930,745	33,885
9 Peru	874,118	33,875
10 Mexico	860,714	86,893
11 UK	762,542	43,967
12 South Africa	706,304	18,656
13 Iran	545,286	31,346
14 Chile	495,637	13,719

**Global tally**

41,192,932

**Deaths**

1,131,568

**Recovered:**

30,709,840

**New cases**

+168,201

**New deaths**

+2,720

Figures as of closing

**Middle East**

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	105,705		6,142		98,413	1,150
Saudi Arabia	343,373	+405	5,235	+18	329,715	8,423
UAE	119,132	+1,538	472	+2	111,814	6,846
Kuwait	118,531	+813	721	+7	109,916	7,894
Oman	111,484	+451	1,137	+15	97,367	12,980
Qatar	130,210	+266	225	+1	127,093	2,892