

News in brief

◆ **Germany's coronavirus infection levels are encouraging but cases of the Delta variant are rising and the country should exercise sound judgment so as not to risk what it has achieved, Chancellor Angela Merkel said yesterday.** "The pandemic is not over yet. We are still on thin ice," she told lawmakers in the Bundestag lower house of parliament.



**Merkel says pandemic is not over, Germany still on thin ice**

◆ **Nine Catalan separatists who were serving** long prison sentences for their role in a failed 2017 independence bid were released from jail on Wednesday a day after being pardoned by Spain. Rain was falling as the seven male prisoners walked out of Lledoners jail some 70 kilometres (45 miles) northwest of Barcelona, where they were met by umbrella-carrying supporters shouting "Independence, independence!" As they walked

**Nine Catalan separatists freed after Spain pardon**



through the gates, they were embraced by newly-appointed Catalan leader Pere Aragonés, and posed for a photograph alongside a Catalan independence flag and a banner reading

"Freedom for Catalonia", an AFP correspondent said. At the same time, the two remaining prisoners, both women, were released from two other facilities.

◆ **Thai authorities warned demonstrators against gathering to mark the anniversary** of the Siamese Revolution on Wednesday, citing the kingdom's

soaring Covid-19 infections. Key pro-democracy groups have announced plans for

**Thai authorities warn against planned pro-democracy protest**



demonstrations across Bangkok on Thursday to commemorate the 89th anniversary of the Siamese Revolution, an uprising that transformed Thailand from absolutism to a constitutional monarchy. Mass protests against the government of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha shook Bangkok in the second half of last year, fuelled by discontent at the former military chief who came to power via a 2014 coup, but tailed off as covid cases rose.

◆ **A massive manhunt is underway in central India after a gang of robbers stole nearly** a tonne of cow dung from a village, police said. Villagers in the central state of Chhattisgarh complained to police last week after more than 800 kilogrammes (1,770 pounds) of poo disappeared from their storehouse. Police said the gang struck at night, breaking into the depository in

**Manure hunt underway after India thieves steal cow dung**

Korba district's Dhurena village and fleeing with their pungent plunder estimated to be worth some 1,600 rupees (\$22). "We have questioned some suspects but no arrests have been made yet,"

local police officer Harish Tandekar told AFP on Wednesday. He added that it was not clear how the suspects had been able to transport such a large amount of faeces, or why they had stolen it. "Investigations are continuing and every effort is being made to find the culprits," Tandekar said.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

	Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1	USA	34,435,231	617,893	180,079,604
2	India	30,067,305	391,385	Deaths
3	Brazil	18,056,639	504,897	3,900,979
4	France	5,760,002	110,829	Recovered:
5	Turkey	5,381,736	49,293	164,822,188
6	Russia	5,368,513	130,895	New cases
7	UK	4,667,870	128,027	+160,500
8	Argentina	4,298,782	90,281	New deaths
9	Italy	4,254,294	127,322	+3,090
10	Colombia	3,997,021	101,302	
11	Spain	3,768,691	80,719	
12	Germany	3,731,551	91,101	
13	Iran	3,128,395	83,329	
14	Poland	2,879,192	74,893	

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	278,295		15,935		206,852	55,508
Saudi Arabia	478,135	+1,253	7,716	+13	459,091	11,328
UAE	618,148	+1,988	1,773	+6	597,008	19,367
Kuwait	342,929		1,888		322,897	18,144
Oman	254,656	+2,047	2,816	+34	222,344	29,496
Qatar	221,273	+154	586	+2	218,787	1,900

Figures as of closing

Russian forces reportedly fire warning shots at British destroyer in Black Sea



British Royal Navy's Type 45 destroyer HMS Defender arrives for a port visit in Istanbul, Turkey

Reuters | Moscow

A Russian military ship fired warning shots at a British Royal Navy destroyer after it entered Russian waters in the Black Sea, and a Russian jet dropped bombs in its path as a warning, Interfax cited Russia's defence ministry as saying on Wednesday.

The British Ministry of Defence did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The HMS Defender left Russian waters soon after the incident, having ventured as much as 3 kilometres (2 miles) inside, the Russian ministry said, adding that the confrontation took place near Cape Fiolent, a landmark on the coast of Crimea.

Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 in a move condemned by the West which still considers it Ukrainian territory.

"The destroyer had been warned that weapons would be used if it trespasses the border of the Russian Federation. It did not react to the warning," it said.

A Russian bomber dropped four high explosive fragmentation bombs as a warning in the British destroyer's path, according to the Russian ministry.

Three killed in bomb targeting police in Pakistan's Lahore

AFP | Lahore, Pakistan

A bomb killed three people in Pakistan's eastern megacity Lahore yesterday, in an attack officials believe targeted police and security forces.

The blast happened outside a house near a checkpoint in an affluent neighbourhood, the province's police chief Inam Ghani said.

"Our assessment is that the most obvious target was the police and security forces," he said, adding that the blast was being treated as a terrorist incident.

He said it was unclear whether a vehicle was packed with explosives that were remotely detonated or if a suicide bomber was behind the blast.

US blocks 36 Iran websites

● Several of the sites were back online within hours with new domain addresses

● The sites seized included Press TV, the Iranian government's main English-language satellite television channel, and Al Alam, its Arabic-language equivalent

● The Justice Department said the 33 domains used by IRTVU are owned by a United States company

Reuters | Dubai

The US Justice Department said yesterday it seized 36 Iranian-linked websites, many of them associated with either disinformation activities



A screen grab from alalamtv.net shows a notice saying the website has been seized by the United States government as part of law enforcement action,

or violent organizations, taking them offline for violating US sanctions.

Several of the sites were back online within hours with new domain addresses.

"Today, pursuant to court orders, the United States seized 33 websites used by the Iranian Is-

lamic Radio and Television Union (IRTVU) and three websites operated by Kata'ib Hizballah (KH), in violation of US sanctions," the department said in a statement.

Also spelled Kataib Hezbollah, KH is one of the main Iran-aligned Iraqi militia groups and has been designated a Foreign Terrorist Or-

Dozens killed after air strike on market in Ethiopia's Tigray

● The bomb hit a market at around 1:00 p.m

● The market had been full of families

● A medical official confirmed at least 43 fatalities

AFP News



A woman is taken to Ayder Referral Hospital, in Mekelle, after an air strike in Togoga, Ethiopia's Tigray region

"We didn't see the plane, but we heard it," she told Reuters on Wednesday. "When the explosion happened, everyone ran out. After a time we came back and were trying to pick up the injured."

The woman said the market had been full of families, and she did not see any armed forces in the area. "Many, many" people had been killed, she said.

Reuters could not independently verify her account. She and other sources asked not to be identified for fear of reprisals.

The medical official confirmed at least 43 fatalities, citing witnesses and first responders.

A spokesperson for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the head of a government task force on Tigray did not respond to requests for comment on the incident.

News of the airstrike came as Ethiopian officials counted ballots from national and regional parliamentary elections held this week in seven of the nation's 10 regions.

No voting was held in Tigray, where the military has been battling forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the region's former ruling party, since November. Security concerns and

North Korea's foreign minister says ta

AFP | Seoul

North Korea's foreign minister yesterday ruled out any talks with the United States, saying dialogue with Washington would "get us nowhere".

His comments come after Sung Kim, the top US envoy in charge of North Korea negotiations, visited South Korea this week in a bid to

