

News in brief

Ukrainian lawmakers pass law on oligarchs after assassination attempt ◆ Ukraine's parliament

passed a law to order "oligarchs" to register and stay out of politics, a day after an attempt to kill a top aide to President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, which officials said could have been a response to the reform. The law provides a definition for an oligarch, while giving the authorities the power to designate individuals who meet the criteria. Oligarchs would be forbidden from financing political parties or taking part in privatisations. Top officials, including the president, prime minister and head of the central bank, would be required to declare dealings they had with them.

All six people on board an ageing Antonov An-26 transport plane that crashed in the Russian far east the previous day have been killed, Russia's emergency services ministry said. ◆ Six dead after plane crash in Russian far east involving ageing plane

The plane, which the TASS news agency said belonged to a company that performed technical checks at Russian airports and was 42 years old, disappeared from radar screens on Wednesday.

Over 30 dead during Guinea-Bissau health worker strike, union says ◆ More than 30 people have died because a health workers' strike in Guinea-Bissau has paralysed the healthcare system, a spokesperson for the nurses' union said.

The boycott over working conditions, pay and other issues was launched on Monday in the small West African nation where chronically under-equipped hospitals and clinics have long angered workers and endangered patients.

A Russian spy chief accused Britain of lies and trying to divert attention from other issues after British police said a third Russian suspect had been identified in the 2018 Novichok murder attempt on a former double agent. ◆ Russian spy chief accuses Britain of lies after latest nerve attack charge

The attack on Sergei Skripal, who sold Russian secrets to Britain, caused one of the biggest rows between Russia and the West since the Cold War, leading to the tit-for-tat expulsion of dozens of diplomats after Britain blamed Moscow.

UN commissioner urges international effort on Myanmar 'before it is too late' ◆ The United Nations High Commissioner

for Human Rights yesterday warned of a human rights catastrophe under military rule in Myanmar and urged the international community to do more to prevent conflict from worsening. "The national consequences are terrible and tragic - the regional consequences could also be profound," Michelle Bachelet said in a statement.

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	43,417,209	699,878
2 India	33,592,214	446,373
3 Brazil	21,283,567	592,357
4 UK	7,565,867	135,803
5 Russia	6,971,493	201,445
6 France	6,971,493	116,309
7 Turkey	6,932,453	62,307
8 Iran	5,493,591	118,508
9 Argentina	5,245,265	114,684
10 Colombia	4,945,203	125,782
11 Spain	4,940,824	86,085
12 Italy	4,649,906	130,551
13 Indonesia	4,201,559	141,114
14 Germany	4,178,841	93,798

Global tally
231,110,100
Deaths: 4,736,302
Recovered: 207,810,217
New cases: +267,148
New deaths: +4,554

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	298,988		17,043		251,902	30,043
Saudi Arabia	546,792	+57	8,684	+5	535,783	2,325
UAE	733,972	+329	2,083	+3	726,035	5,854
Kuwait	411,316		2,442		408,159	715
Oman	303,551	+39	4,093		295,168	4,290
Qatar	235,907		604		233,728	1,575

Figures as of closing

Four Tunisian parties say president has lost his legitimacy

Reuters | Tunis

Four Tunisian parties said yesterday that President Kais Saied has lost his legitimacy and called for an end to what they called a coup after he took control of legislative and executive powers.

Saied said on Wednesday he would rule by decree and ignore parts of the constitution as he prepared to change the political system.

Attayar, Al Jouhmouri, Akef and Ettakatol parties said in a joint statement that Saied's move enshrined an absolute power monopoly.

Saied has held nearly total power since July 25 when he sacked the prime minister, suspended parliament and assumed executive authority citing a national emergency.

Yesterday's opposition statement increased the pressure on him. Although the four parties are not the most powerful, they hold influence in the streets, especially Attayar, which was close to Saied before his intervention.

"We consider the president has lost his legitimacy by violating the constitution... and he will be responsible for all the possible repercussions of this dangerous step," the four parties said in the statement.

Anour Ben Kadour, a senior official in the powerful UGTT labour union, said: "Tunisia is heading towards absolute, individual rule."



Tunisian President Kais Saied takes the oath of office in Tunis (file photo)

YOU KNOW WHAT

The new measures announced on Wednesday go far beyond the steps he took in July, writing into the official gazette rules that transform Tunisia's political system to give the president almost unlimited power

UGTT, which has about one million members and is a major force in Tunisian politics, has

started a meeting to formulate a position on Saied's actions and is expected to issue a statement yesterday.

While many Tunisians have backed Saied and see his actions as necessary to oust a corrupt and unpopular political elite after years of economic stagnation, his critics from across the spectrum say he is inexperienced and uncompromising.

The leader of Tunisia's powerful Islamist Ennahda party, Rached Ghannouchi, said on Wednesday that Saied's declarations meant cancelling the constitution. The party - the biggest in parliament - would not accept that, he said.

Saied's moves have undermined the democratic gains of Tunisia's 2011 revolution that ended autocratic rule, despite his pledges to uphold the freedoms won a decade ago.

Sri Lanka shaman dies of COVID-19 after touting 'blessed' water cure

AFP | Colombo

A high-profile shaman who tried to end Sri Lanka's COVID-19 outbreak with "blessed" water has died of the virus, his family said yesterday.

Eliyantha White, 48, who treated sports stars and top politicians including the country's prime minister, claimed in November he could end the pandemic in Sri Lanka and neighboring India by pouring pots of his "blessed" water into rivers.

Health minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi endorsed the water treatment, but was infected two months later and ended up in a hospital intensive care unit.

She was later demoted, and lost her portfolio, but remains in the cabinet.

White attracted international attention in 2010 when legendary Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar publicly thanked him for treating a knee injury, saying it helped him hit the first-ever one-day international double century against South Africa. In a 2010 interview, White claimed he had "special powers" since the age of 12.

He has since treated other Indian cricket stars, including Gautam Gambhir and Ashish Nehra.

White's family said he had refused the Covid-19 vaccine.

His body was cremated at Colombo's main cemetery yesterday in line with quarantine regulations.



Buddhist monks perform the last rites during the funeral of Eliyantha White, a local shaman who died of the COVID-19

YOU KNOW WHAT

Eliyantha White attracted international attention in 2010 when legendary Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar publicly thanked him for treating a knee injury, saying it helped him hit the first-ever one-day international double century against South Africa

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was among politicians to have consulted White, said on Twitter: "His legacy will continue to live through all the lives, he touched and healed of various ailments."

But mainstream doctors described White as a fraud and Ayurveda physicians rejected his claims - even though the shaman said he used methods from the 3,000-year-old Indian medical tradition.

Sri Lanka's total coronavirus deaths exceeded 12,000 with more than half a million people infected so far.

Doctors say the real toll is at least twice as high and authorities have resorted to mass cremations to clear bodies piling up at hospitals and morgues.

US envoy slams

Ambassador warns ir basics for returning r

◆ Daniel Foote excoriates Washington in letter addressed to Antony Blinken

Reuters | Washington

The US special envoy to Haiti dramatically resigned yesterday in a letter that excoriated the Biden administration for deporting hundreds of migrants to the crisis-engulfed Caribbean nation from a camp on the US-Mexican border in recent days.

Daniel Foote, a career diplomat named to his post in July, said conditions in Haiti were so bad that US officials were confined to secure compounds. He said the "collapsed state" was unable to support the infusion of returning migrants.

"I will not be associated with the United States' inhumane, counterproductive decision to deport thousands of Haitian refugees and illegal immigrants," Foote said in a letter addressed to Secretary of State Antony Blinken that circulated publicly yesterday.

The United States has returned 1,401 migrants from the camp to Haiti and taken another 3,206 people into custody, the Department of Homeland Security said on Wednesday.

Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, has gone through profound instability in recent weeks, including a pres-

Gas pipe worker 800-year-old b



Objects, food, artifacts and ancient funeral eight people unearthed by workers

Peruvian workers laying gas pipes found the remains of eight people buried in a common tomb with food and musical instruments some 800 years ago, an archaeologist said.

The bodies of adults and children had been wrapped in plant material, with corn, dishes, and a variety of wind instruments, including flutes, placed around them, Cecilia Camargo, an archaeologist hired by the Calidda gas com-