

News in brief

French MPs want inquiry into
alleged Russian party financing



Members of the French National Assembly said yesterday they had asked the president of the lower house of the country's parliament to set up an investigation committee to look into alleged Russian financing of political parties. In a letter to Yael Braun-Pivet, shown to reporters, MPs said the move was prompted by a recent declassification of U.S. intelligence showing Russia had paid hundreds of millions of euros to foreign political parties "with the aim to ... influence elections". The eight MPs, who belong to French President Emmanuel Macron's En Marche party, also noted that Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National party is still paying off a loan granted by Russian banks.

NASA's Artemis moon launch
delayed as storm expected in Florida

NASA said

yesterday that it was scrapping Tuesday's plans to launch Artemis, the U.S. return to the moon after five decades, noting concerns about a tropical storm headed to Florida. Tropical Storm Ian is expected to hit Florida, home to the Kennedy Space Center, next week, according to the US National Hurricane Center. Apart from weather and technical challenges like a fuel leak, Artemis I, the uncrewed test flight, signals a major turning point for NASA's post-Apollo human spaceflight program, after decades focused on low-Earth orbit with space shuttles and the International Space Station. Artemis will be headed to the moon, as a stepping stone for a future flight to Mars..



Clashes erupt at Mexico
protest over missing students



cannon in response..

A gang of armed

men killed at least 15 people at a mosque in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state, residents said yesterday. The attack in the Bukkuyum local government area took place during Friday prayers at the Jumu'at central mosque in Ruwan Jema town, three residents told Reuters. "The armed bandits came on motorbikes while holding their guns and moved straight to the mosque and began to shoot sporadically us," resident Amimu Mustapha said. Another resident who asked not to be named said the attack took place at roughly 2pm local time, adding there were many others

Protesters hurling rocks and homemade explosive devices clashed with security forces at a Mexican military base during a demonstration over the disappearance of 43 students in 2014. Hundreds of demonstrators, some shouting "murderers," pulled down metal fencing and tried to enter Military Camp No. 1 in Mexico City in the latest event marking the eighth anniversary of the tragedy. Authorities fired water

Armed bandits kill 15 at mosque in
northwest Nigeria, residents say



COVID-19: Countries worst affected

	Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1	USA	97,880,451	1,081,566	619,885,033
2	India	44,565,874	528,487	
3	France	35,087,657	154,887	
4	Brazil	34,666,387	685,816	6,539,503
5	Germany	32,952,050	149,458	
6	S. Korea	24,594,336	28,140	
7	UK	23,621,952	189,919	599,722,528
8	Italy	22,284,812	176,867	
9	Japan	20,982,896	44,262	
10	Russia	20,746,163	386,662	+249,426
11	Turkey	16,852,382	101,068	
12	Spain	13,403,502	114,009	
13	Vietnam	11,471,340	43,146	New deaths
14	Australia	10,201,791	14,925	
				+539

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	515,645		24,613		442,182	48,850
Saudi Arabia	815,743	+57	9,341	+1	803,035	3,367
UAE	1,025,213	+368	2,343	+1	1,004,581	18,289
Kuwait	658,520		2,563		655,316	641
Oman	397,993		4,260		384,669	9,064
Qatar	446,277	+528	682		127,093	2,892

US sending 'dangerous signals' on Taiwan, China tells Blinken

Reuters | New York

China has accused the United States of sending "very wrong, dangerous signals" on Taiwan after the US secretary of state told his Chinese counterpart on Friday that the maintenance of peace and stability over Taiwan was vitally important.

Taiwan was the focus of the 90-minute, "direct and honest" talks between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York, a U.S. official told reporters.

"For our part, the secretary made crystal clear that, in accordance with our long-standing one-China policy, which again has not changed, the maintenance of peace and stability across the Strait is absolutely, vitally important," the senior US administration official said.

China's foreign ministry, in a statement on the meeting, said the United States was sending "very wrong, dangerous signals" on Taiwan, and the more rampant Taiwan's independence activity, the less likely there would be a peaceful settlement.

"The Taiwan issue is an internal Chinese matter, and the United States has no right to interfere in what method will be used to resolve it," the ministry cited Wang as saying.

Tensions over Taiwan have soared after a visit there in August by US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi - which was followed by large-scale Chinese military drills - as well as a pledge by US President Joe Biden to defend the democratically governed island.

Biden's statement was his most explicit to date about



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with Chinese State Counsellor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi



Tensions over Taiwan have soared after a visit there in August by US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi - which was followed by large-scale Chinese military drills - as well as a pledge by US President Joe Biden to defend the democratically governed island

committing US troops to the defend the island. It was also the latest instance of his appearing to go beyond a long-standing US policy of "strategic ambiguity," which does not make it clear whether the United States would respond militarily to an attack on Taiwan.

The White House has insisted its Taiwan policy has not changed, but China said Biden's remarks sent the wrong signal

to those seeking an independent Taiwan.

In a phone call with Biden in July, Chinese leader Xi Jinping warned about Taiwan, saying "those who play with fire will perish by it."

China sees Taiwan as one of its provinces and has long vowed to bring the island under its control and has not ruled out the use of force to do so.

Taiwan's government strongly objects to China's sovereignty claims and says only the island's 23 million people can decide its future.

Taiwan's foreign ministry, responding to the meeting between Blinken and Wang, said China's "recent provocative actions" had made the Taiwan Strait a focus of discussion, and China was trying to "confuse the international audience with arguments and criticisms that contradict reality."

The State Department had said earlier that Blinken's meeting with Wang was part of a US effort to "maintain open lines of communication and manage competition responsibly," and the senior official said Blinken had reiterated US openness to "cooperating with China on matters of global concern."

North Korea may be preparing to test submarine-launched ballistic missile, South Korea military says

Reuters | Seoul

South Korea's military has detected signs that North Korea may be preparing to test a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), Yonhap news agency reported yesterday, days before a visit by US Vice President Kamala Harris.

The military detected preparations this week in Sinpo,



This photo provided by the North Korean government shows a ballistic missile launched from a submarine

South Hamgyong Province, North Korea, Yonhap reported, citing an unnamed South Korean military source. This is in line with a US-based think tank's report this week, which cited commercial satellite imagery.

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol is aware of signs and movements suggesting North Korean provocations, including SLBMs, the presidential office said in a statement yesterday.

US Vice President Harris is set to visit the region next week and meet with leaders of Japan and South Korea.

A senior US administration

official told a briefing on Friday that a nuclear test or other provocation was possible during Harris' trip to the region, but that they had no predictions or announcements to make.

A US aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea on Friday for the first time in about four years, joining other military vessels to participate in joint drills with South Korean forces.

North Korea has denounced previous US military deployments and joint drills as rehearsals for war and evidence of hostile policies by Washington and Seoul.

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● "Butcher of Mariupol"
appointed Russia's
Deputy Defence Minister

AFP | Kyiv

Russia yesterday toughened penalties for voluntary surrender and refusal to fight with up to 10 years imprisonment and replaced its top logistics general after a series of setbacks to its seven-month war in Ukraine.

The tough new amendments and personnel change come days after Russia instigated partial mobilisation with Kyiv taking back more and more territory in a counter-offensive.

It also comes as Kremlin-held regions of eastern and southern Ukraine voted for a second day on becoming part of Russia, dramatically raising the stakes.

Integrating the four regions into Russia would mean that Moscow would consider any military move there as an attack on its own territory.

Russia's invasion, launched on February 24, and Ukraine's recent gains have laid bare flaws with some analysts seeing logistics as the weak link in Moscow's army.

"Army General Dmitry Bulgakov has been relieved of the post of deputy minister of defence" and will be replaced by Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev, aged 60, the defence ministry said.

The new general who will be

89 dead in Lebanon

AFP | Damascus

Eighty-nine bodies have been recovered since a boat carrying migrants from Lebanon sunk off Syria's coast, Syrian state media said yesterday, as the Lebanese army said it arrested a suspected smuggler behind one of the deadliest recent shipwrecks in the eastern Mediterranean.

Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), called it a "heart-wrenching tragedy".

At least 14 people rescued were recovering in hospitals in Syria while six others were discharged, as search efforts continued, with several people still missing since the boat sank on Thursday.

"There are 89 victims, while 14 people are receiving treatment at Al-Basel Hospital, two of whom are in intensive care," Syria's official news agency SANA reported, quoting Iskandar Ammar, a hospital official.

Lebanon's army said it arrested a Lebanese man who "admitted to organising the recent smuggling operation from Lebanon to Italy by sea".

Lebanon, a country which hosts more than a million refugees from Syria's civil war, has since 2019