

News in brief

◆ **At least three people were killed and six were injured in a major road collision involving over 40 vehicles and a chemical tanker in central China yesterday.** About 10 vehicles caught fire in the crash, which occurred at about 7am on Baomao highway in the city of Tongchuan, in Shaanxi province. Emergency efforts were continuing with many people trapped, state broadcaster CCTV reported. Two people had so far been rescued. The response involved at least 16 fire engines and more than 100 firefighters. The flames were extinguished before they spread to the 34-tonne tanker, which was carrying highly flammable methanol, according to CCTV.



3 dead in China road crash involving 40 vehicles and chemical tanker

◆ **Dozens of nations began pledging billions of dollars in aid for Afghanistan at a conference in Geneva yesterday,** hoping that peace negotiations recently begun between the government and the Taliban will end nearly two decades of war. During the lead up to the quadrennial international donors conference, diplomats reckoned Afghanistan could receive 15-20% less funding than the roughly \$15.2 billion pledged at the last conference in Brussels in 2016 due to uncertainties over the peace process and difficulties getting commitments during the coronavirus pandemic.

International donors meet to pledge billions in aid to Afghanistan



◆ **Paolo Gabriele, the butler of former Pope Benedict who passed on the pontiff's personal documents to the media and was convicted in the so-called "Vatileaks" case, has died.** He was 54. Official Vatican media said on Tuesday he died in a Rome hospital after a long illness. Gabriele worked for several years as Benedict's private butler before leaking letters and other documents from the pope's desk in 2012 to an Italian journalist who wrote a book about corruption in the Vatican.

Papal butler convicted in "Vatileaks" case dies



◆ **Russia said Tuesday its Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine was 95 percent effective** and easier to alternatives, heats up to announcement was the latest in a flurry of breakthroughs as several vaccine makers worldwide published preliminary data showing efficacy rates of 90 percent and higher. Countries are hoping to begin inoculating their populations by year's end or in early 2021 to stop a pandemic that has claimed the lives of nearly 1.4 million people.



Russia says Sputnik V virus vaccine 95pc effective

would be cheaper store than some as the global race develop a jab. The

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

| | Country | Total cases | Total deaths | Global tally |
|----|-----------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | USA | 12,786,174 | 263,899 | 59,733,982 |
| 2 | India | 9,193,982 | 134,383 | |
| 3 | Brazil | 6,088,004 | 169,541 | |
| 4 | France | 2,144,660 | 49,232 | Deaths |
| 5 | Russia | 2,138,828 | 37,031 | |
| 6 | Spain | 1,606,905 | 43,131 | |
| 7 | UK | 1,527,495 | 55,230 | 1,405,813 |
| 8 | Italy | 1,431,795 | 50,453 | |
| 9 | Argentina | 1,374,631 | 37,122 | |
| 10 | Colombia | 1,254,979 | 35,479 | Recovered: |
| 11 | Mexico | 1,049,358 | 101,926 | |
| 12 | Germany | 951,324 | 14,695 | |
| 13 | Peru | 950,557 | 35,641 | 41,325,024 |
| 14 | Poland | 909,066 | 14,314 | |
| | | | | New cases |
| | | | | +191,353 |
| | | | | New deaths |
| | | | | +4,162 |

| Middle East | | | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Country | Total cases | new cases | Total deaths | New Deaths | Total recovered | Active cases |
| Egypt | 113,381 | | 6,560 | | 101,981 | 4,840 |
| Saudi Arabia | 355,741 | +252 | 5,811 | +15 | 344,311 | 5,619 |
| UAE | 161,365 | +1,310 | 559 | +5 | 150,261 | 10,545 |
| Kuwait | 140,795 | +402 | 870 | +2 | 133,407 | 6,518 |
| Oman | 122,579 | +223 | 1,391 | +5 | 113,856 | 7,332 |
| Qatar | 137,642 | +227 | 236 | | 134,698 | 2,708 |

Figures as of closing

Guard against laxity in Covid-19 fight: Modi tells chief ministers

News18

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a virtual meeting yesterday, warned the chief ministers of eight states and union territories against letting their guards down in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. He called for reducing the positivity and fatality rates by focusing on curbing the virus transmission. Even as he underlined that India's COVID-19 situation is more stable than other countries in terms of recovery and fatality rates, the prime minister called for more RT-PCR tests. Modi asked them to work towards bringing the positive

rate to less than 5 per cent and the fatality rate to under 1 per cent and called for more RT-PCR tests. "We need to speed up our efforts to reduce transmission of the virus. Testing, confirmation, contact tracing and data must be given top priority," he said.

The meeting was also attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, while the chief ministers who participated in the virtual interaction include Delhi's Arvind Kejriwal, Rajasthan's Ashok Gehlot, West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee, Maharashtra's Uddhav Thackeray, Chhattisgarh's Bhupesh



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Baghel, Telangana's K Chandrashekhhar Rao and Gujarat's Vijay Rupani. A massive network of testing to treatment is running well in the entire country and it is being regularly widened, the prime minister said.

Modi has held several rounds of virtual meetings with states over the coronavirus situation so far.

While the national daily COVID-19 case count has remained below 50,000 for some time, several urban centres have witnessed a surge, resulting in enforcement of several measures, including curfews in some cities.

Trump clears way for Biden

● **Trump, in a post on Twitter, offered support for the move**

● **Biden forges ahead with building team**

Reuters | Wilmington, Delaware



US President-elect Joe Biden holds videoconference meeting with US Conference of Mayors at his transition headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware

leadership team.

It also paves the way for Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris to receive regular national security briefings that Trump also gets.

Biden and Harris are expected to formally introduce their appointments to critical national security and foreign policy positions in Wilmington, Delaware.

cal national security and foreign policy positions in Wilmington, Delaware.

Biden on Monday tapped trusted aide Antony Blinken to head the State Department and John Kerry, a former U.S. senator, secretary of state and 2004 Democratic presidential nominee, to serve as his special climate envoy.

Biden, who plans to undo many of Trump's "America First" policies, also named Jake Sullivan as his national security adviser and Linda Thomas-Greenfield as US ambassador to the United Nations - both with high-level government experience.

He is likely to tap former Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen to become the next Treasury secretary, according to two Biden allies, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a personnel decision that was not yet public.

'Very Weak President': Chinese Adviser says Biden could 'Start Wars'

News18

A Chinese government advisor has said the country must drop its illusion that the Sino-American relations will automatically improve under the President-elect Joe Biden and that Beijing should prepare for a tough stance from Washington.

Zheng Yongnian, who is the Dean of the Advanced Institute of Global and Contemporary China Studies, a Shenzhen-based think tank, has said that Beijing should utilise every opportunity to mend ties with the US, South China Morning Post reported, according to ANI.

Claiming that American society is 'torn apart', the government advisor said that "Biden couldn't do anything about it."

"He is certainly a very weak President, if he can't sort out domestic issues, then he will do something on the diplomatic front, do something against China. If we say Trump is not interested in promoting democracy and freedom, Biden is. Trump is not interested in war... but a Democratic President could start wars," he said.

