

News in brief

◆ **Russia said yesterday it would investigate** the cause of a large fire that erupted in the early hours of the morning at an oil storage facility in the city of Bryansk 154 km (96 miles) northeast of the border with Ukraine. Unverified social media footage showed what sounded like two explosions followed by a tower of flames, with one unverified video showing a fire raging around a giant fuel reservoir. Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations said nobody had been hurt in the incident. The ministry said in a statement that the fire had broken out at a facility owned by oil pipeline company Transneft at 0200 Moscow time (2300 GMT), and that there had been no need to evacuate any parts of Bryansk, a city of 400,000 people.

Russia investigates large oil depot fire in region near Ukraine

Biden names veteran career diplomat Brink as US ambassador to Ukraine



◆ **US President Joe Biden** named veteran diplomat Bridget Brink

as the new US ambassador to Ukraine, the White House said yesterday, moving to fill a crucial position that was vacant for nearly three years and at a time when Washington is ramping up its support to help Ukraine fend off a Russian invasion. Brink, who is currently serving as the US ambassador to Slovakia, has been a career diplomat for 25 years and has worked in Uzbekistan and Georgia as well as at several senior positions across the State Department and White House National Security Council. A Michigan native who speaks Russian, Brink's "decades of experience make her uniquely suited for this moment in Ukraine's history," a State Department statement said.

◆ **Iran and Saudi Arabia held a fifth round of "positive" talks** in Baghdad last Thursday on normalising bilateral relations, Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh confirmed yesterday. "The fifth round of talks between Saudi Arabia and Tehran were held in Iraq and the talks were progressive and positive," Khatibzadeh told a televised weekly news conference. On Sunday, Iraq's Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein said Baghdad would host a new round of talks. Khatibzadeh said "initial talks were underway between Tehran and Riyadh on sending 40,000 Iranian pilgrims to the haj in Mecca" this year.

Iran confirms fifth round of talks held with Saudi

◆ **US President Joe Biden will visit Israel in the coming months following an invitation** from Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, Bennett's office and the White House said on Sunday. The two leaders spoke on Sunday and Bennett briefed Biden on efforts "to stop the violence and incitement in Jerusalem," Bennett's office said in a statement, in reference to Israeli-Palestinian clashes at the holy city's Al-Aqsa mosque. At least 57 Palestinians were injured in clashes with Israeli police within the mosque compound on Friday, raising concern of a repeat of last year's war between Israel and the Hamas Islamists ruling Gaza. US officials have been engaged with Israelis, Palestinians and Arab

Biden to visit Israel in coming months after Bennett invitation

representatives in the region amid the tensions. Biden "took note of ongoing efforts between Israeli and Palestinian officials to lower tensions and ensure a peaceful conclusion to the holy season of Ramadan" and affirmed "his unwavering support for Israel and its defense needs," the White House said in its statement.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

	Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1	USA	82,662,748	1,018,335	509,691,132
2	India	43,060,086	522,223	
3	Brazil	30,349,463	662,701	
4	France	28,303,931	145,060	6,243,826
5	Germany	24,173,897	134,683	
6	UK	21,933,206	173,352	
7	Russia	18,144,788	375,061	462,583,933
8	S. Korea	16,929,564	22,243	
9	Italy	16,161,339	162,781	
10	Turkey	15,018,547	98,691	+215,582
11	Spain	11,786,036	103,908	
12	Vietnam	10,563,502	43,013	
13	Argentina	9,060,923	128,344	New deaths
14	Netherlands	8,040,607	22,227	
				+882

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	753,526	+109	9,079	+1	740,871	3,576
UAE	897,351	+215	2,302		880,145	14,904
Kuwait	631,294		2,555		627,899	840
Oman	389,074	+21	4,258	+1	384,172	644
Qatar	364,300	+113	677		362,776	847

Russia warns US against

● **Russia warns West over arms supplies to Ukraine**

● **US pouring oil on fire of Ukraine conflict - ambassador**

● **US pledges more security aid**

● **Blinken, Austin visit Kyiv**

Reuters | London

Russia told the United States to stop sending more arms to Ukraine, warning that large Western deliveries of weapons were inflaming the conflict and would lead to more losses, Moscow's ambassador to Washington said.

Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine has killed thousands of people, displaced millions more and raised fears of a wider confrontation between Russia and the United States - by far the world's two biggest nuclear powers. The United States has ruled out sending its own or NATO forces to Ukraine but Washington and its European allies have supplied weapons to Kyiv such as drones, Howitzer heavy artillery, anti-air-

800m

US President Joe Biden pledged \$800 million in more weaponry for Ukraine on Thursday and said he would ask Congress for more money to help bolster support



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin attend a meeting with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

Russia says it will let civilians leave besieged steel plant

Reuters

Russia's defence ministry said its troops would halt hostilities to allow civilians to leave the besieged steel plant Azovstal in Ukraine's port city of Mariupol from 1400 Moscow time (1100 GMT) yesterday.

The ministry said any civilians trapped at the facility could leave in whichever direction they chose.



Service members of pro-Russian troops, including fighters of the Chechen special forces unit, stand in front of the destroyed administration building of Azovstal Iron and Steel Works

craft Stinger and anti-tank Javelin missiles.

Anatoly Antonov, Russia's ambassador to the United States, said such arms deliveries were aimed at weakening Russia but that they were escalating the conflict in Ukraine while undermining efforts to reach some sort of peace agreement.

"What the Americans are doing is pouring oil on the flames," Antonov told the Rossiya 24 TV channel. "I see only an attempt to raise the stakes, to aggravate

the situation, to see more losses."

Antonov, who has served as ambassador to Washington since 2017, said an official diplomatic note had been sent to Washington expressing Russia's concerns. No reply had been given, Antonov said. "We stressed the unacceptability of this situation when the United States of America pours weapons into Ukraine, and we demanded an end to this practice," Antonov said. The interview was replayed on Russian state television throughout Monday.

Funerals held in Tripoli after shipwreck, dozens still missing

● **A seventh body was found yesterday morning**

Reuters | Tripoli, Lebanon

The families of migrants killed who died when their vessel capsized Lebanon's northern coast held funerals in the port city of Tripoli yesterday while rescue efforts continued to find dozens still missing.

A dinghy carrying Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian migrants sank late on Saturday off the coast near Tripoli when naval forces collided with the vessel as the smuggler tried to evade capture.

The United Nations' refugee agency (UNHCR) estimates the dinghy was carrying 80 people at the time it capsized. The authorities say 47 people were rescued, leaving around two dozen unaccounted for.

A seventh body was found yesterday morning, the head of the Tripoli port authority told Reuters.

In Tripoli's Bab al-Tebbaneh



People stand near stretchers that are prepared for dead bodies after a boat capsized off the Lebanese coast of Tripoli overnight, at port of Tripoli, northern Lebanon



I tried to grab my son but I got a blanket instead. The water took him from me

AMID DANDACH

and a young man from the Dandachi family who buried their loved ones while desperate to hear the fate of another eight still missing, among them children.

Amid Dandachi, 38, said he and his wife had barely survived the shipwreck. Their children likely hadn't.

"I tried to grab my son but I got a blanket instead. The water took him from me," he told Reuters, his eyes red from crying.

His brother Bilal was also still

waiting to know what happened to his two children and wife, whose bodies he suspects are trapped in the sunken dinghy.

In the same neighborhood, another funeral was being held for two more victims of the disaster - a young girl and a woman from the Sammak family. Men on foot and atop motorcycles fired rifles in the air in mourning as they accompanied the bodies to the cemetery.

In a press conference on Sunday, the army said naval forces had collided with the dinghy as the smuggler in charge tried to evade the military. It previously said the boat had left the coast of Lebanon illegally.

Breaking down into tears, Bilal Dandachi said Lebanon's naval forces had not done enough to rescue those drowning.

"I only have one request from the army command - a transparent investigation. It's the right of my children and the children of my brother and the children of all these people," he said.

In addition to the sunken dinghy, three boats carrying a total of 64 migrants had departed Lebanon this year, of which two were intercepted, according to UNHCR.

US to reopen Ky

● **Washington pledges \$713 mln in military aid**

● **Russia demands Washington stop sending arms**

● **US diplomats to return to Ukraine in sign of support**

● **Huge fire hits Russian fuel depot near border**

Reuters | Kyiv

The United States will reopen its embassy in Ukraine soon, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday after he and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Kyiv, promising more military aid and hailing the fight against Russia's invasion.

Both men said the fact they were able to come to Kyiv was proof of Ukraine's tenacity in forcing Moscow to abandon an assault on the capital last month.

"What you've done in repelling the Russians in the battle of Kyiv is extraordinary and inspiring quite frankly to the rest of the world," Austin told President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at a meeting overnight after a train journey from Poland. "We are here to support you in any way possible." Said Blinken: "The reason

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Kyiv on Sunday.

They told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of more than \$322 million in new military