

News in brief

New Zealand leader plans to discuss contested Indo-Pacific with Biden on Tuesday

New Zealand Prime



Minister Jacinda Ardern said she will meet with US President Joe Biden at the White House next Tuesday, when she expects to discuss increasing competition in the Indo-Pacific, trade and the US economic role in the region. The two countries are close allies but the meeting with Biden had been uncertain after Ardern

tested positive for COVID-19 earlier this month, given strict White House pandemic protocols. Ardern, who spoke with reporters on Thursday after delivering the commencement address at Harvard University during a visit to the United States, said she would also meet with US Vice President Kamala Harris the same day.

China and Russia on Thursday vetoed a US-led bid at the United Nations to toughen sanctions on North Korea over its missile launches, laying bare divisions that Western envoys fear would be exploited by Pyongyang.

China, Russia veto US bid at UN to punish North Korea



The Security Council resolution put forward by the United States would have reduced the amount of oil North Korea could legally import as punishment for a test Wednesday of an intercontinental ballistic missile. The resolution enjoyed the support of the 13 other members of the Security Council, although some US allies quietly wondered whether Washington should have gone ahead with the vote knowing the unflinching opposition from Beijing and Moscow.

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's son cleared in high-profile drugs case

Indian authorities have dropped a case



against the son of Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan who was arrested during a raid on a cruise ship last year on suspicion of having drugs on him.

India's main drug law enforcement agency, the Narcotics Control Board (NCB), said yesterday it was dropping the case against Aryan Khan, 24, and five others due to a lack of "sufficient evidence", while pressing charges against 14 others.

Falling ice boulders killed two climbers and hurt nine more on a peak in southwestern Switzerland yesterday, prompting a major rescue operation, police said.

Falling ice boulders kill two, hurt nine on Swiss Alp



Several chunks of ice fell off the Grand Combin mountain in the Val de Bagnes region of Valais canton, pummeling the climbers below. Seven rescue helicopters scrambled to the site, evacuating others of the 17 climbers who were at the scene in various groups. The two who died were a 40-year-old French national and a 65-year-old Spaniard, police said. Two of the nine hurt sustained serious injuries.

Seven dead as bus carrying Indian soldiers falls into remote gorge



Rescues at the site of the accident

AP | New Delhi

A bus carrying soldiers fell into a gorge in India's remote Ladakh region yesterday, killing at least seven and injuring 19 others, officials said.

The bus plunged off a mountainous road and rolled down the 25-meter (80-foot)-deep gorge in the frigid region's Nubra Valley, police said.

The injured soldiers were flown to a military hospital in

the northern city of Chandigarh, the military said.

Authorities were investigating whether the accident was caused by a mechanical failure or driver negligence. The privately owned bus was hired by the military to transport soldiers in the high-altitude region.

The accident occurred near an area where the borders of India, Pakistan and China meet, in what strategic experts call the world's only three-way nuclear-armed junction.

Turkey's talks with Sweden, Finland made little progress on NATO concerns, sources close to talks say

Reuters | Ankara

Talks between Turkish officials and delegations from Sweden and Finland this week in Turkey made little headway overcoming Ankara's objections to the Nordic countries joining NATO, and it is not yet clear when further discussions will take place, according to two sources.

"It is not an easy process," a senior Turkish official said yesterday. "They need to take concrete steps that will be difficult. Further negotiations will continue. But a date doesn't seem very close."

Finland and Sweden formally applied to join NATO last week to boost their security in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

All 30 NATO members must approve enlargement plans. But Turkey challenged the move saying the Nordic countries harbour people linked to what it calls terrorist groups, and because they have halted arms exports to Ankara. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said yesterday that his country expects Sweden and Finland to take concrete action and halt such support before it lifts its objections.

Russia captures encircles most of Sievierodonetsk

Pro-Russia separatists say have captured street

Governor says two-thirds of Sievierodonetsk encircled

Reuters | Washington

Russian forces in eastern Ukraine captured the centre of the railway hub town of Lyman and encircled most of Sievierodonetsk, Ukrainian officials acknowledged yesterday, as Kyiv's forces fell back in the face of Moscow's biggest advance for weeks.

Ukraine insisted its forces were still holding firm at new defensive lines in the eastern Donbas region, despite the apparent Russian advances on two of the major fronts there, battles that showed how momentum has shifted in recent days.

Moscow's separatist proxies said they were fully in control of Lyman, a railway hub that Russia has been attacking from the north in one of the main axes of its advance.

Ukrainian officials acknowledged that Russia had captured most of the town. But the defence ministry said forces were still holding out in northeastern and southwestern districts, blocking the Russians from launching an advance towards Sloviansk, a major city a half-hour drive further southwest.

Further east, Russian forces had encircled two-thirds of the city of Sievierodonetsk, Luhansk regional governor Serhiy Gaidai said. The city is the easternmost major population centre still held by Ukraine in the Donbas, and Russia has been trying to trap Ukraine's main fighting force inside it and its twin city Lysychansk across the Siverskiy Donets river. Ninety percent of buildings in Sievierodonetsk were destroyed, Gaidai said.

Oleskiy Arestovych, an adviser to Ukraine's president, said in an interview overnight that Lyman had fallen, and that



Service members of pro-Russian residential building during Ukraine

the well-organised Russian showed that Moscow's proving its tactics and op

After being driven back Kyiv in March and from the second biggest city Kh month, Russian forces a strongest advance in wee Donbas region.

The advance has gained Russian forces broke thr lines south of Sievierodo of Popasna last week.

Popasna, reached by Re in Russian-held territory c a blasted wasteland of bu apartments and shattered ings. Russian tanks and oth cles tore through the rubb kicking up dust with th low-flying attack helico overhead. The bloated bo in combat uniform lay in Natalia Kovalenko had f

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	85,573,432	1,030,775
2 India	43,147,530	524,539
3 Brazil	30,880,512	666,248
4 France	29,439,416	148,129
5 Germany	26,247,110	139,132
6 UK	22,276,975	178,313
7 Russia	18,315,292	378,784
8 S. Korea	18,053,287	24,103
9 Italy	17,355,119	166,476
10 Turkey	15,068,017	98,948
11 Spain	12,280,345	106,105
12 Vietnam	10,715,247	43,078
13 Argentina	9,178,795	128,825
14 Japan	8,737,532	30,458

Global tally

530,528,029

Deaths

6,308,412

Recovered:

501,154,945

New cases

+357,914

New deaths

+694

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	515,645		24,613		442,182	48,850
Saudi Arabia	765,788	+483	9,140	+2	750,232	6,416
UAE	906,639	+403	2,302		890,311	14,026
Kuwait	632,781		2,555		629,695	531
Oman	389,473		4,260		384,669	544
Qatar	367,939	+132	677		365,987	1,275

Kids called 911 from classroom during Texas massacre as police waited outside - official

Reuters | London

Nearly 20 police officers waited for nearly an hour in a hallway outside the classrooms where a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers in a Texas elementary school, even as panicked 911 calls were placed from inside the rooms pleading for police to intervene, authorities said yesterday.

At least one child and one teacher made multiple calls to the 911 emergency number from the two connecting classrooms after 18-year-old Salvador Ramos had entered with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, according to Colonel Steven McCraw, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

In hindsight, McCraw told reporters at a news briefing, "it was the wrong decision" for the onsite commander to wait for a specially trained tactical team before trying to enter the classroom at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

Someone whom McCraw did not identify called the 911 line



Candles are lit at dawn at a memorial site in the town square for the victims killed in this week's elementary school shooting

multiple times starting at 12:03 p.m., telling police in a whisper that there were multiple dead and that there were still "eight to nine" students alive, the colonel said. A student called at 12:47 p.m. and asked the operator to "please send the police now."

Officers did not go into the classroom until 12:50 p.m., according to McCraw, when the US Border Patrol tactical team used keys from a janitor to open

the locked door and kill Ramos.

Several officers had an initial exchange of gunfire with Ramos shortly after he entered the school at 11:33 a.m., when two officers were grazed by bullets. There were as many as 19 officers in the hallway by 12:03 p.m., McCraw said - the same time that the first 911 call from inside the classroom was received.

Police recovered 142 spent rounds inside the school from



The official said there was a barrage of gunfire shortly after Ramos entered the classroom where they killed Ramos but that shots were "sporadic" for much of the 48 minutes while officers waited outside the hallway

Ramos' rifle, as well as nearly two dozen more on school property outside the building, McCraw said.

Videos that emerged on Thursday showed frantic parents urging police to storm the school during the attack, with some having to be restrained by police.