

News in brief

Thai protesters practise 'coup prevention' in latest rally ◆ Thousands of democracy activists blocked a major junction in Bangkok to rehearse "coup prevention" strategies in the latest round of Thailand's anti-government protests. The country has for months been rocked by youth-led protests demanding a new constitution, reform of the untouchable monarchy, and for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to resign. Prayut, who came to power in a 2014 coup, this week played down the prospects of being overthrown or introducing martial law.

Thousands attend funeral of Sudan's last democratically elected PM ◆ Thousands of Sudanese packed into the city of Omdurman for the funeral of Sadiq al-Mahdi, Sudan's last democratically elected prime minister, who died from the coronavirus at the age of 84. Mourners in traditional white garments, mostly wearing masks, wept and waved national flags ahead of prayers for the two-time prime minister, who was a central figure in Sudan's political and spiritual life for more than half a century.

Tens of thousands of Sadr supporters pack Iraqi capital ◆ Tens of thousands of supporters of Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr packed the streets of the Iraqi capital in a show of force as preparations ramp up for June parliamentary elections. Despite the novel coronavirus pandemic, tens of thousands gathered shoulder-to-shoulder for noon Muslim prayers in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, spilling out into the surrounding streets. The Sadrist movement had called for protests to back the reform of what it says is Iraq's corrupt state, but its populist leader has also been making moves ahead of next year's vote.

Swiss politicians have voiced outrage and demanded an investigation after revelations that a second Swiss encryption company was allegedly used by the CIA and its German counterpart to spy on governments worldwide. A first investigation had revealed back in February an elaborate, decades-long set-up, in which the CIA and its German counterpart creamed off the top-secret communications of governments through their hidden control of a Swiss encryption company called Crypto.

France outlaws discrimination based on regional accents ◆ The French lower house of parliament approved a law banning discrimination based on a person's accent, calling the practice "a form of racism". The text, overwhelmingly adopted by 98 votes to 3, adds accents to the list of causes of actionable discrimination, along with racism, sexism and discrimination against the disabled. The maximum penalty proposed in the new legislation is three years' imprisonment and a fine of 45,000 euros.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	13,285,319	269,845	61,633,362
2 India	9,325,786	135,906	
3 Brazil	6,209,404	171,564	Deaths
4 Russia	2,215,533	38,558	
5 France	2,183,660	50,957	1,443,858
6 Spain	1,646,192	44,668	
7 UK	1,589,301	57,551	Recovered:
8 Italy	1,538,217	53,677	
9 Argentina	1,399,431	37,941	42,617,632
10 Colombia	1,280,487	36,019	
11 Mexico	1,078,594	104,242	New cases
12 Germany	1,013,582	15,911	
13 Poland	958,416	16,147	+334,893
14 Peru	956,347	35,785	
			New deaths

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	114,475		6,596		102,268	5,611
Saudi Arabia	356,691	+302	5,857	+17	345,622	5,212
UAE	165,250	+1,283	567	+3	152,708	11,975
Kuwait	141,876	+329	874	+2	135,303	5,699
Oman	122,579		1,391		113,856	7,332
Qatar	138,250	+184	237		135,370	2,643

Denmark mulls exhuming mink carcasses

Denmark wants to dig up 'zombie mink' that resurfaced from mass graves

Denmark's government wants to dig up mink that were culled to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, after some resurfaced from graves

Reuters | Washington

Denmark's government said yesterday that it was considering digging up and cremating the hastily buried carcasses of millions of culled minks in the latest twist to a virus-linked farming scandal that has shaken the government.

After a mutated version of the novel coronavirus was found in the animals, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced a cull in early November of the estimated 15 to 17 million minks in the Scandinavian nation, the world's biggest exporter of their fur.

Once a mass gassing programme had already begun, a court challenge to the order found that the executive's decision had no legal basis, leading to the resignation of the agriculture minister.

Now problems have emerged with the disposal of the dead animals amid fears that phosphorus and nitrogen could be released in large quantities into the soil



Dead mink being disposed in a military area near Holstebro in Denmark (file photo)

surrounding mass graves due to the decomposition process.

Denmark's new minister for agriculture, Rasmus Prehn, yesterday expressed his backing of the idea of exhuming the culled minks and burning them, while saying such a move would need the approval of the country's environment agency.

"The desire to get rid of the minks and burned I have had since the first day I heard of it," he told broadcaster TV2.

A majority of the Danish parliament, where the idea has been debated, supports the idea.

Earlier this week, in the western Holstebro municipality, gases released during the decomposition process started to push the carcasses back to the surface of a burial pit that was too shallow.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Frederiksen wiped away tears and apologised for the handling of the crisis as she visited one of the affected mink farmers.

"I don't have any issues with apologising for the course of events, because mistakes have been made," Frederiksen, told broadcaster TV2

The cull was ordered out of

YOU KNOW WHAT

Dead mink were tipped into trenches at a military area in western Denmark and covered with two metres of soil. But hundreds have begun resurfacing, pushed out of the ground by what authorities say is gas from their decomposition. Newspapers have referred to them as the "zombie mink"

fears that a mutated coronavirus found in mink would render vaccines against the disease less effective.

Last week, the Danish government concluded that the potential threat to human vaccines was "very likely extinguished", in the absence of any new cases of the mutated version.

More than 10 million minks have already been culled in the Scandinavian country, according to the latest tally.

AstraZeneca CEO expects to run new global trial of COVID-19 vaccine

Reuters | London

AstraZeneca is likely to run an additional global trial to assess the efficacy of its COVID-19 vaccine using a lower dosage, its chief executive was quoted as saying amid questions over the results of its late-stage study.

Instead of adding the trial to an ongoing US process, AstraZene-



ca might launch a fresh study to evaluate a lower dosage of its vaccine that performed better than a full dosage, Pascal Soriot told Bloomberg News.

"Now that we've found what looks like a better efficacy we have to validate this, so we need to do an additional study," he said, adding that the new, likely global,

study could be faster because it would need fewer subjects as the efficacy was already known to be high.

The news comes as AstraZeneca faces questions about its success rate that some experts say could hinder its chances of getting speedy US and EU regulatory approval.

S Korea foils North's attempt to hack COVID-19 vaccine makers

AFP | Seoul

South Korea's intelligence Agency foiled North Korean attempts to hack into South Korean companies developing coronavirus vaccines, the News1 agency reported yesterday, citing a member of the parliamentary intelligence committee.

Lawmaker Ha Tae-keung said after being briefed by the National Intelligence Service that the agency did not specify how many and which drugmakers were targeted but said there was no damage from the hacking attempts, News1 said.

Last week, Microsoft said hackers working for the Russian and North Korean governments have tried to break into the networks of seven pharmaceutical companies and vaccine researchers in South Korea, Canada, France, India and the United States.

Brazil's Bolsonaro says he will not take coronavirus vaccine

Reuters | London

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said evening that he will not take a coronavirus vaccine, the latest in a series of statements he has made expressing skepticism toward coronavirus vaccination programs.

In statements broadcast live over multiple social media platforms, the right-wing leader added that Congress was unlikely to require Brazilians to take a vaccine.

Brazil has the second highest number of coronavirus deaths in the world, and Bolsonaro has for months played down the seri-



Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro attends a ceremony at the Planalto Palace in Brasilia

ousness of the pandemic despite being infected with the virus in July.

"I'm telling you, I'm not going to take it. It's my right," he said. Bolsonaro also expressed skepticism over the effectiveness of mask wearing in the broadcast, implying there was little conclusive evidence of the effec-

tiveness of masks in stemming the transmission of the virus.

The president has repeatedly said Brazilians will not be required to be vaccinated when a coronavirus vaccine becomes widely available. In October, he joked on Twitter that vaccination would be required only for his dog.

"I'm telling you, I'm not going to take it. It's my right"

JAIR BOLSONARO