

News in brief

Wagner chief writes to White House over new sanctions

◆ The head of the Russian private military contractor



Wagner published yesterday a short letter to the White House asking what crime his company was accused of, after Washington announced new sanctions on the group. White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday that Wagner, which has been supporting Russian forces in their invasion of Ukraine and claiming credit for battlefield advances, would be designated a significant Transnational Criminal Organization.

◆ The fast-spreading Omicron XBB.1.5 is estimated

Omicron subvariant XBB.1.5 makes up nearly half of US COVID cases- CDC

to make up nearly half of US COVID-19 cases, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed on Friday, putting it on track to become the dominant subvariant in the country. It is estimated to account for 49.1% of COVID cases in the country in the week ended Jan. 21, a jump from 37.2% last week. The subvariant is an offshoot of XBB, a combination of two other Omicron sub-variants, that has been rapidly gaining ground in United States, particularly in the northeast.



Canada to repatriate 23 citizens from Syria

◆ Canada will repatriate twenty-three citizens who have been detained in northeast Syria in camps for family members of Islamic State group fighters, officials and a lawyer said. It would be the largest such repatriation of IS family members yet for Canada, and it comes after the families challenged the government in court, arguing Ottawa was obliged to repatriate the group under the Canadian



Charter of Rights and Freedoms. On Friday, the foreign ministry announced its decision to repatriate six Canadian women and 13 infants. And a court later ruled that four men seeking repatriation as part of the group must also be sent back to Canada, said lawyer Barbara Jackman, who is representing one of the men.

◆ Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes attempted to flee the US shortly after

Theranos founder attempted to flee US - prosecutors

her conviction on fraud charges last year, prosecutors claim. According to a new court filing, the 38-year-old bought a one-way ticket to Mexico last January. "Only after the government raised this unauthorised flight... was the trip cancelled," prosecutors said. Holmes was convicted for defrauding investors in her blood testing start-up that was once valued at \$9bn (£7.5bn).

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Radio signal from ancient galaxy is most distant ever detected

Yahoo | New Delhi

A huge radio telescope in India has picked up a radio signal from the most distant galaxy ever recorded - more than eight billion years ago.

Detecting radio signals from distant galaxies is difficult as the signals become weaker the further away a galaxy is from Earth, making it tricky for recent radio telescopes to pick up.

Researchers from Montreal in Canada and India have captured a radio signal at a specific wavelength known as the 21cm line, allowing astronomers to peer into the secrets of the early universe.

Arbab Chakraborty, a post-doctoral researcher at Montreal's McGill University, said: "A galaxy emits different



The Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope in Pune, India

It's the equivalent to a look-back in time of 8.8 billion years

ARNAB CHAKRABORTY, A POST-DOCTORAL RESEARCHER AT MONTREAL'S MCGILL UNIVERSITY

kinds of radio signals. Until now, it's only been possible to capture this particular signal from a galaxy nearby, limiting our knowledge to those galaxies closer to Earth.

"But thanks to the help of a naturally occurring phenomenon called gravitational lensing, we can capture a faint signal from a record-breaking distance.

"This will help us understand the composition of galaxies at much greater distances from Earth."

For the first time, researchers were able to detect the signal from a distant star-forming galaxy known as SDSSJ0826+5630 and measure its gas composition.



The signal detected by the team was emitted from this galaxy when the universe was only 4.9 billion years old, enabling the researchers to glimpse into the secrets of the early universe

Zelenskyy honours those killed in helicopter crash

Ukraine honours interior minister, other senior officials, killed in helicopter crash

Reuters | Washington

A tearful Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy attended a memorial service yesterday to commemorate seven senior Interior Ministry officials killed in a helicopter crash this week, a fresh blow to a nation already grieving its many war dead.

Interior Minister Denys Monastyrskyi, his deputy and five other high-ranking ministry officials were killed when their French-made Super Puma helicopter plummeted amid fog into a nursery on the eastern outskirts of Kyiv on Wednesday.

Another seven people were killed, including one child, in the crash. Officials are still investigating the cause of the crash.

The helicopter went down just days after at least 45 people were killed in a Russian missile attack that partially levelled a block of flats in the southeastern city of



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and first lady Olena Zelenska attend a memorial ceremony

mental advances 11 months into its full-scale invasion. "The indescribable sadness is covering the soul," Zelenskyy wrote in a Telegram post yesterday. "Ukraine is losing its best sons and daughters every day."

Zelenskyy and his wife, Olena Zelenska, paid their respects to the victims' relatives inside the hulking Ukrainian House cultural centre in central Kyiv. A crowd of mourners snaked outside toward

Independence Square. Kyrylo Budanov, the military intelligence chief, described

Monastyrskyi's death as "a huge loss".

"If not for (Monastyrskyi), everything could have been completely different," he told Ukrainian media, referring to the resistance Ukraine mounted after Moscow's Feb. 24 assault.

"He is a true hero of this country," Monastyrskyi had been flying to a location near the frontline, a police spokesperson said on Thursday.

YOU KNOW WHAT

The cause of the crash is not known but Zelenskyy said earlier that it happened because the country is at war. That view was repeated by Ruslan Stefanchuk, chairman of Ukraine's parliament, speaking after the service

Chris Hipkins to be New Zealand PM



Chris Hipkins speaks to members of the media, after being confirmed as the only nomination to replace Jacinda Ardern as leader of the Labour Party

Reuters | Wellington

Chris Hipkins, who played a significant role in New Zealand's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, is set to replace Jacinda Ardern as prime minister after emerging yesterday as the only candidate to lead the ruling Labour Party.

Hipkins, 44, is expected to be confirmed as the new leader at a meeting of Labour's 64 lawmakers, or Caucus, on Sunday.

"I think we're an incredibly strong team," Hipkins told a news conference after the party announced him as the sole candidate.

"We've gone through this process with unity and we'll continue to do that. I'm feeling really fortunate to be working with such an amazing group of people who have a real commitment to the service of the people of New Zealand."

Known as "Chippy", Hipkins built a reputation for competence

in tackling COVID-19 and was a troubleshooter for Ardern when other cabinet ministers were struggling.

He would not be drawn on his policy plans. A cabinet reshuffle proposed by Ardern would go ahead, but he said he planned to keep Grant Robertson as finance minister.

More bodies found Friday following an avalanche that buried vehicles outside a highway tunnel in Tibet, raising the death toll to 28, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Images from the scene at the exit of the tunnel connecting the city of Nyingchi in Tibet's southwest with an outlying county showed about half a dozen backhoes digging through deep snow. Reports said around 1,000 rescuers had joined the effort.

Tons of snow and ice collapsed onto the mouth of the tunnel on Tuesday evening trapping drivers in their ve-

World's oldest dog is chihuahua

◆ Spike, who is 23 years old, was 'severely neglected' when found by owner Rita Kimball in August 2009

Telegraph | Camden, Ohio

A dog who was found abandoned in a supermarket car park has gone on to become a Guinness World Record holder, being named the world's oldest living dog.

Chihuahua cross Spike - who is 23 years old and lives in Camden, Ohio - was taken in by Rita Kimball and her family after they found him in a "severely

neglected" state in August 2009. Ms Kimball said that despite the dog being in the condition he was, as soon as she opened the car door "Spike jumped



Spike with the Guinness World Record

More bodies found in Tibet

Reuters | Beijing

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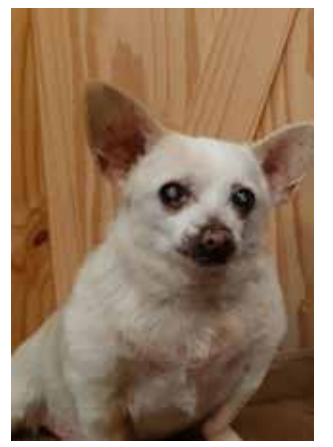
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Rescuers search for survivors following China's Tibet Autonomous Region

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