

News in brief

Libya urged to reschedule presidential vote 'swiftly'

The US and four European powers on Friday urged war-torn

Libya to quickly set a new date for delayed presidential elections. In a joint statement, they urged the North African country's leaders to "swiftly" name a new date and issue the final list of presidential candidates, which had been a key point of contention in the run-up to the polls that were set for Friday. "We call on the relevant

Libyan authorities to respect the aspirations of the Libyan people for prompt elections," said Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States.

Mali's government has denied any deployment of Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group following charges by a group of 15 Western powers involved in the fight against jihadists in the Sahel country. The government "gives a formal denial to these baseless allegations" of "an alleged deployment of elements from a private security company in Mali," it said in a statement released late Friday. Mali's government "demands that proof be brought to it by independent sources" and said "Russian trainers" were in Mali as part of strengthening the operational capacity of the national defence and security forces.

Mali denies deployment of Russian mercenaries



Court sentences two Mexican army officers to 30 years for femicide

A court in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas has

sentenced two army officers to 30 years in prison for femicide over the killing of a female soldier, the state attorney general's office said. In addition to handing down the jail terms, the court ordered the army captains to each pay a fine of almost 520,000 pesos (\$25,194) for killing the 28-year-old woman in April 2019, according to the attorney general's office.

A South African cabinet minister is demanding the cancellation of an upcoming auction

South Africa objects to auction of Nelson Mandela's cell key

in the US of a key to the Robben Island prison cell in Cape Town where the late Nelson Mandela, the country's first Black president and internally renowned rights activist, was long jailed for his opposition to apartheid. The key is among Mandela memorabilia being sold by Guernsey's auction house in New York on January 28.



Russia's communication watchdog has blocked the website of the prominent protest monitor OVD-Info after a court ruling.

Russia blocks website of protest monitoring group OVD-Info

according to the group, as Moscow continues to press ahead with a sweeping crackdown on dissent. OVD-Info - which has, for years, documented anti-Kremlin protests and provides legal support to victims of political persecution - said yesterday that the Roskomnadzor media regulator had moved to restrict access to its site earlier this week.

More than 30 killed, bodies burnt in Myanmar's Kayah state

Reuters | London

More than 30 people, including women and children, were killed and their bodies burnt in Myanmar's conflict-torn Kayah state on Friday, according to a local resident, media reports and a local human rights group.

Karenni Human Rights Group said they found the burnt bodies of internally displaced people, including elders, women and children killed by the military that rules Myanmar, near Mo So village of Hpruso town yesterday.

"We strongly denounce the inhumane and brutal killing which violates human rights," the group said in a Facebook post.

The Myanmar military said it had shot and killed an unspecified number of "terrorists with weapons" from the opposition armed forces in the village, state media said. The people were in seven vehicles and did not stop for the military, it said.

The Myanmar military could not immediately be reached for comment.

Photos shared by the human rights group and local media showed the charred remains of bodies on burnt-out truckbeds.

The Karenni National Defence Force, one of the largest of several civilian militias opposing the junta that led a Feb. 1 coup, said the dead were not their members but civilians seeking refuge from the conflict.

"We were so shocked at seeing that all the dead bodies were different sizes, including children, women and old people," a commander from group told Reuters, asking not to be named.

A villager who asked not to be named for security reasons said he was aware of the fire on



Burned vehicles are seen in Hpruso township in Kayah state, Myanmar



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Friday night but could not go to the scene as there was shooting.

"I went to see this morning. I saw dead bodies that had been burnt, and also the clothes of children and women spread around," he told Reuters by phone.

Meanwhile fighting in another part of the country, near the Thai border where the Myanmar military continues to clash with a rebel group, resulted in a wayward rocket-propelled

grenade damaging a house on the Thailand side of the border with no deaths or injuries, Thai authorities said yesterday.

The Myanmar military carried out airstrikes a day earlier on an area controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) near the border in an escalation of fighting that flared up last week and has since sent thousands fleeing into Thailand.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military overthrew the elected government of Nobel Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi almost 11 months ago, claiming fraud in a November election that her party had won. International observers have said the ballot was fair.

Civilians enraged by the coup and subsequent crackdown on protesters have been taking up arms. Many local resistance forces have sprung up across the country.

The military has outlawed many opponents, labelling them traitors or terrorists, including a self-proclaimed National Unity Government that seeks to lobby the international community and prevent the junta from consolidating power.

NASA's telescope

James Webb Space Te

The \$9bn observatory seeks out faint light from the first stars and galaxies, providing a glimpse into cosmic creation

Reuters | Washington

NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, built to give the world its first glimpse of the universe as it existed when the earliest galaxies formed, was launched by rocket early yesterday from the northeastern coast of South America, opening a new era of astronomy.

The revolutionary \$9 billion infrared telescope, described by NASA as the premiere space-science observatory of the next decade, was carried aloft inside the cargo bay of an Ariane 5 rocket that blasted off at about 7:20 a.m. EST (1220 GMT) from the European Space Agency's (ESA) launch base in French Guiana.

The flawless Christmas Day launch, with a countdown conducted in French, was carried live on a joint NASA-ESA webcast. The liftoff capped a project decades in the making, coming to fruition after years of repeated delays and cost over-runs.

"From a tropical rain forest to the edge of time itself, James Webb begins a voyage back to the birth of the universe," a NASA commentator said as the two-stage launch vehicle, fitted with double solid-rocket boosters, roared off its launch pad into

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	52,996,163	837,671	279,725,740
2 India	34,779,815	479,520	
3 Brazil	22,230,737	618,429	Deaths
4 UK	11,891,292	147,857	
5 Russia	10,368,299	303,250	5,412,553
6 Turkey	9,286,986	81,403	Recovered:
7 France	9,088,371	122,546	249,978,370
8 Germany	6,999,103	111,022	New cases
9 Iran	6,182,905	131,348	
10 Spain	5,718,007	89,019	+396,175
11 Italy	5,622,431	136,530	New deaths
12 Argentina	5,445,236	117,008	
13 Colombia	5,118,254	129,686	+3,440
14 Indonesia	4,261,667	144,053	

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	379,654		21,546		315,896	42,212
Saudi Arabia	552,406	+325	8,870	+1	540,744	2,792
UAE	749,530	+1,621	2,156	+1	740,707	6,667
Kuwait	414,761		2,467		411,256	1,038
Oman	304,984		4,113		300,235	636
Qatar	247,796	+279	614		244,615	2,567

At least 30 dead in migrant boat accidents in Greece

Reuters | Athens

Greek coast guards scoured for survivors in the Aegean Sea yesterday after the latest in a series of migrant boat accidents that have killed at least 30 people in just days.

Late Friday, the coastguard found 16 bodies, including those of three women and a baby, and rescued 63 people from a boat that overturned and sank near the island of Paros.

According to those rescued, around 80 people had been on the vessel that was bound for Italy.

Smugglers operating from Cesme and Bodrum on the Turkish coast are packing migrants in yachts to send them to Italy using new, more dangerous routes, according to the ERT television channel.

Three coast guard patrol boats, private vessels, a coast guard plane as well as divers searched for more survivors, officials said.

The latest tragedy -- the third since Wednesday -- came amid high smuggler activity not seen in Greek waters in months.

Hours earlier, 11 bodies were recovered from another boat



Migrants rescued from their dinghy in their attempt to cross the sea disembark a coast guard boat at the port of Chios Island, Greece (file photo)



This shipwreck is a painful reminder that people continue to embark on perilous voyages in search of safety

ADRIANO SILVESTRI, THE UNHCR'S ASSISTANT REPRESENTATIVE IN GREECE

that ran aground on an islet north of the Greek island of Antikythera on Thursday evening.

Coast guard said yesterday that two of the rescued mi-

grants -- both men suspected of being the smugglers -- were arrested.

Ninety people stranded on the islet were rescued. And on Wednesday, a dinghy carrying migrants capsized off the island of Folegandros, killing at least three people.

Thirteen people were rescued, while dozens remain missing, Greek authorities said.

Survivors gave conflicting accounts: Some said there had been 32 people on board, while others put the number around 50, a coast guard official told AFP.

Tear gas fire in Sudan in a

AFP | Khartoum

Thousands of Sudanese protesters rallied yesterday two months on since a military coup, demanding soldiers "go back to the barracks" and call-

YOU KNOW WHAT

Protests against the coup have continued even after the reinstatement of the deposed Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok on Nov. 21, with demonstrators demanding that the military should have no government role in a transition to free elections