

News in brief

◆ **China has replaced Chen Quanguo, who as Communist Party chief in the Xinjiang region oversaw a security crackdown targeting ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslims in the name of fighting religious extremism. Chen, in his post since 2016, will move to another role and Ma Xingrui, governor of the coastal economic powerhouse Guangdong province since 2017, has replaced him, the official Xinhua News Agency said on Saturday. It gave no other details. Chen, 66, is a member of China's politburo and is widely considered to be the senior official responsible for the security crackdown in Xinjiang. He was sanctioned last year by the United States.**



**China replaces Xinjiang Communist Party chief Chen**

◆ **Israel's government set a goal yesterday of doubling the number of Jewish settlers in the Golan Heights within five years, a move that could tighten its hold on the territory it occupied in fighting with Syria in 1967. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett cited then-U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition in 2019 of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan and no sign that his successor, Joe Biden, intends to reverse the decision, as factors behind a multimillion-dollar housing and infrastructure plan for the area. Under a blueprint approved by the cabinet, which held its weekly session on the Golan, some 7,300 housing units will be built in Katzrin, Israel's main settlement in the area, and in smaller Jewish communities.**



**Israel sets goal of doubling number of Jewish settlers**

◆ **Russia has received talks on Jan. 12** a NATO proposal to commence talks on Moscow's security concerns on Jan. 12 and is considering it, TASS news agency quoted the Foreign Ministry as saying yesterday. Russia, which has unnerved the West with a troop buildup near Ukraine, last week unveiled a wish list of security proposals it wants to negotiate, including a promise NATO would give up any military activity in Eastern Europe and Ukraine. "We have already received this (NATO) offer, and we are considering it," TASS quoted the foreign ministry as saying.

**Moscow considering NATO proposal to hold talks on Jan. 12**



◆ **The bodies of more than a dozen migrants who drowned trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe washed up on Libya's coastline late on Saturday, its interior ministry and the local Red Crescent said. Libya is a major transit point for migrants, many from African countries, who are seeking better opportunities in Europe.**

**Bodies of drowned migrants wash up on Libyan shore**

**Bennett self-isolates after daughter tests positive for COVID-19**

◆ **Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett went into isolation at home yesterday and will await the results of a COVID-19 PCR test after his 14-year-old daughter tested positive for the coronavirus, his office said. Bennett left the weekly meeting of his cabinet and headed home after learning of his daughter's positive test, which came amid fast-spreading infections in Israel caused by the Omicron variant.**

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	53,033,604	837,779
2 India	34,786,802	479,682
3 Brazil	22,234,626	618,457
4 UK	11,891,292	147,857
5 Russia	10,392,020	304,218
6 Turkey	9,307,124	81,576
7 France	9,088,371	122,546
8 Germany	7,009,073	111,076
9 Iran	6,184,762	131,400
10 Spain	5,718,007	89,019
11 Italy	5,647,313	136,611
12 Argentina	5,452,419	117,020
13 Colombia	5,121,668	129,729
14 Indonesia	4,261,759	144,055

Global tally

Deaths: 5,415,714

Recovered:

New cases: +203,810

New deaths: +2,449

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	380,520		21,571		316,656	42,293
Saudi Arabia	552,795	+389	8,871	+1	540,868	3,056
UAE	751,333	+1,803	2,158	+2	741,325	7,850
Kuwait	414,911		2,468		411,299	1,144
Oman	305,105	+47	4,114	+1	300,291	700
Qatar	248,092	+296	615	+1	244,748	2,729

# Nobel Prize-winning anti-apartheid hero Desmond Tutu dies

● **Tutu won Nobel for non-violent opposition to apartheid**

● **Tutu considered nation's conscience by both Black and white**

● **Anti-apartheid hero fought for "Rainbow Nation"**

● **State gives no details on the cause of death**

● **Tutu diagnosed with cancer in 1990s**

Reuters | Johannesburg

minority rule, died yesterday at the age of 90.

In 1984 Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent opposition to apartheid. A decade later, he witnessed the end of that

regime and chaired a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up to unearth atrocities committed during those dark days.

The outspoken Tutu was considered the nation's conscience by both Black and white, an enduring testament to his faith and spirit of reconciliation in a divided nation.

He was diagnosed with prostate cancer in the late 1990s and in recent years was hospitalised on several occasions to treat infections associated with his cancer treatment.

"The passing of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu is another chapter of bereavement in our nation's farewell to a generation of outstanding South Africans who have bequeathed us a liberated South Africa," President Cyril Ramaphosa said.

"Desmond Tutu was a patriot without equal."

The presidency gave no details on the cause of death.

Tutu preached against the tyranny of the white minority but his fight for a fairer South Africa never ended, calling the Black political elite to account with as much feistiness as he had the white Afrikaners.

In his final years, he regretted that his dream of a "Rainbow Nation" had yet to come true.

"Ultimately, at the age of 90, he died peacefully at the Oasis Frail Care Centre in Cape Town this morning," Dr

Ramphela Mamphele, acting chair-per-

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu was a guiding light for countless people globally. His emphasis on human dignity and equality will be forever remembered. I am deeply saddened by his demise, and extend my heartfelt condolences to all his admirers. May his soul rest in peace.

Former US President Barack Obama said Tutu was a "mentor, a friend, and a moral compass" who "never lost his impish sense of humor and willingness to find humanity in his adversaries".

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and veteran of South Africa's struggle against white



U.S. President Barack Obama (L) is pictured alongside Desmond Tutu

Archbishop Desmond Tutu shares a joke with the Dalai Lama during his visit, the first by the Buddhist leader

## First Omicron case detected in Gaza, Palestinians say

Reuters | Gaza

The Palestinian health ministry said yesterday it had identified the first case of the Omicron coronavirus variant in the Gaza Strip.

The carrier is a Gaza resident who was infected within the coastal territory, ministry official Majdi Dhair told a news conference.

Dhair said this meant the variant, first identified in southern Africa and Hong Kong last month, existed in Gaza and was now spreading among the population. The discovery poses a new challenge to the enclave's under-developed health system.

"We are ahead of difficult days. It is expected that the Omicron variant will spread fast," he told reporters.

## 'Back to me in a coffin' - bodies of migrants drowned in Channel reach Iraq



People pray next to bodies of Iraqi Kurdish migrants

Reuters | Sulaimaniya, Iraq

At least 16 bodies of Iraqi Kurdish migrants who drowned in November when their dinghy deflated while they tried to cross the English Channel were returned on Sunday to Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Nov. 24 disaster, in which 27 migrants died, was the worst on record involving migrants trying to cross the Channel to Britain from France, read more

The plane carrying the bodies landed on early Sunday in the airport of Erbil, capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region. Ambulances then took

the coffins to the home towns of those who died.

"The last time I heard my son's voice was when he got on board the boat. He said 'Don't worry Mum, I will reach England shortly' Now he's back to me in a coffin," said Shukriya Bakir, whose son was one of those who drowned.

In the past decade, hundreds of thousands of people have slipped into the wealthy economies of Western Europe with the help of smugglers, fleeing conflict, persecution and poverty on epic journeys from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan and elsewhere. Few are welcomed.

## La Palma volcano after three months

● **Seismic activity ended 12 days ago**

● **3,000 properties destroyed, many displaced**

● **Huge cleanup operation underway**

Reuters | Madrid

Scientists declared the eruption on Spain's La Palma officially over on Saturday, allowing islanders to breathe a sigh of relief nearly 100 days after the Cumbre Vieja volcano began to spew out lava, rock and ash and upended the lives of thousands.

After bursting into action on Sept. 19, the volcano suddenly went quiet on Monday Dec. 13 but the authorities, wary of raising false hope, held off until Christmas Day to give the all-clear.

"What I want to say today can be said with just four words: The eruption is over," Canary Islands regional security chief Julio Perez told a news conference on Sat-