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# India starts vaccine drive as global deaths top 2 million

## Lebanon hits record coronavirus deaths, infections



KUWAIT: Environment Public Authority and Kuwait coastguard personnel remove the carcass of a whale found near Jaber Causeway yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

**NEW DELHI:** India kicked off one of the world's largest coronavirus vaccination drives yesterday as the pandemic spread at a record pace and global COVID-19 deaths surged past two million. The World Health Organization has called for accelerating vaccine rollouts worldwide as well as ramping up efforts to study the sequencing of the virus, which has infected more than 93 million people globally since it was first detected in China in late 2019.

India, home to 1.3 billion people, has the world's second-largest caseload. The government has given approvals to two vaccines - though one is yet to complete clinical trials - aiming to inoculate around 300 million people by July. One of the first to receive a jab in the eastern city of Kolkata was 35-year-old health worker Santa Roy, who told AFP he now saw a "ray of hope" after witnessing people die of the coronavirus.

Authorities say they are drawing on their experience with elections and child immunization programs for the drive, which is a daunting task in an enormous, impoverished nation with often shoddy transport infrastructure and one of the world's

worst-funded healthcare systems. Regular child inoculations are a "much smaller game" and vaccinating against COVID-19 will be "deeply challenging", said Satyajit Rath from India's National Institute of Immunology.

The government has readied tens of thousands of refrigeration tools and about 150,000 specially trained staff to try and overcome some of those challenges. The vaccines will also have high security, so that doses do not end up being sold on India's large black market for medicines. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Friday said he wanted "to see vaccination under way in every country in the next 100 days so that health workers and those at high risk are protected first".

His call came as infections snowballed, with 724,000 new cases recorded on average per day globally over the past week, according to AFP's tally - a record 10 percent increase on a week earlier. The worrying spikes in deaths and infections come as concerns and criticism grow over vaccine logistics and supply issues in many parts of the world.

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## WhatsApp delays data share update after backlash

**SAN FRANCISCO:** WhatsApp on Friday postponed a data-sharing change as users concerned about privacy fled the Facebook-owned messaging service and flocked to rivals Telegram and Signal. The smartphone app, a huge hit across the world, canceled its Feb 8 deadline for accepting an update to its terms concerning sharing data with Facebook, saying it would use the pause to clear up misinformation around privacy and security.

"We've heard from so many people how much confusion there is around our recent update," WhatsApp said in a blog post. "This update does not expand our ability to share data with Facebook." It said it would instead "go to people gradually to review the policy at their own pace before new business options are available on May 15".

The update concerns how merchants using WhatsApp to chat with customers can share data with Facebook, which could use the information for targeted ads, according to the social network. "We can't see your private messages or hear your calls, and neither can Facebook," WhatsApp said in an earlier blog post. "We don't keep logs of who everyone is messaging or calling. We can't see your shared location and neither can Facebook."

Location data along with message contents is encrypted end-to-end, according to WhatsApp. "We're giving businesses the option to use secure hosting services from Facebook to manage WhatsApp chats with their customers, answer questions, and send helpful information like purchase receipts," WhatsApp said in a post. "Whether you communicate with a business by phone, email, or WhatsApp, it can see what you're saying and may use that information for its own marketing purposes, which may include advertising on Facebook."

Technology experts note that WhatsApp's new requirement of its users makes legally binding a policy that has been widely in use since 2016. Facebook aims to monetize WhatsApp by allowing businesses to contact clients via the platform, making it natural for the internet giant to centralize some data on its servers.

The Turkish Competition Authority said it is opening an investigation and requiring WhatsApp to suspend the data sharing

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## Iran test-fires missiles on targets at sea

**TEHRAN:** Iran's Revolutionary Guards test-fired ballistic missiles against targets in the Indian Ocean as they wrapped up a two-day exercise, their official website reported yesterday. The missiles of "various classes" targeted "the enemy's battleships and destroyed them from 1,800 km away," according to the Sepahnews website. The missiles were fired from central Iran at targets located in the northern Indian Ocean, the Guards said. A video released by state television showed two missiles being launched and targets being hit at sea.

Iran's armed forces chief of staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri was present on the second day of the drill, alongside Guards chief Major General Hossein Salami and aerospace commander Brigadier General Amirali Hajizadeh. "One of our major goals in defense policies and strategies is to be able to target enemy ships, including aircraft carriers and battleships, using long-range ballistic missiles," Salami said, quoted by Sepahnews.

Bagheri said the launch showed Iran was ready to respond to any "ill will" by its enemies, warning that in such cases "they will be targeted and destroyed by our missiles". "We do not intend to carry out any attack," he said, adding the exercise showed Iran's readiness to defend itself "with all its strength" against any aggressor.

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This handout photo shows a launch of missiles during a military drill in an unknown location in central Iran yesterday. — AFP

## Nepal team claim first winter ascent of Pakistan's K2

**ISLAMABAD:** A team of Nepali climbers made history yesterday after becoming the first to summit Pakistan's K2 in winter, on the same afternoon a Spanish mountaineer fell and died lower down the perilous peak. Dozens of climbers have been competing over the past few weeks to summit the world's second highest mountain, the last peak

above 8,000 m to be topped in wintertime. "WE DID IT," tweeted Seven Summit Treks, a trekking company leading one of the expeditions. "The Karakorum's 'Savage Mountain' been summited in most dangerous season: winter. Nepalese climbers finally reached the summit of Mt K2 this afternoon at 17:00 local time."

But the success was overshadowed by the death of a Spanish climber, Sergi Mingote, lower down the mountain. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez described him as a "great sportsman" on Twitter, writing: "He wanted to keep on making history... and a tragic accident ended his life." The Alpine Club of Pakistan said in a statement that the climber fell while descending to Base Camp shortly before 4 pm.

Secretary Karrar Haidri added the club was helping to coordinate the evacuation of the body, but with weather conditions expected to be poor overnight, it would be done today morning. The name "Savage Mountain" comes from the punishing conditions there - winds can blow at more than 200 km per hour and temperatures can drop to minus 60 degrees Celsius. Since the maiden attempt in 1987-1988, just a handful of winter expeditions have been tried on the storied 8,611-metre (28,250-foot) peak in the Karakoram range along the Chinese border. None had got higher than 7,650 m until yesterday, when the good conditions allowed the successful team to push ahead.

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## Trump to leave town before inauguration

**WASHINGTON:** By the time Joe Biden is sworn in as the 46th US president Wednesday, his scandal-tainted predecessor Donald Trump will already be far away, having helicoptered out of the White House a last time earlier that morning, an official said Friday. Trump will be the first president in a century and a half to snub the inauguration of his successor.

An official who asked not to be identified said Trump would go to his Mar-a-Lago golf club in Florida, which is his legal residence and will become home after the White House. He is expected to be out of town well before Biden is sworn in on the steps of the Capitol building at exactly noon.

After spending more than two months trying to overturn the results of the November election, pushing false conspiracy theories about fraud, Trump's presence had not been expected at the inauguration. The final straw came on Jan 6 when Trump gathered a huge crowd of supporters on the National Mall and once more claimed that they had to fight to stop a fraudulent election.

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WASHINGTON: National Guard troops are seen on the lawn of the US Capitol building on Friday. — AFP