

# Omicron; deaths in the Channel; and a big day for Barbados

**The Covid B.1.1.529 mutation was first identified by South African and Botswanan scientists early last week.**

Within 72 hours, it had been renamed Omicron and designated the fifth variant of global concern. By last Friday, the first cases had been detected in Europe, and travel restrictions were being imposed. Quite what the Omicron variant has in store for the world remains to be seen, but the winners and losers are again likely to fall along lines of rich and poor. For our big story, David Cox and Linda Geddes survey the uncertain landscape.

Then, in our longer-read section, author Kwame Anthony Appiah argues powerfully why the pandemic should be the basis for building a fairer global society.

**The big story** *Page 10* →

**The two pandemics** *Page 34* →

**The death last week of 27 people attempting to cross the Channel from France to Britain caused shock** in both countries and resulted in yet more unseemly squabbling between Paris and London, where politicians are under extreme pressure to deliver on promises to halt the crisis. Meanwhile, the human misery continues unabated at ramshackle camps such as those in Dunkirk, as the Observer's Tim Adams discovers.

**Spotlight** *Page 15* →

**This week Barbados lowered the Royal Standard and declared itself a republic**, cutting ties with Queen Elizabeth as its head of state. Michael Safi was there to witness a cathartic moment in the Caribbean island's history and find out how the move came about.

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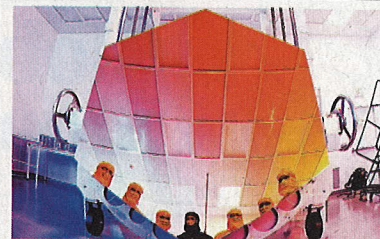


## On the cover

While the data around Omicron remains unclear, Jeffrey Barrett from the Wellcome Sanger Institute argues on page 14 that South Africa should be lauded for its discovery. "It would be a disaster if the global response to this heroically open science sent the message that the reward for such bravery is isolation," he writes.

*Illustration: Guardian Design*

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