

News in brief

◆ **The health of jailed Iranian Nobel laureate Narges Mohammadi has deteriorated in prison, supporters said yesterday, demanding her freedom and calling to give her access to medical care "without delay".** Rights activist Mohammadi, 52, has been jailed since November 2021, and has spent much of the past decade in and out of prison. A group of supporters of Mohammadi, who in 2023 won the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her advocacy work, said they had been informed of the results of medical tests carried out last month "which showed a worrying deterioration of her health". "The Free Narges Coalition is extremely worried about the deterioration of Narges Mohammadi's health in detention," the group said in a statement, noting cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and other risks.



Supporters say Iranian Nobel winner's health deteriorating in prison

◆ **The Kremlin said yesterday that any F-16s delivered to Ukraine would be shot down and have little impact on the battlefield, in response to reports that the first fighter jets have arrived.** "Their number will gradually decrease, they will be shot down... But of course, these deliveries will not have any significant impact on the development of events on the front," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. For more than two years, Ukraine has pleaded with Western allies for the US-made fighter jets -- long considered the crown jewel in the sprawling list of military hardware Kyiv has sought from its Western backers. For decades, the F-16 has been touted for its precision, speed and range.

Kremlin says F-16s delivered to Ukraine 'will be shot down'



◆ **Bangladesh police freed six student leaders yesterday whose campaign against civil service job quotas sparked deadly nationwide unrest, as the government looked to calm tensions and forestall fresh demonstrations.** Students Against Discrimination staged nationwide rallies last month that ended in a police crackdown and the deaths of at least 206 people, according to an AFP count of police and hospital data. The group's leadership were among thousands picked up in the police dragnet that followed some of the worst unrest of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 15-year tenure. "All six quota movement coordinators have been returned to their families this afternoon," deputy commissioner Junaed Alam Sarkar said.

Bangladesh police release student leaders after unrest



SPOTLIGHT

Signs of life spark hope for UK's felled Sycamore Gap tree

AFP | London, United Kingdom

New shoots have appeared at the stump of one of the UK's most beloved and photographed trees after it was illegally cut down last year, a conservation charity said Thursday.

The news has sparked hope that the Sycamore Gap tree in northern England could "live on", the National Trust added.

The tree, which grew for more than 200 years in a picturesque dip in the Northumberland landscape alongside Hadrian's Wall, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was found felled in September 2023.

Efforts have been underway to see if the tree in Northumberland National Park could regrow after it was determined that the stump was still alive.

Now, eight new shoots have emerged, which "could develop significant new growth to form as 'new' trees around the original stump", according to the National Trust and the Northumberland National Park Authority.

The sycamore became internationally famous when it was used for a scene in the 1991 blockbuster film "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves", starring Kevin Costner.

The regrowth was spotted during a routine check by park ranger Gary Pickles, who called the discovery "serendipitous".

"I've done this walk several times over the last year, but this time it was different,

there was something new -- the trunk was showing signs of regeneration," Pickles said.

Andrew Pond, general manager for the National Trust at Hadrian's Wall, said officials "always had hope that nature would find a way to recover, and to see signs of life, just ten months on, is astonishing".

The National Trust, which looks after UK heritage and nature conservation, and the park authority said they would leave the shoots to grow for "a few years" to see how they develop.

"We'll also do what we can to protect the root zone, and to avoid any compaction. The next few weeks and months are vitally important for the success of these shoots forming into the reinvigorated tree", Pond said.

To protect the shoots, the authorities have asked visitors to keep away from the stump and not touch the shoots, as well as not leave ashes in the area -- done by people who have special memories associated with the site.

There are also plans to "extend fencing around the site", according to the statement.



Jordan says Israel turned 'rogue'



The New York Times, citing Iranian officials, reported that Khamenei has ordered Iran to strike Israel directly. The international community called for calm and a focus on securing a ceasefire in Gaza -- which Haniyeh had accused Israel of obstructing.

AFP | Amman, Jordan

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said yesterday that Israel had turned "rogue" state with its "assassination" of the Hamas political leader and needed to be stopped.

He said the killing of Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's lead negotiator in efforts for a truce and hostage release deal for Gaza, was a clear sign that Israel had decided to undermine the US-backed talks.

"Yesterday, Israel assassinated Ismail Haniyeh. He was the one who was negotiating the exchange deal. So how on earth is a

Plane carrying body of Hamas leader arrives in Qatar

AFP | Doha, Qatar

A plane carrying the body of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, killed in a strike in Tehran blamed on Israel, landed in Doha yesterday after a public funeral in Iran, Qatar-based network Al Jazeera reported.

Haniyeh, who had resided in exile in the Gulf state with other members of Hamas's political office, is to be buried in Qatar on Friday following prayers at the Imam Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab Mosque, Doha's largest.

Haniyeh and a bodyguard were killed in the pre-dawn strike on their accommodation in Tehran

early Wednesday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said, in an attack that has been blamed on Israel.

Hamas said in a statement on the same day that the burial ceremonies in Qatar would be held "with popular and factional attendance and the participation of Arab and Islamic leaders".

A public funeral ceremony for Haniyeh was held in Tehran earlier on Thursday with crowds of mourners paying their respects to the Hamas political chief.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led prayers for Haniyeh having earlier threatened "harsh punishment" for his killing.

country that wants to conclude a deal killing the main interlocutor in those negotiations?" Safadi told a news conference.

"So when Netanyahu decided and sent his missiles to assassinate Haniyeh in Iran in violation of the sovereignty of another country and bringing escalation to a very high level, is that somebody who wants the deal to work?"

"And all the work that has been done by Egypt, Qatar, and the US

to bring a deal that would have brought a ceasefire, that would have released the hostages, that would have released prisoners, Israel decided to undermine all that".

Israel has not commented on Haniyeh's death, but both Iran and Hamas said it was the result of an Israeli air strike in Tehran before dawn on Wednesday.

Safadi demanded action by the international community to rein

Iran, allies plan joint retaliation against Israel

AFP | Beirut, Lebanon

Iran and armed groups backed by it are preparing coordinated action meant to deter Israel but avert all-out war, sources and analysts said, after the killings of top Hamas and Hezbollah figures. On Wednesday, Iranian officials met in Tehran with representatives of the so-called "axis of resistance" -- a loose alliance of Tehran-backed groups hostile

Hamas military chief Deif killed

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

Israel's army confirmed yesterday that Hamas military chief Mohammed Deif was killed in an air strike last month in the southern Gaza Strip.

The announcement came a day after Hamas and Iran said the Palestinian movement's chief Is-

rael in. "The (UN) Security Council must not allow a state that has

Hopes fade for more survivors in Indian landslide rescue

AFP | Wayanad, India

Indian rescue crews scoured mud-caked tea plantations and villages yesterday with little hope of finding more survivors from landslides that killed around 200 people.

Days of torrential monsoon rains have battered the southern coastal state of Kerala, with blocked roads into the Wayanad district disaster area complicating relief efforts since Tuesday.

Army teams were working around the clock to build a temporary bridge over raging waters to help search efforts after earlier relying on jury-rigged ziplines to transport bodies that had been recovered.

The bodies of at least 176 people had been recovered from the disaster site by Thursday. But the final toll is certain to rise, with rescuers reporting the gruesome discovery of dozens of body parts recovered from flood waters or found buried in the muddy earth.

Two killed, 28 missing in north India floods



NDRF personnel conducting a search and rescue operation after cloudburst near Shimla

AFP | New Delhi, India

Heavy monsoon downpours in India's Himalayan foothills triggered flash floods that killed two people, officials said yesterday, with the hunt on for around 28 others still missing.

Fatal floods and landslides are common across India during the annual monsoon but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency, intensity and unpredictability.

Rescue crews worked through the night at two flood

sites in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh.

Mandi district official Madan Kumar told AFP that rescuers had recovered two bodies. "One other person is seriously injured and eight people are missing," said Kumar. "Several houses have been damaged."

In neighbouring Shimla district, a popular tourist destination in India's rugged north, local official Abhishek Verma said rescue crews were searching for around 20 more people believed missing.

17-year-old charged with murder of 3 girls in UK kn



A handout pictures released by Merseyside Aguiar (L), seven-year-old Elsie Dot Stanco

AFP | Southport, United Kingdom

A 17-year-old male was charged yesterday with the murder of three girls and the attempted murder of 10 more people in a knife attack at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class, UK prosecutors said.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said it had authorised Merseyside Police to charge the suspect with three counts of murder over the deaths of Bebe King, six, Elsie Dot Stacombe, seven, and Alice Dasilva Aguiar, nine.

The suspect will appear at court in Liverpool, in northwest

Police clash footage shocks Bangladesh as inter

AFP | Dhaka, Bangladesh

When millions of Bangladeshis came back online this week after a nationwide internet shutdown, many were shocked to watch a ferocious police clampdown they had earlier only heard while bunkered in their homes. At least 206 people were killed last month during some of the worst unrest of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's tenure, sparked by student demonstrations against civil



Bangladesh police scuffle with people as they protest to demand justice for the victims killed in the recent countrywide violence

service hiring rules. Bystanders and several police officers were among the dead but most were protesters killed by police fire, hospitals told AFP, with rights groups and the European Union condemning what they said was an excessive use of force.

Footage of clashes between security forces and crowds was largely absent from news broadcasts and few had a grasp of their extent until the national mobile internet network was switched