

News in brief

◆ **The world inched a step closer towards tackling plastic pollution**, with the United Nations publishing the first draft of a binding treaty to tackle the scourge. Some 175 nations are working to reach a landmark agreement by end-2024 that will curb plastic pollution, which ends up in oceans, birds' stomachs and on mountain peaks. Microplastics have even been detected in blood and maternal milk. Global plastic production has more than doubled since the start of the century to reach 460 million tonnes and could triple by 2060 if nothing is done. Only nine percent is currently recycled. The draft deal, published by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, will form the basis of fresh talks in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, on November 13-19, the UN Environment Programme said on Monday. The proposals include reducing the production of primary plastic polymers, which NGOs have been advocating for years. Major plastic producers like the United States and Gulf countries could strongly oppose the measure. They prefer to promote re-use and recycling to reduce waste.



World inches step closer towards plastic pollution deal: UN

◆ **UNESCO recommends placing Kyiv, Lviv on endangered heritage list**



◆ **Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral and the historical centre of western Ukrainian city Lviv should join UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites in danger** due to the Russian invasion, a senior official at the UN body said yesterday. "These sites are threatened with destruction. There have been attacks on the buffer zones around these sites and we don't know what will happen in the future," the head of the World Heritage programme Lazare Eloundou told AFP in Paris. The World Heritage Committee, set to meet from September 10-25 in Riyadh, will "likely" make the decision "based on experts' opinion" that the sites are "demonstrably in danger", Eloundou added.

◆ **Elon Musk, the owner of social media platform X, formerly Twitter, said the site is considering suing the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) over accusations of anti-Semitism, which he blames for falling revenue.** Musk late Monday accused the US-based Jewish organization of making unfounded complaints against him and X that have scared away advertisers. "To clear our platform's name on the matter of anti-Semitism, it looks like we have no choice but to file a defamation lawsuit against the Anti-Defamation League... oh the irony!" Musk wrote on X on Monday. "Based on what we've heard from advertisers, ADL seems to be responsible for most of our revenue loss," he wrote, adding that the group "would potentially be on the hook for destroying half the value of the company, so roughly \$22 billion."

◆ **Musk threatens to sue anti-defamation group for falling revenue**



CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Pentagon reveals Japan as UFO sighting hotspot

Yahoo

The US Department of Defense has published a document outlining the "world's UFO hotspots".



Representative picture

It is based on reports from between 1996 and 2023, and includes a map that shows where unidentified object sightings have been reported the most frequently.

The map was released soon after the Pentagon's top official acknowledged that hundreds of enigmatic objects have been observed "all over the world".

According to the map, UFO sighting hotspots include Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan. It may surprise enthusiasts who typically identify sightings with the US to learn that Japan and a region of the Middle East, encompassing Iraq and Syria, are hotspots for UFO spotting.

The small town of Iinomachi in Fukushima prefecture, sometimes known as "UFO Town", is another of Japan's tourist highlights. In an effort to gain attention and market itself as a "home to aliens", Iinomachi has been decorated with alien-themed ornaments. It also serves as the headquarters for the International UFO Lab, a study organisation run by alien aficionado Takeharu Mikami that was established in 2021.

According to the Japan Times, the International UFO Lab released six photos in June of "probable UFOs" that were reportedly taken near Kobe and Fukushima, among other areas.

A total of 494 reports received from people in Japan and abroad in a single year were whittled down. Most appeared to be of drones, birds or were just reflections.

Sightings were also reported on the east and west coasts of the US, including California, and regions of the Middle East.

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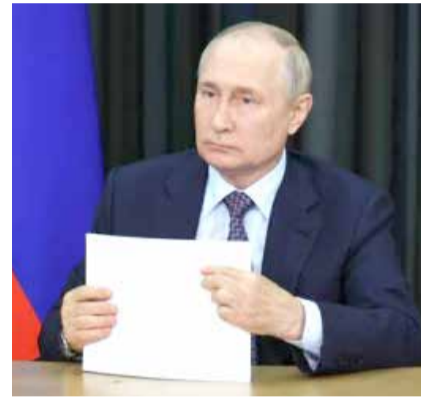
The US government's map is included in a five-page report titled UAP Reporting Trends that was posted on the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office's (AARO) new website, which launched in August. The AARO is a specialised UFO department that was established in July of last year.

Cuba uncovers human trafficking ring for Russia's war

- **There was no immediate reaction from Moscow**
- **The Cuban government had initiated criminal proceedings**

AFP | Havana, Cuba

Cuba has identified an alleged human trafficking ring aimed at recruiting its citizens to fight



Russian President Vladimir Putin

in Russia's war in Ukraine, the foreign ministry said Monday.

The government was working to dismantle a "trafficking network that operates from Russia to incorporate Cuban citizens living there, and even some from Cuba, into the military forces involved in military operations in Ukraine," the ministry said in a statement.

The Cuban government had initiated criminal proceedings against those carrying out the trafficking, it added. Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodri-

gues said in a poster, that the gov with the full for trafficking opera "Cuba is not Ukraine," the r it would take a "who participat man trafficking recruitment or ban citizens to country?"

There was no from Moscow. America TeVe 1

Egypt president calls for measures to slow birthrate

AFP | Cairo, Egypt

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi called yesterday for measures to slow the birthrate in the Arab world's most populous country, citing China's one-child policy as an example.

"We need 400,000 births per year," said the leader of the country of 105 million inhabitants which recorded nearly 2.2 million births in 2022.

Sisi intervened when his minister of health and population, Khaled Abdel Ghafar, told a conference that "having children is a matter of complete freedom".

"I do not agree with your idea that having children is a matter of complete freedom," the president said.

"Leaving their freedom to people who potentially do not know the extent of the challenge? In the end, it is the whole of society and the Egyptian state which will pay the price," he said

Japanese man admits starting deadly anime studio fire: reports

AFP | Tokyo, Japan



Shinji Aoba suffered burns to 90% of his body in the fire

AFP | Tokyo, Japan

A Japanese man allegedly angry that his ideas had been stolen admitted Tuesday to starting a fire that killed 36 people in an animation studio in 2019, local media said.

The blaze that ripped through the studios of Kyoto Animation in July 2019 shocked Japan as well as the huge anime industry and its fans around the world.

"It's correct I've done" what is in the charges, Shinji Aoba said at the Kyoto District Court as the trial opened, according to the Jiji Press news agency.

"I didn't think so many people would die and now I think I went too far," said the 45-year-old.

Aoba, who nearly died from burns he sustained and appeared in court in a wheelchair, faces five charges including murder, attempted murder and arson.

He is accused of breaking into the studio's building, spreading gasoline around the ground floor and setting it alight before reportedly shouting "drop dead".

Many of those killed in the blaze were young staff, including a 21-year-old woman. More than 30 others were injured.

Aoba's lawyers on Tuesday entered a plea of not guilty, saying he "did not have the capacity to distinguish between good and bad and to stop committing the crime due to mental disorder," public broadcaster NHK said.

French 'getaway king'

AFP | Paris, France

A convicted burglar who escaped prison in 2018 aboard a hijacked helicopter in a jailbreak that astonished France went on trial in Paris on Tuesday, facing life in prison over his brazen getaway.

Nicknamed the "getaway king", Redouine Faïd, 51, was serving time for burglary when accomplices hijacked a helicopter and landed it in the courtyard of Reau prison, southeast of Paris, on the morning of July 1, 2018.

While one of them held a gun to the pilot's head, two others stepped out of the helicopter launching smoke grenades.

One of them then kept watch, armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle, while another -- wearing a fake police armband -- used a circular power saw to cut open the gate to the prison cell corridor where Faïd and his brother Brahim were being held.

Witnesses later said that Faïd "very calmly" walked out of his



A courtsketch of armed robber

Six billion tonnes of sand extracted from world's oceans each year: UN

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

Some six billion tonnes of sand and other sediment is extracted from the world's seas and oceans every year, the UN said yesterday, warning of the devastating toll on biodiversity and coastal communities.

Launching the first ever global data platform on sediment extraction in marine environments, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), warned that the scale of dredging was growing, with dire consequences.

"The scale of environmental impacts of shallow sea mining activities and dredging is alarming," said Pascal Peduzzi, who heads UNEP's analytics



Representative picture

centre GRID-Geneva.

He pointed to the effects on biodiversity, as well as on water turbidity, and noise impacts on marine mammals.

The new data platform, Marine Sand Watch, uses artificial intelligence to track and monitor dredging activities of sand, clay, silt, gravel and rock in the world's marine environment.

It uses so-called Automatic Identification System (AIS) signals for ships combined with

AI to identify the operations of dredging vessels, including in hotspots like the North Sea and the east coast of the United States. The signals emitted by the vessels allow "access to the movements of every ship on the planet," Peduzzi told AFP, adding that AI makes it possible to analyse the mountains of data gathered.

That process is still in the early stages, and so far, only around 50 percent of vessels are being monitored.

But the platform estimates that between four and eight billion tonnes of marine sand and other sediment were extracted every year from marine environments between 2012 and 2019.

Great Wall of sha

AFP | Beijing, China

Two people have been detained after using an excavator to dig a hole in the Great Wall of China, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Police in Shanxi province followed tracks made by machinery used to dig a shortcut through a segment of the wall -- remains of the immense structure built by China's emperors to deter foreign invaders.

The suspects admitted under questioning that they had used a digger to create a shortcut in the wall in a bid to reduce local travel time, state media reported.

The section of the Great Wall affected, situated about a six-hour drive west of central Beijing, dates back to China's Ming Dynasty of the 14th through 17th centuries.

State broadcaster CCTV reported Monday that the suspects had caused "irreversible damage" to