

News in brief

◆ **Ukraine said yesterday**

it was behind the assassination of a Russia-backed politician and former militia leader who died in a car bomb attack in eastern Ukraine. Mikhail Filipenko, a deputy in the pro-Moscow Lugansk regional parliament, was killed on Wednesday morning when an "unidentified explosive device" detonated under his 4x4, Russian investigators said earlier. In a statement issued a few hours after the attack, Ukraine's military intelligence directorate said it had carried out a "special operation to eliminate" Filipenko, working "jointly with representatives of the resistance movement." Several high-profile backers of Russia's assault on Ukraine and Moscow-installed officials have been attacked since Russia launched its offensive last February -- though outright claims of responsibility by Kyiv are rare. Filipenko was a deputy in the Lugansk regional parliament and a former head of a Moscow-backed separatist militia set up in 2014 to fight against Kyiv.



Ukraine says it was behind car bombing of Russian proxy politician

◆ **Russia sentences captive Ukrainian soldier to 19 years**



◆ A Russian military court yesterday sentenced a Ukrainian soldier to 19 years for allegedly shooting a civilian he suspected of being a Russian infiltrator in Mariupol last March. Russian investigators said Anton Cherednik, a member of Ukraine's naval infantry, killed one man in the southern Ukrainian city -- which was under siege by Russian forces at the time -- after stopping two civilians while on a patrol. Russian forces launched an intense assault on Mariupol, a port city home to more than 400,000 people before the conflict, destroying large swathes in weeks of air strikes, shelling and gun battles at the start of the conflict last year.

◆ **Putin meets senior Chinese general, hails growing military ties**



◆ Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed strengthening military ties with Beijing yesterday as he hosted a senior Chinese general in Moscow. Russia has bolstered ties with its Chinese neighbour in the last year, as it seeks allies against the backdrop of its dragging offensive on Ukraine. "Our contacts in the military and military-technology spheres are becoming increasingly important," Putin told Zhang Youxia, a high-ranking general and vice chairman of Beijing's Central Military Commission. In televised remarks, the Russian president said Moscow and Beijing were not building a Cold War-style "military alliance", but said cooperation between them is "a serious factor stabilising the global situation." He said the United States was boosting its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, and that Russia and China would react "calmly, carefully and by strengthening our defence capabilities." Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu had earlier welcomed Zhang and a Chinese military delegation in a red carpet ceremony in the Russian capital.

SPOTLIGHT

South Korean man killed by industrial robot



Representative picture

AFP | Seoul, South Korea

A man was crushed to death by a robot in South Korea after the machine apparently failed to differentiate him from the boxes of produce it was handling, the Yonhap news agency reported yesterday. The man, a robotics company worker in his 40s, was inspecting the robot's sensor operations at a distribution centre for agricultural produce in South Gyeongsang province.

The industrial robot, which was lifting boxes filled with

bell peppers and placing them on a pallet, appears to have malfunctioned and identified the man as a box, Yonhap reported citing the police.

The robotic arm pushed the man's upper body down against the conveyor belt, crushing his face and chest, according to Yonhap.

He was transferred to the hospital but died later, the report said.

In March, a South Korean man in his 50s suffered serious injuries after getting trapped by a robot while working at an automobile parts manufacturing plant.

Massive destruction of Gaza

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

Israel's widespread and systematic bombardment of housing and civilian infrastructure in Gaza is a war crime, as are the indiscriminate Hamas rocket attacks that hit Israeli dwellings, an independent UN expert said Wednesday.

A month of Israeli strikes on targets within the Gaza Strip have destroyed or damaged 45% of all housing units in the Palestinian territory, Balakrishnan Rajagopal said, warning the destruction comes at a "tremendous cost to human life".

The UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing stressed that systematic or widespread bombardment of housing, civilian objects and infrastructure are strictly prohibited under international law.

"Carrying out hostilities with the knowledge that they will systematically destroy and damage civilian housing and infrastructure, rendering an entire city -- such as Gaza City -- uninhabitable for civilians is a war crime," he said.

When such acts are "directed against a civilian population, they also amount to crimes against humanity", he said.

Rajagopal stressed that civilian housing in Israel was also not a



A Palestinian civil defence member sprays a building with a hose to put out a fire in a collapsed building in the aftermath of Israeli bombardment in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip

military object, warning that Hamas's continuing indiscriminate launching of rockets from Gaza and elsewhere also constituted "a war crime".

According to the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza, Israel's bombardment has killed more than 10,500 people, most of them

women and children.

Nearly 2,500 others, more than half of them children, have been reported missing and are most likely trapped under the rubble.

'Domicide'

Rajagopal, an independent expert appointed by the UN Human

Rights Council but who does not speak on behalf of the United Nations, had previously coined the term "domicide" to refer to the systematic and widespread attacks on civilian housing and infrastructure that cause death and suffering.

Domicide, he said, "is now be-

Michelangelo's 'secret' sketches open to public

AFP | Rome, Italy

Sketches drawn on the walls of a small room in Florence by Renaissance artist Michelangelo as he hid from an angry pope are going on show for the first time.

Charcoal figures run along the sides of the room, a former coal cellar in the depths of the Museum of the Medici Chapels which will open to the public from November 15.

Known as Michelangelo's "secret room", the space -- which measures 10 metres by three metres (33 feet by 10 feet) -- was used to store coal until 1955.

It was then "unused, sealed



Michelangelo

and forgotten for decades below a trapdoor covered by wardrobes, furniture and stacked furnishings" before being discovered again in 1975, the museum said in a statement.

The director at the time, Paolo Dal Poggetto, attributed many of the sketches uncovered to Michelangelo Buonarroti, best known for his statue of David and the frescos in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel.

Dal Poggetto believed Michelangelo had hidden from Pope Clement VII in the room for two months in 1530 because the pontiff, a member of the Medici family, was "infuriated" with him.

The artist had served as a supervisor of the city's fortifications during the short-lived republican government (1527 to 1530), when the Medici were driven out of the city.

"The drawings, still being studied by critics, were produced during the artist's 'self-confinement' period, using the walls of the small room to 'sketch out' some of his projects," the museum said.

Curator Francesca de Luca said the space was "truly unique for its exceptional evocative potential".

"Its walls appear to be teeming with numerous sketches of figures, largely of monumental size," she said in the statement.

"These are accompanied by studies, varying between in-depth and superficial analyses, capturing details of the body, facial features and unusual poses."

Scientists blame climate change for 'extreme drought' in Iraq, Iran and Syria

AFP | Baghdad, Iraq

The "extreme" drought gripping Iraq, Syria and Iran would not have occurred without climate change caused primarily by burning fossil fuels, scientists said Wednesday, warning that punishing dry spells will become more intense as the world warms.

High temperatures due to human-caused climate change made the drought "much more likely to happen" -- about 25 times more likely in Syria and Iraq and 16 times more likely in Iran, according to the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group.

"Human-induced climate change has increased the intensity of such a drought such that



Representative picture

it would not have been classified as a drought in a 1.2C cooler world," said the scientists.

It found that existing vulnerability from "years of conflict and political instability" also reduced people's ability to respond to the drought, sparking a "humanitarian disaster".

The research focused on the period from July 2020 to June

2023 in two regions where impacts have been most severe: Iran, and the basin of the Tigris and the Euphrates, the rivers that cross Syria and Iraq.

Both regions are currently experiencing an "extreme drought" as classified by the US Drought Monitor scale, said the scientists in a statement.

El Nino set to...

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

The El Nino weather phenomenon, which triggers higher global temperatures, is expected to last until at least April 2024, the United Nations said yesterday.

El Nino is a naturally occurring climate pattern typically associated with increased heat worldwide, as well as drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere. The UN's World Meteorological Organization said the current El Nino, which developed rapidly during July-August this year, was likely to peak between now and January.

"There is a 90-percent likelihood it will persist throughout the upcoming northern hemisphere winter/southern hemisphere summer," it said in its lat-