

News in brief

Malaysia ex-premier Muhyiddin questioned by anti-graft body

Malaysian anti-graft authorities



yesterday questioned former prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin following allegations that his party misused public funds meant to fight Covid-19. Muhyiddin was prime minister for 17 months between 2020 and 2021, at the height of Malaysia's battle against the coronavirus, and now leads an opposition coalition. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has not commented on why they are questioning Muhyiddin, but it came weeks after it launched the probe into the alleged misuse of pandemic funds by Bersatu, his political party. The 75-year-old said in a Facebook post on Wednesday that he had been asked to appear before MACC, but did not say why.

The US State Department signalled Wednesday it would let Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen visit California to meet with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, downplaying the significance of the event in the face of protests by China. McCarthy confirmed Tuesday that he would see Tsai in his home state, sidestepping a potential visit by the top Republican to Taiwan that policymakers there feared could provoke a military response from Beijing. State Department spokesman Ned Price described Tsai's expected travel as "transit" rather than a "visit" to the United States, which supports but does not recognize the self-ruling democracy claimed by Beijing.

US ready to let Taiwan leader visit to see top Republican



US Republican Senator McConnell hospitalized after fall

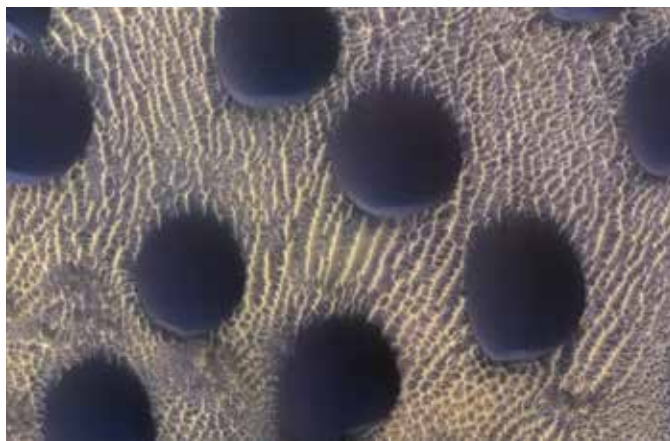
Top United States Senate Republican Mitch McConnell was hospitalized



after he tripped and fell during a private dinner, his spokesperson said. The 81-year-old from Kentucky has been the Republican Senate leader since 2007, and a major opponent of President Joe Biden on several legislative issues. "This evening, Leader McConnell tripped at a local hotel during a private dinner. He has been admitted to the hospital where he is receiving treatment," his spokesperson said in a statement sent to media.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

NASA spacecraft captures images of circular sand dunes on Mars



Circular sand dunes on the surface of Mars
TDT | Agencies

NASA recently reported an unusual discovery made by the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO) spacecraft while orbiting the red planet.

The MRO captured images of sand dunes that appear to be circular in shape, leaving officials stunned.

The MRO's High-Resolution Imaging Experiment (HiRISE) spacecraft's colour camera had previously taken stunning images of crescent-shaped dunes and other circular objects on Mars.

However, the latest batch of images has revealed something never seen before on the planet.

The pictures of the dunes were taken in late November of last year using the HiRISE camera, which is operated by the University of Arizona.

The MRO has been orbiting Mars since 2006 and is equipped with high-resolution sensors to study the atmosphere and topography of the planet.

In addition to its scientific duties, the MRO also serves as an essential relay station for several Martian missions. With the latest discovery of the strange circular sand dunes, the MRO's ongoing mission to explore and study the red planet has yielded yet another exciting development.



The MRO has been orbiting Mars since 2006 and is equipped with high-resolution sensors to study the atmosphere and topography of the planet

North Korea fires ballistic missile ahead of US-South Korea drills

AFP | Seoul

North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile yesterday, Seoul's military said, Pyongyang's latest show of force just days before South Korea and the United States kick off major joint military exercises.

Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their worst points in decades, with the nuclear-armed North conducting ever more provocative banned weapons tests as Seoul moved to ramp up security cooperation with Washington in response.

Last year, Kim Jong Un's regime declared North Korea an "irreversible" nuclear power and vowed to exponentially increase weapons production, including tactical nuclear weapons, as the US looks to move more assets to the region to defend ally Seoul.

Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said that it "detected the launch of one short-range ballistic missile from the North's western port city of Nampo at 6:20 pm (0920 GMT)".

It added it was analysing "the possibility that North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles from the same region simultaneously".

"Our military maintains a full readiness posture while closely cooperating with the US as we



Strategic cruise missile Hwasal-2 launching from a platform during a drill in the area of Kim Chaek City in North Hamgyong Province

and vigilance," it said.

North Korea has long claimed its nuclear weapons and missile programmes are for self-defence, and has bristled over US-South Korea military exercises, describing them as rehearsals for an invasion.

Earlier this week, North Korea accused the US of "intentionally" ramping up tensions, and Kim's powerful sister warned that if the US were to intercept one of Pyongyang's missile tests, it would be seen as a "clear declaration of war".

After talks between Kim and then-US president Donald Trump collapsed in 2019, diplomacy has stalled and the North has doubled down on military development.



North Korea has long claimed its nuclear weapons and missile programmes are for self-defence, and has bristled over US-South Korea military exercises, describing them as rehearsals for an invasion

have strengthened surveillance

Indonesia landslide death toll rises to 30

AFP | Jakarta

The death toll from a landslide on a remote Indonesian island rose to 30 after rescuers found more bodies yesterday, an official said.

The landslide struck Monday on Serasan Island, located in the Natuna region between Borneo and Peninsular Malaysia.

"As of 11:50 am (0450 GMT) today, nine bodies have been found," local government spokesperson Patli Muhamad said.

The bodies were found buried under the rubble and landslide debris at Pangkalan village, Muhamad said, adding that 24 people are still missing.



Rescue team evacuate the body of a victim that was found buried by a landslide at Pangkalan village, in Natuna Islands

Muhamad said the poor weather that had previously hampered search and rescue efforts had improved and communication lines were also being gradually restored.

Three arrested in Japan for 'sushi terrorism' pranks

AFP | Tokyo

Three people have been arrested in Japan over unhygienic pranks at a conveyor-belt sushi restaurant after footage of their antics -- dubbed "sushi terrorism" -- sparked outrage online.

Police accused the young trio of seeking to obstruct business at major restaurant chain Kura Sushi, which was bombarded with customer complaints after the video went viral.

The clip shows one member of the group grabbing a piece of sushi from a plate as it passes, shoving the whole morsel into their mouth and then drinking soy sauce directly from a communal bottle.



Plates of sushi on a conveyor belt at a sushi chain restaurant in Tokyo

Similar videos filmed at different chains surfaced last month on platforms including Twitter and TikTok, with some apparently weeks or even years old.

Other unsavoury pranks included customers touching moving pieces of sushi with a freshly licked finger, or sucking the rim of a teacup before placing it back on a shelf.

Russia deadly

Barrage of Russian missiles

Russia says the wave of attacks were in retaliation for a border incursion last week

AFP | Kyiv

Russia hit Ukraine with a barrage of missiles yesterday, killing nine people and triggering a wave of power cuts, including at Europe's biggest nuclear power plant.

The UN nuclear agency's chief warned next time "luck will run out" in reference to the danger of repeated electricity outages at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia facility.

Russia said the strikes were a response to a border incursion earlier this month and cast doubt over the extension of a vital UN-brokered grain deal, saying it would discuss its renewal with the UN on Monday.

The missiles fell across the country, causing the first civilian deaths in the western Lviv region, considered relatively safe and far from the front lines, in a long time as fighting raged in town of Bakhmut in the east.

In Velyka Vilshanytsia, a small village outside the city of Lviv, shocked villagers searched through the rubble where Ukrainian officials said a Russian missile killed five people around 120 kilometres (75 miles) from the Polish

Taliban governor

AFP | Kabul

The Taliban governor of Afghanistan's Balkh province, known for fighting against Islamic State jihadists, was killed in a suicide attack at his office yesterday, officials said.

The killing, a day after he met top government officials visiting from Kabul, makes Mohammad Dawood Muzammil one of the highest-ranking figures slain since the Taliban stormed back to power in 2021.

Violence across Afghanistan has dramatically dropped since the Taliban seized control, but the security situation has again deteriorated with IS claiming several deadly attacks.

"Two people, including Mohammad Dawood Muzammil, the governor of Balkh, have been killed in an explosion this morning," local police spokesman Asif Waziri said, adding that the blast happened on the second floor of his office, in the provincial capital Mazar-i-Sharif.

"It was a suicide attack. We don't have information as to how the suicide bomber reached the office of the governor," he said, adding that two people were also wounded.

The explosion happened moments after the governor arrived