

News in brief

◆ Public trust in police in England and Wales is "hanging by a thread"

following a series of "dreadful" scandals, the head of a law enforcement watchdog warned yesterday. Andy Cooke, head of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), said the police service was at a "historic turning point" as he demanded "definitive action" to restore public faith. In his annual assessment, Cooke called for legal powers so failing police forces can be ordered to improve when there are serious concerns for public safety.

Trust in England police 'hanging by a thread': watchdog



◆ Dutch top court says Crimean gold must go to Kyiv



◆ The Netherlands' highest court ruled yesterday that a priceless collection of Crimean gold must be handed over to Ukraine, the latest move in a legal tug-of-war spanning almost a decade. The treasures, dubbed the "Scythian Gold," were loaned to the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam just before Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014. Both Ukraine and four museums in the occupied peninsula have demanded that the treasures be returned to them, but the Allard Pierson Museum said it would not do so until a judge ruled to which party it should go.

◆ Myanmar's junta has suspended

UN says Myanmar junta halts humanitarian access to cyclone survivors

travel authorisations for aid workers trying to reach hundreds of thousands of people in the cyclone-ravaged Rakhine state, the UN's humanitarian affairs office said yesterday. Cyclone Mocha brought lashing rain and winds of 195 kilometres per hour (120 miles per hour) to Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh last month, killing at least 148 people in Myanmar. The cyclone destroyed homes and brought a storm surge to Rakhine state, where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya minority refugees live in displacement camps following decades of ethnic conflict.



CURIOSER & CURIOSER

A decade on, giant duck brings a friend home to roost in Hong Kong



People take photos of two large inflatable yellow ducks called "Double Ducks" by Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman in Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour

AFP | Hong Kong

Ten years after a giant inflatable yellow duck captivated crowds in Hong Kong, the art installation returned to the city's Victoria Harbour yesterday as a double-bill exhibition.

The twin 18-metre-tall (59-foot) sculptures by Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman are part of the Rubber Duck series that has made appearances in major cities since its 2007 debut.

The faddish artwork previously made headlines in Hong Kong for drawing huge audiences and for accidental deflations, including when it shrank to a flat disk next to a ferry pier in 2013.

Following stormy weather early yesterday before they were released onto the water, Hofman joked that the two ducks "took a bath this morning".

"In a world where we suffered from a pandemic, wars and political situations, I think it is the moment to bring back the double luck," he said.

Setting sail in front of Hong Kong's landmark Convention and Exhibition Centre, the mighty ducks moved through the harbour before stopping

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DUTCH ARTIST FLORENTIJN HOFMAN

to nest near the city government's headquarters.

Office workers strolled by during lunch breaks to snap selfies, while others carried yellow duck balloons to celebrate the sunny duo's new perch.

"I think it's very good to have the duck back after 10 years because it is simple happiness, especially after the pandemic," one admirer named Vivian said.

"It's a form of flashback," said 32-year-old bank employee Zenj. "I think it brings luck."

During its 2013 visit to Hong Kong, the solo lemon-hued bird ruffled feathers in Beijing after internet users edited the famous "Tank Man" photo from the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown by replacing the tanks with ducks.

UK jets scrambled to escort Russian planes near NATO airspace: govt



Two British Royal Air Force Typhoon FGR4 aircraft fly over RAF Waddington near Lincoln, England

AFP | London

British Royal Air Force fighter jets were twice scrambled over the course of 24 hours to intercept Russian aircraft flying close to NATO airspace, the Ministry of Defence in London said yesterday.

RAF Typhoons based in Estonia and Swedish Gripen fighters were on Thursday evening scrambled to "intercept" a Russian Il-20 reconnaissance aircraft and a Su-27 fighter jet "flying close to NATO and Swedish airspace", the ministry said.

The Russian aircraft "were not complying with international norms by failing to communicate with the relevant Flight Information Regions (FIRs)" but "remained in international airspace and flew in a professional manner", it added.

Fighting in southern Ukraine as offensive expected

Intense fighting erupts in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region

● Russian official reports ongoing combat in Zaporizhzhia, potentially marking Kyiv's anticipated counter-offensive

● Ukraine remains silent, but expectations rise for Western-backed forces to reclaim occupied territories

● Russia claims Ukrainian offensive involved 1,500 soldiers and 150 armored vehicles but was repelled

AFP | Washington



A dog walks on the debris of a destroyed building in the town of Orikhiv, in the Zaporizhzhia region (file photo)

fensive.

Ukraine has not offered any confirmation but expectations have built for months over when its forces, bolstered with Western weapons and training, would launch a counter-offensive in a bid to reclaim land occupied by Russian forces.

The fighting comes as the humanitarian and environmental cost climbed after the destruction

of the Kakhovka dam unleashed destructive flooding in a different part of Ukraine's south.

"At the moment, active combat is ongoing in the region between Orekhovo and Tokmak," Vladimir Rogov, an official with Russian occupation authorities, wrote on the Telegram messaging service, referring to a locality known in Ukrainian as Orikhiv.

Alexander Sladkov, a corre-

China slams US over reported 'spy base' in Cuba

AFP | Beijing

China warned the United States yesterday against "interfering in Cuba's internal affairs," in response to reports that Beijing was planning to set up a spy base on the island just off American shores.

The media reports, based on comments by anonymous US officials to The Wall Street Journal and CNN, were dismissed by Cuba's deputy foreign minister as "mendacious and unfounded," while the White House called them inaccurate.

When asked about the alleged

spying base at a regular press briefing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said he was "unaware of the situation" before criticizing US policy on Cuba.

"As we all know, spreading rumors and slander is a common tactic of the United States, and wantonly interfering in the internal affairs of other countries is its patent," said Wang.

"The United States should reflect on itself and stop interfering in Cuba's internal affairs under the banner of freedom and democracy, and immediately cancel the economic, com-



A staff prepares a table before a meeting between Cuban foreign minister Bruno Rodriguez and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing (file photo)

mercial and financial embargo against Cuba."

The reports suggested that the Chinese spying base would

be capable of eavesdropping on communications across broad swathes of the southeastern United States.

The developments come as Chinese leader Xi Jinping has pushed a rapid expansion of the country's security presence around the world.

A base in Cuba, which lies 150 kilometers off Florida's southern tip, would present the most direct challenge yet to the continental United States.

The Soviet Union had electronic spying facilities in communist Cuba to monitor the United States.

Greta Thunberg marks last 'school' strike as she graduates

AFP | London

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg said yesterday she was marking her last "school strike" as she was graduating high school, but said she would continue partaking in weekly protests.

"Today, I graduate from school, which means I'll no longer be able to school strike for the climate. This is then the last school strike for me," Thunberg said in a post on social media.

Greta Thunberg was only 15 when she began her "School strike for climate" in front of Sweden parliament in Stockholm



Sweden's Greta Thunberg and other young climate activists stage a demonstration (file photo)

Thunberg, who spearheaded the global Fridays for Future movement, also said she didn't plan on giving up the protests completely.

"I'll continue to protest on Fridays, even though it's not

technically 'school striking'. We simply have no other option than to do everything we possibly can," said the 20-year-old, adding "the fight has only just begun."

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GRETA THUNBERG

when she began her "School strike for climate" in front of Sweden parliament in Stockholm.

"When I started striking in 2018 I could never have expected that it would lead to anything," she said in a statement.