

News in brief

Top court delays Madagascar presidential vote by a week



◆ Madagascar's top court yesterday ordered that presidential elections be postponed by one week, amid high political tensions after disputes over the regularity of the vote. For more than a week, opposition parties have held demonstrations against what they call an "institutional coup" to keep outgoing president Andry Rajoelina in power. "The Constitutional Court, by virtue of its regulatory power, orders the postponement of the first round of the presidential election to November 16, 2023," the court wrote in a ruling. Voters in the Indian Ocean island nation were initially due to head to the polls on November 9.

The Japanese government said yesterday it was seeking to strip official recognition from the Unification Church, the influential sect under intense scrutiny since the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe.

Japan moves to strip Unification Church of government recognition



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida last year ordered a probe into the church after it emerged that Abe's alleged killer was motivated by resentment against the group. It has been accused of pressuring its followers into making hefty donations and blamed for child neglect among its members.

Two dead in suspected migrant smuggling accident in Hungary



◆ Two people died and six others were injured when a car thought to be smuggling people through Hungary overturned yesterday, Hungarian police said. Since July, there has been a rise compared to previous months in the number of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers crossing from Serbia into Hungary, which is a member of the European Union. The car driver refused to stop for a routine inspection and instead sped off, losing control at a nearby bend in the road, according to the police. The vehicle swerved, hit a tree and overturned.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Scientists pry a secret from the 'Mona Lisa' about how Leonardo painted the masterpiece



Journalists walk past Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa during a visit of the Louvre museum (file photo)  
AP | Paris

The "Mona Lisa" has given up another secret.

Using X-rays to peer into the chemical structure of a tiny speck of the celebrated work of art, scientists have gained new insight into the techniques that Leonardo da Vinci used to paint his groundbreaking portrait of the woman with the exquisitely enigmatic smile.

The research, published Wednesday in the Journal of the American Chemical Society, suggests that the famously curious, learned and inventive Italian Renaissance master may have been in a particularly experimental mood when he set to work on the "Mona Lisa" early in the 16th century.

The oil-paint recipe that Leonardo used as his base layer to prepare the panel of poplar wood appears to have been different for the "Mona Lisa," with its own distinctive chemical signature, the team of scientists and art historians in France and Britain discovered.

"He was someone who loved to experiment, and each of his paintings is completely different technically," said Victor Gonzalez, the study's lead author and a chemist at France's top research body, the CNRS. Gonzalez has studied the chemical compositions of dozens of works by Leonardo, Rembrandt and other artists.

"In this case, it's interesting to see that indeed there is a specific technique for the ground layer of 'Mona Lisa,'" he said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Specifically, the researchers found a rare compound, plumbonacrite, in Leonardo's first layer of paint. The discovery, Gonzalez said, confirmed for the first time what art historians had previously only hypothesized: that Leonardo most likely used lead oxide powder to thicken and help dry his paint as he began working on the portrait that now stares out from behind protective glass in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

# Israeli air strike kills 45 Palestinians

Israel deploys forces, tanks and other military hardware to Gaza border in preparation for possible ground invasion of the Palestinian territory after what has been labelled Israel's 9/11.

Blinken says Palestinians have "legitimate aspirations"

Agencies

An Israeli military airstrike on a residential building in the densely populated Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza killed at least 45 people and wounded dozens of others yesterday.

The airstrike hit the centre of the Jabalia camp in the late afternoon, according to Eyad Bozum, a spokesperson for the Gaza Interior Ministry.

The building was packed with dozens of people, some of whom had fled earlier attacks, Bozum added.

The death toll is expected to rise as civil defence workers continue to search for bodies in the rubble.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the Palestinians also have "legitimate aspirations" but also vowed US support for Israel in its war with Hamas.

The attack killed 1,200 people in Israel while Hamas took about 150 hostages in their surprise on-



Smoke plumes billow during Israeli air strikes in Gaza City

slaught from Gaza Saturday. Israel has retaliated by raining air and artillery strikes on Hamas targets in Gaza for six days, claiming over 1,350 lives.

Israel has deployed forces, tanks and other military hardware to the Gaza border, AFP journalists said, as it prepared for a

possible ground invasion of the Palestinian territory after what has been labelled Israel's 9/11.

Israeli fighter-jets and drones flew above Gaza City in the relentless bombardment that has levelled entire blocks and destroyed thousands of buildings, while Hamas had now fired more

than 5,000 rockets at Israel from Gaza, the army said.

Blinken hinted at the need for an eventual peace settlement -- an idea that has long met resistance from the right-wing Netanyahu.

He said Palestinian people have "their legitimate aspirations to live with equal measures of secu-

Israel-Hamas war a 'new cloud' over world economy: IMF

AFP | Marrakesh

The war between Israel and Hamas has cast a shadow over the IMF-World Bank annual meetings in Morocco, with warnings yesterday that it has darkened the outlook for an already sluggish global economy.

The global lenders are holding their gathering, which brings together finance ministers and central bankers from around the world, in an Arab country for the first time in 20 years.

The conflict has raised concerns about its potential impact on the world economy.

Speaking at a press conference in Marrakesh, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said the International Monetary Fund was "very closely monitoring how the situation evolves" and how it is affecting oil markets.

She said it was "too early" to assess the impact of the conflict, but "this is a new cloud on not the sunniest horizon for the world economy -- new cloud, darkening this horizon."

Georgieva noted that the IMF's World Economic Outlook, which was released earlier this week but drafted before the conflict broke out, already showed weak global growth.

Egypt receives humanitarian aid bound for Gaza

AFP | Cairo

The first shipment of humanitarian aid arrived in Egypt's Sinai yesterday from Jordan, state-affiliated media reported, to be transported into Gaza, which Israel has been bombarding for days following a surprise Hamas attack.

El-Arish airport, 50 kilometres (30 miles) away from the Rafah border crossing into Gaza, "has been designated by Egyptian authorities to receive international humanitarian aid from different parties and international organisations", Egypt's foreign ministry said in a statement yesterday.

It was not immediately clear when the aid would arrive in Gaza, after three Israeli air strikes on the Rafah border crossing -- the only entry point into Gaza not controlled by Israel -- resulted in its closure.

Calls for aid to Gaza have multiplied, including from United Nations chief Antonio Guterres, who spoke with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Wednesday.

Blinken says will visit Egypt, UAE on H

AFP | Cairo

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday he will visit Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan to put pressure on Hamas after Israel.

Blinken announced the addition of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to his itinerary after talks in Israel. Blinken announced he would visit the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia before the crisis had taken the bitious US-backed push to normalize relations with Israel.

In each stop, "we will continue to help prevent the conflict and to use their leverage on Hamas and unconditionally release the hostages," Blinken told a news conference in Tel Aviv.

Over 40% of Antarctica's ice shelves lost mass in 25 years: study

AFP | London

More than 40 percent of Antarctica's ice shelves lost volume in 25 years, increasing the risk of sea levels rising and with human-induced warming the likely cause, scientists said yesterday.

Ice shelves are freshwater extensions of the ice sheets that cover much of Antarctica, floating on the seas that surround the vast and ecologically fragile continent.

They act as giant "plugs" stabilising massive glaciers, slowing down the flow of ice into the ocean.

When ice shelves shrink, these

plugs weaken and the rate of ice loss from the glaciers increases.

In a study published in the journal Science Advances yesterday, scientists analysed more than 100,000 satellite radar images to assess the health of Antarctica's 162 ice shelves.

They found that the volume of 71

fell from 1997 to 2021.

"Acceleration of glaciers and ice shelf deterioration has a level since the start of the satellite period," said Benjamin Davis, a research fellow at the University of Leeds in Britain who led the study.