



News in brief

◆ **Russia on Thursday** said it was expelling two US embassy staff for allegedly "liaising" with Robert Shonov, a former US consulate worker accused by Moscow of spying. Shonov, who worked for the US consulate in Vladivostok, was charged with allegedly passing information about the conflict in Ukraine to American diplomats, a claim the US has rejected. Russia's foreign ministry said the two US diplomats -- Jeff Sillin and David Bernstein -- conducted "illegal activities by liaising with a Russian citizen, (Robert) Shonov". "The US ambassador was told that Sillin and Bernstein must leave the territory of Russia within seven days under the status of persona non grata," it said. Tensions between Russia and the United States have been deteriorating for years, and both sides have expelled diplomatic staff. The United States strongly condemned Shonov's arrest in May, accusing Russia of using "increasingly repressive laws against its own citizens".



Russia expels two US diplomats for links to 'spy'

Taiwan slams Musk for calling it an 'integral part' of China

◆ **Slamming Elon Musk** for calling Taiwan an "integral part of China," the Taiwan foreign minister has asserted that Taiwan is "not for sale". Musk, the owner of the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter), as well as the Tesla (TSLA.O) electric car company and Starlink satellite network has stated that Taiwan is an integral part of China. His remarks at the All-In Summit in Los Angeles were recorded and posted to YouTube this week. "Their (Beijing's) policy has been to reunite Taiwan with China. From their standpoint, maybe it is analogous to Hawaii or something like that, like an integral part of China that is arbitrarily not part of China mostly because ... the US Pacific Fleet has stopped any sort of reunification effort by force," Musk said. Responding to this, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu, posted on X on Wednesday night. "Hope @elonmusk can also ask the #CCP to open @X to its people. Perhaps he thinks banning it is a good policy, like turning off @Starlink to thwart #Ukraine's counterstrike against #Russia. Listen up, #Taiwan is not part of the #PRC & certainly not for sale! JW."

Princess Diana's 'Black Sheep' sweater sells at auction for \$1.1 mn



◆ **An iconic red sweater** worn by Princess Diana shortly after her engagement to then-Prince Charles, featuring rows of fluffy little sheep, sold at auction for more than \$1.1 million following a frenetic bout of final bidding. Sotheby's announced yesterday. The 19-year-old sported the knit garment -- which includes one black sheep amid dozens of otherwise white woolly creatures -- at a June 1981 polo match during her whirlwind days as a shy royal-in-the-making. The playfully patterned "Black Sheep" sweater became one of the most emblematic articles of clothing worn by Diana, which in hindsight seems to foretell her troubled journey as a member of the British royal family.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

NASA joins the still controversial search for UFOs



Representative picture

AFP | Washington, United States

NASA on Thursday officially joined the search for UFOs -- but reflecting the stigma attached to the field, the US space agency wouldn't identify the director of the new program tasked with tracking mystery flying objects. The official's appointment is the result of a year-long NASA fact-finding report into what NASA calls "unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP)." "At NASA, it's in our DNA to explore -- and to ask why things are the way they are," NASA chief Bill Nelson said. An independent team of 16 researchers concluded in the report that the search for UAPs "demands a rigorous, evidence-based approach." "We need to ensure that the scientific process and methods are free," said Daniel Evans,

who worked on the year-long NASA report leading to the announcement. "Some of the threats and the harassment have been beyond the pale quite frankly," Evans said. **800 events** There have been more than 800 "events" collected over 27 years, of which two to five percent are thought to be possibly anomalous, the report's authors said during a May meeting. These are defined as "anything that is not readily understandable by the operator or the sensor," or "something that is doing something weird," said team member Nadia Drake. The US government has begun taking the issue of UAPs more seriously in recent years, in part due to concerns that they are related to foreign surveillance.

Ukraine backtracks on retaking village near Bakhmut

Ukraine's deputy defence minister Ganna Malyar backtracked on an announcement earlier Thursday that Kyiv had retaken an eastern village near Bakhmut after troops on the ground said fighting was ongoing. Kyiv began pushing back against Moscow's forces in the south and east of the country in June after building up Western weapons and recruiting assault battalions. Malyar had announced that the village of Andriivka was "ours", saying Kyiv's forces were "moving forward in the Bakhmut sector." The announcement was rejected by Ukrainian soldiers on the ground. "The statement about the capture of Andriivka is premature," the 3rd Separate Assault Brigade, fighting in the Donetsk region, said on social media. "There are serious and important battles in the areas of Klishchivka and Andriivka," it said, calling the statement "unfair." Malyar said she was "clarifying" the situation, blaming it on a "communication breakdown."

German Red Cross says Morocco aid plan thwarted

The German Red Cross (DRK) yesterday said it had been forced to cancel a plan to deliver aid to earthquake-hit Morocco. "For reasons beyond our control... new rules and regulations announced at short notice have made it impossible for the plane to take off today," the DRK said, without giving further details. "We deeply regret these developments because the people on the ground urgently need help," it said.

Japan warns against 'violations' of UN ban on arms deals with N.Korea

Japan warned yesterday against violating UN resolutions on arms deals with North Korea, after Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Kim Jong Un. "We are watching (the talks) with concerns including the possibility that it could lead to violations of the Security Council's ban on all arms-related material transactions with North Korea," new Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa said. Kamikawa said that the "Russian invasion of Ukraine cannot be accepted". She added: "Japan has urged third parties not to provide support to Russian forces. We are watching related activities with concerns."

Global aid effort into for flood-stricken L



This image grab from footage published on social networks by Libyan al-Masar television channel on September 13 shows an aerial view of floods after the Mediterranean storm "Daniel" hit Libya's eastern city of Derna.

AFP | Derna, Libya

A global aid effort for Libya gathered pace yesterday after a tsunami-sized flash flood killed at least 4,000 people, with thousands more missing -- a death toll the UN blamed in part on the legacy of years of war and chaos. The enormous surge of storm water burst two upstream river dams late Sunday and reduced the city of Derna to an apocalyptic wasteland where entire city blocks and untold numbers of people were washed into the Mediterranean. "Within seconds the water level suddenly rose," recounted one injured survivor who said he was swept away with his mother

Most casualties could have been avoided: UN Geneva, Switzerland

The United Nations said Thursday that most of the thousands of deaths in Libya's flood disaster could have been averted if early warning and emergency management systems had functioned properly. With better functioning coordination in the crisis-wracked country, the human toll could have been far smaller, the UN's World Meteorological Organ-

ization said. It warned that other conflict-hit countries faced similar, dangerous deficiencies to their early warning systems. If the system in Libya had worked properly, "the emergency management forces would have been able to carry out the evacuation of the people, and we could have avoided most of the human casualties," WMO chief Petteri Taalas told reporters in Geneva.

in the late-night ordeal before both managed to cling onto and scramble into an empty building downstream. "The water was rising with us until we got to the fourth floor, the water was up to the second floor," the unidentified man said from his hospital bed, in

EU parliament backs criminalising pa

Strasbourg, France

The European Parliament voted on Thursday to back a motion calling for those paying for prostitution to face criminal prosecution. The motion is non-binding, but comes at a time when several EU member states are reconsidering their laws on prostitution, which vary wildly around the bloc. It urges EU countries to make



Representative picture

it a crime to "solicit, accept or obtain a sexual act from a person in exchange for remuneration, the promise of remuneration, the provision of a benefit in kind or the promise of such a benefit." The motion generated fierce debate and was only passed by 234 votes to 175, with all the main party groupings of right and left

Immunologist wins 'Breakthrough Prize' for innovative c

AFP | Washington, United States

When Michel Sadelain began his decades-long quest to genetically modify immune cells to fight cancer, his peers dismissed his ideas as absurd and even his mother grew concerned for his career. On Thursday, the French and Canadian scientist was announced as a winner of the pres-



Dr Michel Sadelain

tigious Breakthrough Prize for his pioneering work in CAR T-cell therapy, a new form of treatment that has shown exceptional efficacy against blood cancers. "Over the years, I can't tell you how many times I've heard this won't work, can't work, even if it works it has no future," the 63-year-old told AFP in an interview. He was passed up for grants, promotions became uncer-



tain, and graduate students steered clear of joining his lab. "One thing I have to do is to throw a big party with all those who contributed," Sadelain said,