

News in brief

◆ US President Joe Biden

discussed the Israel-Hamas war Sunday with leaders of major Western powers, the White House said, as Israel intensified its attacks on Gaza. Biden spoke with the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany and Italy, the White House said. "The leaders reiterated their support for Israel and its right to defend itself against terrorism and called for adherence to international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians," a White House readout of the discussions said. It said the leaders discussed their own citizens trapped in the Israel-Hamas war, "in particular those wishing to leave Gaza." Fighting raged unchecked and scores more were killed in air strikes by Israel in Gaza as the humanitarian situation in the enclave worsened. Another convoy of 17 aid trucks arrived in Gaza as the Hamas-run territory faced "catastrophic" shortages.



Biden discusses Mideast war with Western allies: White House

◆ French President Emmanuel Macron will visit Tel Aviv on Tuesday for talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his office announced.

Macron to visit Israel for talks with Netanyahu: Elysee

US President Joe Biden, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni have already visited Israel. Israel says around 1,500 Hamas fighters were killed in clashes before its army regained control of the area under attack.



◆ The European Union on Monday took a legal step towards imposing sanctions on Niger's new military rulers, who overthrew the democratically elected leader in July. The 27-nation bloc has condemned the ouster of Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum, which toppled a key Western partner in the jihadist-hit region. The EU announced it had adopted a legal framework under which it can now "sanction individuals and entities responsible for actions that threaten the peace, stability and security of Niger".

EU moves closer to imposing sanctions on Niger military rulers

The bloc's foreign policy chief said the move "sends a clear message -- military coups bear costs". The EU has already suspended security cooperation and financial support with Niger following the military takeover. Former colonial power France is currently pulling out its 1,500-strong military deployment to the Sahel country after a demand from Niger's new rulers. A relative told AFP on Sunday that Bazoum is with his family and is doing well, after claims by the country's new military rulers this week that he had tried to escape. Since he was toppled by the military, Bazoum has refused to resign and has been held at his residence in the heart of the presidential palace along with his wife and son.



CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Spain seizes ancient gold jewellery stolen from Ukraine



some of the stolen Ukrainian ancient gold jewellery, valued at more than 60 million euros

AFP | Madrid, Spain

Spanish police said yesterday they have seized centuries-old gold artefacts worth over 60 million euros (\$64 million) that were stolen and taken out of Ukraine illegally. The 11 pieces, including necklaces, bracelets and earrings, were displayed at a Kyiv museum between 2009 and 2013, and were smuggled out of Ukraine before 2016, police said in a statement. "The seized peices -- gold jewellery of great historic and economic value -- had been stolen and exported illegally from Ukrain and were going to be sold in Madrid," the statement added, noting items dated from between the 8th and 4th centuries BC.

Three Spanish and two Ukrainian nationals -- one of them an Orthodox Church priest -- were arrested as part of the operation, which was

carried out with the help of the authorities in Ukraine as well as Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus and North Macedonia.

Police said the artefacts had forged documents in English, Ukrainian and Spanish to make it look as if they belonged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

"These are pieces that cannot be sold through the usual legal channels, such as auction houses," said police spokeswoman Ana Ramon.

Police began their investigation in 2021 after one of the pieces -- a gold belt with rams' heads -- was sold to a businessman in a private sale in Madrid.

This led investigators to the other 10 artefacts which police seized last month from the suspects.

The pieces are being studied by Spain's National Archaeological Museum and the country's Cultural Heritage Institute.

More than 19,000 displaced in Lebanon amid tensions on Israeli border: UN agency

AFP | Beirut, Lebanon

More than 19,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon amid an uptick in tensions between Israel and Hezbollah at the country's southern border, figures released yesterday by a United Nations agency showed.

"An increase in cross-border incidents" has resulted in the displacement of 19,646 people in Lebanon, "both within the south and elsewhere within the country", said the International Organization for Migration.

"We expect the numbers to rise as the cross-border tensions continue" or if there is an escalation in violence, IOM spokesperson Mohammedali Abunajela told AFP in a statement.

Hezbollah has launched escalating attacks on Israel, raising fears the group intends open a



Mustafa al-Sayyid's children who fled their village in southern Lebanon, sit in a classroom of a school where displaced Lebanese families from villages near the southern border took refuge in Tyre city

front from Lebanon in support of ally Hamas.

The IOM's Abunajela said that "amidst a deteriorating economic situation and the significant rise in poverty across all populations in Lebanon, internal displacements may add additional stress

to the resources of host communities".

Most of the displaced are currently "sheltered in host and family settings, while there are three designated schools, managed by local authorities that are also used as shelters", Abunajela said.

At least 40 people have been killed on the Lebanese side of the border, according to an AFP tally -- mostly combatants but also including at least four civilians, one of them Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah.

Four people have been killed in Israel, including three soldiers and one civilian.

While the tit-for-tat exchanges have so far been relatively contained, analysts have warned that the chances of Hezbollah scaling up involvement could hinge on any Israeli ground invasion of Gaza.

Palestinian PM says West gives Israel 'licence to kill' in Gaza

AFP | Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh yesterday accused Western nations of giving Israel a "licence to kill" in its war against the Gaza Strip's Islamist rulers Hamas.

"What we hear from the mouth of the occupation (Israeli) leaders on preparations for a land invasion means more crimes, atrocities and forced displacement," Shtayyeh told the start of a Palestinian Authority government meeting.

"We condemn the statements that constitute a licence to kill and give Israel political cover to commit massacres and spread destruction in Gaza," he added.

Faster West Antarctic Ice Sheet melting unavoidable: study

AFP | Paris, France

The melting of West Antarctica's ice shelves is likely to substantially accelerate in coming decades even if the world meets ambitions to limit global warming, according to research yesterday, warning it would drive rising sea levels.

Researchers warned that humans had "lost control" of the fate of thinning ice shelves -- frozen ridges floating on the fringes of the main ice sheet that play a stabilising role by holding back the flow of glaciers into the ocean.

This region has already seen accelerating ice loss in recent decades and scientists have said that West Antarctica's vast ice sheet, which holds enough water to lift ocean levels by several metres, could be nearing a climate "tipping point".

In the new study, researchers using computer modelling found that faster ice shelf



Representative picture

melting is already inevitable in the coming decades as the ocean warms.

Their results were largely the same even in a scenario where greenhouse gas emissions are slashed and warming stays within the more ambitious Paris Agreement target of 1.5 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times.

"It appears that we may have lost control of the West Antarctic ice shelf melting over the 21st century," said lead author Kaitlin Naughten, of the British Antarctic Survey.

EU debate top diplomat

● Aid allowed into Gaza from Egypt was "not enough"

● Israel, and key ally United States, have so far opposed any calls for a halt

AFP | Luxembourg, Luxembourg

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell yesterday urged faster aid deliveries to Gaza, and said the bloc was debating calling for a "humanitarian pause" in Israel's conflict with Hamas.

"What's important (is) more, quicker, and in particular to enter the basic things that make water and electricity supply being restored," Borrell said, ahead of a meeting of European Union foreign ministers.

Borrell said that the few dozen trucks of humanitarian aid that had been allowed into Gaza from Egypt was "not enough" and said fuel to produce power and drinking water was particularly needed.

He said ministers would discuss calls from United Nations' secretary-general Antonio Guterres for a "humanitarian ceasefire" and the issue would be on the table at an EU leaders summit on Thursday.

"Personally, I think that a humanitarian pause is needed in order to allow the humanitarian support to come in and be distributed, seeing that half of the population of Gaza has been moving from their houses," Borrell said.

He said "the attacks of missiles, rockets from Hamas, from Gaza, has to stop and the hostages, people who have been kidnapped, have to be released".

"It is part of any step towards de-escalation."

Manila says Chinese vessels 'intentionally' hit Philippine boats

AFP | Manila, Philippines

Manila said Monday that Chinese vessels "intentionally hit" Philippine boats at the weekend, escalating a diplomatic row over two collisions in the South China Sea.

The countries have traded blame over Sunday's incidents near Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands, with both sides filing diplomatic protests and releasing videos to support their accusations.

Philippine officials accused a Chinese coastguard ship and a "militia" vessel of "dangerous maneuvering" that resulted in collisions with a Philippine resupply boat and a Philippine Coast Guard vessel.

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro took it one step further Monday, labelling the Chinese actions near Second Thomas Shoal deliberate.

"Chinese coast guard and maritime militia vessels, in blatant violation of international



A collision between a Chinese Coast Guard ship (R) and Philippines' resupply boat (L)



The two collisions happened during a Philippine resupply mission to troops stationed on a navy vessel that was grounded on the shoal in 1999 to assert Manila's territorial claims.

law, harassed and intentionally hit Unaiza May 2 and Philippine Coast Guard vessel BRP Cabra," Teodoro said.

"We are here to really decry in the strongest possible terms

this egregious violation and illegal act within the (Philippines') 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone and the obfuscation of the truth by China's distorting the story to fit its own ends."