

News in brief

Rival Libya administration threatens to block oil exports

◆ The head of Libya's east-based administration threatened yesterday



to block oil and gas exports from territory under its control, claiming the UN-recognised government in Tripoli was wasting energy revenues. Oussama Hamad also said in a statement that he had "frozen" 2022 oil revenues "equivalent to more than 130 billion dinars (around \$27 billion)" as a first step. The east-based government, which does not recognise the authority of the Government of National Unity based in Tripoli, is ready for more steps, including an oil blockade, and would seek a legal ruling, he said.

◆ Chinese police arrested four people yesterday linked to a restaurant explosion that killed dozens, state media reported.

Four arrested over China restaurant blast that killed 31



At least 31 people were killed and seven others injured when a gas explosion ripped through a barbecue restaurant in the northwestern city of Yinchuan on Wednesday. It happened on the eve of the three-day Dragon Boat Festival holiday when many in China go out and socialise with friends. The suspects included the restaurant owner, two shareholders and the manager, state news agency Xinhua reported.

Sierra Leone votes amid crippling economic crisis

◆ Sierra Leoneans voted yesterday in a general election in which President Julius Maada Bio is seeking a second term amid a crippling economic crisis that sparked deadly riots last year.



One of the world's poorest countries, Sierra Leone was battered by a brutal 1991-2002 civil war and the Ebola epidemic a decade later. More economic misery followed due to the Covid pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which notably spiked food prices in the import-dependent West African nation.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Like dogs, wolves recognize familiar human voices



A wolf inside its enclosure at the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center (CWWC) in Divide, Colorado

AFP | Washington

The fact that the wolves engaged with disembodied voices played through speakers echoes what's been seen in dogs from the era of gramophones -- as captured in a famous painting entitled "His Master's Voice" -- to today's video doorbells, though it's not yet known whether our pooches enjoy this or it frustrates them

Like dogs, wolves recognize and respond to the voices of familiar humans more than strangers, according to a study that has implications both for the story of canine domestication and our broader understanding of the natural world.

Holly Root Gutteridge of the University of Lincoln, a co-author of the paper that appeared in Animal Cognition this week, told AFP a longstanding theory held that dogs' ability to distinguish human voices was a consequence of generations of selective breeding.

"So we wanted to look at wolves, because obviously nobody has been selecting so that wolves can recognize human voices," she said.

Root Gutteridge and colleagues carried out experiments across five zoos and wildlife parks in Spain, involving a total of 24 gray wolves, both male and female, aged between one and 13.

The team set up speakers and first played the animals the voice of a number of strangers that they would "habituate"

to, in other words, get bored of, because they decided it was not salient to them.

Then, they played the wolves the voice of their keeper who would say familiar things to them in Spanish, such as "Hey, what's up wolves?" or "Hello little ones, good morning, how's it going?"

In gestures that would be instantly recognizable to any dog owner, the wolves raised their heads, pricked their ears up, and turned towards the speaker.

Biden vows to fight Rep 'extreme' anti-abortion

President Biden denounces Republican agenda and calls for federal-level protections for abortion rights

AFP | Washington

A year after US Supreme Court scrapped the constitutional right to abortion in the United States, President Joe Biden yesterday vowed to fight against the "extreme and dangerous" effort by Republicans to curb access to the procedure nationwide.

The high court's decision to overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade decision passed the regulation of abortion back to individual states -- some of which have since moved to drastically restrict the procedure.



US President Joe Biden speak at an event

"State bans are just the beginning," Biden said in a statement on the anniversary of the ruling. "Their agenda is extreme, dangerous, and out-of-step with the vast majority of Americans."

Pro- and anti-abortion groups

held rival events in the American capital yesterday and Vice President Kamala Harris addressed reproductive rights in a speech in the southern US state of North Carolina.

Some 20 states, mostly in the

Congressional Republicans want to ban abortion nationwide, but go beyond that, by taking FDA-approved medication for terminating a pregnancy, off the market, and make it harder to obtain contraception

JOE BIDEN

South and Midwest, have prohibited abortion outright or severely restricted access while others, mainly on the coasts, have moved to protect it.

The closure of abortion clinics in about a dozen states has forced tens of thousands of women to travel elsewhere to terminate a pregnancy.

Scots leader says independence to be 'front and centre' at next election

AFP | London

The Scottish National Party (SNP) will fight the next general election in the United Kingdom with independence "front and centre" of its campaign, First Minister Humza Yousaf said yesterday.

Addressing a conference of Scotland's governing party in the city of Dundee, Yousaf vowed he would seek fresh negotiations with the UK government about independence if the SNP wins the most Scottish seats in the election expected next year.

"Let me be clear, if the SNP does win this election, then the



Scottish National Party leader Humza Yousaf

people will have spoken," he said.

"We will seek negotiations with the UK Government on how we give democratic effect to Scotland becoming an independent nation."

We will seek negotiations with the UK Government on how we give democratic effect to Scotland becoming an independent nation

HUMZA YOUSAF

Yousaf's remarks come as public support wanes for the SNP after the arrest of its former leader and first minister Nicola Sturgeon, the key figurehead of the independence movement in recent years.

The Dundee meeting is the first in-person conference since Yousaf, 38, replaced her in March, and the party started to see a drastic slide in its popularity.

Sturgeon, who came to power after the last -- failed -- 2014 referendum on Scotland breaking away from the UK, unexpectedly announced her resignation in February, saying she lacked the "energy" to carry on.

She was arrested and interviewed by police earlier this month over claims of mismanagement of SNP finances, weeks after her husband, the party's former chief executive, had also been detained.

No evidence Covid created in Chinese lab: US intelligence

AFP | London

The head of US intelligence said that there was no evidence that the Covid-19 virus was created in the Chinese government's Wuhan research lab.

In a declassified report, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said they had no information backing recent claims that three scientists at the lab were some of the very first infected with Covid-19 and may have created the virus themselves.

Drawing on intelligence collected by various member agencies of the US intelligence community (IC), the ODNI report said some scientists at the Wuhan lab had done genetic engineering of coronaviruses similar to Covid-19.

But the US "has no information" indicating they had done such work on the specific Covid-9 virus, known as SARS-CoV-2, or on any "close



The P4 laboratory (C) on the campus of the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan

progenitor, or a backbone virus that is closely related-enough to have been the source of the pandemic."

The report, made for Congress and carrying an unreleased classified annex, came three months after lawmakers demanded a fuller explanation on the origins of the pandemic which erupted at the end of

2019. Some lawmakers allege that the virus was created out of so-called gain-of-function genetic engineering research at Wuhan, and that Beijing had covered up evidence to show it was a man-made disease.

Reiterating a conclusion announced in March, the ODNI report said "almost all" of its constituent agencies, which

YOU KNOW WHAT

Reiterating a conclusion announced in March, the ODNI report said "almost all" of its constituent agencies, which include the NSA, the CIA and FBI, assess that Covid-19 was not genetically engineered and most believe as well it was not laboratory-adapted

include the NSA, the CIA and FBI, assess that Covid-19 was not genetically engineered and most believe as well it was not laboratory-adapted.