

News in brief

US Abrams battle tanks arrive in Ukraine, Zelensky says

Ukraine has received US Abrams battle tanks,

President Volodymyr Zelensky announced yesterday, boosting Kyiv's forces as they seek to break through heavily-fortified Russian defensive lines. The announcement came just after Ukraine claimed it had killed the commander of Russia's Black Sea fleet in a missile strike on Moscow's naval headquarters in Crimea last week in what would be a major embarrassment for Russia. "Abrams are already in Ukraine and are preparing to reinforce our brigades," Zelensky said on social media.

Sicilian Mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro, captured in January after three decades on the run, has died in hospital in central Italy, the ANSA news agency reported yesterday.

Sicilian Mafia boss Messina Denaro is dead: Italian media

The 61-year-old had colon cancer, for which he had sought treatment while on the run -- a decision that brought him to the attention of the authorities, who arrested him at a clinic in Palermo. Messina Denaro was one of the most ruthless bosses in Cosa Nostra, the real-life Sicilian crime syndicate depicted in the Godfather movies. He was convicted by the courts of involvement in the murder of anti-Mafia judge Giovanni Falcone in 1992 and in deadly bombings in Rome, Florence and Milan in 1993.



Kosovo says six suspects linked to deadly clashes fled to Serbia

Kosovo's interior minister yesterday said at least six suspected

assailants accused of participating in deadly clashes in northern Kosovo on Sunday were now in Serbia and receiving treatment at a hospital. The accusation came a day after the killing of a police officer during an ambush and an ensuing firefight at a monastery near the border with Serbia marked one of the gravest escalations in Kosovo for years. "Six wounded terrorists are being treated in the hospital of Novi Pazar and we ask Serbia to immediately hand them over to the Kosovo authorities, so they can face justice," interior minister Xhelal Svevca told reporters, referring to a city in southern Serbia.



CURIOSER & CURIOSER

'Three, two, one, nothing': fake fireworks fizzle, fuddle at Games



The light show for the opening ceremony of 2022 Asian Games is pictured in the sky over the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium

AFP | Hangzhou

Fireworks at the climax are a highlight of any opening ceremony and they were too at the Asian Games in China, except for one thing -- they weren't real.

The computer-generated pyrotechnics fooled television audiences and disappointed onlookers after host city Hangzhou opted for a virtual display, citing environmental concerns.

Chinese President Xi Jinping declared the 19th Asian Games open at an extravaganza packed with foreign dignitaries on Saturday, but organisers ditched the traditional firework display.

Instead, they superimposed virtual "fireworks" that appeared to go off all over the city on the official live broadcast.

The decision left people who had gathered near the stadium scratching their heads at the anti-climactic finale, with comical videos from the night going viral on Chinese social media site Weibo.

In one video, an excited

group of local residents aim their phone cameras at the lotus-shaped Hangzhou Olympic stadium, counting down in unison.

"Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one... nothing?" voices can be heard saying in the video, before the crowd erupts into awkward laughter.

Another clip taken across the river from the stadium pans back and forth between the empty sky over the "Big Lotus" and the exuberant virtual firework display shown by state broadcaster CCTV on someone's phone.

The cameraperson shakes and shrieks with laughter, asking "what did we wait for?"

The virtual display was so convincing that some journalists were fooled by what they saw on TV, with one regional newspaper reporting that fireworks erupted around Hangzhou at the end of the ceremony.

Organisers had previously announced there would be no fireworks, citing the lower carbon footprint of a digital show.

Biden hails tentative deal to end Hollywood writers' strike



Actors, writers and other union members join SAG-AFTRA and WGA strikers on a picket line in front of the offices of HBO and Amazon

AFP | Washington

US President Joe Biden welcomed yesterday a tentative deal for striking Hollywood writers to resume work after a months-long stoppage that paralyzed the film and TV business.

"I applaud the Writers Guild of America and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers for reaching a tentative agreement that will allow writers to return to the important work of telling the stories of our nation, our world -- and of all of us," Biden said in a statement.

Biden said the deal included "assurances" about the use of artificial intelligence, adding that it "did not come easily."

But he added that it was a "testament to the power of collective bargaining" between employers and unions.

The president also used the

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JOE BIDEN

Hollywood deal to underscore his call for autoworkers to get a "fair share" of profits in their separate strike against the country's "Big Three" vehicle makers.

Biden is set to travel to the picket line in Detroit on Tuesday in solidarity with auto employees.

Egypt to hold vote on Dec

Experts suggest the election was moved forward to address potential economic crises

AFP | Cairo

Egypt will hold a presidential vote on December 10-12, election officials said yesterday.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, a former army chief in power for nearly a decade, has yet to formally announce his candidacy, but state-aligned media has already published messages of support from pro-government entities.

Sisi, 68, was first elected in 2014, the year after he led the ouster of late Islamist president Mohamed Morsi, and then won a 2018 vote in a landslide against one of his own supporters.

Only two other candidates have so far declared their intention to run this time, including opposition politician Ahmed al-Tantawi, who has for months denounced harassment by security forces.

The election had initially been expected in the spring of 2024. Some experts have said it was



a view of vehicles and pedestrians at a street in Egypt's capital Cairo

moved forward to schedule it ahead of a possible switch to a flexible exchange rate that could exacerbate social tensions in the country of 105 million.

The vote will be held "on December 10, 11 and 12", said National Election Authority chairman Judge Walid Hassan Hamza.

Hopefuls can apply from October, with the candidate list to be finalised by November 9. The campaign period runs until November 29 and the winner will be announced on December 18.

The upcoming election is already fraught with accusations of repression and harassment of

Russian media rhetoric could be 'incitement to genocide': UN investigators

AFP | Geneva

United Nations investigation into human rights violations in Ukraine since Russia's invasion warned yesterday that some rhetoric transmitted by Russian media could amount to incitement to genocide.

Speaking before the UN Human Rights Council, the head of the investigation team, Erik Mose, voiced concern "about allegations of genocide in Ukraine".

"For instance, some of the rhetoric transmitted in Russian state and other media may constitute incitement to genocide," he said, adding that the team



Firefighters push out a fire as police experts look for fragments of missile at a crater on an industrial area in Kyiv

was "continuing its investigations on such issues".

The Norwegian judge heads a three-person Commission of

Inquiry (COI), which was created by the council to investigate violations committed since Russia's full-scale invasion of its

neighbour in February last year.

In its first full report in March, the team determined that Russian authorities had committed "a wide range of war crimes".

Mose said at the time that the commission was aware of accusations of genocide, including the forced transfer of Ukrainian children to areas under Russian control, and vowed to investigate.

In his update on the situation yesterday, he said the commission had "continued to investigate individual situations of alleged transfers of unaccompanied minors by Russian authorities to the Russian Federation".

Picasso masterpiece begins pre-auction tour in Dubai

AFP | Dubai

Pablo Picasso masterpiece expected to fetch at least \$120 million at auction went on show yesterday in Dubai, kicking off a set of rare viewings outside the United States.

The 1932 portrait of Marie-Therese Walter, Picasso's mistress and "golden muse", is being exhibited for two days before heading to Hong Kong and London, a boon for the United Arab Emirates' bid to establish itself as a cultural powerhouse.

The viewing "marks the first time a painting of this calibre by the world-renowned artist has ever been exhibited in the UAE", Sotheby's Dubai said in a statement, noting it is the first time the portrait had been shown



A visitor looks at Pablo Picasso's painting 'Femme a la montre' displayed for viewing at Sotheby's Dubai, ahead of an auction in New York

rare Picasso is unveiled here," said UAE Culture Minister Sheikh Salem bin Khalid al-Qassimi. The painting titled "Femme



a la montre" will be sold in November as part of a two-day auction of late New Yorker Emily Fisher Landau's prestigious collection.

Walter met Picasso in Paris in 1927, when the Spaniard was still married to Russian-Ukrainian ballet dancer Olga Khokhlova, and while Walter was 17.

Walter, whose daughter with Picasso passed away last year, was also featured in "Femme assise pres d'une fenetre (Marie-Therese)", which sold in 2021 for \$103.4 million by Christie's auction house.

Fifty years after his death in 1973 at age 91, Picasso remains one of the most influential artists of the modern world, often hailed as a dynamic and creative genius.