

News in brief

Two top figures in Mexico's Sinaloa drug cartel in US custody



Two top leaders of Mexico's Sinaloa drug cartel, including its co-founder Ismael Zambada Garcia, were arrested on Thursday in Texas, the US Department of Justice said. "Ismael Zambada Garcia, or 'El Mayo,' co-founder of the Cartel, and Joaquin Guzman Lopez, a son of its other cofounder, were arrested today in El Paso, Texas," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement, calling the cartel "one of the most violent and powerful drug trafficking organizations in the world." The pair face "multiple charges in the United States for leading the Cartel's criminal operations, including its deadly fentanyl manufacturing and trafficking networks," Garland said.

Journalists at some of Australia's largest newspapers launched a rare five-day strike yesterday, downing tools ahead of the Olympic opening ceremony due to a rancorous pay dispute. The strike hit the Sydney Morning Herald, The Age and Australian Financial Review, in one of the most significant acts of industrial defiance to hit Australia's troubled news sector in years. It is estimated hundreds of journalists employed under the umbrella of Nine Entertainment have deserted newsrooms in major cities Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

Journalists strike at top Australian newspapers



Brazil records world's first Oropouche virus deaths



Brazil has recorded the world's first Oropouche virus deaths, the country's health ministry said Thursday, after two women died of the illness spread by infected flies and mosquitoes. The women from the state of Bahia in northeast Brazil were "under 30 years old, with no comorbidities, but who had signs and symptoms similar to a severe case of dengue," the ministry said in a statement. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website states there are currently known outbreaks of Oropouche in parts of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba and Peru.

SPOTLIGHT

SpaceX cleared to launch Falcon 9 rocket again



The Falcon 9 Booster at SpaceX Headquarters in Hawthorne, California

AFP | San Francisco

SpaceX's stalwart Falcon 9 rocket has been cleared for launch after experiencing a rare failure earlier this month, officials said Thursday.

The rocket, a prolific launch vehicle that propels both satellites and astronauts into orbit, experienced an anomaly during a launch on July 11 in its second stage booster that meant it failed to deploy 20 Starlink satellites at a high enough altitude, and all burnt up on re-entry through Earth's atmosphere.

"During the first burn of Falcon 9's second stage engine, a liquid oxygen leak developed within the insulation around the upper stage engine," Elon Musk's company said in a statement.

"The cause of the leak was identified as a crack in a sense line for a pressure sensor attached to the vehicle's oxygen system."

After investigating the mis-

hap, the Federal Aviation Administration said it had determined "no public safety issues were involved in the anomaly" and that the Falcon 9 vehicle "may return to flight operations while the overall investigation remains open."

The last time a Falcon 9 experienced a serious incident was in September 2016, when one blew up on the launchpad. And in June 2015, the second stage of a Falcon 9 disintegrated two minutes after lift-off, resulting in the loss of important equipment bound for the International Space Station.

The new mishap notably came as the first crew of Boeing's problem-plagued Starliner spaceship are stuck waiting for ground teams to give a green light for them to return from the ISS.

With Falcon 9 cleared, the next scheduled resupply of the orbiting outpost in early August can now take place as planned, using a Northrop Grumman Cygnus cargo ship.

Sabotage disrupt French rail

Coordinated sabotage hits high-speed rail network hours before Paris Olympics

Attacks affected Atlantic, northern, and eastern rail lines

Around 800,000 passengers expected to be impacted over the weekend

Fires targeted fibre-optic cables crucial for train operations

AFP | Paris

Arson attacks scrambled France's high-speed rail network for tens of thousands of passengers yesterday, after what officials called pre-meditated acts of "sabotage" just hours before the Paris Olympics opened.

Yesterday's attacks were launched as the French capital was under heavy security ahead of the Games opening ceremony, with 300,000 spectators and an audience of VIPs expected at the event.

The fires that affected France's Atlantic, northern and eastern lines led to cancellations and delays at a time of particularly heavy traffic for summer holiday travel.



SNCF employees and French gendarmes inspect the scene of a suspected attack on the high speed railway network at Croiselles, northern France

Around 800,000 passengers are expected to be affected over the weekend as the damage is heavy and labour-intensive to repair.

"Early this morning, coordinated and prepared acts of sabotage were perpetrated against installations of SNCF," the national rail operator, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said.

"There are huge and serious consequences for the rail network," he added, while security services are hunting the culprits.

SNCF chief executive Jean-Pierre Farandou said that the attackers had started fires in "conduits carrying multiple (fibre-optic) cables" that carry "safety in-

formation for drivers" or control the motors for points.

"There's a huge number of bundled cables. We have to repair them one by one, it's a manual operation" requiring "hundreds of workers," he added.

Passenger services chief Christophe Fanichet said there were delays of 90 minutes to two hours on services between Paris and France's north and east.

"We ask people please not to come to the station, because if you haven't heard from us, your train won't be running," Fanichet told reporters.

One major branch of the network, the line to France's south-

Eurostar services to London also affected with cancellations and delays

east, was spared. CEO Farandou said that railway workers doing night maintenance in central France spotted unauthorised people, who then fled when the workers called in police.

Multiple services between Paris and London via northern France were also cancelled, the Eurostar company said, with others suffering delays as they divert onto lines not meant for high-speed trains.

Paris's RATP transport network was also operating under "increased vigilance" following the railway attacks, its chief executive Jean Castex said as he visited a control station.

The RATP has laid on a denser schedule throughout the day to bring spectators to and from the opening ceremony.

Olympics under heavy security

France's intelligence services were scrambling to determine the perpetrators of the sabotage, a security source told AFP.

The source added that the arson method used resembled past attacks by extreme-left actors.

In September, arson attacks on conduits holding railway cables

UN puts 4th century Gaza monastery on endangered site list

AFP | Paris

The Saint Hilarion complex, one of the oldest monasteries in the Middle East, has been put on the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites in danger due to the war in Gaza, the body said yesterday.

UNESCO said the site, which dates back to the fourth century, had been put on the endangered list at the demand of Palestinian authorities and cited the "imminent threats" it faced.

"It's the only recourse to protect the site from destruction in the current context," Lazare Eloundou Assomo, director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, told AFP, referring to the war sparked by Hamas's



A picture shows a view of the archaeological site of Saint Hilarion in the centre of the Gaza Strip

October 7 attack on Israel.

In December, the UNESCO Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict decided to

grant "provisional enhanced protection" -- the highest level of immunity established by the 1954 Hague Convention -- to the site.

Typhoon Gaemi displaces nearly 300,000 in eastern China

AFP | Beijing

Authorities evacuated nearly 300,000 people and suspended public transport across eastern China yesterday, as Typhoon Gaemi brought torrential rains already responsible for five deaths in nearby Taiwan.

Gaemi was the strongest typhoon to hit Taiwan in eight years when it made landfall on Thursday, flooding parts of the island's second-biggest city.

It also exacerbated seasonal rains in the Philippines on its path to Taiwan, triggering flooding and landslides that killed 20 people.

It had weakened by the time



fishing boats returning to port to avoid Typhoon Gaemi in Xiamen, in eastern China's Fujian province

it made landfall in China's eastern Fujian province shortly before 8:00 pm local time on Thursday, state media said.

China is enduring a summer of extreme weather, with heavy rains across the east and south coming as much of the north

has sweltered under successive heatwaves.

The country is by far the world's largest emitter of the greenhouse gases scientists say are driving climate change and making extreme weather more frequent and intense.

Sri Lanka announces first presidential vote since unrest



Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe
AFP | Colombo

Sri Lanka's first presidential elections since an unprecedented economic crisis spurred widespread unrest will be held in September, the election commission said yesterday.

The election will be the first test of the public mood since the height of the 2022 downturn, which caused months of food, fuel and medicine shortages across the island nation.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe, 75, who took office after street protests forced his predecessor to flee the country, has strongly hinted he plans to run.

He will face at least two rivals campaigning against austerity measures his government imposed to satisfy an International Monetary Fund bailout package.

The five-week campaign announced by the commission will conclude with a September 21 vote in a country still struggling with a fragile economic recovery and endemic discontent over cost of living issues.

Economic issues are expected to dominate the campaign as the country emerges from its worst-ever recession in 2022, when the GDP shrank by a record 7.8 percent.