

News in brief

Decoupling from China 'an illusion', French finance minister says



France's finance minister said during a visit to Beijing on Sunday that cutting all economic ties with China was "an illusion", as some Western countries question their reliance on the Asian giant. "We are totally opposed to the idea of decoupling. Decoupling is an illusion," Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told reporters at the French embassy. "There is no possibility of having any kind of decoupling between the American, European and Chinese economies." Le Maire nonetheless defended France's ambition to become more economically independent in certain sectors. But, he added, the concept of de-risking, which has become a byword in the West in recent months, "does not mean that China is a risk".

Saudi plans to host talks on Ukraine war



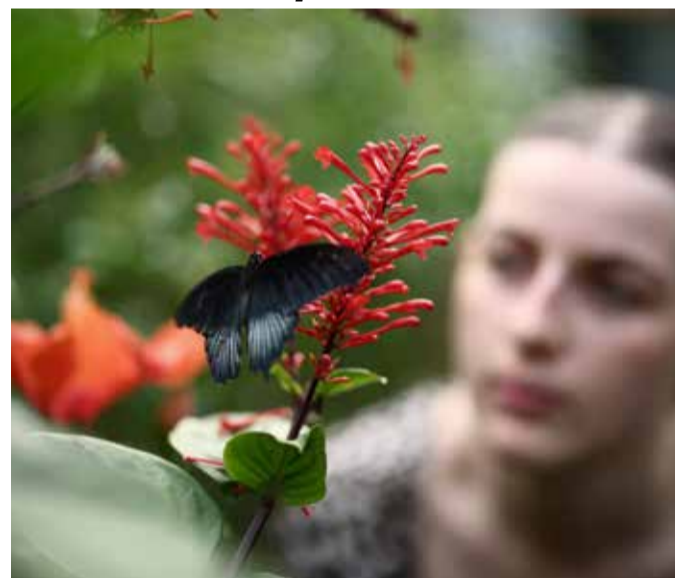
Saudi Arabia plans to host talks next weekend to discuss a path towards peace in Ukraine, convening representatives from Kyiv, Western powers and developing countries, officials told AFP on Saturday. Russia will not attend the meeting in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah, just as it did not participate in a similar gathering last month in Copenhagen, said three officials based in the Gulf who have been briefed on the plans. A full list of participants was not available, although countries including Britain and Japan were expected to attend, the officials said.

Moscow says thwarts Ukraine attack on Crimea involving 25 drones

Moscow said on Sunday its forces had thwarted a Ukrainian attempt to attack Russia-annexed Crimea with 25 drones overnight. "Sixteen Ukrainian UAVs were destroyed by air defence fire," the Russian defence ministry said, referring to unmanned aerial vehicles. "Another nine Ukrainian drones were suppressed by means of electronic warfare and, without reaching the target, crashed into the Black Sea," the ministry said, adding that there were no victims. Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, has been targeted by Kyiv throughout Moscow's Ukraine offensive but has come under more intense, increased attacks in recent weeks.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Wildlife lovers urged to join UK's annual butterfly count



A person looks at a Scarlet Mormon Butterfly resting on a flower inside the Butterfly enclosure at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) Zoo

Abbotskerswell, United Kingdom

Wildlife enthusiasts across Britain are being encouraged to log sightings of butterflies and some moths, as the world's largest annual survey of the increasingly endangered pollinating insects returns.

The UK-wide "Big Butterfly Count" -- which this year runs from July 14 to August 6 -- helps conservationists assess the health of the country's natural environment, amid mounting evidence it is increasingly imperilled.

Volunteers download a chart helping them to identify different butterfly species and then record their sightings in gardens, parks and elsewhere using a smartphone app and other online tools.

It comes as experts warn the often brightly coloured winged insects are in rapid decline in

Britain as they fail to cope with unprecedented environmental change.

"It's a pretty worrying picture," Richard Fox, head of science at the Butterfly Conservation charity, which runs the nationwide citizen-led survey, told AFP at Orley Common, a vast park in Devon, southwest England.

"The major causes of the decline are what we humans have done to the landscape in the UK over the past 50, 60, 70 years," he added from the site, which is seeing fewer butterflies despite offering an ideal habitat for them.

A report published this year that Fox co-authored, based on 23 million items of data, revealed that four in every five UK butterfly species have decreased since the 1970s.

Half of the country's 58 species are listed as threatened, according to a conservation "red list".

Pilot lands plane in sea off France after engine breakdown

AFP | Marseille, France

A pilot landed his tourist plane in choppy waters off southern France yesterday after the aircraft's engine broke down, with all occupants sur-

living unharmed, firefighters said.

The Cessna 177 touched down 600 metres (1,968 feet) off the coast near the Mediterranean resort of Frejus shortly before 10:00 am (0800 GMT).

The local fire service said the pilot chose the location to "avoid the beach, where there were already a lot of holidaymakers".

"To pull that off, you need a lot of technical ability and a bit of luck," a spokesman said.

Firefighters rescued two women and one man, who escaped unharmed but were shaken up.

The plane sank, although no pollution has been detected in the sea so far.

Taliban create bonfire of 'immoral' music equipment

AFP | Herat, Afghanistan

Authorities from Afghanistan's vice ministry created a bonfire of confiscated musical instruments and equipment in Herat province at the weekend, deeming music immoral.

"Promoting music causes moral corruption and playing it will cause the youth to go astray," said Aziz al-Rahman al-Muhajir, head of the Herat department of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

Since seizing power in August 2021, Taliban authorities have steadily imposed laws and regulations that reflect their austere vision of Islam -- including banning playing music in public.

Saturday's bonfire saw hundreds of dollars worth of musical gear go up in smoke -- much of it collected from wedding halls in the city.



A pile of musical instruments and equipments being set on fire by the members of Taliban on the outskirts of Herat.

It included a guitar, two other stringed instruments, a harmonium and a tabla -- a type of drum -- as well as amplifiers and speakers.

Women have borne the brunt of the new government regulations, and are not allowed in public unless wearing a hijab.

Teenage girls and women

have been barred from schools and universities, and they are also prohibited from entering parks, playgrounds and gyms.

Last week, thousands of beauty salons were shuttered across the country after authorities deemed certain makeovers to be too costly, or un-Islamic.

Putin, several African leaders attend Russian naval parade

AFP | Saint Petersburg, Russia

President Vladimir Putin yesterday praised Russia's navy in an address at an annual warship parade in Saint Petersburg, which he attended accompanied by several African leaders.

The military display took part as Moscow's offensive in Ukraine stretches into its second year and three Ukrainian drones were downed over Moscow early on Sunday.

The Russian Navy has played a key role in Moscow's assault on Ukraine by pummeling the Western-backed country with ship- and submarine-launched cruise missiles, among other operations.

Without mentioning Ukraine in his speech, Putin hailed "the brave crews of ships and submarines".

"In the name of Russia, our sailors give all their strength,



Russian President Vladimir Putin and several African leaders attend the Navy Day parade in Saint Petersburg

show true heroism and fight valiantly, like our great ancestors," Putin said.

"Today, Russia is confidently implementing major elements of its national maritime policy and is consistently building up the power of its navy," he added.

Forty five ships, boats and submarines took part in the pa-

rade along with around 3,000 servicemen, the Kremlin said.

The former imperial capital hosted a Russia-Africa summit earlier this week.

Several leaders and representatives of African countries including Mali and Burkina Faso attended the parade on Sunday.

Tens of thousands evacuated as northern China hit by torrential rain

Beijing, China

Tens of thousands of people were evacuated from high-risk areas of Beijing and another northern city as much of China was lashed by torrential rain yesterday.

Deadly storm Doksuri has been sweeping northwards over China since Friday, when it careened into southern Fujian province after battering the Philippines as a typhoon.

The Chinese capital and surrounding region were drenched

over the weekend, with officials warning of potentially hazardous conditions including floods, swelling rivers, mudslides and landslides.

More than 27,000 people in high-risk areas of Beijing have been evacuated, and another 20,000 were relocated from parts of neighbouring province Hebei's capital Shijiazhuang, state media said.

Hundreds of millions of people in northern China, including in Beijing, remain under a red alert -- the highest level

-- for heavy rain through at least Monday afternoon.

The alert covers Beijing's 22 million people and Tianjin's 14 million, as well as parts of Hebei, Shanxi, Shandong and Henan provinces. It is the first time since 2011 that such a heavy rainfall warning has been issued, according to local media. Chinese authorities have been cautious about heavy downpours since severe flooding in 2021 killed more than 300 people in central China, mainly in the city of Zhengzhou.

At least at Pakis

● The blast targeted the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) party

● No group has claimed responsibility for the attack

AFP | Peshawar, Pakistan

At least 39 people were killed and dozens more wounded yesterday by a bomb blast at a political gathering of a radical Islamic party in northwest Pakistan, officials said.

The blast targeted the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) party when more than 400 members and supporters gathered under a tent in the town of Khar, near the border with Afghanistan.

"I can confirm that in the hospital we have 39 dead bodies, with 123 wounded that includes 17 patients in a serious condition," Riaz Anwar, the health minister for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, told AFP.

Provincial governor Haji Ghulam Ali confirmed the death toll to AFP. Images from the blast site circulating on social media showed bodies strewn around the scene, and volunteers helping blood-soaked victims to ambulances. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but the

Zelensky says 'war' after Moscow dron

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned yesterday that "war" was coming to Russia after three Ukrainian drones were downed over Moscow.

"Gradually, the war is returning to the territory of Russia -- to its symbolic centres and military bases, and this is an inevitable, natural and absolutely fair process," Zelensky said on a visit to the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk.

"Ukraine is getting stronger," he added, warning however that the country should prepare for new attack on energy infrastructure in winter.

"But we must be aware that, just as last year, Russian terrorists can still attack our energy sector and critical facilities this winter," Zelensky said, adding that preparations for "all possible scenarios" were discussed in Ivano-Frankivsk.

Zelensky spoke after three Ukrainian drones were downed over Moscow early on Sunday, the Russian defence ministry said.