

News in brief

◆ **Iranian reformist president** Masoud Pezeshkian was sworn before parliament on Tuesday as the Islamic republic's ninth president at a ceremony attended by foreign dignitaries. Pezeshkian won a runoff race against ultraconservative Saeed Jalili on July 5 to replace president Ebrahim Raisi who died in a helicopter crash in May. Tuesday's ceremony came two days after Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei officially endorsed Pezeshkian and gave the 69-year-old heart surgeon presidential powers. "I as the president, in front of the Holy Koran and the people of Iran, swear to almighty God to be the guardian of the official religion and the Islamic Republic system and the constitution of the country," Pezeshkian said at the ceremony which was broadcast live on state TV. Pezeshkian, who is expected to unveil his government within two weeks, had secured more than 16 million votes during the runoff, or about 54 percent of the roughly 30 million ballots cast.



Iran's president Pezeshkian sworn in at parliament

◆ **The United States** will provide \$500 million in military funding to the Philippines, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday, as Washington boosts ties with Manila in the face of China's growing assertiveness. Blinken was in Manila with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin as part of an Asia-Pacific tour to strengthen Washington's latticework of alliances aimed at countering Beijing. "We're now allocating an additional \$500 million in foreign military financing to the Philippines to boost security collaboration with our oldest treaty ally in this region," Blinken told a joint news conference. Blinken described it as a "once in a generation investment" to help modernise the Philippine armed forces and coast guard.

◆ **An Indian passenger train** derailed and several of its cars overturned yesterday, killing at least two people and injuring 20 others. India's extensive rail network is the main form of travel in the vast country, but it is poorly funded and deadly accidents often occur. The Howrah-Mumbai Express derailed near Jamshedpur in the eastern state of Jharkhand before dawn. "At least two people were killed and 20 injured," Indian Railways spokesman Om Prakash Charan told AFP. The accident happened at around the same time a goods train coming from the opposite side derailed, possibly colliding with the passenger train when it passed by. "There was another derailment of a goods train nearby, but it was unclear if the two accidents occurred concurrently," Charan said.



Blinken says US to provide \$500 mn military funding to Philippines

◆ **Two killed, 20 injured in India train derailment**



Two killed, 20 injured in India train derailment

SPOTLIGHT

Uganda police find 17 human skulls at suspected shrine

AFP | Kabanga

Seventeen human skulls buried in metal boxes have been unearthed in an underground chamber at a suspected shrine in the centre of Uganda, police told AFP on Tuesday.



Representative picture

Children foraging for firewood outside Kabanga village near Mpigi town, about 40 kilometres (24 miles) west of the capital Kampala, made the grisly discovery on Sunday, according to local residents.

the use of heavy machinery, slowing the search.

Shocked and worried villagers told police there were metallic boxes containing what appeared to be skulls in an underground chamber beneath one of three ruined shrines on a sleepy hillside.

"Our worry (is) if police have recovered the skulls, where could the rest of the body parts be, like the legs, the hands?" father-of-four Mubumbi told AFP.

"We swiftly moved in and dug up the place, and so far we have recovered 17 human skulls," regional police spokesman Majid Karim told AFP.

"We are shocked. We never expected this to happen in our neighbourhood," he said.

"We are conducting more excavations to ensure there are no more skulls other than what we have so far recovered," he said.

Local media reported residents as saying that people had previously gathered at the location to worship.

He added that the remains, discovered in four boxes, were being examined to determine their age and sex, as well as when they may have been buried.

Police said the suspected owner of the site is on the run, having been linked to a separate case involving the murder of a prominent traditional Baganda leader, entrepreneur Daniel Bbosa.

He urged the public to remain calm, with officers working to investigate the incident.

The killing in Kampala was reportedly carried out by hired gunmen as Bbosa returned home from work in February this year.

It is not clear how the skulls ended up at the site, located on a steep hill that has prevented

Mpigi district, although densely populated, remains semi-rural, with agriculture dominating local trade.

133 killed after landsli

AFP | Bengaluru, India

Landslides in India triggered by pounding monsoon rains struck tea plantations and killed at least 133 people yesterday, with at least 250 others rescued from mud and debris.



Relief personnel conduct a search and rescue operation at a site following landslides in Wayanad

The southern coastal state of Kerala has been battered by torrential downpours, with blocked roads into the disaster area in Wayanad district complicating relief efforts.

"This catastrophe has resulted in the loss of 108 lives," the state's chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said in a statement on Tuesday afternoon. "This is one of the worst natural calamities Kerala has ever witnessed."

Another 128 people had been hospitalised for treatment after their rescue, he said.

"My thoughts are with all those



Nearly 500 people were killed around Kerala in 2018 during the worst flooding to hit the state in almost a century. India's worst landslide in recent decades was in 1998, when rockfalls triggered by heavy monsoon rains killed at least 220 people and buried the tiny village of Malpa in the Himalayas.

who have lost their loved ones and prayers with those injured," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on social media platform X.



NDRF personnel at the disaster site as they rescue victims of the landslide



A site following landslides

Wayanad is famed for the tea estates that crisscross its hilly countryside and which rely on a large pool of casual labourers for planting and harvest.

Images published by the National Disaster Response Force showed rescue crews trudging through mud to search for survivors and carrying bodies on stretchers out of the area.

Several estates in the district were hit by two successive landslides before dawn when most of their inhabitants were asleep.

Homes were caked with brown sludge as the force of the landslide scattered cars, corrugated

iron and other debris around the disaster site.

India's army said it had deployed more than 200 soldiers to the area to assist state security forces and fire crews in search-and-rescue efforts.

Modi's office said families of the dead would receive a com-

Turkish stray dog law sparks opposition anger

AFP | Ankara, Turkey

Turkish opposition parties vowed yesterday to fight a law authorising the capture -- and in some cases killing -- of the country's estimated four million stray dogs.

Evacuations, destruction as California's largest fire of year rages



Surrounded by flames, residents Grant (L) and Andrea Douglas (R) pull over on the side of the road while evacuating as the Park fire continues to burn near Paynes Creek in unincorporated Tehama County, California Los Angeles, United States

The emotive law -- which animal lovers fear will lead to a mass cull despite government denials -- was passed at final reading in the early hours of Tuesday by a margin of 51 votes, in the face of opposition protests.

Thronged firefighters were mobilized in California Monday to battle the state's largest blaze of the year, which has prompted thousands of evacuations and already burned an area larger than the city of Los Angeles.

No casualties have been reported so far, and firefighters benefitted from a slight drop in temperatures over the weekend that allowed them to make some progress, with the fire now 12 percent contained.

Deputies against the law wore white gloves stained with fake blood during the debate. "We will challenge this law in the constitutional court as soon as possible. It violates the animals' right to life," said Ozgur Ozel, leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP).

The Park Fire outside of Chico in the state's north has been raging since Wednesday in a rural region about three hours' drive northeast of San Francisco.

Nearly 4,900 firefighters have been mobilized, with 33 helicopters, 400 fire trucks and numerous planes battling the conflagration.

It has now ravaged more than 370,000 acres (149,700 hectares) according to the Cal Fire agency, making it one of

the largest fires in state history. More than 26,000 residents were under evacuation orders Monday afternoon, with authorities calling for extreme caution due to a high risk of fire escalation.

Russia stages naval drills involving most of its fleet

AFP | Moscow, Russia

Russia yesterday began large-scale military drills involving every part of its navy not engaged in the Ukraine offensive, the defence ministry said.

Some 300 vessels, including submarines, and more than 20,000 personnel will be involved in the exercises, which are being staged in the Pacific and Arctic Oceans, as well as the Baltic and Caspian Seas.

The drills will involve "more than 300 combat exercises with the practical use of combat weapons", the ministry said.

"The main purposes of the exercises is to test the actions of the navy's military command at all levels, as well as the readiness of the ships' crews, naval aviation units and naval coastal troops," it continued.