

News in brief

◆ **The health ministry** in Hamas-run Gaza on Saturday said more than 70,000 people have been killed since the war between Israel and Hamas erupted more than two years ago. The milestone comes as a fragile US-brokered ceasefire largely holds, but with both sides accusing the other of violating the terms of the deal. In a statement, Gaza's health ministry said the death toll from the war had risen to 70,100. The ministry said that since the ceasefire came into effect on October 10, 354 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli fire. Two bodies arrived at hospitals in the Gaza Strip in the past 48 hours, the ministry said, one of which had been recovered from beneath the rubble.



Death toll from Gaza war surpasses 70,000: health ministry

◆ **Pakistan dismissed yesterday** a warning by the UN rights chief of potential "far-reaching consequences" for the rule of law in granting the head of the all-powerful military legal immunity. The foreign ministry said Pakistan was "fully committed to protecting... basic freedoms and the rule of law as enshrined in the constitution", responding to criticism from UN rights chief Volker Turk. A constitutional amendment approved by parliament earlier this month, shielding Field Marshal Asim Munir and other top officials from prosecution for life, has raised alarm among rights group. The change also created a new Federal Constitutional Court, stripping the Supreme Court of some of its powers and tightening oversight of judges. "These changes, taken together, risk subjugating the judiciary to political interference and executive control," Turk said in a statement on Friday. He warned of a risk of "far-reaching consequences for the principles of democracy and rule of law which the Pakistani people hold dear"

Pakistan rejects UN warning over lifetime immunity for military chief

◆ **Iran's Revolutionary Guards** have seized a ship flying the flag of Eswatini and carrying "smuggled fuel", state media reported yesterday. Iranian forces regularly target tankers illegally transporting fuel in the Strait of Hormuz, a key chokepoint for global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments. "A vessel carrying 350,000 litres of smuggled fuel operating under the flag of Eswatini was seized and taken to Bushehr" in the south-west, state television said, quoting a local Revolutionary Guards commander. "There are 13 crew members on board, all from a neighbouring country and India," it added. Earlier this month, the Revolutionary Guards -- the ideological arm of the Islamic republic's military -- confirmed they had seized a Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker in the Gulf. The company managing the ship later said Iran had released the tanker and its 21 crew members were safe.

Iran Guards seize foreign ship carrying 'smuggled' fuel



SPOTLIGHT

'End of an era'

MTV pulling plug on music channels

AFP | London, United Kingdom

MTV kick-started a new era of music and pop culture in 1981, when it went on air for the first time, emblematically playing "Video Killed the Radio Star" as its debut music video.



More than four decades later, the channel, now owned by US media giant Paramount Skydance, will wind down its international music broadcasting by the end of the year as it struggles to compete with online streaming and social media.

MTV Music, MTV Hits and its 80s and 90s music shows will be shut down in the UK and other European countries in the coming months, sources at Paramount confirmed to AFP.

These music channels will stop broadcasting at the end of the year in France, Germany, Poland, Australia and Brazil as well, according to various media reports.

It has been declared the "end of an era" by dismayed fans and former MTV video jockeys -- the beloved mu-

sic presenters known as VJs who appeared on millions of screens at the height of the network's popularity.

However, the conditions that made MTV "revolutionary" simply "don't exist anymore", said Kirsty Fairclough, a professor of screen studies at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The rise of digital streaming platforms like YouTube and TikTok has "completely refigured how we engage with music and images", the researcher on popular culture told AFP.

Viewers or listeners now expect "immediacy" and "interactivity" that sitting in front of the television to watch rolling music videos cannot provide, she added.

James Hyman, who directed and produced MTV Europe's dance music shows in the 1990s, agrees the network thrived before the internet was ubiquitous.

"It was so exciting, because that's mainly all people had," Hyman told AFP.

Indonesia, Thailand race to find missing as flooding toll tops 600

Heavy monsoon rain overwhelmed swaths of Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia

● **Death toll in Indonesia rose to 442**

● **In Thailand, at least 162 people were killed**

AFP | Padang, Indonesia

Indonesian and Thai authorities raced yesterday to clear debris and find hundreds of missing people as the death toll from devastating floods and landslides across Southeast Asia topped 600.

Heavy monsoon rain overwhelmed swaths of Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia this week, leaving thousands of people stranded without shelter or critical supplies.

At least two areas of Indonesia's worst-affected Sumatra island were still unreachable on Sunday, and authorities said they had deployed two warships from Jakarta to deliver aid.

Central Tapanuli and Sibolga city "require full attention due to being isolated", National Disaster agency head Suharyanto said in a statement, adding that the ships were expected in Sibolga on Monday.

The death toll in Indonesia rose to 442, while 402 were still missing, according to a tally published on Sunday by the disaster authority.

It said at least 646 people had been injured.

In Sungai Nyalo village, about 100 kilometres (62 miles) from West Sumatra's capital Padang, floodwaters had mostly receded on Sunday, leaving homes, vehicles and crops coated in thick



Vehicles parked on an elevated road to keep them out of flood waters in Hat Yai in Thailand's southern Songkhla province

grey mud. Authorities had not yet begun clearing roads, residents told AFP, and no outside assistance had arrived.

"Most villagers chose to stay; they didn't want to leave their houses behind," said Idris, 55, who, like many Indonesians, goes by one name.

Across the island towards the north coast, an endangered Sumatran elephant lay buried in thick mud and debris near damaged buildings in Meureudu town.

Public criticism

In Thailand, where at least 162 people were killed in one of the worst floods in a decade, author-

ities continued to deliver aid and clear the damage.

Relief measures rolled out by the Thai government include compensation of up to two million baht (\$62,000) for households that lost family members.

However, there has been growing public criticism of Thailand's flood response, and two local officials have been suspended over their alleged failures.

Two people were killed in Malaysia after floods left stretches of northern Perlis state underwater.

A tropical storm has exacerbated conditions, and the tolls in Indonesia and Thailand rank among the highest in floods in those countries in recent years.

Climate change has affected

storm patterns, including the duration and intensity of the season, leading to heavier rainfall, flash flooding and stronger wind gusts.



The annual monsoon season, typically between June and September, often brings heavy rain, triggering landslides and flash floods.

Swiss right-to-die group says founder dies by assisted suicide

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

The head of Swiss right-to-die organisation Dignitas has died through assisted suicide, the group said in a statement yesterday.

Ludwig Minelli, who founded the group in 1998, died on Saturday just days before his 93rd birthday, Dignitas said.

Dignitas said it would "continue to manage and develop the association in the spirit of its founder as a professional and combative international organisation for self-determination and freedom of choice in life and at the end of life".

Minelli, a lawyer by trade, faced plenty of legal challenges and made several successful appeals to the Swiss supreme court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Dignitas said his work had a lasting influence on Swiss law, pointing to a 2011 ECHR ruling that recognised the right of a person to decide the manner and time of their own end of life.



Ludwig Minelli

Swiss law does not allow for euthanasia, where a doctor or other person administers a lethal injection for example. But assisted dying -- when a person who articulates a wish to die commits the lethal act themselves -- has been legal for decades.

Unlike some similar organisations in Switzerland, Dignitas, which says it has more than 10,000 members, also offers its services to people living outside the country.

Iran, Turkey agree to build key trade rail link



Representative image
AFP | Tehran, Iran

Iran and Turkey have agreed to begin constructing a new joint rail link to serve as a strategic gateway between Asia and Europe, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said yesterday.

The planned route, known in Iran as the Marand-Cheshmeh Soraya railway transit line and running towards Turkey's Aralik border region, will cover around 200 kilometres (120 miles).

It will cost roughly \$1.6 billion and is expected to take three to four years to complete, Iranian authorities have said.

Earlier this month, Iran's transport minister Farzaneh Sadegh said the rail line would

transform the southern section of what was once the Silk Road into an "all-rail corridor ensuring the continuity of the network between China and Europe".

It would also ensure "fast and cheap transport of all types of cargo with minimal stops", she added. At a joint press conference on Saturday with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan, Araghchi said "emphasis was placed on the need to remove barriers to trade and investment between the two countries".

"The two countries also stressed the importance of the rail link ... in the region and expressed hope that the construction of this line can start as soon as possible," he added.