

News in brief

Lawyer of Suriname ex-dictator calls for his acquittal

◆ The lawyer of Suriname's former dictator Desi Bouterse

called Friday for a court to acquit him of a 20-year sentence over the deaths of 15 political prisoners. Bouterse first seized power in a 1980 coup and in December 1982 allegedly rounded up 15 political opponents -- including lawyers, journalists and businessmen -- for execution at the Fort Zeelandia military barracks in the capital

Paramaribo. The 77-year-old had already been sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2019, but he has been challenging that verdict and under Surinamese law cannot be arrested before he exhausts the appeals processes.

◆ Fifteen people were injured Friday when two trains derailed as stormy winds lashed northwestern Switzerland, police said.

Fifteen hurt as two Swiss trains derail in storm

The incidents, on regional passenger rail lines, took place within 20 minutes of each other, and about 30 kilometres (18 miles) apart, north of the Swiss capital Bern. Three people were injured in the first derailment, including the driver, and 12 were hurt in the second, including one person with serious injuries. Wind speeds of 136 kilometres per hour were recorded nearby. One train carrying 16 people derailed in the lakeside village of Luscherz at around 4:30 pm (1430 GMT), police said.



US to open Vanuatu embassy in new Pacific boost

◆ The United States said Friday it planned to open an embassy in Vanuatu, its latest

effort to beef up its presence in the South Pacific where China has been seeking to expand its clout. An embassy in the capital Port Vila "would allow the US government to deepen relationships" in the archipelago and to step up development assistance including on climate, a State Department statement said. President

Joe Biden's administration, with bipartisan support from Congress, has been expanding the US role in an area that once received limited attention after a shock last year when China reached a security pact with the Solomon Islands.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Those protruding T Rex teeth? They were covered by lips: study



The skeleton of "Sue" the Tyrannosaurus rex at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago

AFP | Chicago

Sorry, "Jurassic Park" and toymakers everywhere.

Tyrannosaurus rex probably did not have those exposed jagged teeth.

The fearsome choppers of arguably the most celebrated of dinosaurs were likely covered by lips when the mouth was closed.

It's not an open and shut case, but that's the conclusion of a team of international researchers whose findings are published in the journal Science.

"Animals like T-Rex, theropod dinosaurs, most likely had some sort of lips, like a soft tissue covering on their mouth to cover their teeth," said one of the authors of the study, Thomas Cullen, an assistant professor of paleobiology at Auburn University.

"This is different than what a lot of prior assumptions had been -- which was that they looked more like crocodiles, having the teeth exposed when

When we looked at enamel thickness on the inside and outside of the teeth in large Tyrannosaurs, they don't show that pattern like a crocodile. They show a pattern more like an animal that has lips

THOMAS CULLEN, AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PALEOBIOLOGY AT AUBURN UNIVERSITY

the mouths were closed and having no lips."

To reach their conclusion, Cullen and the other researchers studied a range of different theropods from various museums and followed several lines of inquiry.

They looked at wear patterns, for example, on the enamel of dinosaur teeth and crocodilians, the most closely related animals to theropods alive today.

Deadly storms, tornado sweep through central US

◆ Tornadoes leave devastation across Arkansas, Illinois and Iowa

AFP | Washington

A major storm system bore down on the US east coast yesterday, after producing tornadoes and devastating winds across several central states that killed at least 11 people.

Multiple tornadoes swept through Arkansas on Friday, including in the capital Little Rock, killing at least five people, the state's governor said.

Dozens of others have been reported injured.

Daylight revealed extensive damage in impacted areas, with several homes torn apart, cars overturned, and trees ripped out of the ground.

Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders has declared a state of



The damaged remains of a neighbourhood is seen in Little Rock, Arkansas

emergency and activated the national guard to help with recovery efforts.

The city of Wynne, in the northeastern part of the state, was "cut in half by damage from east to west," Mayor Jennifer Hobbs told CNN.

The National Weather Service had also issued tornado warnings for several other states, from as far north as Iowa to the southern state of Mississippi, where a twister just last week

killed 25 people and caused extensive property damage.

Calamity struck in the Illinois town of Belvidere, outside of Chicago, when severe weather caused the roof and part of the facade of the Apollo Theater to collapse while a heavy-metal band played on stage inside.

TV footage showed emergency personnel carrying out injured concert-goers on stretchers, while video posted on social

media showed rubble -- some nearly waist-high -- on the floor of the concert venue, and a gaping hole in the roof.

Belvidere Fire Chief Shawn Schadle reported one death and 28 injuries, including five people who were hospitalized with serious injuries.

In the neighbouring state of Indiana, three people were killed by a storm in Sullivan County, several US media reported, citing local authorities.



The destructive weather comes as President Joe Biden tours the aftermath of a deadly tornado that struck Mississippi a week ago

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Climate activists turn landmark Rome fountain black

AFP | Rome

Climate activists in Italy turned a Baroque-style fountain at the foot of Rome's Spanish Steps black yesterday, in a protest they said evoked an "end of the world" scenario.

Three activists from the anti-climate change organisation Last Generation poured a vegetable-based carbon liquid into the landmark 17th-century fountain, known to Romans as La Baraccia, before being escorted away by police.

The fountain, in the shape of a boat, was designed by famed Italian sculptor Pietro Bernini.

Popular tradition has it he was inspired by the discovery



The Baraccia Fountain at Piazza di Spagna in Rome's historic centre, after the activists poured black liquid

in 1598 of a boat in the square after it was washed inland by a flooding Tiber river, Last Generation said.

Turning the water black "foreshadows the 'end of the world' scenario we are heading for, as we increasingly step on

the accelerator: drought alternating with devastating floods, which will put an end to life on Earth, along with heat waves," it said in a statement.

Last Generation began carrying out peaceful but disruptive protests in Italy last year ahead of the general election, urging politicians from all parties to make climate change their priority.

The protests in Italy are part of a series of actions across Europe to focus attention on climate change.

Activists have thrown soup, cake, mashed potatoes or washable paint at heritage and culture sites and artworks in museums.

Musk's AI letter is a 'hot mess' of hype, say critics

AFP | Washington

A letter signed by Elon Musk and hundreds of experts calling for a pause in the development of artificial intelligence is a "hot mess" of "AI hype" that even misrepresents an academic paper, critics say.

Billionaire Tesla boss Musk and other luminaries wrote that "AI systems with human-competitive intelligence can pose profound risks to society and humanity".

But Timnit Gebru, whose academic paper was cited to support that claim, wrote on Twitter that her article actually warns against making such inflated claims about AI.

"They basically say the opposite of what we say and cite our paper," she wrote.



Big tech companies like Google, Meta and Microsoft have spent years working on AI systems -- previously known as machine learning or big data -- to help with translations, search and targeted advertising



Elon Musk

hype".

The risks of AI, she wrote, were never about AI being "too powerful" but rather they were "about concentration of power in the hands of people, about reproducing systems of oppres-



They basically say the opposite of what we say and cite our paper

TIMNIT GEBRU

sion, about damage to the information ecosystem".

The open letter, published on Wednesday on the website of the Musk-funded Future of Life Institute, called for a six-month pause in development of powerful AI systems.

The signatories, who included academics and tech titans like Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, argued that the pause should be used to bolster regulation and ensure the systems were safe.