

News in brief

◆ **Thailand has seized more** than \$300 million in assets tied to criminal networks running multibillion-dollar scam centres in Southeast Asia, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said yesterday. The announcement comes after authorities across Asia, Europe and the United States targeted Cambodia's Prince Holding Group and its global business network with asset seizures and freezes worth billions of dollars. In October, US authorities indicted Prince's Chinese-born founder Chen Zhi, accusing him of presiding over forced labour camps in Cambodia where trafficked workers conduct online scams. Anutin told reporters on Wednesday that alleged scammers targeted with asset seizures valued at more than \$300 million were "among the big ones", including Chen, a Cambodian senator and two Thai nationals. "All those responsible must be brought to justice under the law," the prime minister said.



Thailand seizes \$300 mn in assets linked to cyberscam networks

◆ **China investigates factory allegedly making 'childlike' sex dolls** reportedly making "childlike" sex dolls sold on major internet shopping platforms is under official investigation, local authorities said yesterday. Online news outlet The Paper reported that several factories in southern Guangdong province were producing customisable dolls with "childlike pornography characteristics". The items -- including some designed to appear "pregnant" -- were being sold on Chinese e-commerce platforms like Taobao and the Instagram-like Xiaohongshu, the report earlier Wednesday said. District regulators in Huizhou city said a team was investigating one factory allegedly making the dolls and had ordered it to "immediately suspend production". A public outcry erupted last month after French authorities accused global e-commerce giant Shein of selling sex dolls resembling children.

◆ **German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier** received a ceremonial welcome to Britain Wednesday as his state visit got into full swing -- the first by Germany's official head of state in 27 years. Steinmeier enjoyed a horse-drawn carriage ride with King Charles III and inspected a Guard of Honour at Windsor Castle, west of London, on day one of his three-day stay. He was feted with a 41-gun salute at the 1,000-year-old castle where he ate lunch and reviewed items related to Germany in the Royal Collection. Steinmeier then met UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer at Downing Street, where the British leader praised the work the two countries had done supporting Ukraine. Starmer said Britain and Germany were also working together on migration, trade and economic growth and that the two countries' relationship was going from "from strength to strength".

German president enjoys royal treatment on UK state visit



SPOTLIGHT

Raccoon goes on liquor binge, passes out in toilet



Representative picture

AFP | Washington, United States

The suspect in a break-in at a liquor store in the US state of Virginia left a trail of broken glass and ended in a drunken heap on the floor. But the perpetrator of this booze-fueled rampage was released without charge into the wild after a few hours' sleep to sober up. Hanover County Animal Protection and Shelter reported Tuesday that a raccoon broke into the Ashland ABC Store over the Thanksgiving Holiday weekend. One of the shelter's officers was called to the scene on Saturday morning and discovered the "suspect" had ransacked several shelves and passed out in the bathroom. Photos

showed an aisle of the store littered with broken bottles, and the raccoon spread-eagled, face-down, beside the lavatory. "After a few hours of sleep and zero signs of injury (other than maybe a hangover and poor life choices), he was safely released back to the wild, hopefully having learned that breaking and entering is not the answer," the shelter said in a Facebook post. "A good drunk always passes out near the toilet," joked one Facebook commenter, Tom Wright. Raccoons, known for their dexterous paws, are native to North America. They are nocturnal and often rifle through garbage and other places as they scavenge for food.

US halts immigration applications for 19 nations

Homeland Security said would push to expand the list of restricted countries

● 19 nations include Afghanistan, Yemen and Haiti

AFP | Washington, United States

The US government has halted immigration applications for citizens from 19 nations including Afghanistan, Yemen and Haiti, an official memorandum said Tuesday, deepening a sweeping crackdown on migration. Authorities paused green card and citizenship processing for people from countries already subject to travel restrictions announced in June by President Donald Trump, the memo from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) said. Other affected nations include Venezuela, Sudan and Somalia. Senior US officials had signaled in recent days they would dramatically tighten restrictions on immigration, a move fueled by the shooting of two National Guard soldiers last week. The main suspect in the shooting, which killed one, is an Af-



Street vendors, many of whom are recent arrivals from West Africa, sell bags, watches, and jewelry along Canal Street in New York City.

ghan national who entered the United States during mass evacuations as foreign forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021. He pled not guilty to murder charges on Tuesday. The memo said USCIS "plays an instrumental role in preventing terrorists from seeking safe haven in the United States." The country had recently seen "what a lack of screening, vetting, and prioritizing expedient adjudications can do to the American people," it added, citing the Afghan murder suspect. Homeland Security chief Kristi Noem said Monday she would push to expand the list of restricted countries. "I just met with the President. I am recommending a full travel ban on every damn country that's been flooding our nation with killers, leeches, and entitlement junkies," she said on X, without naming which countries should be included.

US media reported Tuesday that federal authorities planned to launch a major immigration enforcement operation against Somali immigrants in Minnesota in the coming days, sparking pushback from local leaders who said state police would not cooperate. "Our values and our commitments to the Somali community, to every community of immigrants and people in our city is rock solid and will be unwavering," said Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey.



Each year, the United States issues around 1 million green cards, with roughly half granted to immediate relatives of US citizens, making family-based immigration the largest pathway to permanent residency.

China says Britain embassy delay 'completely unreasonable' Beijing, China

China said yesterday it was "strongly dissatisfied" with Britain's latest delay to a decision on whether to allow Beijing to build a sprawling new embassy in London. Residents, rights groups and China hawks have opposed the development of the embassy complex, which would be the largest in Britain if built, fearing it could be used for spying and harassing dissidents.

Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi



People walk outside the Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi. Zayed National Museum opened its doors in Abu Dhabi with galleries showcasing the history, heritage, and development of the United Arab Emirates.

Israel says received presumed remains of Gaza hostage

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

Israel announced yesterday it had received hostage remains found in Gaza from the Red Cross, which were being transported to the morgue for identification. It comes as the US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas remains fragile, with both sides accusing each other of violating the terms. Under the first phase of the deal -- which came into effect in October -- Palestinians were due to return all 48 hostages they held captive, 20 of whom were still alive. All but the bodies of two hostages -- Israeli Ran Gvili

To allow Gazans to exit to Egypt

Jerusalem, Undefined

Israel said yesterday it would open the Rafah crossing from Gaza to Egypt to allow residents to exit the Palestinian territory "in the coming days," but Egypt denied such a deal with Israel. "In accordance with the ceasefire agreement... the Rafah Crossing will open in the coming days exclusively for the exit of residents from the Gaza Strip to Egypt", COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body

that oversees civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, said in a statement. But Egypt swiftly denied that it had agreed a deal, insisting that the key crossing be opened in both directions. "If an agreement is reached to open the crossing, it will be in both directions, to enter and exit the Gaza Strip, in accordance with the plan of US President Donald Trump," the state information service said in a statement, quoting an official Egyptian source.

and Thai national Sudthisak Rinthalak -- have since been handed over, but Israel has accused Hamas of dragging their feet on returning remains. "Israel has received, via the Red Cross, the coffin of a deceased hostage, which was delivered to (army) and Shin Bet (internal security service) forces in the Gaza Strip," Prime Minister's office said. "The coffin of the deceased hostage... crossed the border into the State of Israel a short while ago and is on its way to the National Institute for Forensic Medicine, where identification procedures will be carried out," the Israeli army said.