

News in brief

◆ **China said yesterday** would introduce free pre-school education from the autumn, as the world's second most populous nation faces a looming demographic crisis. "Starting in the fall semester of 2025, childcare and education fees will be waived for children attending public kindergartens in the year before school," said the State Council, China's cabinet. The announcement comes a week after the country said it would offer parents the equivalent of \$500 per year for each child under the age of three. China's population has declined for three consecutive years, with United Nations demography models predicting it could fall from around 1.4 billion today to 800 million by 2100. There were just 9.54 million births in China last year, half the number in 2016, the year Beijing ended its one-child policy after more than three decades. The population declined by 1.39 million last year, and China lost its position as the world's most populous country to India in 2023.



China to offer free pre-school education from autumn

◆ **Japan sets record temperature of 41.8C** with the mercury hitting 41.8C, the weather office said, warning temperatures may rise further still. Temperatures the world over have soared in recent years as climate change creates ever more erratic weather patterns, and Japan is no exception. The scorching temperature in the city of Isesaki on Tuesday surpassed the previous record in the Hyogo region of 41.2C, which was set only last week. Tokyo has also been struggling with extreme heat.

◆ **Israel said it** culled 200 crocodiles at an abandoned farm on a settlement in the occupied West Bank, reporting the animals had resorted to cannibalism and posed a "significant risk" to humans. The Nile crocodiles "were being kept in an abandoned compound under poor conditions that constitute animal abuse, with insufficient access to food, which had driven them to cannibalistic behaviour", said COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body that oversees civil affairs in the Palestinian territories. COGAT said in its statement on Monday that the premises' fencing had deteriorated after the farm was closed in 2013, allowing several crocodiles to escape "into nearby communities and nature reserves". After the owner's refusal to repair the fence and "12 years of seeking solutions" to the issue, COGAT said "the hazard must be addressed immediately through the humane culling of the animals". A video that circulated on social media this year showed teenagers throwing stones at the crocodiles, prompting authorities to take action on the issue. The farm, located in the Israeli settlement of Petzrael in the Jordan Valley, was first opened to tourists in the 1990s before being turned into a commercial farm for crocodile skin.

Israel culls more than 200 crocodiles at West Bank farm



SPOTLIGHT

Danish zoo in hot water over public call for animals as food

AFP | Copenhagen, Denmark

Any chickens or rabbits to Aspare? Denmark's Aalborg Zoo is seeking animals to feed to its predators -- after they have been euthanised -- a plea that has sparked a public backlash.

"We are looking for small livestock, not pets," Anette Sofie Warncke Nutzhorn, one of the zoo's managers, told AFP on Tuesday. "It can be for instance a chicken that doesn't lay eggs anymore."

"Predators usually catch prey of this size, so it's like the natural course," she added.

The zoo has found itself in hot water since sending out the appeal in social media.

"If you have an animal that, for various reasons, has to go, you are welcome to donate it to us," it wrote last week.

The zoo specified that it was looking in particular for chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs and horses.

"The animals are carefully put down by qualified staff and then

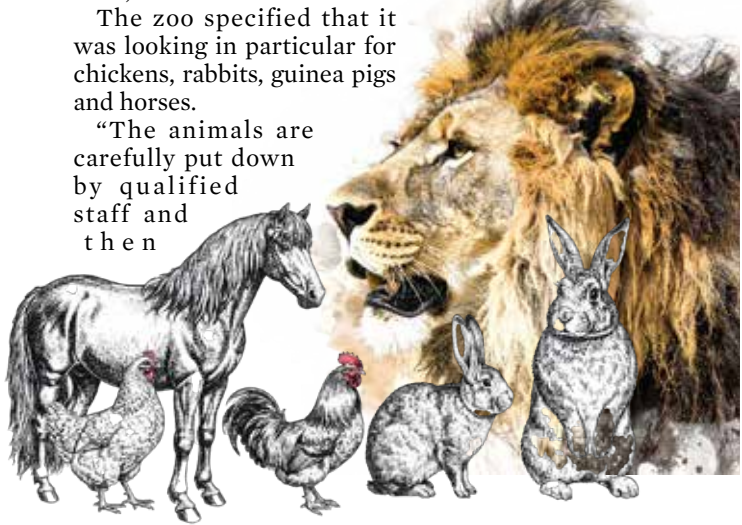
used as food," it said.

Only healthy animals are accepted by the zoo, which has been accepting donated animals for several years.

"It is a very common practice, we were just sending a friendly reminder," Warncke Nutzhorn said.

The zoo later turned off the comments section on the social media post in response to what it called "hateful" postings. Practices at Danish zoos, particularly the euthanasia of healthy animals to limit the risk of inbreeding, have in the past triggered fierce international criticism.

In 2014, a giraffe calf named Marius was put down at the Copenhagen Zoo and staff later performed an autopsy on the carcass in front of visitors, before feeding it to the lions.



Gaza civil defence says Israeli attacks kill 26

The Israeli army said it was looking into the incidents



Palestinians react at the site of an overnight Israeli strike, in Jabalia in the central Gaza Strip

Thousands of Gazans gather daily near food distribution points across Gaza

Gaza Humanitarian Foundation operations have been marred by chaotic scenes

AFP | Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

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Gaza's civil defence agency said 26 people were killed by Israeli gunfire and air strikes yesterday, including 14 who were waiting near an aid distribution site inside the Palestinian territory.

Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP that eight people were killed by Israeli gunfire while waiting for aid near the south Gaza city of Khan Yunis. Six more people were killed and

21 injured by Israeli fire in central Gaza while waiting for food near a distribution centre, according to Bassal.

The Israeli army told AFP it was looking into the incidents.

Media restrictions in Gaza and difficulties in accessing many areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the tolls and details provided by the civil defence agency and other parties.

Thousands of Gazans gather daily near food distribution points across Gaza, including

four belonging to the US- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

Its operations have been marred by chaotic scenes and near-daily reports of Israeli forces firing on those waiting to collect rations.

Israeli restrictions on the entry of goods and aid into Gaza since the start of the war nearly 22 months ago have led to shortages of food and essential goods, including medicine, medical supplies and fuel, which hospitals rely on to power their generators.

UN experts call for GHF to be dismantled

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

United Nations special rapporteurs called yesterday for the Israel- and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation to be immediately dismantled, saying aid was being "exploited for covert military and geopolitical agendas".

An exceptionally-large group of the UN-mandated experts voiced grave concerns over the GHF's operations.

The private organisation began distributing food in Gaza Strip in May as Israel began easing a more than two-month aid blockade on the Palestinian territory that had exacerbated existing shortages.

"The GHF ... is an utterly disturbing example of how humanitarian relief can be exploited for covert military and geopolitical

agendas in serious breach of international law," the experts said in a joint statement.

"The entanglement of Israeli intelligence, US contractors and ambiguous non-governmental entities underlines the urgent need for robust international oversight and action under UN auspices.

"Calling it 'humanitarian' adds on to Israel's humanitarian camouflage and is an insult to the humanitarian enterprise and standards."

On July 22, the UN rights office said Israeli forces had killed more than 1,000 Palestinians trying to get food aid in Gaza since the GHF started operations -- nearly three-quarters of them in the vicinity of GHF sites.

"Without clear accountability, the very idea of humanitarian

relief may ultimately become a casualty of modern hybrid warfare," the special rapporteurs said.

"The credibility and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance must be restored by dismantling the GHF, holding it and its executives accountable, and allowing experienced and humanitarian actors from the UN and civil society alike to take back the reins of managing and distributing lifesaving aid."

The joint statement was signed by Francesca Albanese, the UN's special rapporteur on the rights situation in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

Israel accuses her of having an "obsessive, hate-driven agenda to delegitimise the state of Israel".

The statement was also signed by 18 other special rapporteurs,

plus other UN experts and members of UN working groups -- a notably large number for such statements.

Special rapporteurs are independent experts mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to report their findings. They do not, therefore, speak for the United Nations itself.

More than two million people live in the Gaza Strip.

GHF says it has distributed more than 1.76 million boxes of foodstuffs to date.

"We continue to improve our operations," GHF executive director John Acree said Monday.

"We urge the international humanitarian community to join us -- we have the scale and capacity to deliver more aid to the people of Gaza."