

News in brief

◆ **The Israeli army said** Monday it was introducing a new technological system to enforce movement restrictions in the occupied West Bank for both Israelis and Palestinians, in a move Israeli media said aims to rein in surging settler violence. The decision allows security forces “to install a technological monitoring device on individuals subject to an administrative order restricting their movement within the (West Bank),” the army said in a statement. The system would allow for monitoring of “violations of these restriction orders accordingly,” it added. The measure was adopted after a request by head of the domestic Shin Bet security agency David Zini in response to rising violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank, Israel’s Channel 12 reported. The monitoring devices used will be electronic bracelets, according to the Israeli broadcaster.



Israel to
introduce electronic
tagging in West Bank

◆ **Malaysia ex-PM Mahathir’s hip injury** ‘serious but not dangerous’: daughter

◆ **Malaysia’s 100-year-old** former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad is being treated for a hip fracture after falling on Tuesday, with his daughter saying the injury was serious but “not dangerous”. The political veteran has suffered health problems in recent years and was previously hospitalised for fatigue after a picnic celebration for his centenary in July. He was taken conscious by ambulance to the hospital earlier Tuesday after he fell at his home, aide Sufi Yusoff told AFP. “It is serious, but it’s not dangerous. For his age, everything is relative... he’s fine,” his daughter Marina Mahathir was quoted as saying by national news agency Bernama.

◆ **The UK government** yesterday called on Elon Musk’s social network X to take urgent action over its AI tool Grok being used to create fake sexually explicit images of children. “What we have been seeing online in recent days has been absolutely appalling, and unacceptable in decent society,” Technology Secretary Liz Kendall said in a statement. “X needs to deal with this urgently,” she added. Grok is facing a growing international backlash for allowing users to generate sexualised deepfakes of women and minors through its so-called spicy mode setting. The European Commission announced on Monday that it was “very seriously” reviewing complaints about the tool. The UK’s media watchdog Ofcom also said it was looking into X and xAI, which created Grok. Kendall said Ofcom “has my full backing to take any enforcement action it deems necessary”. Under Britain’s Online Safety Act which came into force in July, websites, social media and video-sharing platforms hosting potentially harmful content have been required to implement strict age verification through tools such as facial imagery or credit card checks.

UK urges
Musk’s X to act over
‘appalling’ sexual
deepfakes



SPOTLIGHT

Climate-driven tree deaths
speeding up in Australia: study

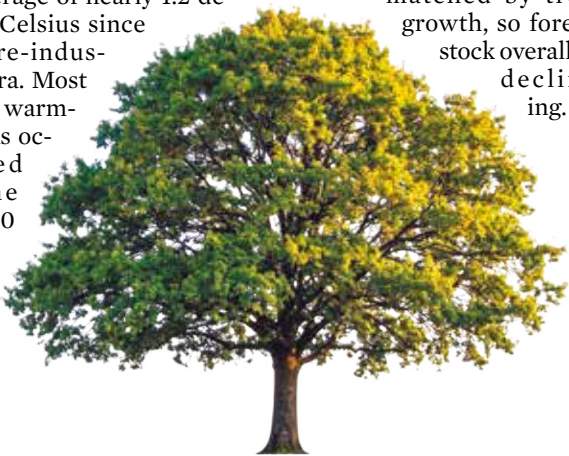
AFP | Bangkok, Thailand

Australia’s forests are losing trees more rapidly as the climate warms, a new study examining decades of data said Tuesday, warning the trend was likely a “wide-spread phenomenon”. The research used forest inventory data from 2,700 plots across the country, ranging from cool moist forests to dry savanna. It excluded areas affected by logging, clearance or fires to examine how “background tree mortality” has changed in recent decades.

“What we found is that the mortality rate has consistently increased over time, in all of the different forest types,” said Belinda Medlyn, a professor at Western Sydney University’s Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment.

“And this increase is very likely caused by the increase in temperature,” she told AFP.

The world has warmed by an average of nearly 1.2 degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial era. Most of this warming has occurred in the last 50 years.



The rate at which trees die off in a forest can vary in response to different types of disturbances, or as forests grow thicker and there is greater competition for resources.

But the research, published in the Nature Plants journal, excluded areas affected by fires or clearing, and also examined the stand basal area -- the sum of the cross-sectional areas of all trees in an area.

“The (mortality) trend over time remains even after we correct for basal area,” explained Medlyn, who led the research.

The scale of the increase varied across the four different biomes surveyed, with the sharpest rise in tropical savannas.

There, the number of trees dying on average increased by 3.2 percent a year, from close to 15 per 1,000 in 1996, to nearly double that number by 2017.

The research found that the deaths were not being matched by tree growth, so forest stock overall is declining.

Maduro pleads not guilty,
insists still president

Thousands of people marched through Caracas in support of Maduro

◆ **Maduro’s wife Cilia Flores** likewise pleaded not guilty

◆ **Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado** slammed Rodriguez

◆ **Trump declared that the United States** was “in charge”

◆ **The 79-year-old president also dismissed the idea of Caracas** having new elections in the next month

◆ **Details of the US operation in Caracas** were still emerging

◆ **US House Speaker and Trump ally Mike Johnson** said he thinks an election “should happen in short order” in Venezuela.

AFP | New York, United States

Ousted Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking and other charges at a defiant appearance in a New York court Monday, two days after being snatched by US forces in a stunning raid on his home in Caracas.

Maduro, 63, told a federal judge in Manhattan “I’m innocent. I’m not guilty.”

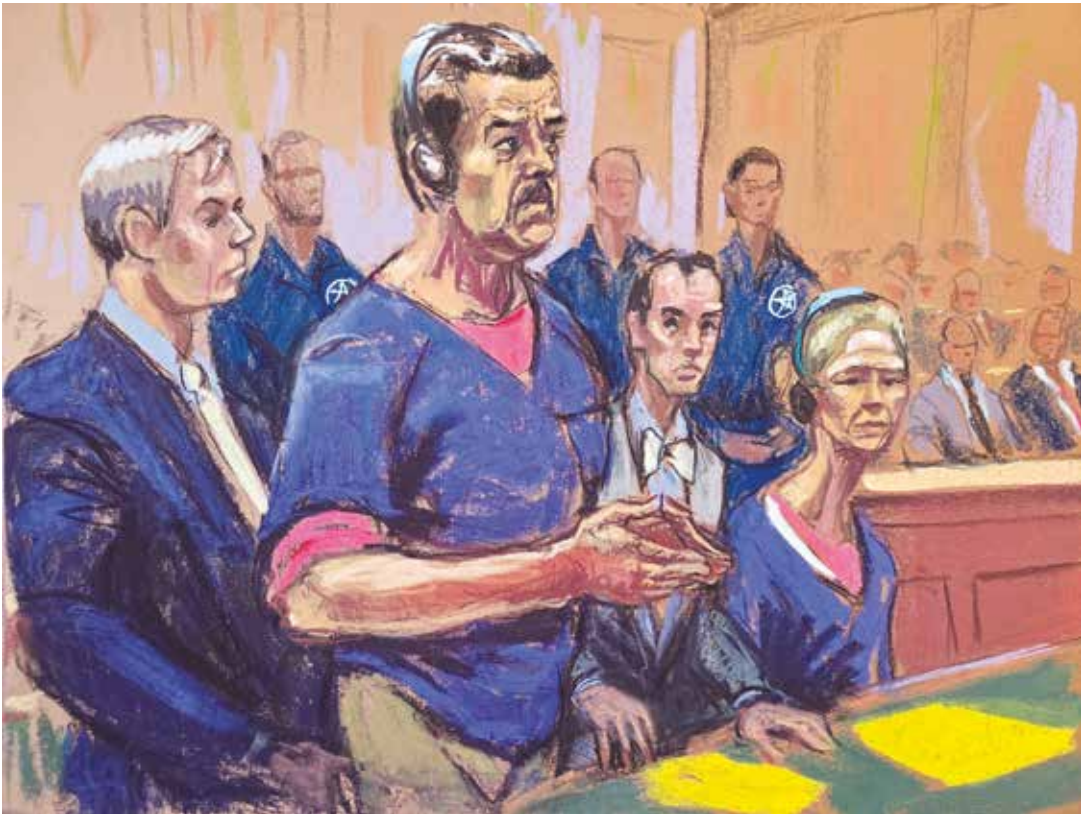
Smiling as he entered the courtroom and wearing an orange shirt with beige trousers, Maduro spoke softly.

“I’m president of the Republic of Venezuela and I’m here kidnapped since January 3, Saturday,” Maduro told the court, speaking in Spanish through an interpreter. “I was captured at my home in Caracas, Venezuela.”

Maduro’s wife Cilia Flores likewise pleaded not guilty. The judge ordered both to remain behind bars and set a new hearing date of March 17.



Maduro became president in 2013, taking over from his equally hardline socialist predecessor Hugo Chavez. The United States and European Union say he stayed in power by rigging elections -- most recently in 2024 -- and imprisoning opponents, while overseeing rampant corruption.



This courtroom sketch shows deposed president of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro (2nd-L), and his wife, Cilia Flores, attending their arraignment at Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse



Demonstrators hold signs in support of ousted Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro outside the Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse

55 Cuban, Venezuelan troops killed during US capture of Maduro: official tolls

Caracas, Venezuela

Fifty-five Cuban and Venezuelan military personnel were killed during the US raid to seize Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, according to tolls published Tuesday by the two Latin American allies.

During his 12 volatile years in power, Maduro -- like his predecessor Hugo Chavez -- employed specialized Cuban soldiers for his protection.

Venezuela’s Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez said on Sunday that Maduro’s presidential guard was largely wiped out “in cold blood” by US troops who bombarded the

capital and seized him from his home.

Cuba published the names of 32 members of its military who died in the nighttime assault that led to Maduro’s capture in Caracas on January 3.

They included three senior officers from the Cuban interior ministry.

The Venezuelan military published online a list of 23 of its personnel who were also killed, including five admirals.

In the face of pressure from Washington, the leftist governments in Cuba and Venezuela maintain close ties in military cooperation, health and education.

The presidential couple were forcibly taken by US commandos in the early hours of Saturday in airstrikes on the Venezuelan capital backed by warplanes and a heavy naval deployment.

Thousands of people marched

through Caracas in support of Maduro as his former deputy, Delcy Rodriguez, was sworn in as interim president.

Venezuela opposition leader Maria Corina Machado slammed Rodriguez, saying she was “rejected” by the Venezuelan people

and calling her “one of the main architects of torture, persecution, corruption, narco trafficking.”

Speaking from an undisclosed location to broadcaster Sean Hannity on Fox News in her first public comments since the weekend, Machado added that she plans to return to Venezuela “as soon as possible” after leaving under cover last month to accept her Nobel Peace Prize.

After the raid, Trump declared that the United States was “in charge” in Venezuela and intends to take control of the country’s huge but decrepit oil industry.

The 79-year-old president also dismissed the idea of Caracas having new elections in the next month.

“We have to fix the country first. You can’t have an election. There’s no way the people could even vote,” Trump told broadcaster NBC News in an interview aired Monday.

However, US House Speaker and Trump ally Mike Johnson said he thinks an election “should happen in short order” in Venezuela.

Cuba, Greenland next?

Trump, who has shocked many Americans with his unprecedented moves to accumulate domestic power, also now appears increasingly emboldened in foreign policy.

On Sunday, he said communist Cuba was “ready to fall” and he repeated that Greenland, which is part of US ally Denmark, should be controlled by the United States.

Brian Finucane, of the International Crisis Group, told AFP that Trump “seems to be disregarding international law altogether” in Venezuela and added that US domestic law also appeared to have been broken.