

News in brief

◆ **The United States, Israel and Qatar** held a trilateral meeting in New York Sunday, a senior White House official told AFP, months after Israeli jets conducted an airstrike in Doha, unsuccessfully targeting Hamas leadership. The White House official confirmed that the meeting had taken place but did not provide any further details. Two sources told US news outlet Axios it was “the highest level meeting between the countries since the deal to end the war in Gaza, for which Qatar served as a key mediator.” Axios also reported White House envoy Steve Witkoff hosted the meeting, with Mossad spy chief David Barnea representing Israel and an unnamed senior Qatari official in attendance. On Saturday, Qatar and Egypt both called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops and the deployment of an international stabilization force to fully implement the fragile agreement to end the conflict in Gaza.



Israel, Qatar and US hold trilateral meeting in New York

◆ **US President Donald Trump** commented Sunday on Netflix's effort to acquire storied Hollywood studio Warner Bros., saying the streaming giant already has “a very large market share” and “it could be a problem.” “I'll be involved in that decision,” Trump said upon arriving at the Kennedy Center Honors awards ceremony, referring to the decision facing federal regulators weighing the nearly \$83 billion deal that has raised antitrust concerns and ire among Hollywood's elite. Trump also lavished praise on Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos, who recently visited the White House, saying “he's done one of the greatest jobs in the history of movies.”

◆ **European Council** president Antonio Costa yesterday rejected any attempt by the United States to meddle in Europe's politics, after Washington published a new security strategy sharply criticising the continent's policies. “What we cannot accept is the threat to interfere in European politics,” Costa told a conference in Brussels. The new US National Security Strategy, released last week, saw President Donald Trump lambast Europe as an over-regulated, censorious continent lacking in “self-confidence” and facing “civilizational erasure” due to immigration. The strategy made clear that the United States under Trump would aggressively pursue similar objectives in Europe, in line with the agendas of far-right parties. It said the administration would be “cultivating resistance to Europe's current trajectory within European nations.” “The United States cannot replace European citizens in choosing which parties are good and which are bad,” Costa said. “The United States cannot replace Europe in what's its vision is of freedom of expression.”

EU chief says Europe cannot accept US ‘threat to interfere’



SPOTLIGHT

France to return smuggled dinosaur skeleton to Mongolia



Minister of Culture, Sports, Tourism and Youth of Mongolia Undram Chinbat (C-L) and France's Public Accounts Minister Amelie de Montchalin (C-R) listen to a National Museum of Natural History (MNHN) paleontology expert (L) during the handover

AFP | Paris, France

France was to hand over a 70 million-year-old dinosaur skeleton to Mongolia Monday which was looted from the Gobi desert and seized by French customs.

The “extremely rare” fossil of a *Tarbosaurus baatar*, considered to be the Asian cousin of the fearsome *Tyrannosaurus rex*, was seized by French officials in 2015.

Public Accounts Minister Amelie de Montchalin was to hand it and around 30 other items including dinosaur eggs over later Monday.

They had been looted from the Gobi Desert before passing through South Korea and were confiscated by customs

during a seizure in the central town of Gannat in February 2015.

“This is an entire *Tarbosaurus*, estimated at around 700,000 euros when it was seized, but since then the market has exploded, so we could say it is worth two to three times that amount today,” Sophie Hocquerelle, communications manager for French customs, told France 2 television on Sunday.

She described the find as “an exceptional discovery”.

*Tarbosaurus bataar* lived during the Cretaceous period and disappeared some 65 million years ago.

There have been no specimens of *T.bataar* reported outside of Asia.

Tens of thousands celebrate as Syria marks one year since Assad's ouster

The war killed more than half a million people

● **Sharaa's Islamist-led alliance took Damascus on December 8 after nearly 14 years of war**

AFP | Damascus, Syria

Tens of thousands took to the streets across Syria yesterday to celebrate a year since the toppling of long-time ruler Bashar al-Assad, with President Ahmed al-Sharaa urging people to unite to rebuild the country.

Sharaa's Islamist-led alliance launched a lightning offensive in late November last year and took Damascus on December 8 after nearly 14 years of war, ending more than five decades of Assad family rule.

Military personnel marched in Damascus as helicopters flew overhead with Sharaa and several ministers in attendance, state media reported. Parades and large celebrations were also held in other major cities including Aleppo.

Sharaa is expected to speak later Monday.

The war, which erupted in 2011 with the then-government's brutal crackdown on democracy protests, killed more than half a million people and displaced millions from their homes.

Jubilant crowds thronged the streets of the capital, many people waving Syrian flags, AFP correspondents said, after mosques in the Old City began the day broadcasting celebratory prayers at dawn. “What happened over



An areal photograph shows people celebrating a year since the ousting of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian capital Damascus

the past year seems like a miracle,” said Iyad Burghol, 44, a doctor, noting major developments including President Donald Trump's embrace of Sharaa, a former jihadist who once had a US bounty on his head.

After years of war and economic crisis, people need basics like electricity “but the most important thing to me is civil peace”, Burghol told AFP.

Sharaa has made progress abroad like restoring Syria's international standing and winning sanctions relief, but he faces ma-

joor challenges at home including gaining people's trust, guaranteeing security, rebuilding institutions and keeping his fractured country united.

“The current phase requires the unification of efforts by all citizens to build a strong Syria, consolidate its stability, safeguard its sovereignty, and achieve a future befitting the sacrifices of its people,” Sharaa said following dawn prayers at Damascus's famous Umayyad Mosque.

He was wearing military garb

YOU KNOW WHAT

In October, the World Bank said Syria's post-war reconstruction could cost up to \$216 billion.

as he did when he entered the capital a year ago.

Magnitude 7.6 quake strikes off Japan, triggering tsunami warning

AFP | Tokyo, Japan

A major earthquake rocked Japan's northern coast yesterday, with the country's meteorological agency recording two 40-centimetre tsunami waves and local media reporting injuries.

The United States Geological Survey said the magnitude 7.6 quake struck at 1415 GMT off Misawa on Japan's Pacific coast, at a depth of 53 kilometres (33 miles).

The Japan Meteorological Agency issued a tsunami warning, with a first wave hitting a port in the northern region of Aomori, where Misawa is located, at 11:43 (1443 GMT).

At 11:50 pm, another wave reached the town of Urakawa town in the Hokkaido region, the agency said.

Both waves measured 40 centimetres (16 inches), it added.

Public broadcaster NHK cited a hotel employee in the city of Hachinohe in Aomori as saying there had been some injuries, with live footage showing shattered glass fragments scattered



Japan recorded a 40-centimetre (16-inch) tsunami after a 7.6-magnitude quake

across roads. The quake was also felt in the northern hub of Sapporo, where alarms rang on smartphones to alert residents.

A reporter for NHK in Hokkaido described a horizontal shaking of around 30 seconds that made him unable to keep standing as the earthquake struck.

The meteorological agency earlier warned a tsunami of up to three metres (10 feet) was expected to hit Japan's Pacific coast.

Japan sits on top of four major tectonic plates along the western edge of the Pacific “Ring of Fire” and is one of the world's most

tectonically active countries.

The archipelago, home to around 125 million people, experiences around 1,500 jolts every year. The vast majority are mild, although the damage they cause varies according to their location and depth below the Earth's surface.