

**Death toll from Venezuela's twin quakes rises to 3,889**

AFP | Caracas

The death toll from the powerful twin tremors that struck Venezuela two weeks ago has risen to at least 3,889, a government report stated.

Nearly 17,000 people were injured in the 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes on June 24, while almost 18,000 more lost their homes.

The death toll rose from 3,811 to 3,889 on Thursday, according to a report from National Assembly chief Jorge Rodriguez posted on Telegram.

Interim leader Delcy Rodriguez on Wednesday called for the release of Venezuelan funds frozen abroad to help the country cope with the disaster.

**North Korea vows boost to nuclear buildup, military intelligence**

AFP | Seoul

North Korea will strengthen its nuclear force "both in quality and quantity" and expand the role of its military intelligence agency focused on South Korea, state media said yesterday.

Pyeongyang is under widespread sanctions over its nuclear programme, and the two Koreas remain technically at war as their 1950-53 conflict ended without a peace treaty.

**Intense sand and dust storms struck China, US in 2025: UN**

AFP | Geneva

China and the southern United States were hit last year by some of the worst sand and dust storms in decades, the United Nations said yesterday.

The UN's weather and climate agency said these episodes affected public health and the environment, and disrupted transport and economic activity.

In its 10th annual Airborne Dust Bulletin, the World Meteorological Organisation said that globally, overall average dust concentrations last year were similar to 2024 -- though with big regional variations.

"Every year, around 2,000 million tonnes of dust enters the atmosphere, and can be transported for hundreds of kilometres and even thousands of kilometres, across continents and oceans," the WMO said.

**Syria says IS behind Damascus blasts, finds explosives cache**

Raids uncover explosives cache following blasts near French president's Damascus hotel

● IS-linked cell captured

● Further plots allegedly prevented

AFP | Damascus

Syrian authorities yesterday said they uncovered an explosives cache after having captured an IS-linked cell responsible for two bomb blasts during French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Damascus earlier this week.

The attacks, which occurred near the hotel where Macron spent the night, cast a shadow over the first trip by a European Union head of state since Bashar al-Assad was toppled in late 2024, as President Ahmed al-Sharaa tries to rebuild the country's image after more than a decade of conflict.

Syria's Interior Minister Anas Khattab said that "the cell responsible for the terrorist bombings that targeted Damascus two days ago is now in our custody".

Ahmad Dalati, head of interior security for the Damascus region, said on Syrian state television that preliminary investigations indicated "the cell was affiliated with the IS (Islamic State) group".

Yesterday, the interior ministry



Syria's Interior Minister Anas Khattab (C) inspects an area near the Four Seasons Hotel following two blasts in Damascus

said that "intensive investigations with members of the terrorist cell" allowed authorities to find "a secret cache the cell had designated for storing explosives in preparation for a series of terrorist attacks".

The ministry had said the night prior in a statement that the cell had been captured following a series of raids "carried out at the same time against the suspects' different locations across Damas-

cus and its countryside".

The statement said the raids occurred in four neighbourhoods, with the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor saying dozens were arrested in the working-class Ish al-Warwar suburb.

An Alawite-majority neighbourhood before the 2024 fall of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad, who belongs to the minority religious community, the area was

targeted with raids and arrests after Islamist authorities took power, causing many to leave.

An Ish al-Warwar resident who requested anonymity told AFP the Thursday arrests did not, to their knowledge, target any Alawites.

Two blasts hit central Damascus on Tuesday, killing one person and wounding dozens during the French president's first visit to Syria.

The explosives had been plant-

ed near the Four Seasons Hotel, with Syria's interior ministry saying one was placed in a rubbish container and the other in a vehicle near the hotel in the heart of the capital.

The blasts came after Macron's departure from the building, and moments before Syrian state media announced his arrival at the presidential palace to meet his Syrian counterpart Ahmed al-Sharaa.

In a joint news conference after the blast, Macron said he must "not let ourselves be destabilised" by such attacks, and reiterated Paris's support for the country.

Sharaa praised Macron's "courage" for pressing ahead with his visit despite the bombings.



French President Emmanuel Macron kept the timing of his Syria visit secret until his plane landed, citing security concerns

**Bayeux Tapestry arrives in London after epic journey from France**

AFP | London

The medieval Bayeux Tapestry arrived in London in the early hours of yesterday after a hugely complicated journey to leave France for the first time in more than 900 years for an exhibition in the British capital.

AFP journalists at the British Museum saw a metal case holding the 11th-century work being unloaded from a truck which carried it across the Channel



Workers unload a specially designed crate (R) carrying the Bayeux Tapestry at the British Museum in central London

in a hushed-up, high-security operation.

"It's a unique moment and it's the product of so much hard work," museum director Nicholas Cullinan told AFP after the tapestry arrived around 3:00 am (0200 GMT). It left its home in northern France on Thursday night.

"It's been very special to have witnessed the arrival of the Bayeux Tapestry, and especially for it to be back on these shores for the first time in probably a thousand years," added Cullinan.

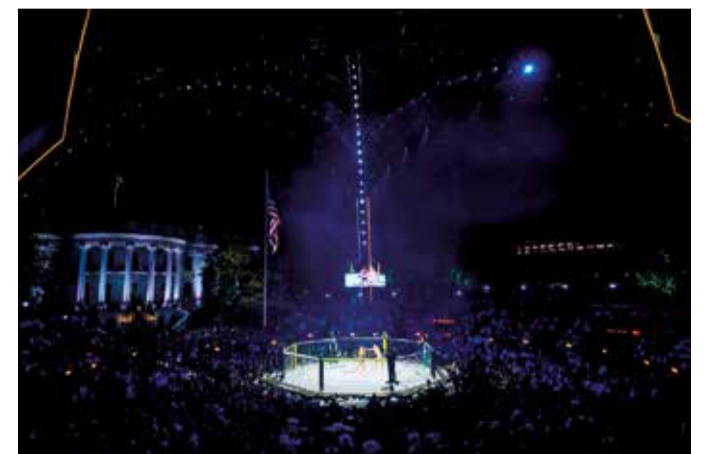
While its exact origins are shrouded in mystery, the tap-

stry depicting the 1066 Battle of Hastings and start of the invasion by William the Conqueror's Norman army is widely thought to have been made in England before being transferred to Bayeux.

It is believed to be the first time the fragile, 68-metre (224-foot) embroidered tapestry has left France since then, and the first time it has been moved in over 40 years.

It will be displayed at the British Museum from September 10 to July 11, 2027, with 100,000 tickets already sold to the public for the first four months of the exhibition.

**Murder, terror charges for suspects in Trump cage fight attack plot**



A view during the UFC Freedom 250 on the South Lawn of the White House

AFP | Washington

Eight men accused in an alleged plot to attack a White House mixed martial arts fight hosted by President Donald Trump in June have been indicted on murder and terrorism conspiracy charges, the Department of Justice said.

The suspects, ranging in age from 19 to 32, were accused of planning to use armed drones to attack the event on the White House South Lawn, with snipers firing on "high value targets" in the chaos,

prosecutors have said.

Law enforcement officials said they foiled the plot in the lead-up to the June 14 "UFC Freedom 250" event, which coincided with Trump's 80th birthday and ultimately took place without incident.

It attracted 4,000 fans to the fight in a temporary arena called "The Claw" that towered over the White House.

The eight alleged plotters were charged Thursday in a two-count federal indictment in Columbus, Ohio, the Justice Department said.

**YOU KNOW WHAT**

The fragile, 68-metre (224-foot) embroidered tapestry depicting the 1066 Battle of Hastings arrived in London for the first time in over 900 years, with the British government providing £800 million (over \$1 billion) insurance cover