

News in brief

Thai PM dissolves parliament,  
paving way for national elections



◆ Thailand's prime minister dissolved parliament yesterday, paving the way for general elections early next year as deadly border clashes continue with neighbour Cambodia. The move comes earlier than expected and just three months after Anutin Charnvirakul -- of the conservative Bhumjaithai party -- became prime minister when his predecessor was removed from office over an ethics violation.

"The House of Representatives is dissolved to hold a new general election for members of the House," a decree published in the Royal Gazette yesterday said.

◆ Indonesia's deadly flooding was an "extinction-level disturbance" for the world's rarest great ape, the tapanuli orangutan, causing catastrophic damage to its habitat and survival prospects, scientists warned yesterday.

Indonesia floods were 'extinction level' for rare orangutans



Only scientifically classified as a species in 2017, tapanulis are incredibly rare, with fewer than 800 left in the wild, confined to a small range in part of Indonesia's Sumatra. One dead suspected tapanuli orangutan has already been found in the region, conservationists said.

South Korea exam chief resigns after tests dubbed too hard



◆ The chief organiser of South Korea's notoriously gruelling university entrance exams has quit -- after complaints that an English test he designed was just too difficult.

South Korea's college entry exam -- known locally as the "Suneung" -- is essential for admission to top universities and widely regarded as a gateway to social mobility, economic security and even a good marriage. But

this year just over three percent of those who took the exam scored top marks in the English test -- the lowest since absolute grading was introduced for the subject in 2018.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

North Korea's Kim vows to root out 'evil', scolds lazy officials



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un paying a condolatory visit to the Russian embassy as regards the demise of Aleksandr Ivanovich Matsegora, Russian Ambassador to North Korea

AFP | Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has vowed to root out "evil" and scolded lazy officials while praising his troops fighting with Russia against Ukraine, state media said yesterday, capping a major meeting of Pyongyang's top brass.

The three-day meeting of the regime's central committee discussed key policy issues as well as plans for a congress of its ruling party, expected in early 2026 -- North Korea's first in five years.

Wrapping up the meeting on Thursday, Kim condemned "the wrong ideological viewpoint and inactive and irresponsible work attitude" of some officials, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

He called on officials to have "greater confidence in and courage for the future of our cause and struggle".

State media did not offer specifics, though it did say the ruling party had revealed nu-

merous recent "deviations" in discipline -- a euphemism for corruption.

The North Korean leader reserved praise for Pyongyang's soldiers fighting against Ukraine alongside Russia, of whom at least 600 have died and thousands more sustained wounds, according to South Korean estimates.

Their work, Kim said, "demonstrated to the world the prestige of our army and state as the ever-victorious army and genuine protector of international justice".

Analysts say Pyongyang is receiving financial aid, military technology, food and energy supplies from Russia in return for sending troops.

Kim's mention of the troops "signalled Pyongyang's intention to maintain that deployment", Ahn Chan-il, a researcher originally from North Korea, told AFP.

"North Korea is also highly likely to seek a role in post-war reconstruction in Russia once... the conflict ends," he added.

# Ukraine's EU bid gains US backing: official

US-led peace plan could see Ukraine join the European Union as early as 2027

● Part of a broader plan to end the war

● Accession requires ceding land to Russia

● Zelensky seeks US leverage on Hungary

AFP | Kyiv

Ukraine could join the European Union as early as January 2027 under the latest US plan to end the war with Russia, a senior source familiar with the matter said yesterday.

The complicated EU accession process usually takes years and requires a unanimous vote from all 27 members of the bloc, and some countries, most notably Hungary, have consistently voiced opposition to Ukraine joining.

The idea of a speedy accession is included in the latest version of a US-led plan to end the war, which would also see Ukraine cede land to Russia, and has triggered a diplomatic frenzy across Europe in recent weeks.

"It's stated there but it's a matter for negotiation, and the Americans support it," the senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, referring to the US plan.

Washington has the leverage needed to convince leaders opposed to Ukraine's membership to change their stance, President Volodymyr Zelensky told journalists, including AFP, on



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky records a video message on his mobile phone in front of the road sign marking the entrance to Kupiansk, Kharkiv region

Thursday.

"The United States can take steps to unblock our path to the European Union," he said, adding that "the US president has various levers of influence and that this will have an effect on those who are currently blocking Ukraine."

Kyiv has long strived for EU membership and has been implementing reforms since a pro-European 2014 revolution but has struggled to eradicate endemic corruption -- a core prerequisite for joining the bloc.

After completing a diplomatic tour across Europe last week, Zelensky was due in Berlin on



The plan includes creating a demilitarized "free economic zone" in parts of eastern Ukraine as a buffer, requiring only Ukrainian troops to withdraw from those areas

Monday for more talks on the plan, full details of which have not been released.

"If the security situation allows, he'll be there", the senior official said.

Moscow yesterday indicated it was suspicious about the efforts to amend the US plan, which it has largely been supportive of and heeded to most of its core demands.

"We have an impression that this version, which is being put forward for discussion, will be worsened," Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov told the Kommersant business daily.

## Nobel laureate Machado feared for her life leaving Venezuela

AFP | Oslo

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, winner of the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize, feared for her life during her secret journey from Venezuela to Norway to receive the award, she said yesterday.

"There were moments when I felt that there was a real risk to my life, and it was also a very spiritual moment because, in the end, I simply felt that I was in God's hands and that whatever would be, would be," she told reporters in Oslo.

She declined to give precise details about how she managed to leave Venezuela, where she has lived in hiding since last year, to protect those involved -- following dramatic accounts of her journey in US media.

"We did get support from the United States government to get here," Machado told a press conference on Thursday, when asked by AFP about whether Washington had helped.

The Wall Street Journal reported this week that she wore a wig and a disguise on the high-



Nobel peace prize laureate Maria Corina Machado waves next to Kristian Berg Harpviken, Secretary of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, during a press conference at the Grand Hotel in Oslo, Norway

risk journey, leaving her hide-out in a Caracas suburb on Monday for a coastal fishing village, where she took a fishing skiff across the Caribbean Sea to Curacao.

The newspaper said the US

military was informed to avoid the boat being targeted by airstrikes, given Washington's attempts to pile pressure on Venezuela with a major naval buildup in the region and strikes on alleged drug-trafficking boats.



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MARIA CORINA MACHADO

The Wall Street Journal later reported that Machado and the small crew of the skiff had been left drifting after their GPS fell overboard in rough seas and a backup failed.

As a result she did not meet the extraction team at the designated pickup point, prompting a search to find her in the Gulf of Venezuela.

In an interview with CBS News, Bryan Stern, who heads a non-profit rescue organisation, recalled meeting Machado out at sea after she left Venezuela.