

News in brief

◆ **Germany's coalition** government has agreed a new voluntary military service model, politicians said yesterday, after weeks of wrangling over whether there should be a compulsory element. Under the plan, all 18-year-old men will from next year have to fill in a questionnaire on whether they would want to serve and undergo an armed forces physical test. No one will be compelled to join the Bundeswehr, however, said Defence Minister Boris Pistorius. He has advocated instead a campaign to make military service more attractive to draw more male and female recruits. Chancellor Friedrich Merz has made bolstering Germany's ill-equipped military a major priority, citing a hostile Russia and doubts about future US security commitment to Europe.



Germany agrees to keep military service voluntary

◆ **A British couple** detained in Iran for nearly a year on suspicion of espionage have gone on hunger strike having "lost all hope", a relative said yesterday. Lindsay and Craig Foreman, both in their early fifties, were seized in January as they passed through Kerman, in central Iran, while on a round-the-world motorbike trip. "My mum and Craig shouldn't have to starve themselves to be seen," said Lindsay's son Joe Bennett in a statement. "They're exhausted, frightened, and feel abandoned. If this doesn't wake our government up, what will?" he added. The couple's family, who after their detention only spoke to them for the first time in early August, have grown increasingly frustrated at the handling of their case in Iran as well as at the support received from the British government in London.

◆ **Twenty-five** countries shipped oil to Israel during its two-year offensive in Gaza, according to a report published yesterday by the nonprofit Oil Change International, which argued the same fossil-fuel system driving the climate crisis is also enabling "genocide." Released at the UN climate summit in Brazil, the analysis found Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were by far the largest suppliers of crude, accounting for 70 percent of shipments between November 1, 2023 and October 1, 2025. Russia, Greece and the United States were the top providers of refined petroleum products -- with the US standing out as the sole supplier of JP-8, a jet-fuel blend designed for military aircraft. "The states that have supplied Israel with fuel during this period have done so in full knowledge of its atrocities," said Oil Change International, which advocates for a global phase-out of fossil fuels. "Their complicity is documented here to hold these states accountable. These states must address their role in the genocide and cease their complicity."

Study flags 'complicity' of oil-supplying states in Gaza war



SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan grants lifetime immunity to president, current army chief



Asif Ali Zardari
AFP | Islamabad, Pakistan



Asim Munir or admiral of the fleet will now retain rank and privileges for life, remain in uniform, and enjoy immunity from criminal proceedings. Such protections were previously only reserved for the head of state. "This constitutional amendment will increase authoritarianism and whatever little liberalism of whatever existed in this country will fade away," said Osama Malik, an Islamabad-based lawyer. "It will not only remove civilian oversight from the military's activities, it will also completely destroy the military hierarchy where all service chiefs were considered equal under the joint chief system," he told AFP. The amendment also shields President Asif Ali Zardari from any criminal prosecution, although that immunity will not apply if he or any other former president later holds another public office.

Pakistan's parliament approved a sweeping constitutional amendment yesterday granting lifetime immunity to the president as well as the current army chief, a move critics warned would erode democratic checks and judicial independence. The 27th amendment, passed by a two-thirds majority, also consolidates military power under a new Chief of Defence Forces role and establishes a Federal Constitutional Court. The changes grant army chief Asim Munir, promoted to field marshal after Pakistan's clash with India in May, command over the army, air force and the navy. He and other top military brass will enjoy lifelong protections. Under the amendment, any officer promoted to field marshal, marshal of the air force,

Pakistan blames **Afghans** for Islamabad suicide attack

● **Relations hit a new low last month after the worst cross-border clashes in years killed more than 70 people**

AFP | Islamabad, Pakistan

Pakistan yesterday blamed Afghan citizens for a suicide bombing in the capital Islamabad this week, and a separate deadly attack near the frontier. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi told a Senate session that the bomber behind Tuesday's blast outside the district court buildings was from Afghanistan. "We have traced the Islamabad blast culprits. The suicide bomber was from Afghanistan," he said, without offering any evidence. "It will be decided on a government-level what to do," the minister told reporters when asked how the government would proceed with regards to



Pakistani military troops guard outside the damaged entrance after an attack on the Cadet College Wana, a military-linked school, in the South Waziristan district near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border

Afghanistan. A faction of the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, the first to hit the capital in nearly three years. A dozen people were killed and 27 wounded. Naqvi told reporters on Monday that Afghan nationals also took part in an assault the same

day on Cadet College Wana, a military-linked school in northwest Pakistan. The attack left three people dead. The accusations come amid a sharp deterioration in ties between Islamabad and Kabul, with Pakistan blaming what it says are Afghan-based militants -- particularly the Tehreek-e-Tal-

iban Pakistan (TTP) -- for a surge in attacks since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. Kabul denies the charge. Relations hit a new low last month after the worst cross-border clashes in years killed more than 70 people, including dozens of Afghan civilians, according to the United Nations. "We have told them (the Afghan government) about our concerns but they still support terrorists," Naqvi said in remarks broadcast on live television. Kabul has not commented on the allegations. Pakistan's information ministry repeated the claims Thursday, saying the Wana attack was "planned and controlled from Afghanistan" and that all those involved were Afghan citizens. "The identities of the Afghan terrorists killed in the attack firmly establishes the links of terrorists in their bases in Afghanistan," it said on X. The TTP has threatened more attacks unless hardline Islamic law is implemented in Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country.

YouTube superstar MrBeast opens pop-up park in Saudi

AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

MrBeast, the world's most followed YouTuber with over 450 million subscribers, opened a temporary amusement park in Riyadh yesterday, the latest celebrity drawn to Saudi Arabia as it aspires to become a major entertainment hub. "Beast Land", open from November 13 to December 27, features several obstacle course-like challenges similar to those that appear in his popular videos where contestants compete for massive pay days. MrBeast's park will be part of Riyadh Season, a major annual festival launched to promote the capital city as a tourist hub, as Saudi Arabia seeks to attract high-profile celebrities to diversify its oil-reliant economy. "The majority of our audience is outside of North America and



US YouTuber James Stephen "Jimmy" Donaldson, commonly known by MrBeast, smiles during an interview

we have a large concentration of people who watch our videos in the Middle East," he told AFP in the Saudi capital Riyadh. "A lot of times when we do stuff, we do it in the West or in other places and I just really wanted to do something fun for our fans who live around here," he added. The influencer had earlier posted a video from the

gates of the new park in Riyadh, shaped like a blue tiger's head with flashing lightning bolts for eyes, reminiscent of his logo, with neon lights beaming on the attractions. "This thing is the craziest thing that I've ever done, I can't wait for you guys to experience this," he said in the clip. With more followers across his social media platforms than

there are people in the United States, the 27-year-old influencer, whose real name is Jimmy Donaldson -- has built a digital empire over the years thanks to his prodigious output of content often featuring contests and challenges.



With more than 75 percent of Saudis under 35 years of age, the kingdom is the perfect playground for influencers like MrBeast, whose content is mostly watched by children and young people.

Tata, Adani, Reliance power up Bhutan Hydroelectric ambitions in India-Bhutan energy collaboration

TDT | agencies

India and Bhutan have taken a big step forward in their ties and energy cooperation. During his visit to Bhutan on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a 4,000 crore (about \$455 million) line of credit to support new energy projects, Reuters reported. He also joined King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck to inaugurate the 1,020-megawatt Punatsangchu-II hydroelectric power project, which has been built with Indian support. Private Indian companies



such as Tata Power, Adani Group, and Reliance Power have also signed agreements with Bhutan's Druk Green Power Corporation to develop more hydroelectric projects in the coming years, according to Reuters. This visit comes amid India's effort to strengthen its ties with

Bhutan, at a time when Beijing has been working to establish diplomatic relations and settle its border dispute with Bhutan. Hydropower project to boost Bhutan's capacity. The leaders of the two countries inaugurated the Punatsangchu-II project, which will boost Bhutan's total hydropower capacity by nearly 40%. The project is the fifth major hydropower initiative supported by India in Bhutan. This brings the combined generation capacity of Indian-assisted projects to nearly 3,000 megawatts. Both leaders also discussed

ways to improve connectivity, which they said is essential for trade and regional growth. "Connectivity creates opportunity. And opportunity creates prosperity," PM Modi said, announcing that India will link Gelephu and Samtse in Bhutan to India's rail network. Once completed, this will help Bhutanese farmers and industries get access to India's large markets easily. Former Bhutanese energy minister Lok Nath Sharma said that after meeting its own energy needs (around 1,000 megawatts), Bhutan will export the surplus electricity to India.