

News in brief

Iranian Nobel winner

Narges Mohammadi was taken to hospital twice after being violently arrested last week and appeared unwell in her first telephone contact since being detained, her supporters said yesterday. Mohammadi suffered “severe and repeated baton blows to the head and neck” during her arrest and in the call “her physical condition was not good, and she appeared unwell”, her foundation said in a statement. Iranian civil society activists, including prize-winning filmmaker Jafar Panahi, called for the “immediate and unconditional release” of Mohammadi and other campaigners arrested on Friday. Mohammadi, who won the 2023 Nobel prize, was detained after addressing a memorial ceremony in the eastern city of Mashhad for lawyer Khosrow Alikordi, who was found dead earlier this month. The foundation said Mohammadi was “taken to the hospital emergency room twice” following her arrest.



Iran Nobel winner  
Narges Mohammadi  
‘unwell’ after violent  
arrest: supporters

Israeli army to  
demolish 25 residential  
buildings in West Bank  
camp: local authorities

Abdallah Kamil, governor of the Tulkarem governorate where Nur Shams is located, told AFP he was informed of the planned demolition by the Israeli defence ministry body COGAT. COGAT, which is in charge of coordinating civilian affairs in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, did not respond to AFP’s requests for comment. Faisal Salama, head of the popular committee for Tulkarem camp, which is near Nur Shams, said the demolition order would affect 25 buildings holding up to 100 family homes.

US negotiators still want Ukraine to cede control of the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions as a condition for peace talks with Russia, an official briefed on the discussions told AFP yesterday. Kyiv is pushing back against Washington’s demand that it pull troops from the two regions collectively known as Donbas, which Russia has been unable to capture since invading in February 2022. Russian President Vladimir Putin “wants territory,” the official told AFP, adding the United States was demanding that Ukraine “withdraw” from the regions and that Kyiv was refusing. “It’s a bit striking that the Americans are taking the Russians’ position on this issue,” the official added. Moscow controls almost all of the Lugansk region and about 80 percent of the Donetsk region, according to the US-based Institute for the Study of War.

Ukraine resists  
US pressure to cede  
Donbas



SPOTLIGHT

Japan’s only two pandas  
to be sent back to China



Japan currently has only two pandas, Lei Lei and Xiao Xiao, at Tokyo’s Zoological Gardens

AFP | Tokyo, Japan

Two pandas at a Tokyo zoo will be returned to China in January, the Tokyo government said yesterday, potentially leaving Japan without the beloved animals for the first time in half a century.

Loaned out as part of China’s “panda diplomacy” programme, the distinctive black-and-white animals have symbolised friendship between Beijing and Tokyo since the normalisation of diplomatic ties in 1972.

Japan currently has only two pandas, Lei Lei and Xiao Xiao, at Tokyo’s Zoological Gardens in the Ueno neighbourhood.

But the twins are now set to be repatriated a month before their loan period expires in

February, said Tokyo Metropolitan Government, which operates the Ueno zoo.

Tokyo’s regional government has been asking for the immensely popular mammals to remain at the zoo -- where they attract huge crowds -- but China didn’t agree, according to the Nikkei business daily.

In September last year, animal lovers in Tokyo bid farewell to the parents of Lei Lei and Xiao Xiao who returned home.

Just before they left, thousands of tearful fans came out to catch a final glimpse and take photographs of the beloved bears.

The Asahi Shimbun reported that Tokyo is seeking the loan of a new pair, although their arrival before the return of Lei Lei and Xiao Xiao is seen as unlikely.

‘Terrified’ Sydney man  
misidentified as shooter

Authorities have condemned the attack as an act of terrorism

ABC said the  
alleged assailant was  
Naveed Akram

Social media went  
viral over a photo taken  
from the Facebook  
profile of a different  
Naveed Akram

Australia’s leaders  
agreed yesterday to  
toughen gun laws  
after attackers killed  
15 people at a Jewish  
festival on Bondi Beach

Police say the  
attackers fired into the  
crowds killing 15 people,  
the oldest of whom was  
87. The youngest victim, a  
10-year-old girl, died later  
in a children’s hospital

Police say one of  
the assailants was a  
50-year-old father  
who was killed in a  
shootout with officers

The other was  
his 24-year-old son,  
who is in a critical  
condition in hospital,  
under police guard

AFP | Sydney, Australia

A Sydney man said he had received death threats and was “terrified” to leave his home yesterday after his photo was widely shared online as the gunman responsible for the Bondi Beach shooting.

A father and son duo opened fire on a Jewish festival at Australia’s best-known beach on Sunday evening, killing 15 people, including a child, and wounding 42 more.

Authorities have condemned the attack as an act of terrorism, though they have not named the



Mass shootings have been rare in Australia since a lone gunman killed 35 people in the tourist town of Port Arthur in 1996. The so-called “Port Arthur massacre” led to sweeping reforms but Albanese said tougher gun laws may be needed after the latest attack.



Mourners gather at a tribute at the Bondi Pavillion in memory of the victims of a shooting at Bondi Beach, in Sydney

Australia hails ‘hero’ who stopped gunman in his tracks

AFP | Sydney, Australia

Australians are hailing a “hero” whose daring struggle with a gunman Sunday led to the disarming of an attacker during the country’s worst mass shooting in years.

He even earned a shout-out from US President Donald Trump, who said the man’s brave actions “saved a lot of lives” during a shocking assault on a Jewish gathering to celebrate Hanukkah.

Following the deadly shooting on Sydney’s Bondi Beach, footage emerged on social media of a man risking his own life by grabbing one of the gunmen as he fired on people who were out of view of the recording.

The man then wrestles the gun out of the attacker’s hand, before pointing the weapon at the assailant who backs away.

Local outlet 7News identified him as 43-year-old Ahmed al Ahmed, a fruit seller, and reported he had suffered two gunshot wounds. The outlet spoke to a man called Mustapha who said he was his cousin.

“He’s in hospital and we don’t know exactly what’s going on inside,” he said.

“We do hope he will be fine. He’s a hero 100 percent,” he said.



New South Wales Premier Chris Minns (L) talking with Ahmed Al Ahmed, the man who tackled and disarmed one of the Bondi Beach attackers, at St George Hospital in Sydney

The startling footage of the encounter has gone viral, and Ahmed was feted online for his bravery and lifesaving quick thinking, with many people saying he likely saved several lives.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese hailed him and others as “heroes”, as did Premier Chris Minns of New South Wales, the state where Bondi Beach is located.

“In all of this evil, in all of this sadness, there are still wonderful, brave Australians that

are prepared to risk their lives to help a complete stranger,” Minns told a press briefing late Sunday.

At the White House, Trump offered his own praise and “great respect” for the man who disarmed a gunman.

“It’s been a very, very brave person, actually, who went and attacked frontally one of the shooters, and saved a lot of lives,” the American president said, adding the man “is right now in the hospital, pretty seriously wounded.”

two shooters -- one killed at the scene, and the other now in hospital.

However, Australian public broadcaster ABC said the alleged assailant was Naveed Akram from the western Sydney suburb of Bonnyrigg, quoting an anonymous official, and other local media reported that police had raided his home.

Photos of a beaming man in a green Pakistan cricket jersey pinged across social media.

Some of the posts were shared thousands of times, drawing vitriolic comments.

But the photo was taken from the Facebook profile of a different Naveed Akram, who pleaded Monday for people to stop the misinformation in a video published by the Pakistan Consulate of Sydney.

“Per media reports, one of the shooters’ name is Naveed Akram

and my name is Naveed Akram as well,” he said in the video.

“That is not me. I have nothing to do with the incident or that person,” he said, condemning the “terrible” Bondi Beach shooting.

“I just want everyone’s help to help me stop this propaganda,” he said, asking for users to report accounts that misused his photo, which he had shared in a 2019 post.

‘Life-threatening’

The 30-year-old, who lives in a northwestern suburb of Sydney, told AFP he first heard around 9:30 pm on Sunday that he had been falsely identified as the shooter.

“I could not even sleep last night,” Akram told AFP by phone, adding he deleted all the “terrible” messages he got.

“I’m terrified. I could not go outside, like it’s a life-threaten-

ing issue, so I don’t want to risk anything... my family is worried as well, so it’s quite a hard time for me.”

He asked the Pakistan Consulate to put out the video because relatives in the country’s Punjab province were getting phone calls as well.

“It was destroying my image, my family’s image,” he said.

“People started to call them. They were worried, and they have told the police over there.”

The Pakistan native moved to Australia in 2018 to attend Central Queensland University and later did a masters at Sydney’s Holmes Institute.

Today he runs a car rental business, and he said Australia is “the perfect country”.

“I love this country. I have never had any safety issues here, like everyone is so nice, the people are so nice here,” Akram said.