

# Venezuela president behind crimes against humanity: UN

● Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and top ministers have been accused of possible crimes against humanity by UN investigators

● UN team based their findings on 274 remote interviews with victims

● The investigators called for the dismantlement of Venezuela's Special Action Forces

AFP News

Venezuela's president and top ministers are responsible for probable crimes against humanity including extrajudicial killings and the systematic use of torture, UN investigators said on Wednesday.

In their first report, a team of investigators tasked with probing a slew of alleged violations in Venezuela said they had found evidence that state actors, including President Nicolas Maduro, were behind serious international crimes.

The International Fact-Finding Mission, created by the UN Human Rights Council a year ago, "found reasonable grounds to believe that Venezuelan authorities and security forces have since 2014 planned and executed serious human rights violations," Marta Valinas, the mission's chairperson, said in a statement.

Some of those violations, "including arbitrary killings and the systematic use of torture,



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amount to crimes against humanity," she said.

"Far from being isolated acts, these crimes were coordinated and committed pursuant to state policies, with the knowledge or direct support of commanding officers and senior government officials."

The 411-page report spelled out which Venezuelan officials it deemed responsible, citing "reasonable grounds to believe that both the President and the Ministers of People's Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, and for Defence, ordered or contributed to the commission of the crimes documented in this report."

## International 'legal action'

The investigators demanded that Venezuelan authorities immediately carry out "independent, impartial and transparent investigations" into the violations, and ensure victims receive "full redress".

Other jurisdictions, including the International Criminal Court, "should also consider legal actions against individuals

responsible for violations and crimes the mission identified," Valinas said.

The three-person team was unable to visit Venezuela, but based their findings on 274 remote interviews with victims, witnesses, former state officials and others, and analysis of confidential documents, including legal case files.

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And it probed 140 so-called Operations for People's Liberation, established purportedly to fight crime, but which between

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2015 and 2017 resulted in 413 people being killed, shot "sometimes at point blank range".

The report pointed out that government officials had repeatedly praised such operations.

## 'Systematic' torture

"These extrajudicial executions cannot be attributed to a lack of discipline among the security forces," Valinas said, pointing out that "high-ranking officials had effective command and control over the perpetrators and knowledge of their actions but failed to prevent or repress the violations.

"The killings appear part of a policy to eliminate unwanted members of society under the cover of combatting crime."

The investigators called for the dismantlement of Venezuela's Special Action Forces, which along with the national police agency was responsible for well over half of the killings.

The investigators also decried the "systematic practice of torture".

It pointed to techniques including rape, asphyxiation, beatings, electric shocks and death threats to extract confessions or as punishment.

At least three people had died after being subjected to torture while in the custody of Venezuela's military counter-intelligence directorate and its national intelligence service, the report found.

Investigator Francisco Cox stressed in a statement that commanding officers and high-level officials "had full knowledge of this pattern of crimes," adding that the investigators had drawn up a list of 45 officials within the two agencies "who should be investigated and prosecuted".

# \$500 million burglary nets stamps and calligraphy in H.Kong



The thief struck an apartment belonging to Chinese collector Fu Chunxiao in the city's bustling Kowloon district

AFP News

A brazen Hong Kong burglar made off with a collection of stamps and calligraphy worth a reported \$500 million in a daylight heist, a police source said Wednesday.

The thief struck an apartment belonging to Chinese collector Fu Chunxiao in the city's bustling Kowloon district and took just two hours to steal the staggering haul, the source said.

According to the South China Morning Post daily, the stolen goods were worth HK\$4 billion (\$516 million) and included calligraphy by Chairman Mao Zedong, five extremely valuable antique stamps and revolutionary items from mainland China.

Fu, a member of the Hong Kong Philatelic Society, was in mainland China at the time of the burglary on Thursday September 10, said the police source, who asked not to be named.

The thief walked into the 16-storey residential building, prized open an iron gate and burst through a wooden door to get inside the apartment, before making off via the same route with the goods.

The SCMP cited a source who said the value of the stolen items emerged after Fu's daughter arrived in Hong Kong to help the police probe.

The valuable goods were taken from a locked drawer in the apartment, the source told the newspaper.

The thief struck an apartment belonging to Chinese collector Fu Chunxiao in the city's bustling Kowloon district and took just two hours to steal the staggering haul, the source said.

# Scientists find world's oldest sperm in Myanmar amber

● The sperm was found inside an ostracod -- a type of crustacean that has existed for 500 million years and can be found in many oceans today

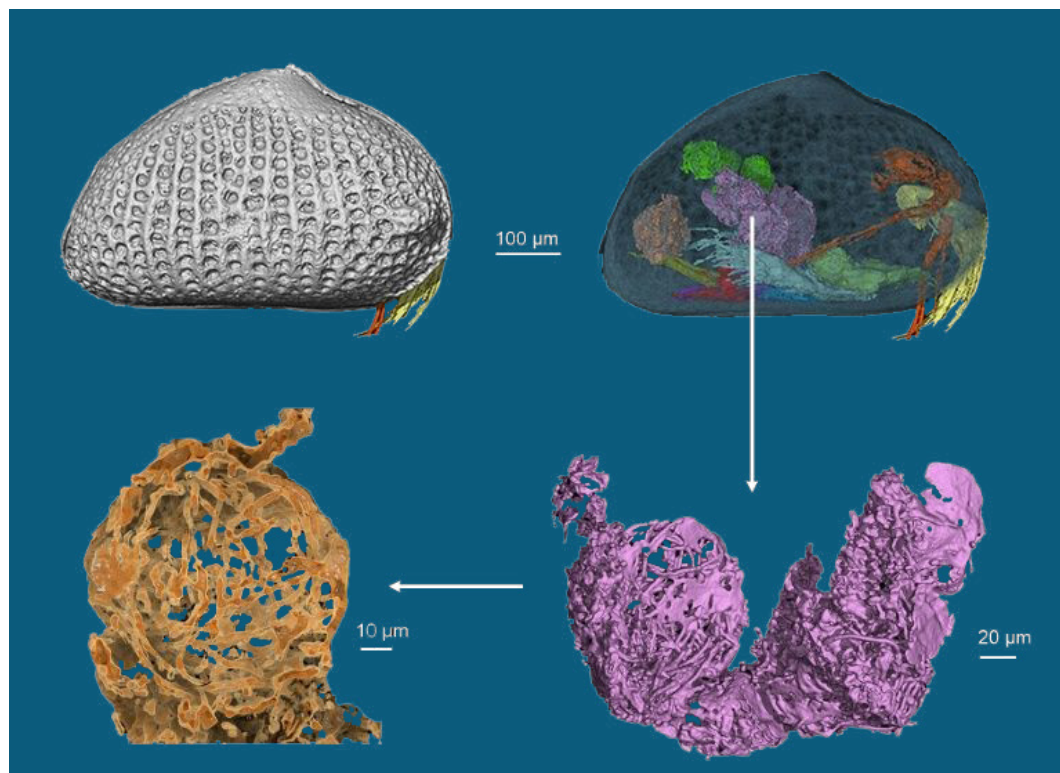
AFP News

A team of palaeontologists have discovered what they believe is the world's oldest animal sperm, frozen 100 million years ago inside a tiny crustacean in tree resin in Myanmar.

The oldest known examples of fossilised animal sperm were previously a mere 17 million years old, according to the team of experts led by Wang He of the Chinese Academy of Science in Nanjing.

The sperm was found inside an ostracod -- a type of crustacean that has existed for 500 million years and can be found in many oceans today, they said in a paper published on Wednesday in the Royal Society's Proceedings journal.

They were found in the body of a female specimen, indicating that she must have been



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fertilised shortly before being trapped in amber, the experts said.

The individual sperms were described as "giants", measuring up to 4.6 times the size of the

body of the male.

"This is equivalent to about 7.30 metres in a 1.70-metre human, so it requires a lot of energy to produce them," Renate Matzke-Karasz of the Ludwig Max-

imilian University of Munich, co-author of the study, told AFP.

The ostracod was also a new species that the scientists have named "Myanmarcyprius hui".

## 'Eureka moment'

Fossilised shells of ostracods are common but finding a specimen with "soft parts" is rare, the experts said.

During the Cretaceous period around 145 to 66 million years ago, the ostracods in question probably lived in the coastal waters of present-day Myanmar where they became trapped in a blob of tree resin.

The tiny creatures are less than a millimetre long but the scientists made 3-D reconstructions of them to observe them more closely, leading to what Wang described as "one of those special Eureka moments in a researcher's life".

As well as the sperm, the reconstructions also showed the distinctive muscular sperm pumps and penises (two of each) that male ostracods use to inseminate the females.

Most males in the animal world including humans produce tens of millions of tiny sperm cells, but ostracods are different -- for them, it's all about quality over quantity.

There are several conflicting theories about the evolutionary value of such giant sperms.

"For example, experiments have shown that in one group, a

high degree of competition between males can lead to a longer sperm life, while in another group, a low degree of competition also led to a longer sperm life," said Matzke-Karasz.

"To show that using giant sperms in reproduction is not an extinction-doomed extravagance of evolution, but a serious long-term advantage for the survival of a species, we need to know when they first appeared."



Scientists have been researching the amber of Myanmar for decades, finding all kinds of frozen treasures including frogs, snakes and a feathered dinosaur tail.