

## News in brief

### Russian PM to visit China next week: Beijing



◆ Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin will visit China from May 23 to 24, Beijing's Foreign ministry and the Kremlin said yesterday. "At the invitation of Premier Li Qiang of the State Council, Russian Federation Prime Minister Mishustin will pay an official visit to China from May 23 to 24," Foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said in a statement. Confirming the visit, the Kremlin said: "Russian-Chinese cooperation in trade and economic spheres will be discussed." Mishustin will also visit Shanghai during his visit, where he will speak at a Russian-Chinese business forum, the Kremlin said.

◆ The death toll from Cyclone Mocha has reached 145 in Myanmar, its junta said yesterday, with most of the dead from the persecuted Rohingya minority. Mocha

brought lashing rain and winds of 195 kilometres per hour (120 miles per hour) to Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh on Sunday, collapsing buildings and turning streets into rivers. The storm churned up villages, uprooted trees and knocked out communications across much of Myanmar's Rakhine state. The region is home to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who live in displacement camps following decades of ethnic conflict.

### Cyclone Mocha death toll reaches 145 in Myanmar



### 'Someone else done it': Man charged in deadly NZ hostel fire



burning a couch earlier in the building, frantically with his hands and paced from side to side in the dock during his first hearing at Wellington District Court. The man, whose name was suppressed by the court, was remanded in custody. He did not enter a formal plea.

◆ A 48-year-old man accused of igniting a New Zealand hostel fire that killed at least five people claimed that someone else started the blaze during a court appearance yesterday. During the hearing, he shouted: "I need bail, I need a good lawyer. Someone else done it."

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## CURIOSER & CURIOSER

## 'Mini kangaroos' hop back in South Australia



A rare Burrowing Bettong (*Bettongia lesueri harveyi*) hides under a hollow log near Cygnet River on Kangaroo Island (file photo)

AFP | Sydney

◆ The brush-tailed bettong -- a rare, very cute marsupial resembling a rabbit-sized kangaroo -- is bouncing back on the South Australian mainland, more than 100 years after disappearing from the region.

Bettongs, which leap with their hindlegs much like a full-sized kangaroo, populated over 60 percent of Australia before falling victim to cats, foxes and land-clearing after European settlement more than two centuries ago.

Now they are making a comeback in South Australia's Yorke Peninsula, after wildlife scientists released 120 of the animals over a two-year period to see if they could survive outside of predator-proof enclosures or islands.

New monitoring shows they are thriving, researchers said yesterday.

Scientists said they had trapped 85 brush-tailed bettongs, finding that 40 percent of them were new animals born in the peninsula and 42

They're a little, ankle-sized kangaroo, a mini kangaroo on steroids if you like. They've got really powerful hind legs, they carry their young in their pouch, like a kangaroo does, but they're only a kilo and a half (three pounds)

DEREK SANDOW, ECOLOGIST FOR THE NORTHERN AND YORKE LANDSCAPE BOARD

of the 45 females had young in their pouches.

"It's fantastic to see so many new animals in the population," said Derek Sandow, ecologist for the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board.

The furry creatures -- their numbers down from tens of millions pre-colonisation to an estimated 12,000 to 18,000 now -- have clung to existence on Australian islands, in protected enclosures, and in a few pockets of Western Australia.

# Zelensky to make surprise G7 appearance

Zelensky to attend G7 summit in Japan as bloc targets Russia

### Ukrainian president likely to repeat call for fighter jets

AFP | Hiroshima

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is poised for a first post-invasion trip to the Asia-Pacific, meeting allies at a G7 summit in Hiroshima as the bloc hit Russia's "war machine" with further sanctions.

The previously unannounced visit was revealed by officials yesterday -- a rare long-haul foray for the war-time president and an opportunity to huddle with leaders of seven wealthy democracies that bankroll his country's stoic defence.

The visit comes at a potentially pivotal time in the 15-month-old conflict, as Ukrainian troops push back against Russian gains at Bakhmut and ready a long-awaited spring offensive.

Top Zelensky security aide Oleksii Danilov said the Ukrainian leader would go "wherever the country needs him, in any part of the world", including Hiroshima, a city synonymous with the horrors of war.

Informed sources said Zelensky would come in person to Hiroshima, where he is expected to meet G7 leaders and invited non-members on Sunday.

The trip will give Ukraine's president an opportunity to win over powerful unaligned nations joining the summit, including Brazil and India.



G7 leaders visit the Peace Memorial Park as part of the G7 Leaders' Summit in Hiroshima

"Very important things will be decided there, and therefore the presence, the physical presence of our president is absolutely essential to defend our interests," Danilov said.

Zelensky recently embarked on a European tour, pleading for military support like modern US-made fighter jets, as well as tougher sanctions on Russia.

Yesterday he arrived on an unannounced visit to Jeddah to address Arab League leaders gathered in the Saudi Arabian city.

### 'Diamonds are not forever'

"There are a host of things that Ukraine will continue to need, from artillery shells to sophisticated air defence systems," said Ian Lesser of the German Marshall Fund foreign policy think tank.

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TOP ZELENSKY SECURITY AIDE OLEKSI DANILOV

shall Fund foreign policy think tank.

Securing the transfer of US F-16 fighter jets, of which there are "very large numbers in Europe that could be sent to Ukraine", will also likely be on the agenda, he added.

The group's leaders agreed new sanctions yesterday that they said would "starve Russia of G7 technology, industrial equipment and services that support its war machine".

A G7 statement also pledged to "restrict trade in and use of diamonds mined, processed or produced in Russia", including with the use of tracing technologies.

The trade is estimated to be worth about \$4.5 billion a year for Russia.

## French boy found living as recluse with mother

AFP | Paris

A 14-year-old boy was taken into state care in northwest France after he was found living as a recluse with his mother, who faces prosecution, officials and reports said yesterday.

The teenager was born in the Philippines to a French mother, but brought up in Paris before moving to the city of Rennes without ever being registered with authorities or sent to school.

His mother, 48, was charged on Monday with neglecting her legal obligations and causing harm to a child, as well as causing harm by depriving a child of healthcare or food, which carries a maximum seven-year jail term, the local prosecutor's office said.

The mother's lawyer, Emmanuel Ludot, told AFP it was wrong to see it as a case of "mistrreatment", adding that

YOU KNOW WHAT

Authorities began investigating when the teenager was admitted to hospital in Rennes last July weighing only 25 kilograms (55 pounds), around half the norm for his age, and showing severe learning difficulties

his client was from a wealthy background.

"It's what is unusual in this case: he is over-loved. The mother is suffocating and allows him to do what he wants. He eats what he wants, and studies what he wants," he added.

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THE MOTHER'S LAWYER, EMMANUEL LUDOT

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Ludot said he weighed 33 kilograms when he was taken into state care.

## Louise Bourgeois spider sculpture fetches record \$32.8 mn at auction

AFP | New York

A giant spindly sculpture of a spider done by French-American artist Louise Bourgeois fetched \$32.8 million on Thursday, setting a record for a work by a woman sculptor at auction, Sotheby's said.

The work -- which soars over 10 feet tall and spans 18 feet across -- was finished by Bourgeois in 1996 and is one of just four monumental spiders to appear at auction.

Sotheby's did not identify the buyer.

The seller, it said, was the

installation art.

She was a prolific painter and printmaker but became best known for her large-scale sculptures, particularly of nimble, spindly spiders, which she said evoked memories of her mother, both as a sinister threat and an industrious repairer and weaver.

Bourgeois's monumental spiders have appeared in public spaces such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain, the Tate Modern in London, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

Fundacao Itau of Brazil, which acquired the work more than 25 years ago.

Bourgeois, who died in 2010 at age 98, was born in Paris but spent much of her adult life in New York City, where she became known for her iconic



## Hundreds of millions of lives lost

AFP | Geneva

Nearly 337 million life years were lost in the two first years of the Covid-19 pandemic, as millions of people died prematurely, the World Health Organization said yesterday.

The UN health agency's annual world statistics report also showed a swelling threat from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

The most dramatic finding, based on data up to 2022, was the estimate of how many years of life Covid had taken, WHO said.

The pandemic has wreaked global devastation and officially killed nearly seven million people.

## Tsunami alert

AFP | Sydney

A tsunami warning in the Pacific has been lifted after a 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck yesterday, sending many islanders fleeing coastal areas.

The quake hit at 0257 GMT, prompting people on multiple South Pacific islands to race to higher ground as sirens warned of possible hazardous waves.

"Based on all available data the tsunami threat from this earthquake has now passed," the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said in a statement.

It forecasted "minor sea level fluctuations" over the next few hours.

The Honolulu-based body had earlier issued tsunami