

News in brief

◆ **Portugal yesterday** became the latest nation to back Morocco's plan to give autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty to the disputed Western Sahara territory. Portugal considers the plan "serious, credible and constructive" for the resource-rich north African territory, where the Algerian-backed Polisario Front rebel group has campaigned for an independent state. Morocco moved in to control most of the sparsely populated territory after former colonial ruler Spain withdrew in 1975. The United Nations considers Western Sahara a "non-self-governing" territory and has had a peacekeeping mission, MINURSO, there since 1991 with the official aim of holding a self-determination referendum. Morocco has however refused to allow a vote where independence could be an option. In recent years, France, the United States, Spain, Germany and last month Britain have all backed the Moroccan autonomy plan.

◆ **The World Health Organization** warned yesterday a major chikungunya virus epidemic risks sweeping around the globe, calling for urgent action to prevent it. The WHO said it was picking up exactly the same early warning signs as in a major outbreak two decades ago and wanted to prevent a repeat. Chikungunya is a mosquito-borne viral disease that causes fever and severe joint pain, which is often debilitating. In some cases it can be deadly.

"Chikungunya is not a disease that is widely known, but it has been detected and transmitted in 119 countries globally, putting 5.6 billion people at risk," said the WHO's Diana Rojas Alvarez. She recalled how from 2004 to 2005, a major chikungunya epidemic swept across the Indian Ocean, hitting small island territories before spreading globally and affecting almost half a million people.

◆ **Russian lawmakers** advanced a bill yesterday that would fine internet users who search online for web pages, books, artworks or music albums that authorities have deemed "extremist" -- a move critics have called a dangerous attack on freedom. More than 5,000 entries are on the Russian justice ministry's list of "extremist materials", including songs praising Ukraine, blog posts by feminist rock band Pussy Riot and websites critical of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Deputies in the lower house State Duma backed the bill by 306 votes to 67 and the text will now be sent to Russia's upper house, where it is unlikely to face any major opposition. The legislation would impose fines of up to 5,000 rubles (\$64) on anyone found to have deliberately searched for or gained access to material on the list.



Portugal backs Morocco sovereignty plan for disputed W. Sahara

WHO sounds alarm on risk of chikungunya epidemic

Russia seeks to fine web users searching for content deemed 'extremist'



SPOTLIGHT

Humans beat AI gold-level score at top maths contest



AFP | Sydney, Australia

Humans beat generative AI models made by Google and OpenAI at a top international mathematics competition, despite the programmes reaching gold-level scores for the first time.

Neither model scored full marks -- unlike five young people at the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO), a prestigious annual competition where participants must be under 20 years old.

Google said Monday that an advanced version of its Gemini chatbot had solved five out of the six maths problems set at the IMO, held in Australia's Queensland this month.

"We can confirm that Google DeepMind has reached the much-desired milestone, earning 35 out of a possible 42 points -- a gold medal score," the US tech giant cited IMO

president Gregor Dolinar as saying.

"Their solutions were astonishing in many respects. IMO graders found them to be clear, precise and most of them easy to follow."

Around 10 percent of human contestants won gold-level medals, and five received perfect scores of 42 points.

US ChatGPT maker OpenAI said that its experimental reasoning model had scored a gold-level 35 points on the test.

The result "achieved a long-standing grand challenge in AI" at "the world's most prestigious math competition", OpenAI researcher Alexander Wei wrote on social media.

"We evaluated our models on the 2025 IMO problems under the same rules as human contestants," he said.

"For each problem, three former IMO medalists independently graded the model's submitted proof."

Israeli military killed over **1,000** seeking Gaza aid since late May

GHF operations have been marred by chaotic scenes and near-daily firing



Palestinians shove to receive a hot meal at a charity kitchen in the Mawasi area of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip

- **Gaza's population faces severe shortages of food**
- **Aid groups have refused to cooperate with the GHF**

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

The UN yesterday said Israeli forces have killed over 1,000 Palestinians trying to get food aid in Gaza since the US- and Israel-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation started operations.

An officially private effort, the

GHF began operations on May 26 after Israel halted supplies into the Gaza Strip for more than two months, sparking famine warnings.

GHF operations have been marred by chaotic scenes and near-daily reports of Israeli forces firing on people waiting to collect rations in the Palestinian territory, where the Israeli military is seeking to destroy Hamas.

"Over 1,000 Palestinians have now been killed by the Israeli military while trying to get food in Gaza since the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation started operating," UN human rights office spokesman Thameen Al-Kheetan told AFP.

"As of July 21, we have recorded 1,054 people killed in Gaza while trying to get food; 766 of them were killed in the vicinity of GHF sites and 288 near UN and other humanitarian organisations' aid convoys."

Kheetan added: "Our data is based on information from multiple reliable sources on the ground, including medical teams, humanitarian and human rights organisations."

The war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas's deadly attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, has created dire humanitarian conditions for the more than two million people who live in the coastal territory.

Gaza's population faces severe

shortages of food and other essentials.

GHF says it has distributed more than 1.4 million boxes of food-stuffs to date.

"We're adjusting our operations in real time to keep people safe and informed, and we stand ready to partner with other organisations to scale up and deliver more meals to the people of Gaza," GHF interim director John Acree said Monday.

The United Nations and major aid groups have refused to cooperate with the GHF over concerns it was designed to cater to Israeli military objectives and violates basic humanitarian principles.

Gaza hospital says 21 children died from malnutrition and starvation in 72 hours

AFP | Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

The head of Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City said yesterday that 21 children had died across the Palestinian territory in the past three days "due to malnutrition and starvation".

"These deaths were recorded at hospitals in Gaza, including Al-Shifa in Gaza City, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir el-Balah and Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis... over the past 72 hours," Mohammed Abu Salmiya told reporters.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned on Monday evening that "the last lifelines keeping people alive are collaps-



People rush towards an truck carrying humanitarian aid as it drives along al-Rashid street in western Jabalia, after trucks entered the northern Gaza Strip through the Israeli-controlled Zikim border crossing.

ing" in Gaza, and that there were growing reports of children and adults with malnutrition.

Abu Salmiya told reporters that new cases of malnutrition and starvation were arriving at Gaza's remaining functioning hospitals "every moment".

After talks to extend a six-week ceasefire broke down, Israel imposed a full blockade on Gaza on March 2 this year, allowing nothing in until trucks were again permitted at a trickle in late May.

But stocks accumulated during the ceasefire gradually depleted, leaving the territory's more than two million inhabitants experiencing the worst shortages since the start of the war in October 2023.