

News in brief

◆ **India's Supreme Court** has ordered an investigation into allegations of illegal animal imports and financial misconduct at a vast private zoo set up by the son of Asia's richest person. Vantara, which bills itself as the "world's biggest wild animal rescue centre", is run by Anant Ambani, son of Mukesh Ambani, the billionaire head of the multinational conglomerate Reliance Industries. The site in the western state of Gujarat is home to more than 200 elephants, as well as 50 bears, 160 tigers, 200 lions, 250 leopards and 900 crocodiles, among other animals, according to India's Central Zoo Authority. Wildlife activists have criticised the facility, saying it is housing endangered species on baking flatlands next to a giant oil refinery complex without any plan to return them to the wild. And on Monday, India's Supreme Court said it had ordered a panel led by retired judges to investigate alleged unlawful acquisition of animals -- particularly elephants -- other violations of wildlife regulations, and money laundering.



India to probe giant zoo run by son of Asia's richest person

Xi says China, Russia ties 'most stable' in turbulent world

◆ **President Xi Jinping** said yesterday that China's ties with Russia are the "most stable, mature and strategically significant" among major world powers, state media reported. During a meeting with Vyacheslav Volodin, chairman of Russia's Duma, or lower house of parliament, Xi hailed the countries' relationship as being a "stable source of world peace", Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said. "The two sides should... work together to safeguard the security and development interests of both countries, unite the Global South, uphold true multilateralism, and promote the international order towards greater fairness and justice," Xi told Volodin in Beijing's opulent Great Hall of the People. Former socialist allies with a history of tempestuous ties, relations between Beijing and Moscow have deepened since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

◆ **A Berlin court** yesterday convicted a Syrian teenager of contributing to an Islamic State-inspired plot to attack a Taylor Swift concert in Vienna. Three dates in the US pop megastar's record-breaking "Eras" tour were cancelled last summer after authorities warned of the plot. The 16-year-old defendant, named by prosecutors as Mohammad A., was found guilty of "preparing a serious act of violence endangering the state" and "supporting a terrorist act abroad", the court said in a statement. He was given an 18-month suspended sentence. Mohammad A., who was 14 at the time of the foiled attack, had been "radicalised by IS propaganda on the internet", the court said.

Berlin court convicts Syrian youth over Taylor Swift bomb plot



SPOTLIGHT

25 countries suspend postal services to US over tariffs: UN



A woman posts mail at the Lunel post office south of France

Geneva, Switzerland

The UN postal agency said Tuesday that 25 countries had decided to suspend package deliveries to the United States, as concern grows over the impact of President Donald Trump's looming tariffs. The Trump administration has said it will abolish a tax exemption on small packages entering the United States from August 29. The move has sparked a flurry of announcements from postal services in France, Germany, India, Australia and other countries that most US-bound packages would no longer be accepted. The UN's Universal Postal Union said it had already been advised by "postal operators of 25 member countries... that they have suspended their out-bound postal services to the US,

citing uncertainties specifically related to transit services". "These suspensions will remain in place pending further information on how US authorities will operationalise (their announced) measures as well as actual implementation of the required operational changes," it said in a statement. The UPU did not provide a list of postal services it had heard from. The organisation, which was established in 1874 and counts 192 member states, warned that the new US measures would "entail considerable operational changes for postal operators around the world". From Friday, the UPU said the measures would require postal carriers delivering packages to the United States "to collect customs duties from senders in advance", on behalf of the US Customs and Border Protection agency.

Ukraine eases ban on men aged 18-22 travelling abroad

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Ukrainian men aged 18 to 22 are now allowed to travel abroad, Kyiv authorities said on Tuesday, in an easing of a law designed to ensure enough army conscripts to fight Russia's invasion. Since the start of Russia's all-out assault, Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 have required authorisa-

tion to leave Ukraine.

Thousands of men try each year to illegally flee the country, sometimes on risky routes over the borders.

"The government has updated its procedure for crossing national borders. Men aged 18 to 22 can cross the border unhindered during the martial law," Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said on Telegram.

She said the decision covered "all citizens" in that age range, including those currently in other countries, who could now return to Ukraine and leave again if they wished.

"We want Ukrainians to maintain their links with Ukraine as much as possible," Svyrydenko said.

Men aged 18 to 22 are not subject to a national military call-up,

which currently has a minimum age of 25 after it was lowered last year.

Ukraine's military has tried to bring in male volunteers under 25 by using financial incentives, but has fallen short of its intake targets.

According to UN figures, there are more than 5.6 million Ukrainians living abroad, most of them in European countries.

Uproar after US envoy tells Lebanon journalists to 'act civilised'

AFP | Beirut, Lebanon

US envoy Tom Barrack told Lebanese journalists at a press conference at the country's presidential palace on Tuesday to "act civilised", sparking outcry and calls for an apology.

As journalists shouted questions after the US delegation's meeting with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, Barrack stepped up to the podium in the packed room and said: "We're going to have a different set of rules... please be quiet for a moment."

"The moment that this starts becoming chaotic, like animalistic, we're gone," he said.

"Act civilised, act kind, act tolerant, because this is the problem with what's happening in the region," added Barrack, who is US ambassador to Turkey and special envoy to Syria and has recently been leading talks with Lebanese officials.



US ambassador to Turkey and special envoy for Syria Tom Barrack (R) speaks to US deputy Middle East envoy Morgan Ortogus

The Lebanese presidency in a statement on X expressed regret at "remarks made inadvertently from its podium by one of its guests", affirming its appreciation for the journalists and media representatives. Information

Minister Paul Morcos in a statement also expressed regret at the remarks "by a member of the foreign delegation towards media representatives at the presidential palace".

The photojournalists' syndicate

called Barrack's comments "a direct insult" that set "a serious and totally unacceptable precedent".

In a statement, it demanded "an immediate and public apology", rejecting attempts to "downplay the seriousness of what happened or let it pass without accountability".

The press editors' syndicate also called for "a public statement of apology" and floated a boycott of the envoy's future visits and meetings. The union of journalists in Lebanon said Barrack's remarks were "a reflection of an unacceptable arrogance in dealing with the media" and also called for an official apology.

Ibrahim Musawi, a lawmaker from the Iran-backed group Hezbollah and head of parliament's media committee, called the remarks "a blatant insult" and urged the government to "summon the US ambassador and reprimand her".

Israeli forces raid exchange office in West Bank's Ramallah

AFP | Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

Israeli forces raided the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday, targeting a currency exchange and, according to the Red Crescent, leaving dozens of Palestinians wounded.

Israel carries out frequent raids across the West Bank, where tensions have remained high throughout the Gaza war, but incursions into central Ramallah -- seat of the Palestinian Authority -- are relatively rare.

A military statement said that "forces conducted a targeted raid on a currency exchange business that transfers terror funds to Hamas", the Palestinian militant group whose October 2023 attack on Israel triggered the ongoing war in Gaza.

The forces arrested five people "suspected of terrorist activity" and confiscated "hundreds of thousands of shekels that were identified as terror funds".

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said that the Israeli operation left at least 27 people wounded, eight of them by live fire, 14 by rubber bullets and five by shrapnel. Another 31 people were treated for tear-gas inhalation.



Israeli soldiers block a road during a raid in the city of Ramallah, in the Israeli occupied West Bank

An AFP journalist saw soldiers on the ground around Al-Manara Square in the city centre and on balconies overlooking it.

"Special forces suddenly stormed" the area, said witness Ihab Abu Sneineh, a 22-year-old shopkeeper.

"We didn't know what was happening," he told AFP, adding that the forces were "storming from all directions" before entering an exchange office near his shop.

Palestinians were throwing stones at troops as they began the operation, the AFP journalist said.

Witnesses told AFP that the army withdrew in the early afternoon.

According to the Red Crescent, its teams treated a 12-year-old boy shot in the back and a 71-year-old man wounded in the raid.

The medical organisation also accused Israeli forces of impeding the evacuation of wounded people.

Since the Gaza war began, Israeli raids on Palestinian population centres, particularly in the northern West Bank, have intensified.

Previous Israeli operations, earlier this year and in December 2023, have similarly targeted currency exchange offices.

Egypt condemned Tuesday's raid and the "aggressive and extremist Israeli policies", dubbing Israel "the main source of destabilisation in the region".

Since the start of the Gaza war, Israeli troops or settlers in the West Bank have killed at least 972 Palestinians, including militants and civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Palestinian Authority figures.

In the same period, at least 36 Israelis, both civilians and security forces, have been killed in attacks or during military operations in the territory, according to Israeli figures.



Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967.