

News in brief

US rejects WHO non-communicable diseases declaration: RFK Jr

◆ US Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.



rejected a United Nations political declaration on non-communicable diseases on Thursday, saying it “pushes destructive gender ideology” while ignoring the most pressing health issues. The World Health Organization has said the “new, ambitious and achievable” declaration will lay out a roadmap for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing towards 2030 and beyond. The declaration is expected to secure approval next month from a majority of the WHO’s 193 member states despite objections from the United States.

◆ Gaza’s civil defence agency said Israeli forces killed more than 20 people across the Palestinian territory yesterday, ahead of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s speech at the United Nations in New York.

Civil defence says over 20 killed in Gaza ahead of Netanyahu’s UN speech



It comes as the Israeli military presses its offensive against Hamas in Gaza City, from which hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee. The civil defence agency -- a rescue force operating under Hamas authority -- reported at least 22 people killed since dawn across the territory, including 11 in Gaza City. Israel’s military said in a statement yesterday that the air force had over the past day “struck over 140 targets throughout the Gaza Strip, including terrorists, tunnel shafts (and) military infrastructure”..

UK to launch digital ID scheme to curb illegal migration

◆ UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday announced plans for a new nationwide digital ID in a bid to curb illegal migration, but the move faces strong opposition in country that has long-resisted such moves.



The new digital ID will be held on people’s phones and there will be no requirement for individuals to carry or be asked to produce it, said the government. However, it will be “mandatory as a means of proving your right to work,” a statement said.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Million-year-old skull could change human evolution timeline



AFP | Bangkok

A digital reconstruction of a million-year-old skull suggests humans may have diverged from our ancient ancestors 400,000 years earlier than thought and in Asia not Africa, a study said yesterday.

The findings are based on a reconstruction of a crushed skull discovered in China in 1990, and have the potential to resolve the longstanding “Muddle in the Middle” of human evolution, researchers said.

But experts not involved in the work cautioned that the findings were likely to be disputed, and pointed to ongoing uncertainties in the timeline of human evolution.

The skull, labelled Yunxian 2, was previously thought to belong to a human forerunner called Homo erectus.

But modern reconstruction technologies revealed features closer to species previously thought to have existed only later in human evolution, including the recently discovered Homo longi and our own Homo sapiens.

“This changes a lot of thinking,” said Chris Stringer, an anthropologist at the Natural

History Museum, London, who was part of the research team.

“It suggests that by one million years ago, our ancestors had already split into distinct groups, pointing to a much earlier and more complex human evolutionary split than previously believed,” he added.

If the findings are correct, it suggests there could have been much earlier members of other early hominins, including Neanderthals and Homo sapiens, the study says.



The reconstructed skull, Yunxian 2, shows features similar to Homo erectus but its apparently larger brain capacity is closer to the recently discovered Homo longi and our own Homo sapiens

Trump hopes more opponents to be charged after Comey

Trump says Comey is a “dirty cop” as he steps up his campaign of political retribution

● Trump cheers Comey indictment

● Pushes for more political prosecutions

● Breaks norms separating DOJ and White House

AFP | Washington

US President Donald Trump called yesterday for more of his political opponents to face criminal charges as he cheered the indictment of former FBI director James Comey and branded him a “dirty cop.”

The Republican’s comments step up an extraordinary, undisguised campaign of retribution against those who oppose him that defies decades of norms in US politics.

“Frankly I hope there are others,” Trump told reporters at the White House when asked about Comey’s indictment on Thursday.

“It’s not revenge. It’s also about the fact that you can’t let this go on.”

Presidents have historically bent over backward -- at least in public -- to show clear separation between the White House and the Justice Department. Trump has smashed that precedent, making clear he intends to influence Comey’s case -- and others.



US President Donald Trump waves as he makes his way to board Air Force One

Comedy was charged with making false statements and obstruction of justice in connection with the probe he conducted into whether Trump colluded with Russia to win the 2016 election.

“He’s a dirty cop, he’s always been a dirty cop,” Trump told reporters about Comey, echoing an earlier post on his Truth Social network in which he declared him guilty.

The charges against the former FBI chief came days after Trump publicly urged Attorney General Pam Bondi to take action against Comey and others he sees as enemies.



The prosecutor who brought the case was a former personal lawyer to Trump with no prior experience as a prosecutor, appointed just days before the indictment

They included Leticia James, who as New York’s state prosecutor brought a civil fraud case against Trump, and California Senator Adam Schiff, who led the prosecution at the president’s first impeachment in 2019.

Asked who would be next for prosecution, Trump said: “It’s not a list, but I think there will be others.”

Trump has used his office since returning to power in January to pressure a huge variety of individuals and institutions that either opposed him in the past or, as in the case of several media outlets, had sought to maintain their independence from him.

EU steps up ‘drone wall’ plans after Russian incursions

● Drone wall follows recent violations

● Focus on detection and interception

AFP | Helsinki

Europe needs to learn from Ukraine and swiftly build a “wall” of anti-drone defences, the EU’s defence chief said yesterday, after talks with eastern member states rattled by a string of airspace violations by Russia.

Defence ministers from around 10 EU countries agreed during the talks, convened by commissioner Andrius Kubilius, to make the so-called “drone wall” a priority for the bloc.

Focus sharpened on the threat this week after unidentified drones forced the closure of airports in Denmark -- which joined the meeting.

“We need to move fast,” Kubilius told AFP in an interview. “And we need to move, taking all the lessons from Ukraine and making this drone wall together with Ukraine.”

Ukraine -- which has developed a raft of capabilities to detect and shoot down Russian



A soldier of the German armed forces Bundeswehr demonstrates the use of a handheld HP 47 drone jammer

drone swarms more cheaply -- also participated in yesterday’s talks, and said it wants to be part of the project.

“The drone wall will create a fundamentally new defence ecosystem in Europe, of which Ukraine is ready to be a part,” Ukraine’s Defence Minister Denys Shmygal wrote on social media.

Kubilius likewise said he wanted to see Ukraine be a “real partner in development of this wall”

and that he saw it as another way to integrate Kyiv into Europe’s defence build-up.

“Ukraine built an acoustic sensor system when the war started in a very short period of time,” defence commissioner Kubilius told AFP. “So I think that we can do that also without long delay.”

‘Detection, tracking, and interception’

Kubilius, a former Lithuanian prime minister, said there was



Ukraine built an acoustic drone-detection system in weeks at the start of Russia’s invasion – a model EU leaders now want to replicate quickly across Europe

not yet a firm notion of the costs of creating the project, but estimated it would be in the range of “several billion euros, not hundreds of billions”.

“More or less we understand what we need to develop. How much it will cost -- we shall see,” he said.

Kubilius earlier told a news conference in Helsinki that meeting participants had “agreed to move from concept to concrete actions”.

He said ministers had backed a broad plan to bolster the EU’s eastern defences, the “priority” being to build a drone wall “with advanced detection, tracking, and interception capabilities.”