

News in brief

Thailand sounds alarm after anthrax outbreak in Laos



◆ Thailand ordered a close watch on livestock yesterday after an outbreak of anthrax in neighbouring Laos, where more than 50 suspected human cases have been reported. Anthrax, which spreads through bacteria in soil, commonly infects grazing livestock and wild animals but can infect humans and be deadly in some cases. Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has ordered officials to closely monitor the disease and to "protect the public". Humans can become infected by breathing in the spores, eating contaminated food or touching bacteria with broken skin, for instance when handling diseased animals.

The Bidens' dogs grabbed headlines with their bad behavior, but "First Feline" Willow is getting a book all to herself.

First Lady Jill Biden has written a children's story about the short-haired tabby's journey from a farm in Pennsylvania to the White House in 2022. With a June publication date, "Willow the White House Cat" will come out four months before President Joe Biden faces a bitter political catfight for reelection with Donald Trump.

Jill Biden writes children's book about 'First Feline' Willow



Colombia expels Argentine diplomats over Milei 'terrorist' remarks



◆ Colombia said Wednesday it had ordered the expulsion of Argentine diplomats, after President Javier Milei called his Colombian counterpart Gustavo Petro a "terrorist" and "murderer". Colombia's foreign ministry cited Milei's "denigrating" remarks, which were made in an interview with CNN which has not yet been aired in full. "The Argentine president's comments have deteriorated the trust of our nation, in addition to offending the dignity of President Petro, who was democratically elected," the ministry said in a statement.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

New Zealand's Maori King calls for whales to be given personhood



Rescuers retrieve the carcass of a stranded fin whale in Christchurch (file photo)

AFP | Wellington

The King of New Zealand's Indigenous Maori people made an impassioned call yesterday for whales to be granted the same legal rights as people in a bid to protect the hallowed yet vulnerable species.

Kiingi Tuheitia Potatau te Wherowhero VII said that majestic marine mammals should be given inherent human rights, such as having a healthy environment, to allow the restoration of their populations.

"The sound of our ancestor's song has grown weaker, and her habitat is under threat, which is why we must act now," King Tuheitia said in a rare public statement.

New Zealand has previously passed laws granting legal status to natural features such as rivers and mountains that are important to the Maori people.

The Mount Taranaki volcano and Whanganui River, both in New Zealand's North Island, are seen by the Maori as both ancestors and of spiritual importance. They were both granted personhood in 2017.

The status has since been invoked to slow or overturn development projects and to force consultation with local groups.

King Tuheitia said granting whales the same status would act as "a cloak of protection for our taonga (treasure), our ancestor -- the whales".

The statement was jointly issued with the high chief of the neighbouring Cook Islands, Travel Tou Ariki.

The leaders are advocating for Indigenous knowledge to be combined with science for a "more holistic approach" to whale conservation.

Establishing protected marine areas would be a "crucial" step, they added.

The leaders want Polynesian nations who share "a love for the vast Pacific Ocean" to help.

"We can no longer turn a blind eye," high chief Travel Tou Ariki said. "Whales play a vital role in the health of our entire ocean ecosystem. Their decline disrupts the delicate balance that sustains all life in Te Moana (the sea)."

"We must act with urgency to protect these magnificent creatures before it's too late."

French bill seeks to ban hair discrimination affecting black women



French former government spokesperson Sibeth Ndiaye, hairstyle was disparaged online, speaks in parliament (file photo)

AFP | Paris

Four people, including a teenage girl, were killed and at least five injured after a man went on a stabbing spree at multiple addresses in the US state of Illinois, police have said.

The stabbings took place on Wednesday afternoon, Rockford city police said in a statement, adding that a 22-year-old suspect was taken into custody.

The statement did not say anything about a possible motive.

Rockford is located about 90 miles northwest of Chicago.

Those killed included a 15-year-old girl, a 63-year-old woman and two men aged 49 and 22, according to the police.

The police statement said that five people had been wounded, but US media later cited the police saying seven wounded.

Battles, bombardment Israel reschedules t

Tensions rise as airstrikes persist despite calls for

Israeli PM faces mounting criticism over civilian casualties and dire conditions

AFP | Gaza

Battles and bombardment pounded the Gaza Strip yesterday, after Washington said Israel agreed to reschedule cancelled talks with tensions worsening between the allies.

United States criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has mounted over Gaza's civilian death toll, dire food shortages, and Israeli plans to push its ground offensive against Hamas into the far-southern city of Rafah, which is packed with displaced civilians.

World leaders have warned against a Rafah offensive which they fear would worsen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation for the Palestinian territory's 2.4 million residents.

The United Nations reported late Wednesday that famine "is ever closer to becoming a reality



A man walks with a bicycle loaded with blankets and cushions past destroyed buildings along a street in Gaza City

in northern Gaza," and said the territory's health system is collapsing "due to ongoing hostilities and access constraints."

Bombardment and fighting have continued despite a binding United Nations Security Council resolution passed on Monday demanding an "immediate ceasefire" in Gaza and the release of hostages held by Hamas.

Netanyahu scrapped an Israeli visit to Washington to discuss the Rafah plan, in protest of the UN ceasefire resolution from which

the United States abstained, allowing it to pass.

Netanyahu's government has since backtracked and agreed "to reschedule the meeting dedicated to Rafah", according to White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre.

She added that they were working to find a "convenient date".

US officials say they plan to present Israel with an alternative for Rafah, focused on striking Hamas targets while limiting the civilian toll.

Exercise Tiger Triumph: Indian, US forces train together for joint sub-conventional Operations in HADR

ANI | Visakhapatnam

As part of the Exercise Tiger Triumph, Indian Army, US Marines and US Army National Guard train together for joint sub-conventional operations in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief scenario.

In a post on X, Indian Army stated, "Exercise #TigerTriumph 2024 Witness the synergy as #IndianArmy, #USMarines and #USArmy National Guard train together for joint sub-conventional operations in Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief #HADR scenarios. Collaboration at its finest, ensuring swift and effective response in times of crisis."

Exercise 'Tiger Triumph 2024', a bilateral, triservice exercise, is being held India and the US. The harbour phase of the exercise is ongoing in Vishakhapatnam. The opening ceremony of the exercise took place onboard INS Jalashwa on March 19.

Robust strategic partnership

"The exercise represents the robust strategic partnership between both countries and aims to share best practices and Standard Operating Procedures in undertaking multinational HADR operations," the Ministry of Defence said in an official release.

The Harbour Phase of the exercise is being conducted at Visakhapatnam from March 18-25 and will include pre-sail discussions, Subject Matter Expert Exchange on professional



Indian Army, US Marines, US Army train together during Exercise Tiger Triumph

subjects and deliberations on planning and execution procedures of various tasks. Sports engagements are also scheduled as a part of the drills to enhance the camaraderie between the defence forces of India and the US.

"Sports engagements are also scheduled to further enhance camaraderie between the participating armed forces personnel of both nations. The Sea phase, from 26 to 31 Mar 24, would include units of both countries setting up a joint Command and Control Centre and a Joint Relief and Medical Camp," the official release read.

Significantly, the participating units from the Indian Navy include a Landing Platform Dock, Landing Ship Tanks (Large) including their integral

Landing Crafts and helicopters, guided missile Frigate and Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance Aircraft.

The Indian Army is being represented by one infantry battalion group, including mechanised forces, whereas the Indian Air Force has deployed its medium-lift aircraft, transport helicopters and a Rapid Action Medical Team (RAMT).

Additionally, the Special Ops Forces from all three services are participating in the exercise. Meanwhile, the US Task Force comprises a US Navy Landing Platform Dock, including its integral Landing Craft Air Cushions and helicopters, a destroyer, maritime reconnaissance and medium lift aircraft, and, as well as Marines.

Four killed in US stabbing spree



Police officers on scene after the stabbing

AFP | Chicago

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