

News in brief

◆ **Switzerland said Monday**

it would return nearly \$29 million to Equatorial Guinea after auctioning luxury cars seized from the son of the African nation's longtime ruler in a court case. The Swiss foreign ministry announced the signing of the deal that detailed "the return of 22.8 million Swiss francs" (\$28.6 million) to Equatorial Guinea in a press release. The funds aim to "improve the quality of and access to primary healthcare services for vulnerable peoples" in four provinces, the statement said, adding that there would be "a specific governance and monitoring system". The assets were seized in a criminal procedure initiated by the Geneva public prosecutor in October 2016 against Equatorial Guinea's Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, known as Teodorin -- the president's son. He and two others were charged with money laundering and mismanagement of public funds. As part of the probe, the Geneva courts seized 25 luxury vehicles belonging to the vice president including Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Bentleys, a Maserati and a McLaren.



Switzerland returns \$29 mn to Equatorial Guinea

◆ **Chinese woman admits huge Bitcoin fraud at UK court**

◆ **A 47-year-old** Chinese woman on Monday told a UK court that she played a leading role in a multibillion pound fraudulent Bitcoin scheme. Chinese businesswoman Zhimin Qian, alias Yadi Zhang, pleaded guilty at London's Southwark Crown Court following what is believed to be the single largest cryptocurrency seizure in the world, now worth about £5.5 billion. She admitted acquiring and possessing criminal property, namely cryptocurrency. "Between 2014-2017, Zhang orchestrated a large-scale fraud in China through defrauding over 128,000 victims and went on to store the illegally obtained funds in Bitcoin assets," London's Met Police said in a statement. "She then fled China using false documents and entered the UK, where in September 2018 she attempted to launder the proceeds via purchasing property," it added.

◆ **N.Korea vows at UN never to give up nuclear**

◆ **A North Korean** minister said yesterday in a rare address to the UN that Pyongyang would never surrender its nuclear weapons but left open the door to diplomacy. Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Kim Son Gyong made the trip to New York to attend the United Nation's annual high-level week -- a role previously performed at a lower level by the country's ambassador. "(The) imposition of 'Denuclearization' on the DPRK is tantamount to demanding it to surrender sovereignty and right to existence and violate the Constitution," said Gyong. "We will never give up nuclear which is our state law, national policy and sovereign power as well as the right to existence. Under any circumstances, we will never walk away from this position."



SPOTLIGHT

Taliban shut down communications across Afghanistan

AFP | Kabul, Afghanistan

Taliban authorities yesterday imposed a nationwide shutdown of communications, weeks after they began severing fibre optic connections to prevent "vice".

Connectivity was operating at less than one percent of its normal levels, according to internet watchdog Netblocks, who called it a "comprehensive, or total blackout".

In the minutes before it happened, a government official told AFP the shutdown would last "until further notice".

"It is going to be cut, it will happen gradually tonight, there are eight to nine thousand telecommunications pillars it will shut down," he told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"There isn't any other way or system to communicate... the banking sector, customs, everything across the country will be affected."

AFP lost all contact with its bureau in the capital Kabul at around 5:45 pm (1315 GMT).

Afghanistan's Taliban authorities began the crackdown on access earlier this month, effectively shutting down high-speed internet in several regions.

Telephone services are often routed over the internet, sharing the same fibre lines, especially in countries with limited telecoms infrastructure.

"A nation-wide telecoms

blackout is now in effect," said Netblocks, a watchdog organisation that monitors cybersecurity and internet governance, adding it "appears consistent with the intentional disconnection of service".

"It may turn out that disconnecting internet access while keeping phone service available will take some trial and error."

Over the past weeks, internet connections have been extremely slow or intermittent.

On September 16, Balkh provincial spokesman Attaullah Zaid said fibre optic internet was completely banned in northern province on the Taliban leader's orders.

"This measure was taken to prevent vice, and alternative options will be put in place across the country to meet connectivity needs," he wrote on social media.

In 2024, Kabul had touted the 9,350-kilometre fibre optic network -- largely built by former US-backed governments -- as a "priority" to bring the country closer to the rest of the world and lift it out of poverty.

Since regaining power, the Taliban have instituted numerous restrictions in accordance with their interpretation of Islamic law.

It is the first time since the Taliban government won their insurgency in 2021 that communications have been shut down in the country.



Donald Trump Meets Israeli Pm Benjamin Netanyahu

Trump announces Gaza peace plan, with Netanyahu backing

Washington | USA

President Donald Trump unveiled a wide-ranging Gaza peace plan Monday and won cautious backing from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who warned he was still ready to "finish the job" against Hamas.

However, Hamas had yet to comment and Netanyahu's warning reflected the complexities lying ahead. "If Hamas rejects your plan, Mr President, or if they supposedly accept it and then then basically do everything to counter it, then Israel will finish the job by itself," Netanyahu said at a joint press conference in the White House.

The 20-point plan, which Trump has also circulated to Arab leaders, calls for a ceasefire, release of hostages by Hamas, disarmament of Hamas and gradual Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Other key points include deployment of a "temporary international stabilization force" and creation of a transitional authority headed by Trump himself and featuring other foreign leaders.

The deal would demand Hamas militants fully disarm and be excluded from future roles in the government. However, those who agreed to "peaceful co-existence" would be given amnesty. Following Israeli withdrawal, the borders would be opened to aid and investment.

In a crucial change from Trump's earlier apparent goals, Palestinians will not be forced to leave Gaza and instead, the document said, "we will encourage people to stay and offer them the opportunity to build a better

Netanyahu apologizes to Qatar PM for strike in Trump-led call

Washington, United States

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday apologized to Qatar's prime minister for strikes against Hamas in the Gulf country in a telephone call placed from the White House, a diplomat

said.

The diplomat, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said Netanyahu voiced regret for the violation of Qatari sovereignty and the death of a Qatari security guard in the September strikes.

Gaza." Netanyahu made clear he was in favor, saying it "achieves our war aims," while Trump said he was hopeful that Hamas would also give its backing. Approval from all sides was "beyond very close," Trump said.

However, many important details remained to be clarified. Netanyahu stressed to reporters that Israeli forces would retain responsibility for Gaza security "for the foreseeable future." He also cast doubt on whether the Palestinian Authority, which runs the West Bank territory, would be allowed a role in Gaza's governance.

"Gaza will have a peaceful,

civilian administration that is run neither by Hamas nor by the Palestinian Authority," said Netanyahu.

- Trump frustration with Netanyahu

The US president had met key Arab leaders at the United Nations last week and said Sunday on social media that "ALL ARE ON BOARD FOR SOMETHING SPECIAL, FIRST TIME EVER." Netanyahu had recently given little reason for optimism, vowing in a defiant UN speech Friday to "finish the job" against Hamas and rejecting Palestinian statehood -- recently recognized by several

Western nations. But normally a staunch ally of Netanyahu, the US president has shown increasing signs of frustration ahead of the Israeli premier's fourth White House visit since Trump's return to power.

Trump was infuriated by Israel's recent strike on Hamas members in key US ally Qatar. And he warned Netanyahu last week against annexing the Israeli-occupied West Bank, as some of Netanyahu's cabinet members have urged, a move that would seriously complicate the route to Palestinian statehood. Netanyahu's coalition government is propped up by the far-right ministers who oppose a peace deal.

Voices from Gaza

Meanwhile, Israeli strikes continued across the Gaza Strip, killing at least four people in Khan Yunis, according to the Hamas-run territory's civil defense agency. Families of Israeli hostages held in Gaza urged Trump to uphold his Gaza proposal.

And in Gaza, people expressed a mix of hope, exhaustion and distrust ahead of the White House meeting. "I don't expect anything from Trump, because Trump supports Netanyahu in destroying the Gaza Strip," said Mohammed Abu Rabee, 34.

The Gaza war was triggered by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack that killed 1,219 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally from Israeli official figures. Israel's offensive has killed 66,055 Palestinians, also mostly civilians, according to health ministry figures in the Hamas-run territory that the United Nations considers reliable.