

DEADLY ARSON ATTACK IN JAPAN

Suspect believed anime studio stole his novel

REUTERS, Kyoto
A man suspected of torching an animation studio and killing 33 people in Japan's worst mass killing in two decades had been convicted of robbery and carried out the attack because he believed his novel had been plagiarized, media said yesterday.
Public broadcaster NHK, which identified the 41-year-old man as Shinji Aoba, citing police, said he served time in prison for robbing a convenience store east of Tokyo in 2012 and, after his release, lived in facilities for former convicts. He had also received care for mental illness, NHK said.
The attack on Thursday in the ancient capital of Kyoto, targeting the well known animation studio, Kyoto Animation, killed 33 people and 10 were in critical condition, authorities said.
It was the worst mass killing in a country with one of the world's lowest crime rates since a suspected arson attack in Tokyo killed 44 people in 2001.
Aoba wheeled a trolley carrying at least one bucket of petrol to the entrance of the building before dousing the area, shouting "die" and setting it ablaze on Thursday,

broadcaster Nippon TV said, citing police. "I did it," Aoba told police when he was detained, Kyodo news said, adding that he had started the fire because he believed the studio had stolen his novel. Broadcaster Nippon TV said the suspect was under anaesthesia because of burns he suffered and police were unable to question him.
Tributes to the victims lit up social media, with world leaders and Apple Inc's chief executive offering condolences.
None of the victims' identities had been disclosed as of yesterday. There were 74 people inside the building when the fire started.
The fire that tore through the building have spread so fast not only because it was fuelled by petrol, but because it was funnelled up a spiral staircase and there were no sprinklers to douse it, experts said.
Nineteen of the 33 who died were found on a staircase leading up to the roof from the third floor, bodies piled on top of each other, Kyodo said, citing authorities.
Firefighters arriving soon after the fire began found the door to the roof was shut but could be opened from the outside, Kyodo said.

Report says attacker spent time in prison for robbery, treated for mental illness



A man prays yesterday next to flowers and tributes laid at the scene where 33 people died in a fire at an animation company building in Kyoto. Tributes to the Japanese animation studio ravaged in a suspected arson attack lit up social media yesterday, with world leaders and Apple Inc's chief executive offering condolences to the families of the 33 people who were killed.

Taiwan offers asylum to HK protesters

AFP, Taipei
Taiwan's government yesterday said it would provide assistance to Hong Kongers seeking sanctuary after local media reported dozens of activists involved in an unprecedented storming of the city's parliament had fled to the island.
The pledge risks infuriating Beijing but comes as Taiwan gears up for a presidential election where a dominating issue will be relations with the mainland -- which sees the self-ruled island as its own territory and has vowed to seize it.
Over 30 Hong Kong protesters who fear prosecution for their involvement in the ransacking of the finance hub's legislature on July 1 have arrived in Taiwan to seek shelter, Taiwan's Apple Daily said, citing unnamed sources.
The report said the activists are staying in various locations and that some are receiving

MANKIND'S DESTRUCTION OF NATURE

7,000 species put on 'Red List'

AFP, Paris
Mankind's destruction of nature is driving species to the brink of extinction at an "unprecedented" rate, the leading wildlife conservation body warned Thursday as it added more than 7,000 animals, fish and plants to its endangered "Red List".
From the canopies of tropical forests to the ocean floor, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) said iconic species of primates, rays, fish and trees were now classified as critically endangered.
The group has now assessed more than 105,000 species worldwide, around 28,000 of which risk extinction.
While each group of organisms face specific threats, human behaviour, including overfishing and deforestation, was the biggest driver of plummeting populations.
"Nature is declining at rates unprecedented in human history," said IUCN acting director general, Grethel Aguilar. "We must wake up to the fact that conserving nature's diversity is in our interest."
In May the United Nations released its generational assessment of the state of the environment. It made for grim reading.
The report warned that as many as one million species were now at risk of extinction, many within decades, as human consumption of freshwater, fossil fuels and other

natural resources skyrockets.
It found that more than 90 percent of marine fish stocks are now either overfished or fished to the limit of sustainability.
The IUCN singled out a number of sea and freshwater fish that now occupy its highest threat category of "critically endangered" -- the next step on the Red List is extinction.
Wedgefishes and giant guitarfishes, known collectively as Rhino Rays due to their elongated snouts, are now the most imperilled marine families on Earth.
The False Shark Ray is on the brink of extinction after overfishing in the waters off of Mauritania saw its population collapse 80 percent in the last 45 years.
Seven species of primate are closer to extinction on the new list, including the Roloway Monkey of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, with fewer than 2,000 individuals left in the wild.
Prime culprits are humans hunting the animals for bushmeat and "severe habitat loss" as forest is converted to land to grow food.
40 percent of all primates in West and Central Africa are now threatened with extinction, according to the IUCN.
The updated list shows that over half of Japan's freshwater fish and more than a third of Mexico's are threatened with extinction due to the loss of free-flowing rivers and increasing pollution.



ANGER IN S KOREA OVER FORCED LABOUR DURING WWII

Man dies of self-immolation outside Japanese embassy

AFP, Seoul
An elderly South Korean man died yesterday after setting himself on fire outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul as a bitter diplomatic dispute over wartime forced labour compensation took a fatal turn.
The row has seen Tokyo restrict exports of chemicals vital to Seoul's world-leading chip and smartphone industry in an escalation of a decades-long dispute over Japanese forced labour during World War II.
The man in his 70s started a fire inside his vehicle parked in front of the embassy building and later died after being treated in hospital, authorities said, adding around 20 disposable gas canisters were also found in the car.
He had spoken to an acquaintance on the phone while driving to the Japanese embassy from his home on Friday morning and told the person that he was "setting fire" to himself because of "his hostility against Japan", a police officer at Seoul's Jongno Police Station told AFP.

"His family members have also told us that his father-in-law was one of the victims of Japan's wartime slavery."
The suicide came as Japan's foreign minister summoned the South Korean ambassador in Tokyo over the dispute which analysts say could batter the global tech market.
Taro Kono urged Seoul to "immediately take corrective measures" after South Korea's high court ordered Japanese firms that used forced labour to compensate victims.
Japan says the issue was resolved under an agreement signed after relations with South Korea were normalised, which included a package of loans.
Tokyo also warned it would take unspecified "necessary measures" over the issue.
The Blue House said Japan's claims that South Korea is violating international law are "simply wrong" and urged Tokyo to "withdraw unjustified export restriction measures and refrain from comments and measures that could further exacerbate the situation".



assistance from local NGOs.
The Mainland Affairs Council, Taiwan's top policy-making body on China, did not confirm whether any requests for sanctuary had been made.
But it issued a statement yesterday saying it would handle such cases "under the principle of respecting human rights protections and humanitarian concerns".
Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen added her support for such a move.
"These friends from Hong Kong will be treated in an appropriate way on humanitarian grounds," Taiwan's Central News Agency quoted her as saying during a visit to the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia, one of Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies.



Palestinian protesters hide behind a wall as Israeli troops advance during clashes following a weekly demonstration against the expropriation of Palestinian land by Israel in the village of Kfar Qaddum near the Jewish settlement of Qadumim (Kedumim), in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

China finds new way to eradicate mosquitoes

CNN ONLINE
A population of the world's most invasive mosquito species was almost completely wiped out by an experiment on two islands in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, according to a study published Wednesday.
The experiment successfully reduced the female Asian Tiger Mosquito population -- the main source of bites and disease transmission -- by up to 94%, reducing the number of reported human bites by 97%.
One of the Chinese study's researchers, Xi Zhiyong, a professor at Michigan State University, has been a longtime pioneer in this field of study. Running a mosquito factory in southern China, he previously attempted to use sterilized male mosquitoes to mate with unaltered females.
"We're building good mosquitoes that can help us fight the bad ones", Xi told CNN in 2016.
In the new study, published by the International Journal of Science, Xi and his colleagues attempted to cut mosquito numbers even further by limiting both male and females' ability to reproduce.
Female mosquitoes were sterilized with low level radiation while the males were infected with the Wolbachia bacteria, then both were released during the peak breeding seasons in 2016 and 2017 on two islands near Guangzhou city.
The results were so successful they nearly eradicated the entire female mosquito population on the two islands.
Mosquitoes pose grave threats to human health beyond just irritating bites. The World Health Organization (WHO) has described the insects as "one of the deadliest animals in the world," due to their ability to rapidly spread deadly diseases such as dengue fever and malaria.

Zuma takes U-turn, now will cooperate with graft probe

Former South African president Jacob Zuma agreed to continue giving evidence at a public inquiry into state corruption yesterday after earlier complaining of "relentless cross-examination" and saying he would pull out. The inquiry is looking into allegations that Zuma, ousted by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party in February 2018, had allowed cronies to plunder state resources and influence senior appointments during his nine years in power. Zuma, 77, has long denied any wrongdoing but he has ducked and dived in his testimony to the inquiry this week, saying that he is being questioned unfairly. State prosecutors are following the inquiry and could open cases against Zuma if sufficient evidence emerges.

Pence urges Saudis to free blogger Badawi

Vice President Mike Pence on Thursday urged Saudi Arabia to free Raif Badawi, a blogger jailed and publicly whipped for insulting Islam, in a rare criticism of the US ally as he vowed to champion religious freedom worldwide. Speaking to dozens of government ministers who flew in for a conference on religious liberty, Pence offered usual US denunciations of adversaries such as China, Iran and Venezuela. But Pence also raised the case of Badawi, whose public flogging in a Jeddah square in 2015 prompted an international uproar. Badawi was arrested under Saudi Arabia's draconian cyber crime law after he criticised Saudi religious police force. Badawi had also called for peaceful assembly to mark a "day of liberalism," as well the end to the role of religion in politics. He was sentenced to 10 years in jail and 1,000 public lashes.



5.1 quake shakes Athens, knocks out phone service

A strong, shallow 5.1-magnitude earthquake jolted Athens yesterday, knocking out phone connections and causing power outages and minor damage, as worried residents rushed into the streets. "There are no reports of serious injury," government spokesman Stelios Petsas said on television, adding that a small number of other buildings had suffered minor damage. According to the Greek geodynamic institute, it was a 5.1-magnitude quake with an epicentre 23 kilometres northwest of Athens and was followed by several aftershocks. The quake struck at around 11:00 GMT at a depth of 13 kilometres, the institute said.

RACIST ATTACK ON US CONGRESSWOMEN

Trump remarks undermine America's strength: Merkel

AFP, Berlin
German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday condemned President Donald Trump's xenophobic tweets against four minority Democratic congresswomen, saying the US leader's attacks "go against what makes America great."
"I firmly distance myself from (the attacks) and I feel solidarity towards" the women, she told journalists.
"Those (President Trump's comments) are sentiments which are very much in opposition to my impressions (about the US) ... and it is something that undermines America's strength."
Trump on Sunday urged a group of four progressive Democratic congresswomen of colour -- all American citizens and three of them US-born -- to "go back" to their countries of origin.
Despite a domestic uproar over the comments which were deemed "racist" by the House of Representatives, Trump repeatedly renewed his attack.
"If you're not happy here, you can leave.... This is about love for America, certain people hate our country," he tweeted on Tuesday, while repeating the same message to a rally on Wednesday.
International condemnation has been rained down over the comments. British Prime Minister Theresa May called them "completely unacceptable". New Zealand's leader Jacinda Ardern said she "completely and utterly" disagreed with Trump.
Questions over racism are particularly sensitive in Germany given its Nazi past, and the government routinely speaks out forcefully in favour of tolerance and diversity.

Dutch SC cuts state's liability

Says peacekeepers had only a 'slim' chance of preventing massacre

AFP, The Hague
The Dutch Supreme Court yesterday slashed the state's liability for the 1995 Srebrenica massacre during the Bosnian War, saying peacekeepers had only a "slim" chance of preventing the deaths of hundreds of Muslim men.
Judges reduced to 10 percent from 30 percent the Dutch state's responsibility for compensation to the families of 350 victims killed by Bosnian Serb forces who overran the safe haven.
Lightly-armed Dutch UN peacekeepers were overrun by the Bosnian Serbs during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, triggering the worst atrocity in Europe since World War II.
Almost 8,000 Muslim men and boys were killed in the genocide at Srebrenica.
"The Dutch State bears very limited liability in the 'Mothers of Srebrenica' case," the Supreme Court said. "That liability is limited to 10 percent of the damages suffered by the surviving relatives of approximately 350 victims."
The relatives are represented by the Mothers of Srebrenica victims' organisation which sued for compensation, sparking a years-long legal battle.

There was no immediate reaction from either the Mothers of Srebrenica or the Dutch government.
A Dutch court originally held the state liable for compensation in 2014. In 2017 the appeals court upheld that decision before it was referred to the Supreme Court.
In a swipe at the failure of other foreign powers to act, the top court added that the "chance of Dutchbat (the Dutch UN mission) receiving effective support from the international community was slim".
Srebrenica has cast a long shadow over The Netherlands, forcing the government to resign in 2002 after a scathing report over the role of politicians in the failure of the peacekeepers.
Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic is currently serving a life sentence in jail in The Hague after being convicted of genocide over Srebrenica and war crimes throughout the 1990s.
Ex-military chief Ratko Mladic, 76, dubbed the "Butcher of Bosnia", is currently appealing a life sentence on similar charges at an international tribunal in The Hague. Slobodan Milosevic, Karadzic's long-time patron during the war, was on trial in The Hague at the time of his death in 2006.



SREBRENICA MASSACRE