

## Open for business, not for sale

### Greenland tells Trump

AFP, Qulusuk

Greenland is not for sale, local authorities said Friday, after a newspaper reported that US President Donald Trump is looking into whether it might be possible for the United States to buy the mineral-rich Arctic island.

Trump has expressed interest in the self-governing part of Denmark -- which is mostly covered in ice, -- asking advisors if it is possible for the US to acquire the territory, The Wall Street Journal said Thursday, citing people familiar with the discussions.

The president, a former real estate magnate, has been curious about the area's natural resources and geopolitical relevance, the paper reported.

Greenland is a self-governing region of Denmark, which colonised the 772,000 square-mile (two-million square kilometre) island in the 18th century, and is home to only about 57,000 people, most of whom belong to the indigenous Inuit community.

"#Greenland is rich in valuable resources such as minerals, the purest water and ice, fish stocks, seafood, renewable energy and is a new frontier for adventure tourism," Greenland's ministry of foreign affairs tweeted.

"We're open for business, not for sale," it added.

The office of Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

But a former premier, Lars Lokke Rasmussen, tweeted: "It must be an April Fool's Day joke... but totally out of season!"

Some Trump advisors say acquiring Greenland, which is northeast of Canada, could be good for the US, while others called it only a "fleeting fascination" from the president, The Wall Street Journal said.

The US's northern-most military base, Thule Air Base, has been located on Greenland for decades.



(From left, clockwise) Anti-government protesters attend a rally in the Hung Hom district of Hong Kong yesterday; a pro-Beijing supporter displays a China national flag sticker on her face as she takes part in a pro-government rally at Tamar Park; and pro-government protesters gather in central London to denounce violence caused by pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong.



PHOTO: AFP

## Hong Kong division deepens

### Rivals stage rallies; EU calls for 'inclusive dialogue'

AFP, Hong Kong

shadow.

On Tuesday, protesters blocked passengers from boarding flights at the city's airport and later assaulted two men they accused of being Chinese spies. The images damaged a movement that until then had largely only targeted the police or government institutions, and prompted some soul-searching among protesters.

China's propaganda apparatus seized on the violence, with state media churning out a deluge of damning articles, pictures and videos.

State media also ran images of military personnel and armoured personnel carriers across the border in Shenzhen, prompting the United States to warn Beijing against sending in troops, which analysts say would be a reputational and economic disaster for China.

Yesterday's rallies began with thousands of teachers marching through torrential rain in support of the largely youth-led protests. In the afternoon thousands also marched through Hung Hom and To Kwa Wan, two harbourside districts popular with mainland tourists.

Some protesters targeted the local offices of the staunchly pro-Beijing Federation of Trade Unions, pelting it with eggs and spraying graffiti.

But across the harbour at the pro-Beijing rally, where a giant screen showed recent clashes with police, 60-year-old retiree Irene Man had a very different take as she rounded on democracy protesters.

"Their acts are not human, they have all become monsters. They are rioters, with no reason, no thinking," she said.

The biggest pro-democracy rally is expected to take place today on the main island.

Meanwhile, the European Union yesterday called for "inclusive dialogue" to calm tensions in Hong Kong.

"It is crucial that restraint be exercised, violence rejected, and urgent steps taken to de-escalate the situation," EU diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini said in a statement.

## 'UNPRECEDENTED' SPECIES DECLINES

### Key wildlife meet eyes to toughen trade rules

AFP, Geneva

Inger Anderson, who heads the United Nations Environment Programme, echoed her sense of urgency, warning the conference that "we are losing species at a rate never seen before."

The devastation caused to many species by poaching and booming illegal wildlife trade will be in the spotlight during the meeting, as will new challenges arising from illicit commerce increasingly moving online.

The plight of African elephants is expected to dominate the discussions. Some countries are calling for stronger protections for all African elephants, while countries in southern Africa, where populations are better protected and healthier, are requesting resumption of ivory stockpile sales.

Southern white rhinos, the American crocodile and a range of shark and ray species are also on the agenda, as is the African giraffe, amid warnings that the gentle giant is facing a "silent extinction."

"The future of biodiversity is at stake but... we have a unique opportunity to change the course," Andersen said.

Amid growing alarm over accelerating extinctions, a major international conference opened in Geneva yesterday aiming to tighten rules on trade in elephant ivory and other endangered animal and plant species.

Thousands of conservationists and policymakers from more than 180 countries will meet for 12 days to evaluate regulations and species protection listings under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

"Business as usual is no longer an option," CITES Secretary General Ivonne Higuero said at the start of the meeting, warning that "nature's dangerous decline is unprecedented."

The treaty, created more than four decades ago, regulates trade in over 35,000 species of plants and animals and contains mechanisms to help crack down on illegal trade and sanction countries that break the rules.

The meeting follows warnings about rapid species decline, with a UN report in May indicating that one million species are being pushed to the brink of extinction.

## Small protests in Moscow for free elections

AFP, Moscow

Russian opposition activists held small one-man protests in Moscow yesterday to demand free elections, as the wave of the Russian capital's larger demonstrations took a breather this weekend.

In a move to circumvent restrictions by the authorities, activists took turns to hold protest signs as such demonstrations do not technically need approval.

The protests, held at several locations in central Moscow, were a far cry from the wave of rallies in which tens of thousands took to the streets after opposition figures were banned from local elections a month ago.

The previous rallies, which have taken place every Saturday since the ruling, were the biggest since mass protests broke out in 2011 against President Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin after a term as prime minister.

Police have come down hard on the demonstrations, which have tapped into wider anger over declining living standards and a stalling economy.

Some 3,000 people have been arrested for taking part and prominent members of the opposition, including top Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, remain behind bars.

Earlier yesterday around 4,000 people took part in an approved Communist Party rally for free elections, according to independent monitors. The Communists are tolerated by the Kremlin and veteran leader Gennady Zyuganov has said the party will not support the liberal opposition's protest.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is welcomed by his Bhutanese counterpart Lotay Tshering (R) upon arriving at Paro airport during his two-day official visit in Bhutan yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Bhutan is a trusted friend: Indian PM

KUENSEL/ANN

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's yesterday started his two-day visit in Bhutan with a message of trust and friendship.

Referring to Bhutan as India's trusted friend and neighbour, he said India and Bhutan enjoyed excellent bilateral ties exemplified by extensive development partnership, mutually beneficial hydropower co-operation, and strong trade and economic linkages.

"These are reinforced by a shared spiritual heritage and robust people-to-people ties," he said.

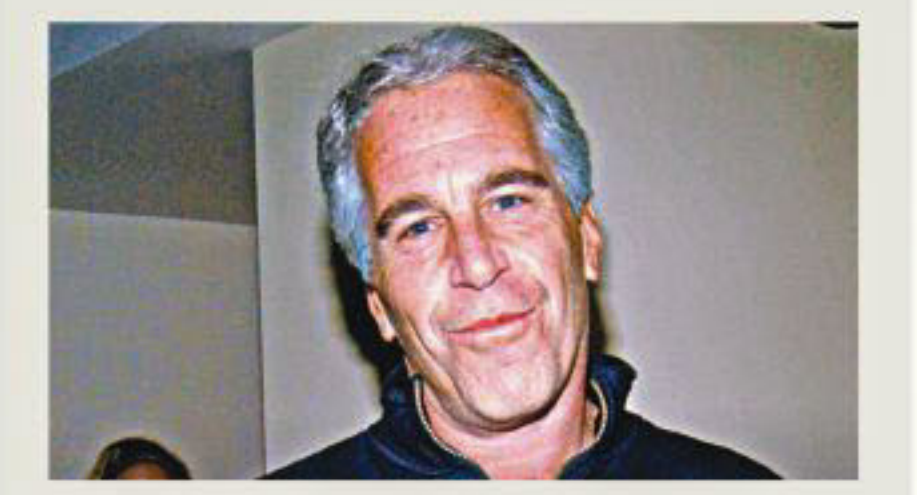
He also said that both countries jointly celebrated the golden jubilee of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations last year.

"India-Bhutan partnership today is of a special character and substance and forms an important pillar of government of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy."

Modi said he looked forward to having fruitful discussions with His Majesty The King, His Majesty The Fourth King and the Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering on the entire gamut of bilateral relations.

He said: "I also look forward to addressing young Bhutanese students at the prestigious Royal University of Bhutan."

He also said he was confident that his visit would promote the time-tested and valued friendship between the two countries and consolidate it further for the prosperous future and progress of the people of both our countries.



## Jeffrey Epstein death ruled as suicide by hanging

An autopsy on disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein, who was found dead in his jail cell, has concluded that he committed suicide by hanging, US media reported Friday. The ruling, first reported by The New York Times, comes six days after the 66-year-old, who was accused of trafficking girls as young as 14 for sex, was found dead. The newspaper said the official results of the New York City medical examiner's investigation into how Epstein had died showed that the wealthy hedge fund manager had killed himself. It cited officials as saying that Epstein had used a bedsheet to hang himself.

## Security scare in New York, empty rice cookers found

New York went on alert for two hours Friday during the morning rush hour because of three suspicious objects that turned out to be empty rice cookers. Police said the alarm was first sounded in Manhattan around 7:00 am (11:00 GMT) when a passenger saw a cooker abandoned at the Fulton Street subway station near the World Trade Center -- a neighborhood rebuilt after the September 11 attacks in 2001. A second rice cooker was found in another part of the same station. The station was quickly evacuated, service on two subway lines was suspended and trains on other lines serving Fulton Street bypassed the station. As police announced the objects turned out to be harmless, a third suspicious object was detected on 16th Street in the Chelsea district further to the north. It, too, turned out to be a rice cooker.

## 'May God ruin Trump'

US congresswoman Rashida Tlaib's grandmother has condemned Donald Trump over his comments about the congresswoman's proposed trip to Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories. "Trump tells me I should be happy Rashida is not coming," Muftia Tlaib said. "May God ruin him." The women have not seen met since 2006. On Thursday, bowing to pressure from the US president, Israel barred a visit by Rashida Tlaib and fellow Democrat Ilhan Omar which the country had initially allowed. After much criticism, the country said Tlaib could visit her relatives in the West Bank on humanitarian grounds. Tlaib rejected the offer, saying Israel had imposed restrictions meant to humiliate her. Trump later tweeted no one would accept the grandmother who doesn't have to see Tlaib.

## Ukraine hotel fire kills nine

AFP, Kiev

Nine people were killed in a hotel fire in Ukraine's port city of Odessa yesterday, leading authorities to launch a country-wide inspection of safety regulations in holiday resorts and hotels.

The fire broke out at 1.34 am (2234 GMT) in the southern city's Tokyo Star hotel.

Emergency services initially said eight people had died and ten were injured, later saying the number of deaths rose to nine.

Some 65 firefighters backed by 13 emergency vehicles put out the blaze three hours later.

In a statement on his Facebook page, President Volodymyr Zelensky said four of those injured were in a critical condition.

Odessa authorities said around 150 people were evacuated from the area.

Police opened a criminal investigation into possible violations of fire safety requirements and the causes of the fire were being established.

"We lost eight lives overnight," Zelensky said on Facebook. "And this is not due to war and shelling. It is because of criminal negligence, neglect of elementary safety standards and neglect towards human life."

Zelensky added he would "personally make sure" that those responsible are punished "in accordance with the norms of the law."

## Seven killed in Indonesia ferry accident

AFP, Kendari

Seven people, including two children, were killed and four others missing after a ferry carrying dozens of passengers caught fire off Indonesia's Sulawesi island early yesterday, police said.

The ferry, heading from Southeast Sulawesi to an island in Central Sulawesi, caught fire shortly after midnight. Police suspect the fire was triggered when the diesel tank exploded.

It was unclear how many people were aboard the vessel at the time. The passenger manifest listed 50 but rescuers and locals recovered 61 survivors while seven people, including two children aged two and four, were found dead.

## Beloved Thai baby dugong dies due to plastic waste

AFP, Bangkok

A sick baby dugong whose fight for recovery won hearts in Thailand and cast a spotlight on ocean conservation has died from an infection exacerbated by bits of plastic lining her stomach, officials said yesterday.

Mariam washed up in shallow waters off southwestern Thailand months ago and photos of her nuzzling playfully next to rescuers quickly went viral.

The discovery soon after of another orphaned dugong brought the sea cows celebrity status, the attention of a Thai princess -- who named the second one "Jamil" -- and round-the-clock webcasts giving viewers a front-row seat to feedings and treatment.

But Mariam died just after midnight after going into shock and efforts to resuscitate her failed, Chaiyapruk Werawong, head of Trang province marine park, told AFP.

"She died from a blood infection and pus in her stomach," he said, adding they found small amounts of plastic waste in her intestinal tract. Several pieces of plastic were found in her intestine, with one measuring up to 20 centimetres (eight inches).

The plastic had caused obstructions in the animal's stomach, leading to inflammation and gas build-up, veterinarian Nantarika Chansue posted on Facebook.

The dugongs are the latest marine creatures to make headlines in Thailand, whose plastic-choked waters are also a threat to habitats.

