

NEWS
IN brief

Iran rejects IAEA inspection call

The UN nuclear watchdog on Friday demanded an immediate reply from Iran on whether it would extend a monitoring agreement that expired overnight, prompting an Iranian envoy to respond that Tehran was under no obligation to provide an answer. The agreement continued the International Atomic Energy Agency's collection of data on some of Tehran's activities, cushioning the blow of Iran's decision in February to reduce cooperation with the agency. Washington and the other signatories of the 2015 deal believe Tehran should engage the IAEA without further delay.

Pakistan still in FATF 'grey list'

A global dirty money watchdog said on Friday it had added European Union member Malta to its "grey list" of countries under increased monitoring, and kept Pakistan on the list despite progress on tackling terrorism financing. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) also said that Haiti, the Philippines and South Sudan were added to its grey list, and that Ghana had been removed after the country had made progress. FATF president Marcus Pleyer said that Pakistan made substantial progress addressing everything on a 2018 action plan except a last item concerning the investigation and prosecution of senior leaders and commanders of UN-designated terrorist groups. He added that Pakistan was still failing to put global anti-money-laundering standards into place.



'Apology not enough'

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday he has asked the pope to come to Canada to apologize for the Catholic Church's role running residential schools for indigenous children, after nearly 1,000 bodies were found in two mass graves. "I have spoken personally directly with His Holiness Pope Francis to press upon him how important it is not just that he makes an apology but that he makes an apology to indigenous Canadians on Canadian soil," Trudeau told reporters in Ottawa. The residential school system, which operated between 1831 and 1996, removed about 150,000 indigenous children from their families and brought them to Christian residential schools, mostly Catholic, run on behalf of the federal government. A federal commission's report found the residential school system enacted cultural genocide on Canada's indigenous people.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Protesters march during a brief rally after the sentencing of Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis policeman found guilty of killing George Floyd, a Black man, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, on Friday. Chauvin's 2 and half years sentence was one of the longest given a former police officer for using unlawful deadly force in the United States.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Killer cop gets over 22 yrs in jail

Sentencing hailed as 'historic' step towards racial reconciliation in US

AFP, Minneapolis

Former policeman Derek Chauvin was sentenced to 22 and a half years in prison on Friday for the murder of African American George Floyd, the killing that sparked America's biggest demonstrations for racial justice in decades.

The white, 45-year-old Chauvin gave his "condolences" to the Floyd family in a Minneapolis court, without apologizing, before Judge Peter Cahill handed down a lesser sentence than the 30 years the prosecution had sought.

"This (jail term) is based on your abuse of a position of trust and authority and also the particular cruelty shown to George Floyd," Cahill told Chauvin, who listened impassively.

The decision was read out at the end of a tense hearing in which the court watched a recorded message by Floyd's seven-year-old daughter and heard from Chauvin's mother.

The Floyd family's lawyer called the sentencing a "historic" step towards racial reconciliation in the United States.

"(It) brings the Floyd family and our nation

one step closer to healing by delivering closure and accountability," Ben Crump tweeted.

President Joe Biden said: "I don't know all the circumstances that were considered but it seems to me, under the guidelines, that seems to be appropriate."

After the sentence was announced, chanting marchers with megaphones and motorcycle escorts took over some of the city's busiest blocks during rush hour. No serious incidents were reported.

GEORGE FLOYD MURDER

The sentencing was long awaited in Minnesota, with hundreds of people gathering near the courthouse into the evening. Many said Chauvin should have gotten 30 or 40 years.

Chauvin, who has been behind bars since being convicted on three counts of murder and manslaughter two months ago, wore a light gray suit as he learnt his fate following a trial that captivated the world.

Chauvin and three colleagues arrested Floyd,

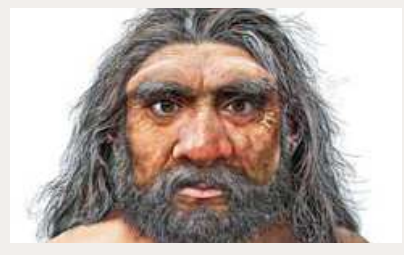
46, in May 2020 on suspicion of having passed a fake \$20 bill in a store in Minneapolis, a northern city of around 420,000. They handcuffed him and pinned him to the ground in the street.

Chauvin then knelt on the back of Floyd's neck for nearly 10 minutes, indifferent to the dying man's groans and to the pleas of passers-by. The scene, filmed and uploaded by a young woman, quickly went viral triggering unprecedented protests across the country and overseas to demand an end to racism and police brutality.

Chauvin's lawyer said Chauvin had followed police procedures at the time and that Floyd's death was due to health problems exacerbated by drug use. The defense will appeal the verdict.

The jurors took less than 10 hours to convict. Their decision was greeted with a huge sigh of relief across the country. Many had feared an acquittal would lead to worse unrest, while others worried that once again a white police officer would get away with what they saw as murder.

With good behavior, Chauvin could serve just two-thirds of any prison sentence, with the remaining third on supervised release.



'Dragon Man'
Scientists say new species is our closest ancestor

AFP, Washington

A skull preserved almost perfectly for more than 140,000 years in northeastern China represents a new species of ancient people more closely related to us than even Neanderthals -- and could fundamentally alter our understanding of human evolution, scientists announced Friday.

It belonged to a large-brained male in his 50s with deep set eyes and thick brow ridges. Though his face was wide, it had flat, low cheekbones that made him resemble modern people more closely than other extinct members of the human family tree.

The research team has linked the specimen to other Chinese fossil findings and is calling the species Homo longi or "Dragon Man," a reference to the region where it was discovered.

The Harbin cranium was first found in 1933 in the city of the same name but was reportedly hidden in a well for 85 years to protect it from the Japanese army.

It was later dug up and handed to Ji Qiang, a professor at Hebei GEO University, in 2018.

"On our analyses, the Harbin group is more closely linked to H. sapiens than the Neanderthals are -- that is, Harbin shared a more recent common ancestor with us than the Neanderthals did," co-author Chris Stringer of the Natural History Museum, London told AFP.

This, he said, would make Dragon Man our "sister species" and a closer ancestor of modern man than the Neanderthals.

The findings were published in three papers in the journal The Innovation. The skull dates back at least 146,000 years, placing it in the Middle Pleistocene.

More than 100,000 years ago, several human species coexisted across Eurasia and Africa, including our own, Neanderthals and Denisovans, a recently discovered sister species to Neanderthals. "Dragon man" might now be added to that list.



People react at the memorial for victims of a partially collapsed residential building in Surfside, near Miami Beach, Florida, US, on Friday. A large section of the 12-story building collapsed suddenly in the early hours of Thursday as residents slept, in a disaster whose cause is not yet known. Four people have been confirmed killed and 159 are still unaccounted for, with search-and-rescue teams working around the clock through an unstable mountain of debris.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SUSPECTED ISLAMIST KNIFE ATTACK IN GERMANY

Investigators seek motive after Somali man kills 3

AFP, Wurzburg

Investigators were racing yesterday to pinpoint the motive of a man who went on a knife rampage in the German city of Wurzburg, killing three people and leaving five seriously injured.

The suspect, a 24-year-old Somali who arrived in Wurzburg in 2015, staged the attack in the city centre on Friday evening, striking at a household goods store before advancing to a bank.

He was later overpowered by police after they shot him in the thigh, Bavaria's interior minister Joachim Herrmann said.

Investigators found records showing that the man had been treated at a psychiatric institution, and police said he was not a known Islamist.

"The police investigation will determine if this was an Islamist act or if it was due to the psychiatric state" of the man, said Herrmann.

But the case was immediately seized on by the far-right AfD, with the party's co-chair Joerg Meuthen noting that a witness

had reportedly heard the suspect shouting "Allah Akbar" (God is greatest).

Meuthen lamented the latest "Islamist knife murders in the middle of Germany," adding that it was a "tragedy for the victims, who have my sympathy and another manifestation of Merkel's failed migration policy".

The AfD has railed that Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow in more than one million asylum-seekers -- many fleeing Iraq and Syria -- since 2015 has contributed to a heightened security risk.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier voiced shock at the "extreme brutality" of the crime. "He will be held to account by the rule of law for this inhumane act," the president said.

Video footage circulating online showed passers-by trying to stop the suspect using folded chairs. A crowd of people gave chase before a police car arrived on the scene, one video showed.

While the perpetrator's motive remains unclear, Germany has been on high alert after several Islamist extremist attacks.

Quotes of the day



"We have through COVAX this month zero doses of AstraZeneca vaccines, zero doses of SII vaccines (Serum Institute of India), zero doses of J & J (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine. The situation right now is dire."

BRUCE AYLWARD, WHO SENIOR ADVISER



JUNE 27

1997 - At a conference in Brussels, 95 countries agreed to sign up to a ban on landmines.

2002 - G8 finalised a \$20 billion deal to help pay to decommission weapons of mass destruction in Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union.

2007 - Gordon Brown replaced Tony Blair as Britain's prime minister after years of waiting, promising sweeping changes to restore trust in a government damaged by the Iraq war.

2008 - India's former army chief Sam Manekshaw, considered one of the country's greatest war heroes, died.

SOURCE: REUTERS

US INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Proof on UFOs 'inconclusive'

AFP, Washington

A highly awaited US intelligence report on dozens of mysterious unidentified flying object sightings said most could not be explained, but did not rule out that some could be alien spacecraft.

The unclassified report said researchers could explain only one of 144 UFO sightings by US government personnel and sources between 2004 and 2021, sightings that often were made during military training activities.

Eighteen of those, some observed from multiple angles, appeared to display unusual movements or flight characteristics that surprised those who saw them, like holding stationary in high winds at high altitude, and moving with extreme speed with no discernable means of propulsion, the report said.

Some of the 144 might be explained by natural or human made objects like birds or drones cluttering a pilot's radar, or natural atmospheric phenomena, the report said.

Others could be secret US defense tests, or unknown advanced technologies created by Russia or China, it said.

Yet others appeared to require more advanced technologies to determine what

they are, it said.

The sightings of what the report calls unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) "probably lack a single explanation," said the report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

"We currently lack sufficient information in our dataset to attribute incidents to specific explanations."

The report made no mention of the possibility of -- or rule out -- that some of the objects sighted could represent extraterrestrial life.

"UAP clearly pose a safety of flight issue and may pose a challenge to US national security," the report said. Some could be US rivals' intelligence collection operations or represent other technology so advanced that the US military has nothing similar.

The report was ordered after more UFO sightings by military pilots became public and pilot and radar videos leaked out showing flying objects behaving strangely with no explanation.

The nine-page report released Friday did not discuss any specific incidents. It was the public version of a more detailed classified version being supplied to the armed services and intelligence committees of Congress.

Afghans to 'decide their future'

Biden tells Ghani, Abdullah as US troop's withdrawal nears end

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden promised Afghan leader Ashraf Ghani strong support during a White House meeting Friday but made clear he was not planning to slow the US withdrawal after nearly two decades of fighting.

Less than three months before his deadline for the removal of all troops, Biden told Ghani that Afghans had to determine their own fate even as they face a mounting offensive by Taliban insurgents.

Biden told the Afghan president, "Afghans are going to have to decide their future, what they want."

"The senseless violence, it has to stop. It's going to be very difficult."

Ghani was in Washington along with Abdullah Abdullah, who oversees Kabul's peace negotiations with the Taliban, amid rising uncertainty over the group's recent gains and the possibility of their return to power.

The extremists subjected the population to a brutal version of Islam when they ruled from 1996-2001. Sitting next to Biden, Ghani



insisted that no one should count his government out, amid reports that the Taliban could possibly take over Kabul within six months of the US departure.

Ghani said Afghan government forces retook six districts, in the north and south, on Friday, reversing recent Taliban gains.

Ghani met with top members of Congress, the CIA, and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on his two-day visit to Washington.

Washington is expecting him to reach a negotiated settlement on power sharing with the Taliban before it is too late.

The US pullout could be mostly

completed next month. Biden is expected to reaffirm billions of dollars in US aid for the country, and make arrangements for US civilian contractors -- essential to keep the Afghan air force flying -- to remain there.

The administration is also working on a plan to evacuate some 18,000 Afghan interpreters and others who worked for US forces and who are under personal threat from the Taliban.

Another key issue was how to guarantee the security of US diplomats who remain in the country. A large contingent of US Marines is expected to remain to protect the embassy.