

## MIGRANT TRAGEDY

### About 40 feared dead as boat capsizes off Western Sahara

REUTERS, Madrid

About 40 migrants were feared dead after a boat carrying about 50 people travelling from Western Sahara to Spain's Canary Islands capsized, a Spanish non-governmental organisation, said on Friday.

"Tragedy: forty-two people, among those thirty women, eight children and four men, died when a boat capsized off the coast of Dakhla," tweeted Helena Maleno of Caminando Fronteras, which monitors migratory flows.

Official sources, quoted by the Spanish newspaper El Pais, said the number of people feared dead was 30. Maleno said 10 people survived and were picked up by fishermen.

The accident happened when the migrant boat set out in bad weather on Tuesday but details had only emerged on Friday.

Fronteras claims during the first six months of 2021 2,087 migrants died or disappeared as they tried to make the perilous voyage by sea to Spain from Western Africa.



Flames rise near a house as a wildfire burns in the village of Kirinthos, on the island of Evia, Greece on Friday. Thousands of tourists and residents were evacuated and a thick cloud of smoke and ash hung over Athens as "nightmarish" forest fires raged in Greece yesterday, while heavy rains brought some relief to neighbouring Turkey. Greece and Turkey have been fighting devastating fires for more than a week as the region suffers its worst heatwave in decades. The fires have killed two people in Greece. In Turkey, eight people have been killed.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## NEWS

### IN brief

#### Japan commuter knife attacker wanted to kill 'happy women'

The man alleged to have wounded 10 people in a knife attack on a Tokyo commuter train late on Friday told police he became incensed when he saw women who "looked happy" and wanted to kill them. Japanese media reported yesterday. Police arrested the 36-year-old man in another part of Tokyo after he slashed and stabbed people in the attack at about 8:40 pm (11:40 GMT) on Friday on a train on the Odakyu Line in the western part of the city, media reported. One victim, a female university student, was seriously wounded, while the rest suffered less severe injuries. The Sankei newspaper reported that suspect told police: "I began feeling like I wanted to kill women who looked happy about six years ago. Anyone was fine, I just wanted to kill a lot of people." Other media outlets, including NHK, in Japan reported similar quotes.

#### US charges two in plot to attack Myanmar's anti-junta UN envoy

US prosecutors said Friday they had charged two Myanmar citizens in a plot to attack the country's UN ambassador, Kyaw Moe Tun, an outspoken supporter of the democracy movement who has refused junta orders to quit. In an alleged conspiracy foiled by US investigators, the pair spoke of hiring hitmen who would force Kyaw Moe Tun to resign or, if he refused, to kill him, officials said. FBI said law enforcement acted "quickly and diligently" after receiving a tipoff on the hit mission on Tuesday, according to court documents. Suspects Phyo Hein Htut, 28, and Ye Hein Zaw, 20, were being charged in a federal court in Westchester on counts for which they could be sentenced to up to five years in prison. Prosecutors said Phyo Hein Htut had been in touch with an arms dealer in Thailand who had dealings with the military in Myanmar. The arms dealer spoke to Phyo Hein Htut about hiring assassins for the plot, the criminal complaint said.

#### Two plead guilty to assaulting cops in attack on US Capitol

A New Jersey gym owner pleaded guilty Friday to assaulting a policeman in the January 6 attack on the US Capitol by supporters of then-president Donald Trump. Scott Fairlamb, who is 44 years old, faces up to just more than four years in prison for joining the attack, which sought to prevent Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's defeat of Trump in the November 2020 election. In a hearing in Washington federal court on Friday, the former mixed martial arts fighter was the first out of hundreds charged in the attack to plead guilty to assaulting a police officer. Videos taken of the melee showed him shouting and blocking a police officer as he waved a collapsible baton. Fairlamb shouted to "patriots" to disarm the police and storm the building. A second man, Devlyn Thompson of Washington state, also pleaded guilty Friday to assaulting police on January 6. Thompson, 28, was among a group that threw objects at police and took their riot shields.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

## Iran defiant as West ups ante

Tehran blasts accusations as G7 blames it for the attack, US releases 'evidence'

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday rejected Western allegations its drones were used in a deadly tanker attack, while accusing Israel of concocting the "scenario" in a bid to undermine the Islamic republic.

The MT Mercer Street, an oil products tanker operated by Israeli-controlled Zodiac maritime, was struck last week off Oman's coast, killing two crew members -- a Briton and a Romanian.

The incident on July 29 upped the stakes in what analysts have called a "shadow war" that has seen a spate of attacks on vessels linked to Iran and Israel.

G7 foreign ministers on Friday pointed the finger of blame for the latest attack at Iran, as the US military released the findings of an investigation alleging the drones were made in the Islamic republic.

Iran dismissed the allegations. "We strongly condemn the baseless statement by the foreign ministers of the G7 and the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs in which they have directed baseless accusations at the Islamic Republic

of Iran," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

The tanker attack and the accusations against Iran were a "scenario" concocted with "notable" timing, he said, as they came days before Iran's new ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi took the oath of office.

Raisi was inaugurated on August 3 by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and sworn in by parliament two days later, taking over from moderate president Hassan Rouhani.

#### ISRAELI-LINKED TANKER ATTACK

"For experts and those who know the history of this region, it is not a new thing that the Zionist regime (Israel) would design such conspiracies," Khatibzadeh said.

Citing the results of a probe, the US Central Command said on Friday that remnants from one of three explosives-laden drones that targeted the Mercer Street indicated it was produced in Iran.

"This was a deliberate and targeted attack, and a clear violation of international law..."

There is no justification for this attack," the foreign ministers of the world's seven most developed nations (G7) said in a statement.

Iran's military spokesman denied the US allegations. "This is the Americans' method, to weave stories and use it to accuse Iran... this is the method they have chosen to pressure Iran," Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi was quoted by IRNA news agency as saying.

On Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said his government was "working on enlisting the world" in response to the attack but warned "we also know how to act alone".

Iran on Thursday warned its arch-foe not to take military action against it.

"We state this clearly: ANY foolish act against Iran will be met with a DECISIVE response," Khatibzadeh said.

"Don't test us," he added.

There have been several reported attacks on Israeli and Iranian ships in recent months that the two have blamed each for.

Iran has also accused Israel of sabotaging its nuclear sites and killing a number of its scientists.

## UN: North Korea developing nuke missile programs

REUTERS, United Nations

North Korea continued developing its nuclear and ballistic missile programs during the first half of 2021 in violation of international sanctions and despite the country's worsening economic situation, according to an excerpt of a confidential United Nations report seen by Reuters on Friday.

The report by a panel of independent sanctions monitors to the UN Security Council North Korea sanctions committee said Pyongyang "continued to seek material and technology for these programmes overseas."

"Despite the country's focus on its worsening economic travails, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continued to maintain and develop its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes," the sanctions monitors concluded.

North Korea has been subjected to UN sanctions since 2006 over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The Security Council has steadily strengthened sanctions in a bid to cut off funding for the programs.

The monitors said they were continuing to investigate North Korea's involvement in global cyber activity. The UN sanctions monitors have previously reported that North Korea has stolen hundreds of millions of dollars using cyberattacks.



AUGUST 08

**1786** - US Congress unanimously chooses the dollar as the monetary unit for the United States of America.

**1919** - Treaty of Rawalpindi, British recognise Afghanistan's independence.

**1945** - USSR declares war against Japan in WWII.

**1945** - President Harry Truman signs the United Nations Charter.

**1949** - Bhutan becomes an independent monarchy.

**1974** - Forced by Watergate scandal, US president Richard Nixon announces he will resign at 12pm the next day.

SOURCE: WEBSITES

## Brazil has near-record year for Amazon deforestation

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon reached near-record levels for the 12 months through July, according to figures released Friday, the latest bleak news for the world's biggest rainforest under President Jair Bolsonaro.

A total of 8,712 square kilometers (3,364 square miles) of forest cover -- an area nearly the size of Puerto Rico -- was destroyed from August 2020 to July 2021, according to satellite data from Brazilian space agency INPE's DETER monitoring program.

That is the second-worst year on record for the program's August-July reference period, behind only the 9,216 square kilometers deforested the previous year -- the worst for the Brazilian Amazon since the monitoring program was launched in 2015.

The latest annual figure is an increase of more than 90 percent since 2017-2018, the last full year before Bolsonaro took office.

The far-right president has slashed environmental protection programs and pushed to open protected lands to agribusiness and mining.

Environmentalists say that is having a disastrous impact on the Amazon, a critical resource in the race to curb climate change.

"The rainforest's future is currently in the hands of land speculators, illegal loggers and gold miners," said Marcio Astrini, executive secretary of the Climate Observatory, a coalition of environmental groups.

"The Amazon has become a free-for-all for environmental crime, in partnership with the current government," he said in a statement.

Facing international pressure to improve his administration's environmental record, Bolsonaro accepted the resignation in June of environment minister Ricardo Salles.

The regulation-slashing Salles, who was one of Bolsonaro's most controversial ministers, is under investigation for allegations of involvement in a timber trafficking scheme.

The Climate Observatory said the new minister, Joaquim Leite, "has not yet made a single move to undo his predecessor's policies."

Two recent studies have found heavily damaged portions of the Amazon are now emitting more carbon than they absorb, a worrying sign the rainforest may not act as a curb on global warming much longer.

The DETER figure is for the period through July 30, meaning the final number is likely to be slightly higher.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A demonstrator uses a slingshot during clashes with police in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday. Inset: A police officer fires a weapon during the clashes. Thai police fired tear gas and rubber bullets yesterday at hundreds of protesters in Bangkok demanding political reform and calling for a change to the country's coronavirus vaccination programme.

## An election without opposition!

Nicaragua's electoral council on Friday disqualified the country's main opposition party, from upcoming presidential polls, in which it headed an alliance against the reelection of President Daniel Ortega. According to the statement, the president and legal representative of the Citizens Alliance for Liberty (CAL) holds dual United States-Nicaraguan citizenship "in clear violation of the law," AFP reported. The move is the latest in an escalating political crackdown in the Central American country, with critics accusing Ortega's government of trying to prevent any meaningful opposition from standing in the November 7 election. Ortega, in power since 2007, is standing for a fourth consecutive term with his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, once again as his running mate. Authorities have already arrested seven presidential hopefuls ahead of the vote. The United States has in recent weeks announced visa restrictions on Nicaraguans linked to Ortega in response to



the crackdown. EU has also slapped sanctions on the country and its ruling elites including Ortega's wife. A former leftist guerrilla, Ortega also governed Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990 when the United States backed armed opposition to his Sandinista movement. Ortega later rebranded himself as a business-friendly pragmatist, but Western nations and the opposition say he is increasingly turning into a dictator, as he seeks a stranglehold on power.

## Sexual harassment: Cuomo accuser files criminal complaint

A woman who says New York Governor Andrew Cuomo groped her breast has filed a criminal complaint against the politician, US law enforcement said Friday, increasing the possibility he might be charged. The woman, who has not been named but who works as an aide to Cuomo, says the three-term governor assaulted her at his executive mansion last year. Her allegation formed part of an explosive report released this week that said Cuomo sexually harassed 11 former and current state employees. The veteran Democrat, 63, has repeatedly denied ever touching a woman inappropriately. US media said the complaint was made by a woman referred to as "Executive Assistant #1" in the report made public by New York state Attorney General Letitia James on Tuesday. At least five district attorneys have since opened inquiries into Cuomo's behavior. Legal

experts have suggested that Cuomo could face forcible touching misdemeanor charges. James's report also accused him of presiding over a toxic workplace for women and of taking retaliatory action against at least one of his accusers. Cuomo has rejected calls from President Joe Biden and other leading Democrats to quit and state lawmakers are moving to impeach him. He has been given a deadline of August 13 to submit evidence in his defense to their impeachment investigation. Cuomo was initially praised for his handling of the coronavirus crisis before he was engulfed in accusations that he covered up the scale of deaths in nursing homes. He is believed to have long coveted winning a fourth term as governor in elections scheduled for November next year but a poll released Friday suggested he might have trouble winning.

## Dixie Fire becomes third-largest in California history

A huge wildfire tearing through northern California became the third-largest in the state's history Friday, and looked set to continue growing. A long-term drought that scientists say is driven by climate change has left the western United States parched -- and vulnerable to explosive and highly destructive fires. The Dixie Fire, which this week razed the Gold Rush town of Greenville, has torched more than 1,700 square kilometers (650 square miles) since it erupted in mid-July. Authorities said there were no injuries so far from the huge blaze, but stressed it was vital that people in the path of the fire heed evacuation warnings. More than 5,000 personnel are battling the blaze, which is sending enormous clouds of smoke into the air that are easily visible from space. The Dixie Fire added around a fifth to its area overnight, making it larger than the Bootleg Fire that has



laid waste to a swathe of Oregon over the last month. Thousands of square kilometers of the western United States have burned this year, an alarming result of the warming planet that has affected weather patterns. By late July, the number of acres burned in California was up more than 250 percent from 2020 -- itself the worst year of wildfires in the state's modern history.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS