

Says report; UN warns grain deal in 'difficult territory'

Russia has held at least 6,000 Ukrainian children - likely many more - in sites in Russian-held Crimea and Russia whose primary purpose appears to be political re-education, according to a US-backed report published on Tuesday.

The children included those with parents or clear familial guardianship, those Russia deemed orphans, others who were in the care of Ukrainian state institutions before the invasion and those whose custody was unclear or uncertain due to the war, it said.

The youngest child identified in the Russian program was just four months old, and some camps were giving military training to children as young as 14 years, Raymond said, adding that researchers had not found evidence those children were later deployed in combat.

“We do our best to keep underage people in families, and in cases of absence or death of parents and relatives - to transfer orphans under guardianship,” the embassy said on the Telegram messaging platform.

Meanwhile, the UN warned yesterday that agreements to enable grain shipments from war-torn Ukraine, desperately needed to ward off hunger in poor countries, were in “difficult territory.”

The hard-won Black Sea Grain Initiative was brokered by the UN and Turkey last July. It was renewed a first time in November and is up for renewal again on March 18, reports AFP. "I think we're in slightly more difficult territory at the moment," UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths told reporters.



PHOTO: AFP

Israeli firm meddled in more than 30 polls worldwide

An Israeli firm sought to influence more than 30 elections around the world for clients by hacking, sabotage and spreading disinformation, according to an undercover media investigation published yesterday.

It adds to a growing body of evidence that shadowy private firms across the world are profiting from invasive hacking tools and the power of social media platforms to manipulate public opinion.

The firm was dubbed “Team Jorge” by investigating journalists who posed as potential clients in order to gather information on its methods and capabilities.

Its boss, Tal Hanan, is a former Israeli special forces operative who boasted of being able to control


The investigation was carried out by a consortium of journalists from 30 outlets, including the Guardian in Britain, Le Monde in France, Der Spiegel in Germany and El Pais in Spain, under the direction of the France-based non-profit Forbidden Stories. “The methods

“Evidence of a global private market in disinformation aimed at elections will also ring alarm bells for democracies around the world.”

The 50-year-old told three undercover reporters that his services, often called "black ops", were available to intelligence agencies and political campaigns.

"We are now involved in one election in Africa... We have a team in Greece and a team in [the] Emirates... [We have completed] 33 presidential-level campaigns, 27 of which were successful," the Guardian quoted him as saying.

73 migrants presumed dead: IOM



At least 73 migrants were reported missing and presumed dead following a shipwreck off the Libyan coast on Tuesday, the official Twitter account of International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Libya said yesterday. Seven survivors made it to shore from the boat, which was carrying around 80 people, who had reportedly departed from Qasr Alkayar, east of Tripoli, to head to Europe, the IOM added. So far, 11 bodies have been retrieved by the Libyan red Crescent and the local police, while the seven survivors are in hospital, the IOM said. Libya has become a major launching point for migrants seeking to reach Europe via a dangerous route across the desert and over the Mediterranean. The central Mediterranean remains the world's deadliest migratory sea crossing. The latest tragedy brings the numbers of deaths there since the beginning of this year alone to 130, IOM said. According to the agency's Missing Migrants Project, more than 1,450 migrant deaths were recorded on that route in 2022.

Sturgeon quits

Says she is too divisive to win independence

Nicola Sturgeon quit as Scottish first minister yesterday, saying her dominance over her party and the country was no longer the asset it once was in the fight for an independent Scotland. The 52-year-old, who has been first minister since 2014, also said she would stand down as leader of the ruling Scottish National Party (SNP), saying a fresh face would have a better chance of reaching across the political divide, and that she had become too divisive - and too tired - to lead that fight any more. She will stay in place until a successor is found. Sturgeon became SNP leader in the wake of a 2014 independence referendum when Scotland voted 55 percent to 45 percent to remain part of the UK. But in recent months she has been outmanoeuvred by Sunak's government over attempts to hold a second referendum.






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