

## International

# Azerbaijan activists sound alarm over wave of killings of women

## Thousands of women subjected to domestic violence

### News in brief

#### 'Provocative' Taiwan visit

BEIJING: China reacted with fury yesterday to a visit by a delegation of US lawmakers to Taiwan, as tensions between Beijing and Taipei reach their highest in years. China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its territory and has vowed to retake it by force if necessary, with the democratic island living under the constant threat of invasion from its increasingly belligerent neighbor. Taiwan's foreign ministry confirmed the visit was arranged by the American Institute in Taiwan-Washington's de facto embassy on the island-and said it would provide "necessary administrative assistance". Beijing responded by saying the "risky and provocative actions" are "doomed to end in failure". "Colluding with Taiwan independence forces is a dangerous game and playing with fire will result in burning themselves," said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin at a press briefing, calling the visit a "clumsy performance".—AFP

#### Morocco lifts COVID curfew

RABAT: Morocco said it was lifting a nationwide pandemic curfew thanks to an improving health situation and widespread vaccinations. Infections had surged in the North African country after it initially eased the curfew - imposed early in the pandemic - and opened its borders to travelers in June. The government on Tuesday cited "improvement in the epidemiological situation" for its decision to lift the curfew "following positive results realized in the framework of the national vaccination campaign," the government said in a statement published by the official MAP news agency. COVID-19 infection rates in Morocco, a country of around 36 million people, have been down for the past several weeks, and more than 22 million people have received two vaccine doses.—AFP

#### Turkish drone strike kills 3

QAMISHLI: The Kurdish administration in northeastern Syria said yesterday that a Turkish drone strike targeting a car in the border city of Qamishli killed three civilians. The strike, which was carried out on Tuesday, "killed three members of a single family", including an 82-year-old man, a statement released by the autonomous administration said. Nuri Mahmoud, a spokesman for the Kurdish security forces, named the dead as "national figure Yusuf Kello and his two grandsons Mazloum and Muhammad." "The treacherous targeting of the patriots of northeastern Syria by the Turkish occupation will not discourage us," the spokesman said on Twitter. Turkey, which considers the Kurdish movement that dominates the administration to be a terrorist organization, has thousands of troops deployed across northern Syria.—AFP

#### Ukraine arrests 'executioner'

KIEV: Ukraine said it arrested the former head of a notorious separatist prison camp, dubbed "the executioner" by the media after years of alleged torture. Kiev announced the arrest of 37-year-old Denys Kulykovsky, with its SBU security service saying he organized the "murders and tortures of illegally detained people" in the separatist capital, Donetsk. Kiev has fought pro-Moscow separatists in its eastern regions since 2014, when Russia annexed its Crimea peninsula. Kulykovsky allegedly ran the "Izolyatsia" prison camp in the separatist capital Donetsk between 2015 and 2018. It was set up by rebels in a former art centre on the premises of an abandoned factory in the city. Thousands went through the detention centre. Charged with war crimes and creating an illegal armed group, Kulykovsky faces up to fifteen years behind bars.—AFP

#### President 'nude' picture case

HARARE: A Zimbabwean judge has thrown out a case against a couple who shared a photoshopped nude of the country's president on a WhatsApp group, their lawyer said yesterday. Sarudzayi Ambiri Jani, 39, and Remember Neube, 35, were arrested in June 2020 for sharing the image on a neighborhood group in the southern border town of Beitbridge. The image showed President Emmerson Mnangagwa, 79, naked except for regalia from his Zanu-PF party. Zimbabwe has strict laws that forbid undermining or insulting the president. But magistrate Takudzwa Gwazemba tossed out the charges on Tuesday, saying the state had failed to prosecute them after more than a year.—AFP

BAKU: Dilara Bagiyeva's face grew pale as she recounted how, after suffering abuse from her husband for a decade, he turned on their eight-year-old daughter in a drunken fit last year. That evening in November, he returned home intoxicated to their 13th-floor apartment in Azerbaijan's capital Baku, beating Bagiyeva first in the bedroom, then the hallway and finally the kitchen, where he tried to throw her from the balcony. Before the 41-year-old English teacher lost consciousness, she remembered her daughter Farah pleading: "Daddy, don't hit my mom."

When she came to, Farah was nowhere to be seen. Police who arrived at the scene shortly after refused to let Bagiyeva see the body. "He dragged me out onto the balcony that night to throw me off. Instead, he threw my baby out the window," Bagiyeva said. "She was my everything," she added, looking at a picture of her daughter on her phone. Bagiyeva is among thousands of women subjected to domestic violence in Azerbaijan, where activists are sounding the alarm over femicide despite considerable barriers in the conservative Caspian Sea country.

Seventy-one women were killed in the ex-Soviet republic by husbands or male relatives last year and 48 more in the first eight months of 2021, the office of Azerbaijan's prosecutor general told AFP in an email. The first Muslim nation to introduce universal suffrage in 1919, Azerbaijan is one of the most

secular countries in the Islamic world. But wives and daughters are often limited to carrying out family duties in its male-dominated society, which tolerates abuse against women.

#### 'Fear of retribution'

Officials said the approximately 2,000 cases of domestic violence against women that are reported annually are just the tip of the iceberg, as most victims remain silent. "Many women don't phone the police for fear of retribution from family members," said Taliya Ibrahimova of the state committee for women's affairs. The government last year adopted a four-year action plan to combat domestic violence that included setting up a hotline and a state-run shelter for victims.

Ibrahimova said a 2010 law to tackle domestic violence was being updated, and the violation would soon

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Daddy, don't hit my mom

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become a separate category of offence in the penal code. But activists say the measures are not enough, and accuse the authoritarian government of President Ilham Aliyev of failing to protect women. "Femicide is a political issue because tackling



BAKU: Dilara Bagiyeva, 41, a victim of domestic violence, looks at a picture of her daughter Farah in a family photo album during an interview with AFP in Baku. — AFP

the problem requires political will," said Gulnara Mehdiyeva, a prominent women's rights activist.

She described Azerbaijan's political system as "despotic", and said the authorities "don't want citizens to know their rights". Mehdiyeva said activists had come under pressure from conservative groups since March 8 last year, when they held their first rally to raise awareness of violence against women. She said a pro-government website had even leaked recordings of her conversations with a friend "to portray me as a whore and to shame me".

There is a prevalent "negative attitude in society that accuses us of eroding family values", Mehdiyeva said. The US embassy this year raised concerns over the killings of women, while the British embassy urged

Azerbaijan to join the 2011 Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence. Azerbaijan is among just a handful of countries that have not ratified the first legally binding international treaty to address the issue.

#### 'Until my last breath'

The United Nations says Azerbaijan lacks the statistics to accurately track trends on women's rights, including on the pay gap and physical and sexual harassment. But it noted that, as of February this year, women held only 18 percent of seats in parliament. "Women lack the foundational representation in public office that would ensure that others hear their voices," the Borgen Project, a US-based women's rights group said last year.—AFP

## Myanmar charges US journalist with terrorism, sedition

YANGON: Myanmar's junta has charged a US journalist detained since May with sedition and terrorism, which carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, his lawyer said yesterday. The military has squeezed the press since taking power in a February coup, arresting dozens of journalists critical of its crackdown on dissent that has killed over 1,200 people, according to a local monitoring group. Danny Fenster, who had been working for local outlet Frontier Myanmar for around a year, was arrested as he was heading home to see his family in May and has been held in Yangon's Insein prison since.

The 37-year-old is already on trial for allegedly encouraging dissent against the military, unlawful association and breaching immigration law. The additional charges under Myanmar's anti-terrorism and sedition laws open Fenster up to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The trial is scheduled to begin on November 16. "He has become quite thin," Than Zaw Aung said. Fenster was "disappointed" at being hit with the new charges, which were filed on Tuesday, the lawyer added.

They come days after former US diplomat and

hostage negotiator Bill Richardson met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing in the capital Naypyidaw, handing the increasingly isolated junta some rare publicity. Richardson has previously negotiated the release of prisoners and US servicemen in North Korea, Cuba, Iraq and Sudan and has recently sought to free US-affiliated inmates in Venezuela. The former UN ambassador said he was hopeful he had brokered a deal for a resumption of visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross to prisons—which have been filled with political prisoners.

Richardson, declining to give further details, said the US State Department asked him not to raise Fenster's case during his visit. "Danny's case has become emblematic of the utter contempt Myanmar's military has for independent media," Emerlyne Gil, Amnesty International's deputy regional director for research, said in a statement. "These harsh new charges only further highlight the clumsy attempt to prosecute an independent journalist who should be freed immediately and unconditionally so he can be reunited with his family and friends."

#### Press clampdown

Fenster is believed to have contracted COVID-19 during his detention, family members said during a conference call with American journalists in August. He last spoke with US consular officials by phone on October 31, State Department spokesman Ned Price said Monday, adding Washington remained "deeply concerned over his continued detention". The



HUNTINGTON WOODS: A person wears a t-shirt calling for the release of US journalist Danny Fenster from detention in Myanmar. — AFP

Southeast Asian country has been mired in chaos since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, with the junta trying to crush widespread democracy protests and stamp out dissent. The military has tightened control over the flow of information, throttling internet access and revoking the licenses of local media outlets. Several journalists critical of the military government were among those released last month in a junta amnesty to mark a Buddhist festival. More than 100 journalists have been arrested since the putsch, according to Reporting ASEAN, a monitoring group. It says 31 are still in detention.—AFP

## Tigray rebels 'raped, beat women' in Ethiopian war

NAIROBI: Tigrayan rebels raped, robbed and beat up several women during an attack on a town in Ethiopia's Amhara region, Amnesty International said yesterday, the latest disturbing testimony from the year-long conflict. The investigation, which draws on interviews with 16 sexual assault survivors in the town of Nifas Mewcha, follows an earlier report by the rights group that documented the rape of hundreds of women and girls by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers in the Tigray region.

Yesterday's report focused on assaults that took place in August during an offensive by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), with 14 of the 16 women interviewed telling Amnesty they were gang-raped by the rebels, in some cases at gunpoint and with their children watching. "The testimonies we heard from survivors describe despicable acts by TPLF fighters that amount to war crimes, and potentially crimes against humanity," said Amnesty's secretary general Agnes Callamard. "They defy morality or any iota of humanity." In one of the many horrific incidents detailed in the report, Gebeyanesh-not her real name-said TPLF fighters gang-raped her while her children, aged nine and 10, wept. "Three of them raped me while my children were crying," the 30-year-old food seller said. "They slapped me (and) kicked me. They were cocking their guns as if they are going to shoot me."

Many of the rapists used ethnic slurs against their victims, with a 28-year-old mother-of-two telling Amnesty that one of the four men who assaulted her called her a donkey while her daughter watched. "He was saying: 'Amhara is a donkey. Amhara has massacred our people, the Federal



ADDIS ABABA: Women in mourning clothes attend a memorial service for the victims of the Tigray conflict organized by the city administration in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. — AFP

Defense forces have raped my wife, now we can rape you as we want." Another woman told Amnesty she fell unconscious after TPLF fighters raped her and beat her, using the butts of their guns. The men also stole her jewelry after assaulting her, she said.

Amhara government officials told Amnesty more than 70 women reported rapes in Nifas Mewcha during the TPLF's nine-day rule over the town. The rights group said the vast majority of the women interviewed were suffering from health problems as a result of the sexual assaults but were unable to get the help they needed after Nifas Mewcha hospital was damaged in the TPLF offensive.

The war, which has ravaged northern Ethiopia since November 2020, has been punctuated by accounts of massacres and mass rapes, with thousands of people killed and two million displaced. A joint investigation by the office of UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published last week found evidence of "serious abuses" by all sides in the conflict, saying some of the violations may amount to crimes against humanity.—AFP

## Indian party woos voters with sweet smell of socialism

NEW DELHI: A left-wing Indian opposition party has launched a perfume with what it calls the "fragrance of brotherhood, love and socialism" that will "end hatred". The product was unveiled on Tuesday by the Samajwadi Party in the hopes of wooing voters in elections in early 2022 in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Pushpraj Jain, a state lawmaker from the party, said it took "22 natural fragrances"—a reference to the 2022 vote-to-develop the scent. "When you use it the anger and hatred in the air will be defeated. We will also prepare another scent with 24 natural fragrances (for 2024 national elections)," Jain said. The fragrance comes in a bottle in the party's red and green colours embossed with its workmanlike election logo of a bicycle.

Party leader Akhilesh Yadav is hoping it will help unseat Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the huge state, India's most populous with around 230 million people. The state has been run by the BJP since 2017 under saffron-robed, firebrand Hindu monk Yogi Adityanath, a hardliner known for his inflammatory rhetoric against Muslims. Adityanath, 49, could strengthen his claim as a possible successor to 71-year-old Modi if he retains power in the poll, which will likely be held in February or March.

Uttar Pradesh's huge population makes it a key political battleground. There and in other states, politicians and parties use all kind of sops, freebies and even cash bribes to win over voters. Yadav's party distributed the perfume to journalists and party workers at a press conference without detailing when, where and how it will be available for potential voters. It is not the first time Yadav has launched a perfume. Local media reports say the state's former chief minister released four fragrances inspired by four cities in Uttar Pradesh to celebrate his four years in office in 2016.—AFP