

Lifestyle | Features



Aerial view showing a large sinkhole that appeared over the weekend near the mining town of Tierra Amarilla, Copiapo Province, in the Atacama Desert in Chile. — AFP photos

SINKHOLE LARGER THAN TENNIS COURT HAS CHILE PERPLEXED

Experts in Chile on Tuesday were investigating the appearance of an enormous sinkhole, bigger than a tennis court, that has appeared near a copper mine in the Atacama desert. Experts were dispatched to examine the hole, some 32 meters (104 feet) across and twice as deep, which appeared in an area about 800 kilome-

ters (nearly 500 miles) north of Santiago over the weekend, the National Geology and Mining Service (Sernageomin) said in a statement. A 100-meter security perimeter has been erected around the hole in the Tierra Amarilla municipality, near the Alcaparrosa mine operated by Canadian firm Lundin Mining. The com-

pany said in a statement there had been "no impact to personnel, equipment or infrastructure," and the sinkhole has remained stable since its detection. As a preventive measure, "development work in an area of the Alcaparrosa underground mine has been temporarily suspended," the company said. Sernageomin director

David Montenegro said experts would seek to determine the cause of the collapse and "ensure that all safety measures are taken to safeguard the lives of workers and communities close to the site." Cristian Zuniga, mayor of the Tierra Amarilla municipality of some 13,000 inhabitants, told journalists the sink-

hole was unprecedented. "We ask that the cause be clarified: whether the collapse is the product of mining activity or something else," he said. Chile is the world's largest copper producer, responsible for a quarter of global supply. — AFP

Belgium detainee rips out toilet, escapes from jail

A 25-year-old man has escaped a detention cell in Belgium's capital by breaking its toilet and wriggling out through a hole in the wall, the police said Tuesday. The man fled the police station in Brussels' Molenbeek neighborhood in the night of Monday to Tuesday, just a few hours after his arrest, it said. Making the best of a "faulty" security camera, the young man "unhooked the toilet from the wall" and slipped out "through a hole no larger than an A4 sheet of paper", a police spokesman told AFP. He appears to have dropped down into an underground corridor and then climbed out of a window onto the street, he said. The escapee, who holds several previous convictions, had been detained on Monday for violating the terms of his parole in an ongoing case over failing to comply with police orders, a spokesman for the prosecution in the Flemish city of Courtrai said. — AFP



(From left to right) Dane DiLiegro, Ben Rosenblatt, Dakota Beavers, Jhane Myers, Amber Midthunder, Dan Trachtenberg, Stormee Kipp, Patrick Aison and Michelle Thrush attends the Prey Premiere at Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California. —AFP photos

Comanche warriors take spotlight in 'Predator' prequel 'Prey'

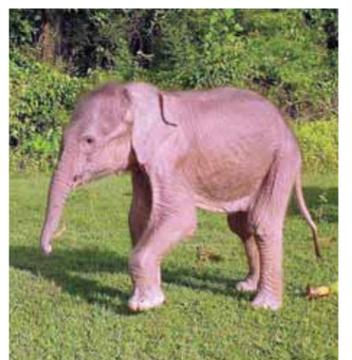
Having battled mighty heroes across time and space, the invisible extra-terrestrial hunters of the "Predator" films have a new-or rather, old-foe in an 18th-century female Comanche warrior. Prequel film "Prey," out Friday on Hulu in the United States, is perhaps the most unlikely direction yet for the "Predator" franchise, which first hit screens with Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1987 action classic. Since then, the bloodthirsty trophy-hunting creatures have slaughtered humans in Central American rainforests, Los Angeles and faraway planets, even battling the monsters of the "Alien" fran-

chise in two crossover films. The latest installment is set centuries earlier, landing its predator in 1719 North America, where it takes up the trail of Comanche hunters, French fur-trappers and buffalo. Director Dan Trachtenberg told a packed preview screening at Comic-Con in San Diego last month he had been inspired to make the film because "Native American and Comanche specifically have often been relegated to playing the sidekick or the villain, and never the hero." During the 19th century, Comanches clashed with Europeans and other Native American peoples across the Southern Plains of the modern-day United States, earning a reputation for fearsome military prowess. Hollywood has mostly portrayed them as brutal enemies, such as in John Ford's classic Western "The Searchers." In the new film, Amber Midthunder plays the heroine Naru, a young woman who must battle sexism within her own tribe as well as the film's villain. Disney-owned 20th Century Studios' decision "to get behind a movie like this that has not just a female action hero, but

an Indigenous female action hero... that's something that I don't recall seeing, maybe possibly ever," she said. The film's setting is "a real time in history for us, that is not that long ago, (when) I had ancestors walking around doing cool stuff, you know?" While "Prey" was shot in English, French and Comanche, its Native American actors later re-recorded their lines so that the whole movie can be played in Comanche—a first for a major studio film, according to producer Jhane Myers, who is herself Comanche. For Midthunder, "what I really honestly thought about every day I came to work, was not wanting to let down Comanche people first and foremost, but specifically Indigenous people." "And that if it did work, and we did pull it off, then how great that would be for us to have something where we feel like we can look at a movie and feel represented and reflected in a way that you're proud of," she said. "Because we don't often get that." — AFP

Rare white elephant born in Myanmar

A rare white elephant has been born in western Myanmar, state media said on Wednesday, unveiling what many in the Buddhist-majority country believe to be an auspicious creature. Born last month in western Rakhine state, the baby weighs about 80 kilograms (180 pounds) and stands roughly 70 cm (two-and-a-half feet) tall, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper. Footage released by state TV showed the tusker tot following his mother to a river and being washed by its keepers, and later feeding from her. The mother-a 33-year-old called Zar Nan Hla-is kept by the Myanmar Timber Enterprise in Rakhine state, the Global New Light said, adding the baby possessed seven of the eight characteristics associated with rare white elephants. "Pearl-colored eyes, plantain branch-shaped back, white hair, a distinctive tail, auspicious plot signs on the skin, five claws on the front legs and four on the back legs and big ears," the newspaper reported. Social media users first posted about the birth of the elephant—which has not been named yet—last month. Historically, white elephants were considered extremely auspicious in Southeast Asian culture, and the region's ancient rulers acquired as many as they could to boost their fortunes. But the ruinous cost of keeping the beasts in appropriately lavish style gave rise to the modern expression in which a "white elephant" is a useless, if beautiful, possession. There are currently six white elephants in captivity in the military-built capital Naypyidaw, according to state media—mostly from Rakhine state and the southern Ayeyarwady region. —AFP



This handout photo shows a newborn baby white elephant walking on the ground at Taungup township in Rakhine state. — AFP



Lawyers decry ban on 'menacing' eyewear at Japan prison

A Japanese prison that banned a convict from wearing his glasses because they made him look "menacing" has come under fire from lawyers who call the decision a rights violation. The jail in northern Japan stopped the prisoner bringing in his half-rimmed specs—with a silver bar on top,

and no visible frame underneath—while serving his sentence, according to the Sapporo Bar Association, which has issued a warning to the facility. Tsukigata Prison disallowed the glasses because they "lent a menacing aura" to the man that risked "intimidating and inviting derision from" other prisoners, the association cited the jail as saying. The style of eyewear in question "could have a bad influence on his incarcerated life, by triggering undisciplined behaviour such as fights and bullying," it said. A prison official defended the move when contacted by AFP. "We believe there is nothing illegal or unjust in the way we handled the situation," the staff member said, declining to be named due to the jail's internal policy. The prisoner, a man in his 40s who has

since been released, lived without glasses for months while jailed for a traffic law violation, said the lawyers' official warning, filed in June. His eyesight was so bad that he ended up "bumping into other inmates" and suffering "bouts of strong headaches." Sapporo Bar Association vice president Ayako Ito told AFP this week that for people with limited vision, glasses can be tantamount to "a body part". "For example, prisoners are entitled to spend their days reading, but being deprived of glasses renders such an act difficult, which violates their rights to maintain a minimum standard of cultured living" as guaranteed by the Japanese constitution, she said. Ito said it was just the latest instance of a prison in Japan denying inmates access to glasses for various

reasons. Tsukigata Prison was also called out by the bar association in 2020 after it rejected another prisoner's request to use his own Bvlgari glasses, which it deemed "too ostentatious". Strict rules in Japanese prisons have been challenged before. In October, a death-row prisoner in southern Japan's Fukuoka region reportedly sued the state, seeking to restore his right to use colored pencils for drawings. That prisoner saw art as a way to express his remorse, but a rule change last year by the justice ministry led to colored pencils being banned at detention centers. — AFP