



Tea picking season peaks in Turkey's Black Sea regions



In this time of the year, picking of tea leaves peaks in Rize's fields where large numbers of farmers reap the money-yielding crop. In this town, situated on the Black Sea shores, and in the nearby top resort and the agricultural lush and green region, Trabzon, there

are many tea factories with a record of earning a total of \$204 million in the last decade. The aromatic Turkish tea reaches markets of up to 120 countries worldwide. — KUNA



Morocco bans film about daughter of Prophet Muhammad

Morocco announced Saturday it had banned a British film about the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which Muslims in a number of countries have denounced as blasphemous. "The Lady of Heaven" will not receive a license to be shown in the country, the Moroccan Cinematographic Centre (CCM) said in a statement issued late Saturday.

The CCM ruling bans the film, directed by Eli King, from being screened on either

a commercial or cultural basis in the country. The drama is billed as the first film on the life of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatimah, and draws links between the Islamic State group in the 21st century and historical figures in Sunni Islam.

The CCM's ruling comes hours after Morocco's Supreme Ulema Council, the kingdom's highest religious authority, firmly condemned the film in a statement Saturday. In the statement, they said the film was a "flagrant falsification of the established facts of the history of Islam". The film was released in Britain on June 3 but after protests outside cinemas, the world's second-largest cinema chain, Cineworld, cancelled all screenings. Egypt, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq are among the countries to have denounced the film as blasphemous. — AFP

Overcoming hate, Brazilian heads to Trans Miss Universe

Looking resplendent in a bejeweled red ball gown, Brazilian beauty queen Eloa Rodrigues knows how lucky she is: in the world's deadliest country for trans people, she is daring to live out her dreams. The slender, striking 29-year-old from the Rio de Janeiro suburbs is leaving Sunday to represent Brazil at Miss International Queen in Thailand, the pageant considered the "Trans Miss Universe."

She considers herself a fortunate "outlier," given where she comes from: the poor, violent city of Sao Goncalo, across the bay from Rio, in the country that has set the record for murders of trans people for the past 14 years. Rodrigues, the reigning queen of Brazil's top trans pageant, was raised by her aunt and grandmother in a loving, accepting home, and has had the opportunity to study at university, pursue modeling and acting, and now jet halfway around the world to the famed beach resort of Pattaya.

But it is still difficult for a black trans woman like her to dream in Brazil, she says. "I went through a lot of very difficult processes to get where I am today," she tells AFP as she prepares lunch in their comfortable, roomy home, whose beige walls are decorated with family photos—and, in Rodrigues's room, her trophy collection. "There were times I came very close to giving it all up, even came close to abandoning life itself."

Rodrigues, who studies social sciences at Fluminense Federal University, is reluctant to go into detail about her childhood and transition. She says of that time: "I had to be very strong to face my family and say, 'Look, I'm a woman,' when that kind of refer-

ence just didn't exist here," she says. "But I found the strength to articulate that to my family and get them to understand and respect me—and to myself understand and respect the processes they had to go through."

Her aunt, Ivone, has been a rock of support. "It's important to support her dream," Ivone says. "She's given everything to get where she wants to be." Not everyone in Rodrigues's situation has that backing. "The large majority of trans people face a reality of very scarce possibilities, dreams and affection," Rodrigues says.

Sobering statistics

The numbers on violence against trans people in Brazil are disturbing. The country of 213 million people, which has a deep-rooted culture of machismo, has led the world in murders of trans people every year since the organization Transgender Europe began keeping statistics in 2008.

There were 92 such murders last year, and a total of 1,645 since 2008, according to the group's annual reports. Black trans people account for a disproportionate amount of those murdered in Brazil — 80 percent in 2018, according to another rights group, Antra. "I think for most trans and

transvestite people I know, their biggest fear is dying," says Rodrigues.

"That used to be my reality, too," she says. "But not anymore. Of course, I'm not privileged, because I'm still trans and black, but I'm getting the chance to chase my dreams." Not that it has been easy. Rodrigues has struggled to put together her trip to Thailand, where she will be competing against 23 other finalists from around the world when the contest opens on June 25 — delayed for two years by the coronavirus pandemic.

It has been an uphill battle to find sponsors. She is mostly funding her travels and wardrobe herself—with nearly 30 different outfits required. "A lot of people and brands don't want to link their image to a person like me," she says.

"When I won the national title (in 2020), I got lots of hate and racism on social media." If she wins, she plans to use the 450,000-baht (\$13,000) prize to help her family and fulfill one of her biggest dreams of all: become a mom, she says. "I want people to look at me and think, 'Wow, she did it-so I can, too.'" — AFP



Transgender model Eloa Rodrigues, 29, poses for pictures for AFP in the street outside her house in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP