

# Panorama

Around the world in 10 stories



## ISRAEL

### Military tries to placate Druze

Israel's military chiefs are pleading to keep politics out of the army amid protests by the Druze minority against a recently passed law that enshrines the state's Jewish character.

Lieutenant General Gadi Eisenkot reaffirmed "our shared mission and camaraderie" with the Druze, an Arabic-speaking minority that serves in the military.

Like other minorities, the Druze have been outraged by the law, which they say renders them second-class citizens. AP

## UAE

### Visa plan to aid foreign workers

The United Arab Emirates has begun a three-month visa amnesty programme, hoping to resolve a catch-22 for foreign workers who are fined daily for overstaying their permits but prevented from leaving until they pay the penalties.

It expects "thousands" of people, primarily labourers from South and South East Asia, to take advantage of the amnesty launched yesterday. It is the fifth general amnesty since 1996. More than 60,000 people took advantage of the last one, in 2013.

Fines will be forgiven and people will be allowed to return to the UAE with new visas. AP

## THAILAND

### New political party takes aim at ruling junta

By Panarat Theppumpanat  
IN BANGKOK

A new Thai party that aims to shake up politics has hit back at the ruling junta, accusing it of tarnishing the nation's image by filing police charges against party members.

Thailand is preparing for a general election by next May, as promised by the military junta that has ruled since ousting a civilian government in 2014. Since then it has brought in curbs on politicians, and jailed dozens of critics.

"The NCPO used its power to suppress the public who have political views that differ from its own," the Future Forward Party said in a statement, referring to the junta by its official name, the National Council for Peace and Order. REUTERS

## Postcard From... Da Nang

In the mountains of central Vietnam, a colossal pair of hands lifts a golden thread of walkway high above the clifftops, as if the mountain itself has sprouted limbs.

"I feel like I'm walking on clouds," said Vuong Thuy Linh, from Hanoi. "It's so unique".

Since it opened in June, Cau Vang or the "Golden Bridge" in Vietnam's Ba Na Hills has attracted scores of tourists eager to see a novel piece of architecture.

The pedestrian walkway sits at over 1,000m above sea level, offering tourists uninterrupted views of the

majestic landscape beneath. "It creates a walkway in the sky, among the foggy and fairy-like lands of Ba Na mountain," said Linh.

The Ba Na Hills, a popular getaway for the French during the colonial occupation of Vietnam, received over 2.7 million visitors last year, according to the Vietnam's National Administration of Tourism.

But it is the Golden Bridge and what supports it – two huge stone hands styled in such a way that it looks as if the jungle is struggling to reclaim them – which have garnered the most attention from visitors.

"The two, smooth, giant hands look real," said Truong Hoang Linh Thuy, another tourist. REUTERS

Kham Nguyen

## SYRIA

# Assad regime registers deaths of civil war victims

By Ayat Basma  
IN BEIRUT

After years of government silence about the fate of tens of thousands of people that rights groups say have been forcibly disappeared during the Syrian war, authorities have begun updating registers to acknowledge hundreds of their deaths.

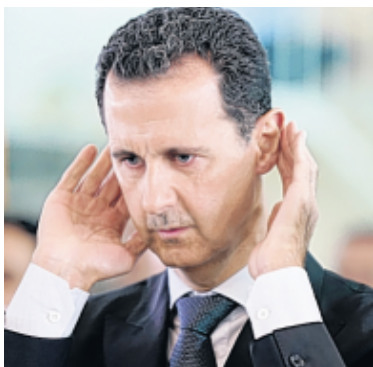
Fadel Abdul Ghany, head of the UK-based Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), say the death notices are the Assad regime's signal to the

country that it has won the brutal civil war.

Starting in April, families began discovering what happened to their loved ones by chance, when they requested records from registry of-fices, rights groups and Syrians said.

Word spread that deaths were being acknowledged and more people began approaching registries.

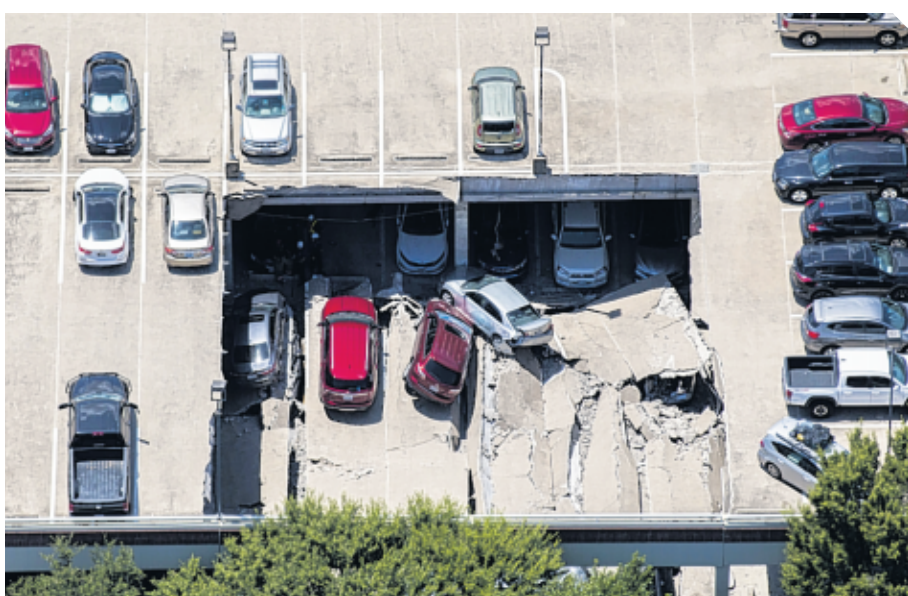
The Syrian government last year denied an Amnesty International report that it had carried out mass exterminations at Sedneya prison.



President Bashar al-Assad has told Syrians that 'victory is near' REUTERS

The SNHR has documented that at least 85,036 people have been forcibly disappeared across Syria since the start of the war.

Around 90 per cent of those are thought to have been taken by government security agencies, with the rest by factions operating in the chaotic multi-sided war. REUTERS



## Car park's top floor collapses

The top floor of a parking garage collapsed in Irving, Texas, yesterday in an incident that destroyed some cars and damaged more than 20 overall. There were no injuries to civilians or emergency service crew, and the cause of the collapse was not immediately known. AP

## UNITED STATES

### Bite from deadly snake sparks scramble for antivenom

By Chris Riotta  
IN NEW YORK

A snake bite forced doctors to frantically call zoos and venom response programmes across the United States in search of antivenom medicine.

A 26-year-old man became nauseous and started vomiting about 20

minutes after being bitten by his pet albino monocol cobra. The snake was outside of its enclosure when it bit the man's ankle. The victim did not respond to the generic antivenom medicine he was initially treated with at a Michigan-area hospital.

The monocol cobra is native to southern Asia and contains some of

the fastest-acting deadly venom in the world.

The next day, Miami-Dade County sent 20 vials of a unique antivenom medicine to the Detroit medical centre via a commercial flight.

Doctors say he is on his way to recovering from the rare venomous bite. THE INDEPENDENT

## JAPAN

### Journalist in Syria begs to be rescued

Japan's government said it was doing its utmost for the rescue of a Japanese journalist believed to be held in Syria after a video of a man appearing to be him was posted online. Freelance journalist Jumpei Yasuda was last heard from in Syria in June 2015.

The bearded man in the video said he needed an immediate rescue. He cited the date as 25 July 2018, in the 20-second footage apparently filmed outdoors. AP

## YEMEN

### Unicef warns over cholera

The UN children's agency is warning of another cholera outbreak in Yemen after air strikes hit water facilities and other civilian infrastructure in the port city of Hudaydah.

Unicef's executive director, Henrietta Fore, said yesterday that the air strikes this week damaged a sanitation facility and a station that supplies most of the city's water.

She said such attacks "jeopardise efforts to prevent another outbreak of cholera". AP

## MEXICO

### Free healthcare promised

President-elect Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador says he plans to direct spending in the public health system so Mexicans can enjoy European-quality free healthcare.

Mexico has near-universal health coverage. But facilities are often understaffed or lack medicine. "We're going to guarantee that medical attention and medicine are free," Mr Lopez Obrador said. AP

## WORLD FOCUS

# UK supports drone project in Colombia to monitor crops

British technology helps farmers in South America. By **Andrew Wight**

The UK space agency has awarded almost £4m to a group of Colombian scientists who will be using drones, satellites and the Internet of Things to monitor CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and crop yields, in Colombia's remotest rice and palm oil plantations. Ministers hope the initiative will help the troubled Latin American country, while giving a boost to the UK's technological credentials as it seeks new trade deals post-Brexit.

At the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture, in the south of the country, a team of Colombian scientists is working with an NGO, Rothamsted Research, on the government's Ecological Production Management Information System (EcoProMis).

The hi-tech solution, which is currently being installed, uses satellites, drones and cameras, networked together using internet devices. These eyes in the sky will then give industry and farmers a snapshot of crop yields, carbon emissions and even what kind of plants and animals are growing and thriving on the plantations.



The two crops being targeted are rice and palm oil: Colombia is the top producer of palm oil in Latin America, while rice is a key staple and exports accounted for \$15m (£10.5m) in 2016. Colombia has also pledged to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent by 2030.

With £3.9m in initial funding from the UK Space Agency's £3m International Partnership programme, EcoProMis is designed to be self-sustaining by April 2021.

UK science minister Sam Gyimah said at the programme launch that the UK was aiming to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges, while aiming to increase the UK's share of the global space market to 10 per cent by 2030.

"The UK Space Agency's International Partnership Programme will help developing countries tackle big issues like disaster relief and disease control, while showcasing the services and technology on offer from our leading space businesses," he said.

The UK Government and Kew Gardens have also co-funded expeditions in Colombia that discovered fungi, plants and animals previously unknown to science.

## AUSTRALIA



Supermarket chain Coles has scrapped plans to reintroduce a 15 cents charge for plastic bags GETTY

# 'Bag rage' leads to supermarket U-turn

By Tom Westbrook  
IN SYDNEY

Australia's second-largest supermarket has halted plans to charge for plastic bags after customers, furious at the 7p cost, succumbed to "bag rage".

Coles, and its larger rival Woolworths Group, removed one-use plastic bags from stores late in June as part of a national push to reduce

waste, selling reusable ones for a small fee instead.

It drew a furious response, dubbed "bag rage", as customers angry about having to bring their own bags or pay 15 Australian cents (7p) for a reusable plastic bag abused check-out staff and vented their anger on social media.

The union representing store workers launched a public campaign on the issue and both grocers capit-

ulated, temporarily waiving the fee. Coles, which had initially planned to reintroduce the fee on 12 July, never levied it and has now extended the waiver indefinitely.

"Some customers told us they needed more time to make the transition to reusable bags," the company said in a statement.

"Many customers bringing bags from home are still finding themselves short a bag or two so we are offering complimentary reusable [bags] to help them," it said.

The UN wants to eliminate single-use plastic by 2022 and says more than 60 countries have taken steps to ban or reduce plastic consumption. REUTERS

## MIDDLE EAST

### Amnesty claims activist was target of Israeli hacking

By Raphael Satter

Amnesty International claims one of its employees has been targeted with Israeli-made surveillance software – with the activist's interest in Saudi Arabia used as a hook.

In a 20-page report, Amnesty outlined how it thinks a hacker tried to break into an unidentified

staff member's smartphone in early June by baiting the employee with a WhatsApp message about a protest in front of the Saudi Embassy in Washington DC.

Amnesty said it traced the malicious link to a network of sites tied to the NSO Group, an Israeli surveillance company implicated in a series of digital break-in attempts.

Use of Israeli technology to police dissent in the Arab world could raise uncomfortable questions for Israel, which portrays itself as a bastion of democracy in the region.

Joshua Franco, Amnesty's head of technology and human rights, said the latest hacking attempt was emblematic of the increased digital risk faced by activists worldwide. AP

## CHINA

### Muslims told to wear tracking devices to Mecca

By Conrad Smith

Muslims from China making the Hajj pilgrimage are having to wear state-issued tracking devices, reports say.

Humans rights groups have al-

ready warned that repressive levels of surveillance were being used against some Chinese Muslims.

The state-run China Islamic Association has published photos of Chinese Muslims at the Beijing airport departing for Mecca this week wearing customised "smart cards" on blue lanyards around their necks.

The devices, which include a GPS tracker and personal data, are designed to ensure the wearer's safety, according to the association.

In Saturday's

iweekend

Cool summer sips

The best wines to drink in the heat



Plus

- Gardening
- TV guide
- Puzzles pull-out