

## IN BRIEF



## Giant dinosaur bone found in France

PARIS  
The thigh bone of a giant dinosaur was found this week by French palaeontologists at an excavation site in southwestern France where remains of some of the largest animals that ever lived have been dug up since 2010. The animal probably weighed 40 tonnes. REUTERS



## Underwater glaciers melting at rapid pace

NEW YORK  
Underwater melting of glaciers is occurring much faster than was predicted, a study published in *Science* said. Scientists used a new approach to directly measure submarine melt, which could improve projections of sea level changes. IANS



## A\$AP Rocky fans join in protest against Sweden

WASHINGTON  
U.S. fans of rapper A\$AP Rocky have issued a call to arms, including meatball moratoriums and an end to binges at Ikea, in protest at Sweden's move to put him on trial for assault. Several fans on Twitter sought a boycott on Swedish products. AFP



## Swarms of grasshoppers invade Las Vegas Strip

LOS ANGELES  
Massive swarms of grasshoppers descended on the Las Vegas Strip this week, startling tourists and residents as the insects pass through town on their northbound migration. Even street pavements were covered with the insects. AFP

## Hill of soap suds claims victim

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MEXICO CITY

A towering hill of soap suds floating atop a heavily polluted stream in Mexico has apparently claimed its first victim. A man who stopped to take a selfie fell into the quivering mass and disappeared.

Authorities in the central state of Puebla are still looking for the man who fell into a mound of suds about 20 feet high.

The local civil defence office launched a search on Monday, using fire hoses to compact the suds and a large fan to try to blow a path into the mass.

It took almost a whole day just to locate his car. Authorities say excess detergents from homes that drain into streams feeding the Valsequillo reservoir caused the suds to accumulate.

## When Santa takes a summer break

A group of people who live every day like it's Christmas get together for an annual cruise

AARON REISS

During the Christmas season, Santa may circle the globe in a flying sleigh, but during the summer, he vacates on a cruise ship.

In May this year, 77 Mr. and Mrs. Clauses embarked on a seven-day, Alaska-bound voyage aboard the *Royal Princess*. This was the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Santa Cruise, an event conceived by Santa Tim Connaghan, a 50-year veteran of the red suit, as a chance for professional Santas to gather, schmooze, and stay sharp during the off-season.

The men on this cruise are "real bearded Santas", as opposed to "designer bearded" or "skin chin" Santas. They introduce themselves as "Santa Steven" or "Santa Bill", the same way another professional might introduce themselves as "Doctor Jacobs" or "Professor Bryant".

"I had read some stories of people - like real estate agents or doctors - having training conferences on ships, and I said, 'Why not Santa?'" Santa Tim said.



Time to cheer: (Clockwise from left) Santas on their way to the *Royal Princess*; relaxing on the ship; Christmas-themed cash for use on board and a cap for vacation wear. • NY TIMES/CHRIS MAGGIO

Aboard the ship, Santa Tim organises lectures and workshops covering logistical topics like the proper cradling of a baby, correct hand

placement (to prevent law-suits), and beard-bleaching, as well as more philosophical topics, such as how to be true to the teachings of the



historic St. Nicholas. For the cruise-goers, Santa is a way of life.

Santa Marcel painted his fishing boat in bright red and

green. Mrs. Claus Debbie and Santa John renewed their vows for their 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary in North Pole, an Alaskan city that is known for year-round Christmas-themed decorations.

Of course, being Santa year-round isn't always easy. You can never be naughty. "You've always got to be aware of the children around you, and be ready to act as Santa at the drop of a hat, even in July," Santa Dave Starr said. "If someone cuts you off on the expressway, you have to wave back with five fingers, not one," Santa Jerry Owens said. "You can't say anything slanted or particularly political, because you are Santa. You don't have those views. All you do is make toys."

And yet, for the fully committed, the sacrifice is worth it. "The wide-eyed wonder you see in a little one's eyes," Mrs. Claus Mary Shannon said, "or the smile that spreads across a child's face suggests you and that child are sharing a special secret that the adults don't know, and that is priceless." NY TIMES

## WHO recommends use of innovative HIV drug

'Dolutegravir safe for pregnant women'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Based on new evidence assessing benefits and risks, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended the use of the HIV drug dolutegravir (DTG) as the preferred first-line and second-line treatment for all populations, including pregnant women and those of childbearing potential.

According to a release, initial studies had highlighted a possible link between DTG and neural tube defects (birth defects of the brain and spinal cord) in infants born to women using the drug at the time of conception.

"But new data from two large clinical trials comparing the efficacy and safety of DTG and efavirenz (EFV) in Africa have now expanded the evidence base. The risks of neural tube defects are significantly lower than what the initial studies may have suggested," the release said.

It noted that DTG is more effective, easier to take and



Dolutegravir pills

has fewer side effects than alternative drugs. It also has a high genetic barrier to developing drug resistance, which is important, given the rising trend of resistance.

In 2019, 12 of the 18 countries surveyed by WHO reported pre-treatment drug resistance levels exceeding the recommended threshold of 10%.

All the above findings informed the decision to update the 2019 guidelines, WHO noted.

In 2019, 82 low- and middle-income countries reported to be transitioning to DTG-based HIV treatment. The new recommendations aim at helping more nations improve their HIV policies.

## Vanishing wildlife: 22 species have gone extinct in India

Ministry lists habitat degradation as one of the causes

SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
KOLKATA

Four species of fauna and 18 species of flora have gone extinct in India in the past few centuries, according to wildlife survey organisations.

The data was tabled earlier this month in the Lok Sabha by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

A.A. Mao, Director of the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) said India is home to 11.5% of all flora in the world. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, a new study has shown that since 1750, more than double the number of plants have disappeared from the wild than birds, mammals and amphibians combined.

As per information given by the BSI, 18 species of



Cheetahs once lived in the Indian sub-continent.

plants - four non-flowering and 14 flowering - have gone extinct. The notable among them are *Lastreopsis wattii*, a fern in Manipur discovered by George Watt in 1882 and three species from the genus *Ophiorrhiza* (*Ophiorrhiza brunonis*, *Ophiorrhiza caudate* and *Ophiorrhiza radican*), all discovered from peninsular India. *Coryphata liera* Roxb, a palm species discovered in Myanmar and the Bengal region by William Roxburgh is also extinct.

Among mammals, the cheetah (*Acionyx jubatus*) and the Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) are considered extinct in India.

The pink-headed duck (*Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*) is feared extinct since 1950 and the Himalayan quail (*Ophrysia supercilios*) was last reported in 1876.

Kailash Chandra, Director of ZSI, said that the four animals can be found in other parts of the world. India has about 6.49% of all the fauna species in the world, he said.

Factors like "competition, predation, natural selection, and human induced factors like hunting, habitat degradation" are some of the important reasons that have led to these extinctions, the Ministry said.

## Selfie museum clicks in Budapest

Pink palm trees and a banana swing a hit with visitors who love social media

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BUDAPEST

A new so-called 'selfie museum' in Budapest that lets visitors pose by pink palm trees and frolic in multi-coloured sprinkle baths has proved to be a hit with social-media savvy locals and tourists alike.

With almost 30,000 visitors since it opened last December, the 400-square-metre large "Selfie Museum", billed as the first of its kind in Europe, is already one of the Hungarian capital's most popular attractions.

Its creators say their idea, inspired by a similar venue in the U.S., is targeted at the younger generation looking for an edge to their status updates or profile pictures. However, recently a pair of pensioners also popped in to top up their photos for an annual calendar they present to each other, said Lilla Gan-



Picture perfect: Visitors taking pictures in the pink room of the Selfie Museum in Budapest. • AFP

gel, who co-founded the museum with her partner Balazs Koltai.

Visitors entering the first of 11 exhibition rooms are met with palm trees growing from the walls and pink-coloured surroundings. "Here you can stand out from the crowd, perhaps by finding a crazy new perspective like an aerial photo, or by play-

ing with the quirky props," said 33-year-old Ms. Gangel. "There are more and more places on the Internet where you can share photos, we're living in this type of world now, whether we like it or not," she said.

The 11 interactive installations at the museum include a ride on banana swings, a climb on a unicorn, or a

lounge on giant macaroons. "We play with shapes and colours, and try to push people's borders and let their creativity bloom," Ms. Gangel said.

Word about the new museum has spread fast, unsurprisingly, on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat.

"They're typical teenagers, they like Instagram and photos," said Oli, an Israeli tourist, while her young daughters threw exaggerated poses behind her. "These are the times we are living in, what can you do," she laughed.

Panka Major, an 18-year-old Hungarian student, said she was an avid user of social media but lamented that "nowadays everyone checks their phones every minute".

"It's a natural thing but also bad, as you do not live in the moment, and instead reach for a phone to record it," she said.

## Pakistani policeman channels life stories into gritty novels

Books explore crime and violence in Karachi

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KARACHI

His father was assassinated by a notorious Karachi hitman, while his police partner was murdered by the Taliban.

Personal tragedy haunts the hard-boiled novels that are turning top cop Omar Shahid Hamid into one of Pakistan's most popular English-language authors.

For nearly two decades Mr. Hamid has worn a badge in Karachi. Now a deputy inspector general, he is also fast becoming one of Pakistan's most recognisable writers, publishing four books in quick succession since 2013.

His work has even nabbed the attention of major streaming outlets on the hunt for new original material from South Asia, including Netflix, which has already seen major success with similar material in TV series such as *Sacred Games*, about Mumbai's corrupt underworld.

Mr. Hamid said the secret to his success is his unflinching accounts of political corruption, contract killers, and crooked cops alongside nuanced portraits of Karachi's divided neighbourhoods.

"Books like mine wouldn't work if I pulled punches," he says. "It's that grittiness, that uncompromising reality that I think a lot of readers enjoy."



Omar Shahid Hamid

At times, the reality has hit dangerously and heartbreakingly close to home.

Mr. Hamid did the bulk of his writing while he was on sabbatical after being advised to leave Karachi and take a break from policing in 2011 when he was threatened by extremist groups.

**Personal loss**  
Weeks after the release of his first novel *The Prisoner*, his mentor and police partner Chaudhry Aslam - the inspiration for one of the book's protagonists - was killed in a Taliban-claimed suicide blast.

In his third novel, *The Party Worker*, Mr. Hamid portrays the rise of a brutal hitman who killed at the behest of a fictional political party ruling the city with an iron fist.

For Karachi insiders, the character mirrors the life of feared hitman Saulat Mirza, who served as the feared enforcer for the once-powerful Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) party, and whose list of victims include Mr. Hamid's own father, Shahid.

"It's less a thing of making a sketch of Saulat Mirza," explains Mr. Hamid, calling the character a "sketch of a particular type of young man... who kind of in the last 30 years or so essentially gave their lives away to these ideologies thinking they were doing the right thing."

"What he has written is fiction but it's very close to reality," says Faheem Siddiqui, Karachi bureau chief for Geo News. "As a crime reporter, I know what had happened in the city. It took a great deal of courage to write about these events."

Writing, Mr. Hamid explains, is a release. "I had a lot of frustrations about things that had happened in my career until that point," says Mr. Hamid. "I felt a need to vent about them."

Though he often takes aim at Karachi's dangerous and powerful, he has received little blowback, he says. But he says his latest novel *The Fix* released in June may ruffle more feathers, as he explores corruption in cricket.

"For a nation of cricket fanatics and conspiracy theorists, it's strangely been an area that has never really been explored," he explains.

Mr. Hamid remains hopeful for his beloved home town. "It may not be everyone's cup of tea," he shrugs, "but as a city, it will keep going."

## Born free



Pop of colour: Participants of the Christopher Street Day gay pride parade walk through the streets of Berlin on Saturday. • AFP

## Kidnapped triathlete talks her way to freedom



Nathalie Birli during a practice session. • INSTAGRAM

27-year-old was abducted while on a bike ride

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
VIENNA

An Austrian triathlete kidnapped while riding her bike talked her way to freedom by complimenting her captor's orchids, a police source said on Saturday.

Professional triathlete Nathalie Birli, 27, was struck

by a car on Tuesday and broke her arm while falling to the ground near Graz in southeastern Austria, press reports said.

The driver then knocked her out with a piece of wood and took her to his isolated home. "When I regained consciousness, I was naked and tied up in an armchair in an old house," Birli told the *Kronen Zeitung* newspaper.

The man forced her to drink alcohol and tried to

suffocate her. However, she managed to placate the man by complimenting him on the many orchids growing in his home.

Though he was initially "filled with hate", the man suddenly became "nice to me" and confided that gardening was his passion before opening up about his troubled childhood, she said. Finally, he agreed to let her. Police arrested the man on Wednesday.