

TOPOF THE WORLD



New Zealand Speaker Trevor Mallard feeding an MP's baby during a session. Reuters

NEW ZEALAND

Speaker makes Parliament more parent-friendly

Wellington: As New Zealand MPs vigorously debated fuel prices in Parliament, Speaker Trevor Mallard called for order while feeding baby Tutanekai his bottle. The six-week-old son of MP Tamati Coffey and his husband, born via a surrogate mother last month, was being cuddled by his father in the debating chamber on Wednesday when the Speaker offered to hold him. “There are times when I can be vaguely useful,” Mallard said. The newborn joins many other babies in the legislature after Mallard relaxed rules in 2017 to make Parliament more child-friendly.

USA

MIT professor quits over lab links to Epstein

New York: The head of a research centre at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has said he will quit in protest after the revelation of financial ties between the institution and disgraced hedge fund manager Jeffrey Epstein. Ethan Zuckerman, director of the Center for Civic Media at the MIT Media Lab, said he would leave at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year after finding out that lab director Joi Ito took money from Epstein, who committed suicide in prison on August 10 as he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges.

W.H.O. REPORT

‘Plastic particles in drinking water present low risk’

Geneva: Microplastics contained in drinking water pose a “low” risk to human health at current levels, but more research is needed to reassure consumers, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Thursday. Studies over the past year on plastic particles detected in tap and bottled water have sparked public concerns but the limited data appears reassuring, the UN agency said in its first report on potential health risks associated with ingestion.



A tract of Amazon jungle burnt by loggers and farmers in Iranduba, Amazonas state, Brazil. Reuters

Amazon rainforest burning fast, Brazil’s President blames NGOs

Brazilian space research centre says 77% jump in number of fires this year

MANUELA ANDREONI & CHRISTINE HAUSER
RIO DE JANEIRO, AUGUST 22

FIRES ARE burning in the Amazon rainforest at one of the fastest paces in years, Brazil’s space research centre said this week.

The centre, the National Institute for Space Research, which monitors fires using satellite images, reported Wednesday that it had detected 39,194 fires this year in the world’s largest rainforest, a 77 per cent increase from the same period in 2018.

The fires, most of which have been set by farmers clearing their land, are raging in uninhabited areas of rainforest and intruding on populated areas in the country’s north, including

EXPLAINED

Slowing pace of climate change: Why the Amazon matters

THE AMAZON is the biggest rainforest in the world and helps to slow down climate change. According to NASA, the increase in carbon dioxide (CO2) levels caused by human activity since the Industrial Revolution is the most important long-term issue “forcing” climate change. The trees in the Amazon absorb an amount of CO2 that is equivalent to the fossil fuel emissions of nine countries in the region between 1980-2010, a BBC report said. Without the Amazon, all of this CO2 would have been released into the atmosphere, hastening global warming. The forest also houses the richest biodiversity in the world. It is also home to a large indigenous population, who rely on the forest to maintain their way of life.

the states of Rondônia and Acre. The blazes are so large and

widespread that smoke has wafted thousands of miles away

to the Atlantic coast and São Paulo, the country’s most populous city, according to the World Meteorological Organisation.

On Wednesday, Brazil’s far-right President, Jair Bolsonaro, accused non-governmental organisations of setting the fires in the rainforest after the government pulled their funding, although he presented no evidence.

“It could be; it could; I’m not saying it is, a criminal action by these NGO people to call attention against me, against the Brazilian government,” he said. “This is the war we face.”

Deforestation of the Amazon has increased rapidly since Bolsonaro took office last year, and his government cut back on efforts to confront illegal activity in the rainforest. **NYT**

UN report: Myanmar troops’ sexual violence against Rohingya shows genocidal intent

MICHELLE NICHOLS
UNITED NATIONS, AUGUST 22

SEXUAL VIOLENCE committed by Myanmar troops against Rohingya women and girls in 2017 was an indication of the military’s genocidal intent to destroy the mainly Muslim ethnic minority, United Nations investigators concluded in a report released on Thursday.

The panel of independent investigators, set up by the UN Human Rights Council in 2017, accused Myanmar’s government of failing to hold anyone accountable and said it was responsible “under the Genocide Convention for its failure to investigate and punish acts of genocide”.

A military crackdown in Myanmar’s Rakhine state that began in August 2017 drove more than 730,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. Myanmar denies widespread wrongdoing and says the military campaign across hundreds of villages in northern Rakhine was in response to attacks by Rohingya insurgents.

“Hundreds of Rohingya women and girls were raped,

NO ROHINGYA TURN UP FOR REPATRIATION FROM BANGLADESH

Teknaf: A fresh push to repatriate Rohingya refugees to Myanmar fell flat on Thursday, with no one turning up to hop on five buses and 10 trucks laid on by Bangladesh.

Members of the Muslim minority, 740,000 of whom fled a military offensive in 2017, are refusing to return without guarantees for their safety and a promise that they will at last be given citizenship by Myanmar.

“The Myanmar government raped us, and killed us. So we need security. Without security we will never go back,” Rohingya leader Nosima said. **PTI**

with 80 per cent of the rapes corroborated by the Mission being gang rapes. The Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) was responsible for 82 per cent of these gang rapes,” the report said. **REUTERS**

South Korea-Japan history feud escalates, agreement to share intelligence scrapped

HYONHEE SHIN & JOSH SMITH
SEOUL, AUGUST 22

SOUTH KOREA said on Thursday it will scrap an intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, a decision that could escalate a dispute over history and trade and undercut security cooperation on North Korea.

With the decision not to extend the pact, the political and trade disputes between South Korea and Japan now extend into some of the most sensitive national security issues in the region.



South Korean protesters in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. AP

The arrangement was designed to share information on the threat posed by North Korea’s

SENT TO THE ISS, FEDOR TO BE USED IN OPERATIONS THAT ARE DANGEROUS FOR HUMANS

Russia launches humanoid robot into space

REUTERS
MOSCOW, AUGUST 22

A **RUSSIAN** humanoid robot was making its way on Thursday to the International Space Station after blasting off on a two-week mission to support the crew and test his skills.

Known as FEDOR, which stands for Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research, the Skybot F-850 is the first humanoid robot to be sent to space by Russia. NASA sent humanoid



FEDOR is the size of an adult and can emulate movements of the human body. Reuters

robot Robonaut 2 to space in 2011 to work in hazardous environments.

“The robot’s main purpose it to be used in operations that are

missile and nuclear activities.

The decision to end it comes after North Korea launched a series of short-range ballistic missiles in protest against what it sees as military build-ups in South Korea and Japan.

The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was due to be automatically renewed on Saturday, unless either side decided to cancel it.

The decision was announced after an hour-long discussion within the presidential National Security Council (NSC). South Korean President Moon Jae-in

approved it.

Japan created a “grave change” in the environment for bilateral security cooperation by removing South Korea’s fast-track export status, said Kim You-geun, a deputy director of the NSC.

A large section of the public in South Korea remain bitter over Japan’s actions during its colonial rule of Korea from 1910 until the end of World War Two.

A 2012 attempt to seal the deal fell apart in the face of opposition in South Korea toward military cooperation with Japan. **REUTERS**

the Baikonur Cosmodrome.

The ISS is a joint project of the space agencies of the US, Russia, Europe, Japan and Canada.

Travelling in an unmanned Soyuz MS-14 spacecraft, FEDOR is expected to dock at the ISS on Saturday with 660 kg of cargo including medical supplies and food rations for the crew waiting at the station, NASA said.

FEDOR, who is the size an adult and can emulate movements of the human body, described himself as “an assistant to the ISS crew” on his Twitter page.

stored, there is a loss of confidence in the integrity of systems that handle basic services like water, power, emergency communications and vote counting.

“The business model for the ransomware operators for the past several years has proved to be successful,” said Chris Krebs, the director of the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which has the primary responsibility for aiding American victims of cyberattacks.

“Years of fine-tuning these attacks have emboldened the actors, and you have seen people pay out — and they are going to continue to pay out,” he said, despite warnings from the FBI that

meeting ransom demands only encourages more attacks.

In Georgia alone in recent months, the tally of victims has been stunning: the city of Atlanta. The state’s Department of Public Safety, State and local court systems. A major hospital. A county government. A police department for a city of 30,000 people.

The Department of Public Safety was hit particularly hard and continues to feel the effects of an attack discovered on July 26. The computer network remains down. Every device, including laptops and tablets, is being examined and reconfigured. Much of the email system cannot be entered. State troopers are unable to use computer systems in their pa-

trol cars; like their colleagues in Wilmer, they’re writing tickets.

An FBI warning sent to key players in the American cyberindustry on Monday left unclear who was responsible for the malware afflicting Texas, a strain first seen in April and named Sodinokibi. On Wednesday, the Department of Homeland Security issued a warning about a “Ransomware Outbreak”, cautioning cities and towns to “back up your data, system images and configurations” and keep them offline. It urged them to update their software — something Baltimore had failed to do.

Ransomware is hardly new, but attacks have become more frequent in recent times. **NYT**

MEANWHILE

GIRAFFES TO BE PROTECTED AS NUMBERS FALL

An international conference on endangered species has agreed to protect giraffes for the first time. Thursday’s vote by a key committee at the World Wildlife Conference known as CITES paves the way for likely approval by its plenary next week. Giraffe numbers in Africa have fallen by 40% in the past 30 years, in what is being called a “silent extinction”.



Seriously looking at ending birthright citizenship: Trump

Right enshrined in 14th Amendment of US Constitution

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, AUGUST 22

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump has threatened to end what he called the “ridiculous” policy of birthright citizenship, which gives citizenship automatically to those born in America, as he sought ways to check illegal immigration.

“We’re looking at that very seriously, birthright citizenship. It’s frankly ridiculous,” Trump said Wednesday outside the White House while responding to a question on the birthright citizenship, which grants automatic citizenship to those born in the US.

His comments echoes his administration’s previous promise to unilaterally end the practice.

“Birthright citizenship where you have a baby on our land, you walk over the border, have a baby, congratulations, the baby is now a US citizen. We’re looking at it very, very seriously,” Trump said.

During his 2016 campaign, Trump had said that he would end birthright citizenship.

The 14th Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees birthright citizenship, and states: “All persons born or naturalised in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the



Trump in in Louisville, Kentucky, on Wednesday. AP

“Birthright citizenship where you have a baby on our land, you walk over the border, have a baby, congratulations, the baby is now a US citizen. We’re looking at it very, very seriously.”

— DONALD TRUMP
US PRESIDENT

United States and of the State wherein they reside.”

Indian-origin Presidential candidate Kamala Harris, a Democratic senator from California, mocked Trump’s comments on Twitter Wednesday, stating the President “should ‘seriously’ consider reading the Constitution.” **PTI**

RECENT MOVES TO CURB IMMIGRATION

■ The Trump administration recently announced a proposal to detain undocumented families indefinitely, scrapping a 20-day limit for holding children.

■ Trump had enacted and later reversed a “zero tolerance” policy that led to the separation of many migrant children from their parents.

■ The White House last week unveiled a rule that would make it more difficult for poor immigrants to obtain green cards.

UK’s Hong Kong mission worker held in China over prostitution: State media

REUTERS
BEIJING, AUGUST 22

AN EMPLOYEE of the British consulate in Hong Kong has been detained in China for involvement in prostitution, the state-backed *Global Times* newspaper said on Thursday, as Britain said it continued to urgently seek information.

China’s foreign ministry confirmed on Wednesday that the employee, Simon Cheng, had been detained in the border city of Shenzhen neighbouring Hong Kong.

In a report on its English-language website, the paper, published by the ruling Communist Party’s official *People’s Daily*, cited Shenzhen police as saying Cheng had been detained for 15 days for “solicitation of prostitution”.

Police in Shenzhen’s district of Luohu said Cheng had violated article 66 of the law on administrative penalties for public security, it added. The law provides for those who engage in prostitution, or who visit prostitutes, to be detained for up to 15 days, and they may also be fined 5,000 yuan (\$705.15). Shenzhen police referred *Reuters* to the *Global Times* report, saying it contained all the relevant details.

OFFICIALS MUST DECIDE WHETHER TO PAY RANSOMS TO GET THEIR COMPUTERS BACK WORKING AS 40 MUNICIPALITIES HIT THIS YEAR

Ransomware attacks cripple cities across America, testing their resolve

MANNY FERNANDEZ, DAVIDE SANGER & MARINA TRAHAN MARTINEZ
HOUSTON, AUGUST 22

AT THE public library in Wilmer, Texas, books were checked out not with the beeps of bar code readers but with the scratches of pen on notebook paper. Out on the street, police officers were literally writing tickets — by hand. When the entire computer network that keeps the small town’s bureaucracy afloat was recently hacked, Wilmer was thrown into the digital Dark Ages.

“It’s weird,” said Jennifer Dominguez, a library assistant. “We’ve gone old school.”

This has been the summer of crippling ransomware attacks. Wilmer — a town of almost 5,000 people just south of Dallas — is one of 22 cities across Texas that are simultaneously being held hostage for millions of dollars after a sophisticated hacker, perhaps a group of them, infiltrated their computer systems and encrypted their data. The attack instigated a statewide disaster-style response that includes the National Guard and a widening FBI inquiry.

More than 40 municipalities have been the victims of cyberattacks this year, from major cities such as Baltimore, Albany and Laredo, Texas, to smaller towns including Lake City, Florida. Lake

City is one of the few cities to have paid a ransom demand — about \$460,000 in Bitcoin, a cryptocurrency — because it thought reconstructing its systems would be even more costly.

In most ransomware cases, the identities and whereabouts of culprits are cloaked by clever digital diversions. Intelligence officials, using data collected by the National Security Agency and others in an effort to identify the sources of the hacking, say many have come from Eastern Europe, Iran and, in some cases, the United States. The majority have targeted small-town America, figuring that

sleepy, cash-strapped local governments are the least likely to have updated their cyberdefences



A handwritten sign posted near City Hall in Baltimore. Reuters

or backed up their data.

Beyond the disruptions at local city halls and public libraries, the attacks have serious conse-

quences, with recovery costing millions of dollars. And even when the information is again accessible and the networks re-