

## WEEKLY NEWS (December 24 – December 30)

### INTERNATIONAL

#### **Strike closes Eiffel Tower on builder's death anniversary**

The Eiffel Tower in Paris, one of the world's prime tourist attractions, was closed on Wednesday after staff went on strike, the tower's operator said. The strike on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of engineer Gustave Eiffel, who built the tower, was to protest about "the current way it is managed", the hard-left CGT union said in a statement. The tower's operator SETE was "headed for disaster", it said.

The CGT said management was running the Eiffel Tower according to a business model that was "too ambitious and unsustainable" and that it said was based on an inflated estimate of future visitor numbers, while underestimating construction costs. SETE apologised to visitors, advising anyone with electronic tickets for Wednesday "to check their email" for more information on their booking.

Tourists can still access the glass-enclosed esplanade beneath the tower, but access to the 300 metre landmark itself is closed until further notice, according to an Eiffel Tower spokesperson. The Eiffel Tower attracts nearly seven million visitors a year, around three-quarters of them foreigners, according to its website.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, numbers dropped sharply due to closures and travel restrictions but recovered to 5.9 million in 2022. The CGT said the tower's management was basing its future budget on 7.4 million annual visitors, although "this level has never been reached".

## WEEKLY NEWS (December 17 - December 23)

### INTERNATIONAL

#### **Ghana's Cocoa farms losing ground to illegal mining**

Ghana, the world's second biggest cocoa producer, faces a growing risk to its harvest—and blow to its crisis-hit economy—from illegal mining and smugglers, industry officials, farmers and activists warn.

Ivory Coast and Ghana, together with other West African neighbours, produce around two thirds of the world's supply of cocoa. Once seen as an economic star and beacon of political stability in the region, Ghana has been forced to take \$3-billion credit deal with the International Monetary Fund to shore up its finances, while its inflation stands at more than 26%.

Cocoa crops generate about \$2 billion in foreign exchange annually in a major contributor to government revenue and growth. But its production is falling victim to illegal mining, mostly for gold, a practice known locally as *galamsey*. It is a major problem in Ghana despite government efforts to crack down and arrest those involved who have included Chinese nationals.

“For the past five years, we've been experiencing serious destruction on cocoa farms as a result of activities of illegal miners,” Michael Kwarteng, director in charge of anti-illegal mining activities at Ghana Cocoa Board said. Despite an incentive package to help producers increase the price of a bag of cocoa, farmers accept lucrative deals to sell off land for unlawful mining. The harvest has fallen in recent years, impacted by illegal mining, experts say.

(H.21/12)

## **WEEKLY NEWS (December 10 - December 16)**

### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **Urgent need to control use of e-cigarettes, says WHO**

E-cigarettes as consumer products are not shown to be effective for quitting tobacco use at the population level. Instead, alarming evidence has emerged on adverse population health effects, the World Health Organization said on Thursday. It added there is an urgent need to control e-cigarettes to protect children, as well as non-smokers and minimise health harms to the population.

“Children are being recruited and trapped an early age to use e-cigarettes and may get hooked to nicotine.” WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghereyesus said in a statement, while urging countries to implement strict measures to prevent uptake to protect citizens, especially children and young people.

The WHO said that e-cigarettes have been allowed on the open market and aggressively marketed to young people. Thirty-four countries have banned the sale of e-cigarettes, 88 countries have no minimum age at which e-cigarettes can be bought and 74 countries have no regulations in place for these harmful products. In India, the possession of e-cigarettes and similar devices is violation of Prohibition of Electronic Cigarette Act, 2019, according to the Union Health Ministry.

Even brief exposure to e-cigarette content on social media can be associated with increased intention to use these products, as well as more positive attitudes towards e-cigarettes. Studies consistently show that young people who use e-cigarettes are almost three times more likely to use cigarettes later in life, the WHO said.

(H.15/12)

## **WEEKLY NEWS (December 03 –December 09)**

### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **U.S., allies in talks on naval task force in Red Sea after attacks from Houthi rebels**

The White House said on Monday that the U.S. may establish a naval task force to escort commercial ships in the Red Sea, a day after three vessels were struck by missiles fired by Iranian back Houthis in Yemen. National security adviser Jake Sullivan said the U.S. has been in active conversations with allies about setting up the escorts though nothing is finalised, describing it as a “natural” response to that sort of incident.

On Sunday, ballistic missiles fired by Yemen’s Houthi rebels struck three commercial ships, while a U.S. warship shot down three drones in self-defense during an hourslong assault, the U.S. military said. It marked an escalation in a series of maritime attacks in West Asia linked to the Israel-Hamas war.

“We are in talks with other countries about a maritime task force sorts involving the ships from partner nations alongside the United States in ensuring safe passage”, Mr. Sullivan told reporters. The Houthi attacks imperil traffic on one of the world’s most vital shipping lanes and with it global trade overall.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration says 8.8 million barrels of oil a day are shipped through the Red Sea and the narrow straits of the Bab al-Mandab within range of the Houthis, making it one of world trade’s most crucial chokepoints.

(H.6/12)

## **WEEKLY NEWS (November 26 – December 2)**

### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **U.S. to impose visa bans on Israeli extremist settlers**

The Biden administration has informed Israel that Washington will impose visa bans in the next few weeks on Israeli extremist settlers engaged in violence against Palestinian civilians in the occupied West Bank, a senior State Department official said. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his war Cabinet have let them know that the U.S. will take its own action against an undisclosed number of individuals. The West Bank, among the territories where Palestinians seek statehood, has experienced a surge of violence in recent months amid expanding Jewish settlements. The violence surged further after Israel hurtled into a new war in response to the Hamas attack. Asked for a response, Israeli government spokesman Eylon Levy said he had no comment but said that Israel firmly condemned attempts by individuals to take the law into their own hands.

The U.S. has expressed its concern over the rising violence in the West Bank saying it must stop. U.S. President Joe Biden, in a Washington Post Opinion piece threatened to take action against the perpetrators. “I have been emphatic with Israel’s leaders that the extremist violence against Palestinians in the West Bank must stop and that those committing the violence must be held accountable. The U.S. is prepared to take our own steps including issuing visa bans against extremists attacking civilians in the West Bank,” Mr. Biden wrote.

(H.02/12)

## WEEKLY NEWS (November 19 - November 25)

### INTERNATIONAL

#### **Afghan border trade resumes after Pakistan suspends visa rule**

Cross-border trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan was back to normal on Wednesday, officials in both countries said, after Islamabad suspended a new visa rule. Commercial traffic ground to a halt on Tuesday when Pakistan began requiring the crew of commercial vehicles to have passports and visas to enter, and Afghanistan responded by refusing to allow any trucks to pass.

“Yesterday, when Pakistan enforced its new rules, the Afghan side responded by suspending trade in protest”, a Pakistan customs official said. “Last night, officials from the Ministry of Commerce held a meeting with Afghan officials, reaching an agreement to grant another two-week extension for Afghan drivers”.

The official said Pakistan had already twice deferred implementing the new rule. Long fraught relations between Kabul and Islamabad have worsened since October, when Pakistan announced plans to deport hundreds of thousands of Afghan migrants it said were in the country illegally. So far about 3,40,000 Afghans have been deported returned voluntarily.

(H.25/11)

## **WEEKLY NEWS (November 12 -November 18)**

### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **Days before new Maldives President assumes office, Nasheed quits as Speaker**

The Maldives Speaker of Parliament, Mohamed Nasheed, resigned on Monday, days before the swearing-in of a new President following a fiercely contested election in the Indian Ocean archipelago. Parliamentary elections are not due until the second quarter of next year, meaning that President elect Mohamed Muizzu - who takes power on Friday after winning September polls will have to work with an Opposition controlled parliament.

Mr. Nasheed, who is also a former President, decided to quit from the number two position in the country to head off a no-confidence motion by ruling party legislators, a close aide told AFP. "He didn't want a no trust vote against him and decided to resign," the aide said. Mr. Nasheed, caught international attention for holding a 2009 Cabinet meeting underwater to highlight the threat of global warming, signing documents as officials wore scuba gear with coral reefs in the background. He was toppled in a military-backed coup in 2012, convicted on a terrorism charge and jailed for 13 years. He left the country on medical leave and sought refuge in Britain, returning to the Maldives after Presidents Ibrahim Mohammed Solih won the presidency in 2018 with his backing.

In 2019, Mr. Nasheed became Speaker after his Democratic Party (MDP) won parliamentary elections, but he quit the party in June over differences with Mr. Solih. Mr. Nasheed, a world-renowned climate campaigner, survived an assassination attempt in May 2021, spending five months in Germany for treatment after a bomb blast. There has been no claim of responsibility, but the MDP has blamed religious extremists in the tiny Islamic republic of 3,80,000 Sunni Muslims, which practices a liberal form of the religion and is known for its upmarket tourism.

(H.14/11)

## **WEEKLY NEWS (November 5 -November 11)**

### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **More Civilian flee North Gaza as safe passage opened**

Thousands of Palestinians streamed onto Gaza's only highway on Friday, fleeing the combat zone in the north after Israel announced a window for safe passage, as officials in the enclave said the Palestinian death toll surpassed 11,000 people. Amid an intensifying campaign of airstrikes and ground battles in Gaza City, the search for safety in the besieged enclave has grown increasingly desperate. Tens of thousands have walked south, where they face the prospect of ongoing bombardment and dire conditions. Others have crowded into and around hospitals, sleeping in operating rooms and wards.

Gaza medical officials accused Israel of striking near hospitals on Friday, though Israel said at least one was the result of a misfired Palestinian rocket. The Red Crescent called for medical facilities and workers in war-ravaged Gaza to be protected, warning the health system there had "reached a point of no return".

Early Friday, Israel struck the courtyard and the obstetrics department of Shifa Hospital, where tens of thousands of people are sheltering, according to Ashraf al-Qidra, spokes person at the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. A video at the scene recorded the sound of incoming fire waking people up in their makeshift shelters in the courtyard, followed by screams for an ambulance.

The Israeli army has alleged that Hamas hides in and under hospitals and that it has set up a command center under Shifa claims the militant group and hospital staff deny. The director of Shifa said Israel demanded the facility be evacuated, but he said there was nowhere for such a large number of patients to go. "Where are we going to evacuate them?" Director Mohammed Abu Selmia asked in an interview on the television network Al Jazeera. The Health Ministry later said one person had been killed at Shifa and several were wounded. Another strike near the Al-Nasr Medical Center, which includes two hospitals for children, killed two people, according to the ministry. In all, Gaza health officials said strikes were carried out near four hospitals overnight and early Friday. A senior Israeli security official said that initial findings indicated that one strike at Shifa was the result of a misfire by militants.

(I.E.11/11)



## WEEKLY NEWS (October 29-November 04)

### INTERNATIONAL

#### **Gaza now a 'graveyard' for thousands of children:UN**

The Gaza Strip has become graveyard for thousands of children, the UN said on Tuesday, as it feared the prospect of more dying of dehydration. The Gaza Health Ministry said the Israeli strikes have killed more than 8,500 people, mainly civilians. The UN children's agency UNICEF said there was a risk that the number of child deaths directly from bombardment could become eclipsed.

"Our gravest fears about the reported numbers of children killed becoming dozens, then hundreds, and ultimately thousands were realised in just a fortnight," UNICEF spokesman James Elder said in a statement. "The numbers are appalling; reportedly more than 3,450 children killed; staggeringly this rises significantly every day."

"Gaza has become a graveyard for thousands of children. It's a living hell for everyone else." He said the more than 1 million children living in the Gaza Strip were also suffering from a lack of clean water. "Child deaths - particularly infants - to dehydration are a growing threat," he said.

(H.01/11)

WEEKLY NEWS (October 22- October 28)

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **Hong Kong will have own national security law in 2024**

Hong Kong leader John Lee said on Wednesday the semi-autonomous city would create its own national security law in 2024, four years after Beijing imposed sweeping legislation aimed at silencing dissent. In a three-hour-plus policy address, the Beijing anointed leader, unveiled measures aimed at revitalising Hong Kong's COVID-ravaged economy and flagging population growth, while asserting the need to protect the Chinese city from "external forces." "Some countries are undermining China and the implementation of 'one country, two systems' in Hong Kong for their own benefits," he said, referring to the governance model agreed by Britain and China under which the city would keep some autonomy and freedoms following the 1997 handover. "We must guard against those seeking to provoke conflict... and remain alert to acts of 'soft resistance in different forms," Mr. Lee said, using a phrase that China and Hong kong officials have started deploying in speeches to denote anti-government actions.

(H.26/10)

WEEKLY NEWS (October 15- October 21)

INTERNATIONAL

**PAK., CHINA SIGN 20 DEALS DURING PM KAKAR'S VISIT**

Pakistan and China have inked 20 agreements and MoUs during the maiden visit of interim Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Ka-kar to enhance cooperation under the Beijing-backed Belt and Road Initiative, according to a joint statement issued on Friday.

During the visit, the two sides signed 20 agreements and MoUs, covering cooperation on the BRI, infrastructure, mining, industry, green and low-carbon development, health, space cooperation, digital economy, development cooperation and export of agricultural products to China, the joint statement said.

(H.21/10)

**INTERNATIONAL**

**2023 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences awarded to U.S. Economist Claudia Goldin for research on the workplace gender gap**

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has decided to award the 2023 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel to Claudia Goldin “for having advanced our understanding of women’s labour market outcomes.” Claudia Goldin, a professor at Harvard is only the third woman to ever be awarded the economics prize — with just two since it was first awarded in 1969 — Elinor Ostrom in 2009 and Esther Duflo in 2019.

The Nobel economics prize was awarded Monday to Harvard University professor Claudia Goldin for research that has advanced the understanding of the gender gap in the labour market. The announcement went a tiny step to closing the Nobel committee’s own gender gap: Goldin is just the third woman to win the prize out of 93 economics laureates.

(H. 09/10)

WEEKLY NEWS (October 1- October 7)

INTERNATIONAL

## **NORWAY'S JON FOSSE GETS NOBEL LIT PRIZE FOR INNOVATIVE PLAYS**

Norway's Jon Fosse, whose plays are among the most widely staged of any contemporary playwright in the world, won the Nobel Prize in literature on Thursday. Sometimes compared to Samuel Beckett, another Nobel winning playwright, Fosse's work is minimalistic, relying on simple language which delivers its message through rhythm, melody and silence. The Swedish Academy said the 64-year-old was honored for his "innovative plays and prose which give voice to the unsayable". Fosse presents everyday situations that are instantly recognisable in our own lives. His radical reduction of language and dramatic action expresses the most powerful human emotions of anxiety and powerlessness in the simplest terms," the jury said. "I am overwhelmed and grateful. I see this as an award to the literature that first and foremost aims to be literature, without other considerations," Fosse said. Speaking to Norwegian broadcaster NRK, he said he was "surprised but also not," after his name had been mentioned in Nobel speculation for several years.

Fosse's oeuvre, written in Nynorsk - a written form of Norwegian used by 10% of the population - spans a variety of genres and consists of plays, novels poetry collections, essays, children's books and translations. Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store hailed the win as "a great recognition of an outstanding body of work" that "moves people all over the world".

The chairman of the Nobel committees, Anders Olsson, told reporters Fosse had come to be regarded as an innovator through his "ability to evoke man's loss of orientation, and how this paradoxically can provide access to a deeper experience, close to divinity."

His major works include *Boathouse* (1989), which was well-received by critics and *Melancholy I and II* (1995-1996).

(N.I.E. 06/10)

## WEEKLY NEWS (September 24 – September 30)

### INTERNATIONAL

#### **Thai police raid top cop's home in 'Betflix' gambling probe**

Thai police swooped on the home of one of the kingdom's most high-profile officers on Monday as part of a series of raids targeting an illegal online gambling network dubbed "Betflix". Most forms of betting are illegal in Thailand, with authorities striving recently to shut down the illicit gambling sites, often foreign-owned, that have sprung up. A sprawling investigation across six provinces saw SWAT teams raid some 30 locations -- including Deputy National Police Chief Surachate Hakparn's central Bangkok house. Surachate, well known in Thailand for his regular appearances in the media giving updates on investigations, denied any involvement in the alleged gambling ring. "I'm not worried at all, because I'm not involved in this and I can answer any question," he told reporters outside his home while the raid was under way. Police Major General Trairong Phiwpan said the raids stemmed from a probe into a gambling website called "Betflix" and 12 subsidiary sites. Investigators have issued 23 arrest warrants, he said, including eight for police officers -- though Surachate said he was not among them. Officers conducting the raid said they were unaware whose house it was. Known by the nickname "Big Joke" -- for his seniority, not his sense of humour -- Surachate insisted the search warrant for his home was "irregular" and hinted at rivalries within the force. "Today I see this as nothing more than internal politics within the police," he said. The raid comes only a few days before the selection of a new police chief, with Surachate touted as a possible candidate. The long-serving officer -- nicknamed "the cat with nine lives" -- has been linked to powerful figures in the previous government. He was appointed by ex-deputy prime minister Prawit Wongsuwan as chief of the Immigration Bureau in September 2018. He disappeared in 2019 over unclear reasons, before then-prime minister Prayut Chan-o-cha made him a special adviser on strategy to police in 2021. Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, who took office last month, told reporters he was monitoring the situation. "There may be the need to set up an independent investigation committee -- because this is a big problem," he said. "It affects the morale and public impression towards the police." Thai police have long been dogged by allegations of endemic corruption.

(N.I.E.,25/09)