



Thousands protest in Athens after Greece's deadly train crash

Clashes erupted between police and a group of demonstrators in central Athens on Sunday on the fringes of a protest by thousands of students and railway workers over Greece's deadliest train crash in living memory. A small group of protesters hurled petrol bombs at police, who responded with tear gas and stun grenades. The protesters then disperses to nearby streets, Reuters reported. At least 57 people were

killed and dozens were injured on Tuesday when a passenger train with more than 350 people on board collided with a freight train on the same track in central Greece. After protests over the past three days across the country, some 10,000 students, railway workers and groups affiliated with leftist parties gathered in an Athens square on Sunday to express sympathy for the lives lost and to demand better safety stan-

dards on the rail network. "That crime won't be forgotten," protesters shouted as they released black balloons into the sky. A placard read: "Their policies cost human lives." The train, travelling from Athens to the northern city of Thessaloniki, was packed with university students returning after a long holiday weekend. The disaster has triggered an outpouring of anger, as well as a sharp focus on safety standards.

Railway workers, who also lost colleagues in the accident, have staged rotating walkouts since Wednesday to denounce cost-cutting and underinvestment in the rail infrastructure, a legacy of Greece's debilitating debt crisis from 2010 to 2018. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' government has blamed human error for the crash. However Mitsotakis said on Sunday that human error should not deflect from responsi-

bilities for a long-suffering railway network. "As prime minister, I owe everyone, but most of all the relatives of the victims, an apology," he wrote on Facebook. "Justice will very fast investigate the tragedy and determine liabilities." A station master in the nearby city of Larissa who was on duty at the time of the crash was charged this week with endangering lives and disrupting public transport.



Protesters shout at police while holding a banner reading "Murderers" during a demonstration in Athens on March 5, 2023, following a deadly train accident late on February 28. ● LOUISA GOULIAMAKI/AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Massive fire hits Rohingya camp



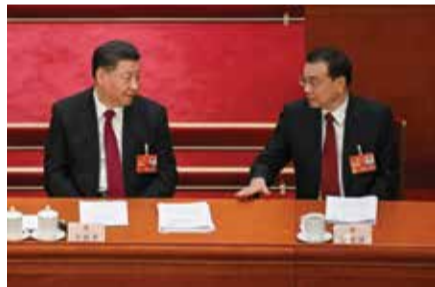
AP – A massive fire raced through a crammed refugee camp for Rohingya Muslims in southern Bangladesh on Sunday, leaving thousands homeless, a fire official and the United Nations said. No casualties were reported immediately at Balukhali camp in Cox's Bazar district, said Emdadul Haque, a fire service official.

North Korea: UN should urge halt to US-South drills



AFP – North Korea's Foreign Ministry called on the United Nations to urge a halt to joint military drills by Seoul and Washington, state media reported Sunday. The drills and rhetoric from the allies have pushed tensions to an "extremely dangerous level," Vice Foreign Minister Kim Son Gyong said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency. The statement came after officials from Seoul and Washington announced on Friday more than 10 days of large-scale military exercises from March 13 to 23.

China increases military spending in face of 'escalating' threats



China's President Xi Jinping (L) speaks with Premier Li Keqiang (R) during the opening session of the National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 5, 2023. ● NOEL CELIS/AFP

China said Sunday its military spending would rise at the fastest pace in four years, warning of "escalating" threats from abroad at a meeting of its rubber-stamp parliament that will hand Xi Jinping a third term as president. The increase in the world's second-largest defence budget came as Beijing announced an economic growth goal of around five percent for this year – one of its lowest in decades, AFP reported. The country's planned budgets for the year put defence spending at 1.55 trillion yuan (\$225 billion), a 7.2 percent rise and the quickest rate of increase since 2019. It officially rose 7.1 percent last year. Outgoing Premier Li Keqiang told delegates to the National People's Congress (NPC) that "external attempts to suppress and contain China are escalating." "The armed forces should intensify military training and preparedness across the board," he said as he presented the government's annual work report to thousands of amassed delegates in Beijing's Great Hall of the People. China's defence spending still pales in comparison with the United States, which has allotted over \$800 billion for its military this year.

Israelis protest judicial reforms for 9th week

Tens of thousands of Israelis demonstrated Saturday against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's contentious plan to overhaul the regime's legal system, as the cabinet pressed on with the proposed changes despite the mass opposition. The plans were proposed in January, weeks after Netanyahu's coalition, the most far-right cabinet in the regime's history, was sworn in. The overhauls have increasingly divided the Israeli community and given momentum to weekly protests every Saturday, according to AP. The debate stems from fears that the changes would weaken the Supreme Court, limit judges' powers, and threaten democratic institutions. Netanyahu and his allies say they will rein in an unelected judiciary. The central city of Tel Aviv saw the largest turnout in this week's protests, with smaller demonstrations in several locations. On Wednesday, Israeli police fired stun grenades and water cannons at demonstrators who blocked a Tel Aviv highway and protesters scuffled with police near the Israeli leader's home as weeks of protests turned violent for the first time.



Protesters clash with Israeli police during a demonstration against the cabinet's controversial justice reform bill in Tel Aviv on March 4, 2023. ● JACK GUEZ/AFP



Tunisians defy protest ban to demand release of president's critics

Hundreds of Tunisians rallied Sunday in defiance of a protest ban, demanding the release of more than 20 prominent figures opposed to the president who were arrested in recent weeks.

President Kais Saied sacked the government and froze parliament in a 2021 power grab and imposed sweeping changes to the political system of the sole democracy to have emerged from the

Arab Spring uprisings, according to AFP. More than 20 political figures have been arrested in the North African country in recent weeks, including members the main opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front (NSF) and its main component, the Ennahdha party. "Freedom for the detainees," chanted the demonstrators, most of them supporters of the NSF, with many waving Tunisian flags and pictures

of detainees, AFP journalists said. Denouncing Saied's power grab as a "coup", the protesters defied a ban on demonstrations imposed by Tunis authorities. Issam Chebbi, head of Al Jomhuri party, is among the Saied opponents who have been arrested in the crackdown launched in February. Other detainees include senior opposition figures Jawhar Ben Mbarek, busi-

nessman Kamel Eltaief, the head of Tunisia's most popular radio station Mosaïque FM, Nouredine Boutar, as well as trade union officials. Saied has accused those arrested of "terrorism" and causing recurrent food shortages as well as plotting against the state. The NSF had called for the demonstration, which came a day after more than 3,000 joined a Tunis rally organised by the powerful UGTT trade union.



People take part in a demonstration in Tunis on March 5, 2023, demanding the release of prominent figures opposed to the president who were arrested in recent weeks. ● FETHI BELAID/AFP

UK PM vows to end asylum claims from small boat arrivals

BBC – Anyone arriving in the UK on a small boat will be prevented from claiming asylum, under new legislation expected to be unveiled on Tuesday. PM Rishi Sunak, who has made "stopping the boats" one of his top priorities, told the Mail on Sunday: "Make no mistake, if you come here illegally, you will not be able to stay." A new "rights brake" could stop lawyers using the right to family life to stop deportations, the paper says.