



GENEVA (AFP) -- New use of landmines, including extensive deployment by Russia in Ukraine, drove a global rise of new casualties from the weapons last year, a monitor said Tuesday. According to the Landmine Monitor, 4,710 people were injured or killed by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) across 49 states and two other areas in 2022. Civilians -- half of them children -- accounted for 85 percent of those casualties, it said. That number of overall casualties was actually a bit lower than a year earlier, when 5,544 such casualties were recorded. But Loren Persi, a co-author of the annual report, noted a dramatic increase in the number of casualties linked exclusively to landmines, explosive devices intentionally placed above or underground that kill and wound people during and long after conflicts.

SEOUL (AFP) -- North Korea on Tuesday slammed a joint statement by G7 foreign ministers that criticized the country's nuclear program, arguing the grouping of rich democracies should be "dismantled immediately." Jo Chol Su, a high-ranking official at Pyongyang's foreign ministry, said he "resolutely" rejects and "most strongly" condemns the recent G7 statement, calling it "groundless." He said members of the G7, especially the United States, have "disgraceful records by doing considerable harm to international peace and security," and that the group "has lost the justification for its existence." The "G7, the remnant of the Cold War, should be dismantled immediately," Jo said, according to Pyongyang's state-run Korean Central News Agency. He accused the group of being a "peace strangler, confrontation maniac and nuclear war merchant." In a statement issued last week, the top diplomats of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain, the United States and the European Union reiterated their longstanding call for the "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula".

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia has signed a contract to supply its Igla hand-held anti-aircraft missile to India and allow production of the Igla there under license, Russian state news agency TASS said Tuesday. India is the world's largest arms importer and Russia remains its largest supplier. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia accounted for 45% of India's arms imports between 2018 and 2022, with France providing 29% and the United States 11%. Another Russian state news agency, RIA, quoted Mikheyev earlier as saying that "Rosoboronexport is working with Indian private and public enterprises to organize joint production of aviation weapons and integrate them into the existing aviation fleet in India". At the beginning of the year, India and Russia also started joint production of AK-203 Kalashnikov assault rifles.

BURLINGTON (AP) -- Two men were shot and killed Sunday night and a third was seriously injured early Monday in two separate, suspected drug-related shootings in Vermont's largest city of Burlington, officials said. The shootings happened on a busy night for police that first included a report of gunfire downtown and later an early morning arson fire in the vestibule of the police station, the chief and mayor said at a press briefing on Monday. At the same time, Vermont State Police are investigating a spate of homicides around Vermont in recent months, many of which they suspect are drug-related. In September, the Burlington City Council passed a resolution declaring the drug crisis its top public health and safety priority.

DEHRADUN, India (AFP) -- More than a hundred rescuers in northern India struggled for a third day on Tuesday to save workers trapped underground after the road tunnel they were building collapsed. Excavators have been removing debris since Sunday morning from the site in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand to create an escape tunnel for the 40 workers, who are all alive. "Our biggest breakthrough is that we have established contact and there is a supply of oxygen and food," Uttarakhand's top civil servant Abhishek Ruhela told AFP on Tuesday. "Whatever is necessary for their survival is being done." Oxygen was being pumped into the tunnel and small food items such as dry fruit were being provided to the workers, he added. The State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) said Tuesday rescuers had spoken to the trapped workers via radio. Ranjit Kumar Sinha, a senior disaster management official, told reporters at the site he was hopeful workers could be freed by Wednesday, adding that there was enough oxygen where they were trapped "for about five to six days".

BANGKOK, Thailand (AFP) -- Fighters from an ethnic minority group pressed their assault on security forces in Myanmar's Rakhine state for a second day Tuesday, a spokesman said, as an offensive against the military widens across the country. Arakan Army (AA) fighters seized an outpost of the border police at Chinkhali in Rakhine state on Tuesday morning, spokesman Khaing Thu Kha told AFP. The AA also attacked military outposts on two hills in Paletwa township in neighbouring Chin state at dawn on Tuesday, he said. In Paletwa the military had responded with airstrikes and heavy artillery fire and the fighting was ongoing and "intense," Khaing Thu Kha said. Local media also reported the clashes in Paletwa township and said two women had been killed in artillery firing. The AA has for years fought a war for the autonomy of the state's ethnic Rakhine population, and has a presence in neighboring Chin state.

Top U.S. Court Unveils Code of Ethics Amid Scandals



A view of the US Supreme Court on October 2, 2023, in Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court adopted its first code of ethics, in the face of sustained criticism over undisclosed trips and gifts from wealthy benefactors to some justices, but the code lacks a means of enforcement. The policy, agreed to by all nine justices, does not appear to impose any significant new requirements and leaves compliance entirely to each justice. Indeed, the justices said they have long adhered to ethics standards and suggested that criticism of the court over ethics was the product of misunderstanding, rather than any missteps by the justices. "The absence of a Code, however, has led in recent years to the misunderstanding that the Justices of this Court, unlike all other jurists in this country, regard themselves as unrestricted by any ethics rules," the justices wrote in an unsigned statement that accompanied the code. "To dispel this misunderstanding, we are issuing this Code, which largely represents a codification of principles that we have long regarded as governing our conduct."

The ethics issue has vexed the court for several months, over a series of stories questioning the ethical practices of the justices. Many of those stories focused on Justice Clarence Thomas and his failure to disclose travel, other hospitality and addi-

tional financial ties with wealthy conservative donors including Harlan Crow and the Koch brothers. But Justices Samuel Alito and Sonia Sotomayor also have been under scrutiny. Liberal critics of the court were not satisfied, with one group saying the code "reads a lot more like a friendly suggestion than a binding, enforceable guideline." Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., one of the loudest voices complaining about the court's ethical shortcomings, was among several leading Democrats who mixed praise for the court with a call to do more. "This is a long-overdue step by the justices, but a code of ethics is not binding unless there is a mechanism to investigate possible violations and enforce the rules. The honor system has not worked for members of the Roberts Court," Whitehouse said.

Public trust in and approval of the court is hovering near record lows, according to a Gallup Poll released just before the court's new term began on Oct. 2. As recently as last week, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the justices could quiet some of the criticism and a Democratic push to impose an ethics code on the court by putting in place their own policy. Durbin said Monday that the code appears to fall short of what is needed.

Weah Faces Serious Challenge as Liberians Vote in Runoff



Liberia's incumbent President George Weah casts his vote at a polling station in Monrovia on October 10, 2023, during the first round of the presidential vote.

MONROVIA (AFP) -- Liberians voted on Tuesday to decide whether to hand former football star George Weah a second term as president despite a controversial record, or to elect political veteran Joseph Boakai despite his age. The runoff is expected to be close between the rivals, who also faced off in 2017 when Weah won in the second round with more than 61 percent.

In the first round of voting on October 10, Weah, 57, and Boakai, 78, came roughly neck and neck on more than 43 percent, with the incumbent taking a 7,126-vote lead. This year's election is the first since the United Nations in 2018 ended its peacekeeping mission in Liberia, created after more than 250,000 people died in two civil wars between 1989 and 2003.

More than 2.4 million people are registered to vote. The incumbent is popular among young people but must defend a controversial record in office, while Boakai is an old hand who has held a multitude of positions in the public and private sectors.

The electoral commission has 15 days to publish the results but could do so sooner, one of its officials, Samuel Cole, said. Since the first-round results, the two

political camps have focused on securing the votes of supporters of the 18 candidates who did not make it through. Edward Appleton, who came third, has backed Boakai, as have two of the other top six candidates.

Weah -- who grew up in the Monrovia slums to become the only African to win football's most prestigious individual award, the Ballon d'Or -- is widely seen as approachable and peaceful. He was president when the Covid-19 pandemic hit at a time when Liberia was still recovering economically from back-to-back civil wars and the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic.

His detractors say he is disconnected from the realities of skyrocketing prices and shortages. More than a fifth of Liberians live on less than \$2.15 a day, according to the World Bank.

Boakai blames Weah for corruption, which is endemic in Liberia and has worsened on the incumbent's watch, according to Transparency International. The former vice president has forged alliances with local barons, including former warlord and senator Prince Johnson, who supported Weah six years ago. Clashes during the campaign left several dead and raised fears of post-election violence.

Germany: 1-Million-Shell Target for Ukraine Infeasible



Ukrainian troops work with artillery shells on a front line position near Bakhmut, Donetsk Oblast, on April 22, 2023.

tion -- "the biggest procurement in Europe at this very moment".

"We will try to do the maximum to deliver the shells to Ukraine because they need it," he said. "Look at Russia. They are producing today more than ever. They are getting shells from North Korea. Europe cannot say that Russia and North Korea can deliver and we cannot."

The EU's struggles to make good on promised deliveries comes as opposition in the United States Congress has thrown doubt on key ally Washington's ability to sustain supplies.

On the ground, fighting appears to have ground to a stalemate as a much-anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive has failed to win back much territory.

Brussels says that together with EU member states it has funneled military support worth 27 billion euros (\$29 billion) to Ukraine since February 2022.

Borrell in July proposed a new 20-billion-euro fund over the next four years to help cover arms deliveries to Ukraine.

But discussions over the EU initiative have stalled amid doubts from key member states.

Germany -- which last week said it would double its own funding for Ukraine to eight billion euros next year -- is reluctant to commit more money to the EU pot.

BRUSSELS (AFP) -- Germany's defense minister said on Tuesday the EU will not hit a one-year target of sending a million artillery shells to Ukraine, as the bloc struggles to secure arms supplies for Kyiv.

The European Union pledged last year to deliver the desperately needed ammunition to Ukraine by March 2024 to help Kyiv battle against Russia's invading forces.

So far, EU nations have only managed to provide 300,000 rounds from their existing stocks.

Countries are now placing joint orders for 155-millimetre shells but

there are doubts over the capacity of defense companies to churn out enough in time.

"Unfortunately, the cautionary voices are now right," German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said at a meeting with his EU counterparts in Brussels. "The one million will not be reached. We have to assume that."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said a major issue was that European defense firms were exporting about 40 percent of production to other countries.

Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur said his country had placed a 280-million-euro order for ammuni-

HRW: Japanese Women Prisoners Suffer Serious Abuses



A view of the US Supreme Court on October 2, 2023, in Washington, DC.

TOKYO (AFP) -- Handcuffs during pregnancy, separation from newborn babies, and insufficient care for elderly inmates are among the abuses suffered by women incarcerated in Japan, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday.

Female inmates are sometimes shackled during labor and immediately after birth, the international NGO alleged in a new report, based on interviews with nearly 60 formerly jailed women.

Japan's ministry of justice denied some of the claims, saying that restraints are "not used when imprisoned women are breastfeeding, holding, bathing, or changing the baby's diapers," according to the report.

According to HRW, new mothers also often have their babies taken away from them soon after birth.

"Many women imprisoned in Japan suffer serious human rights abuse and mistreatment," the rights group said.

Nearly 4,000 women were behind bars in Japan as of 2021, mostly over theft and drug-related offenses.

According to justice ministry data, only three out of 184 women who gave birth while incarcerated were granted access to their babies in prison between 2011 and 2017.

"Separation at birth can be traumatizing and harm the health of both the mother and infant and can interfere with breastfeeding and parent-child bonding," the NGO

said. While the law permits mothers to ask to keep their children with them for at least one year, prison authorities "rarely inform" women of that right, HRW said.

In Japan, pregnant prisoners are typically taken to a hospital to give birth, but they are generally handcuffed before entering and after exiting the delivery room, the justice ministry told HRW.

At one prison in Saga region, in southwestern Japan, inmates interviewed by HRW said that women were handcuffed even as they gave birth, contravening a 2014 government notice against the practice.

According to HRW, the justice ministry denied this allegation, saying that it had "found no record" of women being handcuffed inside delivery rooms after 2014.

HRW also said the prison system "does not cater for the needs of the increasing number of older people", warning of bullying by cellmates and guards frustrated with some prisoners' limited mobility.

Japan's prison population has aged rapidly in recent years, especially its female prisoners.

Government figures show 20 percent of women admitted to prison in 2021 were 65 or older, compared to 13 percent of men.

"Some older women repeatedly commit non-violent crimes such as shoplifting because of social isolation and loneliness," HRW said.

Lion Prowls Streets for Hours in Italy After Escaping Circus

ROME (AFP) -- A lion prowled the streets of an Italian seaside town for several hours after escaping from a local circus, prompting campaigners to call for Italy to ban wild animals in entertainment.

Alessandro Grando, the mayor of Ladispoli, near Rome, had told residents to stay at home while police and circus staff sought to catch the animal, which was eventually sedated and captured.

Videos later published in Italian media, apparently taken by locals and not authenticated by the Guardian, showed the adult lion walking through dark and deserted streets.

But Rony Vassallo, who is responsible for the animals in the Rony Roller Circus, said that while the thought of confronting a lion would make most people fearful, eight-year-old Kimba posed little danger.

"He met with people in an environment he wasn't used to ... and nothing happened. He didn't even for a second have the instinct to attack a person," he told AFP at the circus site. He said his fear had been "that someone could have harm the animal, out of fear, or excess enthusiasm".

In a Facebook post at about 10.30pm (2130 GMT), more than five hours after his message raising the alarm, Grando said the

lion had been "sedated and captured". "Now he will be taken in hand by the circus staff," he wrote, thanking emergency services and volunteers who helped during "these hours of great concern".

"I hope that this episode can stir some consciences, and that we can finally put an end to the exploitation of animals in circuses," the mayor added.

Anticipating residents' complaints, he earlier said he had not authorized the presence of a circus with lions in the town, but that he did not have the power to block it.

Vassallo said Kimba had been only lightly sedated and had woken up almost immediately, while examinations by vets had concluded he bore no ill-effects from his excursion.

But the handler, whose family runs the travelling circus, said they were all "very shaken and very tense" after the escape, which he said was not an accident. Vassallo said he had personally checked on the cage an hour before the lion went walkabout, and "everything was in order".

Kimba was born and raised in captivity, alongside his two brothers, Zeus and Ivan, and sister Maya. The circus has drawn the ire of animal rights campaigners, who say keeping such wild creatures is cruel.