



GERMANY



Germany's capital city, Berlin. The country has called for a ceasefire (a pause in the fighting) between Israel and Hamas

Hamas plot suspects arrested

Three members of Hamas have been arrested in Berlin over a possible plot to attack Jewish sites in Europe. One other member was arrested in the Netherlands. Hamas is the group that controls Gaza and is classed as a terrorist group in most European countries. The four men – two from Lebanon, one from Egypt and one from the Netherlands – were suspected to be looking for a store of weapons and are “closely linked” to Hamas’ military, German officials said. German Justice Minister Marco Buschmann said: “Attacks on Jews in Jewish institutions have increased in our country in recent weeks. We must therefore do everything we can to ensure that Jews in our country do not have to fear for their safety again.”

THE NETHERLANDS

“Don’t drink the sea!” kids told

Children in the Netherlands have been warned not to drink sea foam, after a study showed it contained lots of ‘forever chemicals’. Also known as PFAS, forever chemicals are found in items like clothing, pizza boxes and toilet paper. They’re often used to make things waterproof, but because their particles are resistant to water, grease and heat, they don’t break down in the environment or our bodies. Minister of Water Management Mark Harbers said: “It is sensible to have a shower after swimming, wash your hands before eating, and not to let children and pets swallow any sea foam.” PFAS have also been found on Belgian beaches.



CHINA



Starbucks has 6,806 stores in China

Keen beans! China is the coffee shop capital of the world

China has overtaken the USA as the country with the most branded coffee shops in the world. A wave of new café openings across the country during 2023 means there are 58% more of them now than there were 12 months ago. China’s total stands at 49,691 cafés to the USA’s 40,062. The World Coffee Portal has conducted the count for 20 years, and the USA had always topped the (coffee) table, until now. Chinese chains Cotti Coffee and Luckin Coffee have driven the country’s charge to the top – Luckin has opened more than 5,000 stores in China in the past year.



KENYA



“Welcome home!”

Kenya scraps visas for visitors

From 1 January, holidaymakers will no longer need a visa to visit Kenya. Visas are permits that allow foreigners to enter a country. In a speech to celebrate 60 years of independence from Britain, President William Ruto said: “It shall no longer be necessary for any person from any corner of the globe to carry the burden of applying for a visa to come to Kenya.” Kenya boasts wildlife safaris and beautiful beaches along the Indian Ocean, and tourism is a big boost for its economy. The president added: “Kenya has a simple message to humanity: Welcome home!”

THAILAND

MP jailed for insulting monarchy

A young Thai MP from the Move Forward party has been sentenced to six years in jail for insulting the country’s royals. Rukchanok Srinork, whose nickname is ‘Ice’, got into trouble because of two of her social media posts. In one, she questioned Thailand’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. The 28-year-old was released on bail on the condition she mustn’t criticise the monarchy again. Thailand’s strict ‘lèse-majesté’ law says anyone who “insults or threatens the king, the queen, the heir-apparent or the regent” will be jailed for three to 15 years for each charge against them. In 2017, a man was jailed for 70 years under the law – halved to 35 when he confessed.



‘Ice’ found herself on thin ice under Thai law

JAPAN



Locals have been urged not to eat the fish until the cause of death is known

A fishy mystery in Japan’s seas

Officials are baffled as to why thousands of tonnes of dead fish are washing up on Japanese shores. Earlier this month, 1,200 tonnes of sardines and mackerel were found floating on the water in Hokkaido, and last week, another 30-40 tonnes of sardines appeared in the town of Nakiri. One fisherman told Japanese newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun*: “I’ve never seen anything like this before.” Some experts have suggested the fish may have died from shock and exhaustion after being chased by larger fish trying to eat them, but investigations are ongoing.