

INTERNATIONAL

Native American students miss school at higher rates

Years after COVID-19 disrupted American schools, nearly every State is still struggling with attendance. But attendance has been worse for Native American students—a disparity that existed before the pandemic and has since grown, data show.

Out of 34 States with data available for the 2022-2023 school year, half had absenteeism rates for Native American and Alaska Native students that were at least 9 percentage points higher than the State average.

Many schools serving Native students have been working to strengthen connections with families, who often struggle with higher rates of illness and poverty. Schools also must navigate distrust dating back to the U.S. government's campaign to break up Native American culture, language, and identity by forcing children into abusive boarding schools.

In three states—Alaska, Nebraska, and South Dakota—the majority of Native American and Alaska Native students were chronically absent. In Arizona, chronic absenteeism for Native students rose to 45% in 2022-2023 from 22% in 2018-2019.

Students miss school for reasons ranging from anxiety to unstable living conditions, said Jason Jones, a cultural success coach at San Carlos High School and an enrolled member of the San Carlos Apache tribe.

INTERNATIONAL

Cultural experts ask UN to shield war-torn Lebanon's heritage

Hundreds of cultural professionals, including archaeologists and academics, called on the United Nations to safeguard war-torn Lebanon's heritage in a petition published Sunday ahead of a crucial UNESCO meeting.

Several Israeli strikes in recent weeks on Baal-bek in the east and Tyre in the south-both strongholds of the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah-hit close to ancient Roman ruins designated as UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The petition, signed by 300 prominent cultural figures, was sent to UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay a day before a special session in Paris to consider listing Lebanese cultural sites under "enhanced protection". It urges UNESCO to protect Baalbek and other heritage sites by establishing "no-target zones" around them, deploying international observers and enforcing measures from the 1954 Hague Convention on cultural heritage in conflict.

"Lebanon's cultural heritage at large is being endangered by recurrent assaults on ancient cities such as Baalbek, Tyre and Anjar, all UNESCO world heritage sites, as well as on other historic landmarks," says the petition. It calls on influential states to push for an end to military action that causes destruction of damage to sites, as well as adding protections or introducing sanctions.

Change Lebanon, the charity behind the petition, said signatories included museum curators, academics, archaeologists and writers in Britain, France, Italy and the United States.

Hezbollah and Israel have been at war since late September.

(H.,18/11)

INTERNATIONAL

Nile nations agree on water-sharing without Egypt's nod

A regional partnership of 10 countries said an agreement on the equitable use of water resources from the Nile River basin has come into force despite the notable opposition of Egypt.

The legal status of the "cooperative framework" was formally confirmed by the African Union after South Sudan joined the treaty, the Nile Basin Initiative said in a statement on Sunday.

Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania have ratified the accord. Egypt and Sudan declined to sign, while Congo abstained. Kenya has not yet deposited its ratification documents with the African Union.

The accord, which came into force on Sunday, "is a testament to our collective determination to harness the Nile River for the benefit of all, ensuring its equitable and sustainable use for generations to come," the Nile Basin Initiative said in its statement. "This is a moment to congratulate the governments and people of the Nile riparian countries, and all partners and stakeholders, for their patience, resolve, and dedication to this cause."

The lack of ratification by Egypt and Sudan—desert nations that have raised concern over any attempts to diminish their shares of Nile water—means the accord will prove controversial.

Tensions in the region have increased, stemming in part from Ethiopia's construction of a \$4 billion dam on the Blue Nile, a key tributary of the Nile River. Egypt fears the dam will have a devastating effect on water and irrigation supplies downstream unless Ethiopia takes its needs into account.

(H.,15/10)

INTERNATIONAL

Melting glaciers pose major threat to Central Asia

Near a wooden hut high up in the Kyrgyz mountains, scientist Gulbara Omorova walked to a pile of grey rocks, reminiscing how the same spot was a glacier just a few years ago. At an altitude of 4,000 metres, the 35 year old researcher is surrounded by the giant peaks of the towering Tian Shan range that also stretches into China, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The area is home to thousands of glaciers that are melting at an alarming rate in Central Asia, already hard-hit by climate change. A glaciologist, Ms. Omarova is recording that process-worried about the future. She hiked six hours to get to the modest triangular-shaped hut that serves as a science station-almost up in the clouds. "Eight to 10 years ago you could see the glacier with snow," Ms. Omorova said. "But in the last three-to-four years, it has disappeared completely. There is no snow, no glacier," she said.

The effects of a warming planet have been particularly visible in Central Asia, which has seen a wave of extreme weather disasters. The melting of thousands of glaciers is a major threat to people in the landlocked region that already suffers from a shortage of water.

Acting as water towers, glaciers are crucial to the region's food security and vital freshwater reserves are now dwindling fast. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have stepped up efforts to draw attention to a looming catastrophe. Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov warned last year that forecasts show Central Asian glaciers "will halve by 2050 and disappear completely by 2100".

(H.,17/09)

INTERNATIONAL

China opens investigation into EU dairy exports as trade tensions flare

European milk and cheese producers have become the latest target in a simmering trade war with China.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry said on Wednesday that it would launch an investigation into subsidies given by the European Union and EU member countries for dairy products that could lead to tariffs on their export to China.

The announcement came one day after the EU released a draft decision to finalize tariffs on electric vehicles made in China, in follow-up to provisional tariffs announced last month. The tariffs have been denounced by the Chinese government and automakers and threaten to set back the industry's efforts to go global.

The dairy investigation will cover a range of products including fresh and processed cheese, blue cheese and milk and cream with a fat content of more than 10%. It will look at subsidies under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy as well as those given by eight European Union countries including Italy, Finland and Croatia.

China previously opened investigations into European brandy and pork exports at various stages of the EU investigation into Chinese subsidies for electric vehicles. The tit-for-tat investigations have raised fears that a full-blown trade war could be gradually emerging.

(H.,22/08)

INTERNATIONAL

Scientists have confirmed a cave on the moon

Scientists have confirmed a cave on the moon, not far from where Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed 55 years ago, and suspect there are hundreds more that could house future astronauts. An Italian led team reported Monday that there's evidence for a sizeable cave accessible from the deepest known pit on the moon. It's located at the Sea of Tranquility, just 400 km from Apollo 11's landing site. The pit, like the more than 200 others discovered up there, was created by the collapse of a lava tube.

Researchers analyzed radar measurements by NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, and compared the results with lava tubes on Earth. Their findings appeared in the journal Nature Astronomy. The radar data reveals only the initial part of the underground cavity, according to the scientists. They estimate it's at least 130 feet (40 meters) wide and tens of yards (meters) long, probably more.

"Lunar caves have remained a mystery for over 50 years. So it was exciting to be able to finally prove the existence" of one, Leonardo Carrer and Lorenzo Bruzzone of the University of Trento, wrote in an email.

Most of the pits seem to be located in the moon's ancient lava plains, according to the scientists. There also could be some at the moon's south pole. The findings suggest there could be hundreds of pits on the moon and thousands of lava tubes. Such places could serve as a natural shelter for astronauts, protecting them from cosmic rays and solar radiation as well as from micrometeorite strikes.

(H.,16/7)

INTERNATIONAL

Russia, N. Korea sign defence pact, vow to assist each other if attacked

Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on Wednesday signed a new partnership that includes a vow of mutual aid if either country faces "aggression," in a pact that came as both face escalating stand offs with the West.

Details of the deal were not immediately clear, but it could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War. Both leaders described it as a major upgrade of their relations, covering security, trade, investment and cultural and humanitarian ties.

The two met as Mr. Putin visited North Korea for the first time in 24 years. The summit came as the U.S. and its allies express growing concerns over a possible arms arrangement in which the country provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its war in Ukraine in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile program.

Mr. Kim said the two countries had a "fiery friendship," and that the deal was the "strongest ever treaty" between them, putting the relationship at the level of an alliance. He vowed full support for Russia's war in Ukraine.

Mr. Putin said that it was a "breakthrough document" reflecting shared desire to move relations to a higher level. North Korea and the former Soviet Union signed a treaty in 1961, which experts say necessitated Moscow's military intervention if the North came under an attack. The deal was discarded after the collapse of the USSR, replaced by a pact in 2000 that offered weaker security assurances. Putin's foreign affairs adviser said the leaders exchanged gifts after the talks. In Washington, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Mr. Putin's visit to North Korea illustrates how Russia tries, "in desperation, to strengthen relations with countries that can provide it with what it needs to continue the war of aggression that it started against Ukraine."

INTERNATIONAL

Nigeria changes its national anthem, angering citizens irked over reforms

Nigeria's President has suddenly changed the national anthem, angering residents who questioned his priorities as the country grapples with its worst economic crisis in a generation.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu said the decision to bring back an old version of the song which begins "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" was a tribute to the nation's diversity, "representing all people and how we pledge together to be brothers and sisters". But the move has frustrated Nigerians struggling to make a living after Tinubu brought in reforms last year that have had a devastating effect on economy.

Notmynationalanthem has been trending on social media. Mr. Tinubu signed the National Anthem Bill into law at the Presidential Villa on Wednesday as he marked his first anniversary of taking office.

(H.,31/05)

INTERNATIONAL

Notre-Dame rises from the ashes five years after fire

Five years after being ravaged by fire, Notre-Dame Cathedral has returned to its former splendour months ahead of its planned reopening, participants in a recent visit to the monument said.

The fire at the UNESCO listed cathedral, which used to welcome 12 million visitors a year, shocked the world on April 15, 2019. But now, the interior of the cathedral is at its most luminous in living memory, visitors said.

"It is wonderful to see these colours that had completely disappeared," said Guillaume Normand, vice rector of Notre-Dame, as he inspected the completely restored chapel. "Stunning," he said.

When the public returns to Notre-Dame in December they will get an "unequalled perception of its dimension", added the cathedral's rector, Olivier Ribadeau Dumas. He said he was "humbled" in the face of "those who created, preserved or saved it, and those who are now restoring it". Ongoing work is on track to meet the December deadline for re-opening, the head of the reconstruction said last month.

The monument already had a key moment in February when scaffolding came off around its spire, which authorities say will be fully visible by the time the Paris Summer Olympics kick off in July. The spire has been covered in lead, a material that has caused much debate because of its potential toxicity.

Initially, President Emmanuel Macron promised the building would be fully restored by the time the Olympics open, but the date was pushed back after restoration work hit several snags.

INTERNATIONAL

Hong Kong passes new national security law

Hong Kong lawmakers unanimously approved a new national security law on Tuesday that grants the government more power to quash dissent, widely seen as the latest step in a sweeping political crack-down that was triggered by pro democracy protests in 2019.

The legislature passed the Safeguarding National Security Bill during a special session that lasted on Tuesday. It comes on top of a similar law imposed by Beijing four years ago, which has already largely silenced opposition voices in the financial hub.

Hong Kong's Legislative Council, which is packed with Beijing loyalists following an electoral over haul, rushed the law through to approval. After the vote, Hong Kong leader John Lee said that the law would take effect on Saturday.

The new law threatens stringent penalties for a wide range of actions authorities call threats to national security, with the most severe including treason and insurrection punishable by life imprisonment. Lesser offences, including the possession of seditious publications, could also lead to several years in jail. Some provisions allow criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world.

(H.,20/03)

INTERNATIONAL

Brazil's G-20 presidency kicks off in Rio with ministers meet

Foreign ministers of the Group of 20 nations were gathering on Wednesday in Rio de Janeiro to discuss poverty, climate change and heightened global tensions as Brazil takes on the annual presidency of the bloc.

One of Brazil's key proposals, set by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, is a reform of global governance institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and multilateral banks, where he wants to push for stronger representation of developing nations.

Brazil's Ambassador to the bloc, Mauricio Lyrio, said at a news conference on Tuesday that structural reforms of international institutions are urgent because of a proliferation of conflicts around the world-not just in Ukraine and Gaza, but in a total of 183 locations, according to one study, he said.

After years of diplomatic isolation under former President Jair Bolsonaro, Mr. Lula has sought to reinsert Brazil on the centre stage of global diplomacy since returning to power in January of 2023.

Lucas Pereira Rezende, a political scientist at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, said Mr. Lula was especially well-suited for the role, recalling that during his earlier terms as President from 2003 to 2010 he was once called "the most popular politician on Earth" by then U.S. President Barack Obama.

(H.,22/02)

INTERNATIONAL

Taliban enforcing restrictions on single and unaccompanied Afghan women: UN

The Taliban are restricting Afghan women's access to work, travel and health care if they are unmarried or do not have a male guardian, according to a UN report published on Monday. In one incident, officials from the Vice and Virtue Ministry advised a woman to get married if she wanted to keep her job at a healthcare facility, saying it was inappropriate for an unwed woman to work, the report said.

The Taliban have barred women from most areas of public life and stopped girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade as part of harsh measures they imposed after taking power in 2021, despite initially promising more moderate rule. They have also shut down beauty parlours and started enforcing a dress code, arresting women who do not comply with their interpretation of hijab, or Islamic headscarf. In May 2022, the Taliban issued a decree calling for women to only show their eyes and recommending they wear the head-to-toe burqa.

In its latest quarterly report, covering October to December last year, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said the Taliban are cracking down on Afghan women who are single or do not have a male guardian, or mahram, accompanying them.

Unsaid rule

There are no official laws about male guardianship in Afghanistan, but the Taliban have said women cannot move around or travel a certain distance without a man who is related to her by blood or marriage. Three female health care workers were detained last October because they were going to work without a mahram. They were released after their families signed a written guarantee that they would not repeat the act, the report said.

In Paktia province, the Vice and Virtue Ministry has stopped women without mahrams from accessing health facilities since December. It visits health facilities in the province to ensure compliance. The ministry, which serves as the Taliban's morality police, is also enforcing hijab and mahram requirements when women visit public places, offices and education institutes through checkpoints and inspections. In December, in Kandahar province, ministry officials visited a bus terminal to ensure women were not travelling long distances without mahrams and instructed bus drivers not to permit women to board without one, the UN said.