

Labor's gambling betrayal

Peter Farmer

More than a thousand days after the late Labor MP Peta Murphy's report on gambling reform came out, Labor has finally put up legislation. Labor's response to the report and its recommendations is a betrayal of its promises and of working people.

The legislation cuts down slightly on gambling advertising, but leaves punters exposed to regular ads. There will be a maximum of three gambling ads per hour on TV up to 8.30 pm. After then, it's open slather, so children who stay up after 8.30 pm will be subjected to the same torrent of gambling ads they sit through now.

Online, where children and problem gamblers are targeted on social media and in online games, the onslaught will continue. Albanese's legislation, passed with the cooperation of the Liberal/National Coalition is far weaker than recommended by Murphy. In fact, it's weaker than former Coalition leader Peter Dutton's plan.

THE STAKES

Australia's problem with gambling is not a small one. Gambling is a real problem in Australia, costing Australians \$35 billion a year. Every year, gambling causes huge damage to families. The harm includes suicides, family violence, and crime, as out of control gamblers steal from families and businesses to fund their addiction. Australians lose more to gambling than any other country does.

What's more, the problem is getting worse. Australian working class people have always liked

a bet, but they are subjected to a tsunami of gambling advertising and inducements that their parents and grandparents didn't have. 40% of gambling profits come from problem gambling (gambling that causes significant harm), so the gambling companies and the media they advertise with are focused on keeping that money coming in.

Murphy recommended that the government treat gambling as a public health issue. Given the harm gambling addiction causes, that's a good approach.

For Albanese, the issue is getting away with as little regulation as possible, so he can say he's doing something and keep donors happy. He tries to protect gambling advertising revenue at all costs. His priority has been to protect gambling advertising revenue and keep big donors happy.

INDUCEMENTS

Gambling outlets don't just wait for people to develop an interest in having a punt. They offer a series of inducements to get the serious gamblers in and keep them in – free bets, better odds, more credit, and allegedly escorts and drugs for some of the high stakes punters. Tabcorp and Sportsbet, two of the major companies involved, have denied this. Tim Costello of the Alliance for Gambling Reform says he's received numerous accounts of the practice.

Murphy's committee recommended an outright ban on inducements. Albanese has watered it down to a 14-day wait before the inducements kick in. It's hard to see what difference that will make.

The committee also recommended a comprehensive ban on



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all forms of advertising. That's not happening. Instead the government is going to – eventually – set up an 'opt-in ban,' whereby people who don't want online gambling ads can sign up not to see them. When it finally becomes available, the opt-in ban will be used by people who have the time to sign up. It will be good for motivated problem gamblers who have already kicked the habit and want to stay that way. It will have no effect on the future suckers of all ages the industry wants to cultivate.

The government is deeply compromised on this legislation. Communications Minister Michelle

Rowland a total of \$19,000 from Sportsbet in gifts and donations in 2023. She later said she'd stop receiving gambling largesse, but no problem, the message had been sent. Gambling companies and their lobbying groups donate millions of dollars to both major parties.

The legislation was a bipartisan stitch-up. Having criticised the government on gambling reform for some time, the Coalition fell into line. Labor celebrated their supposedly mature deal-making.

The exception was the Greens, who held out for meaningful reform. Rather than negotiating and

improving his legislation, Albanese went to the Coalition.

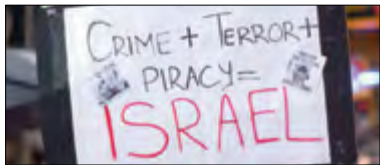
GREENS

The Greens have called a spade a spade, with leader Larissa Waters saying that the Prime Minister "has handed Australian screens over to predatory gambling companies." Waters called the deal with the Liberal party "cowardly" and added that Albanese had chosen "to protect his party's gambling donations rather than delivering evidence-based policy that protects people."

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The Verdict

When the Israeli 'Defence' Force (IDF) investigated itself over the murder of Australian aid worker Zomi Frankcom, the result was never in doubt. Israel's chief military prosecutor found "no reasonable suspicion of criminal misconduct." They announced the verdict on World Humanitarian Day. The verdict would have been a disgrace on any day.

There has been a show of outrage here. Prime Minister Albanese called the verdict "an outrage" and said he had raised the issue with Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He even promised "further steps" after talking with Frankcom's family. Penny Wong called the decision "insulting and hurtful to Zomi's loved ones, to humanitarians, and to Australians."

Foreign Minister Penny Wong called in Israel's ambassador and supposedly expressed outrage about the decision. Predictably, he said it was the aid convoy's fault. Wong also launched a humanitarian award in Frankcom's name.

Problem solved – if you're Albanese, Wong, or the Israeli government. All done, barring those mysterious further steps the Prime Minister talked about.

Here's what they could have done. Firstly, expel the Israeli ambassador. Wong says she's not going to do that because doing that would limit Australia's ability to engage with the Israeli government. Australia engaging with Netanyahu didn't help Zomi Frankcom, or the six other aid workers who were killed with her.

If someone has murdered an Australian citizen, the least this country could do is stop paying and arming the perpetrator. Australia could cancel its contracts with Israeli military contractor Elbit Systems. Albanese could take Australia out of the weapons chain that produces explosive material and vital parts for F-35 fighter-bombers that the IDF uses to wage war on Gaza and Lebanon.

If he really wanted to show disapproval, Albanese could stop the information from Pine Gap helping the Israeli air force. He's not going to do that, because the approval of the US is more important than any number of Australian lives. Going full steam with AUKUS has shown us where Albanese's priorities lie.

The government could stop Australians fighting for the IDF. It's hard to get exact figures on this, because of what Greens Senator David Shoebridge calls the government's 'head in the sand' approach, but one estimate is that around 1,000 people. A crackdown on those fighters would be a good thing.

Those are the things Wong and Albanese would do if they really cared about the outrage of Israel killing an Australian aid worker – not to mention the more than 70,000 civilians Israel has killed in the most recent campaign against Gaza, and the civilians in the West Bank.

Wong and Albanese are not going to do any of those things because what they really care about is keeping the US and the Israel lobby here on board. We can vote for whoever we like in this glorious democracy, but we're still going to wind up with a government that puts the US and Israel ahead of Australian lives.

Defenders of Israel sometimes plead that Australia is a long way away and Israel's assault on the Palestinian people is nothing to do with us. That's never been true. Australia's direct complicity in the genocide and the murder of Frankcom makes it clear that this has a lot to do with us.

Labor's gambling betrayal

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Greens communications spokesperson Sarah Hanson-Young said that Labor has proven itself to be captured by the gambling industry.

Hanson-Young said that Labor has "turned a straightforward reform into a dog's breakfast of exemptions, carve-outs and red tape. That is not an accident; it's how you protect the gambling industry from real accountability."

Labor's feeble response to a serious problem affects everyone. Relatives and coworkers pay in harm from social problems like family violence or embezzlement. On average, a suicide affects six people besides the victim. There's also the sheer amount of money that's lost. \$35 billion a year is money that could be used for better things – food, education, housing.

STATE CAPTURE

Gambling has always been around. What has not always been with us is the tsunami of gambling-related advertising that Australians face when we watch a sporting event, a TV show, or when we go online.

We don't have to have gambling in its current form. Victoria didn't have poker machines or a casino until the early 1990s. WA still doesn't have poker machines outside its casino. Both states get along fine.

People used to be able to watch

sport without being pestered with advertising inviting them to gamble on how many goals a team or player got. They had bets with workmates or they just enjoyed the sport.

Industries that are vulnerable to regulation are very motivated to engage in 'state capture' – influencing the government that could abolish it. The gambling industry knows that it could be legislated out of existence at any time.

That's why the major parties get millions of dollars each in donations. That's almost certainly why Albanese has been softer on gambling regulation than Peter Dutton promised to be before the last federal election.

FURPHY

One cartoon on this topic said that the Murphy report had turned into 'the furphy report.' They weren't wrong. Albanese has tried to muddy the waters on this issue. When he was asked why his legislation was so much weaker than recommended by a committee led by his own party and why he was going to leave children exposed to gambling advertising, 'Albo' implied that he was standing up to people who want to ban all gambling.

Nobody intends to ban gambling completely. Certainly Peta Murphy didn't. If all 31 recommendations were implemented, people would still be free to have a work footy sweep, bet on something with a mate, or even use one of the big betting agencies.

What Murphy wanted to do was to treat gambling as a serious public health issue – which it is. Her committee recommended measures that would help problem gamblers and make sure that there would be far fewer problem gamblers in future.

LABOR FAILURE

The Greens' Hanson-Young says that Labor and the Coalition have chosen to put the profits of gambling companies ahead of the interests of the community, adding that "it's not hard to see why when the gambling industry has spent millions giving inducements in the form of political donations to both the Labor and the Liberal parties."

Labor's betrayal of working Australians on this issue should come as no surprise. Australia has a parliament set up to deliver governments whose first priority is keeping the big end of town happy. The gambling and media industries have been Albanese's priority when it comes to gambling regulation. As with other issues, 'Albo' keeps the 'big end of town' happy.

Unfortunately for Labor, working people have other choices at elections, and other choices politically. Don't forget this betrayal next election time. If you're tired of a system that delivers betrayals like this regularly, consider supporting or joining the Communist Party of Australia. ★

Quote of the Week

"To me, it would be crazy not to tap into that experience in that lifetime of learning about the political system."

Former Defence Minister Christopher Pyne explaining why there's nothing wrong with him going straight from being Defence Minister to running a lobbying firm that is "number one in defence."

Survey Time! Prizes!

So that we know more about what the *Guardian's* readers think, we have made a survey. You can access it three ways:

1. Through this link <https://shorturl.at/kKVj4>
2. With the QR code
3. If you'd rather do a survey on paper, please email info@cpa.org.au or call 0424 638 601 and we'll mail one out

Anyone who does the survey and provides contact details will go in a draw for either some Cuban coffee beans or a \$50 shopping voucher.



Flanagan denounces 'new McCarthyism'

Richard Flanagan, described by the *Washington Post* as one of Australia's "greatest living novelists", has given a speech at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas. Here are some excerpts:

The Israel lobby is not the same thing as the Australian Jewish people nor is it composed solely of Jews – ask Chris Minns – while some of Australia's leading Jewish figures – the likes of Louise Adler, Sarah Schwarz, Antony Lowenstein, and David Lese – have spoken out against the Israel lobby and tried to warn their fellow Australians just what is at stake.

There is nothing unusual or necessarily wrong about a lobby group – no doubt the porn industry has one, and Russia has one and so too the United Arab Emirates. But the porn industry is not seeking to limit our right to protest. And neither Russia nor the UAE are seeking to stifle our freedom of speech and threatening to pervert our democracy.

But these things are just what are being proposed for Australia by the Special Envoy for Antisemitism, Jillian Segal, and her supporters in the staunchly pro-Israel organisations, the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, the Zionist Federation of Australia, and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. And these things are happening with the support of a cowed Albanese government, a government with all the spine of a liquorice stick.

The gutting of University of Queensland Press is another example of the way the IHRA definition of antisemitism can cause great damage. Because University of Queensland had signed up to the IHRA definition, its subsidiary UQP, one of Australia's most storied and celebrated literary publishers, was made to pulp a children's book that had been illustrated by a man who had written an online essay about Israel.

The essay was stupid and offensive. But, on the other hand, it had nothing to do with his children's book illustrations. In consequence of the book's pulping, many of UQP's celebrated list of writers left, including its most distinguished Indigenous writers. In this way a once proud publishing house, an important contributor to Australian culture, was laid waste.

Australians were, last time I looked, still allowed to say stupid and offensive things if

they are within the law. We wouldn't have the Murdoch press if it were otherwise. Tony Abbott, for example, has said more than his fair share of stupid and offensive things from far loftier platforms than an obscure website, including when as prime minister he said of the Sri Lankan government's murderous behaviour at the time of the Sri Lankan civil war, "We accept that sometimes in difficult circumstances, difficult things happen."

Difficult things like rape, torture and massacring tens of thousands of civilians. Yet last year our ex-prime minister published a history of Australia with Harper Collins. I hear no calls for Tony Abbott's book to be pulped, and nor would I call for such a thing, nor the gutting of a major publisher.

We know that many events presented and tallied as evidence of antisemitism after 7 October were rather acts of legitimate protest by Australians about the horror of the emerging genocide in Gaza, culminating in the march for Palestine across the Sydney Harbour Bridge which was dismissed as antisemitic, the 300,000 who took part compared to Nazi-era Germans by Australian Israel advocate Shane Shmuel and condemned by leading Israel lobby advocates like Alex Rychin, co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

The IHRA definition conflates criticism of Israel and criticism of Zionism with antisemitism. While it admits to the reality that not all criticism of either is antisemitic, the various utterances and publications of the Special Envoy make clear that almost any will be seen as such by her, and it is she who will act as the final arbiter of what will and won't be defined as antisemitism.

Earlier this year, her office released their *Handbook of Antisemitism* – an official guide for schools, universities, workplaces, government agencies, and community organisations. In places, the handbook reads not so much a guide to antisemitism as a manual of contemporary Zionist belief. One has to wonder why the Australian government would agree to the imposition of a foreign state's political ideology on every aspect of Australian life. ✖



Protest against Israel's Gaza blockade and attack on flotilla – Naarm/Melbourne, June 2010. Photo: John Englart – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Statement from CPA SA State Committee on fascist attack against the Semaphore Workers Club



Please donate to the GoFundMe

Recently anonymous fascist thugs broke into the Semaphore Workers Club (SWC) and damaged the building, stole irreplaceable artwork and vandalised the heritage-listed pool tables.

This is not the first time we have been targeted and we know it will not be the last.

The Semaphore Workers Club, alongside its sister venue, the Royal Park Doghouse and Fidel's are two examples of the very few existing bastions of truly working class infrastructure that are run by and for the working class. These venues must be protected at all costs.

The CPA recognises that as the material conditions deteriorate

due to the ongoing and predictable contradictions within the capitalist system, the ruling class, unable to maintain the status quo resorts to fascist tactics to suppress working class power.

Fascism has always and will always be a tool of the ruling class.

Cowardly acts like these by a despicable group of fascist thugs acting in the interests of the ruling class demonstrates to people that the CPA is the enemy of their enemy. The ideas of scientific socialism are building momentum and remain a tried-and-true method of building working class power on the road to a socialist future.

The outpouring of support from trade unions, locals, regulars to the club, supporters and working class people across not only South Australia but across the whole of Australia and internationally are seen, heard, and welcomed.

We were not intimidated in the past and we are not intimidated now. The workers united will NEVER be defeated.

In solidarity,

**South Australian State
Committee
Communist Party of Australia
(CPA)**

Victoria's Ben Carroll set to shred workers' rights

Peter Farmer

The Victorian Ben Carroll Labor government is continuing with its attempt to shred workers rights to freedom of association with the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026 to Parliament.

Ostensibly aimed at stopping workers getting ripped off by "fake" unions – unions not registered under the Fair Work Act, the Bill's main effect will be to make life impossible for the very genuine and effective Retail and Fast Food Workers' Union (RAFFWU).

In constraining workers from creating new organisations with an industrial relations purpose under the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic), the Bill limits every Victorian worker's freedom of association.

Consumer Affairs Minister Tim Richardson acknowledges this issue in the Bill's Statement of Compatibility with the Victorian Human Rights Charter. Richardson told Parliament that the Bill "may limit individuals' rights to freedom of association where an affected association is unable to access incorporation under another framework."

The Bill directs the Registrar of

Incorporated Associations to refuse an application for incorporation or direct an incorporated association to wind up if it has "an industrial relations purpose." The Bill defines this broadly as "furthering, protecting or representing the industrial interests of members."

The Bill does not give impacted associations a chance to incorporate under another framework like the FWRO Act. There's an exception for organisations that have applied before 1 July 2026.

Freedom of association includes not just workers' rights to join a union but also the right to establish their own unions.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 16(2) of the Victorian Human Rights Charter outlines that every person has "the right to form and join trade unions." This wording mirrors article 22 of the UN's International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. This right of every worker to form new unions runs through international human rights law including the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Labor Organisation's 1948 Convention concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise.

The Bill makes judicial review

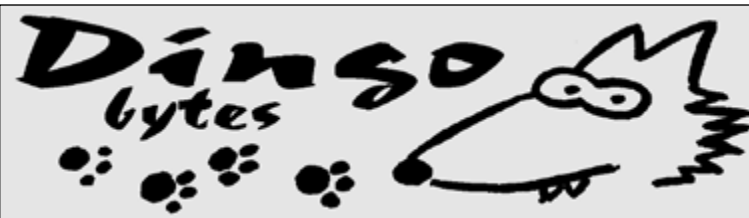
far more expensive. Usually, anyone who wants to contest the Registrar's decisions can appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). Organisations that want to contest decisions about industrial relations organisations will have to appeal to the Supreme Court.

VCAT is accessible to property developers contesting planning decisions worth hundreds of millions of dollars involving complex environmental, infrastructure, and transport issues. Workers wanting to contest the Registrar's determination about the industrial relations purpose test must, however, lodge a far more expensive Supreme Court application.

Victorians who want to help should contact their Victorian Legislative Council member to urge them to vote against the bill. In good news, the Victorian Greens have indicated they'll vote against it.

If the Bill passes, the Victorian government would likely wind up RAFFWU.

Premier Ben Carroll is a member of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA). ★



No Confidence

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) says the Initial National Environmental Standards released recently do not deliver the strong nature protection the Albanese government promised with its reform of the national nature law.

"These disappointing standards do not set out clear and specific rules to strengthen nature protection," said ACF's national biodiversity policy adviser Brendan Sydes.

"The standards retain too much of the discretion and ambiguity that has been a central problem of Australia's nature law – the problem these standards were supposed to fix. ACF's analysis shows thousands of hectares of threatened species habitat is approved for destruction every year. These standards provide no confidence this is about to change.

"The devastating impacts of bird flu highlight the need for increased efforts to improve the resilience of our threatened wildlife, already hit hard by habitat loss and other threats.

"Weak standards are a licence to continue habitat destruction.

"Rather than seize this opportunity for stronger nature protection, Environment Minister Murray Watt has stuck close to the status quo, preserving wriggle room to allow for decisions that would see threatened species become more endangered.

"This is not the big shift you would expect from a government that was committed to tackling Australia's extinction crisis and the longstanding failures of the nature law.

"Biodiversity offsets or accreditation of state and territory governments might please business, but these changes do not help nature.

"It's up to Minister Watt and the Albanese government to now demonstrate how they will make sure the nature law reforms deliver stronger environmental protection and better outcomes for nature, as promised."

National Environmental Standards are the centrepiece of the reform of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. They form part of a new set of benchmarks to assess commercial proposals and the accreditation of state and territory laws.

Along with other reforms, the standards set new outcomes and objectives for the things the Act is supposed to protect, including threatened species, internationally recognised wetlands and World Heritage sites like the Great Barrier Reef.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: is the NT government. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has rejected the NT government's plan to have a private company build and own a prison near Darwin, warning that community safety must not be put at risk by handing essential services that should be delivered by public sector workers to a private operator.

The union is also concerned that privatising the new prison could cost Territorian taxpayers more in the long run, with profits flowing to multinational companies and public money leaving the Territory.

The union says that privatising prison services risks undermining accountability, transparency, and the quality of support provided to staff, prisoners and the broader community: The NT government need only look to other Australian jurisdictions, including New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland, to see that prison privatisation does not deliver better outcomes.

"The NT government's decision to privatise the new prison shows a complete disregard for the skilled public sector workers who keep our correctional system running and deliver the services Territorians depend on every day," said CPSU regional secretary Suwan Adamson.

"Prisons should not be in the hands of profit-making businesses. We have seen firsthand how privatisation has failed in other jurisdictions, where multinationals line their pockets with taxpayers' dollars.

"Community safety should be the sole objective of any corrections system – not the bottom line of a private operator.

"CPSU members are trained, trusted and have the expertise to deliver critical government services. Ignoring that expertise and handing control to a profit-driven operator puts Territorian workers, and the broader NT community at risk."



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CPA comrade fronts AUKUS inquiry

Graham Holton, a long-term Communist Party of Australia member and valued contributor to this paper put in a submission to the AUKUS Public Inquiry taking place around Australia now. As a result, he was asked to appear at the inquiry and face questions from lead commissioner Peter Garrett and commissioners Leanne Minshull and Carmen Lawrence.

Here are some excerpts from Holton's submission:

Supporters argue that AUKUS will strengthen deterrence, improve regional security, and reinforce the rules-based international order.

Critics believe it will increase military competition, contributing to a regional arms race, and create challenges for international non-proliferation agreements.

Some analysts also warn of a security dilemma, where one country's efforts to improve its security are perceived as a threat by others. As Australia strengthens its military capabilities, neighbouring countries may respond by expanding their own defence spending and acquiring more advanced weapons. Such actions could unintentionally increase mistrust and heighten regional instability.

Another concern is that AUKUS

may shift attention away from diplomatic solutions to regional disputes. While military preparedness can deter aggression, long-term peace also depends on dialogue, confidence-building measures, and effective regional institutions. If strategic competition becomes increasingly militarised, opportunities for diplomacy may become limited. One has to only pay attention to the US-Iran conflict to take caution in military decisions.

Smaller Pacific Island nations have raised additional concerns about the increased military presence in the region. Many of these countries prioritise climate change, economic development, and environmental protection over military competition. Some worry that heightened strategic rivalry could divert resources and

political attention away from these pressing issues.

The possibility of miscalculation also increases as more advanced military assets operate in contested areas. Greater numbers of submarines, surveillance aircraft, and naval vessels increase the risk of accidents or unintended escalation during periods of heightened tension.

China views AUKUS as a threat to its national security and regional influence. Beijing prioritises diplomatic engagement and opposes expanding military alliances, viewing AUKUS as a military alliance directed against its rise as a major power. Increased military cooperation among Western allies contributes to regional confrontation, accelerates the arms race, and undermines international trust.

Chinese officials have repeatedly argued that AUKUS reflects a "Cold War mentality" because it relies on military alliances rather than dialogue and cooperative security arrangements. Beijing maintains that regional peace should be achieved through diplomacy, economic cooperation, and



multilateral institutions, not by expanding military partnerships.

China has expressed serious concerns regarding the NPT. Although Australia has repeatedly stated that it will not possess nuclear weapons, China argues that transferring naval nuclear propulsion technology to a non-nuclear-weapon state creates a dangerous precedent.

The present conflict (the US-Israel-Iran war) shows how rapidly limited strikes can expand,

maritime trade threatened, energy markets disrupted, and civilian populations exposed to wider conflicts. By increasing the permanent US military presence in Australia, AUKUS may make Australia more vulnerable with escalating tensions between the US and China. Recent discussion around the long-term presence of US submarines at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia reflects these concerns. ★

Underpayment a red flag for modern slavery

New research has found that two-thirds of temporary migrant workers across Australia are underpaid, with one in four losing at least \$10 an hour.

'Off the Books: Practical Guidance for Business' directly translates findings from the Migrant Justice Institute's landmark Off the Books report co-authored by Associate Professor Laurie Berg from University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and Associate Professor Bassina Farbenblum from UNSW Sydney.

The research found two-thirds of temporary migrant workers across Australia were underpaid, and one in four were shortchanged by at least \$10 per hour. It also shows that the more severe the underpayment, the more likely workers are to experience indicators of forced labour such as coercion, intimidation, and restricted freedom.

Last month the Australian Federal government announced its intention to introduce a new criminal "failure to prevent" modern slavery offence, targeting large companies

with annual consolidated revenues over \$100 million.

The Guidance shows Australian companies where forced labour risks occur in practice, including misuse of ABNs, insecure casual employment, misleading payslips, cash payments, and underpaid night or weekend work. It also emphasises the need to safely engage workers, noting many temporary visa holders fear retaliation or visa consequences if they speak up.

The companion business guidance was developed by Walk Free, the Office of the Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioner and the Migrant Justice Institute. The guidance outlines examples of targeted due diligence by businesses where there are temporary migrant workers across Australian operations and supply chains.

"Our data shows for the first time that misuse of ABNs, misleading pay slips and forced labour indicators operate together as a single architecture of exploitation," says report co-author, A/Prof Farbenblum.

"In horticulture, hospitality, commercial

cleaning, retail and well beyond, Australian employers are securing cost advantages by underpaying migrant workers and using the same handful of tricks to cover their tracks."

Associate Professor Berg says most Australians would be unaware that many of their purchases may be from businesses exploiting migrants.

"Nearly 10,000 workers told us again and again that when an employer controls whether your visa remains intact, the power imbalance is enormous, and some unscrupulous operators exploit it."

"Nobody wants to buy goods or services produced by exploited migrants in Australia – but right now, we all almost certainly do."

Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioner Chris Evans says the onus is on businesses, not their employees, to ensure migrant workers' rights are protected.

"Underpayment is not just non-compliance. In some cases, it is the first sign of more severe risk in your business or supply chain," he says.

"Workers are often too afraid to make a report. That means businesses need to be proactive to identify risks early, remediate impacted workers, and put in processes so it doesn't happen again."

"If you're only checking paperwork, you're missing what's really happening to workers. Businesses need to get out, cross reference records and talk to workers to test the reality on the ground."

Walk Free Foundation Senior Manager Jane Leibowitz says the Migrant Justice Institute's (MJI) business guidance provides a lot of practical information for companies to do the right thing by migrant workers in their own and related businesses.

"MJI's landmark research found that two-thirds of migrant workers in Australia are underpaid. Many of these workers also reported facing coercion, intimidation, and restricted freedom, signaling potential hot-spots of entrenched exploitation," she says.

UNSW Sydney ★

Newcastle workers take action

Highly skilled waterfront and electrical workers employed at Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG) at Kooragang Island have taken the historic step of taking Protected Industrial Action for the first time in the company's history. This is due to the refusal of bosses to provide a decent agreement with conditions that are consistent with the rest of the industry.

This momentous action comes after more than sixteen years working to an enterprise agreement that NCIG workers say has left them trapped under the dead legacy of the WorkChoices era. This agreement was first struck in the wake of a period when workers' rights were deliberately weakened and employers were handed unprecedented power by John Howard, Peter Costello, and Peter Reith.

NCIG workers throughout the operations side of the business are standing together to secure a fair agreement that recognises the value they create every day and brings their conditions into line with industry standards. These workers operate and maintain the massive machinery which loads bulk cargo ships with export grade coal from throughout the Hunter region and beyond.

Members are seeking practical and overdue improvements including:

- Fairer rostering arrangements;
- Fairer recognition when working Public Holidays;
- A decent wage increase to keep up with the rise in the cost of living; and
- Conditions that reflect the skills, flexibility and productivity expected of a modern multi-skilled workforce.

Despite operating as a highly productive

workforce, NCIG employees continue to be paid less than comparable workers at neighbouring operations while delivering stronger outcomes for the business.

"NCIG workers load more, do more, and carry broader responsibilities. They're generating significant value and returns for the company but the bosses would rather provoke a dispute than settle a fair agreement," said Glen Williams, the MUA's Newcastle Branch Secretary.

"For years, these workers have been told there is no case for change, and when a company like this enters bargaining saying it wants nothing from negotiations, workers are entitled to ask whether that's because management already secured everything it wanted under arrangements imposed in a very different industrial era," Williams said.

That question was answered clearly when

NCIG recently put its proposed agreement to a workforce vote and the workforce decisively rejected it.

"With 98% voting against the proposal, NCIG workers sent an unmistakable message that they are no longer prepared to accept conditions that fall short of comparable workplaces or agreements that fail to recognise the contribution they make," Williams said.

"NCIG was given the opportunity to heed that message and come to the bargaining table with a genuine willingness for landing a fair deal. Instead, due to their unwillingness to compromise and their provocations, NCIG workers are now taking protected industrial action – for the first time in NCIG's history."

Maritime Union Australia ★

NSW Supreme Court confirms that criticising Israel is not antisemitism

Paul Gregoire

New South Wales Supreme Court Justice Desmond Fagan has condemned the use of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism as he delivered his reasons for denying the NSW state the right to impose an extended supervision order on inmate Mohammed Farhat.

The judge's critique is significant, as this nation's antisemitism envoy is attempting to make the IHRA definition standard.

"Needless to say, political criticism of Israel, however inflammatory or adversarial, is not by its nature criticism of Jews in general or based on Jewish racial or ethnic identity," his Honour added mid-last year.

Fagan insisted that Stewart's determination applies to Farhat's case, and he elaborated that whether the phrase "Fuk Israel" is antisemitic is "dictated by what 'antisemitic' means according to established common usage in Australia," which the Macquarie

Dictionary defines as "prejudiced against Jewish people."

This and other similar definitions in common usage in this country "accord with how the term has ordinarily been used and understood in Australia in living memory." An antisemitic statement is one that "an ordinary member of the public" would expect "to express hostility to or prejudice against all Jewish people and/or against one or more individual Jews by reason of their Jewishness."

Criticism of Israel is not antisemitic as the nation and the Jewish people are not the same entity, the judge continued. Half of all Jews live outside of Israel. "The Jewish people ... are distinct from Israel." "Logically, conceptually and empirically, hostility or prejudice towards Israel cannot be equated to hostility or prejudice towards the Jewish people." Many Jewish people openly criticise Israel.

The Jewish Council of Australia's submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion was quoted by Fagan, as it sets out that over recent decades "the aggressive actions of

the state of Israel" are often conflated with Jewish identity, and this has been cultivated by Israel, and it "causes direct harm to Jewish people worldwide when they are blamed for Israel's actions."

However, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry has a different opinion. This group has been lobbying the Australian government on behalf of Israel and Zionism. Justice Fagan explains that the ECAJ has been at the forefront of attempting to conflate criticism of Israel and support for Palestine with antisemitism, as it claims all Australian Jews support Israel. But this is at odds with the reality.

The Supreme Court judge then described the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) working definition of antisemitism, which is a controversial definition developed earlier this century that serves to propagate the conflation between criticism of Israel and antisemitism, as it provides eleven definitions of what comprises hatred towards Jews, seven of which involve Israel.

The "verbose and imprecise" IHRA definition, Fagan continued,



Rally, Boorloo/Perth, October 2024.

doesn't equate with the current understanding of antisemitism in Australia. The meaning doesn't reflect common usage of how the term antisemitism is used in this country.

The apparent purpose of promoting IHRA, Fagan explained, "is to graft onto the community's abhorrence of antisemitism, understood as hostility to Jews for their

Jewishness, a parasitic rejection of protest against Israel. Seen in that light, the IHRA proposal is detached from the reality of the common usage and understanding of antisemitism in this country."

From NSW Supreme Court confirms that criticising Israel is not antisemitism.

Paul Gregoire, Sydney Criminal Lawyers ✳

Bendigo back in the black, workers still seeing red

The Finance Sector Union (FSU) has called on Bendigo Bank to shelve its controversial 2030 Strategy after announcing a \$530 million profit for the 2026 financial year.

Since the strategy was announced last year Bendigo Bank staff headcount has dropped 14% partly due to the bank's 'strategic partnerships' with multi-national outsourcing companies Genpact and Infosys.

Under the partnership, 145 Bendigo Bank staff were sent to work at Infosys amid pressure to accept dodgy contracts or be left with no job and no redundancy entitlements.

These contracts provide Infosys with the unilateral right to determine where an employee works, without any guaranteed future wage increases.

The remaining jobs have either been

cut altogether or replaced with cheaper offshore labour through Genpact. Bendigo staff have told the FSU that their workloads have increased and the bank's IT systems are now a 'nightmare' to use. Management has not properly explained the changes to staff and have ignored them when concerns are raised.

The Finance Sector Union said the profit removes any justification for more cuts and makes it harder to ignore the union's ten job security demands to address ongoing concerns. The demands include no forced redundancies, early and transparent communication with staff, offering redeployment or retraining opportunities, and better redundancy support.

FSU National Secretary Julia Angrisano said that the bank's \$530 million profit was

only made possible by CEO Richard Fennell treating his staff and customers "with complete disdain."

"The remaining workforce won't be celebrating with an axe hanging over their head."

"Bendigo Bank management needs to work on the massive trust deficit it has accumulated with workers and the communities they serve."

"Agreeing to the FSU's 10 job security demands would be a good place to start. Our demands are reasonable and doable."

One FSU member Luke* described working at Bendigo Bank as "chaos" and said that the lines of communication have broken down.

"Everything's been ripped up and no one seems to know how anything works anymore," he said.

"We went from having a very good (in-house) help desk to having to use the Infosys helpdesk."

"It's got real issues, calls are dropping out, important messages are not being communicated and problems aren't being fixed."

"I think the bank should use a little bit of that profit to fix these issues but I suspect most of it will be used to keep the institutional investors happy."

Finance Sector Union

*not his real name ✳

Victorian police officers charged over arrest of Aboriginal man

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) has welcomed the announcement that, the state's Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) has criminally charged two police officers involved in an arrest of VALS client, Wade, in August 2025.

VALS are proud to be representing Wade, a young Aboriginal man, as he seeks justice and accountability for what happened to him. VALS' Wirraway Police and Prison Accountability Practice will be representing Wade as they pursue civil damages from Victoria Police for the harm caused.

It is alleged a Senior Constable unlawfully struck Wade in the head with his taser multiple times, they have been charged with aggravated assault with a weapon. A Sergeant is alleged to have struck Wade in the head with his knee, they have been charged with unlawful assault. Wade says, "I remember feeling a police officer's knee pressed into the back of my neck while face down on the ground."

Within the criminal legal system, systemic racism plays a significant role which greatly impacts the lives of Aboriginal people every day. This can look like racial profiling, racial abuse, over-policing, use of force, higher

rates of searches, arrest, fines, bail refusal, and remand.

Victoria's police oversight system falls drastically short – police investigating themselves will never deliver real accountability. VALS has been calling for the establishment of an independent police oversight body for many years, because the system is broken and there is no access to justice.

In 2020-2021, 94.3% of complaints against police were investigated by Victoria police themselves or not investigated at all. Despite facing higher rates of police misconduct, Aboriginal people are less likely to make a formal complaint.

IBAC's Focused Police

Complaints Team, which oversaw this complaint, was launched in 2025. It investigates serious, single incident allegations of Victorian Police misconduct against people from communities at a higher risk of experiencing police misconduct. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Last year this team assessed 28 allegations of misconduct, with one police officer being charged with common assault. VALS knows from its clients that the demand is so much higher than the capacity of that dedicated team allows.

VALS continues to call for an independent police oversight body that ensures that all complaints of

police misconduct are handled in a timely and culturally safe manner.

Wade said, "It has been almost a year since my arrest, I didn't think anything was going to happen to them. I thought that what happened to me was how everyone got treated."

"I am thankful for the bodycam footage from that night. It's always their word against yours and if those cameras weren't recording, I don't even want to think about what they could have done to me."

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service ✳

Priced out: An income test for Australia's rental market

FK

Australia's housing crisis has entered a new phase. For many years, discussions about rental affordability focused on people on the lowest incomes. Those Australians continue to experience the greatest hardship. A new report from housing NGO Everybody's Home shows just how impossible it has become for many of them to secure an affordable home in the private rental market.

These findings represent more than a continuation of previous trends. They suggest that Australia's private rental market is no longer functioning as it once did. Traditionally, renting provided an affordable housing option for a broad cross-section of Australian households, while public and community housing supported those whose needs could not be met by the market.

Today, that distinction has blurred. The private rental market is increasingly failing households across the income spectrum, while decades of underinvestment have left public and social housing unable to meet growing demand.

Social housing has other problems. It's easy for the NGO, community group, or charity that owns the

housing to either sell the housing or jack the rent up to above what's affordable for its own purposes. (see p3 this issue for an example). What Australia needs is public housing.

If you are spending more than that much of your income on your housing, you are under housing stress – that point at which you have to start reducing spending on other essentials, such as food for health.

Let's say you live in a capital city and earn \$70,000 a year. In Adelaide where it's cheapest, you will be handing over 50% of your income to pay rent. If you earn \$130,000 a year, only in Adelaide and Hobart will you be spending 30% or less of your income on rent.

This report argues that the next phase of that reform is now clear. If Australia is to restore housing affordability, governments must build many more public and community homes, ensure renting is secure and fair, and provide adequate incomes for those whose housing needs cannot be met by the private market. Together, these reforms can help rebuild a housing system where everyone has access to a safe, secure and affordable home.

The report, *Priced Out: An Income Test for Australia's Rental Market*, can be found at everybodyshome.com.au ★

Unions push for new rental standard, more public housing

Millions of renters would see Australia's standard rental lease doubled to two years and public housing lifted to 1 in 10 new homes built, under proposals unions put to the federal government.

Unions are now pushing governments to strengthen renters' rights through a modern tenure standard and the scale-up of public housing construction to its highest rate since the 1980s.

Unions want a new national tenancy standard of two years to give renters greater stability, make it easier to plan ahead and reduce the financial pressures of moving homes repeatedly. The plan also includes stronger protections against unfair evictions and rent gouging.

Landlords would be required to offer at least two years of housing security as the default standard, with renters still free to choose shorter leases.

National Cabinet would deliver the changes by updating its 2023 'A Better Deal for Renters' agreement, which harmonised renters' rights across Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.

Unions will also push for 1 in 10 new homes built to be public housing, alongside a goal of lifting public housing to at least 6 per cent of Australia's total housing stock.

The 1 in 10 target for new builds would match the level of public housing construction under the 1983-1991 Hawke government. It would represent a fivefold increase from the current rate, where just 1 in 50 new homes are public housing.

These changes follow union calls for increasing access to home ownership and support of the Capital Gains Tax and Negative Gearing changes announced in the Federal Budget.

ACTU President, Michele O'Neil said, "For too many working people,

housing has become a source of stress rather than security, with many workers not able to find secure, affordable housing near where they work. We want to see strong rights for renters and a substantial increase in public housing.

"Nurses, teachers and other workers are living with the yearly uncertainty that comes with constant rent hikes and one-year leases being the standard option.

"Our housing system should reflect the reality that millions of working people are renters.

O'Neil added that if Australia is serious about fixing the housing crisis, "we must increase public housing stock to free up homes in the private rental market and make renting more affordable for everyone."

Australian Council of Trade Unions ★

GREEN NOTES

Massive deforestation in Eastern Bolivia

Graham Holton

Eastern Bolivia, also called the *Oriente*, recorded a staggering loss of 607,000 of forests cleared in 2025, of which 390,000 hectares was lost from the department of Santa Cruz. Between 2001 and 2025 the region of Chiquitanía accounted for 2.4 million hectares of tree-cover clearance.

Fire is transforming the eastern region from a forest frontier into one of South America's major agricultural and cattle frontiers. Successive governments have promoted agricultural expansion to generate food, soy exports, employment and foreign exchange. The present right-wing government of Rodrigo Paz has reduced Bolivia's once strong environmental and Indigenous-rights even further.

This deforestation is associated with cattle ranching, soy and commercial crops, large agricultural estates, logging, roads and settlements. Recent research estimates that cattle ranching accounted for 57 per cent of Bolivian deforestation between 2010 and 2022, involving farmers, cattle ranchers, agribusiness companies, land speculators, migration, and state-supported agricultural expansion.

Fires have created a class/land-use conflict. Chiquitanía is home to the Chiquitano, Guaraní, Guarayo, and Ayoreo peoples, with much of their economic and cultural life dependent upon communal forests. The expansion of capitalist agriculture into previously non-commodified territory has meant agribusiness and landowners have benefited from expanding the agricultural frontier, while Indigenous communities bear a disproportionate share of the ecological and social costs.

Forests have become more vulnerable to agricultural and commercial exploitation. Once the land is incorporated into the commodity economy, the forest's initial use-value for Indigenous communities is increased because of its export revenue.

From a Marxist perspective, the collectively controlled land is progressively incorporated into a capitalist agricultural economy, in which forests are converted into commodities – soy, beef, timber, and land. This is a direct threat to Indigenous territory, livelihoods, health, culture, and political autonomy.

For Indigenous peoples, large-scale deforestation represents a transformation of their relationship with the land: from collectively controlled living territory into commercially exploitable property. The broader political issue is that Indigenous peoples are becoming dependent on the market, purchased food, and wage labour.

For Indigenous communities, "deforestation" means the conversion of communal territory into private agricultural or ranching property. When the forest disappears, people can no longer obtain their resources locally. This has had an important effect on women, who are often responsible for collecting and processing forest products. A 2024 report found Indigenous women suffered severe economic loss because of their dependence on forest products.

Following widespread fires, these communities marched demanding protection of ancestral lands. In May 2026, following a 27-day march from the *Oriente* to the capital, La Paz, more than 300 Indigenous and rural organisation marchers walked 1,000 kilometres to hold a 10-day sit-in that forced the repeal of Law 1720. The law threatened small-scale communal landholdings, fast-tracking transforming them into individually held medium-sized properties. It disguised dispossession as "rural credit," which favoured the agribusiness sector. Their demands included legal certainty to land, a halt to the anti-protest law, and the right to prior consultation.

During the sit-in, Vivian Palomeque Irina, Executive Secretary of the Vaca Diez Regional Federation of Peasant Workers in the Beni, said, "We cannot return home empty-handed!" The National Confederation of Indigenous Women of Bolivia, the only national body supporting the march, organised the "Meeting for Land and Territory" and played a key role in the mobilisations.

Indigenous territories provide better forest protection than areas exposed to uncontrolled commercial expansion. Research increasingly finds that legally recognised Indigenous territories tend to experience lower deforestation and retain more biodiversity. Indigenous communities are not simply victims of deforestation; they are an important line of defence against it.

**Check out the official Instagram account of the
Communist Party of Australia**

www.instagram.com/communist.party.australia/

Worse than silence: Australian media and judicial support for abusers

C Bartholomew

The murder of 17-year-old Thai girl Tunchanok Donholma has exposed the complicity of Australian media in sexual violence. However, the issue extends beyond the media to courtrooms and Australian society at large.

The 45-year-old Australian man accused of her murder attacked her so brutally that he was able to stuff her body into a suitcase and dump it along a railway track. Yet a disgustingly high amount of Australian media coverage focused on how lonely the murderer was, or the tough time he was having in prison, or how he feels bad and the violence was out of his control.

Rather than investigating the involvement of thousands of Australian men in sex trafficking euphemistically called 'tourism', the media runs with headlines like 'suitcase murder,' denying Tunchanok her humanity.

Such concern for the perpetrators of sexual violence at the expense of their victims is also seen far too often in our courtrooms. Far too many perpetrators are sentenced leniently based on their 'good character.'

For example, Justin Downs was sentenced in July to a three-year community correction order (community service) after being found guilty of rape. Judge Justin Smith acknowledged that Downs showed no remorse yet refused to apply a stricter sentence as he believed there was no "evidence of continuing threat or fear."

Downs' victim, Anastasia Treharne, was injured so badly she bled. Despite this, Smith ruled that the "offence was not deliberate, was not planned in any way, and was not done with disregard to the victim." Smith did not issue any orders restricting Downs from contacting Treharne, despite her reporting that she felt unsafe.

Downs has previous convictions of domestic violence and breaching court orders. Smith ruled that Downs "is still a young man who has taken positive steps towards his mental health and alcohol abuse."

Some Australian jurisdictions such as NSW and Queensland have made moves or begun making moves to ban or restrict good character references to continue so long as they are framed in terms of likelihood of rehabilitation or recidivism. Downs' sentence is an example.

Our judicial system needs to be rid of the warped perspective that sexual violence is just an outlier in a perpetrator's otherwise good personality. It is often the case that a perpetrator's "good character" is one of the tools that allowed them to carry out and get away with sexual violence.

Court suppression orders serve legitimate purposes before trials, to prevent prejudice interfering with a fair trial, and to protect the privacy of victims. Nevertheless, the usage of court suppression orders to protect convicted perpetrators' reputations is disgraceful, such as a recent case where the identities of three high profile men and their messages describing sexual and domestic violence were ordered by a judge to be kept secret.

One of the men "holds many high-profile ambassador roles, commercial sponsorship arrangements and media roles" and Justice Anthony McGrath was told exposing the man's identity and messages would be "devastating" for his work and "lead to serious harm to their reputations and standing as well as their financial interests."

Suppression orders requested by the victim to protect their privacy are important. Suppression orders of this sort, designed to protect the wealth and reputations of convicted



Photo: rawpixel.com (CC0)

Sexual violence is not a crime of desperation

perpetrators and in this instance to maintain a perpetrator's position of public influence, have no place in a society that takes domestic and sexual violence seriously. Strict sentences alone won't solve the problem, but this pattern of excessive leniency exposes the hostility of the justice system to victims.

Sexual violence is not a crime of desperation. In fact, it is often the victims that are in disadvantaged circumstances, due to racial discrimination, sexual identity, financial dependence on a partner, or age. 74% of Australians accessing homeless services are women and children. The numbers of missing

and murdered First Nations women continue to be disproportionately high.

The last Australian jurisdiction to criminalise marital rape was the Northern Territory in 1994. Australians participate in a massive online ecosystem of marketplaces, tutorials, pornography, and chats helping men drug and rape their wives and girlfriends. Australians are among the top three consumers worldwide of livestreamed child sexual abuse.

Albanese and Pauline Hanson want AI companies to invest in Australia while Elon Musk and xAI are suing the US state of Minnesota

for banning AI 'nudification' tools. Forty-two women and seventeen children have been murdered so far this year in Australia's ongoing femicide crisis, including four murders in just three days.

What is apparent across the board is that there continues to be a dominant culture more concerned with the reputation and prospects of perpetrators, especially white male perpetrators, than the dignity and wellbeing of victims. Femicide and other forms of domestic and sexual violence will continue to devastate far too many lives in this country so long as this culture survives. ✳

A blow against the nuclear order

Vijay Prashad

The recent US-Saudi agreement does not directly violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Saudi Arabia joined the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon state, and the treaty does not prohibit such states from enriching uranium for peaceful purposes. What it prohibits is the manufacture or acquisition of nuclear weapons, while requiring nuclear materials to be placed under IAEA safeguards.

This legal distinction is important. Enrichment is not identical to weaponisation. Low-enriched uranium can fuel civilian reactors, whereas far higher enrichment levels are generally required for weapons. But the same basic technology can be used for both purposes. Once a country possesses enrichment plants, trained personnel and stocks of nuclear material, the time required to cross from a civilian program to a military one can be greatly shortened. This is why enrichment and reprocessing are described as sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel cycle.

The IAEA's standard Comprehensive

Safeguards Agreement verifies declared nuclear materials and facilities. The Additional Protocol, developed after the discovery of Iraq's nuclear program in the early 1990s, gives the agency wider access and stronger tools with which to investigate undeclared activities. To allow Saudi Arabia access to sensitive technology without requiring the Additional Protocol is a conscious weakening of the verification regime.

There is also a larger political contradiction. The NPT is built upon three connected promises: non-nuclear states will not acquire nuclear weapons, they will retain access to peaceful nuclear technology, and the existing nuclear-weapon states will pursue disarmament. The third promise has been systematically violated. Rather than move towards disarmament, the recognised nuclear powers have modernised their arsenals, developed new delivery systems and incorporated nuclear weapons more deeply into their military doctrines.

Beyond the NPT stands the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted at the United Nations in 2017 and in force since 2021. That treaty prohibits its parties from

developing, possessing, threatening to use or assisting with nuclear weapons. Neither the United States nor Saudi Arabia is a party to it. Decades of UN resolutions calling for a West Asian zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction have also remained unrealised, above all because Israel refuses to join the NPT or submit its nuclear facilities to comprehensive IAEA safeguards.

This is the central hypocrisy in West Asia. Israel possesses nuclear weapons outside the NPT and faces neither sanctions nor inspections. Iran's safeguarded nuclear program has been subjected to sabotage, assassinations, sanctions and war. Saudi Arabia, a close US partner, is now offered a potential route towards enrichment without the strongest available international inspections. Washington is not defending a non-proliferation order. It is administering a nuclear hierarchy.

The precedent will not remain confined to Saudi Arabia. Turkey, Egypt and other regional states will ask why they should renounce fuel-cycle capabilities that Washington is prepared to discuss with Riyadh.

Iran will reasonably conclude that negotiated restrictions provide no security: it complied with the 2015 nuclear agreement, only for Trump to abandon it in 2018 and restore sanctions. Military attacks and nuclear double standards strengthen precisely those forces in Iran that argue that only a nuclear deterrent can prevent future aggression.

By converting non-proliferation rules into privileges distributed among friends, Washington encourages every state to acquire the technological basis for a future bomb. The only principled alternative is a universal one: no nuclear weapons for Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or any other state, full and equal IAEA safeguards, implementation of the long-delayed nuclear-weapon-free zone in West Asia, and the complete abolition of nuclear arsenals, beginning with those held by the established nuclear powers.

Peace cannot be built by deciding which governments may stand closest to the nuclear threshold. It can only be built by dismantling the threshold itself.

Globetrotter (edited for space) ✳

Inside China

Zhaoshajia, a She minority village

Roland Boer

In early May of 2026, I camped overnight at a small village in northern Fujian province. Usually, I like to ride to a quiet place, pitch my tent, and camp for the night. But I was to find that this is no ordinary village.

I had heard that Zhaoshajia village was worth a visit. About 30 km from my home at the time in Dabu village, Songxi county, I packed my camping gear on the fold-up bicycle and was off on country roads, through townships and villages, until I rolled into Zhaoshajia.

My first impressions were of a well-ordered village with relatively new and solid buildings. In the midst of the village was a dammed stream forming an elongated lake full of fish, lotus plants, walkways, and platforms.

As dusk was looming, I asked a villager if I could pitch my tent. "Of course," was the reply, "if you can find a spot." My camping place for the night turned out to be a sheltered wooden platform on the lake. I was surrounded by water, the sound of frogs and water life, and an extraordinary view of both sides of the village.

Before I go on, here's an observation on camping in the countryside in China. These days, there are more and more camping areas – Chinese-style. These are usually quite elaborate, with good facilities and lots of relaxation options.

However, you can also camp pretty much anywhere. I always ask, and mostly the answer is in the affirmative. So far I have not paid a cent for camping. Why? Since village land is commonly owned and since I bring my own lodgings, the assumption is that I do not need to pay for use of the land or for lodgings. Washing is done in a public toilet and you get used to a full wash in the evening with a tap and washbasin. My gear includes the obligatory tent, sleep mat, sleeping bag, as well as gas stove and cooking implements.

The next morning, I was to find out much more about Zhaoshajia village. This is a She minority nationality area, with its own distinctive features. A little background: of China's 55 minority nationalities, the She number about 750,000 and live mostly in the mountainous areas of northern Fujian (about 90 per cent), as well as in southern Zhejiang, and in Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Anhui. Although they have their own distinctive dialect, they use the common script, and can speak Mandarin.

They often call themselves "Shanha," which means 'guests of the mountains.' This has led some scholars to propose that they moved many generations ago from Guangdong province to escape exploitation by feudal landlords. That history meant that they became enthusiastic about the revolutionary process in the 1920s and 1930s, with many a She area being a revolutionary base.

Zhaoshajia village lies in the fold of a stream that has been dammed to provide water for agriculture and river fish. The people like to drink tea, as most do in Fujian, the men smoke, as most do still in the countryside, and they like to sing. Family traditions are strong, with ancestral lines emphasised, and respect and honour given to ancestors. The She have a reputation for hard work and ability to survive.

After waking with first light, I found a place for my morning wash in a nice new toilet block adjacent to a new cultural centre. Coffee brewed, breakfast cooked, I set off to explore.

Around the lake I walked, across the covered bridge, through lanes and alleys. I was struck by how well-ordered, clean, and relatively new the village buildings are, albeit with a distinctive traditional mountain style. The villagers were friendly and helpful when I approached, curious and happy to talk with a foreigner.

Like more and more villages hereabouts,

the story of Zhaoshajia is written on walls and noticeboards. Part of a policy to showcase local histories and folk customs, this information is based on papers by scholars and reports by journalists. What did I find out?

I was struck by a recent story. In 2013, a freak hailstorm swept through the area and Zhaoshajia village was hit particularly hard. Only one brick-and-tile building was left standing. The rest, made of the plentiful timber hereabouts, were left in ruins. Looking at pictures taken at the time, the village was a miserable site, with people sheltering where they could.

What was to be done? The news made its way from the local Party branch and committees to the provincial leadership. In the middle of a busy schedule, You Quan, the secretary and governor of the whole of Fujian province, made a personal visit to this small village, called on all the villagers one by one to offer his concern and instructed the local Party organisations – from the village through to Nanping administrative of the whole of northern Fujian – to begin as soon as possible the process of restoring and rebuilding the village.

The key here was to involve the villagers in the process so that the work arose from their own engagement and insight. By 2015 work began after much discussion and consultation: 56 houses were completely rebuilt and 42 traditional buildings restored.

This was not all. Zhaoshajia was one of the many parts of China (832 counties in all) that was still dealing with absolute poverty. The restoration and rebuilding took a whole step further in order to enable the village and the She minority district to eradicate absolute poverty and move on to rural revitalisation.

Given the pristine natural environment with its hills, rivers, and lakes, the whole area was developed as an environmental area, with more and more activities established to encourage people to visit from outside. An eatery and a camping area with eco-buggies on hand, cabins, walking trails, and much more were constructed. By 2023, thousands of people had come to the area for its peace and tranquillity, bringing in money for the local economy.

A question arises: a visitor to the area may ask is this: why bother with the restoration and rebuilding? The village is so remote and the population small. Isn't this simply a waste of money? Here we come to an important principle: the She people are a smaller minority nationality.

Given China's long and constantly updated preferential policies relating to minority nationalities, it was out of the question to leave the village and area languishing. Resources had to be found; livelihoods developed over centuries and even millennia had to be preserved. Even more, the natural attributes of the area would be leveraged to enable the villagers to throw off absolute poverty and set out on the road of rural revitalisation.

Throughout this experience of disaster, recovery, and building anew, the Party was deeply involved. From comforting villagers, through consulting about rebuilding, to finding ways to improve livelihoods, the Party branch and committees were inseparable to the whole process.

My early morning visit to the village's Party building reinforced this reality. Even today, so long after the disaster, the practical reality is that in case of need a branch member will be at the home of a farmer in 5 minutes and a district committee member will be in the village in 20 minutes. Think about this for a minute: as a Party member, this means dropping what you are doing immediately and attending to the person or home in question as one's top priority.

This is the practical reality of a "people centred" approach, especially for minority nationalities. As they say in Zhaoshajia: all minority nationalities are united as one close family. 🌸



Letters to the Editor
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‘High treason’

A Ukrainian court has just sentenced a young socialist to 15 years for ‘high treason.’ He has already been held for two years. His legal team are appealing the sentence and are seeking support from around the world, to both protest the sentence and to raise the issues of what was a ‘show trial.’

Bogdan Syrotiuk’s ‘crime’ is that he resolutely stands against the war. His was not a call for this or that country to prevail, but for a unity of the working people across national boundaries. His position was a

principled Marxist position, and for that he is to be locked away for 15 years.

This young man has been found guilty of ‘high treason’ and yet, the case could not show any act of treason, espionage, sabotage or collaboration with any military force. The Ukrainian state’s case was based on six articles he posted online.

The ‘subversive’ nature of these articles was, allegedly, a ‘non-recognition’ of the legitimately elected government, the ‘comparison’ of the present regime with Nazis and fascists, ‘negative’ assessments of the armed forces and a ‘reinterpretation’ of national heroes and historical figures.

The reality is that there is no ‘legitimately elected’ leadership. Zelensky’s term in office ended in May 2024. Elections have been indefinitely suspended and all left-wing parties and remotely progressive organisations have been outlawed.

The national heroes that Bogdan Syrotiuk has ‘reinterpreted’ are the leaders of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Waffen-SS Galicia Division: Nazi collaborators and war criminals. Among the very worst of these criminals was Stepan Bandera.

The Ukraine state officially observes Stepan Bandera’s birthday on 1 January as an annual day of recognition and commemoration.

The sentence of Bogdan Syrotiuk is a gross injustice which must not go unanswered.

Letters of support and protest may be sent to the Pervomaisk City District Court, inbox@pm.mk.gov.ua

William Briggs
Geelong

Killing Hope

A review of *Killing Hope: US and CIA Interventions since WWII* by William Blum, only needs to list the A-Z of the countries that the USA has interfered with in the name of “democracy” and “freedom” through assassinations, coups, meddling in internal politics, supporting dictators, jihadis, terrorists or just plain straight out invasion. Here’s the list:

Afghanistan 1979-1992; 2003-2021; Australia 1973-1975 and still meddling; Albania 1949-1953, 1991; Angola 1975 to 1980s; Bolivia 1964-1975; Brazil 1961-1964;

British Guiana 1953-1964; Bulgaria 1990; Cambodia 1955-1973; Chile 1964-1973; China 1945 to 1960s and recently; Congo 1960-1964; Costa Rica mid-1950s; Cuba 1959 to present; Dominican Republic 1960-1966; El Salvador 1980-1994; East Timor 1975; Ecuador 1960-1963; France/Algeria 1960s; Germany 1950s; Ghana 1966; Greece 1947-1950s; 1964-1974; Grenada 1979-1984; Guatemala 1953-1954; 1960-1980s; Haiti 1959-1963; 1986-1994; Indonesia 1957-1958; 1975; Iran 1953; 1979-present; Iraq 1990-1991; 2003-present; Italy 1947-1970s; Jamaica 1976-1980; Korea 1945-1953; Laos 1957-1973; Libya 1981-1989 and still meddling; Morocco 1983; Nicaragua 1978-1990; Panama 1969-1991; Peru 1960-1965; Philippines: 1940s and 1950s and now; Seychelles 1979-1981; Suriname 1982-1984; Syria 1956-1957; 2009-2026; Uruguay 1964-1970; Venezuela 1895.1908-1935, 1948-58, 2002-2026; Vietnam 1950-1975; Zaire 1975-1976.

Lest we forget.

Eileen Whitehead

Horror: Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter A Marxist perspective

Graham Holton

Based on the novel by Seth Grahame-Smith, in which President Abraham Lincoln is a vampire killer, Timur Whatsisname’s movie blends historical events with vampire-related horror.

As Lincoln rises from smalltown lawyer to president, he discovers that vampires are deeply embedded in the Confederate South using profits from slavery to support the South. For them, slaves are cheap labour and a food source.

Lincoln fights the old ruling class whose economic model has become historically obsolete.

It’s obviously high time there was a Marxist vampire movie. Karl Marx argued that capitalism appropriates the surplus value of workers, seeing the vampire as a perfect symbol of Capital. Marx described them as “dead labour, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour.” The film transforms this metaphor into a literal reality.

During the American Civil War (1861-1865), Lincoln realises that to defeat the Confederacy, he must destroy the planter class/the vampires. The Union represents industrial capitalism, technological progress, which causes the destruction of the feudal form of exploitation. This reflects the historical transition from one mode of production to another rather.

In a Marxist reading of *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, the film is an allegory of class struggle, slavery, and capitalist exploitation. Looking beyond the supernatural narrative, it represents social and economic relationships. The Confederacy is an alliance

between slave-owning aristocrats, inherited privilege, and vampire elites.

Slaveholders are blood sucking vampires, and slavery is an economic system that extracts the life from its victims. The rich plantation class accumulates wealth because they live from the labour and suffering of others.

The vampires own vast wealth, manipulate political institutions, and maintain this power through violence and ideology. Their immortality symbolises the persistence of exploitative economic systems that survive across generations.

The vampires operate secretly. Their exploitation remains invisible because the dominant class disguises its true source of power. Instead of recognising structural exploitation, the protagonists focus on individual villains.

Of course the pro-slavery Confederacy makes a very easy villain. It’s far more difficult for a US filmmaker to show the bad-guy aspect of the other side in the US Civil war – the Union, which won out and eventually became the capitalist superpower that the world is stuck with now. This enjoyable horror flick makes no attempt to do that.

A weakness of the Marxist interpretation of the movie is that Lincoln defeats the vampires on his own, with no help from the collective action of enslaved people, workers, and soldiers. The abolition of slavery does not stop the class exploitation under industrial capitalism, as it is only one stage in the broader struggle against exploitation.

For the real monsters, we’re going to need collective action.

Rating: 4 out of 5 (red) stars. ★



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Across

Down

4. winter headgear

5. Chinese sci-fi epic, The Three-Body

8. What time does when you're in a hurry

9. DPRK leader initials

11. Bad place to be up sans paddle

14. Scary weather event, named after child

15. Albo's gambling legislation is like putting who in charge of the blood bank?

1. Supposed writer of very old poem

2. Can be heavy, death, black or nu

3. Making life hard for FWC around the country

5. Kind of housing Australia needs

6. What Poirot and Stalin have in common

7. Successful Aussie legal comedy

10. Signing up for more of the same (military)

12. If re-elected, Vic Labor will make this free(ish)

13. Crime series with Indigenous lead

the film is an allegory of
class struggle, slavery,
and capitalist
exploitation

Motown music: Union-made in the USA

John Dick

I hear the familiar beat. And it is summer. A tormentingly hot summer day. “Where Did Our Love Go.” A young girl dramatically singing to The Supremes while maniacally dancing to every stanza of the song. She has a microphone, and that mouthpiece plays the music while she sings and dances. It plays only Motown music, and she adores it.

My 9-year-old granddaughter loves to entertain. I wonder where she gets that from? Motown will always be summer music to me. We both love those songs.

Most of us, no matter our age, know this music. Along with the auto industry, it put Detroit on the world map. I do Detroit Labour History tours, and one of my favourite stops is the Motown Museum.

Why this series of houses on West Grand Boulevard? A little-known fact: All of the session musicians, the folks who made the music of Motown, were union-represented musicians. They were paid union scale, including overtime pay and benefits. That is why Motown is included on our Labor History tours.

Members of the Detroit Federation of Musicians, Local 5, helped create the Motown sound starting in 1959. Union contracts covered the Funk Brothers, the 12 studio musicians who provided the beats to the Motown superstars.

Berry Gordy, Jr., the founder of Motown, was not known for his generosity when it came to musicians, and the union was challenged at times to enforce its contract. Sound

familiar? Some of the Motown musicians, including Gordy, had worked at area auto plants and were United Auto Worker members. They grew to learn the importance of the union culture.

The Musicians Union has a long and honourable history in Detroit. It was founded 145 years ago, in 1881, as the Detroit Musicians Union. It affiliated in 1903 with the American Federation of Musicians, Local 5. It now has nearly 1,000 members and is the tenth largest local in the union.

It has collective bargaining contracts with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Michigan Opera Theatre, Detroit Opera House, the Fisher and Fox Theatres, and all of the local symphony orchestras. It also makes sure that musicians have contracts for TV, radio, and internet commercials.

I found an old contract from 1966 quite fascinating. The contract stipulated that studio musicians would be paid \$52.50 per three-hour session, with another \$52.50 for the next 90 minutes after that, and another \$52.50 for the next 30 minutes after that.

For five hours of session work, that comes out to \$157.50, or \$31.50 per hour. To put that into perspective, that is the equivalent of \$327 per hour in today's money. Funk Brother James Jamerson (one of the greatest badass bass players in music history) reported that he made \$100,000 working for Motown in 1966. That would be just over a million dollars in 2026.

This was at a time when many musicians, particularly Black musicians, were getting screwed over on a regular basis by slimy managers



Top left are the union musicians known as the Funk Brothers; bottom left is a the cover label of an album from Motown Records; at right, the hit group Martha and the Vandellas. Images: Motown Museum

and producers. The power of the union!

Barry Gordy didn't like that he had to pay his musicians union scale, but he had no choice if he wanted that kind of talent to sell his records. In the end, it turned out that there was enough money to pay his workers well and for him to become a multi-millionaire.

Funny how that works, and it unfortunately is a lesson that we still need today. Why should anyone be a trillionaire when the Letter Carriers need to have a Food Drive every year because our local food banks have empty shelves? Shameful.

The Funk Brothers, Stevie Wonder, The Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross and the

Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, and many more were all members of the Detroit Federation of Musicians, Local 5, at some point in their careers. According to the union's president, Stevie Wonder and Roy Parker, Jr. (*Ghostbusters*) are still dues-paying members even though they live elsewhere.

Martha Reeves is still a proud member and union activist. At a rally organised by Jobs with Justice a few years ago to honour the 1937 sit-down strikers at General Motors in Flint, and the then current sit-down strikers at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago, Martha came and sang, changing the words of “Dancing in the Street” to “Marching in the Street.” The crowd roared. After having been

an unofficial anthem of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, it became a protest song for a second time.

My pops, a proud UAW man, would often say “God Bless the Union. Ford Motor Company treats me as a number, a cog in a big wheel. The UAW treats me as a man.” I wish he was around to see his granddaughter singing Motown songs. But that is life.

I did get to share this Motown union history with him while he was still alive, and he found it fascinating. “I never knew that.” When your feet start tapping and your throat starts humming to your favourite Motown song, smile and be proud knowing that is union music.

People's World (edited for space) ★

Book Review:

Hiroshima by John Hersey

Reviewer: Graham Holton

Eighty years ago, John Hersey wrote a heart rendering account through the eyes of six survivors of the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. Reading reports and seeing newsreels of the time provide details of numbers wounded and killed, as well as the staggering costs of lost property, but the facts alone are not personal.

Rather than relying on censored materials from the US Occupying Force in Japan that showed the wreckage done by the atomic blast, Hersey interviewed survivors. He tells the human cost of the bomb, presenting raw, gut-wrenching descriptions of the misery in Hiroshima.

Hersey interviewed six survivors, reconstructing their experiences. Doctors Masakazu Fujii and Terufumi Sasaki, a German-born Jesuit Priest, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, and Hatsuho Nakamura, whose husband died while serving with the Japanese army. He also interviewed Toshiko Sasaki, a 20-year-old clerk, and Kiyoshi Tanimoto, a pastor of a Methodist church. He presented the first human account of the attack available at that time.

Those at the centre of Hiroshima felt a blinding flash, but no noise. The heat of the 6,000 °C blast incinerated people. Then a loud blast ripped through the city destroying a hospital 2 km away. A huge cloud of dust went up and later it rained with droplets the size of marbles.

People wandered the streets; their eyes melted from the searing flash. Survivors, burnt and raw, made their way to a river, complaining they felt “so cold.” They lay down and died. Others vomited and by the next day they also were dead.

The aftermath was an “endless parade of misery.” There was no one to carry away the mounting corpses. People were trapped in the rubble, but there was no one to help. Even the soldiers from the Chugoku Regional Army Headquarters were severely injured and dying.

There was little medication, food, clothing or shelters to help the suffering masses, many with radiation sickness. The survivors became known as *hibakusha*, ‘explosion affected persons.’

Of the 150 doctors in Hiroshima, 65 died on the first day. Of the 1,780 nurses, 1,654 were dead. In the Red Cross Hospital there were six doctors, only one uninjured, to attend to the thousands of victims streaming in. Many of these were school girls who had been working preparing

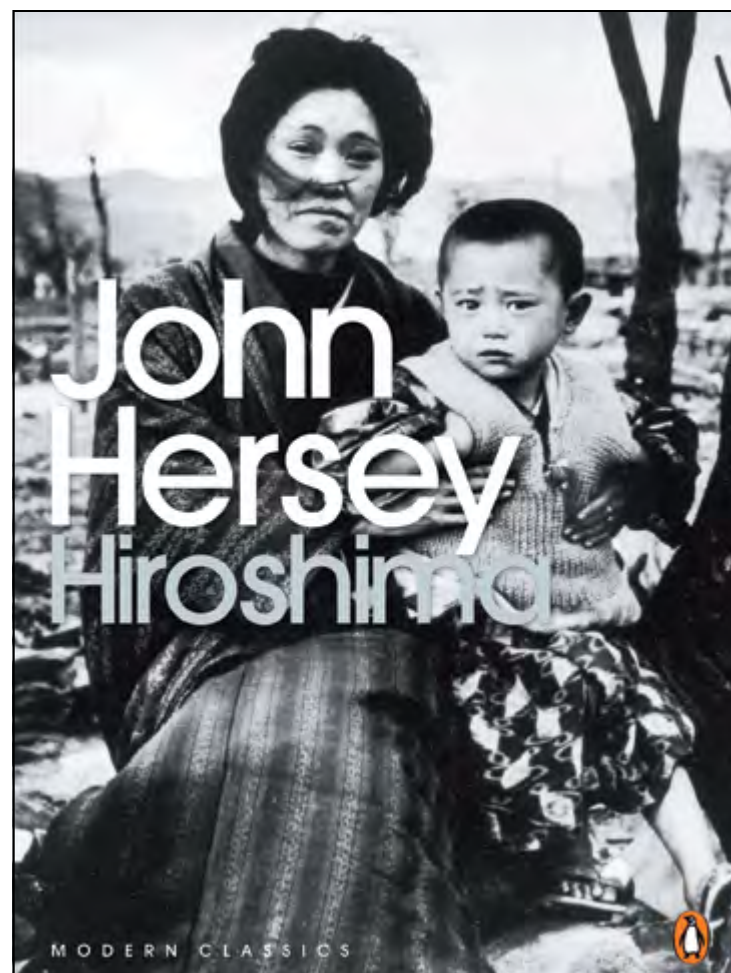
the streets for a bombing raid. Later their hair fell out. From the common symptoms doctors soon realised this was not an ordinary bomb.

On 7 August the Japanese radio broadcast that “it is believed a new type of bomb was used. The details are being investigated.” US President Truman announced they had tested an atomic bomb, equivalent to “twenty thousand tons of TNT.”

By the end of September plants flowered in abundance across Hiroshima. Radiation levels were down to 3.9 times ‘natural’ levels, so scientists allowed the survivors to return to what was left of their homes and businesses. By November 137,000 were living in greater Hiroshima.

In 1957 the Japanese government passed the A-Bomb Victims Medical Care Act. The ruin of the Hiroshima Industrial Promotion Hall was kept as a physical reminder of the bombing.

After writing *Hiroshima* (1946) Hersey turned to writing novels, winning the Pulitzer Prize for *A Bell For Adano*, a story of the Allied occupation of a town in Sicily in 1944. I found *Hiroshima* enthralling. ★



Israel demolishes Palestinian homes, bans protests

Israeli occupation authorities have torn down or forced the demolition of dozens of Palestinian-owned buildings across the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem in recent weeks, part of a year that has already brought a record 870 demolitions since January, according to a new report from the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

This pace is more than double the annual average recorded in the 15 years before 2024.

Among the buildings destroyed recently were 15 residential structures and 24 others used for work, agriculture, water, and sanitation.

Five households totalling 22 people, including five children, were left homeless in the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Ras al-Amud and Sur Baher, in the West Bank village of Khirbet Jamrura near Hebron, and in the Jordan Valley community of Ein al-Hilweh. Nineteen more households, comprising over 100 people, were otherwise harmed by the demolitions, OCHA found.

On 26 July, Israeli forces forcibly evicted five Palestinian families from a three-storey, six-apartment building in Jerusalem's Old City, where they had lived since the 1930s. The eviction followed a lawsuit filed in 2018 by the state's Custodian General after Israeli courts

upheld a challenge to the families' ownership of the property. Once the families were removed, settlers affiliated with Ateret Cohanim, an organisation that works to establish illegal Jewish settlement inside Palestinian neighbourhoods of the Old City and East Jerusalem, took over the building.

That eviction is part of a wider pattern. Since the start of 2026, Israeli courts have ordered the forcible removal of 22 Palestinian households – 85 people, including 30 children – mostly from the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan. OCHA estimates roughly 200 more Palestinian households across East Jerusalem now face the threat of eviction through

ongoing lawsuits in Israeli courts, most of them filed by Israeli settler organisations.

All these new seizures come on top of the Palestinian homes that have already been taken and destroyed.

"The main issue is the cruel reality of the occupation, the ethnic cleansing, and the murder that Palestinians endure daily," Ofer Cassif of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash) said. "Settlers carry out pogroms while the occupation forces enable it, protect them, and sometimes even take an active part."

Recently, hundreds demonstrated against settler violence at Habima Square in central Tel Aviv,

in a protest organised by a coalition called the Peace Partnership that included the DFPE (Hadash) and the groups Looking the Occupation in the Eye and Standing Together.

Police declared the gathering unlawful, pushed protesters back into the square, and later seized demonstrators' sound equipment by force. Similar protests led to nine arrests near Israel's military headquarters on Tel Aviv's Kaplan Street and three arrests in the Arab town of Umm al-Fahm, where police likewise declared the assembly unlawful.

Morning Star (edited for space) ✖

Azerbaijan jails four for promoting communism

RL Richards

A court in Azerbaijan's capital Baku sentenced four Azerbaijani citizens to prison terms of 18 months to two years on 29 July for promoting communist ideology and attempting to organise a march carrying Soviet flags. Theirs is the latest case in an escalating campaign against the political left in Azerbaijan.

Ibrahim Asadli and Abdulla Ibrahimli were each sentenced to two years in prison. Elchin Bayramli and Mehman Zeynalov each received 18-month terms.

All four were charged under Article 233 of Azerbaijan's Criminal Code, which covers organising or actively participating in actions that violate public order. Prosecutors said the men rented an office space in Baku where they held periodic meetings and recorded

material promoting Marxist and communist ideas, distributed that material on social media, and attempted to organise a march through Baku carrying flags of the Soviet Union and the former Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs detained the four men in a Baku park in November 2025 after videos of the planned march circulated online and a court ordered them held in pretrial detention for three months. Their trial concluded with the prison sentences.

Communist parties and communist symbols are not formally banned in Azerbaijan. The Communist Party of Azerbaijan has been a legally registered political party since 1994, entitled to hold political education events, run candidates, and participate in elections. That the state instead pursued a public-order charge against these four men – rather than any law targeting communism

directly – underscores, in the view of critics, that Azerbaijani authorities are using public order statutes as a workaround to punish political dissent that isn't technically illegal.

Human rights organisations have long described Azerbaijan's government as a hereditary dictatorship built around the Aliyev family. Heydar Aliyev, a former chairman of the Azerbaijan SSR's KGB and First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan under the Soviet Union, became president of independent Azerbaijan in 1993. When he died in 2003, power passed to his son, Ilham Aliyev, who remains president today and chairs the ruling New Azerbaijan Party, an observer member of the Centrist Democrat International.

The Human Rights Foundation has described Aliyev as having essentially inherited his father's throne and says the family's grip on power now spans more than three

decades, reinforced by a 2016 constitutional referendum that removed presidential term limits.

Elections are held in Azerbaijan, but international observers and human rights groups have repeatedly found them to fall short of free and fair standards. The country's unicameral legislature, the Milli Majlis, is dominated by Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party, which holds 68 of 125 seats; independents, most of them aligned with the government, hold roughly 44.

This is not an isolated case. Azerbaijani authorities have arrested other activists in recent months over similar attempts to publicly display Soviet symbols, part of a wider crackdown that human rights advocates say treats communist political expression as a public safety threat even though it remains formally legal.

People's World ✖

Marvel stars back campaign to free Palestinian leader

More than 20 actors, including Benedict Cumberbatch, Mark Ruffalo, Don Cheadle, Cate Blanchett, and Tilda Swinton, have backed a campaign calling for the release of imprisoned Palestinian political figure Marwan Barghout.

The actors added their names to a statement urging the United Nations and governments around the world to press for Barghout's release from an Israeli prison.

The statement was shared by the Free Marwan campaign, launched by Barghout's family and supporters. The wider campaign has secured the backing of more than 200 prominent figures from film, music, literature, and culture.

"We express our grave concern at the continuing imprisonment of Marwan Barghout, his violent mistreatment and denial of legal rights whilst imprisoned," the statement said. "We call upon the United Nations and the governments of the world to actively seek the release of Marwan Barghout from Israeli prison."

Among the latest signatories are Cumberbatch, who portrays Doctor Strange in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Ruffalo, known for playing Bruce Banner/Hulk, and Cheadle, who portrays James Rhodes, also known as War Machine.

Other actors with Marvel ties who have backed the statement include Cate Blanchett, Tilda Swinton, Daniel Bruhl, Rebecca Hall, Zawe Ashton, Tatiana Maslany, May Calamawy, Emma Corrin and Kingsley Ben-Adir.

Ian McKellen, Brian Cox, Riz Ahmed, Elliot Page, Hugo Weaving, Dan Stevens, Rob Delaney and Jason Flemyng are also among those highlighted by the campaign.

Barghout, 67, has been imprisoned by the Israeli occupation for more than two decades and remains one of the most prominent figures in Palestinian politics.

A senior Fatah member, Barghout was detained by Israeli forces in 2002 during the Second Intifada. In 2004, an Israeli court sentenced him to five life terms and an additional 40 years after convicting him over attacks that killed five people.

Barghout denied the charges and refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Israeli court.

Despite spending more than two decades in prison, Barghout has remained a prominent political figure among Palestinians and has repeatedly performed strongly in opinion polls as a potential future president.

Al Mayadeen ✖



Bougainville women call for self government

A statement from the
Bougainville Women's Federation



Self-determination is about the right of the people of Bougainville to freely determine their own political future and to shape their social, economic, and cultural development. It reflects the long history of struggle, sacrifices, and aspirations of the Bougainville people for peace, justice, dignity, and greater control over their own destiny.

We voted in a peaceful referendum, and the outcome was a clear 97.7% YES for INDEPENDENCE: Therefore, the people of Bougainville are united in our common aspiration for an independent homeland.

The Women of Bougainville were and are still the backbone of society who stood side by side with the leaders of Bougainville in all political endeavours of our land and also exercised our voice together with the men folk, the youths, the elderly and the marginalised groups (i.e. people with disabilities, widows etc), during the 2019 Bougainville referendum on the question of autonomy or independence for Bougainville.

It is now August 2026 (SEVEN LONG YEARS LATER) – we call on The Papua New Guinea Parliament to do what is right and honourable – and to ratify the referendum outcome for independence for Bougainville.

The Women of Bougainville, during this historical political era, noted the inclusion of the marginalised population at each polling station as a clear demonstration of how serious our stand is towards our political aspiration. We recorded the postal vote visitations made at each centre together with other Civil Society Organisations and advocated for a free, fair and peaceful election. The turnout at the referendum was unprecedented and internationally received and accredited by observer teams, including Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the Pacific Islands Forum.

With respect: we, the people of Bougainville, have waited patiently and in good faith for the government of Papua New Guinea to follow the agreed Peace Process.

What message does the government of Papua New Guinea send if they DENY OUR VOTE and our aspirations for SELF DETERMINATION?

The women of Bougainville are praying and believing for Papua New Guinea to recognise our choice for Independence evidenced through the Bougainville Referendum. If the Parliament fails to endorse the result, where is their respect for us?

The government of Papua New Guinea would become our oppressors and would be seen as perpetuating former colonialism.

To the government and people of Papua New Guinea: as a matter of principle, respect our right to exercise our individual and collective rights to self-determination.

Bougainvilleans never freely ceded their sovereignty to anyone, nor were our leaders going to give it away to the new state of Papua New Guinea. Historically, the people of Bougainville exercised our universally accepted right for a UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence) on 1 September 1975 and declared us to be the Republic of North Solomons. This Declaration was proclaimed fifteen days before Papua New Guinea attained formal independence from Australia on 16 September 1975.

RESPECT OUR CHOICE, LET OUR PEOPLE GO!



Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

4:15pm till 5:00pm

Thursday 17 September

USA Consulate, 50 Miller Street North Sydney

Call 0418 270 885



**Something to say?
Write to the Editor!**

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Global Briefs

INDONESIA: China and Indonesia have agreed to deepen their military cooperation while broadening ties in technology, minerals, energy, and other strategic sectors, as both countries seek to strengthen bilateral relations amid growing geopolitical competition in Asia. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Defence Minister Dong Jan travelled to Indonesia for talks with their Indonesian counterparts. Their discussions covered cooperation in defence, artificial intelligence, railway transportation, green energy, satellite technology and fisheries. "The current international situation is interconnected and complex," said the Chinese FM. "Unilateral actions and attempts at hegemony are having a serious impact on global cooperation and stability." Wang Yi added that China intends to "actively advance China-Indonesia cooperation at a high level."

RUSSIA: Russia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are involved in an upcoming network of railways and highways stretching from Russia to the Indian Ocean coast which will become a mega-project comparable to China's Belt and Road Initiative. The recent transport crises at major logistical bottlenecks such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Suez Canal, highlight the need for additional transport routes. A Russia-Central Asia-Indian Ocean rail corridor through Afghanistan and Pakistan could slash delivery times from 35 days to just five.

PANAMA: The number of ships allowed to pass through the Panama Canal will be reduced due to El Niño. Usually, 36 vessels a day pass through the canal, but this will be reduced due to low rainfall caused by El Niño, a sea surface warming pattern that affects storms and rainfall. Authorities said that the reduction was needed to safeguard water resources for human consumption and "preserve service reliability."

SOMALIA: UNICEF has warned that the Somalia child crisis is getting worse as aid cuts close 205 health and nutrition facilities and drive a 32% increase in severe malnutrition admissions. Under severe funding shortages, as many as 618 health facilities could eventually close across Somalia. This year nearly 1.9 million children in Somalia are projected to be affected by malnutrition, including almost half a million suffering from severe acute malnutrition, UNICEF said.

UK: UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham announced the transfer of classified data for the production of long-range autonomous SCALP missiles in Ukraine to Kiev, according to a statement released by his office, "as Ukraine and France look to establish local assembly lines in Ukraine." Burnham visited Kiev on 24 August 2026.

CHILE: Hundreds of activists took part in protests in the capital and other cities against the removal of environmental protections by the new right-wing president, Jose Antonio Kast. They also protested against plans to allow the hunting of sea lions, which, according to environmentalists, would benefit the salmon farming industry and increase industrial trawling.

LIBERIA: The US carried out its first deportation under an agreement for Liberia to accept up to 1,200 people who are not from this African country. It's one of the largest efforts yet to deport people to countries other than their own.

NETHERLANDS: The Dutch public broadcaster Avrotros has pulled out of the 2027 Eurovision Song Contest, saying that it is not confident that "the independent and neutral character" of the contest has been upheld. Avrotros cited the humanitarian suffering in Gaza and ongoing restrictions on press freedom by Israel as contributing to "divisions" surrounding the contest recently.

65 years after Agent Orange: Vietnam still seeks justice

Amiad Horowitz

August 2026 marks 65 years since the United States first began spraying the chemical weapon known as Agent Orange over Vietnam. More than six decades later, its devastating effects continue to be felt by millions of people across Southeast Asia, making it one of the longest-lasting legacies of the US war against Vietnam.

The significance of this anniversary was highlighted at the annual commemoration organised by the Vietnamese Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (VAVA). Each year, the event is broadcast nationally to increase awareness of the continuing struggle faced by Agent Orange victims and to raise funds for their care.

This year's ceremony recognised not only the victims but also those who have dedicated themselves to supporting them. VAVA was awarded Vietnam's Second Class Labour Medal in recognition of its decades of work caring for people affected by Agent Orange and dioxin poisoning. The event brought together Vietnamese officials, advocates, donors, and international friends of the organisation.

Noticeably absent, however, for the second consecutive year, was any representative of the United States Embassy.

That absence stood in sharp contrast to the scale of the humanitarian work being carried out by VAVA. Over the past year alone, the organisation began construction on nearly 3,000 homes for Agent Orange victims and their families. It also continues to operate care centres across Vietnam for those whose medical and developmental needs go far beyond what individual families can provide on their own.

While this work is essential, it addresses only the consequences of a tragedy whose responsibility remains unresolved.

VAVA works closely with organisations and activists around the world, including the Communist Party USA, the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign, and Veterans For Peace, to raise awareness of the continuing human cost of Agent Orange and to campaign for justice for its victims in both Vietnam and the United States.

Despite decades of advocacy, the US government has limited its response almost exclusively to environmental remediation projects, such as cleaning dioxin-contaminated former military bases. While these cleanup efforts are important and are rightfully celebrated in Vietnam, Washington has continued to refuse to provide meaningful assistance or compensation to the millions of human victims of its chemical warfare.

The corporations that manufactured

Agent Orange have likewise escaped accountability.

For years, US courts have protected companies such as Dow Chemical and Monsanto from legal responsibility, accepting the argument that because they produced Agent Orange under contract for the US government during wartime, they are shielded from civil lawsuits. As a result, victims have repeatedly been denied their day in court.

Until her recent retirement, former Rep. Barbara Lee was among the strongest voices in Congress advocating for justice for Agent Orange victims. Throughout her time in office, she repeatedly introduced legislation that would have provided assistance not only to victims in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, but also to affected communities within the United States, including US veterans and their families. Those efforts never became law, and with the current political balance in Washington, the legislative path toward justice has all but been shut.

But all hope is not lost.

Since 2014, Tran To Nga – a Vietnamese survivor of Agent Orange who is now a French citizen – has pursued an alternative path to justice by bringing a lawsuit in France against the French subsidiaries of several companies that manufactured Agent Orange.

Her case seeks to bypass the protections afforded to those companies in US courts. Although the lower French courts dismissed her claims, they did so on jurisdictional grounds rather than by examining the evidence surrounding the production and use of Agent Orange.

Now, the case has reached a critical turning point.

On 8 July, France's Court of Cassation decided to refer Tran To Nga's appeal to the Assemblée plénière, the court's full assembly and highest judicial formation. The decision does not determine the outcome of the lawsuit, but it recognises that the legal questions involved are of exceptional importance.

Tran's legal team argues that while the companies fulfilled contracts for the US government, they remained private corporations operating for profit. As commercial entities, they should not be allowed to claim the sovereign immunity of the US government to shield themselves from accountability for the consequences of their products.

Especially encouraging is that the Advocate General of the Court of Cassation has recommended that the lower courts' rulings be overturned and that the companies' claims to judicial immunity be rejected.

The appeals process is expected to take another six to twelve months. Should the court rule in Tran's favour, it would not end the struggle for justice. Instead, it would finally allow the case to proceed on its merits



A man with severe arm deformities related to agent orange exposure when he was in gestation and his pregnant mother was exposed to the defoliating chemical, dioxin. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Photo: Emilio Labrador – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Children continue to be born with severe disabilities linked to wartime contamination

and open the possibility that, for the first time, the manufacturers of Agent Orange could be held legally accountable.

Should that happen, it would represent the most significant breakthrough in the decades-long campaign for justice.

The need for that justice has never disappeared. Across Vietnam, an estimated three to four million people continue to suffer the consequences of Agent Orange and dioxin exposure. In neighbouring Laos, hundreds of thousands more have been affected. Children continue to be born with severe disabilities linked to wartime contamination, with fourth-generation victims now being documented in some families.

Sixty-five years after the first spraying

missions, the war's chemical legacy remains a living reality. The United States government and the corporations that produced these poisons have yet to accept responsibility for the human suffering they helped create. Environmental cleanup alone is not enough. The victims deserve recognition, meaningful assistance, and justice.

As Vietnam commemorates another anniversary of the beginning of the Agent Orange campaign, the world should remember that this is not merely a story of history. It is a story that continues every day in the lives of millions of people still waiting for accountability.

People's World ✶

Why North Korea rejected Trump's peace gesture

Dae-Han Song

Trump offered to scale down the 2026 Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise, carried out annually by the US Forces in Korea (USFK) and Republic of Korea (ROK) military.

In Trumpian style, the decision was framed as everything all at once: punishment against South Korea for its tepid response on Iran, and a conciliatory gesture to North Korea.

The decision fell flat on its face. Rather than feeling the pressure, the Lee Administration embraced the decision. Instead of embracing the decision as a conciliatory gesture,

North Korea rejected it. So, what happened?

Lee's Democratic Party has always attempted to improve inter-Korean relations. Reducing the scale of USFK-ROK military exercises was always one way to achieve this. If Korean Democratic Party administrations don't explicitly ask for a scaling down from the US, it is for fear of raising eyebrows in the US and triggering a backlash among South Korea's conservatives. From Lee's perspective, Trump reducing the scale of the military exercises is not a punishment. It's a gift.

Why has North Korea rejected this gesture? Partly the haphazard,

last minute (the day before) aspect of the decision marks it more as a tacked on afterthought rather than a well-placed gesture.

The rejection can also be explained by the dramatic improvement in North Korea's geopolitical and economic position in the region. As the US-led San Francisco System of regional bilateral alliances and NATO are fracturing the world into competing blocs, North Korea consolidated a "blood alliance" with Russia by sending troops to Russia.

As a result, once-crippling US sanctions can no longer isolate and pressure North Korea. In other words, as North Korea aligns with China and Russia, US leverage

and pressure against it decreases. In fact, North Korea's economy is booming.

Faced with his disastrous war in Iran, Trump is trying to win some PR points before the US November election. In the long run, he wants to pull North Korea away from China. Yet, there is little reason for North Korea to break with these relations in exchange for promises that the US might never carry out.

Trump is fickle and nothing guarantees that an agreement would be approved by Congress. There's no guarantee any deal could survive a post-Trump Administration.

The scaling down of the USFK and ROK military exercises should

be welcomed. Yet, on its own, it is simply not enough against the US history of broken promises and against the US drumming for war in the region.

Ultimately, peace in Korea will have to depend on peace in the region. Peace in the region can only be achieved by dismantling the US San Francisco System of bilateral military alliances.

Globetrotter (edited for space) ✶

Time on Iran’s side

Former CIA analyst Larry Johnson has said that a prolonged confrontation increasingly favours Iran, pointing to mounting military, logistical, economic and political pressure on the United States as Tehran prepares to adopt a more offensive posture.

Speaking during the program *The Great Standoff: Iran and the World*, Johnson argued that Washington faces growing difficulties sustaining its military presence and replenishing advanced weapons, while Marandi said Iran’s ability to endure the consequences of the war is greater because it views itself as defending against an externally imposed aggression.

“Time’s on the side of Iran, not the United States,” Johnson said, arguing that strains within the US military would become increasingly difficult to sustain the longer the conflict continued.

Johnson pointed in particular to the deteriorating conditions aboard US vessels, including shortages of food and personal hygiene supplies, malfunctioning sanitation systems and serious morale problems among personnel.

He said those difficulties extend beyond the Navy, citing concerns over suicides and morale across different branches of the US military. “The longer this goes on, the more it wears on the personal morale of individual soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen,” Johnson said.

Johnson mentioned that “one news report indicated that as many as six sailors had tried to jump overboard on the *Abraham Lincoln*. I had a recently

retired US military officer tell me that was a lie, that the number was probably closer to 30, not just six. We find that these problems are not confined just to the Navy.”

Beyond personnel pressures, Johnson argued that the United States is increasingly constrained by shortages of advanced weapons and its reliance on foreign supply chains. He said China controls critical materials required to manufacture weapons, including Tomahawk and JASSM cruise missiles, PAC-3 interceptors used by Patriot systems and THAAD missiles.

Johnson cited a recent study which he said found that nearly 80% of US weapons systems are exposed to Chinese supply chains, arguing that Washington has made itself dependent on a country it simultaneously identifies as a strategic adversary.

He also pointed to limitations in the US Navy’s ability to resupply forces deployed around Iran, saying the number of fast combat support ships available to sustain aircraft carriers, destroyers and cruisers had declined considerably over the past decade.

Johnson argued that Iranian strikes on warehouses in Bahrain and Oman used to resupply US forces had further compounded those problems. “When Iran destroyed the warehouses in Bahrain and Oman that were used to resupply those ships, that’s created a problem,” he said.

“So when you put all that together, time’s on the side of Iran, not the United States.”

Al Mayadeen ★



Balanced (policies)

‘Balance’ is one of those reasonable-sounding words that has its uses. Who doesn’t want to get the balance right? Nobody, that’s who. Balance is what you’re after if you’re planning a meal (balance between meat and veggies), or organising a football team, where you might want a balance between size and speed.

On the other hand, life is full of situations in which the idea of balance is ridiculous. Who wants balance when it comes to cockroaches in the house?

When government policies are ‘balanced,’ it often means that they’re not as horrible as they could be – like going from a 100-cockroach kitchen to a 50-cockroach kitchen. Asked about deeply inadequate gambling legislation, which still leaves incentives for problem gamblers in place and the nation’s children exposed to betting ads, Anthony Albanese said “I think we’ve got the balance right.”

Committed

Google says that they “remain deeply committed to sustainability.” That’s nice, but their carbon emissions are rising much faster than their use of renewables is. Try this at home! Next time someone asks if you’re going to do the dishes, tell them that you remain deeply committed to doing the dishes, then put another dirty dish in the sink and go to bed.

Slammed

There’s a lot of weasel words that work hard to make it look like the world at large is into something that mainly exists in the mind of a media outlet. *Daily Mail Australia*, always striving to be as awful as the UK version, has taken exception to quite a funny speech at the Logies.

Presenter Robert Irwin (Steve’s son) said that Karl Stefanovic’s absence meant that they’d saved money on bartenders and that they’d kept a seat for Karl “over there on the right ... the far right.” The speech was widely reported as funny, but the *Daily Mail*’s headline was “Irwin speech slammed,” implying that the nation was up in arms. All it really means is that the *Daily Mail* doesn’t like disrespect to far-right nitwits.

Politicise

There’s always something touching about politicians complaining about things being political or politicised. Politics is their job, it’s pretty much all they do with their waking hours. Foreign Minister Penny Wong – a professional politician who thinks of nothing else – has said that she doesn’t intend to politicise the Royal Commission into antisemitism. What she really means is that she doesn’t want to talk about it.

Expanding

When is a land-grab not a land-grab? When it’s an Israeli land-grab. The supposedly impartial BBC has reported on a Russian “land-grab” in Ukraine. “Land grab” makes it sound like the Russians have been purse-snatching, definitely doing something wrong.

The BBC has also reported on Israel “expanding settlements,” which sounds far more legitimate, unless you’re the Palestinian people whose land is being grabbed. Shonky language like this only works if you’re the BBC, so we urge readers not to move your fence into a neighbour’s block and try telling them you’re just “expanding” your property.

Secret

Karl Stefanovic (see above) as part of his move into the far-right-o-sphere, is spruiking a podcast about the Fabians, who he calls a “secret socialist society.” The Fabian Society has been around for 140 years. It’s secret in the same way Stefanovic’s podcast is – not hidden, but there’s not much interest.

Rational

Always a good thing for people, ideas, and actions to be, ‘rational’ is often weaselly because it’s not defined. Everything I do is rational, everything you do is emotional or irrational if I don’t like it. The *Australian Financial Review* has accused the union movement of “turning away from rational economic policy.” For the bosses’ paper, ‘rational’ means blaming wages for inflation and fretting over too many people being employed.

China boosts rice yields

Chinese scientists have identified a rare gene variant that could help rice mature earlier without sacrificing yield.

A study published online in the journal *Science* showed the long-standing challenge in rice breeding – the difficulty of combining early maturity with high yields – could be addressed.

A research team at the China National Rice Research Institute identified and cloned a rare DNA sequence, that can simultaneously shorten rice’s growth duration and

increase grain yield. The study found that the gene encodes a protein that not only promotes flowering but also responds to nitrogen signals and enhances nitrogen uptake and use.

The finding is particularly relevant to southern China, where farmers often use multiple-cropping systems involving early rice, late rice and oilseed crops.

In parts of southern China, farmers can grow two rice crops in the same year, leaving only a short window to harvest one crop and

plant the next. Cutting several days from the rice growth cycle could therefore help farmers fit more crops into the same growing season.

The researchers said the gene could be used in different types of rice, including conventional early-season varieties and hybrid varieties planted later in the year, potentially providing a genetic resource for developing varieties that mature earlier while maintaining or increasing yields.

Global Times ★



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'They wanted Iran to become Venezuela'

Iran's president Masoud Pezeshkian has said that attempts to weaken Iran have instead produced greater national cohesion and resilience. He said Tehran wants to escape the damaging "no war, no peace" situation but will not make concessions in negotiations.

Iranian officials also said neighbouring states are discussing new regional security arrangements independent of the United States. The Iranian President has declared that efforts to weaken and isolate Iran have failed, saying the country instead emerged from months of confrontation as a stronger and more cohesive power.

Speaking during a ceremony renewing allegiance to Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic, Pezeshkian said Iran was confronting what he described as a comprehensive war spanning the economic, military and security fields.

"They wanted to turn Iran into Venezuela," Pezeshkian said, according to *Al Mayadeen*, arguing that the opposite had occurred.

Instead, he said, Iran had become a power that "astonished the world" through its resilience, solidarity, and internal cohesion.

His comments came days after US President Donald Trump announced what he called the "most crushing economic operation ever taken against any country," promising an unprecedented campaign of economic warfare and isolation against Tehran.

Pezeshkian simultaneously signalled that Tehran wants a diplomatic path out of the present confrontation.

According to Iran's IRNA news agency, the president said Iranian officials were discussing almost daily how to end the current condition of "no war, no peace."

But he insisted that Iran would not make concessions in order to achieve an agreement.

Pezeshkian said any understanding would have to preserve Iran's "principles and values" while ensuring that its adversaries would not consider launching another attack.

War itself offered no solution, he said, but the continuing possibility that hostilities could suddenly resume was also damaging Iran economically.

Investment, Pezeshkian warned, would remain difficult to attract while the country existed under the constant threat of renewed fighting. The challenge, he said, was therefore to break the deadlock through "logic" while preserving Iran's military strength.

NO CAPITULATION

The Iranian president also defended the memorandum of understanding reached with Washington in June through Pakistani and Qatari mediation.

Pezeshkian rejected suggestions that the agreement represented Iranian capitulation.

He said the document contained no provision requiring Tehran to surrender its positions or make concessions.

The memorandum halted hostilities that had begun in February and opened negotiations toward a more comprehensive settlement. Those talks have since stalled, however, amid disputes over implementation and the future of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.

The strategic waterway remains one of the central points of disagreement between Iran and the United States.

ASSERTIVE

Pezeshkian's remarks echoed increasingly assertive statements from senior Iranian security officials. Supreme National Security Council Secretary Major General Mohsen Rezaei said that Iran's defensive strategy had evolved significantly during the conflict.

"Iran today is not Iran before the war," Rezaei said. He added that perceptions of the United States had also changed as a result of the confrontation. Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said separately the government would not allow the economic stability or livelihoods of Iranian citizens to become targets of what Tehran describes as US "economic terrorism."

The comments came shortly after Iran's army announced that its military doctrine itself was moving from a traditionally defensive posture toward what officials described as a more "offensive" approach.



Iran's president Masoud Pezeshkian. Photo: khamenei.ir – flickr.com (CC BY 4.0)

NEIGHBOURS SEEK NEW ORDER

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf meanwhile said that Tehran has received "numerous messages" from neighbouring states concerning new regional security arrangements and economic cooperation.

"We've received numerous messages from neighbouring countries about shaping new security arrangements and economic cooperation in the region," Qalibaf wrote on social media.

He accused Washington of putting the security of its own regional allies at risk through policies pursued primarily for Israel.

"A homegrown, independent order is what will actually deliver peace and security," Qalibaf said.

Tehran has increasingly portrayed the war as accelerating a regional shift away from dependence on US security guarantees.

Iranian officials argue that the confrontation exposed the vulnerability of countries hosting American military forces and demonstrated the potential costs of allowing their territory to be used in attacks against Iran.

US AIRCRAFT LEAVE BULGARIA

That argument received another boost over the weekend when two US KC-135 aerial refuelling aircraft departed Bulgaria's Bezmer Air Base after approximately one month.

Bulgarian Defence Minister Dimitar Stoyanov said the aircraft left on Friday.

Bulgaria's parliament had approved a US request on 22 July allowing the temporary deployment of up to eight KC-135 aircraft and approximately 250 US military personnel at the base.

The arrival of the initial aircraft triggered local protests amid fears that the base could become a target for Iranian missile or drone attacks.

Tehran had formally protested the deployment and warned Sofia against permitting Bulgarian territory to be used in military operations against Iran. Iran's Foreign Ministry said at the time that allowing such operations would make Bulgaria a participant in aggression and war crimes.

Al Mayadeen ★

Israel attacks Syria

Israel launched a drone attack on a vehicle in south-western Syria on 22 August wounding several people.

The violence came after the US envoy to Damascus accused Israel of carrying out an earlier attack on a north-western airbase, as a means of "baiting" Türkiye.

Syria's Alikhbaryia channel reported that an Israeli drone hit a civilian vehicle near the town of Beit Jinn in the Damascus countryside, wounding a man.

Syria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates slammed

the attack on the civilian vehicle "in the strongest terms."

In a statement the ministry said: "This attack constitutes a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and the integrity of its territory and a blatant breach of international law – and comes in the context of repeated Israeli attacks on Syrian territory."

Israel's military confirmed the strike, claiming it had targeted "a terrorist who advanced terror attacks in their final stages of preparation" in southern Syria.

The activity "posed an imme-

diate threat to our forces" the military added.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes against Syria since the ousting of its former president Bashar al-Assad in 2024.

Israel has also sent troops into the United Nations-patrolled buffer zone that divides Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights.

Last Tuesday it launched an attack on the Abu al-Duhur air base in north western Idlib province, claiming Turkey had been attempting to set up a military presence there.

Damascus and Ankara both deny the accusation.

In a rare rebuke for Israel, United States special envoy for Syria and Iraq, Tom Barrack, who is also ambassador to Türkiye, slammed the attack as an "unnecessary escalation."

Barrack said the strike may have been intended to provoke a conflict with Türkiye ahead of the upcoming general elections in Israel.

"One theory is they were just baiting Türkiye, and it's a very aggressive, but maybe well-received, pre-election concept," Barrack said.

The ambassador also said Israel did not warn the US before the strike.

Israel's far-right Defence Minister Israel Katz contradicted Barrack's claim that there had been no warning, however, saying in a statement that Tel Aviv decided to alert senior members of the Syrian government.

"Simultaneously, we transferred the intelligence reports to the relevant authorities in the US," he added.

Morning Star ★



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