

Dozens of people were arrested in Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and South America on Wednesday in an operation against members of Italy's 'Ndrangheta organized crime group, officials said.

# Dutch set to back Marrakesh migration pact next week

A clear majority of MPs in the Dutch lower house of parliament back signing the Marrakesh pact on controlling migration, it emerged during a stormy debate on Tuesday evening.

The debate was called by Forum voor Democratie leader, Thierry Baudet, who has been engaged in a high profile campaign against the pact, dutchnews.nl reported.

A motion of no confidence in the cabinet, however, was only backed by the FvD and the anti-immigration PVV.

Junior immigration minister, Mark Harbers, defending the measure to MPs, said the pact should be viewed as a diplomatic instrument to combat unregulated migration.

It also includes basic principles which make it easier to reach deals with other countries, he said.

Baudet said in his speech that the pact will encourage immigration and that migrants will derive rights from it, with the help of lawyers, a statement Harbers firmly rejected.

"The pact is not a human right and it cannot be enforced legally," he said.

"It is about cooperation between countries."

Vote MPs will formally vote on the pact next week. The Dutch government has already agreed to introduce an additional declaration to prevent unintentional legal consequences.

The additional document, known as an EOP or explanation of position, reaffirms that the United Nations pact will not lead to additional jurisprudence, thereby stopping refugees using it as an extra legal support in asylum claims.



Forum voor Democratie Leader Thierry Baudet

PETER HILZ/HH

Harbers has also pledged to provide a legal analysis of the pact to parliament, so it can be debated before the Marrakesh meeting next week.

Australia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Austria have all refused to sign the pact,

saying it will weaken their own immigration controls.

In Belgium, the largest party in the center-right coalition government has said it will not back the plan, forcing a government crisis.

## North of England continues to see bigger cuts in public spending, report finds

Government spending in the north of England has fallen by £6.3 billion while the southeast and southwest of England have seen an increase of £3.2 billion since 2009-10, according to an analysis of official figures.

Andy Burnham, Labour mayor of Greater Manchester, called on ministers to place northern England at "the front of the queue for public investment" after the north-south divide was highlighted in a report on Wednesday, theguardian.com reported.

The study, by the think tank IPPR North, found that the north of England continued to see bigger cuts in public spending than any other region.

Spending per head in London has increased by twice as much as spending in the north - £326 per head in London, compared with just £146 per head in the north - since the launch of George Osborne's "northern powerhouse" initiative in 2014, the report found.

Burnham said, "Almost five years after the government promised us a northern powerhouse, we learn that public spending in the north has fallen while rising in the south. This has got to stop and it is time that the north came to the front of the queue for public investment."



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

The report warned that, despite some progress, the government's northern powerhouse initiative had not moved beyond its original focus on increased productivity and transport investment.

The think tank said the next phase of the project must be led by political leaders in the north instead of officials in Whitehall.

Luke Raikes, the report's author and a senior research fellow at IPPR North, said, "The government is so consumed by Westminster's Brexit chaos that it has deprioritized the northern powerhouse agenda at the very time it is needed most. This cannot continue."

"All our regional economies face severe challenges - including London's. Brexit threatens to make this much worse and the northern powerhouse agenda is the best chance we have of fixing this national economic crisis. In the national interest, the north needs to thrive."

The report noted some progress in the north, including advanced manufacturing, energy and health innovation. Productivity in these sectors is forecast to grow by 38 percent by 2030, according to IPPR North.

But more investment in other areas, such as education, skills and health, is needed to transform lives in the north, it added.

As many as two million adults and one million children live in poverty in the north, the report said. Weekly pay has fallen by £21 in the north since 2008, more than the national fall in pay, and half a million people work in accommodation and food services jobs where weekly pay is half the national average.

Northern neighborhoods have the lowest life expectancies in England, the report found. In one neighborhood in Blackpool the average male life expectancy at birth is 68, which is well below the English average of 79.

Sarah Longlands, the director of IPPR North, said the north had started to see some benefits of the northern powerhouse project, but added, "Too many of the north's people and places are yet to feel the benefits. One million northern children live in poverty. Many families depend upon precarious and poorly paid jobs and levels of healthy life expectancy in many areas constrain the opportunities of people to play an active role in their local economy."

A government spokesperson said, "The north is thriving, with a record number of people in work and over 200,000 more businesses today than in 2010."

"Never before has it had such a powerful local voice, following the election of four new metro mayors, and a fifth on the way, who have empowered to champion their communities and build on this success."

"We are also backing the whole of the northern powerhouse with £3.4 billion to boost local economic growth and a record £13 billion in transport improvements, meaning almost £250 per person - more than any other region - will be invested next year to help commuters and motorists across the north."

## Christmas cheer at British school after ban lifted

A British school that threatened to ban Christmas has been persuaded to reinstate it by "thoughtful" pupils.

Lady Lumley's School in Pickering, North Yorkshire, England, previously told pupils it would ban all festive activities, BBC reported.

RE (religious education) teacher Chris Paul said "an avalanche of commercialization" had robbed the season of its meaning.

But after hundreds of emails and letters "making a strong case" for jingling the bells and bringing back the baubles, the school relented.

Paul had challenged pupils to consider the true meaning of Christmas and come up with answers to persuade her to change her mind.

Since throwing down the challenge, the school said it had received more than 500 emails and letters.

Head teacher Richard Bramley said, "Those students who really thought about the situation and challenged the decision appropriately created the change and brought back Christmas."

"I hope they and everyone else has a good Christmas."

He said the challenge was to make students consider the way in which society celebrates Christmas and think about the social problems that arise around this time.

"Students were asked to challenge the status quo; to ask 'why should we do things just because we have always done them?' and... to question whether non-religious people should celebrate a religious festival?"

Previously, Paul told pupils there would be "no cards, no parties, no gifts and no Christmas tree."

"Christmas is a day celebrating the birth of Jesus and should be a time of good will to all, yet it can be a very stressful, expensive, argumentative and lonely time," she said.

However, she added, "If the arguments are good enough, we might see fairy lights in Lady Lumley's once more."



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## Husband in podcast-famous mystery arrested

Australian police arrested the husband of a Sydney woman whose disappearance in 1982 has been the subject of a popular crime podcast.

Chris Dawson, 70, is to be charged with murdering Lynette Dawson, New South Wales (NSW) authorities said, BBC wrote.

Mr. Dawson has denied killing Mrs. Dawson, with whom he has two children. He has said that she abandoned the family for a religious group.

A podcast, "The Teacher's Pet", brought global attention to the case this year.

Police arrested Mr. Dawson in Queensland and said he would be extradited to NSW.

Mrs. Dawson's brother, Greg Simms, said he was "ecstatic" about the development.

"We've always been determined to find the truth and that's the reason why we've fought to keep Lyn's name alive," he told Nine News.

Two separate inquests have recommended for murder charges to be laid against a "known person."

However, prosecutors have previously said there was insufficient evidence to lay charges. No trace of Mrs. Dawson has ever been found.

### Police 'confident'

A search of the family's former



NSW POLICE

home in Sydney earlier this year failed to turn up new evidence.

However, police said the arrest followed three years of renewed investigations.

"We are confident with the case," Supt. Scott Cook told reporters on Wednesday.

"We won't give up on trying to identify the whereabouts of Lynette Dawson, but, from our perspective,

it is not crucial to finalizing the matter."

An inquest in 2003 found that Mr. Dawson, a former high school teacher and rugby league star, had engaged in unethical relationships with teenage students during his marriage.

One 16-year-old girl moved in to the family home within days of Mrs. Dawson's disappearance. The pair later married, but have since

separated.

Since May, more than 27 million people have listened to "The Teacher's Pet" podcast, which is produced by The Australian newspaper.

It has highlighted the bungled handling of Mrs. Dawson's case by police in the early years after her disappearance, prompting a recent apology from the state's police commissioner.

## China releases blue paper on poverty alleviation



news.cgtn.com

Important progress has been made in poverty alleviation efforts by Chinese enterprises, a "blue paper" released on Wednesday concluded.

The document from the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) said this was the result of increased investment, news.cgtn.com reported.

A total of 583 listed enterprises reported their annual investment on poverty alleviation, totaling ¥6.47 billion (\$942 million). The average investment of each enterprise is about ¥11 million.

The top 10 enterprises on spending have

helped more than 500,000 poor people, according to the paper.

Thirty-five successful and demonstrative cases were cited, such as PetroChina's precise policies on poverty alleviation, China FAW's innovative model and Ping An Insurance's efforts on village projects.

The paper also points out some of the shortcomings of the process, such as inferior management and lack of communication and transparency.

Only 1.69 percent of the listed companies have set up poverty alleviation departments, and only 3.07 percent of them have selected group leaders for the work.