

News in brief

◆ **Malaysia has detained** two tankers suspected of illegally transferring crude oil estimated to be worth \$129 million, authorities said yesterday. The Southeast Asian nation, which has come under scrutiny over oil transfers linked to sanctions evasion in its waters, pledged last year to crack down on illegal activities in its maritime zones. The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency said two tankers anchored north of the port of Penang were intercepted on Thursday following a tip-off. "An inspection found both vessels moored together, raising suspicion of an unauthorised transfer," Penang's maritime director, Muhammad Suffi Mohd Ramli, said in a statement. He said the vessels were carrying crude oil "valued at more than 512 million ringgit (\$129 million)". The vessels were seized and their captains handed over to investigators, he added.



Malaysia seizes tankers with \$129 mn worth of crude

◆ **Israeli air strikes** killed 32 people including children in Gaza on Saturday, according to the Palestinian territory's civil defence agency, as the military said it had attacked in response to a Hamas ceasefire violation. Despite a US-brokered truce entering its second phase earlier this month, violence in the Palestinian territory has continued, with both Israel and Hamas accusing each other of violating the agreement. The latest bloodshed comes after Israel announced it would reopen the crucial Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt on Sunday for the "limited movement of people". "The death toll since dawn today has risen to 32, most of them children and women," said the civil defence agency, a rescue force operating under the Hamas authority, updating an earlier toll of 28.

◆ **A powerful snow storm** bore down Saturday on southern states as icy weather that has left more than 100 dead across a swath of the United States intensified in regions not used to subzero conditions. Heavy snows were falling Saturday morning in North Carolina and neighboring states, as authorities urged residents to stay off the roads and warned oceanfront structures were threatened by the storm. The freezing weather forced NASA to postpone a key fueling test over the weekend of the 322-foot (98-meter) rocket that is on the Cape Canaveral launch pad in Florida. That in turn is likely to push back by at least a couple of days a planned, manned Moon flyby slated for next month. The National Weather Service said Saturday that an explosively deepening coastal cyclone will bring moderate to heavy snow, high winds, and possibly blizzard conditions for the Carolinas.

Snow storm barrels into southern US as blast of icy weather widens



SPOTLIGHT

I'm no angel, Italy's PM says amid church fresco row



A picture shows a detail of a newly restored fresco in the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Lucina where an angel is reported resembling Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (R), in Rome

AFP | Rome, Italy

Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, joked yesterday she does not look like an angel, after a row blew up in the media over a restored fresco in a Rome church. Some of Italy's press have been asking whether the premier served as inspiration for a cherub painted in a chapel in the San Lorenzo in Lucina basilica, located a few metres (yards) from the main building of the Italian government. The newspaper La Repubblica noted that, following recent renovations, one of the painted angels bears a resemblance to the blonde, diminutive leader. The winged figure is seen holding a parchment and standing next to a bust of Italy's last king, Umberto II, who reigned for just a month before being deposed in 1946.

The Italian restorer who worked on the cherubim, Bruno Ventinetti, denied to the press that he sought to immortalise Meloni, insisting that he only brought back the image of the original fresco. Meloni herself appeared amused by the controversy, posting an image of the restored fresco on Instagram with the comment: "No, decidedly I do not resemble an angel." But, after several opposition politicians complained, Italy's culture minister, Alessandro Giuli, said he had ordered an inspection of the fresco on Saturday. The expert look-over will "determine the nature of the works carried out on the updated painting inside one of the chapels of San Lorenzo in Lucina and decide what further steps might be taken", he said in a statement.



Modi with Foreign Ministers and delegations of the Arab League yesterday.

India-Arab League ties set for expansion in tech, energy and trade

TDI | agencies

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said India is confident that deeper co-operation with the Arab League will open new opportunities and

elevate bilateral relations, following his meeting with Arab League foreign ministers and their delegations. Mr Modi described the Arab world as part of India's extended neighbourhood, highlighting

long-standing civilisational links, strong people-to-people ties and enduring bonds of friendship. He said both sides share a commitment to peace, progress and regional stability. The Prime Minister noted that

expanding collaboration in areas such as technology, energy, trade and innovation could take the partnership to "new heights", signalling momentum for closer engagement across economic and strategic sectors.

Explosion in Iran port city caused by gas leak

● State television said the explosion ripped though an eight-storey residential building

AFP | Tehran, Iran

An explosion reported yesterday at a residential building in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas on the Gulf coast was the result of a gas leak, according to the local fire chief. State television said the explosion ripped though an eight-storey residential building, "destroying two floors, several vehicles, and shops" in the area of Moallem Boulevard in the city. "The initial cause of the building accident in Bandar Abbas was a gas leak and buildup, leading to an explosion. This is the ini-

Iran army chief warns US, Israel against attack, says forces on high alert

Paris, France

Iranian army chief Amir Hatami on Saturday warned the United States and Israel against an attack, saying his country's forces were on high alert following Washington's heavy military deployments in the Gulf. He also insisted the Islamic republic's nuclear expertise could not be eliminated, after

tial theory," Mohammad Amin Lyaghat said, in comments broadcast on state television. Separate incidents were reported elsewhere in the country on Saturday but media outlets quickly dismissed any connection

Trump said he expected Tehran to seek a deal to avoid US strikes. "If the enemy makes a mistake, without a doubt it will endanger its own security, the security of the region, and the security of the Zionist regime," Hatami said, according to the official IRNA news agency. He noted that Iran's armed forces were "at full defensive and military readiness".

to an attack or potential sabotage, with tensions high as US President Donald Trump intensifies threats of military strikes against Iran. "Unfortunately, a four-year-old girl lost her life," and 14 people

were hospitalised, Mehrdad Hasanzadeh, director general of crisis management for Hormozgan province where Bandar Abbas is the capital, told Mehr news agency. Images circulating on social media show part of the building's facade blown out. The incident came as the US has built up its naval presence in the region, including the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln. After rumours circulated online, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) denied that any of the buildings belonging to its naval forces in the province had been targeted, according to a statement carried by the Fars news agency. The Tasnim agency on Saturday also denied "assassination rumours" surrounding the commander of the Guards' navy Alireza Tangsiri.

Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence pact will not include Turkey

Turkish official said had entered talks aimed at entering the alliance

AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Turkey will not join a mutual defence pact between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, a source close to the Saudi military said yesterday, after a Turkish official said earlier this month that they had entered talks aimed at entering the alliance. Speculation has been rife that the three countries were intent on forming a powerful alliance

amid soaring tensions in the region, following Israeli air strikes in Doha over the summer targeting Hamas officials that preceded Iran's bombing of a US air base in Qatar. "Turkey won't join the defence pact with Pakistan," the source told AFP, dismissing reports of negotiations. "It's a bilateral pact with Pakistan and will remain a bilateral pact". A Gulf official also confirmed the information.

"This is a bilateral defensive relationship with Pakistan. We have common agreements with Turkey but the one with Pakistan will stay bilateral," the official said. The defence agreement between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, announced last year raised many questions, particularly about its possible nuclear component, given that Islamabad possesses nuclear weapons. The Pakistan-Saudi pact was

signed just months after Pakistan and India fought an intense four-day conflict in May that killed more than 70 people on both sides in missile, drone and artillery fire, the worst clashes between the nuclear-armed neighbours since 1999. India's rapidly developing economy relies heavily on petroleum imports, with Saudi Arabia ranked as its third-largest supplier according to the Indian foreign ministry.