

News in brief

◆ **Iran has announced** the discovery of a major gold deposit at one of the country's biggest mines for the precious metal, local media reported yesterday. The new vein structure was found at the privately owned Shadan gold mine in the eastern province of South Khorasan, which Fars news agency described as "among the country's most important". The agency said the new reserves have been officially validated by the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade. "The proven reserves of the Shadan gold mine in the east of the country have experienced a significant increase following the discovery of a vast gold vein," the report said. It added that the vein holds some "795 million tonnes of oxide gold ore and 53.1 million tonnes of sulphide gold ore." The former is usually significantly easier and cheaper to mine. Iran has not officially disclosed the amount of its national gold reserves but claims to have significantly increased its purchases in recent years.



**Iran announces discovery of major gold deposit: media**

**Hong Kong police say arrested 13 for manslaughter over fire**

◆ **Hong Kong police** said yesterday they had arrested a total of 13 people for manslaughter over a deadly fire that ripped through an apartment complex last week, killing at least 146. Chan Tung, director of crime and security of the Hong Kong Police Force, said they "have immediately begun comprehensive investigation along the lines of manslaughter", leading to the arrests of "a total of 13 people, including 12 men and one woman". Tung told a news conference those arrested were aged between 40 and 77. Officials also announced that some of the exterior netting used on scaffolding at the housing estate did not meet fire-resistance standards. "Samples collected from seven locations across high, middle and low floors in four buildings... did not meet the fire resistance test standards," the city's chief secretary Eric Chan told reporters.

◆ **US President Donald Trump** warned Israel yesterday against destabilizing Syria and its new leadership, days after a deadly operation by Israeli forces in the south of the country. "It is very important that Israel maintain a strong and true dialogue with Syria, and that nothing takes place that will interfere with Syria's evolution into a prosperous State," Trump said on his Truth Social platform. Trump said he was "very satisfied" with Syria's performance under former Islamist rebel President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who made a historic visit to the White House in November. Trump has been pushing for a security pact between Israel and Syria since Sharaa's Islamist coalition overthrew longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad a year ago. But tensions have risen over hundreds of strikes by Israel on Syria. In the deadliest so far, Israeli forces killed 13 people on Friday in an operation in southern Syria, saying they targeted an Islamist group.

**Trump warns Israel not to 'interfere' in Syria**



SPOTLIGHT

**WHO backs GLP-1 treatments to tackle obesity epidemic**

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

A range of blockbuster weight-loss and diabetes drugs could help shift the trajectory of the global obesity epidemic, which affects over one billion people worldwide, the World Health Organization said yesterday.



hope to millions."

**Not 'a magic bullet'**

A new generation of appetite-suppressing drugs called GLP-1 agonists -- which includes blockbuster brands Ozempic and Mounjaro -- has become massively popular in recent years.

On Monday, the United Nations health agency issued its first guidelines on how such drugs could be used as a key tool for treating obesity in adults as a chronic, relapsing disease.

More than 3.7 million people died from illnesses related to being overweight or obese in 2022, according to WHO figures -- more than top infectious killers malaria, tuberculosis and HIV combined.

The number of people living with obesity will double by 2030 unless decisive action is taken to stem the rise, the agency estimates.

"Obesity is one of the most serious public challenges of our time," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters from the agency's Geneva headquarters.

"These new medicines are a powerful clinical tool, offering

The new guidelines call for GLP-1 therapies to be used by adults, excluding pregnant women, "for the long-term treatment of obesity", which it defines as a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher.

WHO stressed that while the efficacy of the therapies in treating obesity was "evident", it was issuing "conditional recommendations" for use since more data was needed on efficacy and safety over longer periods.

The agency also emphasised that the medication alone would not reverse the trend in obesity, which it recognised as a complex, chronic disease and a major driver of non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes and some types of cancer.

The new guidelines suggest the therapies could be coupled with "intensive behavioural interventions", promoting healthy diet and physical activity, amid indications such shifts may enhance treatment outcomes.

**Trump-backed candidate holds narrow lead for Honduras presidency**

Nasry Asfura, 67, had 40 percent of the votes



Honduran presidential candidate of the National Party Nasry Asfura



Honduran presidential candidate for the opposition Liberal party, Salvador Nasralla

● **Trump's threat to cut aid if his favored candidate were to lose**

● **Nearly 30,000 Honduran migrants have been deported from the United States**

AFP | Tegucigalpa, Honduras

A conservative candidate backed by US President Donald Trump narrowly leads a right-wing rival in Honduras's presidential election, according to partial results from the electoral commission released Monday.

Nasry Asfura, 67, had 40 percent of the votes and led Salvador Nasralla by just 0.2 percentage points, with 56 percent of votes counted, according to the National Electoral Council (CNE).

Both candidates were more than 20 percentage points ahead of Rixi Moncada, 60, of ruling leftist Libre party, who was trailing heavily, signaling another

Latin American nation poised to swing rightward.

The campaign was dominated by Trump's threat to cut aid if his favored candidate Asfura, who is nicknamed "grandad," were to lose.

The vote count from Sunday's election has progressed slowly, and final results could take days.

Many Hondurans have fled grinding poverty and violence to the United States, including minors fearing forced recruitment by gangs, although this escape route is no longer a viable option under Trump.

In the final days of the race, the US leader threw his weight behind former Tegucigalpa mayor Asfura, whose campaign slogan was "Grandad, at your service!"

That intervention upended a contest that is still too close to call, in a country plagued by drug trafficking and gang activity.

Lawmakers and hundreds of mayors will also be elected in the fiercely polarized nation, which is also one of the most violent in Latin America.

"If he (Asfura) doesn't win, the United States will not be throwing good money after bad,"

Trump wrote Friday on his Truth Social platform.

**'Not because of Trump'**

Trump's comments marked another brazen intervention in another country's politics, echoing threats he made in support of Argentine President Javier Milei's party in recent midterms.

Before Sunday's vote, Trump also made the shock announcement that he would pardon former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez, of Asfura's National Party.

Hernandez is serving a 45-year prison sentence in the United States for cocaine trafficking and other charges.

Some Hondurans have welcomed Trump's intervention, saying they hope it might mean Honduran migrants will be allowed to remain in the United States.

But others have rejected his meddling in the vote.

"I vote for whomever I please, not because of what Trump has said, because the truth is I live off my work, not off politicians," Esmeralda Rodriguez, a 56-year-old fruit seller, told AFP.

Nearly 30,000 Honduran migrants have been deported from the United States since Trump returned to office in January.

The clampdown has dealt a severe blow to the country of 11 million people, where remittances accounted for 27 percent of GDP last year.

After voting in the capital Tegucigalpa, Asfura denied that the planned pardon would benefit him, saying: "This issue has been circulating for months, and it has nothing to do with the elections."



Honduras is home to the ancient Mayan city of Copan, one of the most important archaeological sites of the Mayan civilization, famous for its hieroglyphic stairway and intricately carved stelae.

**Zelensky in Paris seeking support**

AFP | Paris, France

President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday sought to reinforce European support for Ukraine at a potentially pivotal moment in Kyiv's battle against the Russian invasion, meeting President Emmanuel Macron in Paris as Washington pushed a plan to end the war.

Over three-and-a-half years into Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbour, an AFP analysis of data from the US-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW) showed the Russian army made its biggest advance in Ukraine for a year in November.

The plan to end the war is championed by US President Donald Trump but European countries fear it risks forcing Kyiv to cave in to Russian demands, notably on territory.

The situation has been further complicated by a corruption scandal that has rocked Zelensky's inner circle and forced the dismissal last week of his top ne-



Zelensky (L) and his wife Olena Zelenska (2ndL) pose with France's President Emmanuel Macron (R) and his wife Brigitte Macron after a meeting at the Elysee palace in Paris

gotiator and chief of staff Andriy Yermak.

US and Ukrainian negotiators held hours of what both sides called "productive" talks in Florida on Sunday, with Trump declaring on Air Force One "there's a good chance we can make a

deal".

Amid a flurry of American-led diplomacy, US envoy Steve Witkoff is due to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Tuesday.

But he first held a new meeting with Ukrainian negotiator

Rustem Umerov, the country's security council secretary, in Florida, senior sources familiar with the matter told AFP, adding "there are still questions" on the US plan.

"We managed to achieve significant progress, although certain issues require further refinement," said Umerov.

The sources said Zelensky "expects to see Umerov in Ireland" during a visit on Tuesday to hear a detailed report on the Florida talks.

Zelensky and Macron also spoke by telephone to Witkoff and Umerov in Florida, the Elysee said.

"We share the view that the war must be brought to a fair end," Zelensky wrote on X after the talks which also included phone conversations with other European leaders including British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Macron and Zelensky were due to hold a joint news conference in Paris.