

News in brief

◆ **British maritime** security firm Vanguard Tech said yesterday that a US-flagged tanker was approached and challenged by Iranian gunboats in the Strait of Hormuz, before continuing on its way. The Stena Imperative was approached by three pairs of small armed boats belonging to the Revolutionary Guards while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, approximately 16 nautical miles north of Oman, the company said. The gunboats hailed it by radio, ordering the captain "to stop the engines and prepare to be boarded," but the ship increased speed and maintained course, the firm added, stressing it did not enter Iranian territorial waters. "The vessel is now being escorted by a US warship," Vanguard Tech said. Earlier, the British maritime security agency UKMTO reported the incident without specifying the nationality of the ship nor of the boats that approached it.



US tanker approached by Iranian gunboats in Strait of Hormuz

◆ **Israel's army** will appoint its highest-ranking Muslim woman to replace chief Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee, the public face for Palestinians and Lebanese of its military campaigns, a military source said yesterday. Major Ella Wawaya will replace Lieutenant Colonel Avichay Adraee, who for people in Gaza and Lebanon is indelibly linked with Israel's deadly bombing campaigns and known for what are seen as provocative uses of colloquial Arabic, koranic verses and humour in his messages. Wawaya, 36, was born in Qalansawe, an Arab city in central Israel, and volunteered with the Israeli army at 24. As a deputy to Adraee, she was previously known online as "Captain Ella", the source said. "As a child, she watched Arab media, and out of curiosity discovered the Israeli and Zionist narrative", the source said. Around 20 percent of Israel's population are Palestinians or their descendants who remained in what is now Israel after its creation in 1948.

◆ **French President** Emmanuel Macron said on Tuesday that he was preparing to resume dialogue with Vladimir Putin nearly four years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine but stressed Moscow was not showing any "real willingness" to negotiate a ceasefire. Macron said last year he believed Europe should reach back out to Putin, rather than leaving the United States alone to take the lead in negotiations to end the conflict in Ukraine that started with Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. "It is being prepared and so discussions are taking place at a technical level," Macron said Tuesday in response to a question during a visit to northeastern France.

SPOTLIGHT

Dozen people entered Egypt from Gaza on first day of Rafah opening



Ambulances carrying Palestinian patients and war-wounded people, accompanied by relatives, get ready to leave the Gaza Strip for their treatment abroad through the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt

AFP | Rafah, Egypt

A handful of injured Palestinians and their companions entered Egypt from Gaza on Monday, the first day of a limited reopening of the Rafah border crossing, a source on the Egyptian side of the border told AFP.

"Five injured people and seven companions" crossed the border, the source said on Tuesday.

The reopening, demanded by the United Nations and aid groups, is a key part of the second phase of US President Donald Trump's truce plan for Gaza, where humanitarian conditions remain dire after two years of war.

The number of patients al-

lowed to enter Egypt through the crossing was limited to 50 on Monday, each accompanied by two companions, according to three officials at the Egyptian border.

An Egyptian health official told AFP on Monday that three ambulances had arrived with Palestinian patients who were screened upon arrival to determine which hospital to be taken to.

AlQahera News, citing Egypt's health ministry, reported that 150 hospitals and 300 ambulances had been prepared to receive Palestinian patients.

It said 12,000 doctors and 30 rapid deployment teams had been allocated to work with those transferred.

Erdogan visits Saudi



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived in Riyadh yesterday, Saudi media said, his first visit in more than two years. Erdogan is set to meet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during the visit -- his first to the kingdom since July 2023, which was part of a Gulf trip aimed at drumming up investments. There was no official indication of what the two sides would discuss. But Turkish state-run news agency Anadolu reported that they would discuss the "deepening cooperation" between the countries, as well as regional and global developments. It added that Erdogan would then travel to Cairo on Wednesday.

Iran president confirms talks with US after Trump's threats

Trump hopeful that Washington will "work something out"

● **Qatar's foreign ministry** said diplomacy with Iran was "continuing very intensively"

● **Araghchi** said Tehran had lost trust in Washington

● **Iranian officials** have acknowledged more than 3,000 deaths during the unrest

AFP | Paris, France



Motorists drive past a large banner displaying an image of the victorious revolution in Tehran

Iran's president confirmed yesterday that he had ordered the start of talks with the United States, provided they were free of threats, after his counterpart Donald Trump suggested "bad things" would happen without a deal.

There has been no official confirmation from Iran on where the talks would be held, but an Arab official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP a meeting was likely to take place in Turkey on Friday, following diplomatic interventions by Ankara, as well as Egypt, Oman and Qatar.

The US leader has spoken of potential military action and sent an aircraft carrier group to the Middle East following anti-government protests in Iran that were met with a deadly crackdown last month.

Trump has maintained he is hopeful that Washington will "work something out" with Tehran, but also warned that "bad things would happen" if a deal was not agreed.

Tehran has insisted it wants diplomacy, while promising a decisive response to any aggression.

"I have instructed my Minister of Foreign Affairs, provided that a suitable environment exists -- one free from threats and unreasonable expectations -- to pursue fair and equitable negotiations," President Masoud Pezeshkian wrote in a post on X.

He added that the talks followed requests "from friendly governments".

On Tuesday, Qatar's foreign ministry said diplomacy with Iran was "continuing very intensively", in "tandem with all our neighbours".

Earlier, a senior official from the UAE said Iran needed to reach a deal and "rebuild their relationship with the United States".

"I would like to see direct Iranian-American negotiations leading to understandings so that we don't have these issues every other day," said presidential adviser Anwar Gargash.

Iran has repeatedly stressed that any talks should remain focused solely on the nuclear issue, rejecting the possibility of negotiations over its missile programme or defence capabilities.

'Fair and equitable deal'

In an interview with CNN broadcast on Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran had lost trust in Washington as a negotiating partner but a deal on the nuclear issue remained achievable.

"So I see the possibility of another talk if the US negotiation team follows what President Trump said: to come to a fair and equitable deal to ensure that there is no nuclear weapons," he said.

Thousands arrested

Iranian officials have acknowledged more than 3,000 deaths during the unrest, but insist that most were members of the security forces and innocent bystanders, attributing the violence to "terrorist acts".

The Human Rights Activists News Agency, a US-based NGO, says it has confirmed 6,854 deaths, mostly protesters killed by security forces, with other rights groups warning the figure is likely far higher.

On Tuesday, the NGO said it had counted at least 50,235 arrests linked to the protests, with further detentions ongoing.

YOU KNOW WHAT
Iran has one of the largest proven oil and natural gas reserves in the world -- it holds the fourth-largest crude oil reserves and the second-largest natural gas reserves globally, making energy a key part of its economy and geopolitical role.