

# EU, Gulf states to hold talks on Middle East war Thursday

AFP | Brussels, Belgium

EU and Gulf State foreign ministers are set to hold talks by videolink on Thursday on the war in the

Middle East, officials told AFP Tuesday.

The virtual meeting, convened by EU foreign affairs chief Kaja Kallas, comes as violence has spread across the region after

the United States and Israel attacked Iran.

Oil and gas infrastructure, as well as US facilities, in the Gulf have been hit and the strategic Strait of Hormuz effec-

tively closed as Iran has struck back.

The 27-nation bloc EU has been left largely on the sidelines of the fighting to grapple with the fallout of the conflict.

So far European nations have focused mainly on evacuating nationals stranded in the region and have been nervously eyeing the impact of surging energy prices.

Brussels is also monitoring closely for any potential increase in the number of refugees fleeing the Middle East, although there are so far no signs of an exodus.

## Tehran resembles ghost town as bombs rain down



A person stands on the roof of a building looking at a plume of smoke rises after a strike on the Iranian capital Tehran

### ● The Iranian capital is normally home to some 10 million people

AFP | Tehran, Iran

Tehran feels like a ghost town, with residents who have not fled remaining shut away in their homes for fear of new explosions from the US-Israeli bombardment.

"I'm afraid to walk in the deserted streets because bombs are still falling from the sky," said Samireh, a 33-year-old nurse, who did not want to give her family name.

The Iranian capital is normally home to some 10 million people, but in recent days "there are so few people that you'd think no one ever lived here", she added.

Powerful explosions rocked Tehran for the fourth day running on Tuesday, sending thick clouds of grey smoke into the blue sky, AFP journalists said.

"Last night, we slept on the floor with our heads protected in the middle of the apartment", as far as possible from the windows in the

bedroom and the ones in the living room, said 50-year-old Amir, "just to be safe in case the shockwaves shattered the glass".

Still, "my wife insists that we stay to see what happens", he added.

The most-affected areas are those that house the centres of power, such as ministries, courts or the headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards, which were targeted by strikes on Sunday.

Elnaz, 39, said it was "difficult" to stay safe because the raids also target police officers' homes, but "we don't know all our neighbours".

During the night from Monday to Tuesday, Israel issued calls on X for residents to evacuate the area where state broadcaster IRIB is located ahead of strikes.

But few people saw the warnings, as they did not have internet access.

Ferdowsi Square, one of the main junctions in the city centre, is now lined with buildings blown apart by explosions.

A flag of the Islamic republic has been planted in the rubble.

Nearby, a huge billboard covering an entire building displays a portrait of the late supreme

leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in strikes on Saturday.

Police officers, armed security forces and armoured vehicles were stationed at main junctions, carrying out random checks on vehicles.

### Meows and birdsong

The Iranian government on Saturday urged residents in Tehran to leave the city "while remaining calm", after the first Israeli and US strikes on Khamenei's residence.

"I have to stay because I'm a nurse. Otherwise I would have definitely already left the capital," said Samireh.

In the more upmarket north of Tehran, many residents appeared to have left, with the meowing of cats and birdsong replacing the usual din of traffic jams.

Trendy cafes and restaurants, which are typically lively in the evening, were closed.

Streets were deserted and most vehicles still on the road were supplying grocers and small local shops that were still open.

Customers hurried to buy fruit and queued for fresh bread. Bazaar at a standstill

Most of the shops in the Tajrish bazaar were closed. One clothes seller was desperately waiting for customers, sitting next to a T-shirt hanging up in the colours of the Iranian flag.

The bazaars should normally be buzzing with activity as Nowruz approaches at the end of the month.

The weeks leading up to the Persian new year are typically the busiest -- and most lucrative -- time of the year for shopkeepers.

It is also a festive period during which Iranians meet family and friends to try to forget the difficulties of everyday life, especially the high cost of living.

The only authorised public gatherings were organised by the authorities, such as those on Monday evening to pay tribute to Khamenei, who led Iran for nearly 37 years.

Nasim and her family will likely spend the holiday far from her hometown of Isfahan after they decided to leave the country for Turkey.

But the 35-year-old is worried about her parents who stayed in Iran, from whom she has heard "no news" at all.

## Trump says will 'cut off all trade' with Spain over NATO, Iran

Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump yesterday threatened to cut off trade with Spain, whose left-wing government refused to let US planes use its bases to attack Iran and objected to raising defense funding as part

of NATO.

"Spain has been terrible," Trump told reporters as he met German Chancellor Friedrich Merz.

"We're going to cut off all trade with Spain. We don't want anything to do with Spain."

## UK PM says sending warship, helicopters to Cyprus

### ● HMS Dragon is one of the Royal Navy's six Type 45 air defence destroyers.

AFP | London, United Kingdom

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday the UK was dispatching "helicopters with counter drone capabilities" and a warship, HMS Dragon, to Cyprus as Britain continues "defensive operations" in the region.

His announcement comes after Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) Akrotiri base was struck early Monday by an Iranian-made drone, which hit the runway. Another two were intercepted.

"The UK is fully committed to the security of Cyprus and British military personnel based there," Starmer wrote on X.

"We're continuing our defensive operations and I've just spoken with the President of Cyprus to let him know that we are sending helicopters with counter drone capabilities and HMS Dragon is to be deployed to the region.

"We will always act in the interest of the UK and our allies," he added.

HMS Dragon is one of the

Royal Navy's six Type 45 air defence destroyers.

It is fitted with a Sea Viper missile system able to launch eight missiles in under 10 seconds and guide up to 16 missiles simultaneously, Britain's defence ministry said in a press release.

The ministry added that the helicopters are Wildcat helicopters equipped with Martlet missiles that can take down drones.

Britain's armed forces have helped shoot down multiple drones across the region in the past 24 hours, according to the defence ministry, including over Jordan and Qatar.

Starmer initially refused to have any role in the US-Israeli war with Iran but later agreed to a US request to use two British military bases for a "specific and limited defensive purpose".

Those bases are in Gloucestershire in western England and the UK-US Diego Garcia base in the Indian Ocean.

Starmer has insisted that the Akrotiri base is not being used by US bombers.

Monday's drone strike there caused minimal damage and no casualties, according to British officials.

The families of service personnel have been moved away from the base as a precaution.



HMS Dragon