

Trump seeks role in picking Iran's leader

The US president compares Iran to Venezuela, where he ousted Maduro

● **Trump Calls Khamenei's son "unacceptable" and "lightweight"**

● **Wants someone to "bring harmony and peace"**

● **Unclear how US could influence clerical selection**

AFP | Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday insisted he should have a role in picking Iran's next supreme leader after the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, whose son he said he found unacceptable.

"Khamenei's son is a lightweight. I have to be involved in the appointment, like with Delcy," Trump told Axios in an interview, drawing a comparison to Venezuela, where interim president Delcy Rodriguez has cooperated with him under threat of violence after the



US President Donald Trump speaks during a roundtable at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building

United States ousted her boss, Nicolas Maduro.

Trump told the news outlet that the United States would likely return to war within five years without a favorable leader in Iran.

"Khamenei's son is unacceptable to me. We want someone that will bring harmony and peace to Iran," Trump was quoted saying by the news outlet.

It was unclear in what way Trump would be able to take a

role in the Islamic republic's selection of a new supreme leader, a decision made by an assembly of senior Shiite Muslim clerics mostly staunchly opposed to the United States. Trump was raised a Presbyterian.



Trump suggested he could work with someone from within Iran's Islamic republic rather than seeking to topple the government, implying a willingness to engage with the regime he has long opposed

But his remarks imply a willingness to work with someone from within the Islamic republic rather than seek to topple the government, which has been a sworn enemy of the United States since the 1979 Islamic revolution toppled the pro-Western shah.

The late shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, has proposed that he return as a transitional figure before Iran drafts a new constitution

as a secular democracy. Pahlavi earlier yesterday said that any new supreme leader within the Islamic republic would be illegitimate.

Ali Khamenei, who ruled Iran since 1989 with hardline policies that included repression at home and confrontation with neighboring countries, was killed Saturday in an Israeli strike as Israel and the United States opened war.

His son, Mojtaba Khamenei, is considered one of the contenders to succeed his father, who was only the second supreme leader after revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

In Venezuela, Trump ordered a deadly January 3 attack in which US forces snatched Maduro, a longtime US nemesis.

Rather than backing the opposition long championed by the United States, Trump has said he has been pleased by Rodriguez, who was Maduro's vice president but has cooperated on key US demands, notably on benefiting oil companies.

She is doing so under Trump's threat of violence if she does not do what he wants, particularly on access to natural resources.

More flights take off despite continued fighting



Emirates airline planes are parked on the tarmac at Dubai International Airport in Dubai

● **More than 100 flights depart UAE as airspace partially reopens**

AFP | Paris

Fewer commercial flights were cancelled yesterday in the Middle East despite continued military strikes, with more than 100 flights taking off from the United Arab Emirates, according to a specialist data firm.

Airports in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are major hubs for travel between Europe and Asia, so the closure of the region's airspace quickly left tens of thousands of travellers stranded.

Cirium, a company specialising in aviation sector data, said

87 flights took off yesterday from Dubai's international airport, the world's second-largest airport by passengers, and 15 from Abu Dhabi.

Another 60 flights left Oman's capital Muscat.

However, no flights left the airports in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar.

Cirium said that the 43.1 percent of flights across the region were cancelled yesterday.

That is down from 61 percent on Wednesday, and more than 65 percent between Sunday and Tuesday.

Among the aircraft leaving Dubai were the super jumbo A380s flown by flag carrier Emirates.

Other Emirates A380s returned from abroad, including from destinations such as Los Angeles.

"With the limited re-opening

of airspace, Emirates is operating a reduced flight schedule until further notice," the airline said on its website.

It added that customers with earlier bookings were being given priority to reserve new flights.

According to the flight tracking website FlightRadar24, flights departing from the United Arab Emirates were heading south to keep its distance from the Gulf and Iran.

Qatar Airways, whose regular operations are suspended until further notice, said yesterday it would carry out a limited number of repatriation flights for travellers stranded in the region.

It said it would operate flights from Muscat to London, Berlin and Rome, as well as from Riyadh to Frankfurt.

Sri Lanka takes control of Iranian ship fearing new US sub attack

AFP | Colombo

Sri Lanka has offloaded crew of an Iranian navy vessel and assumed control of it, the South Asian nation's president said Thursday, a day after a deadly US submarine attack on another ship.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said in a televised address that his country's navy had offloaded 208 sailors from the IRIS Bushehr, which had requested port entry due to engine trouble.

The Bushehr, like the ship torpedoed off Sri Lanka's southern coast on Wednesday, the IRIS Dena, had recently par-

ticipated in a naval exercise in eastern India, Dissanayake said.

At least 84 sailors were killed in the torpedo attack, which was the first military strike far outside the Middle East region since the United States and Israel launched their war on Iran.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Thursday denounced the attack and warned Washington it would "bitterly regret" establishing such a precedent.

Dissanayake said his country was "not taking sides in this conflict".

"But while maintaining our neutrality we are taking action to save lives," he said.

"No person should die in a war like this. Every life is equally precious."

The Bushehr was close to Colombo, the nation's main seaport, but it will not be anchored there due to the risk to merchant shipping, the president said, noting possible increases in insurance rates.

The ship will therefore be taken to the smaller Trincomalee port on the north-eastern side of the island, he said.

Meanwhile in the southern port city of Galle, where the recovered bodies of the 84 Iranian sailors were taken, authorities began an inquest into the deaths.



A boy plays with his sheep next to an unexploded missile that landed in an open field on the outskirts of Qamishli, eastern Syria