

Israel minister Smotrich banned from France

AFP | Paris, France

France yesterday banned Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezelel Smotrich from entering the country, the French foreign minister said, in the latest sanction slamming Israeli officials over policies towards Palestinian territories and pro-Palestinian activists.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said Smotrich "actively promotes the annexation of the West Bank, which he openly claims, the creation of new settlements in the West Bank, the re-colonisation of Gaza, the economic collapse of the Palestinian Authority and its harmful consequences for the Palestinian population".

"This is a policy that the overwhelming majority of the international community, firmly committed to the two-state solution, cannot accept," Barrot wrote on X.

He added that four leaders of settler organisations and 21 violent settlers were also banned from French territory.

Israel's foreign ministry quickly condemned the sanctions as "disgraceful".



Smotrich is the second member of the Israeli government to be forbidden from entering France in recent months, after National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir was barred on May 23 for mocking activists detained by Israeli soldiers from a Gaza-bound flotilla carrying aid for the Palestinian territory.

"The real essence of these steps is the attempt to impose a political stance regarding the right of Jews to settle in the Land of Israel and concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- camouflaged as measures against violence," ministry spokesman Oren Marmorstein said.

UK urges British firms to stop activities in illegal Israeli settlements

AFP | London, United Kingdom

The UK government yesterday urged British businesses and citizens to refrain from conducting financial activities in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank deemed illegal under international law.

"I have strengthened our business risk guidance to make it clear and unambiguous: if you are a British citizen or business, you should

not conduct any economic and financial activities in illegal Israeli settlements," Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper told parliament.

"We believe that violent settler groups should not be profiting from the land that they have seized from Palestinians," Cooper added, saying the Israeli "government has condemned some settler violence, but that rings hollow when there is scant accountability".

Israel slams 'disgraceful measures' from 6 foreign govts against West Bank settler entities

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

Israel's foreign ministry on Tuesday denounced a series of sanctions from six Western countries against settler entities in the occupied West Bank for their role in increased settlement building and violence against Palestinians.

"Israel firmly rejects the disgraceful measures adopted by foreign governments against

Israeli citizens, entities, and a government minister," ministry spokesman Oren Marmorstein said in a statement.

"The real essence of these steps is the attempt to impose a political stance regarding the right of Jews to settle in the Land of Israel and concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- camouflaged as measures against violence," he added.

Oil falls below \$90 a barrel on hopes of Iran deal

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Oil prices fell around 5% to below \$90 a barrel on Tuesday after US President Donald Trump again said an Iran peace deal could be close.

The international benchmark Brent crude fell below

\$90 for the first time since April 14, while its US counterpart, West Texas Intermediate crude fell to around \$86 a barrel.

The relief came just a day after crude surged as Iran and Israel briefly resumed strikes amid a fragile ceasefire in the Middle East war.

Pope Leo XIV met Bad Bunny in Madrid

AFP | Barcelona, Spain

Pope Leo XIV held a surprise meeting with Puerto Rican music star Bad Bunny at Real Madrid's Bernabeu stadium during his state visit to Spain, the Vatican said on Tuesday.

"Yes... I confirm it. He (Bad Bunny) was with his family and some other people", and Leo "greeted them briefly before leaving the stadium", Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni told reporters of the encounter on Monday.

Spanish media said the papal team and Bad Bunny's entourage were still deciding on the best moment to publish photos of their meeting.

Around 80,000 people packed the iconic football ground for a meeting between the pope and Madrid's diocesan community on day three of Leo's trip to Spain.

His stay in Madrid coincided with a series of concerts by Bad Bunny at the Metropolitan stadium of Real Madrid's cross-town rivals Atletico Madrid, part of his hit "Debi Tirar Mas



Pope Leo XIV and Cardinal Juan Jose Omella, the Archbishop of Barcelona in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross and Saint Eulalia in Barcelona

Fotos" ("I Should Have Taken More Photos") world tour.

Some observers pointed to modern youth being torn between spirituality and profane music in a historically Catholic country where traditional religious observance has declined for decades.

But as his plane headed to Madrid on Saturday, Leo told reporters he was "very pleased by the reports" that young people were increasingly interested

in the Catholic Church.

"I think many will see Bad Bunny. But I think there will also be a few here to see the pope. And that says something," Leo said of the conflicting loyalties.



Puerto Rican music star Bad Bunny

Lebanon state media reports strike on Tyre after Israeli warning

Trump says deal in final stages

Deal possible in "two or three days"

● Trump says pilots 'fine' after report US helicopter down near Hormuz

● Tehran's international airport -- closed during the missile exchanges -- had reopened.

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump yesterday said negotiations over a peace deal to end the Middle East war were in their final stages, after Iran and Israel halted attacks that threatened to reignite the months-long conflict.

Iran and Israel "were going back and forth and now they both agreed through me to stop and we're in the final throes of

We're in the final throes of what will be a very, very good deal,

TRUMP

what will be a very, very good deal," the US leader told reporters on his return from an NBA Finals game. When asked whether a deal would be a matter of days or weeks, he said it would take "two or three days."

Trump, who has reportedly grown increasingly exasperated with Netanyahu, had earlier urged both sides to stop "shooting" and said that "final negotiations" towards peace would proceed "subject to ignorance or stupidity getting in its way".

US Vice President JD Vance told Fox News on Monday that while the United States and Israel shared interests, their positions did not always align.

"The Israelis and the United States, we have a lot of shared interests," Vance said. "But we also have some situations where our interests diverge."

Yesterday, Lebanese state media reported an Israeli strike on the southern city of Tyre after the Israeli military urged residents to evacuate, the first time it had done so for the entire city and its surrounding areas.

"Enemy warplanes launched a heavy strike on Tyre," the state-run National News Agency said.

"For your safety, we ask you to

immediately evacuate your homes... and move north of the Zahrani River," the Israeli military's Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee said on X.

Trump said yesterday that two pilots were uninjured after reports that a US military helicopter went down near the Strait of Hormuz.

It was not immediately clear whether the Apache helicopter was shot down, experienced mechanical failure or encountered some other problem, the New York Times reported, citing two people briefed on the incident.

Local media reported early yesterday that Tehran's international airport -- closed during the missile exchanges -- had reopened, allowing flights carrying hajj pilgrims from Saudi Arabia to land.



EU orders Meta to open WhatsApp to rival AI chatbots for free

AFP | Brussels, Belgium

The EU ordered Meta yesterday to give rival AI chatbots access to its WhatsApp platform for free within five working days as it carries out an

antitrust probe, or risk a heavy fine.

Meta said it would appeal the order, which follows the launch in December of an EU investigation into the US firm's policy of blocking access for AI providers

other than Meta AI.

The European Commission, the EU's digital watchdog, said Meta will have to maintain access to competitors until Brussels wraps up its probe.

"Today, we require Meta to

restore access to WhatsApp for competing AI assistants while we investigate whether the restrictions may infringe EU competition rules," EU antitrust chief Teresa Ribera said in a statement.