

Israel deports two foreign activists seized from flotilla



Activists from the Global Sumud Flotilla stand at the port of Atherinolakkos on the island of Crete after disembarking from a Greek Coast Guard vessel, following their interception by the Israeli Navy in international waters *(file)

● **Saif Abu Keshek, a Spanish national of Palestinian origin, and Brazilian Thiago Avila were among dozens of activists aboard a flotilla intercepted by the Israeli navy in international waters off the coast of Greece on April 30.**

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

Israel deported on Sunday two foreign activists seized from a Gaza-bound flotilla, in what a rights group representing them described as a "punitive attack" on a civilian mission.

Saif Abu Keshek, a Spanish national of Palestinian origin, and Brazilian Thiago Avila were among dozens of activists aboard a flotilla intercepted by the Israeli navy in international waters off the coast of Greece on April 30.

The pair were seized and brought to Israel for questioning, while the others were taken to the Greek island of Crete and released.

"Saif Abu Keshek and Thiago Avila, from the provocation flotilla, were deported today from Israel" following an investigation, the Israeli foreign ministry posted on X on Sunday.

Israel would "not allow any breach" of the blockade on Gaza, it added.

Spain, Brazil and the United Nations had all called for the men's swift release after their detention drew widespread

outrage.

On Wednesday, an Israeli court rejected an appeal contesting the pair's detention.

Abuse claims

During their week-long detention in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon, Adalah claimed the two men had been subjected to "psychological abuse", including prolonged interrogations, constant bright lighting in their cells, complete isolation and transfers while blindfolded, even during medical examinations.

Israeli authorities had rejected these claims, while Israeli courts twice approved the pair's detention to allow police time for questioning.

According to Spanish diplomats, Israel provided "no evidence" linking its citizen Abu Keshek to Hamas.

His interception in international waters and subsequent detention further strained already deteriorating ties between Israel and Spain.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has called Israel's retaliatory military campaign in Gaza a "genocide".

Israel recalled its ambassador after Madrid recognised a Palestinian state in 2024, while Spain formally dismissed its own top envoy in Tel Aviv in March.

The flotilla had set sail from France, Spain and Italy with the aim of breaking Israel's blockade of Gaza and delivering humanitarian aid to the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

The Global Sumud Flotilla's first voyage last year was also intercepted by Israeli forces off the coasts of Egypt and Gaza.

Indian film star sworn in as head of Tamil Nadu

Vijay's TVK emerged as the single largest party



Newly elected chief minister of India's Tamil Nadu state, C. Joseph Vijay (center, 5L) takes an oath during his swearing-in ceremony in Chennai

● **Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Vijay**

AFP | Chennai, India

Indian film star C. Joseph Vijay was sworn in as chief minister of Tamil Nadu state yesterday after his new party brokered a coalition in the southern industrial hub.

The swearing-in ceremony followed days of high drama in the state capital Chennai, where Vijay's fledgling Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) party initially struggled to secure support from smaller parties after state elections.

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Vijay's TVK, founded only two years ago, emerged as the single largest party after the vote with 108 seats in Tamil Nadu's 234-member legislative assembly.

234-member legislative assembly, short of a simple majority.

However, it won support from other parties, including the opposition Congress, to take its number of seats to 120, making it possible for Vijay to claim the top job.

Thousands of supporters gathered in Chennai's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium yesterday, chanting "Mudhalvar", or "chief minister" in Tamil, to watch Vijay take his oath of office.

"I am not from a royal political background, just a common man," the 51-year-old told the crowd.

"My primary focus will be on basic issues such as education, ration supplies, healthcare, drinking water, roads and bus facilities," he said.

Vijay's first set of policies included measures to ease electricity prices and improve women's safety.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Vijay, saying the central government would work with his administration to "improve the lives of people".

Vijay, born to a Christian father and a Hindu mother, began his career as a child actor in 1984 in a movie directed by his filmmaker father.

Known for his charismatic screen presence and mass ap-

peal, his fans dubbed him "Thalapathy", or "leader" in Tamil.

His blockbuster hits blended action, social messaging and populist themes, burnishing his reputation as a voice for the common man.

He cultivated his public image over the years by taking on roles that touched on subjects ranging from farmers' issues to electoral manipulation.

He launched the TVK in 2024 with a promise to end corruption and strengthen social justice.

Tamil Nadu is one of India's most significant economic engines, with its industrial sector producing everything from automobiles to electronics. The state is also India's smartphone manufacturing hub, including for Apple iPhones.

The TVK's campaign sought to end the dominance of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, traditional parties that had ruled the state since the late 1960s.

Analysts said Vijay's large fan following, combined with demands from young people for a new political leader, was behind his stunning election performance.

Vijay, a political novice, now faces the challenge of turning that popularity into policy.



Joseph Vijay is one of the very few Indian film stars to have had a fan club network so large that it later evolved into an organised political movement. His fan associations, originally created around his films, eventually became the base for his political party, the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, launched in 2024.

His campaign rallies drew thousands of fans, but were also marred by allegations of crowd mismanagement. A stampede at a rally in September killed at least 40 people.

However, it did little to dent his popularity.

"When you have a cult, you don't question at all," political commentator Sumanth Raman told AFP after the election results were published.

Ukraine reports multiple casualties on second day of Russia truce

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Russian attacks wounded at least nine people in eastern Ukraine yesterday, the second day of what was supposed to have been a three-day truce with Russia, Ukrainian officials said.

Russia also conducted assault operations on the front line, al-

though it did not launch any "large-scale" air raids during the day, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his evening address.

"On the front line, the Russian army is not complying with the ceasefire and is not even really trying to," he added.

US President Donald Trump announced the ceasefire on Fri-

day, saying the two sides had agreed to stop all "kinetic" warfare for a three-day period starting Saturday, as well as a mutual swap of 1,000 prisoners each.

Ukrainian air force data showed a decrease in long-range Russian drone strikes compared to before the truce, but officials reported casualties nonetheless.

In the eastern Dnipropet-

rovsk region, Russian drone strikes injured a three-year-old girl and a 23-year-old rescue worker, the region's governor Oleksandr Ganzha said.

"The rescue workers were en route to the village of Myrivska to assist local residents when their fire and rescue vehicle was attacked by an enemy drone," he said.