

News in brief

◆ Britain will welcome

Donald Trump for an unprecedented second state visit in September, Buckingham Palace confirmed Monday, saying he would stay as the guest of King Charles III at Windsor Castle. The US president “accompanied by the First Lady Mrs. Melania Trump, has accepted an invitation from His Majesty The King to pay a state visit to the United Kingdom from 17 September to 19 September 2025,” said a palace statement. The visit will come only two months after Charles, and his wife Queen Camilla, welcomed French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte to Windsor. Trump was invited by a personal letter from Charles, which Prime Minister Keir Starmer handed to him in February during a visit to Washington. Starmer has sought to woo Trump with a charm offensive to boost ties and gain better leverage for the UK in tough trade talks with Washington.



UK to roll out red carpet for second Trump state visit

◆ Iran said yesterday it had “no specific date” for a meeting with the United States on Tehran’s nuclear programme, following a war with Israel that had derailed negotiations. “For now, no specific date, time or location has been determined regarding this matter,” said foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei of plans for a meeting between Iran’s top diplomat Abbas Araghchi and US envoy Steve Witkoff. Araghchi and Witkoff met starting in April, without concluding a deal after five rounds of talks that were the highest-level contact between their two countries since Washington in 2018 abandoned a landmark nuclear agreement. The Omani-mediated negotiations were halted as Israel launched surprise strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities on June 13, starting a 12-day war which the United States later joined.

Iran says ‘no specific date’ for US nuclear talks

◆ The United States military teamed with Panamanian police to conduct a series of new exercises aimed at protecting the Panama Canal, amid tensions over alleged Chinese influence along the prized trade route. To kick off the drills, three US Army helicopters arrived in Panama on Sunday -- two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and a CH-47 Chinook -- landing at the Panama-Pacific Airport, formerly the US Howard base. Michael Palacios, subcommissioner of Panama’s National Aeronaval Service -- known as SENAN -- said the exercises would prepare Panama’s forces, as well as countries in the region, against any threats to the security and defense of the canal. US soldiers conducted similar exercises in Panama a month ago, under a bilateral agreement that allows Washington to use Panamanian air and naval bases for training without establishing its own bases.

US conducts military exercises at Panama Canal



SPOTLIGHT

Creepy find: German customs net tarantulas in cookie shipment



A tarantula breeder plays with one of the giant spider at a breeding site in Teluk Betung, in Bandar Lampung

Frankfurt, Germany

German customs officers have discovered a massive haul of about 1,500 tarantulas hidden inside a shipment disguised as cookies, authorities said Monday.

The seven-kilogramme (15-pound) shipment from Vietnam was intercepted at Cologne-Bonn airport and emitted a strange smell when opened, customs officials said.

Inside the found the venomous arachnids packed into plastic tubes and said that many had not survived the flight, with the remaining spi-

ders placed into professional care.

“This unusual discovery left even the most experienced officers speechless,” customs spokesman Jens Ahland said.

It was “deeply troubling what some people do to animals purely for profit”, he added.

A criminal investigation has been launched into the package’s intended recipient for failing to pay duties and make the proper declarations.

In 2020, customs officers at the same airport found 16 live and 10 dead reptiles smuggled inside toys, sweets and dolls from Mexico.

Truce talks limp on but US hopeful

Both sides blamed the other for blocking a deal for a 60-day ceasefire



A boy stands near a destroyed mobile water cistern that was hit by Israeli bombardment in the Nuseirat camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip

● Trump is keen to secure a truce in the 21-month war

● Hamas rejected Israeli proposals to keep troops in over 40% of Gaza

● Netanyahu faces backlash over plan to build a “humanitarian city”

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

Stuttering Gaza ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas entered a second week on Monday, with US President Donald Trump still hopeful of a breakthrough and as more than 20 people were killed on the ground.

The indirect negotiations in the Qatari capital, Doha, appeared deadlocked at the weekend after both sides blamed the other for blocking a deal for a 60-day ceasefire and the release of hostages.

In Gaza, the Palestinian territory’s civil defence agency said at least 22 people were killed in the latest Israeli strikes on Monday in and around Gaza City, and Khan Yunis in the south.

One strike on a tent in Khan Yunis on Sunday killed the parents and three brothers of a young Gazan boy, who only survived as he was outside getting water, the boy’s uncle told AFP.

Belal al-Adlouni called for revenge for “every drop of blood” saying it “will not be forgotten and will not die with the passage of time, nor with displacement or with death”.

AFP reporters in southern Israel meanwhile saw large plumes of smoke in northern Gaza, where the military said fighter jets had pounded Hamas targets over the weekend.

Trump, who met Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington last week, is keen to secure a truce in the 21-month war, which was sparked by Hamas’s deadly October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

“Gaza -- we are talking and hopefully we’re going to get that straightened out over the next week,” he told reporters late on Sunday, echoing similarly optimi-

stic comments he made on July 4.

A Palestinian source with knowledge of the talks told AFP on Saturday that Hamas rejected Israeli proposals to keep troops in over 40 percent of Gaza and plans to move Palestinians into an enclave on the border with Egypt.

In response, a senior Israeli political official accused Hamas of inflexibility and trying to deliberately scupper the talks by “clinging to positions that prevent the mediators from advancing an agreement”.

Pressure

Israel’s Foreign Minister Gideon Saar and the Palestinian minister of state for foreign affairs Varsen Aghabekian Shahin headed to Brussels on Monday for talks between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbours.

But the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority denied media reports that any meeting between the two was on the agenda.

In Israel, Netanyahu has said he would be ready to enter talks for a more lasting ceasefire when a deal for a temporary truce is agreed and only when Hamas lays down its weapons.

But he is under pressure to quickly wrap up the war, with military casualties mounting and with public frustration both at the continued captivity of the hostages and a perceived lack of progress in the conflict.

Politically, his fragile governing coalition is holding, for now, but Netanyahu is seen as beholden to a minority of far-right ministers in prolonging an increasingly unpopular conflict.

‘Sesame Street’ puppet Elmo’s hacked X account calls for Jews’ extermination

Washington, United States

The X account of Sesame Street’s Elmo, a beloved children’s TV character, shared antisemitic and anti-Donald Trump posts after being hacked on Sunday. A slew of messages calling for the extermination of Jewish people and labeling the US president a “puppet” of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were shared on the account.

Around 650,000 users follow Elmo, the fuzzy red monster who

teaches his young audience about kindness and patience.

An archived version of the X account showed several messages were published on Sunday afternoon. They were later removed, although a link to a Telegram page apparently associated with the hack remained in the account’s bio section.

Sesame Workshop, the non-profit behind Sesame Street, said that an unidentified hacker was behind the posts.



Hamas took a total of 251 hostages, of which 49 are still being held, including 27 that the Israeli military says are dead. Israel’s military reprisals have killed 58,026 Palestinians, mostly civilians, according to the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza.