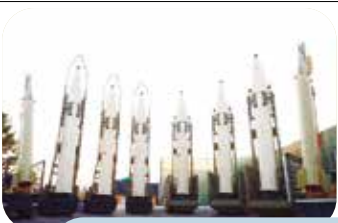


News in brief

◆ **Iran insisted yesterday** that its missile programme was defensive in nature and designed to dissuade attack, while adding the existence of its arsenal was not up for debate. Israel had presented Iran's ballistic missiles, along with its nuclear programme, as the two main threats it sought to neutralise during the 12-day war the foes fought in June. "Iran's missile programme was developed to defend Iran's territory, not for negotiation," foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said at a weekly press conference. "Therefore, Iran's defense capabilities, designed to deter aggressors from any thought of attacking Iran, are not a matter that could be talked about." Iran's ballistic capabilities put Israel within striking distance, and after Israel's unprecedented attacks that sparked the war in June, Tehran responded with waves of missiles and drones launched at Israeli cities.



**Iran says missile programme defensive, non-negotiable**

◆ **Jailed Malaysian ex-PM Najib loses bid for house arrest** Former Malaysian leader Najib Razak lost a bid to have his jail term changed to house arrest yesterday, a setback ahead of a separate verdict this week tied to the country's 1MDB scandal. Najib, 72, is serving a six-year jail term for corruption linked to the plunder of Malaysia's sovereign wealth fund 1MDB, which sparked probes in several countries. His lawyers had argued that the purported existence of an order by Malaysia's former king, called a "royal addendum", granted him permission to serve the rest of his current sentence at home. However, Judge Alice Loke Yee Ching disagreed, saying that the royal addendum was not a valid order. Therefore, "the court cannot issue an... order to direct a house arrest", Loke told the Kuala Lumpur High Court.

◆ **The US Coast Guard** was pursuing another allegedly sanctioned tanker on Sunday, a US official told AFP, as Washington ramps up its pressure campaign targeting Venezuela's vital oil sector. The "active pursuit" in the Caribbean Sea was happening a day after the Coast Guard seized its second vessel off Venezuela in two weeks. US President Donald Trump announced on December 16 a blockade of "sanctioned oil vessels" sailing to and from Venezuela, demanding the return of allegedly stolen US assets in the oil-rich South American country. He has also deployed a large navy armada in the Caribbean with a stated mission of combatting drug trafficking, but which Caracas says is a pressure campaign to oust President Nicolas Maduro. "The United States Coast Guard is in active pursuit of a sanctioned dark fleet vessel that is part of Venezuela's illegal sanctions evasion. It is flying a false flag and under a judicial seizure order," a US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said in a statement to AFP.

**US in 'pursuit' of third oil tanker in Caribbean: official**



SPOTLIGHT

CO2 soon to be buried under North Sea oil platform

AFP | Esbjerg, Denmark

In the North Sea where Denmark once drilled for oil, imported European carbon dioxide will soon be buried under the seabed in a carbon capture and storage (CCS) project nearing completion.



INEOS Energy's Nini platform, a depleted oil and gas field

CCS technology is one of the tools approved by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the International Energy Agency (IEA) to curb global warming, especially for reducing the CO2 footprint of industries like cement and steel that are difficult to decarbonise.

But the technology is complex and costly.

Led by British chemicals giant Ineos, the Greensand project 170 kilometres (105 miles) off the Danish coast consists of a deep, empty reservoir beneath a small, wind-swept oil platform in the North Sea.

In its first phase due to begin in the next few months, Greensand is slated to store 400,000 tonnes of CO2 per year.

It's "a very good opportunity to reverse the process: instead of extracting oil, we can now inject CO2 into the ground," Mads Gade, Ineos's head of European operations, told AFP.

Liquefied CO2 sourced mainly from biomass power plants will be shipped from Europe via the Esbjerg terminal in southwestern Denmark to the Nini platform above an

empty oil reservoir, into which it will be injected.

"The reason why the North Sea is seen as a vault for CO2 storage is because of the enormous amounts of data that we have collected through over 50 years of petroleum production," said CCS coordinator Ann Helen Hansen at the Norwegian Offshore Directorate (Sodir).

This area of the North Sea is teeming with depleted oil and gas fields like Nini, as well as deep rock basins.

According to Sodir, the Norwegian part of the North Sea alone theoretically has a geological storage capacity of around 70 billion tonnes (70 Gt) of CO2. On the British side, the figure is 78 Gt, according to the British government.

In Denmark, the geological institute has no overall data, but the Bifrost project, led by TotalEnergies, estimates it could store 335 million tonnes of CO2. By comparison, the European Union's greenhouse gas emissions amounted to about 3.2 Gt last year.

Israel demolishes residential building in east Jerusalem

Demolition of the building was based on a 2014 court order



Excavators demolish a building constructed without a permit in the Wadi Qaddum area near the Silwan neighbourhood of east Jerusalem

● **Bulldozers began ripping into the structure early yesterday**

● **Activists accuse Israeli authorities of frequently designating areas in east Jerusalem as national parks or open spaces**

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

Israeli bulldozers tore through a four-storey residential building in east Jerusalem yesterday, displacing scores of Palestinians in what activists said was the largest such demolition

in the area this year.

The building, located in the Silwan neighbourhood near the Old City, comprised a dozen apartments housing approximately 100 people, many of them women, children and elderly residents.

It was the latest in a series of buildings to be torn down as Israeli officials target what they describe as unauthorised structures in annexed east Jerusalem.

"The demolition is a tragedy for all residents," Eid Shawar, who lives in the building, told AFP. "They broke down the door while we were asleep and told us we could only change our clothes and take essential papers and documents," said the father of five.

With nowhere else to go, Shawar said his seven-member family would have to sleep in his car.

Three bulldozers began ripping into the structure early on Monday as residents looked on, their clothes and belongings scattered across nearby streets, an AFP journalist saw.

Israeli police cordoned off surrounding roads, with security forces deployed across the area and positioned on rooftops of

neighbouring houses.

Built on privately owned Palestinian land, the building had been slated for demolition for lacking a permit, activists said. Palestinians face severe obstacles in obtaining building permits due to Israel's restrictive planning policies, according to activists, an issue that has fuelled tensions in east Jerusalem and across the occupied West Bank for years.



Israel occupied east Jerusalem, including the Old City, in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and swiftly annexed the area.

New Zealand says agreed free trade deal with India

● **The deal, which comes into effect in the first half of next year**

AFP | Wellington, New Zealand

New Zealand said yesterday it had agreed a wide-ranging free-trade deal with India that eliminates tariffs on 95 percent of the Pacific country's exports, but the government's coalition partner labelled it a bad agreement.

Trade and investment minister Todd McClay said the deal, which comes into effect in the first half of next year, gave unprecedented access to India's 1.4 billion consumers.

"This once-in-a-generation agreement creates opportunities New Zealand exporters have



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

never had in India," McClay said, adding that it "will deliver thousands of jobs and billions in additional exports".

The deal simplifies entry to

New Zealand for some Indian workers, including 1,667 temporary work visas each year for the information and communications technology sector, en-

gineering and some health services.

It also includes a working holiday scheme allowing up to 1,000 people aged 18-30, and allows Indian students to work for up to 20 hours a week.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office said he had spoken to New Zealand counterpart Christopher Luxon on Monday and the two agreed that the deal, signed in a "record time of nine months", would further deepen ties.

Both "leaders agree that the free-trade agreement would serve as a catalyst for greater trade, investment, innovation and shared opportunities between both countries", Modi's office said in a statement.

The agreement "would also open up new opportunities for innovators, entrepreneurs and farmers, it added.