

## 'Indeed an Iranian act'

Netanyahu blames Tehran for ship attack; Iran dismisses idea of talks with EU, US to revive 2015 nuclear deal

AFP, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday accused Iran of a recent attack on an Israeli-owned ship, noting his country was regularly "striking" its arch-foe in comments that followed an overnight raid on Syria.

Iran has denied any role in the explosion last Thursday that hit the MV Helios Ray in the Gulf of Oman, leaving two holes in its side but causing no casualties.

The latest escalation between the sides came as the international community has been trying to salvage the troubled 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

"It is indeed an Iranian act, that's clear," Netanyahu told public broadcaster Kan.

"As for a reaction -- you know my policy," he continued.

"Iran is Israel's greatest enemy, I'm determined to block it, we're striking at it throughout the region."

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh responded swiftly to dismiss Netanyahu's claims.

"We strongly deny this accusation," Khatibzadeh told reporters, adding that "the source of this accusation itself shows how invalid (the claim) is."

Netanyahu's remarks came hours after

Syrian air defences intercepted what they said were Israeli missiles over Damascus.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said the strike hit the area of Sayyida Zeinab south of Damascus, where Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Lebanese Hezbollah forces are reported to be present.

There was no immediate report of casualties.

Meanwhile, Iran on Sunday dismissed Europe's offer for an informal meeting involving the United States on the troubled 2015 nuclear deal, saying the time is not "suitable" as Washington has failed to lift sanctions.

The European Union's political director earlier this month proposed the informal meeting involving all parties of the Vienna deal, a proposition accepted by US President Joe Biden's administration.

Following Biden's election, the US, the European parties to the deal -- France, Germany and Britain -- and Tehran have been trying to salvage the accord, which granted Iran sanctions relief in return for restrictions on its nuclear programme.

The accord has been nearing collapse since former president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew in 2018 and reimposed crippling sanctions against Tehran.



Protesters run after tear gas was fired during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon, Myanmar yesterday. Inset, flowers are placed over a portrait of teacher Tin Nwe Yi, during memorial ceremony in Yangon yesterday, after she was killed in a demonstration against the military coup on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Covid vaccine acceptance rises

Says survey of six countries; Modi takes first dose of home-grown Covaxin as India widens immunisation drive

AGENCIES

Willingness to get a Covid-19 vaccine is on the rise compared to last year, a survey of six industrialised countries published yesterday showed.

More people in the United Kingdom, the United States and even vaccine-sceptical France now accept the idea of getting a coronavirus jab, KekstCNC, an international consultancy, said in the survey conducted in February.

The survey also covered Germany, Japan and Sweden where a similar trend was clear, it said.

"As vaccine rollouts commence, higher numbers of people in all countries say they would take the vaccine," the study said.

The highest percentage was found in the UK with 89 percent of those

questioned in favour of taking a vaccine, up from 70 percent in December.

In Sweden, the rate was 76 percent against 53 in December, in the US 64 percent against 58, in Germany 73 against 63 and in Japan 64 against 50.

France was the country in the study with the least enthusiasm at 59 percent, but favourable opinions about vaccines were still sharply up from the 40 percent level seen in December.

Some people were, meanwhile, highly critical of the vaccine rollout in their country.

While 76 percent of Britons surveyed felt their government had gotten the rollout speed "about right", that percentage fell to 32 percent in the US, 28 percent in Germany and Japan, 22 in France and only 20

percent in Sweden.

People in the six countries judged that Israel and Britain had done the world's best jobs with their vaccine rollout.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was inoculated with the first dose of a home-grown coronavirus vaccine yesterday, kicking off an expansion of the country's immunisation campaign as infections rise in some big states.

People above 60, and those who are 45 or more and suffering from certain medical conditions, are now eligible for the vaccinations.

India has so far vaccinated 12 million health and front-line workers since starting its immunisation programme in mid-January. It wants to cover 300 million of its 1.35 billion people by August.

## GUILTY OF CORRUPTION IN FRANCE

### Ex-president Sarkozy gets 3 years in jail

AFP, Paris

Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty of corruption yesterday and handed a three-year prison sentence after a court in Paris convicted him for trying to illegally influence a judge during his time in office.

The sentence includes two years suspended, which means it is unlikely Sarkozy will physically go to prison.

He is almost certain to appeal and remains free, with no arrest warrant issued.

The verdict is the latest twist in the tumultuous political career of the 66-year-old who ruled France from 2007 to 2012 and remains a favourite for many on the right.

The conviction is likely to undermine any attempted comeback to frontline politics, an ambition he has denied, but which has been promoted by many supporters ahead of 2022 presidential elections.

Only one other French president, Sarkozy's political mentor Jacques Chirac, was put on trial after leaving office, but he was excused from having to attend his 2011 corruption trial because of ill health.

Chirac received a two-year suspended sentence over the creation of ghost jobs at the Paris city hall to fund his party when he was mayor.

The verdict yesterday related to a case of influence peddling and corruption, one



of at least four separate investigations into the former leader, who married former supermodel and singer Carla Bruni while in office.

Sarkozy was accused of offering to help a judge obtain a senior job in Monaco in exchange for putting pressure on an inquiry into his campaign finances.

The former president told the court during the trial he had "never committed the slightest act of corruption".

Prosecutors called for him to be jailed for four years and serve a minimum of two, and asked for the same punishment for his co-defendants -- lawyer Thierry Herzog and the judge Gilbert Azibert.

On March 17, the ex-president is scheduled to face a second trial over accusations of fraudulently overspending in his failed 2012 re-election bid.

## Trump hints at 2024 run

REUTERS, Washington

Former President Donald Trump hinted on Sunday at a possible presidential run in 2024, attacked President Joe Biden and repeated his fraudulent claims he won the 2020 election in his first major appearance since leaving the White House nearly six weeks ago.

Addressing the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando, Florida, Trump vowed to help Republicans try to regain majorities - lost during his presidency - in the US House of Representatives and Senate in 2022 congressional elections and dangled himself as a possibility for president in 2024.

"With your help, we will take back the House, we will win the Senate and then a Republican president will make a triumphant return to the White House."

I wonder who will that be?" he said, smiling. He said he had no plans to try to launch a third party, an idea he has discussed with advisers in the past couple of months.



Women in red clothing dance holding up red tulips as they welcome the meteorological spring during a protest against the Belarus presidential election results near the village of Maloje Zaprudzie, some 95 kilometers northwest of Minsk yesterday. Huge protests erupted in Belarus in August after the veteran leader Alexander Lukashenko, who has dominated the country since 1994, claimed a landslide win over opposition figure Svetlana Tikhanovskaya at a disputed election.

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWS IN brief

### Prince Harry feared 'history repeating itself'

Britain's Prince Harry, who has blamed press intrusion for contributing to his mother Princess Diana's death in 1997, has told US chat show host Oprah Winfrey he was worried about history repeating itself. Harry and his wife Meghan Markle rocked Britain's monarchy with their shock announcement in January 2020 that they were stepping back from royal duties. CBS yesterday released brief clips of an "intimate" interview with Winfrey about their lives which will air March 7. "My biggest concern was history repeating itself," Harry, 36, said, apparently referring to the death of his mother.

### Chinese blogger charged with 'defaming martyrs'

Chinese prosecutors formally charged a popular social media influencer with "defaming martyrs" yesterday, for suggesting the death toll of the China-India border clash was higher than the official count of four. The blogger, listed in the indictment by his surname Qiu, was charged under a newly added provision to China's criminal law that bans the "defamation of martyrs and heroes" and came into effect yesterday. Qiu had more than 2.5 million followers on the Twitter-like platform Weibo under the pseudonym "Crayon Ball".

### Malaysian news site editor questioned

The chief editor of an independent Malaysian news outlet was questioned by police yesterday on suspicion of sedition after he criticised the conviction of his website for contempt. Malaysiakini, which made a name for itself by reporting on the misdeeds of the country's ruling elite, was found guilty last month over readers' comments critical of the judiciary and fined \$120,000. The conviction added to concerns about worsening press freedoms in the Southeast Asian nation since a scandal-plagued coalition came to power last year without an election.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

## Rahul Gandhi takes up 'push-up' challenge in Tamil Nadu

NDTV ONLINE

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, in Tamil Nadu ahead of the state elections, is trying to connect with locals with his fierce poll speeches, one-on-one interactions and also an apparent demonstration of his physical strength.

In a video, which is widely being shared on social media, the 50-year-old ex-Congress chief is seen doing push-ups with a student.

A nearly one-minute-long clip shows the Kerala MP from Wayanad taking up the "push-up challenge" while talking to a student.

"Can you do push-ups. Let's try 15?" he is asked by Merolin Shenigha, a class 10 student.

Handing over the mic, Rahul Gandhi smiles, and then he gets down to the task. Merolin and Gandhi are seen doing one push-up after the other.

The Congress leader pauses while the student doesn't. He apparently says "she

wins". Surrounded by a cheerful crowd, he takes it to the next level and does push-ups with one hand.

Gandhi also shared the clip on his Instagram account, and wrote: "Push up challenge by Merolin Shenigha, a 10th standard Judo enthusiast."

Last week, Gandhi got a compliment from boxer Vijender Singh. "Abs of a boxer. Most daring young fit & people's leader. Way to go @RahulGandhi Ji," Singh tweeted with a photo of Gandhi.

He had shared a picture from the Congress leader's Kerala visit.

The photo was taken after he dived into the sea with local fishermen.

Gandhi was on a boat with several fishermen when he suddenly jumped into the water. The 50-year-old MP swam for 10 minutes before returning to the shore.

His visits to Tamil Nadu and Kerala come ahead of the state polls next months. Both the states vote on April 6; results will be out on May 2.

## The Security Printing Corporation (Bangladesh) Ltd. (SPCBL)

Gazipur

### Amendment of e-Tenders

This is for information of all concerned that the following e-Tenders of The Security Printing Corporation (Bangladesh) Ltd. (SPCBL), Gazipur are hereby amended as follows:

SL	Names of the items	e-Tender Nos.	Extended last date and time for submission of e-Tender	Extended last date & time for opening of e-Tender
01.	Supply of 500 pcs. Blankets for Super Intaglio & Super Orlof Intaglio Printing Machine.	1. Local e-Tender No. 22/2020-2021 2. International e-Tender No. 23/2020-2021	Date: 05.04.2021 Time: up to 11.00am	Date: 05.04.2021 Time: at 11.15am
02.	Supply of 18,400 Kgs UV Curing Varnish with Photoinitiator for 100 Taka and 200 Taka Bank Note.	1. International e-Tender No. 25/2020-2021	Date: 05.04.2021 Time: up to 11.00am	Date: 05.04.2021 Time: at 11.15am
03.	Supply of 3000 Kgs Stapling Wire.	1. Local e-Tender No. 26/2020-2021 2. International e-Tender No. 27/2020-2021	Date: 05.04.2021 Time: up to 11.00am	Date: 05.04.2021 Time: at 11.15am
04.	Supply of 300 pcs Nylo Print Plates	1. Local e-Tender No. 28/2020-2021 2. International e-Tender No. 29/2020-2021	Date: 05.04.2021 Time: up to 11.00am	Date: 05.04.2021 Time: at 11.15am
05.	Supply of 2100 Packets White Mat Board.	1. Local e-Tender No. 09/2020-2021	Date: 30.03.2021 Time: up to 11.00am	Date: 30.03.2021 Time: at 11.15am
06.	Supply of 5,150 Kgs P.P Strap (15 m.m Width)	1. Local e-Tender No. 10/2020-2021	Date: 30.03.2021 Time: up to 11.00am	Date: 30.03.2021 Time: at 11.15am

This is to mention here that the aforesaid e-Tenders were postponed due to technical problem of the related e-Tender System which has not yet been solved. This is why, it is not possible to submit as well as open the e-Tenders electronically right now. In this situation, the intended tenderers are hereby requested to download the concerned e-Tender schedule from the website ([www.spcbl.org.bd](http://www.spcbl.org.bd)) of the SPCBL. Besides, the e-Tender schedule may also be collected from the Accounts Department of the SPCBL within 9.00am to 3.30pm during normal office days up to 04.04.2021 for Serial No. 1 to 4 and up to 28.03.2021 for Serial No. 5 and 6 against an application in the letterhead pad of the intended tenderer paying value of the respective e-Tender schedule. The hard copy of the offer duly filled up and sealed as well as signed at each page of the e-Tender schedule and all related documents shall have to submit directly in intact envelope in the e-Tender box kept at the SPCBL's Head Office in Gazipur alongwith earnest money as instructed in the concerned e-Tender schedule and value of e-Tender schedule in the form of separate Pay Order/Demand Draft/Irrevocable Bank Guarantee/Money Receipt (for collecting e-Tender schedule from the SPCBL). It is to be noted here that the e-Tender will also be acceptable submitted electronically if the e-Tender System of the SPCBL is by this time brought in live. This amendment will be treated as an integral part of the aforesaid e-Tender schedules.

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