

SHIP SEIZURE

## Iran rejects Israel's accusations

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday dismissed as "invalid" Israel's accusations that Yemen's Huthi rebels were acting on Tehran's "guidance" when they seized a Red Sea ship owned by an Israeli businessman.

The Iran-backed rebels in Yemen seized Galaxy Leader on Sunday, days after they threatened to target Israeli vessels in the waterway over Israel's war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the ship "was hijacked with Iran guidance by the Yemenite Huthi militia". Yesterday, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said the Israeli accusations were "invalid".

"We have repeatedly announced that resistance groups in the region represent their countries and act based on the interests of their countries," the spokesman said.



Palestinian premature babies, evacuated from Gaza City's Al Shifa hospital, are transported in a Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance through the Rafah crossing in the southern Gaza Strip to Egypt, yesterday, amid ongoing battles between Israel and Hamas. Twenty-eight premature babies arrived in Egypt, Egyptian media said.

PHOTO: AFP

## Xi, Macron discuss Israel-Hamas war in call: media

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping and French counterpart Emmanuel Macron discussed the Israel-Hamas war in a phone call yesterday, agreeing "to avoid a more serious humanitarian crisis", Beijing's state media reported.

"The two heads of state exchanged views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and both believe that the top priority is to avoid further deterioration of the situation between Palestine and Israel, especially to avoid a more serious humanitarian crisis," state broadcaster CCTV reported.

The phone call comes days ahead of a visit to China by French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna and as a delegation of top diplomats from the Palestinian Authority, Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan meet in Beijing for talks aimed at a "de-escalation" of the conflict in Gaza.

According to CCTV, Xi and Macron agreed to "continue to maintain communication on international and regional issues of common concern and contribute to maintaining world peace and stability".

## CHINA-MIDDLE EAST SUMMIT

# Israel seeks to end Palestinians' presence

### Says Palestinian FM; China FM calls for 'urgent' steps to ease Gaza crisis

AGENCIES

Israel seeks to end the Palestinian people's presence on their "historical land," Palestine's foreign minister has said.

Riyad al-Maliki's comments came as diplomats from Arab and Muslim-majority nations met their Chinese counterparts in Beijing yesterday.

Beijing is hosting a delegation of foreign ministers from the Palestinian Authority, Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan for talks aimed at finding a solution to end the war in the Gaza Strip.

The summit, during which China pledged to work to "restore peace in the Middle East," is seen as part of a push by Beijing to step up its international role.

The Palestinian Authority's al-Maliki accused Israel of seeking to "bring to an end the Palestinian people's presence on what remains of its historical land," AFP reports.

A spokesperson for Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the displacement of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip will threaten peace, security and stability in the region and the world.

"Egypt is making every effort to bring aid into the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing, but Israel's policy of obstructing the entry of aid is a systematic policy



aimed at pushing the Palestinians to leave the strip under the weight of bombing and siege," the spokesperson said.

China, the host of the summit, has historically been sympathetic to the Palestinians. Foreign Minister Wang Yi told the visiting diplomats that his country could see that "a humanitarian disaster is unfolding in Gaza" and that it must be stopped.

"The situation in Gaza affects all countries around the world, questioning the human sense of right and wrong and humanity's bottom line," he said, before urging the international community to "act urgently" to prevent the war from spreading.

Following the outbreak of the

## Earth to warm up to 2.9C even with current pledges: UN

AFP, Paris

Countries' greenhouse gas-cutting pledges put Earth on track for warming far beyond key limits, potentially up to a catastrophic 2.9 degrees Celsius this century, the UN said yesterday, urging G20 nations to boost emissions cuts.

The UN Environment Programme's annual Emissions Gap report is released just ahead of crucial COP28 climate talks in Dubai and will feed into the global response to a sobering official "stocktake" of the failure to curb warming so far.

With this year expected to be the hottest in human history, UNEP said "the world is witnessing a disturbing acceleration in the number, speed and scale of broken climate records".

Taking into account countries' carbon-cutting plans, UNEP warned the planet is on a path for disastrous heating of between 2.5C and 2.9C by 2100. Based just on existing policies and emissions-cutting efforts, global warming would reach 3C.

But the world continues to pump record levels of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, with emissions up 1.2 percent from 2021 to 2022, UNEP said.

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

# US's Austin visits Kyiv in gesture of support

REUTERS, Kyiv

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin arrived in wartime Kyiv yesterday in a gesture of "unwavering" support as questions swirled over the sustainability of vital Western assistance as the war with Russia drags on. Austin, accompanied by the commander of the US European Command, was shown next to a train shaking hands with the US ambassador to Kyiv in a photograph published by the embassy.

"I'm here today to deliver an important message – the United States will continue to stand with Ukraine in their fight for freedom against Russia's aggression, both now and into the future," Austin wrote on social media platform X. US ambassador to Kyiv Bridget Brink said the visit signalled Washington's "unwavering support to Ukraine in its fight for freedom".

The trip comes amid increasing division over aid for Ukraine in the US legislature with a US presidential election in November next year. A joint Ukraine-US military industry conference in Washington is due to take place next month. That event, due on December 6 and 7, is intended to boost Ukraine's domestic arms production as its fight against a full-scale Russian invasion nears the two-year mark. Russia controls nearly a fifth of Ukraine. The West sent in military equipment and Ukraine mounted a counteroffensive push this year to retake occupied land, but it has not made a big breakthrough.

## INDIA COLLAPSED TUNNEL

# Rescuers drill to send more food to trapped workers

REUTERS, Silkyara

Rescuers are trying to send cooked food and set up a phone connection to 41 workers trapped for eight days in a collapsed tunnel in the Indian Himalayas as they explore fresh rescue plans after previous attempts stalled, officials said yesterday.

The men have been stuck in the highway tunnel in Uttarakhand state since it caved in early on November 12 and are safe, authorities said. They have access to light and supplies of oxygen, dry food, water and medicines are being sent via a pipe.

Authorities expect that a second, 6-inch pipeline being drilled into the debris for delivery of cooked food will soon be ready, with 42 metres out of an estimated 60 metres already completed, said Bhaskar Khulbe, officer on special duty for the tunnel project.

"Our priority is to save 41 lives who are trapped inside the tunnel. Through this (pipeline) we will be able to send necessary things to them," federal Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari told reporters on Sunday. Officials are also considering setting up an optical fibre connection through this pipeline, Gadkari added, which can be used insert a camera or phone connection into the tunnel to help workers speak to their families. The men currently receive nuts, pulled rice, chickpeas and other dry food items via a pipe and the district chief medical officer R.C.S. Panwar said three of them have complained of dysentery. Rescuers are exploring five new plans to pull out the workers after a machine drilling horizontally into the debris developed a snag and a sudden "cracking sound" during efforts to restart it caused panic.



## Why Maldives leader wants Indian troops out of nation?

NDTV ONLINE

Addressing the inauguration event on his elevation as the president of the Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu said he will ensure that the small island nation "has no foreign military presence on its soil".

Soon after, during a meeting with Indian Union Minister Kiren Rijiju, the President formally requested New Delhi to withdraw its military personnel.

Indian government sources have said the two sides have agreed to discuss "workable solutions" to continue the use of Indian military platforms by the island nation as they serve the interests of its people.

India has just about 70 soldiers in the island nations. These personnel operate India-sponsored radars and surveillance aircraft. Indian warships in the region help patrol the country's exclusive economic zone.

According to a statement issued by his office, President Dr Muizzu acknowledged the significant role of two Indian helicopters in numerous emergency medical evacuations.

But amid the growing strategic significance of the Indian Ocean region and



border tensions between key Asian players India and China, the island has become a geopolitical hotspot. While the Maldives President has stressed that it wants to work together with both India and China, he has underlined that the island nation is "too small to be entangled in geopolitical rivalry".

President Muizzu succeeds Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, whose tenure saw a boost in ties between the island nation and New Delhi. A former minister and Mayor of Male, President Muizzu is close to former president Abdulla Yameen, who borrowed heavily from Beijing during his tenure from 2013 to 2018.

Following his election to the top post, Muizzu has pushed for the withdrawal of Indian troops from the Maldives on the grounds of security.

He has clarified in an interview to AFP that he does not intend to upend the regional balance by replacing Indian military with Chinese troops.

The Maldives President is clearly trying to strike a fine balance in its ties with India and China.

In his meeting with Union Minister Rijiju, he discussed the progress in projects India is backing in the Maldives.



Newly-arrived Rohingya refugees rest at a local fishermen's hall in Lapang Barat, Aceh, Indonesia yesterday. Frustration at the stateless group, heavily persecuted in Myanmar, is rising in Aceh province, where more than 800 Rohingyas have arrived in at least five vessels in the past week.

PHOTO: AFP