

## 21 drown in Nile boat sinking in Sudan

AFP, Khartoum

At least 21 people drowned when a boat sank in the Nile River in northern Sudan, according to the local state government and eyewitnesses interviewed by AFP.

River Nile State said yesterday that 21 bodies had been recovered after the accident, listed their names and warned that some passengers were still missing.

The boat was crossing the river between the villages of Tayba al-Khawad and Deim al-Qarai, according to the local government's statement.

The statement did not explain the cause of the accident.

Eyewitnesses told AFP the boat was carrying 30 people. The Sudanese Doctors Network said in a statement that six of the boat's passengers survived.



The group said the incident exposes "the fragility of river transport and the absence of basic safety requirements, as well as the complete absence of local authorities and civil defence rescue teams in the early hours of the incident".

Many Sudanese rely on river transport via single-engine boats captained by solo operators. The country's infrastructure has been collapsing due to a war that has been ongoing for nearly three years.

The war has divided the country between the army and their enemy, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, with road closures and a severe deterioration in public services and medical and educational infrastructure.

A massive fire at a displacement camp in Sudan killed one child and left hundreds of people homeless after they had already been forced to flee the fighting ravaging the country.

The "catastrophic" fire broke out on Monday at Al-Omda camp near the city of Tawila in North Darfur, according to Abu Bakr Haroun, deputy head of the camp's management committee. He said the fire killed a three-year-old child, injured 13 other people, destroyed 548 homes and killed many animals.



US President Donald Trump hands a pen to a coal miner after signing an executive order directing the military to purchase electricity from coal-fired power plants, during a 'Champion of Coal' event at the White House in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

## No 'definitive' deal with Netanyahu

Trump insists US talks with Iran to continue

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump said after talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday they reached no "definitive" agreement on how to move forward with Iran but he insisted negotiations with Tehran would continue to see if a deal can be achieved.

Netanyahu, who had been expected to press Trump to widen diplomacy with Iran beyond its nuclear program to include limits on its missile arsenal, stressed that Israel's security interests must be taken into account but offered no

**Two leaders meeting for 4th time in nearly 13 months**

**Netanyahu urges wider US-Iran talks beyond nuke issues**

sign that the president made the commitments he sought.

In their seventh meeting since Trump returned to office last year, Netanyahu - whose visit was more muted than usual and closed to the press - was looking to influence the next round of US discussions with Iran following nuclear negotiations held in Oman last Friday.

The two leaders spoke behind closed doors for more than two and a half hours in what Trump



described as a "very good meeting" but said no major decisions were made and stopped short of publicly accepting Netanyahu's entreaties.

Trump has threatened strikes on Iran if no agreement is reached, while Tehran has vowed to retaliate, stoking fears of a wider war as the US amasses forces in the Middle East. He has repeatedly voiced support for a secure Israel, a longstanding US ally and arch-foe of Iran.

In media interviews on Tuesday, Trump reiterated his blunt warning to Iran, while saying he believes Tehran wants a deal.

"There was nothing definitive reached other than I insisted that negotiations with Iran continue to see whether or not a Deal can be consummated," Trump said in a social media post after the meeting with Netanyahu. "If it can, I let the Prime Minister know that will be a preference."

"If it cannot, we will just have to see what the outcome will be," Trump added, noting that the last time Iran decided against an agreement the US struck its nuclear sites last June.

Trump told Fox Business in an interview broadcast on Tuesday that a good deal with Iran would mean "no nuclear weapons, no missiles," without elaborating. He also told Axios he was considering sending a second aircraft carrier strike group as part of a major US buildup near Iran.

Israel fears that the US might pursue a narrow nuclear deal that does not include restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile program or an end to Iranian support for armed proxies such as Hamas and Hezbollah, according to people familiar with the matter. Israeli officials have urged the US not to trust Iran's promises.

## Militants kill 5 police in attack in NW Pakistan

REUTERS, Dera Ismail Khan

Militants killed five police officers in northwest Pakistan on Wednesday, police said, as the South Asian nation grapples with a rising wave of violence.

Police said they came under attack upon their return from an operation against militants on the outskirts of the city of Dera Ismail Khan.

The militants, who were hiding in a forest, opened fire on the police patrols, a police statement said. It said the police killed four of the militants in a retaliatory attack.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack.

The city sits on the edge of lawless Waziristan district along the Afghan border, which has long been home to Islamist militants, mainly local Taliban, also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.

Militant violence has been on the rise since the TTP revoked a ceasefire with Islamabad in late 2022.

A suicide bombing killed over 30 people at a mosque in Islamabad on Friday.

Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a message of condolences to Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari over the deadly explosion in Islamabad.

## US-CHINA THREATS EU vows swift reforms to meet challenge

AFP, Brussels

EU leaders yesterday vowed to act boldly to bolster Europe's economy faced with twin threats from China and the United States, as they huddled in a Belgian castle to bridge differences on the path ahead.

It is a challenge that has long dogged the European Union, but has gained greater urgency because of geopolitical shocks, intensified global competition and an economy that lags behind bigger powers.

Leaders share a common diagnosis that Europe's moribund economy needs a kickstart -- but they are far from agreed on the cure.

Paris and Berlin have publicly diverged on France's push to favour EU companies and for more joint debt -- although French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz were keen to present a united front yesterday.

"We share this sense of urgency that our Europe must act very clearly" in the face of "very strong pressure", such as unfair competition from China and US tariffs, Macron said.

"We want to make this European Union faster. We want to make it better," Merz said, adding: "I am pleased Emmanuel Macron and I are almost always in agreement on these matters."

## India to buy 114 Rafale jets from Dassault

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Defence Acquisition Council yesterday cleared an initial proposal to buy 114 Rafale fighter jets from France's Dassault Aviation for 3.25 trillion rupees (\$280.4 billion), local media reported.

The air force's fighter squadron strength has shrunk to 29 in recent months, well below the approved number of 42. Its workhorse MiG 21 was retired in September and other early variants of the MiG-29, the Anglo-French Jaguar and the French Mirage 2000, are also set to fly off into the sunset in the coming years.

New Delhi has long relied on importing machinery and weapons for its armed forces, but a recent push by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has helped boost indigenous manufacturing.

For the Indian Air Force, the era of domestic manufacturing began in the 1980s but was fruitful only in the last decade when the Tejas fighter jet was introduced to replace Soviet-era MiG 21s.

Hindustan Aeronautics has nearly 180 of the advanced Mk-1A variants on order domestically, but has yet to begin deliveries due to engine supply chain issues at GE Aerospace.

Heightened tensions with its neighbours have required India's military to modernise. The proposal paves the way for commercial and technical details of the deal to be discussed between the two countries, after a visit by French President Emmanuel Macron to India.

India has boosted military hardware imports from the US, France, and Israel. Macron is set to visit India on February 17. Modi's government has also liberalised laws to ease private investments in domestic defence manufacturing.



## EPSTEIN ASSOCIATES US lawmakers accuse Bondi of concealing names

REUTERS, Washington

A Republican US lawmaker on Wednesday accused Attorney General Pam Bondi of concealing the names of powerful associates of the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein as she faced questions about the Justice Department's handling of investigative files in a charged hearing before a House of Representatives panel.

Representative Thomas Massie, a Republican from Kentucky, who helped lead the effort to require the files' release, accused the Justice Department of a "massive failure" to comply with the law as he questioned why billionaire Leslie Wexner's name was redacted in an FBI document listing potential co-conspirators in the sex trafficking investigation into Epstein.

Bondi said Wexner's name appeared numerous times in other files the department released and that the DOJ unredacted his name on the document "within 40 minutes" of Massie spotting it.

"Forty minutes of me catching you red-handed," Massie replied. Bondi had a series of other heated confrontations with members of the House Judiciary Committee who expressed frustration with the amount of Epstein material the department has redacted and withheld.

The Justice Department released what it called a final tranche of more than 3 million pages of documents late last month, drawing renewed attention to wealthy and powerful individuals who maintained ties with Epstein even after his conviction for soliciting prostitution from a minor.



Demonstrators shield behind a banner reading 'Labour reform kills my freedom' as riot police fire water cannon during a union-led protest against labour reform in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

## UK couple held in Iran 'caught' in geopolitical tensions: son

AFP, London

The son of a British couple held in Iran said Wednesday his parents were "caught in the middle" of geopolitical tensions as he urged the British government to act on their case.

Joe Bennett -- whose mum Lindsay Foreman and stepdad Craig Foreman have been held in Iran since January last year -- said "very difficult" UK-Iran relations and other current events were complicating their situation.

But he hit out at what the family sees as British inaction, calling the lack of recent contact with them by Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper and Prime Minister Keir Starmer "alarming".

"It's very difficult," he told AFP outside the UK parliament, after meeting lawmakers to discuss his parents' plight.