

Tunisia should get some IMF funds before reforms: Italy

ROME: Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said Thursday that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) should approve an initial, unconditional bailout package for Tunisia, with further payments dependent on reforms. Tunisia reached a deal in principle in October with the IMF for nearly \$2 billion to shore up its sinking economy but the bailout still needs approval by the IMF board, which is pressing for reforms, primarily on the economy.

Death toll from migrant boat disaster off Tunisia rises to 24

TUNIS: Tunisia has recovered 14 bodies of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in the Mediterranean, bringing to 24 the number of dead after their boat headed for Europe sank, the coast guard said Thursday. The coast guard had announced on Wednesday that it had recovered 10 bodies of sub-Saharan African migrants after the shipwreck the day before off the coastal city of Sfax. But on Thursday it said 14 more bodies of migrants were discovered, including six women, during search operations, as well as the body of the boat's Tunisian captain.

Saudi Arabia welcomes decision by Qatar, Bahrain to resume diplomatic ties

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia welcomes the decision by Qatar and Bahrain to resume diplomatic ties between the two countries, the Kingdom's foreign ministry said on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the Bahraini-Qatari Follow-up Committee held its second meeting at the headquarters of the Gulf Cooperation Council General Secretariat in Riyadh where the decision was made.

The ministry commended the positive step and said it confirms the strength of relations between GCC countries.

Houthi self-contradiction delays signing of peace pact

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis have made additional demands in order to accept Saudi peace mediation, including an agreement between the militia and Saudi Arabia, dashing expectations of striking a peace deal to end the war in Yemen before the conclusion of Ramadan.

Heavy rains in Iran trigger flash floods, killing at least 2

TEHRAN: Heavy rains have triggered flash flooding in northern and western Iran, killing at least two people, Iranian state television reported Thursday.

According to Pirhossein Koulivand, the head of the country's emergency services, one fatality was reported in Qazvin province and the other in Ilam province in the past 24 hours, the state TV said. Koulivand also reported a third fatality, in West Azerbaijan province, where a person died from a lightning strike.