

The Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Jordan Have Met to Discuss a Draft Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly Calling for Cessation of Israeli Atrocities in Gaza Strip

IRAN NEWS

On the Sidelines of the special session of the UN General Assembly on Palestine, Iranian Foreign Minister Conferred With His Indonesian Counterpart on Cessation of the Israeli Regime's Crimes in Gaza

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Iran-Russia Trade Exchanges Hit New Record in 2022



TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and Prime Minister of Russia Mikhail Mishustin have pointed to the record-breaking trade exchanges between the two countries in 2022, and emphasized the need to strengthen bilateral economic and trade ties. In a visit to Kyrgyzstan, Iran's first VP met with the Russian prime minister on Wednesday afternoon, and expressed satisfaction with the growing relationship between Tehran and Moscow. The level of strategic ties between the two nations is growing properly, Mokhber said, adding that important steps have been taken in the trade and investment sectors; so, both nations should try to remove obstacles and improve the relations. He further appreciated Russia's support for Iran's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Tehran's membership in the BRICS group, as well as a free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Considering the visa waiver or facilitation of visa issuance as an important step to advance joint economic programs and collaborations, Mokhber stressed the need to implement mutual agreements in various fields, including contribution to aircraft manufacturing venture, pursuit of a one-year bilateral transit development plan, finalization of the Rasht-Astara railroad project, and connection of the power networks among Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan. Russian prime minister, for his part, welcomed Iran's full membership in the SCO, noting that Moscow welcomes the fact that the Islamic Republic has been invited to join the BRICS group and that he is confident Iran's participation and membership will increase the credibility of the organizations at international level. Mishustin also referred to the significant issue that bilateral trade ties between Iran and Russia set a record last year by exceeding 350 billion rubles, describing the mutual relationship as close, longstanding, and in line with mutual interests. The relations between Tehran and Moscow are based on friendship and good neighborliness, the senior Russian official said, arguing that the Kremlin attaches special importance to the growing ties with Iran.

Illegal Afghan Immigrants Must Leave Iran



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Undocumented Afghan immigrants should be expelled from Iran, Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said, criticizing the Taliban's disregard for the problem that has been inflicted on Iran. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting, Vahidi emphasized the necessity of organizing the status and activities of Afghan immigrants in Iran. While the community of Afghan migrants would naturally include a number of criminals in any country and although thousands of illegal immigrants have been imprisoned in Iran on various charges, it is necessary to prevent a phobia about Afghanistan, he stated. The minister said Iran has so far deported 200,000 undocumented Afghan citizens, with a number of them having again returned to Iran illegally. Deploring the Taliban caretaker government for failing to pay enough attention to the issue of illegal immigration into Iran, the interior minister said, "The illegal immigrants must leave the country. It is necessary to develop a stronger mechanism to act against the immigrants who return to Iran after being extradited to their country." In June 2022, the deputy interior minister for security and law enforcement estimated that there were around 4.5 million documented and illegal Afghans in Iran. The takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2021 triggered a huge influx of Afghans, many of whom have flocked to Iran, with which Afghanistan has 921 km of common land border.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



U.S. Not to Be Spared From Fire If Israel Keeps Up Gaza Genocide

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has warned the United States that if the Israeli regime keeps its genocidal campaign going against the Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip, Washington will "not be spared from the fire." Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks during his speech at a special meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday. "I say frankly to the American statesmen who are now managing the genocide in Palestine that we do not welcome (an) expansion of the war in the region. But if the genocide in Gaza continues, they will not be spared from the fire." The Iranian diplomat urged the US "to work for peace and security, not war against people, children and women." Instead of sending rockets, tanks, and bombs to be used against Gaza, the Iranian minister said, Washington must stop supporting genocide. Amir-Abdollahian also said the U.S. is watching and supporting the killing of more than 7,000 civilians in less than three weeks by the Israeli regime in Gaza. The White House is clearly assisting the regime militarily, financially and politically, the minister said. "The genocide in Gaza must stop immediately. The forced displacement of the people of Gaza must stop immediately." Amir-Abdollahian also said the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has the right to self-defense, emphasizing that its large-scale attack against the occupying regime was a reaction to the continuation of the regime's occupation and aggression against the Palestinians as well as its widespread crimes in recent months. However, he said, the US and several European countries refer to the occupying and war criminal regime as an entity that has the right to self-defense. "It is certainly not possible to change the places of the killer and the victim by misusing certain expressions." According to international law, as well as hundreds of resolutions approved by this very same Assembly, the entire land of Palestine is an occupied land, and, accordingly, the Israeli regime is recognized as an aggressor and an occupier," the Iranian diplomat stated. The Palestinian nation, like any other nation under occupation, has the "legitimate right to resist the occupation using all available methods, including armed struggle." "Therefore, the recent hypocritical efforts to introduce the struggle of the Palestinian nation against the occupiers as terrorist actions will not mislead the free nations and the awakened minds around the world," the Iranian minister said. Amir-Abdollahian called on the international community to push for the release of 6,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons.

U.S., UK and Israel Crumpled Together by Palestinian Resistance



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has celebrated the "stunning" defeat inflicted on Israel at the hands of Palestinian resistance fighters, saying their operation left the occupying regime and its allies "crumpled together." Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks on Thursday at a summit in the holy city of Mashhad, as the Tel Aviv regime remains in shock over the successful Operation Al-Aqsa Storm that was conducted by the Hamas resistance group on October 7. "Their defeat in Operation Al-Aqsa Storm was one of the most unforgettable, stunning and unprecedented defeats that crumpled the US, the UK and Israel together," he said. "The United States bears responsibility for today's developments in Palestine as it has been trying for years to portray the occupying regime as an angel of democracy and create a [positive] image for them." Salami also noted that the US is seeking to resuscitate Israel after its humiliating defeat. "In the Muslim world, the Zionists are like an unwanted foreign object that has been implanted in this region and start new bleedings every time and again," he added.

Iran Proposes Transit Corridor to Link All SCO Members



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber has proposed a comprehensive transit to link all the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states through Iran. The Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber addressed the 22nd meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states on October 26 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. In his speech, he expressed Iran's readiness to provide transit opportunities to SCO member states for the North-South and East-West corridors. The First Vice President of Iran called the development of transport corridors a top priority for cooperation. "Iran is ready to create a comprehensive transit corridor to connect the member countries of SCO. In line with that goal, it has already taken important steps in the form of the North-South Corridor, which, with its full realization, the commercial and economic access from South and East Asia to the countries of Central Asia, Caucasus, Russia, Black Sea and Europe will be facilitated." "Iran is a territory of transit and logistics opportunities. In this regard, we are ready to create a transit corridor for the accession of SCO member countries," Mokhber also said. The First Vice President also spoke about the need to create East-West corridor. These two transport routes will allow establishing trade between the countries of South/Southeast Asia, the countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Russia, the Black Sea and Europe, he added. At the start of his speech, Mokhber condemned the Zionist Israeli regime's onslaught in Gaza, stressing that "an immediate end to the killing of the oppressed people, send humanitarian aid and lifting the blockade on Gaza," must be put on any agenda of international bodies.

Azerbaijan Drops Armenian Land Corridor Plan, Looks to Iran

BAKU (Dispatches) - Azerbaijan is no longer interested in securing a land corridor through Armenia to the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhichevan and will instead discuss the issue with its southern neighbour Iran, a senior Azerbaijani official said on Wednesday. Routing a potential corridor through Iran, which borders both Armenia and Azerbaijan, could help reduce tensions around southern Armenia, which Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has in the past referred to as historically Azeri land. "Azerbaijan had no plans to seize Zangezur," Hikmet Hajiyev, a top foreign policy adviser to Aliyev, told Reuters, referring to the putative corridor that would link Azerbaijan proper to its enclave of Nakhichevan bordering Turkey, Baku's close ally. "After the two sides failed to agree on its opening, the project has lost its attractiveness for us - we can do this with Iran instead," he said. Armenia had opposed such a corridor, fearing having to make further territorial concessions after Azerbaijan seized the contested



region of Nagorno-Karabakh in a lightning offensive in September. Although internationally viewed as Azeri territory, Karabakh had been controlled by ethnic Armenians since the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. The Azeri offensive prompted almost all the region's 120,000 ethnic Armenians to flee into Armenia. Azerbaijan had in recent weeks called for its longstanding request for a transport corridor through southern Armenia to be included in ongoing talks on a peace treaty aimed at ending three decades of conflict between Baku and Yerevan. The two countries' foreign ministers met in Tehran on Sunday for their first talks Baku's recapture of Karabakh, alongside the foreign ministers of Iran, Turkey and Russia. Separately, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Wednesday that his planned meeting with Aliyev in Brussels would not now go ahead in late October as originally scheduled, citing what he said appeared to be Baku's reluctance. Pashinyan said Armenia was seeking clarification from European Union officials.

IRAN NEWS



Iran, Russia Put Premium on 3+3 Cooperation Format in Caucasus
 MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Deputy foreign ministers of Iran and Russia have held talks in Moscow about the Caucasus region, giving primacy to the meeting of the 3+3 cooperation format in Tehran, aimed at bolstering Caucasus peace and stability without foreign interference. On Thursday, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani and his Russian counterpart Mikhail Galuzin, along with their respected delegations, met and discussed a wide range of issues about relations of cooperation between Iran and Russia. Both sides also reviewed the latest developments in the South Caucasus, placing a premium on holding the 3+3 cooperation format. They also underscored the continuation of collective efforts within that framework.

Iran, Kyrgyzstan Urge Expanding Economic Cooperation



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice President and Kyrgyz Prime Minister have called for expanding economic cooperation, including the establishment of a rail corridor, helping in the construction of refineries, buying and selling bitumen and grains, establishing commercial centers, as well as building power plants. Mohammad Mokhber who has traveled to the capital of Kyrgyzstan to participate in the 22nd meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states, met and held talks with Akylbek Japarov on Wednesday. During the meeting, which was attended by Iran's ministers of oil, transport and urban development, and some heads of relevant organizations, important agreements were made to expand the cooperation

between the two sides. Following the resulting agreements between the senior officials of the two countries, the ministers of the road were tasked to launch a rail corridor from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. Also, Iran's Oil Ministry and Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic were missioned to plan for helping to set up Kyrgyz refineries, as well as produce gasoline and purchase bitumen. Referring to the surprising advance in technical engineering services of Iran, Japarov requested the Islamic Republic of Iran to provide the necessary groundwork for the construction of a power plant in this country as soon as possible.

Over 24,000 Iranian Candidates Registered for Parliamentary Election



TEHRAN (IP) - The spokesperson of the country's election headquarters said that 24,829 candidates have registered definitively for the Parliamentary election. Mohsen Eslami, the spokesperson of Iran's Election Headquarters, said on Thursday after the registration period for the candidates for the Islamic Council of Parliament representatives that 88% of the candidates are men and 12% are women. Giving more details on the candidates, Eslami also talked about the age range of the registrants: 28% of the candidates were between 30 and 40 years old, 37% were between 40 and 50 years old, 26% were between 50 and 60 years old, and 9% of the candidates were between 60 and 75 years old. According to the spokesperson of Iran's Election Headquarters, Alborz, Tehran, Qom, Khorasan-Razavi, Chaharmahal, and Bakhtiari, Yazd, Isfahan, Qazvin, Fars, and Golestan provinces respectively had the most registrations per seat. Iranian Parliament elections are scheduled to take place in Iran on 1 March 2024, four years after the previous election in 2020. The elected candidates will serve a four-year term. The previous legislative elections in 2020 resulted in a significant majority for conservatives, with reformists only gaining 20 seats in parliament. The official turnout for the election was recorded at 42.57%.



Israel's Military, Security Dignity Won't Be

Israel's Military, Security Dignity Won't Be Restored

TEHRAN (IFP) - A top Iranian military commander says the Israeli regime has lost face in its recent war with the Palestinian resistance movements amid unabated strikes on the Gaza Strip. The Spokesman for Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), General Ramezan Sharif, made the remarks in a gathering on Wednesday in the western Iranian city of Boroujen in commemoration of Iranian martyrs of the eight-year war with Iraq in the 1980s. "Even if the Zionists bomb all of Gaza, their military and security dignity will not return. You can be sure that the resistance fighters who carried out the operation, know the Zionists well," the commander said. He was referring to the surprise attack by the Palestinian group Hamas against Israel on October 7 during which 1400 Israelis were killed and more than 200 others were nabbed, that saw the Israeli military and intelligence failure.



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

West Support for Israeli Atrocities Lays Bare Their True Nature of Racism, Colonialism

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says the Western backing for the Israeli regime's continued atrocities against the besieged Gaza Strip exposes their racist, colonialist nature. Speaking in a meeting with visiting Niger's Foreign Minister Bakary Yaou Sangaré on Wednesday, Raisi said the West's support revealed their "naked face of racism and colonialism." He was referring to the US and its European allies throwing their weight behind the Israeli regime in its ongoing war of aggression on Gaza and their blocking international efforts to stop the bombardment of the densely-populated region, which has caused massive human casualties. Over the past days, several Western leaders have visited the occupied territories to show solidarity with the Israeli regime, including US President Joe Biden as well as his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron. Elsewhere in his remarks, Raisi touched on Niger's strained ties with the West following the ouster of a pro-West government there, saying the resistance of Niger's people in the face of

Europeans' dominating policies shows Africa has really overcome colonialism. "Being strong and resilient in the path towards reaching goals and protecting unity and solidarity are the key to success in achieving independence and freedom," he said. The president said Iran is ready to cooperate with Niger in economic fields of mutual interest. The Nigerian minister said he's pleased to witness Iran's achievements, and said his visit is aimed at boosting friendly ties and uplifting cooperation with Iran. Niger's military ousted the Western-backed former president Mohamed Bazoum last July, and formed a government that has strained relations with some Western countries. France, the former colonial power controlling Niger, has refused to recognize the new rulers and demands the restoration of the government of Bazoum. The coup against Bazoum was the third of its kind in the West Africa region in as many years, following similar military actions in Mali and Burkina Faso in 2021 and 2022, amid a wave of anti-French sentiment across parts of the continent.

Tehran, Muscat Urge Boosting Ties in Communications, Information Technology



MUSCAT (IP) - In the meeting between the Minister of Information and Communications Technology of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology of Oman, the need to speed up the implementation of the agreements of the two sides in the field of communications and information technology was emphasized in a bid to develop the relations between the two countries. Minister of Information and Communications Technology, Isa Zarepour, met and talked with Oman's Minister of Communications and Transport Saeed bin Hamoud bin Saeed al Maawali in Muscat on Wednesday. In this meeting, Zarepour said: "In the field of communication, programs such as cooperation in the field of data transit, as well as in infrastructure sectors, plans for cooperation have been developed, and in the field of information technology, the Islamic Republic of Iran has good experience in the field of electronic government and setting up digital services, which we can cooperate with." Minister of Information and Communications Technology of Iran, referring to the progress of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the field of communications and information technology, expressed hope that the development of relations between the two countries will continue. In this meeting, Oman's Minister of Communications and Transport also expressed hope for cooperation in the field of data transit with 15 neighboring countries of Iran and said: "Agreements have been reached regarding the transfer of data from Oman Tel to Infrastructure Communications Company in expert meetings." Saeed bin Hamoud bin Saeed al Maawali also announced Oman's readiness for joint investment to establish data centers in Iran and Oman. The visit of Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology to Muscat is a response to the visit of the Minister of Communications and Transport of Oman that took place in May of this year (2023) and during this visit, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding on joint cooperation in areas such as infrastructure, post, post bank, and information technology.

FM Urges UN Rights Chief to Hold Israel Accountable Over Gaza War Crimes

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has written to the UN rights chief, asking him to help bring the Israeli regime to account for committing war crimes against people in the besieged Gaza Strip. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said in a letter to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk that the regime is currently perpetrating "flagrant and systematic violations" of the rights of the Palestinian people. The Iranian minister said the fact that Israel's atrocities go unpunished has emboldened the regime to commit even more crimes against the Palestinian people. Iran "expects you and other UN rights mechanisms to take action to immediately stop the Zionist regime's strikes and hold its leaders responsible for [committing] crimes against humanity as well as war crimes," he said in the letter, which was released on Wednesday. The Iranian minister said the intensive Israeli bombardment shows its goal is the "mass killing" of the Palestinian people in Gaza. Amir-Abdollahian said Israel's attempts to forcibly push Palestinians out of their homes and its plan to enter Gaza to perpetrate "ethnic cleansing" constitute major violations of international law. "Remarks by Israeli regime's officials as well as massive and systematic attacks by the Zionist regime's forces into the Gaza Strip show this is a campaign of genocide against the Palestinian people," he said.



Envoy Calls on Regional Countries to Convey Israeli Atrocities

TEHRAN (IranPress) - The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan said that it is the regional countries' responsibility to convey the atrocities of the Palestinian people to the world today. Addressing the gathering of poets and writers held in Khana Farhang Iran Rawalpindi regarding the expression of solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine, Iran's ambassador to Pakistan, Reza Amiri Moghadam said: "Palestine is a global issue and the Al-Aqsa flood showed many countries that are trying to reach an agreement with Israel have failed. Gaza war proved to the whole world, especially the Islamic countries, that the Palestinian issue's only solution is a referendum and the participation of the real residents of Palestine is necessary and we believe that Israel will be demolished very soon." Also, the head of Khana Farhang Iran Rawalpindi Farnaz Rehmazand said that the world powers, including the US, are supporting the crimes of Israel. He referred to the letter written by the Qaid-e-Azam (late founder of Pakistan) to then-US President Truman years ago and said that the Qaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had predicted this long ago and the division of Palestine. He thanked the poets and said that people from all walks of life have raised their voices on the issue of Palestine, including poets.

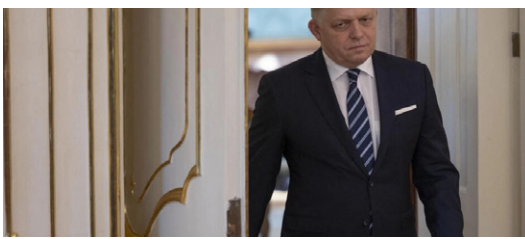


Manhunt After 16 Killed in U.S. Mass Shooting



LEWISTON (Dispatches) - Police in the U.S. state of Maine waged a sprawling manhunt Thursday for a gunman who killed at least 16 people at a bowling alley and a bar in the deadliest mass shooting this year in America. Dozens more people were reported wounded in the rampage in the small town of Lewiston and, in the absence of a formal death toll, local officials estimated the number of fatalities at between 16 and 22. Lewiston was in lockdown Thursday morning, with schools closed and residents ordered to stay indoors. Police said a man named Robert Card -- seen in surveillance footage pointing a semi-automatic rifle with an extended clip as he walked into the bowling alley in Lewiston -- should be considered armed and dangerous. News outlets had broadcast footage of people fleeing in terror from the venue after the shooting started on Wednesday evening. One survivor whose name was not given told CNN he was 15 feet (5 meters) from the gunman when he opened fire. He thought at first it was a balloon popping. "And as soon as I turned and saw it was not a balloon and he was holding a weapon, I just booked it down the lane and I slid basically into where the pins are and climbed up into the machine and was on top of the machines for about 10 minutes until the cops got there," he told CNN. Card is a certified firearms instructor and a member of the US Army Reserve, according to multiple law enforcement sources. Lewiston city councillor Robert McCarthy told CNN Wednesday night as many as 22 people may have died, but others put the toll at 16. Maine public safety official Mike Sauschuck said he was not prepared to give a death toll, calling it "a very fluid situation." He told reporters that police were flooding the streets in search of the gunman. "We have literally hundreds of police officers working around the state of Maine to investigate this case, to locate Mr. Card," he said. President Joe Biden made calls -- stepping away from a state dinner honoring Australia's prime minister -- to Maine's governor, its two senators and a local congressman to offer federal support, the White House said. Police and rescuers reportedly arrived at the Sparetime Recreation bowling alley at about 7:15 pm (00:15 Thursday GMT) in response to an active shooter, and then received reports of another shooting at the Schemengees Bar & Grille. Police issued photographs of 40-year-old Card at the bowling alley, where he appears calm and composed as he moves through the doorway with his rifle raised. Another survivor, Riley Dumont, said she and her family fled to a corner of the bowling venue and hid behind tables and a bench. "I was laying on top of my daughter. My mother was laying on top of me," Dumont told ABC News. "It felt like it lasted a lifetime," she added. "I just remember people sobbing and crying." Sauschuck said officers had located a "vehicle of interest" they had been looking for -- a white sport utility vehicle (SUV) -- in Lisbon, a town around eight miles (12 kilometers) from Lewiston, where residents had also been warned to stay off the streets. Card was not in the vehicle, reports said.

Slovakia's New Populist PM Announces Halt of Military Aid to Ukraine



BRATISLAVA (Dispatches) - Slovakia's new populist Prime Minister Robert Fico said Thursday that his government was stopping military aid to Ukraine, in the first Western reversal of the kind. Fico told MPs that the country would "no longer supply weapons to Ukraine", repeating promises made during his election campaign, but would still supply humanitarian aid to its war-torn neighbor. "I will support zero military aid to Ukraine... An immediate halt to military operations is the best solution we have for Ukraine. The EU should change from an arms supplier to a peacemaker," he added. Russia immediately dismissed the impact Slovakia's decision to halt military aid to Ukraine would have on the 20-month-old conflict. "Slovakia did not have such a big share in the supply of weapons, so it will hardly affect the entire process," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, when asked about Bratislava's decision. Asked by AFP for a reaction on the decision, the foreign ministry of Ukraine declined to comment. Bratislava's previous pro-Western government had shown strong support for Ukraine. The Central European country of 5.4 million people was notably the first NATO nation to deliver fighter jets to its war-torn neighbor. According to the German-based Kiel Institute, Slovakia had pledged 680 million euros in total government support to Ukraine through July 2023. That puts Slovakia among the countries with the largest government support to Ukraine by GDP (0.65 percent), behind Norway, the Baltic states, Denmark and Poland. However, Fico's party won last month's general vote on pledges to end military help for Ukraine, raising concerns about cracks in Western support for Kyiv. Slovak political scientist Branislav Kovack told AFP that Ukraine "will not miss the volume (of aid) provided by Slovakia" but added that "any loss in unity and support has symbolic meaning". Ukraine's once close ties with fellow neighbor Poland have also recently plunged. Following his party's victory, Fico said, "the people in Slovakia have bigger problems than (dealing with) Ukraine" and called for peace talks as "further killing will not help anyone". In the run-up to last month's Polish general election, Warsaw said it would restrict arms deliveries to Kyiv as it needed to build up its own army. A very public diplomatic row ensued, with Polish President Andrzej Duda comparing Ukraine to a "drowning man" who risked dragging his rescuers into the water. Speaking at the UN at the time, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky spoke of some EU countries "feigning solidarity" and thereby "indirectly supporting Russia". Fico -- who will attend the EU summit in Brussels Thursday -- also expressed opposition to sanctions against Russia. "I will not vote for any sanctions against Russia unless we see analyses of their impact on Slovakia," he said. "If there are to be such sanctions that will harm us, like most sanctions have, I can see no reason to support them." Fico spoke a day after his three-party coalition government was appointed. It includes Fico's left-wing Smer-SD, the far-right and pro-Russia SNS, and Hlas-SD, a breakaway party from Smer. SNS shares Fico's staunch anti-refugee stance and populist leanings. Its pro-Russian chairman and former parliamentary speaker Andrej Danko said in July that Russian-occupied territories were not "historically Ukrainian".



EU Leaders Urge Pauses in Gaza Bombing to Get Aid in

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - EU leaders called on Thursday for pauses in Israeli bombing and Hamas rocket attacks to get humanitarian aid into Gaza after days of wrangling that highlighted divisions within the bloc over the broader Israel-Palestinian conflict. In a declaration agreed at a summit in Brussels, the leaders of the Union's 27 nations expressed the "gravest concern for the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza". They called for "continued, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and aid to reach those in need through all necessary measures including humanitarian corridors and pauses for humanitarian needs". The summit was the leaders' first in-person meeting since the deadly Oct. 7 assault on Israel by Palestinian militant group Hamas, which prompted Israel to bombard and blockade Hamas-run Gaza. While EU leaders have strongly condemned Hamas' attack, they have struggled to stick to the same message beyond that, with some stressing Israel's right to self-defence and others emphasising concern about Palestinian civilians. The leaders' differences were still clear as they arrived for the summit. "Israel is a democratic state guided by very humanitarian principles and so we can be certain that the Israeli army will respect the rules that arise from international law in everything it does," said German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. "I have no doubt about that." Scholz's remarks contrasted sharply with comments in recent days by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and Charles Michel, the chairman of EU leaders' summits, who have said that a total blockade of Gaza and attacks on civilian infrastructure already contravene international law. Rights groups such as Human Rights Watch have also accused Israel of violating international humanitarian law. Israel insists it is acting within international law and that its attacks are intended to destroy Hamas, which operates among the civilian population. Belgian Prime Minister

Alexander De Croo warned Israel against starving Gaza. "Israel has a right to take action and to prevent future attacks. But that is never an excuse for blocking a whole region, for blocking humanitarian aid. It cannot be an excuse to starve a population," he said. Ahead of the summit, diplomats spent days debating whether to call for a "humanitarian pause" or "pauses". Countries such as France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Ireland had endorsed calls from the United Nations for a break in the conflict for humanitarian reasons. But others such as Germany, the Czech Republic and Austria resisted, arguing such a measure could curb Israel's ability to defend itself and let Hamas regroup, according to diplomats. The compromise on "pauses" in the plural was meant to signal short breaks in fighting for missions such as hostage releases or aid convoys, rather than a formal ceasefire, diplomats said. While the EU's influence on the conflict is modest, the bloc fears that an escalation could have grave consequences for Europe, including a rise in tensions between communities, possible Islamist militant attacks and a flow of refugees. The crisis erupted with the EU already grappling with the fallout from another war in its immediate neighbourhood - the conflict triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the summit by video link as the EU leaders pledged they will continue to support Ukraine even amidst another major crisis. "We must clearly see this scenario of a larger fire in the Middle East and counter it together," Zelensky said. "The sooner security prevails in the Middle East, the sooner we will restore security here in Europe." Some officials and diplomats have voiced fears that Ukraine may now struggle to get the same political attention and resources from the West, particularly the United States, due to the new crisis in the Middle East.



Seoul, Tokyo, U.S. Condemn North Korea's Supply of Arms to Russia

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea, Japan and the United States "strongly condemn" North Korea supplying arms to Moscow, the allies said in a joint statement Thursday, adding that "several" such deliveries have been made by Pyongyang. Russia and North Korea, historic allies, are both under a raft of global sanctions -- Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine, and Pyongyang for its testing of nuclear weapons. The countries' leaders, Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin, in September held a high profile summit in Russia's far east, fanning Western fears Pyongyang might provide Moscow with weapons for its war in Ukraine. Washington and its key East Asian security allies, Seoul and Tokyo, said they "strongly condemn the provision of military equipment and munitions by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to the Russian Federation for use against the government and people of Ukraine". "Such weapons deliveries, several of which we now confirm have been completed, will significantly increase the human toll of Russia's war of aggression." During his visit to Russia in September, Kim declared bilateral ties with Moscow were his country's "number one priority". Washington and experts have said Pyongyang was seeking a range of military assistance in return, such as satellite technology and upgrading its Soviet-era military equipment. The nuclear-armed North has failed twice this year in its bid to put a military spy satellite into orbit. The Thursday joint statement also claimed Pyongyang was "seeking military assistance to advance its own military capabilities" in "return for its support to Russia". "We emphasise that arms transfers to or from the DPRK ... would violate multiple UN Security Council resolutions," the statement said. "Russia itself voted for the UN Security Council resolutions that contain these restrictions," it said, adding the allies were "deeply concerned" about the "potential for any transfer of nuclear- or ballistic missile-related technology" to the North. In August, Tokyo, Seoul and Washington's leaders met for a summit at Camp David, agreeing to a multi-year plan of regular joint exercises and to share real-time data on North Korea. Pyongyang's leader Kim has described the burgeoning defence alliance as "the worst actual threat" facing his isolated country.

China Launches New Mission to Space Station

JIUQUAN (Dispatches) - China sent a fresh crew to its Tiangong space station on Thursday, in the latest mission for a growing space programme that plans to send people to the Moon by 2030. The Shenzhou-17 blasted off from the Jiuquan launch site in northwest China at 11:14 am (03:14 GMT), carrying a three-astronaut team with the youngest average age since the space station's construction. At a farewell ceremony, hundreds of supporters waving the Chinese national flag and clutching yellow flowers cheered on the three astronauts -- wearing white and blue spacesuits -- as they were introduced to the crowds. The patriotic song "Ode to the Motherland" was sung as the space travellers walked slowly down a short pathway between the crowds, smiling and waving goodbye before boarding a bus to the launch site. Captaining the crew is Tang Hongbo, who is on his first return mission to the space station. Accompanying him are Tang Shengjie and Jiang Xinxin, both in their thirties and each making maiden space voyages. The all-male crew is the youngest ever to man a mission to the space station, with an average age of 38. They are set to "perform various in-orbit space science and application payload tests and experiments", Lin Xiqiang, deputy director of the China Manned Space Agency, said on Wednesday. They will also conduct some maintenance work on the station to fix some "minor

damages" from space debris, he said. "We have found that the solar wings of the space station had been hit by tiny space particles several times," Lin explained. Members of the previous Shenzhou-16 crew -- aboard Tiangong for nearly five months now -- are preparing to receive the trio before returning to Earth next week. Hundreds of spectators gathered on Thursday morning near the rocket site at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, in the Gobi Desert, some wearing the blue uniforms of China's space agency. Excitement broke out among the crowd as a loudspeaker blared a countdown and the rocket lifted off, sending plumes of smoke across the launch pad and the dry, flat desert expanse surrounding the site, before the increasingly loud roar of the engines drowned out the applause. A livestream showed the crew onboard the space station monitoring their ascent in anticipation of their arrival. After the rocket had been airborne for about 15 minutes, a space programme official proclaimed the launch a "complete success". Tiangong, the crown jewel of Beijing's space programme, is constantly crewed by rotating teams of three astronauts. Plans for China's "space dream" have been put into overdrive under President Xi Jinping. The world's second-largest economy has pumped billions of dollars into its military-run space programme in an effort to catch up with the United States and Russia.

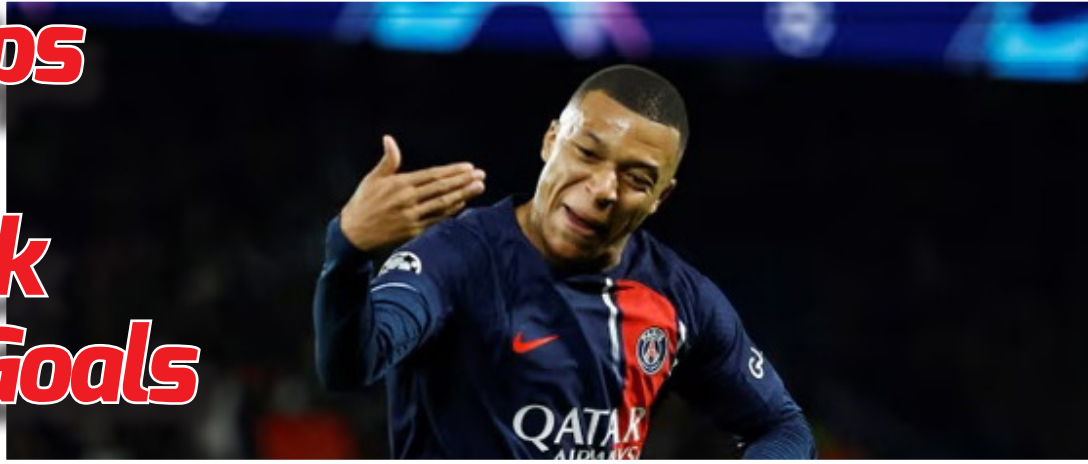


Indonesia Presidential Contender Prabowo Maintains Slim Lead in New Survey

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesian presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto was top in a fourth opinion poll in the space of a week on Thursday, though only narrowly in front of the ruling party's Ganjar Pranowo ahead of the start of campaigning next month. Nearly 205 million Indonesians, a third of them younger than 30, are eligible to vote in presidential and legislative elections on Feb. 14 in the world's third-largest democracy. Three candidates have registered to contest the election: ex-special forces commander Prabowo, 72, and former provincial governor Ganjar and former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan, both 54. The Oct. 16-20 poll of 2,567 people by Indikator Politik Indonesia had Prabowo top on 37%, with 34.8% backing Ganjar and 22% supporting Anies. The survey had a 1.97% margin of error. The outcome tracks most polls in recent months that show Ganjar and Defence Minister Prabowo neck-and-neck, with Anies a distant third. The latest survey was conducted after a widely criticised court ruling on candidates' eligibility that effectively enabled Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the son of outgoing President Joko Widodo, to join Prabowo as his running mate. Some political analysts see that outcome, just days before registration for the election, as advantageous to Jokowi, as the incumbent is known, allowing him to lay the foundations of a political dynasty and retain influence after leaving office. With 36-year-old Gibran on board, Prabowo could also tap into some of the president's huge support base, analysts say. Jokowi, who is completing his second and final term, has said he has no involvement with presidential candidates.



Mbappe Helps PSG Go top, Haaland Back Among the Goals



PARIS (Dispatches) - Kylian Mbappe helped Paris Saint-Germain move top of Champions League Group F with a 3-0 victory over AC Milan on Wednesday, while Newcastle slumped to a first defeat, 1-0 against Borussia Dortmund. Erling Haaland was back on the scoresheet as Manchester City won 3-1 away to Young Boys, and fellow British side Celtic drew 2-2 in Glasgow against Atletico Madrid. Goals from Mbappe, Randal Kolo Muani and Kang-in Lee in Paris against Milan sent PSG top of the closely-contested Group F with six points. The deadlock was broken just after the half-hour mark when Mbappe received the ball from Warren Zaire-Emery, unbalanced Fikayo Tomori and then wrong-footed compatriot Mike Maignan with a smart, low finish. Ousmane Dembele thought he had doubled the hosts' advantage on 50 minutes only for a VAR check to disallow it for a foul in the build-up. Kolo Muani, the third member of PSG's French front three, then did double the lead three minutes later with a close-range tap-in before Lee struck. Newcastle came back to earth with a home defeat by Borussia Dortmund, which saw the Germans move above them into second place on head-to-head. It was a tight encounter with Dortmund edging it thanks to a first-half goal from Felix Nmecha. Nmecha gave Borussia a deserved lead on the stroke of half-time with a well-controlled finish following excellent defensive and then creative work by Nico Schlotterbeck. Newcastle nearly claimed a point in the closing stages of the match when Callum Wilson's header struck the crossbar, before a later Anthony Gordon chance was deflected on to the woodwork. Dortmund coach Edin Terzic told TNT: "With the first half we deserved to win and the second half we protected the win." Manchester City made it three from three to top Group G, with Manuel Akanji's goal and a Haaland brace seeing off Young Boys in Switzerland. Man City endured a frustrating first period on a plastic pitch in Bern, with Young Boys goalkeeper Anthony Racioppi producing several fine saves. Immediately after half-time a stunning save from the Swiss 'keeper saw the ball rebound off the crossbar and fall

straight to Akanji. The hosts stunned the Champions League holders on 52 minutes when Meschack Elia broke clear of the defence and lobbed a finish over the advancing Ederson. However, hopes of an upset were extinguished when Haaland broke his five-game goal drought in the competition with a penalty in the 67th minute. After a Julian Alvarez goal was disallowed, the Norwegian striker produced a fine finish to round off a 3-1 win. In Germany, Leipzig created a five-point buffer for themselves in Group G's second position with a 3-1 win against Red Star Belgrade, thanks to David Raum, a second-half stunner from starlet Xavi Simons and Dani Olmo. The points were shared between Celtic and Atletico in a lively draw, which saw the hosts pick up their first point of the campaign. Celtic took the lead early when Kyogo Furuhashi lifted the ball beyond Jan Oblak in the fourth minute, completing a fine team move. On 23 minutes, Joe Hart tipped an Antoine Griezmann penalty onto the post only for it to rebound perfectly to the Frenchman who made no mistake second time round. The hosts sprang back immediately when a 27th-minute cross fell at the back stick to Luis Palma, who hammered the ball back across the unsuspecting Oblak. Alvaro Morata got Atletico back into the tie on 53 minutes when he sent a perfectly judged header back across Hart and into the net. Rodrigo De Paul picked up a late second yellow card, but the hosts were unable to turn their numerical advantage into a winner. Feyenoord moved into top spot in Group E following a 3-1 victory against Lazio in the pool's early kick-off. A Santiago Gimenez brace and first goal for summer signing Ramiz Zerrouki saw the Dutch home despite a late penalty converted by Pedro for Lazio, who dropped into third. Barcelona saw out a win at home 2-1 against Shakhtar Donetsk thanks to first-half strikes from Ferran Torres and Fermin Lopez, making it three from three for the Group H leaders. Porto came from behind in Belgium to beat Antwerp 4-1, with all their goals coming in the second half courtesy of an Evanilson hat-trick and Stephen Eustaquio.

Tonali Banned for 10 Months for Betting Offences



ROME (Reuters) - Newcastle United midfielder Sandro Tonali has been banned from soccer for 10 months over breaches of rules on betting on matches in Italy, the head of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) said on Thursday.

Italy midfielder Tonali, who joined Newcastle from AC Milan this year, must also attend treatment sessions for problem gamblers and give a series of talks about his experience over a further eight-month period as part of a deal with the FIGC. The plea-bargain agreement, which is expected to apply to international soccer, was confirmed by FIGC President Gabriele Gravina. It will rule Tonali out for the remainder of the club season and next summer's Euro 2024 tournament should Italy qualify. Tonali, 23, is the highest profile player caught up in a betting scandal that is shaking Italian soccer. His agent has said he is suffering from a gambling addiction. The midfielder joined Newcastle from AC Milan in July for a reported fee of 70 million euros (\$74 million), a record sum for an Italian player. There was no immediate comment from Newcastle. Tonali made an appearance as a substitute during their Champions League 1-0 home loss to Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday night. Legal and sporting authorities have been investigating the use of illegal betting platforms by soccer players in Italy. Juventus (JUVE.MI) midfielder Nicolò Fagioli has accepted a seven-month ban as part of a settlement with the FIGC after admitting to gambling problems. The FIGC's Gravina defended the plea-bargain system used to handle these cases rapidly and reduce the more severe penalties that could have been applied. "The rules set out a certain number of years of sanctions, plea-bargaining is allowed as an extenuating circumstance," he told reporters. "The lads have been incredibly cooperative so we continue to follow the rules as they are set out," he added. Aston Villa's Italy midfielder Nicolò Zaniolo is also assisting authorities in their investigation into alleged illegal betting activity, the Premier League club said last week. Zaniolo and Tonali left Italy's squad before their Euro 2024 qualifiers this month after the players were told of their involvement in an investigation by Turin prosecutors.

Sri Lanka Score Big World Cup Win Against England

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka breathed life into their World Cup campaign and left England in increasing danger of missing out on a semi-final spot after crushing the defending champions by eight wickets in a low-scoring match. Chasing a modest 157 for only their second win, Sri Lanka overcame the loss of two early wickets before Pathum Nissanka (77 not out) and Sadeera Samarawickrama (65 not out) got them across the finish line in 25.4 overs. Their earlier restricted England to a below-par 156 all out in 33.2 overs in the must-win encounter between the tournament's stragglers, with only Ben Stokes offering some resistance in an otherwise dismal batting display. Stokes (43) took the attack to Sri Lanka on a dry wicket at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium after England's middle-order collapsed in the face of some incisive bowling, but he holed out to Dushan Hemantha in the deep off Lahiru Kumara (3-35) in the 31st over. England enjoyed an early slice of luck after Jos Buttler won the toss and opted to bat as Jonny Bairstow (30) survived an lbw chance when Sri Lanka failed to review, but he did not build on his breezy start and gifted his wicket to Kasun Rajitha (2-36). Sri Lanka had put the brakes on England's scoring following the powerplay as veteran Angelo Mathews (2-14) dismissed opener David Malan (28) and then helped run Joe Root before Kumara struck twice to leave the holders in tatters at 85-5. Mathews, called in to play in his fourth World Cup as an injury replacement for Matheesha Pathirana, snared Moeen Ali in his second spell while Chris Woakes fell to Rajitha after a low diving catch by Samarawickrama. Sri Lanka, who came into the contest with the same record as England - three losses in four matches - then ripped through the tail to ensure the lowest all-out total in Bengaluru and lay the platform for a comprehensive victory.



Swiss Probe Into FIFA Chief Gianni Infantino Dropped

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Swiss prosecutors announced Thursday they have dropped their three-year criminal proceedings against FIFA president Gianni Infantino over suspected collusion with officials concerning the corruption scandal that engulfed world football's governing body. Infantino declared a "full and clear victory" in the case and demanded an apology from what he called the "envious and corrupt" people out to tarnish his reputation. A probe was opened in July 2020 to investigate suspicions of collusion between Infantino and Switzerland's then-attorney general Michael Lauber, the country's top prosecutor. Lauber was in charge of Switzerland's probe into the towering corruption scandal that exploded at the heart of Zurich-based FIFA in 2015. But he was forced to recuse himself from the investigation in June 2019, following media revelations that he had held several undeclared meetings with Infantino during the probe. Two special prosecutors were assigned to the case, but in a statement Thursday, they said the investigation had closed, with the allegations refuted. "The criminal proceedings... are discontinued," the statement said. "The suspicion of instrumentalisation of the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland by FIFA has not been substantiated in the course of the comprehensive investigation. On the contrary, the suspicion was refuted." In a statement, FIFA noted its "extreme satisfaction" with the decision, saying the only surprise was how long it had taken to reach an "obvious conclusion." "The new FIFA is today a clean, well-run and robust organisation which operates in accordance with the highest ethical and governance standards," it declared. For his part, Infantino, 53, said it was a "full and clear victory for me, for the new FIFA and for justice." "It is now clear that the accusations against me were mere attempts by poor, envious and corrupt people to attack my reputation. If these people have some dignity left, they should at least have the decency and apologise for their actions and the damage caused," he said. "Indeed and with no surprise, the investigation fully and clearly confirms that I have always acted in a lawful and correct way, always defending exclusively the interests of FIFA and football."

Neuer Prepares for Imminent Bundesliga Return With Eye on Euros

BERLIN (Dispatches) - There is more at stake for Bayern Munich keeper Manuel Neuer when he makes his possible return to action in the Bundesliga on Saturday against Darmstadt 98 almost a year after injury. The 37-year-old, who broke his leg during a skiing holiday after Germany's World Cup first-round exit in December and required surgery, has been working hard on his return with intensive training sessions. He did not travel to Bayern's Champions League game against Galatasaray in Istanbul on Tuesday to continue training while a rumoured return in the league last week did not materialise. Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel is reluctant to commit to the player's return this week but Neuer cannot wait to get back as he prepares for another battle: to reclaim his Germany number one spot ahead of next year's European Championship on home soil. Neuer's last Bundesliga game was on Nov. 12 before Germany's departure for the World Cup in Qatar, while his last competitive game was the country's final group match at that tournament against Costa Rica on Dec. 1. The keeper, who has 117 caps for Germany and won a World Cup winners' medal in 2014, had been first choice for the national team for more than 13 years but his spot is currently occupied by Barcelona's Marc-Andre ter Stegen. He has already lost the Germany captain's armband to



Ilkay Gundogan, with coach Julian Nagelsmann confirming the midfielder would remain captain even if the keeper returned to the team. "We have to wait and see," Bayern's Tuchel said on Tuesday when asked whether Neuer will return this week. "We have to talk to Manuel about it. It's clear that he wants to play." A Bayern comeback for Neuer would mean that veteran keeper Sven Ulreich, who has been outstanding in his absence, will quickly slip back into his usual reserve role. "It is always great to be on the pitch, that's clear," said Ulreich last week. "But my role here at Bayern is also clear. When Manuel is fit then he will play."

Man Utd Report Record Premier League Revenues



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United on Thursday reported a Premier League record revenue figure of £648.4 million (\$784 million) for the year ending June 30, 2023. It is 11 percent up on the preceding year and beats the previous record of £627 million set by United in 2019, but the 20-time English champions still reported a loss of £42.1 million. The record earnings come despite the fact United played in the Europa League, rather than the more lucrative Champions League, last season. During the 2022/23 campaign the men's team finished third in the Premier League and won the League Cup, ending a six-year trophy drought. The women's team finished second in the Women's Super League and were runners-up in the FA Cup. The club have predicted revenue for the 2023/24 period will be between £650 million and £680 million. United's wage bill for 2022/23 was down £52.8 million to £331.4 million, which the club attributed to "squad turnover" and their absence from last season's Champions League. The club reported long-term debt at £507.3 million. The figure was given as \$650 million in the accounts, unchanged from the previous year, but the report said the year-on-year change in the exchange rate meant the figure in sterling was a lower amount this year compared with last. The report confirmed no dividends had been paid to the Glazer family, who own the club. Thursday's fiscal results come at a time when the founder of the INEOS chemicals company, British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, is reported to be close to securing a stake in the club. The Glazers announced last November they had commissioned work to look at "strategic alternatives" to help the club grow, which included consideration of a sale. It now appears the Americans will remain in control, with Ratcliffe reported to be taking a 25 percent stake and gaining control over football operations. The Old Trafford club were fourth in this year's Deloitte Money List, behind Manchester City, Real Madrid and Liverpool.