

The Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Has Issued a Warning to Fernando Arias, the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Regarding the Use of Chemical Weapons by Israel Against Residents of Gaza

IRAN NEWS

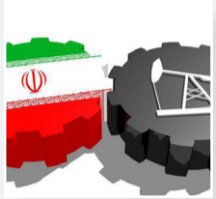
The Chairman of the Iranian Parliamentary Delegation to the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) Has Urged the Assembly to Prioritize the Issue of Palestine and the Crisis in the Gaza Strip and to Spare No Effort in Referring the Regime's Crimes to International Courts

VOL. XXIX, No. 7871 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 29, 2023 AZAR 8, 1402

2 DOMESTIC



Iran's GDP Growth Stands at 7.1% in Q2

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

More Hostages Expected to Be Freed After Gaza Truce Extended

> SEE PAGE 3



Iran Warns U.S., Israel of Harsh Consequences If War Crimes Continue in Gaza



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has warned the United States and Israel that they will face "harsh consequences" if they fail to permanently stop war crimes in the Gaza Strip committed during the genocidal war on the besieged Palestinian territory. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in an interview with Qatar-based Al Jazeera television network published on Tuesday, as a temporary truce is holding between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas resistance group in Gaza. "It is important that the [Israeli] aggression and crimes must halt and that the temporary ceasefire must become a permanent one. Otherwise, the region will face new conditions," he said. "The Zionist regime and the Americans should accept the harsh consequences of a failure to stop the war crimes." The four-day ceasefire in Gaza, which expired on Monday, was extended for two more days. It led to a cessation of Israel's devastating war on Gaza as well as a swap of Palestinians incarcerated in Israeli jails and captives held by Hamas. Amir-Abdollahian said that Israel welcomes the continuation and expansion of the war in the case the U.S. fully supports the Gaza genocide. Tehran, he added, was informed through intermediaries that the White House has recently found out that their continued support for Israel does not benefit them. The top Iranian diplomat also noted that the US has today "the will" to stop Israeli atrocities through a stable ceasefire, send humanitarian aid to Gaza, and prevent the forced displacement of the Palestinian people. "The Israeli regime failed to destroy Hamas in the past six weeks despite the all-out presence of support of the U.S. and its allied countries," he said. "Hamas is a reality that is rooted inside Palestine. Hamas is part of the Palestinian resistance. We believe that the future of Gaza will be decided by the Palestinian people and resistance." Amir-Abdollahian further said that the expansion of the scope of the war in the past weeks was part of a "natural reaction" of regional resistance forces to the US's military support for the Israeli massacre of Palestinian women and children. Iran has no proxy groups in the region, he emphasized, adding that resistance movements are operating to protect the interests of their own countries, preserve regional security, and defend the Arab-Muslim Ummah. Israel waged the war on Gaza on October 7 after Hamas conducted Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. Since the start of the aggression, the Tel Aviv regime has killed over 15,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and left vast swathes of the coastal enclave in ruins. An additional 7,000 Palestinians are missing and believed to be under the rubble. The Iranian foreign minister also described Lebanon's Hezbollah as one of the most powerful resistance groups in the region.

Iran Calls for Probing Israel's Use of Chemical Arms in Gaza



TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister called for an investigation about the possibility of the Israeli regime's use of chemical weapons in Gaza. The 28th meeting of the state parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention began on Monday, November 27, at the headquarters of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague, Netherlands. Delivering a speech in the meeting, Reza Najafi condemned the Israeli war on Gaza called for an investigation by the OPCW and other international organizations regarding the possible use of chemical weapons, especially nerve agents, by the Israeli regime in Gaza. He referred to the four main crimes the Israeli regime perpetrated against the Gazan people, namely genocide, war crimes, crimes against the humanity, and aggression and said that the crimes hold the regime and its supporters accountable. The Iranian official called for the dismantling of such illegal measures that are contrary to the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and restricting the trade in chemicals and the peaceful use of chemistry. The Israeli occupation forces are using internationally banned white phosphorus bombs against the Palestinians in Gaza. The use of white phosphorus weapons to generate a smokescreen and cover troop movements is legally accepted, but the 1980 Geneva Convention forbids its use in densely populated areas. White phosphorus is not illegal under international law, but its use in civilian areas is strictly prohibited because international law requires combatants to distinguish between civilian and military elements.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Iran Navy Progress Since 1979 Revolution "Unbelievable, Remarkable"

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has hailed achievements made by the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy after the 1979 Islamic Revolution as "remarkable and unbelievable." Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a meeting with a group of Navy commanders and officials on Tuesday, on the occasion of the Iranian Navy Day. "In the first years after the Revolution, the presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy beyond territorial waters was unimaginable, but now the Navy makes a 360-degree voyage around the globe powerfully and strongly and returns to the country with pride." Ayatollah Khamenei also stressed the need to discover the Navy's new capacities in order to enhance the country's power and create hope and vitality in the society. Lauding the Iranian Navy's "eye-catching and incredible advances" after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Leader said, "In the early years of the Revolution, the presence of the Navy beyond the territorial waters was unimaginable, but now the Navy circumnavigates the globe mightily and formidably and returns home proudly." Ayatollah Khamenei noted that while it was hardly conceivable in the past that the Navy may be active in the Caspian Sea one day, the Iranian naval forces have now manufactured destroyers and use them in the Caspian fleet. Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to expanding influence in the sea and relying on technology and knowledge as the two main policies of navy forces in order to strengthen the components of power. Emphasizing the necessity to boost the Navy's combat preparedness and capabilities, the Leader said one of the capacities of the Navy that can hearten the Iranian youth is the possibility of conducting tours and excursions to the Navy factories displaying its capabilities. Ayatollah Khamenei noted that efforts should be made to make the Navy a comprehensive strategic force. In this meeting, the commander of the Iranian Navy, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, listed expanding the influence in the sea and relying on technology as the two main policies of the Navy to strengthen the components of Iran's power.

Iran Missile, Space Programs Fully in Compliance With Int'l Law



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations says the country's missile and space programs are fully in compliance with its legitimate rights under international law. Amir Sa'ed Iravani made the remark in a Monday letter to Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres and the rotating president of the Security Council. His letter came in response to an earlier letter by the Israeli envoy to the world body, claiming that Iran's launch of the Noor-3 satellite using Qased (Messenger) Space Launch Vehicle (SLV) on September 27, 2023 was in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231. "The claim in the letter is completely unfounded as Iran has never taken any activity inconsistent with the Security Council Resolution 2231," the Iranian ambassador said. Iravani added, "Iran has made it clear time and again that all activities related to its missile and space programs are fully in compliance with its legitimate rights under international law." "Moreover, Iran has consistently maintained that its missile and space programs fall outside the purview and competence of Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015) and its annexes," he noted. Iran's UN envoy stated that the Israeli regime's baseless claim is aimed at diverting attention from "heinous crimes committed by this apartheid regime against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip." "Accusing Iran

of destabilizing activities in the region appears to be nothing more than a desperate attempt by the Israeli regime to evade accountability for war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity that have been committed and are being committed in the occupied Palestine," he said. Iravani concluded his letter by urging the international community "and, in particular, the United Nations Security Council to hold the Israeli regime accountable for these atrocities." Earlier in October, Iravani had written a similar letter to the UN chief and the Security Council's president after Britain, Germany and France claimed in a letter to the UN that Iran's space activities, including the launch of Qased satellite carrier, violated the Security Council's resolutions. "We reiterate, once again, that Iran is determined to continue its activities related to ballistic missiles and space launch vehicles, both of which are within its inherent rights under international law and are necessary for the preservation of its security as well as socioeconomic interests," he said in that letter. "We caution against any politically driven approach used by certain developed countries with space programs that seek to demonize the use of space technology for peaceful purposes by developing countries under absurd pretexts such as proliferation concerns," the Iranian diplomat said.

Deal Done, Iran to Get Mil Mi-28 Chopper, Sukhoi Su-35 Jet



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Arrangements have been finalized for the delivery of Russian-made Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets, Mil Mi-28 attack helicopters, and Yak-130 jet trainers to Iran, a deputy defense minister said. Speaking to Tasnim, Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Mahdi Farahi said plans have been finalized for Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets, Mil Mi-28 attack helicopters, and Yak-130 jet trainers to join the combat units of the Iranian Armed Forces. He said those three advanced military aircraft will be definitely at Iran's disposal and the processes are currently under way. The general noted that Iran has the strongest fleet of military helicopters in the region in terms of quantity and has upgraded the capabilities of the chopper after carrying out several projects. Iran hasn't acquired any new fighter aircraft in recent years, excluding a few Russian MiG-29 Fulcrum fighters it bought in the 1990s. Iran and Russia have signed major deals to boost their economic, trade, energy and military cooperation. In September, the Iranian Air Force received its first Russian-made Yak-130 jet trainers. Developed by Russia's Yakovlev and Aermacchi, the Yakovlev Yak-130 is a subsonic two-seat jet trainer and light combat aircraft. The advanced aircraft would allow Iranian military pilots to undergo training in operating 4+ and fifth-generation fighter jets, like Sukhoi Su-57.

Raisi a No-Show at Summit Announced by Erdogan



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - President Ebrahim Raisi failed to show up Tuesday for a summit in Ankara that Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan had earlier announced to reporters, but which Tehran itself never officially confirmed. The confusion around Raisi's visit underscores the differences that linger between the two regional powers despite their joint views on the Israel-Hamas war. The Turkish presidency told AFP that Erdogan had no meetings planned for Tuesday and did not explain whether the visit had been cancelled or postponed. Erdogan had personally announced the Iranian president's first official visit to Turkey on his return flight from a summit between regional leaders in Riyadh on November 11 that was also attended by Raisi. "Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is coming to us on the 28th of the month," Erdogan told reporters on board the flight. The visit was also announced by Turkey's state media and discussed heavily on television as late as Monday. But it was never officially confirmed by Raisi's office or announced by Iran's media. Erdogan and Raisi spoke by phone on Sunday evening, and the top diplomats for the two countries did the same on Saturday. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian expressed "his hope that with the continuation of high-level diplomacy between the two countries, the two (sides) can see the strengthening and deepening of mutual cooperation," the Iranian foreign ministry said after the call. "Iran expects Turkey to end its direct and indirect trade with Israel," Istanbul's Centre for Iranian Studies director Hakki Uygur told AFP. "Turkey, on the other hand, has taken an attitude that cares about separating political and commercial issues." Iran and Turkey share a 535-kilometre (330-mile) border and a complex history of close economic relations and opposing views on regional disputes.

IRAN NEWS



IRGC Navy Warns US Aircraft Carrier in the Persian Gulf

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri, the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy, has stressed that US aircraft carriers must adhere to Iran's maritime regulations while navigating strategic waters, revealing that the IRGC Navy had issued a warning to a US aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf. In an interview with Iranian television on Monday, the IRGC Navy Chief disclosed that a US aircraft carrier that had entered Persian Gulf waters was compelled to alter its course and land its helicopters following a direct warning from Iranian naval forces. General Alireza Tangsiri further stated that the navy flew drones over the American warship and ordered them to land their helicopter and they complied with Iran's directives.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

7 Bills to Prevent Blocked Properties Submitted to Majlis



TEHRAN (IP) - The legal deputy of the president about the follow-ups carried out to release Iran's blocked properties said that seven bills have been submitted to the Majlis. Mohammad Dehghan in a press conference about the second national conference on the responsibility of implementing the constitution, said: So far, 5 bills have been approved in the relevant commissions of the parliament and 2 bills have not been approved yet, so that we can declare our claims against some countries regarding the properties seized there. The legal deputy of the president continued: "Initial measures were taken regarding Korea and the original amount that was deposited has returned, but we have not received our right yet because Korea decreased Iran's value currency and we lost one billion dollars. So, we are waiting that the parliament provides the necessary permission." Dehghan noted "Part of our funds in Bahrain, which were confiscated by previous governments, are being followed up and the bill is in the parliament." The legal deputy of the president about Iran's complaints in the International Court of Justice said: "We have 5 complaints in this court. One complaint is against the country and the other 4 cases are complaints that Iran has made against the U.S. and Canada." Dehghan added Iran's complaint regarding some of the properties of the Central Bank led to a result and the judgment was issued in favor of the country in most of the clauses. About the amount that the U.S. should pay to the country, two years have been given for the two countries to reach a conclusion and the delegations of the both countries to carry out evaluations, he concluded.



TEHRAN- Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) including oil grew 7.1 percent in the second quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (June 22-September 22), compared to the second quarter of last year, according to the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI). Based on the SCI data, the figure excluding oil increased by 4.2 percent, Tasnim News Agency reported. As reported, based on the fixed prices in the Iranian year 1390 (ended on March 19, 2012), the country's GDP stood at 21.9 quadrillion rials (about \$43.8 billion) including the oil sector, and at 18.5 quadrillion rials (about \$37 billion) excluding the oil sector in the mentioned period. The SCI data indicate that in the summer of the current Iranian year, the agricultural sector grew by -3.2 percent, the industry and mining sector grew by 8.7 percent and the services sector has grown by 7.5 percent compared to the summer of 1401. As announced previously by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), Iran's GDP including oil grew 6.2 percent in the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21), compared to the first quarter of last year. The CBI put the GDP growth at 3.5 percent excluding oil. According to CBI data, the GDP growth was positive in all four quarters of the previous year so that from the first quarter to the end of the fourth quarter of the said year, the economic growth rate of the country was 1.9 percent, 3.9 percent, 4.9 percent, and 5.3 percent, respectively. As reported, based on the fixed prices in the Iranian year 1395 (ended on March 20, 2017), the

country's GDP stood at 15.15 quadrillion rials (about \$30.3 billion) including the oil sector, and at 13.8 quadrillion rials (about \$27.6 billion) excluding the oil sector in the past year. In early June, the World Bank (WB) in its latest report dubbed "Global Economic Prospects" estimated a 2.2 percent growth for Iran's economy in 2023, a figure which is higher than the average growth forecast for the global economy and despite the fact that the country is still under sanctions imposed by the United States. The bank has predicted that due to the contractionary monetary policy adopted by many countries this year, the average economic growth in the world is expected to decrease from 3.1 percent in 2022 to 2.1 percent in 2023. Based on the WB report, Iran's GDP grew by 4.7 percent in the last quarter of the previous year, while the average GDP growth for most of the advanced countries like the U.S., China, and many European countries was less than the said figure. In terms of economic growth, Iran ranked 15th among the world's 72 major economies in Q4 2022, which means that only 14 countries had higher economic growth than Iran in this period. Iran's 4.7 percent GDP growth in Q4 2022 was achieved, while the average economic growth of developed countries was only 1.2 percent in this period. According to the WB data, Iran's economy experienced a 2.9 percent growth in 2022; the average growth rate in West Asia and North African economies in 2022 was 5.9 percent.

Iran, Iraq Emphasize Enhancing Cooperation in ICT Sector



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Officials from Iran and Iraq stressed the need to strengthen cooperation in the field of communications and information technology (ICT). Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology (ICT) Issa Zarepour in a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart in Baghdad pointed to the high capabilities and potential of Iran in the field of implementing communications projects in Iraq and called for the continuation of cooperation in this sector. The two countries share ample commonalities that can be used for the development of relations in different fields, including communications and information technology (ICT), he said. Turning to the implementation of the previous agreements inked between the two countries in the ICT sector, Zarepour emphasized that the Islamic Republic is ready to participate in mega internet- and communications projects in Iraq. Elsewhere in his remarks, Iran's ICT minister pointed to the launch of a direct link between Iran and Iraq during Arbaeen ceremonies and also the eye-catching improvement of the quality of communications and emphasized that the direct communications link between Tehran and Baghdad should be further strengthened. Iraqi Minister of Communications Hiyam al-Yasiri, for her part, appreciated Iran's achievements in the ICT sector and added that the result of close cooperation between ICT ministries of the two countries was observed during Arbaeen ceremonies. Favorable services were rendered to the pilgrims during the Arbaeen rituals and it seems necessary that the two countries should continue their cooperation in this field, she underlined.



Int'l Consensus Exists on Necessity of Lasting Ceasefire in Gaza

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says there is an international consensus on the need for the establishment of a lasting ceasefire in the Gaza Strip after it was under a genocidal war by the Israeli regime for about seven weeks. The top diplomat made the remarks in a phone call with his Swiss counterpart Ignazio Cassis on Monday. Amir-Abdollahian pointed to a forthcoming foreign ministerial meeting of the United Nations Security Council on the situation in Palestine, which has been scheduled for Wednesday. "There is an international consensus on the priority of lasting cessation of [Israel's] attacks on Gaza and the [occupied] West Bank, lifting of the [Gaza] blockade, dispatch of humanitarian aid, including medicines, food, and fuel, and preventing forced expulsion of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank," Iran's foreign minister said. The Swiss official, for his part, expressed concern about the situation in the Palestinian territories, while emphasizing the need for releasing prisoners, providing support for civilians, sending humanitarian aid to the afflicted areas, and preventing further escalation of the Gaza war. He pointed to consultations that have taken place on the part of his country to protect the lives of civilians as well as the efforts made to realize a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. Cassis expressed hope that the underway truce in Gaza would be extended for a longer period of time.

Direct Flight a Prerequisite for Boosting Business With Cyprus

TEHRAN - Enumerating the cooperation capacities between the private sectors of the two countries, the ambassador of Iran in Cyprus said: Establishing regular and direct flights between Iran and Cyprus will lead to the prosperity of the commercial relations between the two countries by reducing transportation costs. In the meeting to get to know the business opportunities of Cyprus held in the Iran Chamber, the ambassador of Iran in Cyprus said: The prerequisite for increasing the level of economic cooperation between Iran and Cyprus is to re-establish regular and direct flights between the two countries. Alireza Salarian said: Although the government of Cyprus has the will to improve the level of trade relations with Iran, some obstacles, including transportation problems, prevent the realization of this desire. Until 20 years ago, there was a direct flight between Iran and Cyprus, but since then, the flights are made through a third country, which is not cost-effective. He added: While the cost of a direct flight to Cyprus is 500 euros, now this flight is carried out at a cost of around 1,000 euros through the Emirates. I hope that with the cooperation of the Cyprus government, at least a charter flight permit will be issued between Iran and Cyprus, because at least it will have positive effects in the tourism industry. Saying that the signing of the double taxation avoidance agreement between the governments of Iran and Cyprus is a significant advantage, Salarian added: Iranian investors and businessmen can use this opportunity to start their business in Cyprus. He emphasized: Iran has good facilities, especially in the field of food, construction materials, medicine and medical

equipment. Joint cooperation between private sector companies of both sides can increase the level of trade exchanges. Meanwhile Sama Farkhundehejad, the director of the European department of the International Vice-Chancellor of the Iranian Chamber, stated in this meeting that unfortunately Iran's trade balance with Cyprus is negative and continued: In 2022, Cyprus' imports from Iran will be about 432 thousand dollars, including fruits, dried fruits and products. It was iron and steel, while the export of Cyprus to Iran amounted to 9.6 million dollars and included medicine, medical equipment, chemical products and photography and videography equipment. Referring to the geographical location of Cyprus, he said: This country can be the gateway of Iran to Europe. Currently, the main economic partner of Cyprus is the member states of the European Union, and this is a positive point for us in doing business with Cyprus. Farkhundehejad added: The main export of Cyprus is agricultural products and its import is foodstuffs, oil and chemical products. A major part of the economy of Cyprus revolves around the tourism industry, and this sector can be one of the fields of cooperation between the two countries. In addition, the field of energy, especially new and renewable energies, can be another field of cooperation between the two countries. She also announced the planning of the International Vice President of the Iran Chamber to form a joint committee between Iran and Cyprus and said: This committee will be established focusing on the chambers of commerce of the two countries and will consist of active businessmen of the two countries.

Iran Fully Monitors Whole Region



TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian defense minister has dismissed the US accusations against Iran, saying that Iran fully monitors the entire region. Brigadier General Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Minister of Defense reacted to the Western states' statements in which they said that they will impose new sanctions against Iran even after the official end of arms embargo, saying that "We have made great progress in the field of weapons and all these progress took place when the country was under sanctions. Now that there is more room [after the arms embargo], Iran will definitely add to this progress." "The Islamic Republic of Iran will definitely achieve more success in various fields in the defense industry, such as exports, communication and interactions with other countries on military issues, and the statements from these countries are just empty and worthless words," Ashtiani also said. Saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran fully monitors the entire region, "The fact that the Americans falsely link everything that happens [in this region] to us is because they know that the Islamic Republic of Iran has the upper hand and that it is the first power in the region."



Niger Junta Revokes Anti-Migration Law in Setback to EU Strategy

NIAMEY (Dispatches) - Niger's junta has signed a decree revoking a 2015 law that was enacted to curb the smuggling of migrants traveling from African countries through a key migration route in Niger en route to Europe, according to a government circular issued on Monday. "The convictions pronounced pursuant to said law and their effects shall be cancelled," Niger's junta leader, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, said in a Nov. 25 decree, a copy of which was seen Monday by The Associated Press. All those convicted under the law would be considered for release by the Ministry of Justice, Ibrahim Jean Etienne, the secretary general of the justice ministry said in the circular. The revocation of the law adds a new twist to growing political tensions between Niger and EU countries that sanctioned the West African nation in response to the July coup that deposed its democratically elected president and brought the junta into power.



Russian Forces Advancing on Ukrainian Town From All Sides



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian forces are intensifying their drive to capture the eastern Ukrainian town of Avdiivka, trying to advance on all sides after weeks of fighting, the town's top official was quoted as saying. Russian troops have been pressing land and air-based attacks on Avdiivka, since mid-October as the focal point of their slow-moving push through eastern Ukraine's Donbas region in the 21-month-old war. The latest push, reported by Vitaliy Barabash, head of Avdiivka's military administration, followed reports last week that Ukrainian troops had made some headway in halting and pushing back the Russian advance. "Things in the Avdiivka sector have become even tougher. The intensity of clashes has been increasing for some time," Barabash told the media outlet Espresso TV. "The Russians have opened up two more sectors from which they have begun making assaults - in the direction of Donetsk ... and in the so-called industrial zone. The enemy is attempting to storm the city from all directions." Officials say not a single building remains intact after months of battles in the town noted for a vast coking plant. Fewer than 1,500 residents remain of 32,000 before the war. Much of the fighting has focused on the industrial zone and the coking plant. Barabash earlier said that Ukrainian forces had in recent days pushed back Russian forces near Stepove, a village northwest of Avdiivka, pinning them down near a rail line. Ukrainian and Western military analysts say Russia has incurred heavy losses, although the battle for the town is rarely mentioned in official Russian military dispatches. Russian military bloggers also reported Ukrainian gains near Avdiivka last week. On Monday, Russian reports said Moscow's troops had secured control of the industrial zone and were attempting to storm the coking plant. Reuters could not verify reports from either side. Avdiivka was briefly captured in 2014 by Russian-financed separatists who seized large chunks of eastern Ukraine. Fortifications were later built around the town - seen as a gateway to the Russian-held regional centre of Donetsk - and it has resisted attacks since Moscow began its full-fledged invasion in February 2022. Ukraine launched a counteroffensive in June but has made only marginal gains in both the east and the south. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has acknowledged the slow progress but denies any suggestion the war is at a "stalemate". Ukrainian military spokesperson Oleksandr Shtupun told the news outlet liga.net that wintry weather and strong winds were affecting the use of drones by both sides. Shtupun said Russian forces had suffered heavy losses near Avdiivka and nearby Maryinka, another largely destroyed town where control has been contested for months. "Our defenders are holding their ground," Shtupun told liga.net. "We are fighting and will continue to fight despite the weather."



CAIRO (Dispatches) - An Israel-Hamas truce in the Gaza Strip stretched into a fifth day on Tuesday as the two sides completed the release of Israeli hostages and detained Palestinians and looked poised to free more as the pause in fighting was extended by two days. Hamas took about 240 hostages during an Oct. 7 incursion into southern Israel that killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli figures, prompting Israel to retaliate by bombing the coastal enclave and launching a ground offensive in its north. Israel said 11 Israelis had returned to the country from the Gaza Strip on Monday, bringing to 69 the total of Israeli and foreign hostages the Islamist Palestinian group has freed since Friday under the truce. The White House and Qatari negotiators said on Monday the original four day pause in fighting, due to expire at 0500 GMT on Tuesday, had been extended for two more days. Israel has not commented on any agreement to extend the truce but, in what may be an implicit confirmation, the Israeli prime minister's office said the government approved the addition of 50 female prisoners to its list of Palestinians for potential release if additional Israeli hostages are freed. Israel previously said it would extend the truce by one day for every 10 more hostages released, providing some respite from the war. Israel's government has received a list of hostages who are expected to be released on Tuesday, Israel's Army Radio reported, citing the Israeli prime minister's office. The Axios news website reported the list contained 10 hostages. There was no immediate

comment from the prime minister's office. The Israel Prison Service said 33 Palestinian prisoners were released on Monday from Israel's Ofer prison in the occupied West Bank and from a detention centre in Jerusalem, bringing the total number of Palestinians it has freed since Friday to 150. Israeli forces clashed with some of the dozens of Palestinians who gathered outside Ofer prison to await the prisoner release, the Palestinian health ministry said. Some of the protesters waved the flags of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, another Palestinian militant group. The ministry said a Palestinian was killed in the area, and that it was unclear if he had participated in the clashes. Palestinian media reported he was shot dead. Israel had no immediate comment on the incident. The U.S. State Department said U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken would visit Israel, the West Bank and the United Arab Emirates this week to discuss sustaining aid flows to Gaza and freeing all hostages as well as U.S. principles for the future of Gaza and the need for an independent Palestinian state. The original truce agreement allowed more aid trucks into Gaza, where the civilian population faces shortages of food, fuel, drinking water and medicine. An estimated 1.8 million of the territory's 2.3 million population are internally displaced, according to the United Nations. While describing the extension as "a glimpse of hope and humanity," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said two more days was not enough time to meet Gaza's aid needs.

Orban Ramps Up Anti-EU Rhetoric Amid Row Over Frozen Funds



BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - EU chief Charles Michel met Prime Minister Viktor Orbán Monday in a bid to ease rising tensions, with the increasingly belligerent Hungarian leader threatening to block key decisions on Ukraine. The talks, which Orbán described as "useful" without elaborating further, lasted "over 2 hours" an EU official said. Orbán - the only EU leader who has maintained close ties to the Kremlin - is threatening to use his veto at an EU summit in December to block aid to his war-torn neighbour and stop Ukraine's bid to join the bloc. Michel and Orbán had "substantial discussions" on the Hungarian Prime Minister's letter last week calling for an "urgent" rethink of the bloc's strategy on Ukraine, the official added. Budapest is at loggerheads with Brussels on a whole array of issues, ranging from migration, judicial reform and LGBTQ rights to Ukraine. Orbán's latest salvo is an aggressive eurosceptic advertising campaign featuring posters targeting European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. While some analysts describe Orbán's Ukraine move as blackmail to unlock billions of euros in frozen EU funds, others argue that he is trying to mobilise voters against "Brussels bureaucrats" ahead of EU Parliament elections in June - a tactic he has used before other polls. Last week Brussels authorised a 900-million-euro (\$980-million) advance to Hungary from its Covid pandemic recovery fund. But the bulk of the money that Budapest was due to get has been suspended until it meets several rule-of-law conditions which the EU says it has been flouting. Brussels has also frozen 22 billion euros in separate cohesion funds. Orbán told his supporters earlier this month that Hungary was resisting EU policies "with all its might", claiming they would lead Europe "to its ruin". "As the election campaign approaches, the government wants to showcase issues it intends to change in Brussels," political scientist Daniel Deak of the pro-Orbán 21st Century Institute told AFP. But Bulcsu Hunyadi, of the Political Capital think-tank, said Orbán needs these "symbolic battles against external enemies" to "keep his base constantly mobilised". In a similar vein, the nationalist has also recently toughened his stance against the LGBTQ community under pressure from the far-right Our Homeland party. Ahead of the last European elections in 2019, Orbán launched a similar campaign against von der Leyen's predecessor Jean-Claude Juncker. He has continually portrayed EU leaders as puppets of Jewish billionaire George Soros - and now his son Alex - a bete-noire of Orbán's due to their support of human rights NGOs. "This is an old tactic aimed at creating a vague and imaginary threat to distract voters from real issues, such as the quality of public education or the healthcare system," a spokeswoman for Soros' Open Society Foundations told AFP. Von der Leyen, meanwhile, is "completely unfazed" by the posters targeting her in Hungary, according to the European Commission. "We have learned to live with Orbán's barking" his "howls into the microphone" before changing his attitude in the EU council chamber, said a European diplomat. "The challenge is to reach out and not further escalate at a very critical time of negotiations on issues that require unanimity," the diplomat added. But the EU is making a mistake by not being tough with Orbán, Hunyadi said. "Orbán is an excellent tactician, who has no choice but to bend to EU rules for the time being, because he is rather isolated, while playing a dangerous game," he claimed. The "illiberal democracy" he claims to have built in Hungary is incompatible with the bloc's values, Hunyadi argued, saying Orbán is presenting himself as an example for other far-right leaders.



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Arab states and the European Union agreed at a meeting in Spain that a two-state solution was the answer to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell saying the Palestinian Authority should rule Gaza. Borrell said all EU members attending the meeting of Mediterranean nations in Barcelona and almost all attendees had agreed on the need for a two-state solution. The Palestinian Authority must hold elections as soon as possible to gain further legitimacy and improve its functioning, as the only "viable solution" to the future leadership of Gaza, currently run by Hamas Islamists, he said. "I believe it is the only viable solution, but it will be viable if the international community backs it. Otherwise, we will see a power vacuum that will be fertile ground for all sorts of violent organisations," Borrell said at a press conference. An initial four-day truce has been extended by two days, mediator Qatar said, in the first halt in fighting in the seven weeks since Hamas attacked Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking about 240 hostages into Gaza, according to Israeli tallies. In response to that attack, Israel bombarded the enclave and mounted a ground offensive in the north. Some 14,800 Palestinians have been killed, Gaza health authorities say, and hundreds of thousands displaced. Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said any talk of administration of Gaza after the conflict should focus on the West Bank

and Gaza as one entity and that the Palestinian people should decide who rules them. A two-state solution envisages a state for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip alongside Israel. Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki said the Palestinian Authority, which lost control of the Gaza Strip in a 2007 power struggle with Hamas, had no need to return to Gaza, adding: "We have been there all the time, we have 60,000 public workers there." They were speaking at the conclusion of a meeting of the Forum for the Union of the Mediterranean in Barcelona, a 43-member grouping of European, North African and Middle Eastern countries. Israel did not attend the summit. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan spoke as a representative of a group of ministers from the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. "We delivered our message, it's important that we have a ceasefire immediately that we build on the current truce that is in place," he told reporters after the conference ended. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the absence of Israel due to apparent concern over "one-sided hostility" underscored "deep rifts". "That is precisely why I am here today, even though these meetings were not previously given a high profile by Germany. Precisely because the rifts are getting deeper, we have to sit together, we have to talk and hear each other out," she said.



Curfew Partially Lifted in Sierra Leone Capital

FREETOWN (Dispatches) - Clashes that shook Sierra Leone's capital Freetown on Sunday left 13 dead in the ranks of the army loyal to the government, and were orchestrated by active and retired soldiers, the army spokesperson said. "We have launched a manhunt for all those who were involved in the violent attack, amongst them current and retired serving soldiers," Colonel Issa Bangura told reporters. Daily life began to resume amid a heavy security presence in Freetown on Monday, as the government partially lifted a curfew imposed after the clashes erupted in the city. Bangura told AFP eight more soldiers had been seriously injured in the clashes as they defended their barracks. More than 24 hours after the incident, authorities had still to give a full toll after armed assailants stormed a military armoury and several prisons, sparking battles with security forces that lasted for hours. The central prison and other penitentiaries were stormed and dozens of inmates appeared to have escaped. Videos posted on social media appeared to show men in uniform under arrest in the back or beside a military pick-up truck. They meanwhile remained no indication of who had been responsible or regarding their motives. "Certain members of the military are not loyal towards the government or the president, despite taking the oath," said Bangura. "We want to restore law and order as quickly as possible," he stressed. President Julius Maada Bio said late Sunday that calm had been restored after what he described as an attempt to undermine peace and stability and vowed those responsible for the clashes would be held accountable. He said most of those behind the clashes had been arrested. With Freetown placed under high security residents gradually resumed their daily activities. Some shops and banks re-opened and traffic resumed, an AFP correspondent said. Schools, however, remained closed. Many people in Sierra Leone, such as 25-year-old mother Mariama Kamara, rushed to stock up on supplies where they could. "I am looking for food for the family - most shops are closed," she told AFP. I expect the government to protect us. We want peace but many people fear returning to going about their business," she added. Checkpoints have been set up on main highways, with members of the security forces searching vehicles. Security was reinforced at official buildings and prisons.

North Korea Defends Satellite Launch at UN

PYONGYANG (Dispatches) - North Korea's ambassador made a rare appearance at the UN Security Council on Monday to defend his country's launch of a spy satellite, as leader Kim Jong Un studied images including of the White House and Pentagon. Western powers, Japan and South Korea have said North Korea violated Security Council resolutions by launching the satellite last week. The state has said that its new eye in the sky has already provided images of major US and South Korea military sites, as well as photos of the Italian capital Rome. On Monday it took "in detail" images of the White House and the Pentagon in Washington, according to state-run KCNA news agency, which said Kim was reviewing the photos. He also counted some aircraft carriers at a military base and a shipyard in the neighboring state of Virginia, the report said. At the Security Council, North Korea's ambassador to the United Nations, Kim Song, complained that other countries faced no restrictions on satellites. "No other nation in the world is in the security environment as critical as the DPRK," said Kim, using the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "One belligerent party, the United States, is threatening us with a nuclear weapon," he said. "It is a legitimate right for the DPRK as another belligerent party to develop, test, manufacture and possess weapons systems equivalent to those that the United States possesses or is developing." He mocked US charges that satellite

technology also helped North Korea hone its missile capacity, questioning whether the United States put satellites into orbit "with a catapult." The US ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, rejected North Korea's assertion it was acting in self-defense and said that joint US-South Korean exercises were "routine" and "defensive in nature." "We intentionally reduce risk and pursue transparency by announcing the exercises in advance including the dates and the activities, unlike the DPRK," she said, adding that the drills did not violate Security Council resolutions. South Korea's spy agency said that Russia, eager for assistance in Ukraine, helped North Korea on the satellite following a summit between Kim and President Vladimir Putin. The United States said last month that North Korea has delivered more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions to Russia. Russia and China, North Korea's main ally, have put forward a resolution, opposed by the United States, to ease sanctions on Pyongyang as part of an effort to encourage dialogue. Chinese envoy Geng Shuang accused the United States of "further aggravating tension and confrontation" through its military alliance with South Korea. "If the DPRK constantly feels threatened, and its legitimate security concerns remain unresolved, the peninsula will not be able to get out of the security dilemma and only be caught in a vicious cycle of fit-for-tat aggressive moves," he said.





Ronaldo Tells Ref to Overturn Penalty He Won in AFC Champions League

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo convinced the referee to change his mind after awarding him a penalty in Al Nassr's AFC Champions League 0-0 draw with Iran's Persepolis. The 38-year-old former Manchester United and Real Madrid great appeared to have been brought down by Soroush Rafiei inside the box and Chinese referee Ma Ning pointed to the spot. Ronaldo leapt to his feet and approached the referee, wagging his finger, shaking his head and telling him there had been no foul. After consulting VAR, the referee was sent to the pitch-side monitor and reversed his decision in the Group E clash in Riyadh. The Saudi Pro League side had to play most of the match with 10 men after Ali Lajami was given a straight red card for a shin-raking challenge in the 17th minute. They also lost Ronaldo to a neck injury with 13 minutes remaining, caused by Persepolis goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand landing on the Portuguese star when claiming a high ball. But the 2018 and 2020 Champions League runners-up from Iran were unable to capitalise, the point proving enough for Al Nassr to seal their place in the knockout stages as group winners. Ronaldo has little time to recover with Al Nassr facing Al Hilal on Friday in a top-of-the-table league clash. Saudi Arabian champions Al Ittihad are two points clear at the top of Group C after a 2-1 win at Uzbekistan's AGMK FC. Moroccan Abderrazak Hamdallah scored

twice in four first-half minutes before Martin Boakye pulled one back for the hosts with 12 minutes remaining. Two-time winners Al Ittihad, under new manager Marcelo Gallardo, need to avoid defeat at home to second-placed Sepahan in the final round of matches next week to go through as group winners. The Iranian side defeated Iraq's Air Force Club 1-0 at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran, despite having two players sent off. Sepahan's Farshad Ahmadzadeh scored the only goal from close range in the fourth minute before Mohammad Hosseini was sent off just before half-time. Hadi Mohammadi was then red-carded on 90 minutes forcing Sepahan to hold out with nine men for 12 minutes of added time under an Air Force bombardment to secure the three points. Uzbekistan's Nasaf Qarshi moved top of Group B with a 3-1 win at home to Jordan's Al Faisaly, and Qatari side Al Sadd kept their hopes alive by beating Sharjah 2-0 in the UAE. Nasaf are top on 10 points ahead of their final match against Al Sadd, who are third on seven points with Sharjah, who face a trip to Al Faisaly, second on eight. The group stage this year returned to a home-and-away group format for the first time since 2020 and expanded to 40 teams. It rounds off in the West Zone next week with the five winners from Groups A to E and three best runners-up going through to the last 16 in February.

Nadal Wants to Play at the 2024 Australian Open



SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Australian Open CEO Craig Tiley has said he remains confident that Rafael Nadal will feature at next year's tournament. The 37-year-old slipped to a shock second-round defeat in this year's edition and subsequently underwent hip surgery and missed the remaining Grand Slams. However, Tiley said that the Spaniard "wants to play" at the tournament in January and could confirm his availability soon. The Spaniard has not featured in a competitive match since suffering a shock defeat at the hands of Mackenzie McDonald in the second round of this year's edition. The 37-year-old sustained a hip injury during the match and was later forced to withdraw from the remaining Grand Slams of 2023. Tiley has previously stated that Nadal will play at next year's tournament and he has reiterated his stance that the superstar will make his comeback in Australia. "Rafa has been training, I follow him closely, probably every day, because he's a massive drawcard for us," Tiley told reporters in Melbourne, per Reuters. "He wants to play, he's obviously planning on playing. It all depends on how he pulls up. Hopefully in the next week or the next two weeks, we get some specific confirmation of that. We are waiting for Rafa desperately." Corretja on Nadal's long-awaited return to tennis: "I'm certain Rafa will be here because he's not going to want to miss the opportunity to repeat what he did a couple of years ago." Last month, the 22-time Grand Slam champion said next year's Australian Open remains a target, but was keen to manage expectations.

Embiid's Triple-Double Fuels 76ers to Blowout Over Lakers

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Joel Embiid recorded the sixth triple-double of his NBA career with 30 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists to help the Philadelphia 76ers to a 138-94 win against the visiting Los Angeles Lakers. Tyrese Maxey scored 31 points and shot 5-for-12 from 3-point distance, helping the 76ers shoot 22-for-46 as a team, one make short of the franchise record. Marcus Morris Sr. went 4-for-5 on 3s and scored 16 points off the bench for the 76ers, who had lost two of three. Patrick Beverley, who came in 3 for 22 from 3-point distance this season, shot 4 for 8 from beyond the arc and scored 12 points. LeBron James scored 18 points and passed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for the most minutes played, regular season and playoffs, in NBA history when he crossed the 66,289-minute mark. Anthony Davis had 17 points and 11 rebounds and D'Angelo Russell contributed 12 points and seven assists for the Lakers, who had won four of five. The 76ers shot 13-for-26 from 3-point distance in the first half and took a 15-point lead into halftime after leading by as many as 25. The Lakers cut it to 11 on a 3 by Taurean Prince with 9:44 left in the third quarter, but De'Anthony Melton hit 3s on back-to-back possessions to spark a 10-2 run and the lead was back up to 19. Philadelphia eventually took a 98-80 lead into the fourth and continued to expand its lead. The 76ers used a 20-2 run in the first quarter to move ahead 28-15 with 3:11 left and Los Angeles never got back within single digits. Embiid was on the bench when the 76ers took a 32-19 lead into the second quarter, but Philadelphia kept adding to its lead. The 76ers started 4-for-6 from 3-point distance in the second quarter to extend their lead to 46-27 with 8:06 left in the half. Morris hit 3s on back-to-back trips to make it 52-29 with 6:36 left. The Lakers ended the half with a 14-4 run to make it 68-53 at the break.



Covid Cost Dortmund 151m Euros



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke told Sunday's AGM the club had emerged battered but afloat from the Covid-19 pandemic with a cost of 151 million euros (\$165 million). The CEO said Dortmund had made "500 million euros in sales" including player transfers in the previous financial year, saying "economically nobody needs to worry about Borussia Dortmund." But he told club members he suffered sleepless nights at the time. "We have left the valley of darkness behind us, but it cost us 151 million." Known for scouting and selling talents on for big profits, Dortmund sold England midfielder Jude Bellingham to Real Madrid in the summer for a fee of up to 130 million euros. Dortmund had a chance to win their first league title in a decade last season but drew 2-2 at home against mid-table Mainz, to hand the title to rivals Bayern Munich. Watzke called the result "the most terrible day of my life." "Something like this can destroy a club or paralyse it for years... but this club is too strong." The CEO also promised Dortmund would never join a European Super League "no matter what happens." After 12 league matches this season, Dortmund sit in fourth place and are ten points behind leaders Bayer Leverkusen. "We were hoping for two or three more points at this stage" Watzke said "but the sky isn't falling." In the Champions League, Dortmund are first in a group which also includes Paris Saint-Germain, AC Milan and Newcastle. Dortmund travelled to Milan on Tuesday for a clash which is likely to prove crucial in determining who makes the knockout stages of the competition. "We have a chance to qualify early with a win" Watzke said. "I wouldn't have dared to dream of that at the time of the draw."

Garnacho Can Be Something Special

LONDON (Dispatches) - Bruno Fernandes says Alejandro Garnacho's wonder goal in Manchester United's victory against Everton proved the Argentine teenager can be "something special". Garnacho gave a glimpse of his vast potential with a brilliant overhead kick to inspire United's 3-0 win in Sunday's Premier League clash at Goodison Park. Showing outstanding ingenuity and technique to conjure the breath-taking strike, the 19-year-old showed why his United team-mate Fernandes believes he has the ability to become one of the world's best players. "It's amazing, something out of this world, I think," United captain Fernandes said. Garnacho marked the goal by copying former Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo's celebration. Fernandes cautioned that it is too early to suggest Garnacho can emulate Ronaldo's remarkable career, but he expects great things from his young team-mate, who arrived from Atletico Madrid in 2020. "Probably he's watching too much Cristiano clips! We all know that he's a big fan. Still a long way for him to be like Cristiano but he's getting his steps," Fernandes said. "He wants to be something special in the world of football and I think he has the capability to do that, but he has to do more than that goal!" Garnacho was not the only impressive United teenager in action at Goodison Park, with fellow FA Youth Cup winner Kobbie Mainoo flourishing on his first Premier League start. The 18-year-old midfielder recently recovered from the injury he sustained during United's pre-season tour and produced a performance that belied his tender years. "I talk always about Kobbie," Fernandes said. "I think he's a special player too. Obviously, people will not talk as much as they will about Garnacho because Garnacho scores goals, does assists and everything. But what he puts on the game, what he gives to the team, it's known to anyone." "I think he has great players in front of him to learn from because he plays with one of the best in the world like Casemiro. That's probably the best capability he has because he wants to learn every time. He's eager to listen to everyone to get better and better."

