

In a Phone Conversation, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany Annalena Baerbock Talked About the Relations Between Tehran and Berlin and the Latest Developments in Palestine

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Deputy Transport and Urban Development Minister Shahriyar Afandizadeh Said the Ministry Has Approved New Regulations for the Establishment of Companies Active in Port and Maritime Fields

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**2 DOMESTIC**

## 9th Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission Kicks Off in Tehran

> SEE PAGE 2

**3 INTERNATIONAL**

## Gaza Fighting Intensifies, U.S. Vetoes UNSC Demand for Ceasefire

> SEE PAGE 3

## U.S. Exports to Iran Up 20%



TEHRAN (MNA) - The U.S. Bureau of Statistics said the country's export of products to Iran registered a 20 percent hike in the first 10 months of the current year (January-October 2023).Iran and the United States exchanged \$44.4 million worth of products from January to October 2023, showing a four percent decline compared to last year's corresponding period, the report said.The two countries had exchanged more than \$46.5 million of products from January to October 2022.In this period, the US exports to Iran increased but its imports from Iran decreased.According to the report, the United States exported \$42.8 million of products to Iran from January to October 2023, showing a 20 percent growth compared to last year's corresponding period.The US had exported more than \$35.6 million worth of goods to Iran from January to October 2022.The United States imported over \$1.6 million of products from Iran in the first 10 months of 2023, showing an 85 percent decline.The US had imported \$10.9 million worth of products from Iran between January and October 2022.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



## Iran Determined to Expand Economic Ties With Syria

TEHRAN - Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber has said that the Islamic Republic is resolved to expand economic cooperation with Syria as the two sides enjoy cordial, close, and strategic ties in various areas.Mokhber made the remarks in a meeting held in Tehran on Saturday with the visiting Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous.Iranian nation and government have special eye on Syria, Mokhber said, adding that the Islamic Republic prioritizes Syrian welfare, success, independence and tranquility.In his remarks, Mokhber mentioned to the recent crimes being committed by the Zionist regime of Israel in Gaza and called those crimes as massacre, war crime and crime against humanity.Then, he censured the international community for not giving proper response to the Zionists' criminal acts in Gaza.After the October 7 Al Aqsa Storm operation, the grandeur of the United States and the Zionist regime faded away to cause their anger because they had wrong image from their power.Like the terrorist group of Daesh (ISIS) which could not achieve its goals in Syria, the Zionist regime cannot dominate the region as the people in Gaza are strongly standing against the regime forces, Mokhber said.Mokhber expressed hope that the disappointed enemy would leave the region completely.For his part, Arnous said the Syrian nation and government will not forget the Islamic Republic's honorable stance. Syria and Iran have always been under pressure from the global arrogance, the United States and the Western countries because the two countries seek independence, the prime minister noted.Despite all the pressures, Syria will not change its stance and will continue moving towards the path of Resistance.In his remarks, the Syrian prime minister described his Tehran visit as a turning point in bilateral ties.He expressed hope that the two nations would soon feel the achievements to be made during the Tehran visit.Speaking about the Zionist regime's aggression against Gaza, Arnous said such an aggression has been displayed in front of the eyes of the world, and it seems that some are willing to omit Gaza from the map of the world.Meanwhile, the Resistance front resists to foil all the plots.Earlier in the day, the signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding between Iran and Syria was held with the presence of Mokhber, and Arnous.In the press conference after the signing of these memorandums, Mohammad Mokhber said: The implementation of the 16 documents have been signed during the Iranian president's visit to Syria and the agreements made today will lead to the strengthening and development of bilateral cooperation.Arnous also said: The meeting we had today was one of the most successful ones because there was honesty, openness, and mutual understanding in it.The Syrian Prime Minister added: "The suffering and pain of the Palestinian people and the cruel and terrible war that the Western countries have launched in Gaza are done with a series of fake goals and human rights violations."He added that Iran and Syria would not allow the U.S. and the Zionist regime to achieve their goals and would be forced to accept the conditions of the Palestinian people.He listed two goals for his trip to Iran and added: My trip to Iran was for two goals.First, we should follow up on the agreements made during the Iranian president's visit to Damascus, and secondly, we should hold the 15th meeting of the joint economic committee between the two countries, the last of which was held in 2015.Arnous appreciated Iran's economic support to Syria, including sending oil products to that country during the civil wars.

## Iran-Pakistan Rail Service Suspended After Train Derailment



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The Pakistan-Iran rail service was suspended after the derailment of a freight train moving from Iran to Balochistan's capital on Friday. Railway officials confirmed that five bogies of a freight train derailed which resulted in the suspension of the Pakistan-Iran railway service. They said that the Pakistan Railways team was working to restore the railway track. The affected freight train was transporting goods from Iran to Quetta, they added. The officials said that the railway track being used for international trade was in a dilapidated state which disrupted the movement of cargo trains multiple times. Last month, the railway service between Pakistan and Iran was suspended after heavy rainfall in the area. The rail freight service between Quetta to Iran and Iran to Quetta has resumed. The good trains from Pakistan left for Iran, the railways authorities said. The railway track was drowned under the rainwater, which suspended goods train traffic in Iran, Pakistan Railways officials said."A goods train carrying sulfur cargo from Iran was stopped midway," officials further said. "An Iran-bound train from Quetta was also stopped at Dalbandin". The train service between two neighbouring countries used to remain suspended mostly owing to poor railways infrastructure causing derailment a routine.

## Iran Demands Immediate End to Gaza Aggression

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



TEHRAN - Iran's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations has reiterated the country's call for an immediate end to the Israeli genocidal war on Gaza, termination of all forms of military support to the Tel Aviv regime, and complete cessation of hostilities.Zahra Ershadi made the plea at a UN General Assembly meeting entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance" in New York on Friday.Ershadi pointed out that the international community continues to face one of the exceptional challenges and largest tests in its history of humanitarian emergencies, given the humanitarian situation in Gaza."The Gaza Strip has been beset with the worst siege since 2007, and its humanitarian situation is getting worse daily. The death toll is rising due to the atrocious crimes being committed on a daily basis by the Israeli regime against innocent Palestinians. "Hospitals, mosques, churches, schools and other purely civilian infrastructures have not been immune, with many hundreds of people being brutally slaughtered inside these places, she said.The Iranian diplomat highlighted that 70% of the victims killed in Israeli strikes are women and children, and many people have been displaced."At least 131 staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have lost their lives as a result of the Israeli aggression, and the UN agency's buildings are under deliberate attacks."She went on to lambast the "disappointing and unacceptable" inaction of the international community, including the UN and the Security Council, in the face of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza."Humanitarian pauses are not the solution for the deteriorating situation in Gaza. In such a dire situation, sympathy is no longer enough," the Iranian envoy to the UN stressed.Instead of denouncing Israel's brutality in Gaza, those countries which are staunch proponents of humanitarian intervention in other countries and have a horrific record of military interventions in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Libya among others, embolden the Tel Aviv regime both through their verbal support and supply of sophisticated weapons, she said.Ershadi stressed that all perpetrators of crimes against Palestinians, including those who aid and abet Israel to commit brutal crimes across Palestinian territories, particularly especially in Gaza, must be held accountable.Elsewhere in her remarks, the senior Iranian diplomat emphasized that all principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter, notably respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, must be strictly observed by all countries as well as by humanitarian aid organizations, when it comes to the supply of humanitarian aid in other regions.

## Humanitarian situation in Gaza "Catastrophic"



TEHRAN (PressTV) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has denounced as "catastrophic" the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, underlining the need for an urgent ceasefire and de-escalation of tensions in the besieged territory.Guterres made the remark in a telephone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian late on Friday as the two discussed the latest developments in Gaza and the United States' veto of a UN resolution.The resolution was backed by almost all other Security Council members and many other nations demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.Guterres pointed to the activation of Article 99 of the United Nations Charter, which has not taken place since 1989, saying the measure was adopted due to the complicated situation in Gaza and across Palestine."The aforementioned process has been activated as the need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza is felt more than in the past," he added."A humanitarian pause should be made and the spread of tensions in the region should be prevented."Guterres also stressed the necessity of continuing efforts until the realization of Palestinian rights and the formation of a Palestinian State based on the previous resolutions approved by the United Nations.Article 99 states that the UN chief "may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security."Amir-Abdollahian, for his part, thanked Guterres for the invocation of Article 99 following the Israeli genocidal war in Gaza, saying, "The use of Article 99 of the United Nations Charter is a brave action on your part to maintain international peace and security, and is supported by the world's public opinion."The Iranian foreign minister touched on the adverse and tragic situation in the besieged Gaza Strip and the displacement of women and children in deserts in southern Gaza in cold winter amid the Israeli war.Amir-Abdollahian called for speeding up efforts to create deterrence against the Israeli regime's crimes in Gaza and boosting support for Palestinians by the immediate opening of the Rafah crossing for humanitarian aid and stopping the forced migration of Gazans.In another phone conversation with Ziad al-Nakhlah, secretary general of Palestinian Islamic Jihad Resistance Movement on Friday, Amir-Abdollahian discussed the latest measures by the Arab and Muslim world as well as the Islamic Republic in supporting the Palestinian people.

## Who Is the Richest Young Iranian?



Some information is attractive if it is not necessarily useful for us. One of the most important things that the general public follows without having any particular benefit for them is who is the richest person in the world in each year and in each time period?Actually, whether Elon Musk or Mark Bezos is the richest person in the world, it does not make any difference to our current situation. But again, these cases arouse our curiosity to know who actually the richest person in the world is.Have you ever thought about who the richest young Iranian is and how much wealth he has and what is their way of earning? Where did you get your wealth? Stay with us to answer these questions while discussing the youngest rich Iranian. Be with us. Recently, international institutions have given statistics on the increase in the population of wealthy Iranians, and it is even said that in recent years, with the increase in economic fluctuations and the activation of some people in the financial markets, the number of wealthy Iranians has reached 24 thousand people, a strange number that it has attracted the attention of many people and even some media have sought to see who is the richest among the rich. When we look at the media news, we find less information about the amount of

wealth of Iranians, and this shows being conservative is Iranian. However, in our analysis of the status of statistics and information of people who have played the most economic role in recent years, the name of **farzad vajihi** is frequently mentioned, a person who became famous as the best Iranian trader. After the problems he found with the Iranian government, the name of none of it has not declared its companies and assets public, and only Aron Groups Company, which was declared public before facing problems in the country, now Aron Groups Company has reached an international reputation thanks to farzad vajihi.It is speculated that most of the wealth of Farzad Vajihi was obtained through trading, which is known as the Sultan of Trade, and the daily value of his transactions reaches 10 million dollars. farzad vajihi has become famous by setting up an exchange and online gold transactions in Iran. But the fact is that no accurate statistics of his wealth have been published, while he has many companies and properties that are scattered in different countries and their value has not been calculated and reported in the media. Yes, so it is said that he earns billions in profits, that is why he is definitely the richest young Iranian.Vajihi was born in 1367 in Ahvaz, he started his career in car trading, which was his family business, and then entered the financial markets. Between 1393 and 1398, it was widely active in the domestic markets of gold, dollars and coins of Iran, and since then it has reopened various offices in several European countries and the region, and after that it has set up international investment chambers. He now has the citizenship of Turkey, Sweden, Greece, etc. and apparently has a casino hotel in Malaysia, although he now lives in London. By studying his life, we will understand how he was able to reach the highest levels in the highest level of life, both spiritually and materially, and with firm steps and firm determination, he went through the steps of progress and during his years of life, from the smallest He used the moments of his life in the best way. He got married in 2016, and the result of this marriage is a 10-year-old son named Aron, who seems to be the richest Iranian child to appear on social networks in the future by spending this infinite wealth.

# IRAN NEWS



## Iran Ready to Complete Construction of Tehran-Damascus Railway

TEHRAN - Iran's minister of roads and urban development said his ministry is ready to complete the construction operation of the Tehran-Damascus railway. Mehrdad Bazrpash, who is also the chairman of the Iran-Syria Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, expressed his satisfaction with the pace of implementation of agreements previously inked between Tehran and Damascus. He made the remarks in a meeting with Syria's economy and foreign trade minister. Bazrpash proposed setting up a joint permanent working committee in the field of energy in order to pursue the implementation of agreements in the fields of gas and electricity. The minister pointed to the necessity of completion of a rail line between Tehran and Damascus and acknowledged that the Islamic Republic of Iran Railway is fully prepared to conduct feasibility studies for the reconstruction of the rail lines damaged during the war in Syria.

## Israel Had Better Cease Crimes in Gaza



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The highest-ranking Iranian military commander cautioned the Zionist regime to abandon its atrocities against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. It will be in the Zionist regime's interest to stop committing crimes against Palestinians, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri said at a military exhibition in Tehran on Saturday. He emphasized that the Palestinian people, with various religions and faiths, must be free to decide their own fate. Lauding the Palestinian combatants for standing against the Israeli regime's brutal aggression, the top commander said "the front of the truth" will definitely emerge victorious. At least 17,487 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes in Gaza since October 7. In remarks on November 2022, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said the Zionist regime has been "knocked out" in the Al-Aqsa Storm operation that the Palestinian resistance forces had launched outside Gaza.



## 9th Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission Kicks Off in Tehran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The 9th meeting of the Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission started in Tehran on Saturday aimed at expanding trade-economic cooperation and bolstering the constructive interaction between the two countries. The meeting is co-headed by Iran's Minister of Energy and Chairman of the Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission Ali Akbar Mehranian and Qatari Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Qassim Al Abdullah Al Thani. In this meeting, which is held annually, new and effective steps are taken for developing and deepening the friendly relations between Tehran and Doha. Representatives from different organizations are attending the event, including 17 in the Specialized Trade Committee, six in the Infrastructure Committee, seven in the Energy Committee and 11 in the Social Committee. One of the agendas of the 9th Iran-Qatar Joint Economic

Cooperation Commission is to connect the power grids of the two countries. Iran is capable of exchanging electrical energy with all the countries that have a land border, but so far, the infrastructure of connecting the power network through the sea has not been prepared with the neighbors that the country has a maritime border with. Qatar seems to be the first country that Iran will connect its electricity network with through the sea. One of the most important documents signed by the two countries during the visit of the Iranian president and his accompanying delegation to Qatar was the memorandum of understanding on an electrical connection between Iran and Qatar with a capacity of 1000 megawatts. According to an official in Iran Power Generation, Distribution and Transmission Company (Tavanir) the project is currently being pursued. The 9th Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission will run through December 11.

## Iran, Eurasia to Implement Free Trade Soon



TEHRAN (IP) - The Head of Iran's Development and Trade Organization said that the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union would be signed within the next 20 days. Mahdi Zeighami told Iran Press that the facilitation of exports through tariff mechanism is coming to fruit and the Iran-Eurasia agreement is an important development for the country. Zeighami called the agreement a change of attitude in the Iranian free trade field with the implementation of which the first free trade of Iran would take place in recent decades. The agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union is a practice to join free trade with other regions and unions such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), he added. He also reported about two other free trade agreements to be signed with Syria and the Latin American region, respectively within the next two weeks and next three months.

## Tehran, Dushanbe Discuss Ways of Expanding Economic Ties

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - In a meeting between Iranian Vice President and Head of the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) Davoud Manzour and Tajikistan's Minister of Finance Fayziddin Qahhorzoda on Friday the two sides discussed ways of boosting economic and trade ties between the two countries. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the eighth meeting of the Board of Governors of the Asian and Pacific Center for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM) which was held in the Tajik capital Dushanbe on Friday. In this meeting, Manzour referred to the upward trend of economic relations between the two countries and underlined the important role of powerful Iranian companies active in various sectors including mining, metal, agriculture, information technology, and knowledge-based industries in the development of cooperation between the two countries. He noted that President Ebrahim Raisi believes that Tajikistan's progress and security is Iran's progress and security, emphasizing the necessity of mutual use of the capacities of the two friendly and brotherly countries for the development of relations in all areas. Qahhorzoda for his part expressed his satisfaction with the development of relations between the two countries and called for an increase in the role of Iranian companies in

the implementation of infrastructure projects in Tajikistan, including the construction of dams and hydroelectric power plants. Iranian Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian has said the trade between Iran and Tajikistan has increased by 10 times over the past two years, Fars News Agency reported. According to Mehrabian, the value of trade between the two countries which was \$23 million in the Iranian calendar year 1399 (2020-2021) reached \$280 million in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2023). The trade between the two countries also reached \$150 million in the first six months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22) and it is expected to exceed \$300 million by the end of the year (late March 2024). "During the previous visit of President Raisi to Tajikistan, the two countries had set a \$500 million target for the trade between the two sides and now considering the current trend of relations, a much higher goal can be set," Mehrabian said. Iran and Tajikistan on November 8 signed a joint statement and 18 cooperation documents and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to deepen bilateral strategic relations. The joint statement was signed between President Raisi and his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe.



## IME Weekly Trade Up by 2%



TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 3,053,794 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$650m on its physical market. According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,519,824 tons of commodities valued at more than \$426m. On this floor the IME sold 1,310,765 tons of cement, 647,000 tons of iron ore, 438,984 tons of steel, 119,000 tons of sponge iron, 7,750 tons of copper, 7,890 tons of aluminum, 365 tons of zinc, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 75 tons of lead and 45 tons of precious metals concentrate. It's worth noting that the IME also traded 5 tons of cotton on its agricultural trading floor. Moreover, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 512,618 tons of commodities worth nearly \$217m. Commodities traded on this floor included 190,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 153,785 tons of bitumen, 94,066 tons of polymeric products, 32,000 tons of lube cut, 31,269 tons of chemicals, 3,923 tons of oil, 3,775 tons of sulfur and 520 tons of feedstocks. The IME also traded within the same week 21,346 tons of goods on its side market.



## Iran Hails Guterres' Invocation of Article 99 of UN Charter

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has hailed the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' recent invocation of Article 99 of the UN Charter as a means of pushing for a humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, which has come under an unrelenting and genocidal Israeli war. Foreign Minister Hossein Amr-Abdollahian described the move as a "rare and worthwhile" measure aimed at the establishment of peace and security on the global stage. He made the remarks during a phone call with the Gaza-based Palestinian resistance movement of Hamas' Politburo Chief, Ismail Haniyeh on Friday. In a move not taken in decades, the UN chief invoked the article on Wednesday to notify the UN Security Council about the threat that is posed to international peace and security by the Israeli war. Amir-Abdollahian informed Haniyeh about the latest diplomatic maneuvers that have been taken by the Islamic Republic and other Muslim countries on the international level in support of the Palestinian people, condemnation of the Zionist regime's war crimes, and cessation of its massacre of Palestinians across Gaza and the West Bank. The top diplomat, meanwhile, told the Hamas official that the crisis in the coastal sliver had formed a central plank of earlier discussions between President Ebrahim Raisi and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. "Important talks have taken place between the Iranian and Russian presidents concerning the issue of Palestine," Amir-Abdollahian said. During a one-day trip to Moscow, the Iranian chief executive called for an immediate stop to the Israeli "genocide and crimes against humanity" in the besieged Gaza Strip, and drew attention to the United States and other Western countries' support for the Israeli atrocities. For his part, the Hamas official expressed gratitude towards the Islamic Republic over the country's well-known and consistent position of support for the Palestinian nation and Tehran's extensive diplomatic endeavors aimed at ending the Zionist regime's atrocities. "By God's grace, resistance is going to last until the cessation of Zionists' crimes and complete elimination of Palestine's occupation," he asserted.

### Turkey Says Canada, U.S. Linking Drone-Camera Exports to Sweden NATO Membership

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said Canada and the United States were insisting that Ankara ratify Sweden's NATO membership bid before Canada resumes the export of drone cameras to Turkey, the text of an interview with media showed. Speaking with reporters on a flight from Athens late on Thursday, Erdogan said the United States agreed with Canada on the issue, but that Sweden's NATO bid was to be decided by Turkey's parliament, after he sent the bill there for consideration in late October. When Erdogan signalled at a NATO conference in July that Sweden would eventually get the green light, NATO member Canada quietly agreed to re-open talks with Turkey on lifting export controls on drone parts, including optical equipment, Reuters reported. "On the issue of drone cameras we wanted from them, Canada is insisting: Sweden, Sweden. The U.S. is repeating the same thing," Erdogan said. Turkey, a NATO member, asked in October 2021 to buy 40 Lockheed Martin Corp F-16 fighters and 79 modernisation kits for its existing warplanes.



### Killings Hit Record High in 2021 as Post-Lockdown Stress Grew



VIENNA (Dispatches) - The number of murders and other intentional killings surged to a record high across the world in 2021, driven in part by the stress and economic pressures of COVID-19 lockdowns, a U.N. report said on Friday. Around 458,000 people were killed intentionally, higher than the 400,000 to 450,000 recorded every year since researchers started collating the data in 2000, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Study on Homicide said. Escalations in gang or political violence in Ecuador, Myanmar and other countries played their part, the study said. But the after-effects of lockdowns, where people were cooped up inside for long periods, also took their toll. "The noticeable spike in killings in 2021 can be attributed in part to the economic repercussions of COVID-related restrictions," the report said. Initially, the lockdowns that rolled out across the world from 2020 may have reduced the number of murders, as potential killers largely stayed inside and only mixed with people in the same household, the study said. But "in the longer term, the negative social and economic repercussions of lockdowns, which may include increased stress and anxiety, unemployment or loss of income, can be expected to affect homicide trends by creating an environment of 'strain' that drives individuals to commit crime," the report said. In Colombia, strict lockdown measures imposed in March 2020 led to a sharp but short-lived drop in homicides, the researchers found. That was followed by a surge in 2021. Overall, countries in the Americas continued to have the highest homicide rate of the five global regions - more than six times Europe's, which was the lowest. In 2021, eight of the 10 countries with the highest homicide rates were in Latin America and the Caribbean, the report said, citing factors such as crime groups competing for control of markets, weak rule of law and social inequality. Honduras, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Mexico were among those with the highest homicide rates. The two in the top 10 outside Latin America and the Caribbean were Myanmar and South Africa. In Ecuador, the government blamed a surge of killings on drug gangs that use the country as a transit point en route to the United States and Europe. In Myanmar, after overthrowing Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in February 2021, Myanmar's military junta met sustained resistance in the countryside from militias allied with that government. A 2022 U.N. report said troops had carried out mass killings and targeted civilians. Myanmar's military said it had a duty to ensure peace and security. It denied atrocities had taken place and blamed "terrorists" for causing unrest. The UNODC homicide study, published every four to five years, analysed developments up to 2021 as that was the latest year with a full set of data. The study said it looked at killings of one person by another that were intentional and unlawful. "Death as a result of terrorist activities" was included despite the lack of an international definition of terrorism, and most conflict deaths were excluded, though "it is often difficult to disentangle" the types of killing in conflict situations that should be included and those that should not, the study said.

### Guatemala Electoral Court Stands Firm on Bid to Annul Election



GUATEMALA CITY (Dispatches) - Guatemala's electoral court insisted the results of elections won by anti-graft candidate Bernardo Arevalo were "unchangeable", after the prosecutor's office sought to annul them amid accusations of an "attempted coup". Political outsider Arevalo, who is slated to assume office on January 14, has faced an onslaught of legal challenges since his surprise second-round election victory in August, including attempts to suspend his political party and stop him from taking power. The 65-year-old's triumph and his pledge to fight graft are widely seen in Guatemala as alarming to the establishment political elite. On Friday, prosecutor Leonor Morales said investigations have concluded that the election of Arevalo, his vice-president and parliamentarians was "null and void" due to counting "anomalies" in the first round in June. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) responded by saying "the results are validated, formalized and unchangeable." TSE president Blanca Alfaro told reporters the elected officials must assume office in January as planned or else there would be "a breach of the constitutional order." In Washington, the Organization of American States secretariat in a statement said it "condemns the attempted coup d'etat by the Public Prosecutor's Office of Guatemala." "The attempt to annul this year's general elections constitutes the worst form of democratic breakdown and the consolidation of a political fraud against the will of the people," the statement added. The OAS urged outgoing president Alejandro Giammattei, the constitutional and supreme courts and Congress "to defend the institutions and constitutional order of the country by taking action against the perpetrators of this attack in order to preserve democracy in Guatemala." Arevalo, speaking at a news conference, called the actions of the prosecutor's office an "absurd, ridiculous and perverse coup d'etat." He called on Guatemalans to "energetically defend" the country from efforts by Attorney General Consuelo Porras and senior prosecutor Rafael Curruiche to impede his taking power. "The coup perpetrators are trying to destroy the democratic regime and put an end to the basic right of Guatemalans to live in freedom," he said. Porras, Curruiche and Judge Freddy Orellana - who had ordered the suspension of Arevalo's Semilla (Seed) party - are all on a US list of "corrupt actors." Curruiche was present at Friday's press conference, saying "the information that was recorded in the closing and counting act at all polling stations should be annulled." This "criminal information" would be submitted to the TSE, he said, for a final decision. The tribunal has already certified Arevalo's election, but last month it suspended his party for a second time over alleged irregularities with its registration. That investigation is led by Curruiche. On Friday, Judge Alfaro said the prosecutor's office had no authority to make the TSE annul an election.



## Gaza Fighting Intensifies, U.S. Vetoes UNSC Demand for Ceasefire

GAZA (Dispatches) - The United States kept up pressure on Israel to do more to protect Palestinian civilians during a fierce offensive against Hamas militants across Gaza, even as Washington vetoed a U.N. Security Council demand for an immediate ceasefire. Fighting escalated and the Palestinian death toll rose on Friday, with Israel pounding the enclave from north to south in an expanded phase of the two-month-old war against the Islamist group Hamas. Decrying a "spiralling humanitarian nightmare", U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres declared that nowhere in Gaza was safe for civilians, hours before the U.S. vetoed a Security Council resolution backed by the vast majority of its members calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. The vote left Washington diplomatically isolated on the 15-member council. Thirteen members voted in favor of the draft resolution put forward by the United Arab Emirates, while Britain abstained. Deputy U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Robert Wood told the council: "We do not support this resolution's call for an unsustainable ceasefire that will only plant the seeds for the next war." The United States and Israel oppose a ceasefire, saying it would only benefit Hamas, which Israel has vowed to annihilate in response to the militants' deadly Oct. 7 cross-border rampage. Washington instead supports "pauses" like the seven-day halt in fighting that saw Hamas release some hostages and the humanitarian aid flow increase. The deal broke down on Dec. 1. Palestinian U.N. envoy Riyad Mansour told the council the vote means that "millions of Palestinian lives hang in the balance." Ezzat El-Reshqi, a member of Hamas' political bureau, condemned the U.S. veto as "inhumane." Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan said in a statement: "A ceasefire will be possible only with the return of all the hostages and the destruction of Hamas." In Washington, the White House on Friday said more could be done by Israel to reduce civilian casualties and the U.S. shared international concerns about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. "We certainly all recognize more can be done to try to reduce civilian casualties," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters. On Thursday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken sharpened Washington's language, saying it was imperative that Israel took steps to safeguard Gaza's civilian population. "And there does remain a gap between...the intent to protect civilians and the actual results that we're seeing on the ground," he told a press conference. Describing the

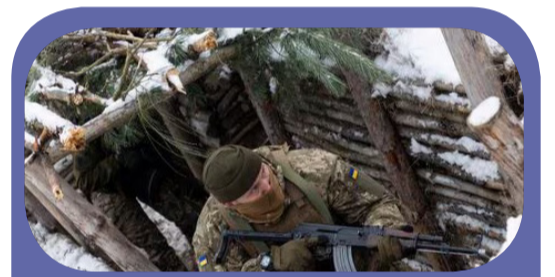
situation as "at a breaking point," Guterres said the collapse of Gaza's humanitarian system could result in a complete breakdown of public order. Most Gazans are now displaced, hospitals overrun and food running out. Residents and the Israeli military both reported intensified fighting in both northern areas, where Israel had previously said its troops had largely completed their tasks last month, and in the south where they mounted a new assault this week. Gaza's health ministry reported 350 people killed on Thursday, and on Friday it said the death toll from Israel's campaign in Gaza had risen to 17,487. More strikes were reported on Friday in Khan Younis in the south, the Nuseirat camp in the centre and Gaza City in the north. On Friday evening, residents reported intensified Israeli tank fire in north Gaza, while health officials said at least 10 people were killed in an air strike on a house in Khan Younis. Israel's military said 94 Israeli soldiers had been killed fighting in Gaza since its ground invasion of the densely populated enclave began in mid-October in retaliation for Hamas' rampage in southern Israel in which militants killed 1,200 people and took more than 240 hostages. An Israeli commander, Brig. Gen. Dan Goldfuss, said in a video message recorded in Khan Younis that his forces were fighting house to house and "shaft to shaft", a reference to tunnel shafts, a reference to tunnel shafts, a reference to tunnel shafts. Since the Israeli military campaign began, most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes, and residents say it has become almost impossible to find refuge. Israel says it is providing detail about which areas are safe and that Hamas is to blame for harm to civilians because it operates among them, an accusation the Islamist group denies. Hamas reported the most intense clashes with Israeli forces were taking place in the north in Shejia, as well as in the south in Khan Younis, where Israeli forces reached the heart of the enclave's second-biggest city on Wednesday. Israel's chief military spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagan said Israel had detained more than 200 suspects from Gaza in the last 48 hours and dozens were taken to Israel for questioning. Reuters journalists in southern Gaza have seen dead and wounded swamping the main Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, where there was no room on the floor on Friday for arriving patients sprawled across blood-smeared tiles. With the fighting now going on in all directions, there was no place left to flee, said Yamen, sheltering at a school in central Gaza with his family.



## EU Strikes Deal on Landmark AI Law

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - EU member states and lawmakers clinched a deal on how to draft "historic" rules regulating artificial intelligence models such as ChatGPT - after 36 hours of negotiations. Meeting in Brussels, negotiators nailed down curbs on how AI can be used in Europe, which they said would not hurt innovation in the sector nor the prospects for future European AI champions. "Historic! With the political deal on the AI Act sealed today, the EU becomes the first continent to set clear rules for the use of AI," declared the EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton. "The AI Act is much more than a rulebook -- it's a launchpad for EU startups and researchers to lead the global race for trustworthy AI," he added. The "AI Act" has been rushed through the European Union's legislative process this year after the chatbot ChatGPT, a mass-market gateway to generative AI, exploded onto the scene late 2022. Although ChatGPT's ability to create articulate essays and poems was a dizzying display of AI's rapid advances, critics worry about how the technology can be misused. Generative AI software, which also includes Google's chatbot Bard, can quickly produce text, images and audio from simple commands in everyday language. Other examples of generative AI include Dall-E, Midjourney and Stable Diffusion, which can create images in nearly any style on demand. Negotiators initially failed to agree after marathon talks that began on Wednesday lasted 22 hours and ended with only a deal to resume talks the next day. Exhausted negotiators then restarted talks at 0800 GMT on Friday. There had been no real deadline but senior EU figures were desperate to secure a deal before the end of the year. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, first proposed the law in 2021 to regulate AI systems based on risk assessments of the software models. The higher the risk to individuals' rights or health, for example, the greater the systems' obligations. The law will still need to be formally approved by member states and the parliament, but Friday's political agreement was seen as the last serious hurdle. "The AI Act is a global first. A unique legal framework for the development of AI you can trust," EU chief

Ursula von der Leyen said in a social media post, welcoming the deal. "And for the safety and fundamental rights of people and businesses. A commitment we took in our political guidelines - and we delivered. I welcome today's political agreement." The EU is not alone in its worries over AI. US President Joe Biden issued an executive order on AI safety standards in October and, while Europe is on track for the first broad law covering the sector, Chinese legislation specifically regulating generative AI came into force in August this year. One of the main stumbling blocks during negotiations was how to regulate general-purpose AI systems such as ChatGPT. Some member states feared too much regulation would hurt the growth of European champions like Germany's Aleph Alpha or France's Mistral AI. French digital minister Jean-Noel Barrot said France would "carefully analyse the compromise" agreed and ensure that it "preserves Europe's capacity to develop its own artificial intelligence technologies". The agreement includes a two-tier approach, with transparency requirements for all general-purpose AI models and tougher requirements for the more powerful models. Another sticking point had been over remote biometric surveillance - basically, facial identification through camera data in public places. Governments wanted exceptions for law enforcement and national security purposes. While the agreement has a ban on real-time facial recognition, there will be a limited number of exceptions. But not everyone was happy with the agreement. "Regrettably speed seems to have prevailed over quality, with potentially disastrous consequences for the European economy," said Daniel Friedlaender, Europe chief at CClA, one of the main tech lobbying groups. "It might even end up chasing away the European champions that the EU so desperately wants to empower," said CClA Europe's policy manager, Boniface de Champris. The EU will be able to monitor and sanction those who violate the law through a new body called the EU AI office that will be attached to the commission. The office will have the power to slap a fine worth seven percent of a company's turnover or 35 million euros, whichever is larger.



## Ukrainian Troops Train in Poland for Harsh Winter Warfare

WEDRZYN (Dispatches) - In a snow-covered field in western Poland, Ukrainian soldiers are being trained in trench warfare, just days before being sent to the front in what has become a grinding war of attrition against Russia. Reuters was among a number of media organizations invited this week to watch the training, which was conducted by soldiers from Poland, France and Belgium, in Wedrzyn, around 40 kilometres from the German border. "Most of the people have actually no military experience and they are taught how to execute some basic tactics," said one Ukrainian soldier. "We are taught how to use weapons in urban areas and in trenches." The training was conducted by the Combined Arms Training Command, which was established as part of the European Union's efforts to aid Ukraine's military. Exercises have been held in 24 out of the bloc's 27 member states. "We will keep adapting because the situation on the battlefield is changing every day," said Lieutenant General Michiel van der Laan, Director General European Union Military Staff. Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and now controls nearly a fifth of its territory. A Ukrainian counteroffensive, under way since June, has made no major breakthrough. Ukraine's Commander-in-Chief General Valery Zaluzhnyi has said the war is moving towards a new stage of static and attritional fighting which could allow Moscow to rebuild its military power. Operations could be further complicated by the weather as the bitter winter cold sets in. "I would say that winter is the most demanding season when it comes to the war. It severely limits our movement and manoeuvrability while the enemy clearly sees us through heat cameras and drones," said the Ukrainian soldier. A second Ukrainian soldier said the training the troops were receiving in Poland would help them make progress in the counteroffensive. "Fighting in the trenches is one of the most important elements in this war... I think that improving skills in this area will help our soldiers succeed on the battlefield," he said.

## Putin Announces Presidential Candidacy in 2024 Elections

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Vladimir Putin moved to prolong his repressive and unyielding grip on Russia for at least another six years, announcing his candidacy in the presidential election next March that he is all but certain to win. Putin still commands wide support after nearly a quarter-century in power, despite starting an immensely costly war in Ukraine that has taken thousands of his countrymen's lives, provoked repeated attacks inside Russia - including one on the Kremlin itself - and corroded its aura of invincibility. Putin announced his decision to run in the March 17 presidential election after a Kremlin award ceremony, when war veterans and others pleaded with him to seek re-election. "I won't hide it from you - I had various thoughts about it over time, but now, you're right, it's necessary to make a decision," Putin said in a video released by the Kremlin after the event. "I will run for president of the Russian Federation." Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center noted that the announcement was made in a low-key way instead of a live televised speech, probably reflecting the Kremlin's spin effort to emphasize Putin's modesty and his perceived focus on doing his job as opposed to loud campaigning. About 80% of the populace approves of Putin's performance,

according to the independent pollster Levada Center. Whether due to real or coerced support, Putin is expected to face only token opposition on the ballot. Putin, 71, has twice used his leverage to amend the constitution so he could theoretically stay in power until he's in his mid-80s. He is already the longest-serving Kremlin leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, who died in 1953. In 2008, he stepped aside to become prime minister due to term limits but continued calling the shots. Presidential terms were then extended to six years from four, while another package of amendments he pushed through three years ago reset the count for two consecutive terms to begin in 2024. At the time of the amendments that allowed him two more terms, Putin's concern about losing power may have been elevated: Levada polling showed his approval rating significantly lower, hovering around 60%. In the view of some analysts, that dip in popularity could have been a main driver of the war that Putin launched in Ukraine in February 2022. Putin's rule has spanned five U.S. presidencies, from Bill Clinton to Joe Biden. He became acting president on New Year's Eve in 1999, when Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned. He was elected to his first term in March 2000.





## Magic Emphatically Send Pistons to 19th Straight Loss

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Franz Wagner scored 27 points and Paolo Banchero added 24 points as the Orlando Magic handed the visiting Detroit Pistons their 19th straight loss, 123-91. Cole Anthony had 16 points and Goga Bitadze added 13 points, eight rebounds and four blocks for Orlando, which led by as many as 34 and snapped a two-game skid. Gary Harris chipped in 11 points. Cade Cunningham led Detroit with 21 points and six assists. Killian Hayes added 16 points and Alec Burks scored 14 for the Pistons, who were held to a season-low point total and fell to 2-20 overall. Detroit shot 6-of-30 (20 percent) from 3-point range and committed 15 turnovers. The Pistons are closing in on the NBA's single-season record of 26 straight losses, set by the Cleveland Cavaliers in 2010-11 and the Philadelphia 76ers in 2013-14. Orlando improved to 10-2 at home after shooting 55.1 percent from the field and 10-of-26 (38.5 percent) from 3-point range. The Pistons claimed an early 18-12 lead, but trailed by five after Orlando closed the first quarter on a 16-5 run. Bitadze scored 11 points in the period. Orlando carried the momentum into the second quarter and held a 58-44 advantage at the half. Banchero scored 17 points in the half to lead all scorers. Hayes had 12 points for Detroit, which shot 42.5 percent from the field and 3-of-12 (25 percent) from beyond the arc. Anthony Black's layup midway through the third quarter capped a 14-1 run and pushed Orlando's lead to 75-49. The Magic kept the pressure on and led by as many as 29 before taking a commanding 93-68 lead into the final quarter. Detroit's losing streak is the longest in one season in franchise history and second-longest overall behind a 21-game skid at the end of the 1979-80 season and start of 1980-81. Orlando played without Jalen Suggs (right ankle strain) and Jonathan Isaac (right ankle sprain). Detroit was without forward Jalen Duren, who will miss the next two weeks after suffering a left ankle sprain in Wednesday's loss to the Memphis Grizzlies.

Meanwhile Joel Embiid had 38 points, 14 rebounds and four blocked shots to lift the host Philadelphia 76ers past the Atlanta Hawks 125-114. Tyrese Maxey put up 30 points, De'Anthony Melton scored 15 and Tobias Harris contributed 13 for the Sixers, who have won two straight. Kelly Oubre Jr. added 11 points off the bench. De'Andre Hunter scored 24 points and Bogdan Bogdanovic and Dejounte Murray each had 20 for the Hawks, who played without star guard Trae Young because of an illness. Saddiq Bey scored 16 and Clint Capela had 15 points and 16 rebounds for the Hawks, who have lost three in a row. The Hawks pulled ahead 109-106 with 5:03 left before Philadelphia finished the game on a 19-5 run. Despite appearing to tweak his knee, Embiid stayed active and knocked down a pair of free throws with 3:31 remaining to tie the game at 109. The Sixers moved in front with 3:15 to go following a dunk by Melton. The Sixers then scored the next nine points to make it a 15-0 run, capped by Maxey's 3-pointer with 1:22 remaining for a commanding 121-109 lead. Philadelphia led by as many as 14 points in the first half. The Hawks closed within 57-51 after Bogdanovic made two 3-pointers 43 seconds apart. Bogdanovic stayed hot with a corner trey and the Hawks trailed 57-56 with 3:28 remaining. On the Sixers' next possession, Harris converted a three-point play. Atlanta closed with a 12-2 run to take a 68-62 lead at halftime thanks in large part to 17 first-half points from Bogdanovic. Embiid led the Sixers with 17, all of which came in the first quarter. The Hawks held an 81-78 lead with 6:07 left in the third following a dunk by Capela. Maxey knocked down a corner trey with 5:00 remaining to put the Sixers ahead 85-83. Hunter hit a short jumper with 3:15 to go and the Hawks led 88-87, but the Sixers held a slim 93-92 advantage at the end of the third. The Hawks had a chance to go ahead but Patty Mills' 3-pointer rimmed out at the buzzer.

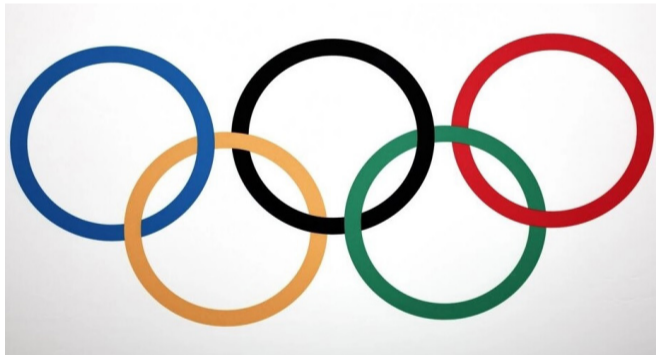
## Ronaldo Marks His 1,200th Game in Style



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo celebrated his 1,200th professional match with a goal and an assist as he helped his Saudi League side Al-Nassr to get a 4-1 win over Al-Riyadh. "Cristiano Ronaldo has now played in 1,200 professional matches," the Saudi League posted on the X platform, as the former Real Madrid player moved closer to Peter Shilton who leads the list of male players with most official appearances. The 38-year-old Ronaldo opened the scoring shortly after the half-hour mark when he tapped in a cross from Sadio Mane, who had had a goal disallowed in the first minute of the game. The Portuguese strengthened his status as the league's top scorer with his 16 goals from the season's 16 matches and helped his team to bounce back following a 3-0 defeat to leaders Al-Hilal last Friday. "Three more points!" Ronaldo posted on social media. "Thankful to all my team mates who helped me reach my 1,200th match. What a ride but we're not done yet!" Three minutes into first-half injury time, Ronaldo assisted on his countryman Otavio's headed goal. Al-Nassr's Brazilian Talisca netted twice in the second half, with a consolation goal from Al-Riyadh's Andre Gray coming in between. Al-Nassr are second in the standings with 37 points, seven adrift of Al-Hilal, while Al-Riyadh are 14th with 16 points. Former England goalkeeper Shilton is acknowledged as the record holder for the most competitive men's professional games, though the total is disputed. Some statistics websites say the tally is 1,390 but Shilton himself, on his X feed, gives it as 1,387.

## IOC Clears Russians to Compete in Paris as Neutrals

LAUSANNE (Dispatches) - Olympic chiefs gave the green light to the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes at next year's Paris Games as neutrals, outside of team events and as long as they did not actively support the war on Ukraine. The International Olympic Committee added that there were currently only eight athletes from Russia and three from Belarus who had qualified as neutral athletes. In comparison, more than 60 Ukrainian athletes have qualified for next year's Paris Olympics. The IOC's executive board "decided that Individual Neutral Athletes (INAs) who have qualified through the existing qualification systems of the International Federations (IFs) on the field of play will be declared eligible to compete at the Olympic Games Paris 2024". But only, it added, if they meet strict eligibility conditions. That includes the exclusion of "teams of athletes with a Russian or Belarusian passport". Also missing out will be "athletes who actively support the war" as well as "athletes who are contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military or national security agencies". Additionally, "no flag, anthem, colors or any other identifications whatsoever of Russia or Belarus will be displayed at the Olympic Games Paris 2024 in any official venue or any official function". "No Russian or Belarusian government or state officials will be invited to or accredited for the Olympic Games Paris 2024." Russia denounced the conditions placed on its athletes as "discriminatory", but said athletes who meet the criteria would go to Paris. "The conditions are discriminatory, they are going against the principles of sport," said Russian sports minister Oleg Matysin. "They are damaging the Olympic Games themselves, and not Russian sport. The approach is unacceptable." World Athletics president Sebastian Coe, though, insisted that there would be no neutral athletes taking part in track and field at the Games. Athletes from Russia and Belarus have faced sanctions from a multitude of sports since Moscow launched its assault on Ukraine in February 2022. Over the past year a number of Olympic sports have eased restrictions,



allowing athletes from both countries to return to competition under certain conditions. However, Russians and Belarusians have remained banned from athletics. "You may well see some neutral athletes from Russia and Belarus in Paris, it just won't be in athletics," Coe told a press conference. "The position that our sport took and has consistently taken is unchanged." In March, the IOC lifted an outright ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes, allowing them to compete as neutral athletes provided they did not support the Ukraine conflict and had no ties to the military. The issue was raised again on Tuesday when representatives of international sports federations and national Olympic committees called for Russian and Belarusian athletes to be admitted under a neutral flag for the July 26 to August 11 2024 Games in Paris "as soon as possible". During the Olympic summit in Lausanne, athlete representatives also asked for "clarity" on the issue. In an interview with AFP on Thursday, Ukraine's acting sports minister said his government was "very concerned" by that call from those IFs and NOCs. Matviy Bidnyi said Kyiv was concerned that the move gave the impression that the IOC "does not want to demonstrate the necessary leadership in the matter of Olympic fairness and justice". "As aptly stated by President Volodymyr Zelensky: 'Obviously, any neutral flag of Russian athletes is stained with blood,'" Bidnyi told AFP. "We count on a responsible decision and leadership of the IOC, which will not allow Russia to use sport for military propaganda." "Even if it's sport under a neutral flag," the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) remains suspended, the IOC having instigated a ban in October for its violation of the territorial integrity of the membership of Ukraine by recognising illegally annexed territories. ROC has recognized organizations from four Ukrainian territories annexed since Russia's invasion began in 2022. Russia's Olympic body last month launched an appeal against its suspension by the IOC at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

## Juventus Back on Top After Clinical Win



TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus delivered an efficient performance as they moved back to provisional top spot in Serie A, securing a 1-0 home win against a wasteful Napoli thanks to a header from Federico Gatti. Six minutes into the second half, Juve broke the deadlock when Gatti collected an Andrea Cambiaso cross at the back post, outjumping his marker to head it into the back of the net. Napoli had numerous opportunities but Khvicha Kvaratskhelia missed a huge chance, while Juventus goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny made several saves to thwart the visitors' clear scoring chances. Juve top the standings with 36 points, one ahead of Inter Milan who host lowly Udinese. "We did well in the first half, moving the ball side to side, then in difficult moments the team becomes a block of granite," Juve manager Massimiliano Allegri told DAZN. "I have a group of players who work hard. We need to slow things down, not always try to make it one-touch football. We should control the ball better in some moments of the match." Asked about Juve's stated hopes of a top-four finish, Allegri said: "We can even say in the dressing room that we have the ambition to win the Scudetto but you need to get results. There's no point talking about what might be, we need to focus on what is." For Napoli, the match highlighted their struggling form, marking three consecutive defeats across all competitions for the first time since October 2016. They are fifth with 24 points. "Anyone who knows football realizes there are moments. The guys played a great game, I think they dominated the match and forced Juventus to defend in their own area for almost the entire second half," manager Walter Mazzarri said. Napoli's intense start saw them creating several early chances, with Giovanni Di Lorenzo denied by Szczesny's goal-line save and Matteo Politano narrowly missing the post moments later. Juve had their best chance of the first half when Dusan Vlahovic's close-range attempt was blocked by Natan, and Weston McKennie's subsequent rebound with an overhead kick was denied by Napoli goalkeeper Alex Meret. Just before the half-hour mark, Kvaratskhelia found himself alone with Szczesny inside the box after being set free by Victor Osimhen. However, the Georgian winger sent the ball over the bar, much to the surprise and relief of the home fans, and causing visible frustration for Mazzarri. "I have seen a team that always played good football, better than the opposition, but we don't seem to be able to score goals. If we do not score that Kvara chance, it is a clear sign we are in a negative period. Bad luck happens too," Mazzarri said.

## Messi Has Brought Transformational Year for MLS

COLUMBUS (Dispatches) - Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber says his league has enjoyed a "transformational year" crediting the arrival of Lionel Messi and the broadcast deal with Apple TV for unprecedented interest. But while he said North America would become the "epicenter" of the game with the World Cup, Copa America and FIFA Club World Cup all coming to the region, Garber acknowledged squeezing in all the club and country competitions was a headache. In his annual "state of the league" address ahead of Saturday's MLS Cup final between Columbus Crew and Los Angeles FC, Garber said MLS was trending upwards in all key areas. "Lionel Messi had many options for the next chapter of his iconic soccer career. The magnitude of his decision to join MLS cannot be over-stated," Garber said. "A World Cup champion, an eight-time Ballon d'Or winner is playing in our league. We're not just part of the global conversation of sports but one of the biggest stories in the world, certainly one of the biggest stories this summer," added Garber. Messi's arrival early in a new 10-year global streaming deal with Apple TV meant "more fans watch MLS games here and around the world than ever before" said Garber, without revealing overall audience figures from Apple. MLS has also seen rising numbers of fans in stadiums across the country with the derby between Los Angeles FC and Los Angeles Galaxy attracting a league record 82,110 to the Rose Bowl on July 4. Garber said there had been a record of "nearly 12 million fans" at MLS games throughout the year and

also hailed the new Leagues Cup, held jointly with clubs from Mexico's Liga MX, as a "smashing success". The tournament in the middle of the MLS regular season was won by Messi and Inter Miami and the World Cup-style format won over my skeptics. "It was a success on every measure and as with so many things this year went on to exceed so many of our expectations. It is only the beginning. This is a tournament which will continue to grow in scale, in scope and reach in the years ahead," he said. But the addition of Leagues Cup games comes into a calendar that will be



squeezed by the major tournaments coming to the USA in the coming years. Next year will see the USA host the Copa America before the new, expanded 32-team, FIFA Club World Cup is held in the country a year ahead of the World Cup itself, co-hosted with Canada and Mexico. "For the next few years, North America will be the epicenter for the beautiful game," he said. But with the Leagues Cup, CONCACAF Champions Cup, the US Open Cup as well as the regular season and the playoffs, fitting all the games in while protecting players from burn-out remains a challenge. Garber said MLS would not stop play during Copa America saying they could not afford to halt their season but would have to be "creative" with their schedule. MLS usually plays through the regional CONCACAF Gold Cup but Garber said there was no question of the league continuing during the World Cup. "Clearly the World Cup in 2026 is a different animal, I can't imagine we are going to be playing games during that, but the economic impact of that is significant," he said. Garber said the big picture may require some changes to how the MLS season is organized and hinted that "Apertura and Clausura" system, used in some South and Central American countries along with Mexico, where the season is split into two separate halves, could be one option. Garber also said MLS was talking to US Soccer about how to improve the knockout US Open Cup. "That process is ongoing and there might be changes to our participation sometime in the future, there is nothing we can announce right now," he said.