

Russia and Iran Will Speed Up Work on a Major New Interstate Agreement, Russia's Foreign Ministry Said in a Statement on Tuesday After a Phone Call Between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and His Iranian Counterpart

# IRAN NEWS

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian Has Traveled to the Swiss City of Geneva to Take Part in a Meeting Held by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

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### Iran Experiences Surge in Trade Amid Challenges



TEHRAN (IP) - The Iranian government has reported a significant increase in trade volume with its neighboring countries, reaching \$38 billion in the first eight months of this year. This development underscores the expansion of Iran's diplomatic and economic ties within the region. Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori-Jahromi, in response to Iran Press, emphasized that the Raisi administration has prioritized economic cooperation and strengthening neighborhood relations, particularly with the 15 neighboring countries. This focus has been a central theme in the administration's discussions and agreements. According to him, the positive effects of these bilateral and multilateral interactions are evident in the country's economic growth. Iran has achieved a 7% growth rate. In the first two quarters of 2023, the value of Iran's exports to neighboring countries reached \$18 billion, marking a 12% growth compared to the same period last year. Bahadori-Jahromi also highlighted the government's efforts to bolster domestic production by importing raw materials and equipment. This strategy aligns with Iran's broader economic policy, which has been characterized by a significant state presence in manufacturing and financial services. He expressed optimism about the 1403 budget bill, emphasizing the need for realistic estimations of resources and expenses. He highlighted the importance of cooperation between the government and parliament in avoiding unrealistic estimations of resources, similar to the cooperation seen in the approval of the 7th development plan. The 1403 budget bill is currently under review. The proposed budget plan for the next Persian year underscores a commitment to financial discipline and a lowered reliance on oil revenue in Iran's public budget. In terms of trade, Bahadori Jahromi noted that in the first 8 months of 1402, the value of Iran's exports compared to its neighbors reached 18 billion dollars, an increase of about 12%. The total amount of trade with the neighbors has reached 38 billion dollars, and the majority of imports have been aimed at raw materials and equipment. The 1403 budget bill is based on the 7th development plan.



### Iran Dismisses IAEA's Concerns on Undeclared Locations

TEHRAN - Refuting the claims fabricated by the Zionist regime and the MKO terrorists about the so-called undeclared locations in Iran, the Iranian nuclear chief said the files on two of those four sites have been closed as two of them proved to be desolate mines. In an address at a university in Tehran on Monday, Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami said the case of the so-called undeclared locations, where the International Atomic Energy Agency suspected that Iran's nuclear activities may have had possible military dimensions (PMDs), has already been dismissed. The undeclared locations in Iran were nothing but a story fabricated by the terrorist Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) and the Zionist regime's spy service, he added. Eslami said the file on two of the four alleged undeclared locations was closed in March and the IAEA affirmed that it has no more questions about them. The disputed location in Marivan and another site in Abadeh were nothing but desolate mines, he stated, saying another place defined as an undeclared location was used for the sale of scrap iron. He highlighted Iran's close cooperation with the UN nuclear agency, stressing that all of the nuclear activities in the country are in conformity with the IAEA regulations, the NPT and the Safeguards Agreement. Eslami also reiterated that Western powers use the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA) as a tool. Regarding the IAEA chief's claims and the IAEA inspectors, Eslami on Tuesday said: We act according to safeguards, when they introduce an inspector, we have the right to accept or reject. We do not have any activities other than safeguards and the NPT framework, the IAEA's report is based on JCPOA, he said. But when the parties did not fulfill their commitments, pressure on Iran is not acceptable, he added. Our relations are based on safeguards and NPT and we only cooperate in this framework, he stressed. Regarding the sale of Iran's heavy water, Eslami said: We sell our heavy water officially. The US bought once and today we have requests from other countries, he further noted. Our strategy is to process heavy water and use its derivatives, he stated.

### Iran Determined to Force U.S. Aircraft Carrier Out of Regional Waters



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Commander of the Iranian Navy Rear Admiral Shahram Irani says the country is determined to force out of regional waters a major US aircraft carrier that has been deployed under the pretext of preventing an escalation of the conflict in Palestine. Irani said on Monday that the Iranian Navy has become a major influential force in the region, adding that the force will not buckle under extra-regional pressure. He ruled out claims that USS Dwight D. Eisenhower has arrived in the region to change the military and political equations in the region. "It should be said that they have come [to the region] to sow division and meet their own needs... we will soon force them out of the region," said the commander while speaking in a gathering in Tehran that was focused on Iran's maritime activities in its southeastern waters. The comments come amid a fragile maritime situation in the region which many believe is a direct result of the conflict in Palestine where the Israeli regime has been involved in a relentless military campaign in the Gaza Strip for more than two months. The United States dispatched two of its major aircraft carriers to the region right after the war in Gaza started on October 7. Washington said at the time that the warships had been sent to prevent a regional spread of the war and to protect Israel and allies against threats from other countries. That comes as US navy forces have been unable to fend off attacks by Yemeni resistance forces on Israeli-linked ships that pass the Arab country's ports in the Red Sea.

### Neither Israel Nor U.S. Will Be Able to Obliterate Hamas



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has warned Israel and the US that they would never be able to realize their goal of wiping out Hamas even if they spend a decade to fight the Palestinian resistance movement. "Neither Israel nor the US, even if they spend another 10 years in Gaza, will be able to obliterate Hamas," Amir-Abdollahian said while addressing the Doha Forum in Qatar via video conference on Monday. Amir-Abdollahian added that it was wrong to assume that the Hamas military operation, which started on October 7, triggered the Israeli onslaught on Gaza as it was rather the continuation of the Zionists' 75-year aggression against Palestinians. It is clear that the fighting has already been expanded to the Lebanese and Yemeni fronts, he emphasized, referring to operations conducted by the Yemeni military and the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement in retaliation for the Israeli massacre in Gaza. Israel waged the war on Gaza after the Palestinian Hamas resistance group carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in retaliation for the regime's intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. According to the Gaza's health ministry, the death toll of the Palestinians who have been killed since the start of Israel's brutal aggression has risen to 18,205, mostly women and children, while more than 49,645 have been wounded. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under the rubble in Gaza, which is under "complete siege" by Israel. Elsewhere in his address, Amir-Abdollahian once again reiterated Iran's opposition to the so-called two-state solution to the Palestinian issue, saying it would not help solve the conflict. "Israel has occupied the Palestinian land and we believe that a two-state solution will not help resolve the Palestinian issue. In the Palestinian land, only a Palestinian government should be formed based on a referendum," Amir-Abdollahian said, noting that such a referendum should be held with the participation of the original inhabitants of Palestine, including the Jews. The top Iranian diplomat also slammed the US move to veto a UN resolution calling for an urgent humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

## Grand Global Festivity of Muhammad (PBUH) 1500



Middle of Lunar month of Rabi' al-awwal 1447 [early September 2025] corresponds to the 1500th birthday of Muhammad (PBUH), the Prophet of Islam.

It would be appropriate for the leaders of Islamic countries to plan from now on for a "Grand Global Celebration" from the eleventh to the seventeenth of Rabi' al-awwal 1447 [Sept. 04, 2023 - Sept. 10, 2023].

Some suggestions in this regard are as follows:

- 1- Naming this week under the name: "Unity, Mercy and Peace in the World".
- 2- Providing financial and humanitarian aid such as building schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc. for underprivileged Muslims around the world.
- 3- Organizing Quranic, film, book and music festivals etc. related to Prophet Muhammad and awarding prizes to the winners of the festivals.
- 4- Organizing celebrations by the Muslims all over the world in mosques and Islamic centers during this week with honoring and hosting the guests with every religion and belief.

In the hope that peace and tranquility will prevail all over the world  
Abolfazl Joker  
Bonn - Germany



### Iran, Oman Stress Promoting Banking, Trade, Economic Cooperation



TEHRAN (MNA) - Officials from Iran and the Sultanate of Oman emphasized the need to enhance bilateral relations in the fields of banking, trade and economy. Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Mohammad Reza Farzin during a visit to Muscat held talks with Omani Finance Minister Sultan bin Salim bin Said al-Habsi on Monday to discuss bilateral ties and issues of mutual interest. The two sides exchanged views on boosting bilateral ties in the monetary-banking fields. Highlighting the 41-percent growth of trade volume between Tehran and Muscat in the current year, Farzin emphasized the need for increasing cooperation to facilitate trade-economic ties and develop trade exchanges between the two countries. Given the amicable ties between Tehran and Muscat, he described strengthening trade and economic relations between Iran and Oman as important. The Central Bank of Iran will take advantage of all capacities to increase monetary and banking cooperation between the two countries in line with spurring bilateral trade exchanges, Farzin underlined. The Omani finance minister, for his part, emphasized the activation of various capacities of Oman for the development of cooperation with Iran.

# IRAN NEWS



## Trial of MKO Terrorists Kicks Off in Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A court in the Iranian capital Tehran has kicked off the hearing of charges of the crimes committed by members of a terrorist group dubbed Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO). On Tuesday, the Branch 11th of the Criminal Court of Tehran province holds a trial of the ringleaders and members of the MKO terrorist group to publicize parts of atrocities and genocide against humanity that they committed against the oppressed Iranian nation. The indictment of the case encompasses over 700 pages, which is read in the presence of families of the victims of terrorism, eyewitnesses to the heinous terrorism in the 1980s, as well as correspondents. According to the criminal court, some 104 members of the terrorist group and a legal entity (the MKO) are sued in the trial for committing inhumane crimes.

## India to Expand Activities in Iran's Free Zones



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The secretary of Iran's Free Zones High Council has traveled to India to meet and hold talks with Indian officials to develop cooperation between the two countries in free zones. Hojatollah Abdolmaleki arrived in India on Monday and on the first day of his visit met with Iran's Ambassador to Delhi Iraj Elahi in which the officials explored the ways of boosting cooperation between Iran and India in the Islamic Republic's free zones. Abdolmaleki also met and held talks with the representatives of one of India's largest steel companies, during which he invited the Indian side to invest in Iran's free zones. Considering the low production costs and the ease of doing business, import and export, and suitable infrastructures that exist in the free and special economic zones of Iran, including the Chabahar Free Zone, the Indian production group expressed its interest in investing in the production of downstream steel products in Iran's free and special economic zones.



## Iran, Qatar Ink Joint Economic Cooperation Document to Bolster Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN - Officials from Iran and Qatar signed a cooperation document to strengthen mutual ties in various fields including trade, economy, industry and energy. At the closing ceremony of the 9th Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, the economic cooperation document was inked between Iran's Minister of Energy Ali Akbar Mehrabian and Qatar's Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohammed Bin Hamad Bin Qassim Al-Abdullah Al-Thani. The two sides emphasized strengthening cooperation in the field of energy (water and sewage, electricity, oil, gas and environment) and the exchange of experiences and technical know-how, holding events such as exhibitions, specialized training courses in the field of water and wastewater technologies, solar and renewable energy, cooperation of the private sectors of the two countries in the fields of consulting and contracting, and manufacturing equipment related to the electricity industry of the two countries, etc. In addition, the two countries vowed to enhance trade and industrial cooperation in banking, insurance and customs interaction, technical and engineering services, free zones, and investment. In the social and cultural fields, the two countries expressed their readiness to hold a meeting of the technical committee of the tourism cooperation, expansion of cooperation between medical sciences universities and exchange of students and university lecturers, and cooperation in the field of medicines and halal foods in the

region. Qatar's Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Qassim Al-Abdullah Al-Thani said that his country's economic relations with Iran have had a great jump, and stressed the need for the further development of trade ties between the two countries. Al-Abdullah Al-Thani was speaking at the closing ceremony of the 9th Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Commission meeting held on December 9-11. The ceremony took place at the Iranian Energy Ministry building in Tehran on Monday. He called the 9th meeting an important opportunity for following up on agreements already reached between the two sides to expand their relations in trade, economic and industrial fields. The Qatari minister also said that the sustainable ties and mutual trust between Tehran and Doha show that they have deepened relations. He meanwhile called for joint cooperation to overcome challenges the two sides face. Also present at the meeting, Iran's Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian called for boosting bilateral relations in the energy sector, the development of renewable energy projects as well as the connection of the two countries' power grids. He said that the two countries reached good agreements during the latest meeting of their joint economic commission, which he expressed hope that would positively impact the bilateral economic cooperation. Mehrabian said that the agreements reached cover cultural and social fields as well as infrastructure.

## Iran's High-Quality Apparel Exported to 7 Countries



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The head of the Iranian Tailors Association emphasized the need for branding the country's apparel industry and said that high-quality clothing made in Iran is exported to several countries. Akbar Sedghi hailed the measures taken in the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi in the field of provision of raw materials needed for the production of clothing and apparel. With the increase in the quality of Iranian clothing production, the import of this product from neighboring Turkey has decreased and now Iranian-made clothing is exported to Turkey, he added. Iranian clothing production requires branding, Sedghi stated. The head of the association reiterated that Iran's high-quality apparel is exported to different countries, including Russia, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and the United Arab Emirates.

## Iran's Consul General Presents Credentials to Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran's new Consul General to the Saudi city of Jeddah Hassan Zamegar Abarghouei has submitted a copy of his credentials to Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia Mazin bin Hamad Al-Himali. Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Riyadh Alireza Enayati announced on his account on the X, formerly known as Twitter, on Monday that Zamegar Abarghouei presented a copy of his credential to the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia. Enayati wished success to Zamegar and the other members of the Iranian Consulate General in Jeddah. Earlier in November, Zamegar was appointed as the new Iran Consul General to the Saudi city of Jeddah by Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian. Zamegar Abarghouei previously served as the head of the Iranian delegation in Saudi Arabia, caretaker head of the Iranian Embassy in Riyadh, the head of the Foreign Ministry's Third Persian Gulf Department, and the head as well as deputy of the Iranian Embassy in Kuwait.

## TCCIMA Hosts Meeting With Syria's Envoy in Tehran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) hosted a meeting between the representatives of the private sector and the ambassador of Iran in Syria to explore the opportunities for cooperation and ways of strengthening the presence of Iranian companies in Syria. The meeting was attended by the TCCIMA Secretary General, the head of the Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce, the ambassador of Iran to Syria and the representatives of some economic organizations, the TCCIMA portal reported. This gathering was held a few days after the presence of a business delegation from Syria in the Tehran Chamber and holding a conference on the development of Iran-Syria relations. During this meeting, the representatives of the Tehran Private sector introduced their potentials as well as their concerns and challenges regarding the presence in the Syrian market.

## Three-Member Committee Facilitates Iran's Trade in Oman



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A three-member committee has been formed which is tasked with facilitating the presence of Iranian businesspeople in Oman,

according to the head of Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce. Jamal Razeghi made the remarks on Monday during a visit to Shiraz Chamber of Commerce in southern Iran by a high-ranking Omani trade delegation. He said that the three-member committee is composed of representatives from Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Oman Investment Authority, and Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce. Oman has zero tariffs with 21 world countries which provides a chance for the Iranian traders and businesspeople to further expand exports to the Sultanate, Razeghi said. He added that major agreements have been reached between Iran and Oman which have led to resolution of problems on the way of regular shipping, financial and banking exchanges as well as the presence of Iranian businesspeople in Oman. Speaking in the meantime, Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, who led the Omani delegation, said that the governments of Iran and Oman are making every effort to help more increased engagement of the private sectors of both countries in bilateral exchanges.

## Monthly PMI Indicates Growth in Iran's Economy

TEHRAN - Iran Chamber of Commerce has released the country's new PMI data for the fiscal month of Aban (October 23 - November 22) which shows an increase in the Iranian economy for a third consecutive month. Although the new PMI reading is 3.19 points less than 54.15 reported in the previous month, it is still above the threshold (above 50) which indicates that the Iranian economy continues to thrive but with a slower speed in comparison with the previous month. The PMI reading (50.96) suggests that the businesses are suffering from the lack of liquidity so that they have problem supplying their raw material. The refusal of the banks from paying loans and allocating hard currency to the businesses in a situation that the companies are facing a decline in demands is hampering the companies' capability to increase their output so that the production lines of many of them are on the brink of shut down. The Statistics and Economic Analysis Center of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, the sponsor and coordinator of the survey, announces the

whole economy PMI data in a report every month. The headline PMI is a number from 0 to 100, such that over 50 shows an expansion of the economy when compared with the previous month. A PMI reading under 50 indicates contraction and a reading of 50 implies no change. PMI is an index of the prevailing direction of economic trends, aiming to provide information about business conditions to company directors, analysts and purchasing managers. The "business activities" sub-index (51.43) has registered its lowest in the month under review. The "new orders" sub-index (46.89) has also registered a three-month low. The "exports of goods and services" sub-index has been declining for a fifth month in a row to settle at 49.81. The "sales of goods and services" sub-index (49.22) has also dropped from the last month reading when it was reported at 53.47. The "expectations for next month economic activities" was another sub-index to fall this month to register an eight-month decline. It was reported at 56.01 in the month under review.



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

## Turkmenistan Serious about Energy Cooperation with Iran



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The foreign minister of Turkmenistan highlighted the significance that his country attaches to cooperation with Iran in the field of energy and the gas industry. In a telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart on Monday, Turkmen Foreign Minister Rasit Meredov hailed the constructive talks they had held recently in Moscow. Turkmenistan's relations with Iran, especially in the energy, gas and transportation fields as well as their road cooperation are very important, he added. Meredov also reiterated Turkmenistan's readiness to expand relations with Iran in all spheres. For his part, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian lauded the brotherly ties between the two neighbors. He also described the Iran-Turkmenistan common border as the frontier of friendship and underlined the need for Tehran and Ashgabat to expand their relations. The two foreign ministers also talked about the latest regional and international developments in the phone call. In June 2022, President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov paid an official visit to Iran, during which the two countries signed nine documents and memoranda of understanding on cooperation in various fields. In a meeting with the Turkmen leader, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said Tehran and Ashgabat are determined to sign a strategic document on cooperation for 20 years.

### French Parliament Rejects Macron's Immigration Bill

PARIS (Dispatches) - The French parliament on Monday voted down a flagship immigration bill of President Emmanuel Macron's government, prompting his high-profile interior minister to offer to resign over the "failure". Macron rejected the offer from Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin to step down, instead ordering him to find new ways to break the deadlock and push the legislation through. In a stunning setback for the government, the lower-house National Assembly adopted a motion to reject the controversial immigration bill without even debating it. Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne was set to hold an emergency meeting involving several ministers and lawmakers on Monday evening. After talks at the presidential Elysee Palace, Macron rejected Darmanin's offer to resign and asked him "to submit proposals to move forward by overcoming this blockage and obtaining an effective law", said a presidential official who asked not to be identified by name. Originally proposed by Macron's centrist government with a mix of steps to expel more undocumented people and improve migrants' integration, the text of the bill leans firmly towards enforcement after its passage through the Senate, which is controlled by the right.



### Zelenskiy Urges U.S. Congress Not to Play Into Putin's Hands



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy told a U.S. military audience on Monday that he hoped he can still count on the United States and urged Congress not to play into Russian President Vladimir Putin's hands, as he started a critical visit to Washington to shore up security assistance. "We won't give up. We know what to do and you can count on Ukraine. And we hope just as much to be able to count on you," Zelenskiy said in an address to the National Defense University. U.S. President Joe Biden's administration has warned Congress that a failure to renew military assistance to Ukraine could tip the nearly two-year-old war in Russia's favor, creating national security threats for the West. Zelenskiy, in an oblique reference to disputes in Congress over allocating aid, said it was "crucial that politics ... not betray the soldiers." "Let me be frank with you, friends. If there's anyone inspired by unresolved issues on Capitol Hill, it's just Putin and his sick clique," Zelenskiy added. Zelenskiy has been invited to meetings at the White House and with members of Congress on Tuesday. Many Republican lawmakers have questioned continued aid to Ukraine. Bolstered by billions of U.S. military aid, as well as U.S. intelligence, Ukraine was able to fend off Russia's initial attempt to sweep the country and roll Russian forces back in key towns. But Kyiv failed to break through Russian defensive lines in a major counteroffensive push this year and Russia is now on the offensive in the east. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin warned that Putin still hoped to achieve victory in Ukraine, even as he offered assurances of "unshakable" U.S. support to the country. "Despite his crimes and despite his isolation, Putin still believes that he can outlast Ukraine and that he can outlast America. But he is wrong," Austin said to applause. He added, in apparent reference to Congress: "America's commitments must be honored." Congress has approved more than \$110 billion for Ukraine since Russia's February 2022 invasion but it has not approved any funds since Republicans took over the House from Democrats in January. By mid-November, the U.S. Defense Department had used 97% of \$62.3 billion in supplemental funding and the State Department had used all of the \$4.7 billion in military assistance funding for Ukraine it had been allocated, U.S. budget director Shalanda Young said last week.



## Hunger Rises in Gaza as UN Prepares to Vote on Ceasefire Resolution

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Hunger was worsening among Palestinians in the besieged Gaza strip, aid agencies said, as the United Nations General Assembly prepared to vote on an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the two-month-old conflict between Israel and Hamas. Hundreds more civilians have died in Israel's assault on Gaza since the U.S. on Friday vetoed a Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire. Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes and residents say it is impossible to find refuge or food in the densely populated coastal enclave. The U.N. World Food Programme has said half of the population is starving. "Hunger stalks everyone," UNRWA, the U.N. body responsible for Palestinian refugees, said on X. Gazans said people forced to flee repeatedly were dying of hunger and cold as well as the bombardments, describing looting of aid trucks and sky high prices. Israel says its instructions to people to move are among measures it is taking to protect civilians as it tries to root out Hamas militants who killed 1,200 people and took 240 hostage in an Oct. 7 cross-border attack on Israel, according to Israeli tallies. About 100 hostages have since been freed. Israel's retaliatory assault has killed 18,205 people and wounded nearly 50,000, according to the Gaza health ministry. The 193-member General Assembly is likely to pass a draft resolution that mirrors the language of one that was blocked by the United States in the 15-member Security Council last week. General Assembly resolutions are not binding but carry political weight and reflect global views. Some diplomats and observers predict the vote will garner greater support than the assembly's October call for "an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce." The vote was due a day after 12 Security Council envoys visited the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, the only place where limited humanitarian aid and fuel have entered. The United States did not send a representative on the trip. U.S. President Joe Biden, who has weathered intense criticism for his support of Israel's response to the Oct. 7 attacks, on Monday told a White House celebration for the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah that his commitment to Israel is "unshakable." "Folks, were there no Israel, there wouldn't be

a Jew in the world that was safe," Biden said. He also alluded to his complex relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who he said is in a "tough spot." State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters on Monday that Israel was no exception to U.S. policy that any country receiving its weapons must comply with the laws of war. "We are monitoring everything that happens in this conflict," Miller said. "We are engaged in conversations with the Israeli government." As the war has intensified, how and where Israel uses weapons from the U.S. have come under more scrutiny, even though U.S. officials say there are no plans to put conditions on military aid to Israel or to consider withholding some of it. Washington found images circulating on social media showing Palestinian men detained in Gaza in their underwear "deeply disturbing" and asked Israel to clarify the circumstances around the photographs, Miller added. Israel has said the men were stripped to make sure they were not hiding explosives or weapons. The White House also said on Monday it was concerned about reports Israel used U.S.-supplied white phosphorus munitions in an October attack in southern Lebanon and was seeking more information. The munitions, which can be legally used on battlefields to make smoke screens among other uses, can cause serious burns. Israel said an allegation by Human Rights Watch that it uses white phosphorus munitions in Gaza and Lebanon was "unequivocally false." U.N. officials say 1.9 million people - 85% of Gaza's population - are displaced and describe the conditions in the southern areas where they have concentrated as hellish. To increase the amount of aid reaching Gaza, Israel said on Monday it would add shipment screening at the Kerem Shalom border crossing even though it was not opening the crossing itself. Most trucks entered the strip at this crossing before the war. Two Egyptian security sources said inspections would begin on Tuesday under a new deal between Israel, Egypt and the United States. After the collapse of a week-long ceasefire on Dec. 1, Israel began a ground offensive in the south and has since pushed from the east into the heart of Khan Younis city.

### Malaysia PM Aims to Rebuild Trust With Major Cabinet Reshuffle



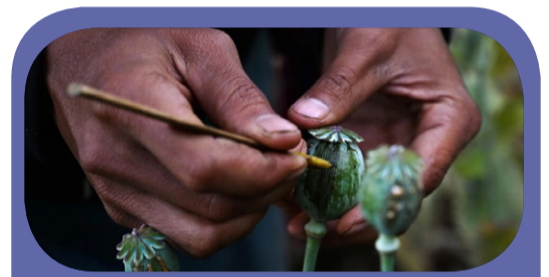
KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim made major changes to his cabinet on Tuesday, appointing the chief of the country's largest state pension fund as second finance minister in an effort to rebuild trust after a year in office. Anwar, who suffered a dip in public opinion polls in recent months amid concerns over the economy, inflation and the slow pace of promised reforms, said the economy, health and education were his government's top priority. "The ministry of finance, other than being headed by me, must have a strong professional team to ensure we are on the right track and focus on the economy," Anwar, who is also finance minister, told a televised press conference. He brought back the position of second finance minister, appointing to the job Amir Hamzah Azzan, the chief executive of the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF). Taking over the foreign ministry from his former position at defence is Mohamad Hasan, a deputy president of one of Anwar's allies, the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO). Tuesday's reshuffle split the energy transition and digital portfolios into separate ministries, taking the number of cabinet members to 31 from 28 previously. A reshuffle was politically necessary and long overdue, said Adib Zulkapli, director of strategic adviser BowerGroupAsia, after a cabinet vacancy left by the death of a minister in July. "By appointing the EPF CEO, (Anwar) is addressing the perception that the ministry has been neglected due to his other responsibilities as the prime minister," he added. Malaysia's economic growth has slowed sharply this year from 8.7% in 2022 amid lower exports. While inflation has moderated, concerns remain over rising consumer costs, as the ringgit is one of Asia's worst performing currencies this year. Anwar heads a government formed of his progressive coalition, one-time rival UMNO, East Malaysian parties, and a number of smaller parties. The latest survey by independent polling group Merdeka Center published last month saw Anwar's approval rating drop to 50% from 68% in December last year, while approval of the government dipped to 41% from 54%. Sentiment was largely driven by concerns over the economy, the Merdeka Center said. The reshuffle moved Fadillah Yusof, a deputy prime minister, to the newly-created energy transition and public utilities portfolio from the commodities ministry. Taking over as commodities minister is former finance minister Johari Abdul Ghani, who leads the government's taskforce on matters related to a multibillion-dollar scandal at defunct state fund IIMB. Popular lawmaker Dzulkifly Ahmad returns to the post of health minister, in which he served from 2018 to 2020, amid a reported rise in COVID-19 infections in recent weeks.



## Tusk Appointed Polish PM, Setting Stage for Warmer EU Ties

WARSAW (Dispatches) - Poland's parliament backed Donald Tusk to become prime minister, ending eight years of nationalist rule and putting the country on track for a thawing of relations with the European Union. Poland has seen tens of billions of euros of European Union funds frozen due to a dispute with Brussels over democratic standards, but Tusk, a former European Council president, has vowed to mend relations and unblock the cash. Tusk got the votes of 248 lawmakers while 201 were against. "I will be indebted to all those who trusted in this new, wonderful Poland, to all those who trusted us ... and decided to make this historic change," he told the chamber after the vote. Earlier in the day former Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party lost a vote of confidence. His party came first in the Oct. 15 election and got the first shot at forming a government, but it lacked necessary majority and all other parties had ruled out working with it. PiS has cast itself as a defender of Poland's sovereignty and identity that has also improved living standards for millions by boosting social benefits and the minimum wage. Critics, however, say PiS undermined judicial independence, turned state-owned media into a propaganda outlet and fomented prejudice against minorities such as immigrants and the LGBT community. In a sign of the deep personal animosity PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski feels towards Tusk, he stormed onto the podium following the vote and told the new prime minister - "I know one thing, you are a German agent!" During the election campaign PiS

regularly painted Tusk as Berlin's stooge. Tusk will give a speech to parliament on Tuesday laying out his government's plans and will then face a vote of confidence. While the mood among Tusk supporters in parliament and beyond was jubilant, events elsewhere in Warsaw highlighted the challenges he will face in unblocking the frozen EU cash. Poland's Constitutional Tribunal ruled on Monday that judicial reform legislation which Poland needed to pass in order to access the funds was unconstitutional. It reached the same conclusion about penalties imposed by the European Union's top court before it reaches a final ruling, known as interim measures. While Tusk is seen in Brussels as a leader who can set the bloc's largest eastern member back on a pro-EU course, officials have said that no funds will be released without judicial reforms. Analysts say this task could be complicated not only by the presence of judges appointed under an overhaul implemented by PiS which critics say politicised the courts, but also by the veto power of President Andrzej Duda, a PiS ally. Nevertheless, congratulations poured in from abroad, including from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. "Your experience and strong commitment to our European values will be precious in forging a stronger Europe, for the benefit of the Polish people," she wrote on social media platform X. Poland's October election saw a record turnout of 74% with people in some locations queuing for hours to vote.



### Myanmar Overtakes Afghanistan as World's Biggest Opium Producer

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Myanmar became the world's biggest producer of opium in 2023, overtaking Afghanistan after the Taliban government's crackdown on the trade, according to a United Nations report released on Tuesday. Myanmar produced an estimated 1,080 metric tonnes of opium - essential for producing heroin - this year, according to the latest report by the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The figures come after opium production in Afghanistan slumped an estimated 95 percent to around 330 tons following the Taliban's ban on poppy cultivation in April last year, according to UNODC. The "Golden Triangle" border region between Myanmar, Laos and Thailand has long been a hotbed of illegal drug production and trafficking, particularly of methamphetamine and opium. The total estimated value of Myanmar's "opiate economy" rose to between \$1 billion and \$2.4 billion - the equivalent of 1.7 to 4.1 percent of the country's 2022 GDP, UNODC said. Last year, an estimated 790 metric tons of opium were produced in Myanmar, it said. Myanmar's legal economy has been gutted by conflict and instability since the military seized power in 2021, driving many farmers to grow poppy. Poor access to markets and state infrastructure as well as rampant inflation "appears to have played a significant role in farmers' decisions in late 2022 to cultivate more poppy", the report said. Estimated opium production for 2022-23 was at its highest level for more than 20 years, UNODC said. UNODC also said poppy cultivation in Myanmar was becoming more sophisticated, with increased investment and better practices - including improved irrigation and possible use of fertilisers - pushing up crop yields. Afghanistan, the world's biggest producer for some years, has seen cultivation collapse after the Taliban authorities vowed to end illegal drug production. Poppy crops accounted for almost a third of the country's total agricultural production by value last year, but the area used for poppy shrank from 233,000 hectares in late 2022 to 10,800 in 2023. In Myanmar, the main cultivating area is Shan state, the northern part of which has been convulsed by fighting in recent weeks after an alliance of ethnic minority armed groups launched an offensive against the junta and its allies. Shan accounted for about 88 percent of the 41,300 hectares (102,054 acres) of opium poppy areas nationwide, the UN report said.

## India's Top Court Upholds End of Special Status for Kashmir, Orders Polls

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's Supreme Court upheld on Monday a 2019 decision by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to revoke special status for the state of Jammu and Kashmir and set a deadline of Sept. 30 next year for local polls to be held. India's only Muslim-majority region, Jammu and Kashmir has been at the heart of more than 75 years of animosity with neighbouring Pakistan since the birth of the two nations in 1947 at independence from colonial rule by Britain. The unanimous order by a panel of five judges followed more than a dozen petitions challenging the revocation and a subsequent decision to split the region into two federally administered territories - Jammu and Kashmir, and the Buddhist territory of Ladakh. It sets the stage for elections in Jammu and Kashmir, which was more closely integrated with India after the government's move, taken in line with a longstanding promise of Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The decision is a shot in the arm for the government before a general election due by May. The challengers maintained that only the constituent assembly of Jammu and Kashmir could decide on the special status of the mountain region, and contested whether parliament had the power to revoke it. The court said special status was a temporary constitutional provision that could be revoked. It ordered that Jammu and Kashmir should return to being a state at the earliest opportunity. "Article 370 was an interim arrangement due to war conditions in the state," Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said, referring to the provision of the Indian constitution which provided the special status after the first India-Pakistan war over the Himalayan region. "Textual reading also indicates that it is a temporary provision," Chandrachud said. Modi called the judgment "a beacon of hope, a promise of a brighter future." "It is a resounding declaration of hope,

progress and unity for our sisters and brothers in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh," Modi posted on X, formerly Twitter. "The court, in its profound wisdom, has fortified the very essence of unity that we, as Indians, hold dear and cherish above all else." Kashmir is divided between India, which rules the populous Kashmir Valley and the Hindu-dominated region of Jammu; Pakistan, which controls a wedge of territory in the west; and China, which holds a thinly populated high-altitude area in the north. Pakistan's caretaker government rejected the court verdict. "International law doesn't recognise India's unilateral and illegal actions" of 2019, caretaker Foreign Minister Jilil Abbas Jilani posted on X. "The judicial endorsement by the Indian Supreme Court has no legal value," he said, adding Kashmiris have an inalienable right to self-determination in accordance with U.N. Security Council resolutions. Islamabad would write to the U.N., the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the European Union to apprise them of the Indian court decision and its "illegality", Jilani added. Political parties in Kashmir that opposed the revocation, and were among those that went to court, said they were disappointed by the verdict. Security was stepped up before the verdict in a region roiled by militant violence and protests since the start of an anti-India insurgency in 1989. Tens of thousands of people have been killed, although violence has tapered off in recent years. "Disappointed but not disheartened," Omar Abdullah, a former chief minister and vice president of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference party, posted on X. "The struggle will continue. It took the BJP decades to reach here. We are also prepared for the long haul." Mehbooba Mufti, another former chief minister and president of the Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party, echoed those views.





## Antetokounmpo Helps Bucks Top Bulls in Overtime

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points, 12 rebounds and six assists to help the Milwaukee Bucks outlast the visiting Chicago Bulls 133-129 in overtime. Brook Lopez and Malik Beasley scored 19 points apiece, Bobby Portis Jr. added 17 points, Damian Lillard chipped in 14 points and Khrist Middleton had 13 points and 13 rebounds. Milwaukee led by as many as 14 points in the second quarter before Chicago forced overtime on DeMar DeRozan's floating jumper with 3.7 seconds remaining in regulation. Milwaukee scored eight of the first nine points in overtime before Chicago cut the deficit to 131-129 on DeRozan's dunk with 12.8 seconds left. Lillard converted two free throws for the final margin. DeRozan scored a season-high 41 points and Coby White added a season-high 33 for Chicago, which had its winning streak stopped at four games. Patrick Williams scored 15 points, Nikola Vucevic added 14 points and 10 rebounds and Andre Drummond tallied nine points and 16 rebounds. AJ Green chipped in a season-high 12 points for the Bucks, who avenged a 120-113 overtime loss to the Bulls on Nov. 30. Milwaukee began its season-long six-game homestand by shooting 51.2 percent from the floor and 15 of 37 (40.5 percent) from 3-point range. The Bucks improved to 11-2 at home this season. Chicago fell short despite another strong outing by White, who shot 12 of 20 from the field, including 6 of 10 from beyond the arc. White has made at least three 3-pointers in a franchise-best 11 straight games. Milwaukee used a 14-2 run to move ahead 51-39 early in the second quarter and held a 74-65 advantage at the half after shooting 57.8 percent from the field and 12 of 20 (60

percent) from 3-point range. DeRozan scored 22 points and White had 19 to lead Chicago. The Bulls battled back and pulled within 91-89 at the end of the third quarter after holding Milwaukee to five made field goals and 17 points in the period. Chicago played without guard Alex Caruso, who sat out with a sprained left ankle. Meanwhile Jamal Murray came back from a first-quarter ankle sprain to score 29 points and lead the visiting Denver Nuggets to a 129-122 win over the Atlanta Hawks. With the victory, Denver ended a three-game losing streak. Murray had to leave the game midway through the first quarter after stepping on teammate Nikola Jokic's foot and twisting his left ankle. Murray returned in the second quarter and finished the game 12-for-15 from the floor, including 4-for-5 on threes, with nine rebounds. It was his third straight game of scoring at least 20 points since returning from a right ankle injury. Jokic regained his shooting touch and scored 25 points to go along with eight rebounds and nine assists. Jokic had shot just 31 percent (18-for-58) over the two previous games but was 9-for-13 against Atlanta. Julian Strawther scored 22 points and Aaron Gordon added 18 points and 12 rebounds. The Hawks have lost a season-high four straight games and have dropped six of their past seven. Bogdan Bogdanovic led Atlanta with a career-high 40 points, including 10 3-pointers. Dejounte Murray scored 21 points and Trae Young scored 19 points with nine assists before being ejected with 25 seconds left in the third quarter. Atlanta was without Jalen Johnson, who missed his seventh straight game with a left wrist fracture, and DeAndre Hunter, who sat out with right quad soreness.

## Turkish Leagues Halted After Club President Punches Referee in Face



ANKARA (Reuters) - The Turkish Football Federation (TFF) has suspended all leagues on a night of "shame" for the nation's soccer after Ankaragucu's president Faruk Koca punched the referee in the face at the end of their Super Lig home match against Rizespor. Koca entered the field and hit referee Halil Umur Meler when the final whistle blew after Rizespor scored a 97th minute equaliser in the 1-1 draw at Eryaman Stadium on Monday, footage from state broadcaster TRT showed. Ankaragucu fans invaded the pitch after the game and Meler was also kicked when he fell, though it was unclear who his assailants were. Meler eventually made it to the dressing room with the help of the police. "The Turkish Football Federation has decided to suspend all games in all leagues indefinitely," the federation posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "The related club, the club chairman, club officials and all those guilty of attacking referee Umur Meler will be punished in the strongest terms possible." A detention order has been issued for Koca. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said in a post on X, adding that two people have already been detained as part of a judicial investigation into the incident. "Turkish football has been punched shamefully tonight. Everyone involved in this incident will pay the price." TFF Chairman Mehmet Buyukceksi said, according to TRT. A FIFA referee since 2017, 37-year-old Meler took charge of Lazio's Champions League group game with Celtic on Nov. 28. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan tweeted: "Sport means peace and brotherhood. Sport is incompatible with violence. We will never allow violence to take place in Turkish sports." Referees in Turkey are often criticised by club managers and presidents for their decisions but are rarely the target of violent attacks. Ankaragucu are 11th in the standings on 18 points, three places below Rizespor on 22 points after 15 matches.

## Lyles and Kipyegon Named Track Athletes of the Year

PARIS (Dispatches) - American sprinter Noah Lyles and Kenya's Faith Kipyegon were named the men's and women's track athletes of the year by World Athletics on Monday. Lyles was recognised for the three gold medals he won at the world championships in Budapest. After an all-conquering 2023, the 26-year-old will now turn his focus to next year's Paris Olympics where he is targeting gold in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay and has said he will also aim for a spot in the US 4x400m relay quartet. In Budapest, he scorched to gold in the 100m in 9.83sec for his first global title in the short sprint. "I've always known I was the fastest man on the planet but no one would have believed me unless I had the 100m title," Lyles said. "That changed the way that people have viewed me a little bit, especially outside of the sport," he added. Kipyegon clinched the women's prize after setting three world records in the 1500m, the mile and the 5,000m. She also completed a 1500m-5,000m double at the world championships. "It was a magnificent year," the 29-year-old said. "I didn't expect what I did this year, breaking three world records and winning two gold medals. It was a historical year for me and I'm very very happy and I know it's not only what I did for myself but I know I inspired many young girls out there," she added. Sweden's Armand Duplantis won the men's field athlete of the year award after he improved his pole vault world record to 6.23m. Venezuela's Yulimar Rojas took the women's field athlete award after winning her fourth world outdoor triple jump title. Awards were also given to Tigist Assefa of Ethiopia who sliced more than two minutes off the women's marathon time in Berlin in September, the biggest single improvement on the mark for 40 years. The equivalent "out of stadia" award for men went to Kelvin Kiptum, the Kenyan who ran a world record 2:00:35 in the Chicago Marathon in October, taking 34 seconds off Eliud Kipchoge's previous record. "The depth of talent and the outstanding performances in our sport this year more than justify the expansion of the World Athletics Awards to recognise the accomplishments by these six athletes across a range of disciplines," said World Athletics President Sebastian Coe. "Our World Athletes of the Year alone have achieved seven world records between them in 2023, as well as a host of world titles and major wins, so it is only fitting that they be recognised as the athletes of the year in their respective fields," he added.



## Osimhen Named African Player of the Year



MARRAKESH (Dispatches) - Napoli's Nigeria striker Victor Osimhen was named men's African player of the year during a ceremony organised by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) in Marrakesh, Morocco. Osimhen, who led Napoli to win the Italian League title last season, beat Paris Saint-Germain's Morocco right-back, Achraf Hakimi and Liverpool's Egypt winger, Mohamed Salah, to win the top award. "It's a dream come true for me," Osimhen said. "I appreciate Nigerians for their support. I appreciate Africa for putting me on the map, encouraging me, and defending me, regardless of my shortcomings." The 24-year-old added Osimhen excelled last season for Napoli, after scoring 31 goals in all competitions and contributing to them winning the Italian League title after a drought that lasted 33 years. Napoli estimate Osimhen's market value at approximately 200 million euros (\$215 million). Osimhen was spotted by European scouts at the 2015 edition of the under-17 World Cup in Chile and joined German outfit Wolfsburg. He was loaned to Charleroi and later joined the Belgian club permanently. His next move was to French side Lille in 2019, where he scored 13 goals in 27 appearances. Napoli signed him one year later for 70 million euros (\$75 million), but he contracted Covid-19 during a visit to Nigeria and later suffered a head injury and a fractured skull and eye socket. Those injuries led Osimhen to wear a protective mask and sections of the media called him the "masked assassin". He missed the 2022 Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon due to the injuries, and Nigeria suffered a shock last-16 loss to Tunisia. Osimhen was the leading scorer with 10 goals in qualifying for the 2024 Cup of Nations, which the Ivory Coast will host from January 13. His total included four in a 10-0 rout of Sao Tome e Principe -- a record winning margin for a qualifier in the competition. Injury-prone Osimhen was sidelined again two months ago after suffering a hamstring injury in a friendly match against Saudi Arabia. The regular absences of the Nigerian angered Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis, who reacted by saying he would sign no more Africans unless they agreed to skip the Cup of Nations. Morocco last year became the first African and Arab country to reach the World Cup semi-finals and goalkeeper Yassine Bounou, his teammates and coach Walid Regragui were honoured in Marrakesh. Bounou was named goalkeeper of the year, Regragui coach of the year and Morocco the national team of the year. Barcelona forward Assiat Oshoala completed a Nigerian double by winning the African Women's player of the year for a record-extending sixth time. Born in Ikorodu, north-east of commercial capital Lagos, her previous successes came in 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2022. After playing for Nigerian clubs Robo and Rivers Angels, she had spells with Liverpool, Arsenal and Dalian Quanjian before an initial loan move to Barcelona became permanent four years ago. Oshoala scored in a win over co-hosts Australia that helped Nigeria reach the 2023 Women's World Cup round of 16, where they lost to England on penalties.

## Giants End Packers' Win Streak With Last-Second FG

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Randy Bullock kicked a game-winning, 37-yard field goal as time expired and Tommy DeVito had 229 yards of total offense as the New York Giants edged the Green Bay Packers 24-22 in East Rutherford, N.J., to stretch their winning streak to three games. Green Bay's Jordan Love threw a go-ahead 6-yard touchdown pass to Malik Heath with 1:33 remaining. The Packers failed on a two-point conversion attempt before their defense faltered. A 32-yard connection between DeVito and Wan'Dale Robinson put the Giants (5-8) deep in Green Bay territory. Bullock's kick snapped a three-game winning streak for Green Bay (6-7), which committed three turnovers. New York's Saquon Barkley rushed for 86 yards and two touchdowns, but a costly fumble at the end of a 34-yard run late in the fourth quarter gave the Packers the ball back. Carrington Valentine leapt over a stumbling Barkley without touching him, then returned the ball 50 yards to the New York 36 to set up the touchdown from Love to Heath. The Giants grabbed their first lead with 11:22 left in the third quarter, taking advantage of a short field after Green Bay's Keisean Nixon fumbled a punt return. Barkley capped a three-play, 31-yard drive with a 1-yard touchdown run that put New York ahead 14-10. Green Bay followed with a punt but got possession back after the ball glanced off New York's Bobby McCain. The Packers recovered at the New York 14 but only managed a field goal to trim the deficit to a point. DeVito was 17-for-21 for 158 yards and a touchdown while rushing for 71 yards on 10 carries. Robinson had six catches for 79 yards, and Isaiah Hodgins snagged an 8-yard TD toss. After gaining just 24 yards on their first two possessions, both of which resulted in punts, the Packers capitalized on favorable field position off a New York missed field-goal attempt to score the game's first touchdown. Green Bay covered 62 yards in seven plays and 3:51, as Jayden Reed punctuated the drive with a 16-yard scoring run with 1:01 left in the first quarter. Love was 25-for-39 for 218 yards and a touchdown. He also threw an interception and lost a fumble. Green Bay's AJ Dillon carried 15 times for 53 yards, while Tucker Kraft had four catches for 64 yards.

