

Deputy Iranian Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Arrived in Tokyo on Monday to Hold Talks With Japanese Officials as the Visit Is Taking Place at the Invitation of His Japanese Counterpart Takehiro Funakoshi

Iran's Deputy Minister of Communications and Information Technology Amir Lajevardi Has Outlined the Achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the ITU World Radiocommunication Conference 2023 (WRC-23)

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Non-Oil Exports to Kenya Hit \$28.3m in 7 months

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Those Behind Rask Attack Will Pay Dearly for It



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami says the country will respond decisively to a terrorist attack on a southeastern police station earlier this week that left 11 guards killed and 6 others injured. Salami said in a message to Iran's police chief on Sunday that those behind the December 15 terrorist attack in Rask, including the foreign actors who ordered it, will pay dearly for it. "The grudge-bearing enemies of the security of Iran and the Iranians must know that the security guardians and defenders of discipline and peace in the Islamic country will soon... make the perpetrators and orchestrators of this crime taste the bitter revenge for it," he said in the message. Iranian authorities say foreign states had ordered the attack by the Jaish al-Adl terrorist group in Rask, a small city in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan. Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said during a funeral held on Saturday in the provincial capital of Zahedan for the police officers killed in attack that the Israeli regime supports terrorist groups operating in Iran. In his Saturday message, Salami offered condolences to the families of the officers killed in the attack in Rask and said that the incident would backfire on those seeking to sow discord in Sistan and Baluchestan where a majority of the population is from Iran's minority Sunni Muslim community.



Army Drones, Missiles Lined Up on Borders to Repel Threats

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Army's Ground Force has deployed missile, drone and artillery units along the country's northeastern border areas to give a "rapid and timely" response to any possible threat, says commander of the force. Brigadier General Kioumars Heidari said on Monday that his forces are fully safeguarding the country's independence and territorial integrity. He said the Iranian Army's Ground Force is designing and implementing a plan focusing on points where it needs more forces. The Ground Force is weighing the plan in terms of missiles, drones and maneuvering forces on borders with the purpose of giving a firm and decisive response to the threats, he added. Meanwhile, the deputy commander of the Iranian Army's Air Force said the force enjoys a high level of defensive capabilities and is ready to confront any potential threats at any scale. Brigadier General Mahdi Hadian said the high level of the country's military preparedness has led to a sense of despair among adversaries in military confrontation and hardware against Iran. He credited the highest preparedness level of the Armed Forces to the sacrifices of martyrs, the Islamic Revolution's tenets, and the guidance of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. He noted that enemies are spending billions of dollars in the field of hybrid and cognitive warfare to harm the country, but all their efforts have been futile thanks to the guidance of Ayatollah Khamenei and the Iranian nation's wisdom. Ayatollah Khamenei has repeatedly called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran's defense capabilities.

Iran Foreign Ministry Updates List of Banned Israeli-Linked Products



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari says the ministry has updated the list of goods produced with the support of the Zionists to prevent their entry into the country. He made the remarks in an interview broadcast on national television, when asked about the Foreign Ministry's implementation of the law on "identifying goods produced with the support of Zionists." "Not long ago, we at the Foreign Ministry updated our list in this regard with the help of Iranian embassies abroad and presented it to relevant officials in this field," he said. Asked about whether there is a connection between domestic producers of Coca-Cola and the Coca-Cola Company, Safari said the domestic producers have confirmed that they have no relationship with the Coca-Cola Company. He also said some of the medicines that are imported from Europe and the US may have affiliations with Zionists or Zionist supporters, but since the case is related to medicine, the country cannot stop the imports, but rather, would further strive to become more self-sufficient in the field of medicine. Last week, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf called on the administration to identify Israeli goods being sold in Iranian markets and prevent their importation. "The Foreign Ministry must compile a list of goods produced companies whose main shareholders are the Israelis," he said. "The administration is also obliged to take necessary measures to prevent the import of these goods."

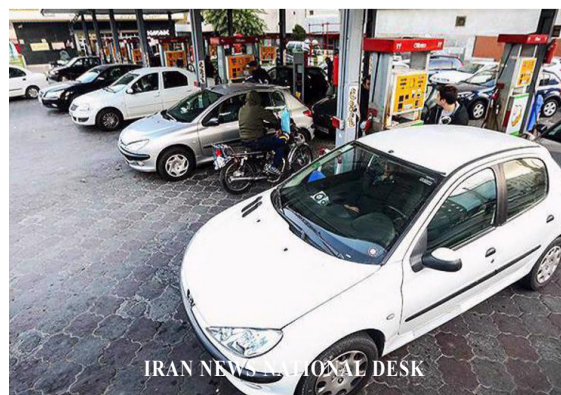
AEOI to Open 50 Plasma-Stimulated Wound Healing Clinics in Iran



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran is going to inaugurate 50 clinics across the country that use plasma technology for the treatment of wounds. AEOI Chief Mohammad Eslami on Monday inaugurated the first clinic that employs plasma technology for the treatment of wounds. Pointing to the construction of three plasma-stimulated wound healing clinics in the cities of Varamin, Qom and Karaj, Eslami said 50 such clinics will be launched across Iran within the next year. He noted that the plasma technologies developed by the AEOI have also been employed for the treatment of cancers and cardiac diseases in cooperation with medical universities. Iran is currently producing 50 types of radiopharmaceuticals for the diagnosis and treatment of diseases, he stated. In December 2022, the AEOI chief said Iran aims to become a global hub for manufacturing deuterium drugs. The AEOI launched a second phase of its deuterium production unit in the Arak Heavy Water Reactor Facility in central Iran in April 2021.

Iran Gas Stations Returning to Normal After Software Problem Disrupts Services

TEHRAN - A software problem has caused disruptions in several petrol stations across Iran, particularly in the capital Tehran, however efforts are underway to return the situation to normal, the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company says. In a statement on Monday, the company said a "technical problem" has occurred in some of the country's petrol stations caused by the "conspiracy of enemies to overshadow the welfare and comfort of the people." It added that specialized working groups have been set up to solve the problem at the shortest possible time while the fuel supply will be carried out through an offline system until further notice. The statement emphasized that the experts and specialized working groups are solving the problem and "in a few hours all stations will be back to normal and the refueling process will become normal." Reza Navaz, a spokesperson for Iran's petrol stations association, also confirmed that a "technical problem" was behind the disruption. He added that the supplement of both gasoline and diesel has been stopped but experts are rapidly resolving the issue. The official rejected claims that the disruption was linked to plans to increase the gas price, saying, "No price hike is on agenda at all." Navaz added that there was no fuel supply shortage. Oil Minister Javad Owji earlier said outside interference was a possible cause. Iranian



President Ebrahim Raisi instructed the oil minister to investigate the reasons behind the disruption and "immediately" fix it in an appropriate way. The president also urged the oil ministry to provide "proper and timely information" to the people. Enemies' claims cannot be verified: Iran's Civil Defense Organization/Iran's Civil Defense Organization said it is weighing all the possible options, including interference and hacking, but it is not currently possible to verify the claims made by the enemies. It added that from the first moments of the disruption, the emergency response teams of Iran's Ministry of Petroleum in cooperation with the Civil Defense Organization have been working on the issue and made the necessary decisions to settle the problem and resume fuel supply. It noted that the issue would be solved in some station by the end of Monday. The organization pledged to inform the Iranian people on the outcomes of its final investigations within the next days. Normalcy is returning to gas stations across Iran after a cyberattack caused disruptions in fuel delivery. A cyberattack targeting the country's fuel distribution system caused a brief outage in October 2021 which was successfully contained by Iranian experts. Iran's Supreme Council of Cyberspace announced that it was possibly launched from abroad.

36 Iranian Universities Among Most Sustainable Institutions Worldwide



TEHRAN - A total of 36 Iranian universities are featured on the GreenMetric World University Ranking 2023 results released in Dubai on December 5. Around 1,183 institutions from all over the world have been evaluated by the UI Green Metric World Ranking 2023, IRNA reported. The University of Kashan with a total score of 8,200 ranked first in Iran and 126 worldwide. Alzahra University, ranked 164, and the University of Zanjan, ranked 172, are placed second and third in the country, respectively. Wageningen University and Research of the Netherlands topped the list followed by Nottingham Trent University and Umwelt-campus Birkenfeld (Trier University of Applied Sciences) in second and third place respectively. GreenMetric has been launched to provide a comprehensive view of the status and policies of the environment and sustainable development of the world's higher education institutions. It is unique in informing university managers and policymakers about environmental challenges and energy consumption. GreenMetric ranking is based on six criteria as follows: Setting and Infrastructure, Energy and Climate change, Waste management, Water, Transportation, and Education and Research are the criteria used in this rating system to measure institutions. Numeric data from universities are collected, and processed data provides a single score that reflects the efforts being made by the institution to implement environmentally friendly and sustainable programs. Universities are ranked according to this score. UI GreenMetric World University Ranking was established by Universitas Indonesia in 2010 to promote awareness of sustainability in higher education institutions. This initiative aims to provide the result of an online survey regarding the current condition and policies related to Green Campus and Sustainability in Universities all over the world. It is expected that by drawing the attention of university leaders and stakeholders, more attention will be given to combating global climate change, energy and water conservation, waste recycling, and green transportation. Such activities will require a change of behavior and providing more attention to the sustainability of the environment, as well as economic and social problems related to sustainability. According to the latest Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking (WUR) 2024 by subject, eight Iranian universities were among the top institutions in the world in the field of law.

IRAN NEWS



Dakar to Host 5th Iran-Senegal Joint Economic Cooperation Commission

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An official at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) said the 5th Iran-Senegal Joint Economic Cooperation Commission will be held in the Senegalese capital of Dakar on December 20 after 12 years. Head of the African Department of the TPO Leila Baghban said the African continent is rich with natural resources, high potentials and capacities, and Iranian traders should seize the opportunity to enhance their trade with African countries. The continent has been paid less attention by Iranian businesspeople due to the difficulty of access to the lucrative market in Africa, low logistics facilities and attractiveness of the neighboring countries' markets, she stated. Baghban put the value of the products exported from Iran to the African states in 2022 at \$1.3 billion and said the bilateral trade reached about \$500 million in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 to November 22, 2023), showing a significant decline compared to last year's corresponding period.

Palestinians Definite Winners of Unequal Battle Against Israel



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian of Iran says Israel continues its "fruitless war crimes" in the Gaza Strip but the Palestinian people will definitely emerge victorious in the face of the regime's "unequal" battle. "Despite the continuation of war crimes against women and children, Palestine is now the definite winner of this unequal battle," Amir-Abdollahian said in a post on his official X account on Sunday. The regime's officials continue to commit crimes more heinous than those by Daesh in a bid to produce an achievement and compensate for their shameful historical failure, the minister stated. The top Iranian diplomat emphasized that Israel's onslaught on Gaza since October 7 has failed to destroy and disarm the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas. The war could not lead to the release of the Zionist military prisoners while the forced displacement of the Gazans also failed to yield any success, the foreign minister said. Israel waged the brutal war on Gaza after Hamas carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm on that October day against the usurping entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. Since the start of the onslaught, Israel has killed at least 19,088 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 54,450 others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under the rubble in Gaza, which is under "complete siege" by Israel.



Iran Ready to Further Strengthen All-Out Ties With Kuwait

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Tehran is ready to further improve relations with Kuwait in various fields. Amir-Abdollahian made the remark in a meeting with new Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah in Kuwait City on Sunday. He offered condolences of the Iranian president and nation to Kuwait over the passing of former Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah and congratulated Sheikh Mishal on his appointment as the new Emir of the country. The top Iranian diplomat reiterated Tehran's support for Kuwait City. The new Kuwaiti Emir, for his part, said he has instructed foreign minister and other cabinet members of the government to put the expansion of all-out ties with Iran on their agenda. Sheikh Nawaf died at the age of 86 on Saturday.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN- Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$28.3 million to Kenya during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22), the spokesman of Trade Development Committee of Iran's House of Industry, Mining and Trade announced. Ruhollah Latifi also announced that the Islamic Republic imported products valued at \$5.2 million from Kenya in the seven-month period. Among the African trade partners of Iran in the first seven months of this year, Kenya was the sixth export destination of the Iranian products, and the sixth source of import to the country, he added. As the official has announced, Iran exported 1.205 million tons of non-oil commodities valued at \$434 million to Africa during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year. Latifi said that the country's seven-month export to Africa fell 53 percent in value, and 33 percent in weight, year on year. The official also announced that Iran imported 38,122 tons of goods valued at \$47.434 million from Africa in the first seven months of the present year, with 21 percent drop in worth and 42 percent fall in weight, as compared to the same period of time in the past year. Over the past 40 years, the

Islamic Republic of Iran has never given up on its principled policy towards Africa due to political and cultural commonalities, despite the sanctions, pressure and disruptions of the West, and has always maintained itself alongside the people and countries of Africa. As reported, during the Iranian calendar years 1384 and 1385 (March 2005-March 2007), the relations between Iran and the African continent increased in terms of trade, but since 1386, the economic relations between Iran and Africa have decreased due to the economic crisis and cruel sanctions against Iran. Surveys show that in the past years, due to the lack of restoration of economic relations with Africa, the amount of trade with the countries of this continent has remained at the level of \$1.2 billion, but according to Mohammed-Sadeq Qanadzadeh, the director general of the Africa Department of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), facilitating the trade route with Africa is happening now and it is expected that the trade figure with this continent will reach \$10 billion in the next three years. In fact, good steps have been taken to use Africa's capacity, and Africa can be a suitable market for Iranian goods, Qanadzadeh stated.

ICCIMA Calls for Establishing Iran-Qatar Joint Investment Committee

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) has proposed the establishment of a joint investment committee between Iran and Qatar, the ICCIMA portal reported. Hossein Selahvarzi made the proposal in a meeting with Head of Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry Khalifa bin Jassim Al Thani in Qatar's Capital Doha on Sunday. Selahvarzi, who visited Doha on top of a delegation to attend the 39th meeting of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (ICCIA) general assembly, also met and held talks with the heads of Egypt and Guinea on the sidelines of the event. During his meeting with Khalifa bin Jassim Al Thani, the two sides emphasized the necessity of developing and balancing the trade between the two countries, while discussing joint investment. In this regard, the head of the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, referring to the volume of bilateral trade relations, said: "Currently, the value of trade between Iran and Qatar stands at about 200 million dollars, which is not at all satisfactory compared to the capacities of the two countries." Iran and Qatar signed a comprehensive cooperation document at the end of the ninth Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Committee meeting in Tehran on December

11. The document was signed by Iran's Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian and Qatar's Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Qassim Al Abdullah Al Thani as the heads of the Joint Economic Committee. In the mentioned document, cooperation in the fields of energy (water and wastewater, electricity, oil, gas, and environment), exchanging experiences and technical knowledge, holding events, including exhibitions, specialized training courses in the fields of water and water technologies, renewable energies have been emphasized.

Exchanging private sector delegations active in the fields of consulting, contracting, and industries, production of equipment related to the electricity industry, and the readiness of the environmental organizations of the two countries to expand relations have also been covered in the document. The document also covers cooperation in other fields including banking, insurance, customs, national development funds, technical and engineering services, trade, industries and mines, free zones, investment, and standards. Cooperation in the fields of transportation, communication and information technology, agriculture, judicial, legal, labor and border are also among the axes of this cooperation document.



Iran Urges Pakistan to Ensure Border Security after Rask Terrorist Attack



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi called on Pakistan to avert insecurity along the common border after Pakistani-based terrorists launched a deadly attack on an Iranian Police station in Sistan and Baluchestan province. The interior minister on Sunday paid a visit to the Police headquarters in Rask, where 11 Police forces were martyred in a terrorist attack on Friday. Vahidi said the investigation found that members of the terrorist group have crossed the border from Pakistan and entered the southeastern Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchestan at nighttime. "We call on the government of Pakistan to take action to protect and secure its border and not allow the terrorist groups to create dens on its soil," the minister stated. He also noted that the perpetrators of the terrorist attack will be soon brought to justice with the efforts of the Iranian security, military and law enforcement forces and a "terrible revenge" awaits them. In the early hours of Friday, gunmen of the "Jaish al-Adl" (better known in Iran as Jaish al-Dhulm) terrorist group stormed the police station in Rask, killing 11 servicemen and injuring a number of others.

Tehran, Muscat to Launch PTA for Boosting Bilateral Trade



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's minister of industry, mine and trade said Iran and the Sultanate of Oman will launch a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) to increase annual trade to \$3.5 billion. The two countries are targeting \$3.5 billion in annual trade exchanges in 2024, Abbas Aliabadi stated. Facilitating trade for businesspersons and removing the existing barriers facing merchants of the country are the main objectives of the ministry, he said, adding that reducing trade and business tariffs is one of the measures taken in this regard. He drew a comparison between a PTA and a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and noted that the tariff rates in a PTA are slightly higher and more limited than an FTA but have a good effect on the amount of trade. Given the Omani membership in the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC), Iran can launch the PTA with Oman, which would lead to an increase in the volume of trade between the two countries, the industry minister highlighted. Iran and Oman have the potential to increase their annual trade to \$5 billion, Aliabadi emphasized. He called on the businesspersons and traders of the country to make their utmost efforts to promote trade ties with the Sultanate of Oman since the two countries have established excellent diplomatic relations.



Iraq Holds First Elections for Provincial Councils in a Decade

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Voting began in Iraq on Monday in the first elections for provincial councils in a decade, with the ruling Shi'ite Muslim alliance likely to extend its grip on power amid a boycott by populist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, its main political rival. The election sets the stage for parliamentary elections scheduled for 2025, which will determine the balance of power in a nation where groups with ties to Iran have made political gains in recent years. Local elections last took place in 2013. They were postponed since due to the war against Islamic State militants who took over large parts of Iraq but were eventually defeated. Sadr's Shi'ite rivals, who blocked his bid to form a government after he emerged as a winner in 2021 parliamentary polls, are likely to take control of most local councils, especially in the mainly Shi'ite southern provinces. This would further consolidate the power of the ruling Shi'ite alliance, known as the Coordination Framework, deepening their power via access to state oil wealth that can be spent on local projects and services.



Serbia's Ruling SNS Set to Win Election



BELGRADE (Dispatches) - President Aleksandar Vucic declared victory in a snap parliamentary election on Sunday, after pollsters projected his ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) was on track to easily win. Based on votes counted in a sample of polling stations, pollsters Ipsos and CeSID predicted the populist SNS won 46.2% of votes, while the opposition center-left Serbia Against Violence (SPN) alliance is set to come second with 23.2%. "This is an absolute victory and it makes me happy," Vucic said after projections were made. The Socialist Party of Serbia of outgoing foreign minister Ivica Dacic was seen coming in third with 6.7% of the vote. The parliamentary election, the fifth since 2012, coincides with local elections in most municipalities, the capital Belgrade and the northern province of Vojvodina. The pollsters also said that SNS won the most votes in Belgrade with 38.6% of the vote for city council and mayor, while the opposition SPN came second with 35% of the vote. With its population of 1.4 million people, Belgrade represents about a quarter of Serbia's electorate, and its mayor is seen as one of the most influential officials in Serbia. CeSID and IPSOS reported a number of irregularities including organized arrivals of voters at polling stations, photographing of ballots, and procedural errors. Serbia Against Violence accused the ruling party of election fraud and said it would complain to the state election commission. "We have witnessed a serious attempt to steal elections," Miroslav Alekscic, one of its leaders, said on Sunday evening. A total of 18 parties and alliances competed for the support of the 6.5 million-strong electorate for 250 seats in parliament. The threshold for entering parliament is 3% of votes. The preliminary vote count suggested SNS will have a slim majority of at least 127 deputies, enough to rule alone, but it is expected to seek coalition partners to cement its dominance of parliament. Two mass shootings in May, resulting in 18 deaths, including nine elementary school students, triggered protests that shook Vucic and the SNS's decade-long grip on power. The discontent was made worse by rising inflation, which hit 8% in November. Opposition parties and rights watchdogs also accuse Vucic and the SNS of bribing voters, stifling media freedom, violence against opponents, corruption and ties with organized crime. Vucic and his allies deny these allegations. The state Election Commission said election monitors from the CRTA watchdog were attacked in northern Serbia. One person was later arrested in connection with the incident, police said. By law, the parliament must be convened within two weeks after the official announcement of final election results, and the parties then have 60 days to form a government. Serbia, a candidate to join the European Union, must first normalise relations with Kosovo, its former predominantly Albanian province that declared independence in 2008 after a guerrilla uprising in the late 1990s. EU-brokered talks between Belgrade and Pristina are stalled and tensions remain high.



North Korea Test Fires Long-Range Missile With U.S. in Range

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea launched another long-range ballistic missile on Monday with a potential capability of striking the United States, Seoul and Tokyo officials said, extending a record-breaking number of weapons tests this year that have been condemned by the West. The firing followed the test of a shorter range missile on Sunday night, with the back-to-back launches coming immediately in the wake of another bout of fearsome rhetoric between North Korea and the US-South Korean allies. South Korea's military said it had detected the launch of a long-range ballistic missile from the Pyongyang area on Monday that flew 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) before splashing down in the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan. The South reported the missile flew up rather than across, a method Pyongyang has previously said it employs in some weapons tests to avoid flying over neighbouring countries. Japan's defence ministry said it was an ICBM-class missile with a potential range covering all of the United States. "The ICBM-class ballistic missile launched this time, if calculated based on the trajectory, depending on weight of warhead, could have a flying range of over 15,000 kilometres (9,320 miles)," said Shingo Miyake, parliamentary vice-minister of defence. "In which case the whole of the US territory would be within the range." The United Nations Security Council has adopted many resolutions calling on North Korea to halt its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes since it first conducted a nuclear test in 2006. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida described Monday's launch as a "threat to peace and stability", and said it violated UN Security Council resolutions. The US State Department released a statement condemning the test. North Korea has previously test-fired four ICBMs this year. The last time was in July, when it launched its solid-fuel Hwasong-18. The Hwasong-18, which was first test-fired in April, is North Korea's first ICBM to use solid fuel, which makes it easier to transport and faster

to launch than liquid-fuelled versions. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson said they were analysing whether Monday's launch was a solid-fuelled ICBM. The United States and South Korea on Friday held their second session of the Nuclear Consultative Group in Washington, where they discussed nuclear deterrence in the event of conflict with the North. On Saturday they warned that any nuclear attack from Pyongyang on the United States and South Korea would result in the end of the North Korean regime. A spokesperson for North Korea's defence ministry on Sunday slammed the allies' plans to expand annual joint military exercise next year to include a nuclear operation drill. "This is an open declaration on nuclear confrontation to make the use of nuclear weapons against the DPRK a fait accompli," said a statement carried by the KCNA news agency, using the official acronym for North Korea. "Any attempt to use armed forces against the DPRK will face a preemptive and deadly counteraction," it added. The North's launch of its military spy satellite launch last month further damaged ties. The portrayed it as a major breakthrough, claiming it was providing images of US and South Korean military sites. That launch fractured a military agreement between the Koreans established to de-escalate tensions on the peninsula. Following the spy satellite launch, both sides ramped up security along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating them. "If North Korea does something reckless that destroys peace, all that awaits them is a hell of destruction," South Korea's Defence Minister Shin Won-sik warned in a meeting with top military commanders last week. Shin has recently made unusually fiery remarks and has threatened lethal missile strikes on "the heart and head" of Pyongyang in the event of a war. North Korea last year declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear power and has repeatedly said it will never give up its nuclear programme, which the regime views as essential for its survival.

Security Scare Near Biden as Car Hits Motorcade



WILMINGTON (Dispatches) - A car crashed into a vehicle attached to Joe Biden's motorcade yesterday, with the security scare startling the U.S. president as he left his campaign headquarters in Delaware. After a loud bang caused by a sedan slamming into an SUV positioned in a nearby intersection about 40 meters from Biden, security personnel rushed the president into a waiting vehicle and he was whisked away from the building in downtown Wilmington. "Both the president and first lady are fine," a White House official told an AFP reporter who witnessed the incident. Further questions were referred to the U.S. Secret Service. Pool reporters had gathered on the sidewalk outside the campaign offices — where the president and First Lady Jill Biden had had dinner with staff — and had just finished shouting questions to Biden from a distance when they heard the crash and saw him with a surprised expression on his face. Agents sprang into action, cornering the silver car with Delaware license plates and drawing weapons on the driver, who held his hands up. Reporters were then quickly rounded up by staff to join the motorcade as it departed the rain-drenched scene. "They're evacuating, you guys gotta go," a staffer told reporters as security personnel secured the area. Biden arrived safely at his family home without further incident.



Israeli Forces Launch Strikes Up and Down Gaza Strip; Hospital Hit

GAZA (Dispatches) - Israeli forces launched deadly attacks up and down the Gaza Strip, hitting a refugee camp in the north, a hospital in the south and killing a teenage girl who had lost her leg in an earlier strike, according to Palestinian officials, media and eyewitnesses. Israeli strikes on the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza killed 90 Palestinians on Sunday, Gaza's health ministry spokesman told Reuters. Another missile attack on a house belonging to the Shehab family killed 24 people, Hamas Aqsa radio said. The son of Dawoud Shehab, spokesman of Hamas-ally Islamic Jihad, was among the dead, an official from the group told Reuters. A medic said dozens of people had been killed or wounded in the Shehab family home and nearby buildings. "We believe the number of dead people under the rubble is huge but there is no way to remove the rubble and recover them because of the intensity of Israeli fire," he said by telephone. In Deir al-Balah, central Gaza, medics said 12 Palestinians had been killed and dozens wounded, while in Rafah in the south, an Israeli air strike on a house left at least four people dead. People rushed to the building to rescue those trapped under the rubble. The sound of the explosion was "as powerful as an earthquake", Mahmoud Jarbou, who lives nearby, told Reuters. The Israeli government said it operated against militant targets and that it takes extraordinary measures to avoid hitting civilians. In Khan Younis in southern Gaza, residents reported hearing Israeli planes and tanks bombing and shelling and the sound of rocket-propelled grenades, apparently fired by Hamas. The Israeli military said it had killed seven militants in an air strike on Khan Younis and found rocket manufacturing parts and three tunnel shafts near a school used as a shelter. An Israeli tank shell hit the maternity building inside the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, killing a 13-year-old girl named Dina Abu Mehsen, according to Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qidra. Al-Qidra said that Abu Mehsen had previously lost her father, mother, two of her siblings, and one of

her legs during the shelling of a house in the Al-Amal neighborhood in Khan Younis a few weeks ago. Around 19,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza health officials, since Oct. 7 when Hamas militants killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli authorities, and captured 240 hostages in their surprise raid. Israeli officials say that 121 soldiers have been killed since the ground campaign began on Oct. 27, when tanks and infantry began to push into Gaza's cities and refugee camps. Hopes for another ceasefire and hostage releases had been raised on Saturday when a source said Israel's spy chief had spoken on Friday with the prime minister of Qatar, which has previously mediated hostage releases in return for a week-long ceasefire and the freeing of Palestinian prisoners. Two security sources from Egypt — another mediator — said on Sunday Israel and Hamas were both open to a renewed ceasefire and hostage release, though disagreements remained on how it would be implemented. "We are open to any efforts aimed at ending the Israeli aggression. This is the ground for any discussion," Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said when asked for comment on the Egyptian statement. In a further positive sign, the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza opened for aid trucks on Sunday for the first time since the outbreak of war, officials said, in a move to double the amount of food and medicine reaching Gazans. But Israeli authorities said they were determined to fight on to eliminate Hamas, which has run Gaza since 2006 and is sworn to Israel's destruction. "It is important for me to make clear, the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) is determined to complete the task of dismantling Hamas," Israeli military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari told reporters in Tel Aviv. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who traveled to Kuwait on Sunday to offer condolences on the death of Kuwait's emir, Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Sabah, is expected in Israel later for meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials.



Russia and Ukraine Launch Swarm of Drones at Each Other's Territory

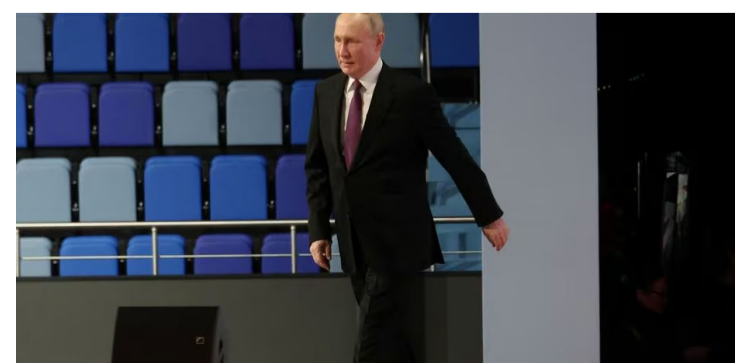
KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine and Russia launched a swarm of drones at each other's territories as both sides step up attacks, with the Russian assault reportedly killing one person in Odesa and the Ukrainian strike targeting a Russian military airfield. Ukraine's air force said yesterday morning that it had destroyed 20 drones and a cruise missile that Russia launched overnight. Nine of the drones were downed over the southern Odesa region, with falling debris starting a fire in a residential house and killing one person. The Russian defense ministry said in a social media statement that its air defense systems destroyed or intercepted a total of 35 Ukraine-launched drones over Lipetsk, Volgograd and Rostov regions. It did not say what was targeted or whether there was any damage. Ukrainska Pravda media outlet reported late yesterday, citing unnamed sources, that the Kyiv attack targeted the Russian Morozovsk airfield in the Rostov region in a reportedly joint operation of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Armed Forces. Reuters could not independently verify the reports. Vasily Golubev, the governor of the Rostov region that borders Ukraine in Russia's southwest corner, said in a statement on the Telegram messaging app that air defence forces repelled "a massive attack" by drones in the area of Morozovsk and Kamensk and that most of the air weapons were destroyed. Several Russian military bloggers said, however, that one bomber at the air base suffered minor damage. The Morozovsk air base is home to Russia's 559th Bomber Aviation Regiment, according to Russian state media, and is armed with Russia's most modern medium-range Su-34 bombers. While Moscow and Kyiv deny targeting civilians in the war that Russia launched on Ukraine in February 2022, both sides have carried out numerous strikes on each other's infrastructure that is critical to their militaries. The attacks follow Ukraine's reports that its air defense systems had shot down 30 Russia-launched drones over 11 regions across the country on Saturday and Russia saying on Friday it had downed 26 Ukrainian drones over Crimea, the peninsula that Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Putin Says Russia Has No Plan to Attack NATO

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin dismissed as complete nonsense remarks by U.S. President Joe Biden that Russia would attack a NATO country if it won the war in Ukraine, adding that Russia had no interest in fighting the NATO military alliance. The war in Ukraine has triggered the deepest crisis in Moscow's relations with the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and Biden warned last year that a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia would trigger World War Three. In a plea to Republicans not to block further military aid earlier this month, Biden warned that if Putin was victorious over Ukraine then the Russian leader would not stop and would attack a NATO country. "It is complete nonsense - and I think President Biden understands that," Putin said in an interview published on Sunday by Rossiya state television, adding that Biden appeared to be trying to justify his own "mistaken policy" on Russia. "Russia has no reason, no interest - no geopolitical interest, neither economic, political nor military - to fight with NATO countries," Putin said. The U.S.-led NATO alliance was founded in 1949 to provide Western security against the Soviet Union. After the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, it was enlarged to include some former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries. Putin has repeatedly cast the post-Cold War expansion of NATO as evidence of the West's arrogant way of dealing with Russia's security concerns. Under Article 5 of the NATO treaty, "the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them

all". Putin said that Finland's entry into NATO in April would force Russia to "concentrate certain military units" in northern Russia near their border. The failure of Ukraine's counteroffensive this year has raised questions in the West and inside Ukraine about just how realistic the Ukrainian and Western aims of defeating Russian forces in Ukraine are. Officials in Moscow and the West have repeatedly spoken of a "new Cold War", with Russia and China on one side and the West on the other. Asked about how common ground could be found with the West given the rhetoric on both sides, Putin said: "They will have to find common ground because they will have to reckon with us." A senior U.S. State Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said last month that Putin would not make peace before he knows the results of the November election in the United States. The West, Putin said, had failed to understand the extent of the changes ushered in by the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, which he said had removed any genuine ideological basis for a confrontation between Russia and the West. "I really did have a naive impression," Putin, a former KGB spy who rose to power in 1999, said of his impressions of the world in 2000. "The reality is that after the fall of the Soviet Union, they considered that they just had to wait for a bit to completely destroy Russia," Putin said. Putin casts the war as part of a much bigger struggle with the United States, which the Kremlin elite says aims to cleave Russia apart, grab its vast natural resources and then turn to settling scores with China. The West, which presents Russia and China as

its main threats, says it has no plan to destroy Russia. Ukraine says it will not rest until every last Russian soldier is ejected from its territory.



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Celtics Drop Magic to Stay Perfect at Home

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Boston improved their perfect NBA home record to 14-0 as Jaylen Brown keyed a fourth-quarter surge that saw the Celtics pull away for a 114-97 victory over the Orlando Magic. Brown scored 17 of his 31 points in the final period to help the Celtics, who led by nine through three quarters, push their lead to as many as 23. Jayson Tatum scored 23 points, and Kristaps Porzingis added 15 points and 10 rebounds in his return from a one-game absence. The Celtics withstood a 36-point, 10-rebound performance from Orlando's Paolo Banchero to beat the Magic for the second time in three days. Stung by that defeat on Friday, the Magic raced to an early 10-point lead, but the Celtics turned the tide in the second quarter and never trailed after the break. Brown, who added five rebounds, six assists, one steal and one block, said his fourth-quarter burst was just a matter of falling into a rhythm. "I'm a do whatever our team needs kind of guy," he said. "First quarter, fourth quarter, it don't matter, I just take advantage of the opportunities I get." The Milwaukee Bucks stayed a game and a half behind the East-leading Celtics with a 128-119 victory over the Houston Rockets. Damian Lillard scored 39 points and Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 26 points and pulled down 17 rebounds -- passing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to become the Bucks' all-time rebounding leader. Antetokounmpo, already the Bucks' all-time leader in points and assists, claimed the franchise rebounding mark with his 14th of the night midway through the fourth quarter that took his career tally to 17,162. The bruising encounter in Milwaukee saw Antetokounmpo leave the court to have a bleeding cut on his arm taken care of and Milwaukee's Pat Connaughton take an elbow to the jaw from

Houston's Dillon Brooks. Brooks and Rockets coach Ime Udoka were both ejected in the final minute. The Rockets were down by nine when Brooks and Udoka were tossed and Lillard made three of the four technical free-throws to put it out of reach. VanVleet led the Rockets with 22 points and center Alperen Sengun added 20. But Houston, who had cut the deficit to three midway through the fourth, couldn't come up with an answer when Milwaukee's Khris Middleton scored 14 of his 20 points in the final period to help the Bucks pull away. In Phoenix, Kevin Durant scored 28 points and Devin Booker added 27 as the Suns erased a 16-point deficit to beat the Washington Wizards 112-108. The Suns were up by one with 42.1 seconds remaining when Durant powered through the Wizards defense to jam in a one-handed dunk over Daniel Gafford. Fouled on the play, Durant made the free-throw to push the lead to 110-106 and the Suns held on for the win. Elsewhere, the New Orleans Pelicans drilled a franchise record 22 three-pointers in a dominant 146-110 victory over the Spurs in San Antonio. CJ McCollum made six of his seven three-point attempts on the way to 29 points. Brandon Ingram was five-of-seven from beyond the arc and scored 26 points for the Pelicans, who threw some cold water on the Spurs' halftime ceremony honoring Tony Parker's induction into the Hall of Fame in August. Rookie sensation Victor Wembanyama scored 17 points and grabbed 13 rebounds under the eye of fellow Frenchman Parker, his childhood idol. The Spurs, who snapped their 18-game losing streak with a victory over LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers on Friday, took a 6-0 lead on Wembanyama's alley-oop dunk in the opening minutes but had little to celebrate the rest of the way.

Kane Says Stuttgart Win Bayern's Best Game of Year



MUNICH (Dispatches) - Harry Kane said Bayern Munich's 3-0 win over fourth-placed Stuttgart was the team's "best game of the year so far", after the reigning champions moved back within four points of Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen. Kane scored twice and now has 20 goals from just 14 league matches since joining Bayern in the summer from Tottenham. "It's probably our best game so far this year against a really tough side," Kane told reporters. "Obviously they're right behind us in the league, big game just before the winter break, and we were dominant through the whole game." They had very few chances, we had countless chances, we could have scored a few more. "Bayern came into the match missing several first-team players through injury or illness, including Leon Goretzka, Joshua Kimmich, Serge Gnabry, Kingsley Coman and Noussair Mazraoui. Leverkusen's 3-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt, who beat Bayern 5-1 last weekend, before kick-off meant Kane's side were in danger of falling further behind Xabi Alonso's men. "Bayer Leverkusen are still going strong, they're still up there, four points ahead, so we just have to win as many games as possible," added Kane, who is still waiting to win the first trophy of his career. "There's still a long way to go, we're not even halfway through the season yet so you can't get carried away. "We needed to show a reaction after last week, which I think we did." Bayern take on Wolfsburg on Wednesday in their final game before the two-week winter break. "Hopefully we can get the three points on Wednesday and we can get to the break in a good position. "From January is where the business end starts." Leverkusen, with 21 wins and three draws from 24 games in all competitions, are undefeated this season. "They've started the season strong, but we can't focus on them, we have to focus on us," said Kane. "We've only had one loss in the league -- we just need to keep that up."

FIFA Club World Cup Format and Qualification Criteria for 2025

ZURICH (Dispatches) - FIFA announced on Sunday that its revamped Club World Cup, to be held for the first time in 2025, will feature 32 teams and will be played from mid-June to mid-July. Following are details of how the tournament will work: - The United States will host the 2025 edition of the expanded event, which will be held every four years thereafter. - The tournament will have eight groups of four with the top two teams from each group going through to the knockout stages -- the same format as the World Cup. - The current version of the FIFA Club World Cup -- an annual competition with seven teams -- will be discontinued after the tournament now being hosted by Saudi Arabia. - Europe will have 12 teams in the new competition and South America will have six, while Africa, Asia and North America will have four each. Oceania has one slot, while the final slot will be allocated to a club from the host country. - Clubs will be ranked based on sporting criteria over four seasons to secure qualification for the Club World Cup. - Teams will get three points for a win, one point for a draw and three points for progress to each stage of their confederation's premier competition. - In Europe, UEFA's club coefficients system will be used, with teams getting two points for a win, one point for a draw, four points for qualification for the group stage, five points for qualification for the last 16 and one point for progress to each stage of the competition thereafter. - Confederation champions from 2021-2024 will be eligible to play in the new Club World Cup, meaning Chelsea, Real Madrid and last season's Champions League winners Manchester City have qualified from Europe. - The other European teams who have qualified based on the points system are Bayern Munich, Paris St Germain, Inter Milan, FC Porto and Benfica. - Only two teams from one country can qualify for the tournament unless they win the continental competition. For example, since Chelsea and City have qualified from England, Arsenal can qualify only if they win the Champions League this season. - From South America, Brazilian sides Palmeiras, Flamengo and Fluminense have qualified as Copa Libertadores champions, while Asian sides Al Hilal and Urawa Red Diamonds are also through. - Al Ahly and Wydad have similarly qualified from Africa while Monterrey, Seattle Sounders and Club Leon are through from North America. - Oceania's Auckland City have sealed progress with no other team in position to overtake their points tally.



Madrid Thrash Villarreal to Go Top



MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid cruised to a 4-1 win over Villarreal to move top of La Liga but their night was tarnished when defender David Alaba suffered a serious knee injury. Carlo Ancelotti's side are a point ahead of Catalan minnows Girona, who host Alaves and will be looking to reclaim pole position. Spain's top scorer Jude Bellingham broke the deadlock for Madrid with his 13th league goal of the season before Rodrygo Goes doubled their lead. Villarreal pulled one back through Jose Luis Morales, but Brahim Diaz scored a superb solo goal to restore Madrid's advantage. Luka Modric drove home the fourth as Madrid fans celebrated a sizeable victory in their final home match of the year. Madrid's joy was tempered by Alaba's injury, confirmed by the club in a statement, saying the defender needs surgery. The Austrian joins a long list of players out, including Thibaut Courtois, Eder Militao and Eduardo Camavinga, all with knee injuries, and winger Vinicius Junior among others. Ancelotti said Alaba's injury was "very sad" but praised his team's performance. "We think we are doing very well, it was one of our best games," said the coach. The highlight of the night was Diaz's fine individual strike. "It's the kind of move I usually try, today it went in, so I'm very happy," Diaz told Real Madrid TV. "I'm happy for the team's work, we did a great job today and I'm happy for the goal and for the win." Former Manchester City midfielder Diaz is striking up a fruitful relationship with Bellingham and Rodrygo in attack. "We understand each other well, we all get along because it's an incredible group, we are very united and you see that on the pitch," he added. Ancelotti put his faith in England international Bellingham to take an attacking role this season for Madrid and it is paying off in virtually every match. The 20-year-old netted his 17th goal across all competitions in his 20th match this season to get the party started after Madrid saw rivals Barcelona, third, held at Valencia on Saturday. Madrid, playing at the renovated Santiago Bernabeu with the new roof closed for just the second time, made the early running against Villarreal. They got their reward midway through the first half when Bellingham leaped high to nod home Modric's delicious clipped cross. After Alaba's injury, sustained while trying to challenge Gerard Moreno, Rodrygo doubled the lead from close range. It was the Brazilian's eighth goal in his last eight games for Real Madrid, continuing his own superb goalscoring form of late after a slow start to the campaign. Early in the second half, Villarreal pulled one back, with Morales finishing past Andriy Lunin, selected over Kepa Arrizabalaga. But Diaz whisked the visitors' hope away when he turned brilliantly away from Aissa Mandi in midfield, drove forward, swerved Jorge Cuenca and finished with ease.

Van Dijk Slams Man Utd's Caution After Liverpool Draw

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool defender Virgil van Dijk slammed Manchester United's defensive approach as he claimed there was "only one team trying to win" Sunday's 0-0 draw at Anfield. Van Dijk was frustrated that struggling United opted for a cautious game plan that left little room for Liverpool to exploit. Liverpool's failure to break down United's massed defence cost them top spot in the Premier League as Arsenal took pole position following their win over Brighton. Taking a swipe at United's negative performance, which allowed Liverpool to have 34 shots but only eight on target, Van Dijk said: "If you see how we played the game, we had most of the ball and created some opportunities. There was only one team trying to win the game. "We want to win every game of course and that is why it is frustrating. Sometimes we shot too easy and could have passed on the overlap. The right decision was sometimes lacking." Van Dijk, who had a first-half header saved by Andre Onana, conceded he could understand why United were content to subdue Liverpool after such a difficult season, in contrast to the Reds' fine form. Urging Liverpool to learn from their failure to kill off United, Van Dijk said: "We carry on of course but it is frustrating because we were superior in all aspects. "In the end they are buzzing with a point, and we are disappointed with a point. "Obviously they are not in the best phase. Coming here you are way of the threat we have. We should have won it today. We have to learn from certain situations, and I know we will." Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp insisted his side had been even more dominant than in their 7-0 demolition of United last season. But the German admitted Liverpool had let themselves down by hurrying their attacks in key moments. "I saw a lot of good things, the one thing I don't like is the result. We should have scored. We were in a rush in moments," he said. "Our counter-pressing was good as a group, and we didn't let them out. I can't remember such a dominant performance against Man Utd - even the 7-0. "Now it's 0-0 they probably feel slightly better than us. But we take the point and keep going." Unlike Van Dijk, Klopp was not surprised by United's

refusal to attack in numbers. "It was the type of game I expected. If we play like this it is difficult for the opposite team to get out of their own half and the way United defending was clean with a lot of passion," he said. "We tried everything and the numbers we created - in terms of shots - is crazy. But with that amount of shots, they should be a few more on target. That was our fault

today and we go from here." Asked if he was frustrated not to take advantage of United's recent struggles, Klopp added: "What everyone says only helps United. Why should we listen to that? They were fired up and I can't remember a game where they turn up with a white flag. It doesn't happen."

