

The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Summoned Sweden's Charge d'Affaires in Tehran in Protest at a Swedish Court's Ruling Against Former Iranian Official Hamid Nouri Over His Alleged Role in the Execution of Some MKO Members in Iran in the 1980s

IRAN NEWS

Germany's ambassador to Tehran Ambassador Hans-Udo Muzel Was Called to the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Protest at the "Baseless Accusations" a Court in the European Country Has Leveled Against Iran

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Iran Condemns Arab-Russian Statement on Persian Gulf Trio Islands



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry refuted the contents of a joint statement from several Arab countries and Russia about Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb, describing the islands as inseparable and eternal parts of Iran's territory. Nasser Kanaani on Thursday condemned the issues raised in a joint statement of the 6th Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum about the three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf. Rejecting the baseless contents of the statement from Russia and the Arab countries about the Iranian islands, the spokesman said those three islands are an inseparable part of Iran's national territory and will belong to Iran forever. Iran maintains that its territorial integrity and national sovereignty over the three Persian Gulf islands will never be subject to negotiations, rejects any claim made by anyone on the islands, and will not by any means budge on its sovereign and territorial rights, he stated. Highlighting Iran's respect for good neighborliness and its policy of strengthening ties with neighbors, Kanaani said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran calls on all of its northern and southern neighbors to move towards stronger relations by considering the actual and potential capacities available at the bilateral and regional levels and avoid repeating a series of refuted claims." Iran will have no hesitation whatsoever in safeguarding its territorial integrity, he reminded Russia and the Arab states. The islands of the Greater Tunb, the Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa have historically been part of Iran, proof of which can be found and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world. In the final statement of the 6th Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum, held in the southern Moroccan city of Marrakech on December 20, the participants supported peaceful solutions and initiatives to resolve what they called the conflict on the three islands through bilateral negotiations or the International Court of Justice.

Iran Rejects Hollywood-Style Claim of Plot to Kill Presenters



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iranian embassy in London has categorically rejected and condemned "baseless accusations" of British free-to-air public broadcast television network ITV about Iran's plot to assassinate two London-based TV presenters. ITV News on Thursday claimed that Iranian agents had offered a people-smuggler \$200,000 to assassinate two news presenters outside their London studio. The Iranian embassy dismissed the claims, saying they are "not only devoid of factual merit but also appear to be rooted in preconceived notions and a Hollywood-style narrative to pursue their malicious scheme and goal against the Islamic Republic of Iran which was in the agenda of some war wingers inside the UK for a while". "Iran as a responsible and transparent state is committed to its obligation according to international law and norms to not interfere in internal affairs of any country," the embassy said in a letter. The "unsubstantiated" claims of Iran's attempt to assassinate the staff of the Persian-language Iran International channel, which is reportedly funded by Saudi Arabia, were first raised by the network and then propagated by the British media and authorities. Last year, the channel sought to make a case in the British House of Commons for the designation of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, but the effort failed. At the time, Iran International claimed that two of its journalists working in the UK had received "credible" death threats from Iran's security forces. Those claims were repeated in a House of Commons meeting by British MP Bob Blackman who had undertaken to push for the blacklisting of the IRGC.

Countries With Rich Histories Must Stop Israeli Atrocities in Gaza



TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has called on countries with ancient cultures and civilizations to work together to stop the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip and to bring the Israeli officials to justice for their war crimes. Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks at the Ancient Civilizations Forum in Tehran on Thursday. He described the situation in Gaza as "dressing" and denounced the Israeli occupation and confiscation of Palestinian lands for the past seven decades. He also criticized the silence of the self-proclaimed defenders of human rights in the face of the atrocities and brutalities committed by the "fake" Israeli regime. He slammed the Israeli aerial and ground aggression that has killed at least 20,057 Palestinians, mostly women and children, injured injury of more than 53,320 others, and displaced most of Palestinians living in the besieged territory. Amir-Abdollahian also condemned Israel's intentional destruction of Gaza's heritage sites and its attempts to erase the Islamic identity of the occupied Old City of al-Quds. "Countries with ancient civilizations are expected to condemn such crimes, and utilize all means at their disposal to stop the current situation and put war criminals on trial at an international court of law," the Iranian minister noted. He also condemned the recent desecration of the Holy Quran and other religious scriptures in some European countries and urged the governments to play their role in preserving the civilized, cultural, and religious interaction and understanding among nations by criminalizing and punishing such actions. He stated that countries with rich histories of culture and civilization have the responsibility to counter the discourse of supremacy, dominance, exclusivity, and racism. He pointed out that the international community is still suffering from the consequences of the discourse of domination and violence, the instrumentalization of international principles, and the double standards. The Ancient Civilizations Forum, which consists of the Iran, Armenia, Italy, Bolivia, Peru, China, Iraq, Egypt, Mexico, and Greece, was established in 2017. Iran took over the rotating chairmanship of the forum and hosted the meeting in 2023.

World Astonished by Palestinians' Resistance Against Israel

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - President Ebrahim Raisi says the world is amazed by the resistance of the Palestinian people against the Israeli regime. Addressing a large crowd of people in the northern Iranian city of Gorgan on Thursday, Raisi hailed the resistance of the strong Palestinian people in Gaza in the face of more than two months of unrelenting Israeli assaults. All in the world are surprised by the power and determination of the young Palestinians, he added, noting that heads of many countries officially acknowledge this power and wonder how the Palestinians have achieved it in a land that is described as the world's largest open-air prison. This resistance is inspired by "the invincible power of the people in the Islamic Republic [of Iran]. We believe that blood prevails over the sword." Israeli regime waged the war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian Hamas resistance group carried out the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in response to the Israeli regime's atrocities against Palestinians. Since the start of the US-backed offensive, the Israeli regime has killed more than 20,000 Palestinians, including about 8,000 children and 6,200 women, and injured 52,586 others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under the rubble. Elsewhere in his remarks, the president noted that the enemies have failed to achieve all their vicious plots against the country, including their efforts to prevent the establishment and consolidation of an Islamic republic system and hinder Iran's progress. Despite all threats and sanctions, the determined Iranian people have succeeded in achieving progress in various sectors, Raisi pointed out. Meanwhile the president called fiber optic an important infrastructure of smart technology, the president said: "Perhaps it was unbelievable for many that the development of communication, information and technology will affect the whole life of people today and all aspects of life will be placed on this

platform." Raisi on Friday at the opening ceremony of the national plan to bring a fiber optics network to homes, businesses, and schools in Golestan, said: "Today we are witnessing the use of one of the most important communication, information and technology infrastructures in this province. I sincerely thank all those involved, the Ministry of Communications, the relevant general administration, specialists and contractors." He further said: "The day when telephone and electricity were invented, there was not so much progress. Progress was made step by step. That is, many villages did not have access to telephone or electricity at the beginning of the revolution. This was not possible in many parts of the world." The president added: "This man-made phenomenon very quickly affected all aspects of human life in the world." The Iranian President stated: "All aspects of human life are based on the internet, in economic, educational, personal and social life, businesses, banking communications and other services depend on this without which life will be disrupted." Raisi added: "This development must happen. One of the most important infrastructures for people's access is optical fiber. Considering the problems that copper cable has and its limitations, optical fiber can guarantee internet communication and internet services. This is one of the important infrastructures and should not be neglected." He continued: "The important thing is that the tasks and activities should be done carefully and quickly, some people complain about the slow speed of the Internet, and this infrastructure can solve the complaints. Raisi added: "COVID-19, we activated the educational system Shad" system (students' educational network) with this platform and people used it. Even now that there is no coronavirus, we insist that they do not abandon it. This is also a possibility for training and virtual training can be used in addition to face-to-face training."



Iran to Become a Major Trade Partner of EAEU



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) are expected to sign a free trade agreement. The trade minister of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) says Iran will become a major trade partner of the Russian-led economic bloc. Andrey Slepnev made the remarks in a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali on Wednesday, as the EAEU and the Islamic Republic are expected to sign a free trade agreement (FTA) in St. Petersburg on December 25. Slepnev described the deal as the most important cooperation document between the EAEU and Iran. Iran will turn into one of the important partners of the Eurasian Economic Community by signing the free trade agreement, he added. Jalali, for his part, said the pact is the fruit of intensive negotiations between the parties and their will to develop their relations. The Iranian ambassador had earlier told IRNA that under the Iran-EAEU free trade agreement, there would be no customs tariffs for the export of about 96 percent of Iranian goods to Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, and vice versa. He noted that the free trade pact will be implemented after its approval at the parliaments of the six countries that are parties to the deal. The Eurasian Economic Community is a regional trade organization of five post-Soviet nations— Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia—designed to promote the free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital in accordance with the EAEU Treaty. Earlier this month, Russian presidential aide Yury Ushakov said the deal "has a significance in the development of ... economic ties between Iran and the EAEU countries [and that it] will be important for our bilateral ties."

Iran Warns Against Any Provocative Israeli Actions in Region



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations has warned against "any provocative actions by the Israeli regime that could seriously impact peace and security in the region". Amir Saeid Irvani addressed a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Syria on Thursday, in which he touched on two Iranians serving as military advisers in Syria killed in an Israeli attack. "We strongly condemn the terrorist attack on military advisors in Syria on Dec. 2 where two Iranian advisors were martyred during their mission to support the Syrian army against terrorism," he said. "We reaffirm the inherent right of the Syrian Arab Republic under international law to take all necessary measures in response to terrorist attacks and acts of aggression by the Israeli regime," he added. Iran, Irvani said, calls on the Security Council to condemn the "destabilizing activities of the Israeli regime and its severe violation of Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity which pose a threat to peace and stability in the region". "The Israeli regime persists in its act of aggression against the Syrian territory. In parallel with the atrocities in the Gaza Strip, this regime engages in terrorism and aggression within Syrian borders, intentionally targeting civilians and critical infrastructure," he said. Irvani also categorically rejected "the groundless allegation made against my country by the representative of the United States that was repeated by the UK in this chamber". "Contrary to the unfounded claim Iran has consistently demonstrated its commitment to promoting peace and security in the region," he said. Irvani said the United States is "fully responsible for its decade-long aggression along with other crimes and unlawful measures in our region".

IRAN NEWS



Owji Says Golestan petchem Plan Will Turn Into Largest Project

TEHRAN (Shana) - The urea and ammonia plant in Golestan Province, northeastern Iran, will turn into the largest provincial construction project, said Oil Minister Javad Owji on Thursday. The minister, who made the statement in a ceremony to resume the suspended project, told reporters the project had been halted for several years and the issue was followed up the province's representative in the Parliament and the National Petrochemical Company (NPC). According to Owji, the plant will start producing 1.1 million tons of urea and ammonia as of 3.5 years later. Construction of the project's gas (feedstock) transmission pipeline will start soon, said the minister, describing the railway in the vicinity of the plant as a considerable advantage of the plan. Based on the plan, domestic knowledge-based companies will supply the major part of equipment needed for implementing the project, which will create 1,500 direct job opportunities when completed, Owji continued.

Iran Committed to Promoting Peace in Neighboring Afghanistan



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations has expressed the country's resolve to cooperate in efforts aimed at bringing lasting peace to neighboring Afghanistan. Speaking at a UN Security Council briefing on Afghanistan in New York, Amir Saied Irvani said that international engagements should not only seek a normalization of ties with the ruling Taliban administration or its recognition, but also contribute to improving the situation for people in the Central Asian country. "Iran remains steadfast in its commitment to close collaboration with neighboring countries, relevant partners, and the United Nations to promote lasting peace, security, and stability in Afghanistan," he said. "We hope that the de facto authorities will fulfill their international obligations, particularly in upholding their obligations to the neighbors." The envoy also pointed to the severe threat to Afghanistan and its neighbors posed by the persistent presence of the groups affiliated to Daesh and al-Qaeda terrorist groups. He further said that Iran has maintained its "active engagement" with the ruling faction in Kabul as a directly impacted neighbor, which is dealing with the repercussions of the situation in Afghanistan and hosting millions of Afghans. "This engagement was conducted both bilaterally and through neighboring and regional mechanisms... aiming to enhance and improve the humanitarian situation and facilitate Afghanistan's economic recovery," Irvani added. He also emphasized the need for impartial humanitarian aid and the lifting of sanctions to support Afghanistan's economic recovery. Meanwhile, the Iranian envoy criticized Afghan authorities for not taking significant steps to "achieve genuine ethnic and political inclusion" in the country and imposing severe restrictions on women and girls as well as their access to education.



Pakistan Pledges to Beef Up Security at Common Border with Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The president of Pakistan promised that his country will do its utmost to ensure security along the common border with Iran after a recent attack by the Pakistani-based terrorists claimed the lives of a dozen Iranian Police forces in Rask. In a telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart on Wednesday, Pakistani President Arif Alvi expressed condolences to Iran on the martyrdom of a number of security guards in the recent terrorist attack in Rask. He emphasized that the Pakistani government will do its best to improve the security of the common border and prevent the activities of hostile and terrorist groups in those areas. Alvi then lauded the position of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran in support of the oppressed Palestinian people, expressed his appreciation for the efforts of Iran in this matter, and said, "Coordinated and joint effort and action of Islamic countries can put extra pressure on the Zionists to stop their crimes in Gaza." The president of Pakistan confirmed the opinion of his Iranian counterpart

about the inability of international organizations, including the UN Security Council, to defend the rights of the Palestinian people and stop the crimes of the Zionist regime in Gaza. "We must seek to seriously change the structure of international organizations, and Muslims must be pioneers in this field," Alvi stated. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, for his part, condemned the Israeli regime's crimes and genocide of people in Gaza and denounced the inefficiency of the international organizations to stop these atrocities. He also stressed the importance of coordinated action by the Islamic countries in order to put pressures on the Zionist regime to stop the killing and crime machine in Gaza, his official website reported. Raisi also called on Pakistan to make more efforts to improve border security. Highlighting the great capacities of the two countries to expand cooperation, especially in the fields of energy, the Iranian president expressed hope that the authorities of the two countries would work more serious efforts to actualize these capacities.

Iran, Turkey FM Deputies Confer on Security Issue in Palestine



TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, in a meeting with Turkey's deputy foreign minister, stated that no one can make decisions for the Palestinian people, emphasizing that Islamic countries should help the Palestinian people decide on their destiny. The new round of political consultations between Iran and Turkey was held on Thursday with the meeting of Ali Bagheri Kani, the political deputy of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ahmad Yildiz, the deputy foreign minister of Turkey, as the heads of the two countries' delegations in Tehran. The talks were focused on bilateral relations, and regional and international developments, particularly the situation in Gaza, where Israeli air and ground attacks have killed more than 19,000 people, displaced more than 90% of the population and destroyed over 60% of infrastructure. The Deputy Foreign Ministers of Iran and Turkey also emphasized the importance of continuing consultation, and cooperation between the two countries in the Caucasus issues and confronting the presence and destructive role of extra-regional factors. The two senior diplomats mainly discussed the continuation of war crimes, genocide against Palestinian people by the Zionist regime, and the need to take effective measures to stop these crimes while providing immediate aid to Gazans and preventing the displacement of the Palestinian people. In this meeting, Bagheri Kani, referring to the all-round support of the United States to the Zionist regime in the continuation of crimes against the people of Gaza and the international community's will to stop the Israeli crimes, stated: "No one can decide for the Palestinian people; therefore, Islamic countries should help the Palestinian people to decide their destiny."

U.S. Internationally Responsible for Complicity in Israeli Genocide

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says the United States is internationally responsible for its irrefutable complicity in Israeli genocide and war crimes against the people of Gaza and the West Bank. Amir-Abdollahian discussed the situation in Gaza on the 76th day of the Israeli invasion of the besieged territory in a phone conversation with his Omani counterpart Sayyid Badr Albusaidi on Thursday. The Iranian foreign minister touched on regular meetings and contacts of the officials of the two countries at different levels, saying agreements reached between President Ibrahim Raesi and Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq are on the right track of implementation. Sultan Haitham visited Tehran in May, during which Iran and Oman signed at least

four agreements in the fields of economy, investment and energy. The Omani foreign minister highlighted the expansion of brotherly and friendly relations between the two countries and underlined the need for a lasting ceasefire in Gaza and the sending of humanitarian aid to the besieged territory. Later Thursday in his phone talks with the secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Amir-Abdollahian called for greater mobilization of the international community to stop Israeli attacks on Gaza and announced Iran's readiness to send humanitarian aid to the territory. Hissein Brahim Taha and Amir-Abdollahian discussed the latest situation of occupied Palestine, the Israeli

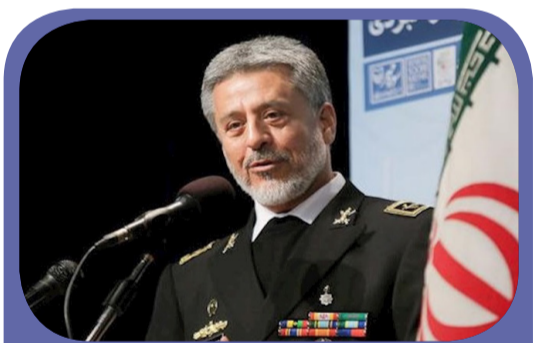


aggression against the people of Gaza and measures taken by the 57-member Islamic bloc to support the Palestinian people. "Expressing deep regret and condemning the continued attacks and aggression of the Zionist regime, which is a clear example of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide", the Iranian minister called for more action by the international community, especially the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, to stop them, Fars news agency reported. He touched on the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the medical and health problems and restrictions created as a result of relentless Israeli attacks. The minister emphasized the need to adopt appropriate and immediate solutions to facilitate the sending of humanitarian aid and shipments, especially medical and pharmaceutical items, based on the resolutions of the recent OIC summit in Riyadh. Amir-Abdollahian also informed the OIC secretary about some of the initiatives taken by the Islamic Republic in order to support the oppressed people of Palestine in the current dire situation, including his visit to Qatar on Wednesday and talks with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Taha expressed concern and condemnation of the continued Israeli attacks against Gaza, as he presented a report on measures taken by the OIC and its secretariat based on the recent resolution issued at the end of the Riyadh summit. He also welcomed Iran's initiatives and announced his readiness to develop the OIC's cooperation and Iran.

Iran Applauds S. Africa's Support for Palestine



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Praising South Africa's political support for the Palestinian people, the foreign minister of Iran called for strong concerted action to force the Zionist regime to end the brutal onslaught on Gaza. In a telephone call on Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his South African counterpart Naledi Pandor talked about the latest regional and international developments, including the Gaza crisis. Lauding the South African government's firm and explicit support for the Palestinian nation, Amir-Abdollahian highlighted the importance of joint efforts in the international arena to condemn the Zionist regime's atrocities and take practical measures to stop the war on the Gaza Strip. He also hailed the growing relations between Iran and South Africa. For her part, Pandor reaffirmed South Africa's overt backing for Palestine and push for an end to the Israeli crimes against people of Gaza. She noted that the government of South Africa has submitted a formal request at the International Court of Justice for the prosecution of the Israeli crimes against Palestinians. At least 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7.



Iran's Armed Forces Ready to Foil Any Threats

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Chief of the Army for Coordination stated that the armed forces are ready to face threats with their intelligence and military capabilities. Deputy Chief of the Army for Coordination, Deputy Chief of the Army for Coordination Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said: "With the intelligent support that the armed forces are equipped, the army and the naval strategic forces, their ability and capacity in guarding and protecting the borders of Islamic Iran is increased every day and are ready to face any threat." Rear Admiral Sayari, in the closing ceremony of the second round of internal military competitions, added: "To carry out a successful mission, you must be ready and increase your combat power." Iranian commander added: "We must deal with possible future threats, which will be multi-faceted and hybrid, to add to our capacities and abilities in different dimensions and not to be negligent in this way, because any shortcoming and negligence will cause surprise in facing the threat." Sayyari stressed: "Supposing that we have no enemies is a big mistake, threats are always there, and in the meantime, trained military forces ready to deal with threats is an effective component in improving combat power." Deputy Chief of the Army for Coordination also noted: "It is the preparation of the armed forces that has pushed back the criminal regime of the US, which has military bases in all neighboring countries and whose main target is Islamic Iran, over the past 40 years."

France Plans to Close Niger Embassy

PARIS (Dispatches) - France is planning to close its embassy in Niger for an indefinite period as it is unable to carry out diplomatic tasks due to restrictions imposed by the ruling junta, a French embassy letter to its Niger staff dated Tuesday and seen by Reuters on Thursday showed. Relations between Niger and France, its former colonial ruler, have broken down since army officers toppled President Mohamed Bazoum and seized power in a coup in July. Following the strategy of juntas in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, they ordered police to expel France's ambassador Sylvain Itte and called for the departure of French troops from its territory. France at first ignored the order, but a month later President Emmanuel Macron announced that the ambassador would return to Paris and French troops would leave. According to the document, shared on social media, Nigerien authorities did not respond favourably to the embassy's request to operate under regular conditions following the coup.



Red Sea Attacks Disrupt World Trade, More Ships Vow to Avoid Waters



FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Germany's Hapag-Lloyd and Hong Kong's OOCL said on Thursday they would avoid the Red Sea, the latest shipping companies to do so after attacks by Yemen's Houthis group on vessels disrupted global trade, prompting the establishment of a naval task force. The hostilities have put a chokehold on ship passages through the Suez Canal, which handles about 12% of worldwide trade. The Suez Canal is most vital to the movement of goods between Asia and Europe, but global logistics executives warned that sending ships on alternate routes could roil global supply chains, causing backups at ports and shortages of vessels, containers and equipment that are suddenly in the wrong place. "The situation remains fluid, things could change quickly, which is why contingency plans that include a plan A, B and C are critical to keeping supply chains moving," said Matthew Burgess, vice president of global ocean services at C.H. Robinson Worldwide (CHRW). Hapag-Lloyd said it would reroute 25 ships by the end of the year from the key waterway as freight rates and shipping stocks have increased because of the disruption. Avoiding the Red Sea and Suez Canal means following a far longer route around Africa. The Houthis, who control much of Yemen, have been attacking ships passing through the Bab al-Mandab Strait at the southern end of the Red Sea for weeks in what they say is a response to Israel's war in Gaza. Traders are meanwhile scrambling to find workarounds, including air flights, to get consumer goods to retailers, with journeys around Africa adding roughly 10-14 days extra to voyage times. "Up to this moment, we have guided OOCL-operated vessels to either divert route or suspend sailing to Red Sea," Hong Kong-headquartered container group OOCL told Reuters in a statement on Thursday, the first time it had confirmed pausing sailings. A crisis at a single point in the supply chain can cause ships to bunch up, upending arrival and departure schedules at seaports and cascading delays throughout the system, said Christian Sur, executive vice president of ocean freight at Unique Logistics.

UN Warns of Gaza Famine Risk as UNSC Resolution Faces Vote



GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) - The United Nations warned the Israel-Hamas war was pushing Gaza towards famine, ahead of an expected Security Council vote on a resolution to boost aid to the Palestinian territory but not call for a ceasefire. Separate diplomatic efforts were also under way for a fresh pause in the worst-ever Gaza war, which was triggered by an unprecedented Hamas attack on Israel in October. With conditions deteriorating in the territory, the UN Security Council has been locked in negotiations on a resolution that would boost aid deliveries. The latest draft seen by AFP, set to face a vote Friday, calls for "urgent steps to immediately allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access, and also for creating the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities." It does not call for an immediate end to fighting. Backed by its ally the United States, Israel has opposed the term "ceasefire". Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday there would be no ceasefire in Gaza until the "elimination" of Hamas. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US ambassador to the UN, told reporters that Washington would support the resolution if it "is put forward as is". The war began on October 7 after Hamas militants broke through Gaza's militarised border and killed around 1,140 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures. Hamas also abducted about 250 people. Vowing to destroy the group, Israel began a relentless bombardment of targets in Gaza, alongside a ground invasion, which the territory's Hamas government on Wednesday said has killed at least 20,000, mostly women and children. The entire

population of Gaza faces "an imminent risk of famine", according to a UN-backed global hunger monitoring system on Thursday, with more than half a million people facing "catastrophic conditions". "We have been warning for weeks that, with such deprivation and destruction, each day that goes by will only bring more hunger, disease and despair to the people of Gaza," UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths posted on X, formerly Twitter. The UN estimates 1.9 million Gazans are now displaced, out of a population of 2.4 million. With their homes destroyed, they are living in crowded shelters and struggling to find food, fuel, water and medical supplies. Diseases are spreading, and communications have been repeatedly cut. Displaced Gazans are pleading for a ceasefire. "My message is to put an end to this humiliation," said Foad Ibrahim Wadi, who found refuge at a greenhouse in Rafah. "This war does nothing but destroy. Enough is enough." After weeks of pressure, Israel approved the temporary reopening of the Kerem Shalom crossing on Friday to enable aid deliveries directly to Gaza, rather than through the Rafah crossing from Egypt. On Thursday, an Israeli strike hit the Palestinian side of Kerem Shalom, the crossings authority and the Hamas health ministry said. Israeli officials did not immediately respond to requests from AFP for comment. The UN secretary-general's spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, said the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, was "unable to receive (aid) trucks" via Kerem Shalom following the "drone strike" and that the World Food Programme had suspended operations at the crossing.

UK Recession Might Be Under Way After Economy Shrinks in Q3



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's economy might now be in a recession according to data which showed output shrank in the July-to-September period, shortly after finance minister Jeremy Hunt suggested the Bank of England might cut interest rates to help boost growth. Gross domestic product contracted by 0.1% in the third quarter, the Office for National Statistics said on Friday. It had previously estimated that the economy showed no change compared with the previous three months and economists polled by Reuters had mostly expected another unchanged reading. The ONS also said economic output in the second quarter was now estimated to have shown no growth, a downwards revision from a previous estimate of 0.2% growth. However, separate data showed retail sales in November jumped by much more than expected, increasing by 1.3% from October, boosted by discount sales. Sterling rose against the dollar and the euro after the data releases. Finance minister Hunt, whose Conservative Party is lagging far behind the opposition Labour Party in opinion polls ahead of an expected election next year, said the outlook for the economy was not as bad as the updated official figures suggested. "The medium-term outlook for the UK economy is far more optimistic than these numbers suggest," he said in a statement.

Gunman Kills 14 in Unprecedented Attack at Prague University



PRAGUE (Dispatches) - A 24-year-old Czech student shot dead his father, then killed 14 people and wounded 25 others at his Prague university on Thursday before possibly killing himself, police said, marking the country's worst-ever mass shooting. The government declared a day of mourning across the central European country for Dec. 23 to remember the victims, decided at a special cabinet meeting with President Petr Pavel. "I would express my great sadness along with helplessness and anger at the unnecessary loss of so many young lives," Pavel said. "I would like to express my sincere condolences to all relatives of the victims, to all who were at this tragic incident, the most tragic in the history of the Czech Republic." Police -- who discovered a large arsenal of weapons at the downtown Prague Charles University building where the shooting took place -- were tipped off earlier in the day the suspect was likely heading to Prague from his town in the Kladno region outside the capital with intentions of taking his own life. Shortly after that, the shooter's father was found dead. Police evacuated a Faculty of Arts building where the shooter was due to attend a lecture, but then were called to the faculty's larger main building, arriving within minutes after reports of the shooting. Police President Martin Vondrasek said. Police had "unconfirmed information from an account on a social network that he was supposedly inspired by one terrorist attack in Russia in the autumn of this year," Vondrasek told reporters, adding the shooter was a legal holder of several firearms. "It was a pre-mediated horrific act that started in the Kladno region and unfortunately ended here." The gunman is also suspected in the killings of another man and his two-month-old daughter who were found last week shot dead in woods in a village outside Prague, Vondrasek said. The gunman's death was likely a suicide but authorities are also investigating whether he may have been killed by police who returned fire, Vondrasek added. Police said he was a high-achieving student with no prior

criminal record and that he acted alone. Police asked not to reveal the man's identity but his name reported by some Czech media matched a police search report. Interior Minister Vit Rakusan said the shooting had no connection to international terrorism. Authorities sealed off the square and area adjacent to the faculty building, in a busy historical district across the river from Prague Castle on a popular street leading to Old Town Square. Media images showed students evacuating the building with their hands in the air, and others perched on a ledge near the roof trying to hide from the attacker while students barricaded classrooms with desks and chairs. "We always thought that this was a thing that did not concern us. Now it turns out that, unfortunately, our world is also changing and the problem of the individual shooter is emerging here as well," Prague Mayor Bohuslav Svoboda told Czech Television. The White House condemned the shooting and said the United States was ready to offer assistance. Leaders across Europe including France's Emmanuel Macron offered their support. Witness Ivo Havranek, 43, told Reuters via Zoom that he initially thought the "couple of bangs" he heard might have come from loud tourists or a nearby movie set. "Then suddenly there were students and teachers running out of the building. I went through the crowd not realising what is actually going on. I wasn't ready to admit that something like that could happen in Prague," he said. Only once he saw police officers with automatic rifles, he knew it was serious, he said. "They shouted at me to run away." People lit candles outside the historic headquarters of Charles University, central Europe's oldest set up in 1348. Gun crime is relatively rare in the Czech Republic. In December 2019, a 42-year-old gunman killed six people at a hospital waiting room in the eastern Czech city of Ostrava before fleeing and fatally shooting himself, police said. In 2015, a man fatally shot eight people and then killed himself at a restaurant in Uhersky Brod.



Macron Defends New French Migration Law

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron defended a bill to toughen immigration laws despite an embarrassing parliamentary vote that put his ruling alliance on the same side as Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement national party. The legislation, approved by both houses late on Tuesday, was initially good news for the centrist president, who made the migration bill a key plank of his second mandate and might otherwise have had to shelve it. But the support of Le Pen's opposition party for the bill surprised Macron, prompting him on Wednesday to accuse Le Pen of political opportunism and to add in a television interview: "That was a shoddy move." Just six months before European Parliament elections in which immigration will be key, the bill's adoption could boost Marine Le Pen who called the rejigged bill "a great ideological victory" for her far-right party. An Elabe poll for BFM TV showed 70% of the French backed the new bill, including 87% of Macron's supporters. But in a sign Le Pen had won the battle of narratives in public opinion, the same poll showed 73% thought her party's ideas had inspired the bill. Macron will refer the bill to the Constitutional Council for checks on whether it complies with the French constitution before he would sign it into law. The council could strike down some of the tougher measures if it deems them unconstitutional. The conservative Les Republicains, who partnered with his ruling alliance on that bill and have over the years hardened their discourse closer to that of the far-right, also claimed victory, saying the bill was essentially theirs. The bill underscored Macron's difficulties governing without a parliamentary majority, which he lost last year, as well as the rightward shift in much of Europe as governments try to curb the rise of the far-right by being tougher on immigration. "This bill will help us fight against what feeds the Rassemblement national," Macron said in the TV interview. "Our fellow citizens tell us we don't control illegal immigration well enough." He said there were measures in the bill he didn't like, such as the fact foreign students will need to present a refundable deposit. He said that could be reworked.

Mass Drone Attack Hits Several Kyiv Districts

KYIV (Dispatches) - More than two dozen Russian drones targeted Ukraine's capital early on Friday, officials said, injuring two people and damaging residential buildings in Moscow's latest overnight drone strike against Ukraine. It was the sixth such attack on Kyiv this month and part of a larger drone swarm aimed at parts of central, southern and western Ukraine, the country's air force said. Ukrainian air defenses shot down 24 out of 28 attack drones, it said. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said on Telegram that a drone had hit a block of flats in the Solomyanskyi district, south of the city centre, triggering a fire on the upper floors that was quickly brought under control. Emergency services also said several apartments were damaged on the 24th, 25th and 26th storeys of the building. Two people were injured, including one being treated in hospital. The incident occurred a few hundred meters from a maternity hospital. A video posted on social media showed a giant orange flame going skyward in the night. Klitschko also said drone fragments had set fire to a house under construction in Darnytskyi district on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River that runs through the city. Pictures posted online showed construction materials strewn about the site. Serhiy Popko, head of Kyiv's military administration, said fragments from a downed drone had struck an apartment building in a third area, also south of the city centre. He posted pictures showing smashed windows and heavy damage to apartments. Ukraine's southern command said an unspecified infrastructure facility in the Mykolaiv region had been struck and that fragments from a downed drone had damaged a grain storage facility in the Odesa region. No injuries were reported and the resulting fires were extinguished, authorities said.



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European Clubs, Leagues Reject Super League After EU

LONDON (Dispatches) - Major clubs and leagues across Europe rejected the Super League in favour of the status quo following Thursday's EU court verdict which said UEFA and FIFA contravened EU law by preventing the formation of a Super League. Manchester United were one of the first to say they remain committed to playing in competitions run by Europe's soccer governing body UEFA, as did German champions Bayern Munich. United were one of the 12 clubs involved in the formation of the breakaway Super League in April 2021 but pulled out due to pressure from fans, governments and players. "Our position has not changed. We remain fully committed to participation in UEFA competitions, and to positive cooperation with UEFA, the Premier League, and fellow clubs through the ECA on the continued development of the European game," the club said. Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur were the other five Premier League clubs involved before pulling out. Two months after the six English clubs pulled out of the project in 2021, they said they would offer a combined 22 million pounds (\$27.78 million) as "a gesture of goodwill" to go towards the good of the game, including new investment to support fans, grassroots football and community programmes. The Premier League said they would face a 30-point deduction if they attempt a similar move in future and each would be fined 25 million pounds for any such breakaway attempt. "The ruling does not endorse the so-called "European Super League" and the Premier League continues to reject any such concept," the Premier League said in a statement. "Supporters are of vital importance to the game and they have time and again made clear their opposition to a "breakaway" competition that severs the link between domestic and European football." Bayern Munich said they were committed to UEFA

competitions, saying the door for the Super League "remains closed" for the German champions. "The Bundesliga is the foundation of FC Bayern, just as all national leagues are the foundation of other European football clubs," Bayern CEO Jan Christian Dreesen said. "It is therefore our duty and our deep conviction to strengthen them, not to weaken them. We are also committed to the European club competitions under the umbrella of UEFA." The German Football League (DFL), which is in charge of the Bundesliga, said it "explicitly supports the European sports model and rejects competitions outside those competitions organised by the federations and the leagues". The European Club Association (ECA), which represents nearly 500 clubs across the continent, said the football world had "moved on from the Super League years ago". "Through ECA, clubs today are already at the heart of decision-making in relation to the competitions they participate in," the ECA said. "Most importantly, football is a social contract not a legal contract." All the recognised stakeholders... spanning confederations, federations, clubs, leagues, players and fans stand more united than ever against the attempts by a few individuals pursuing personal agendas to undermine the very foundations and basic principles of European football. France's Ligue de Football Professionnel (LFP) said it "unequivocally supports" competitions organized by UEFA. The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) reiterated its intention to protect the national championships, "for the defense of the broader and more general principle of sporting merit and the respect of international calendars". "The FIGC believes that the Super League is not a project compatible with these conditions and will always act in pursuing the general interests of Italian football," it added.

Vlhova Overhauls Shiffrin to Pinch Courchevel Slalom Win

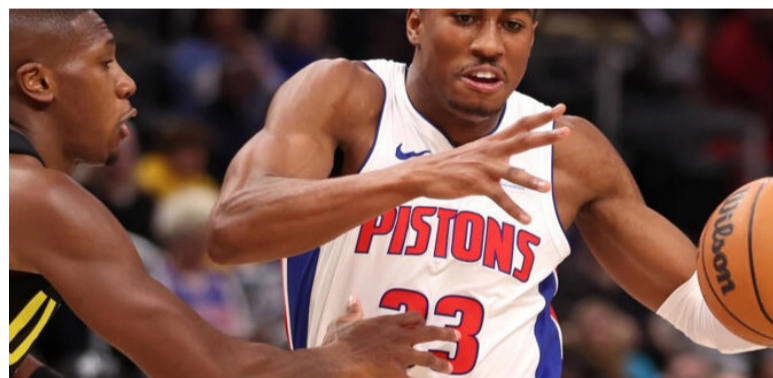


COURCHEVEL (Dispatches) - Olympic champion Petra Vlhova clinched her 30th World Cup win on Thursday with a scorching second run to beat Mikaela Shiffrin in the slalom under the lights at Courchevel. Shiffrin led by 0.17 seconds advantage after the first leg on the Roc de Fer piste but couldn't complete the job, finishing 0.24sec behind the time set by her chief rival. Vlhova, winner of the season's first slalom in Finland, emerged as the lone challenger to Shiffrin, with the rest of the field over a second off the pace after the opening run. The Slovak denied Shiffrin a 92nd World Cup victory and what would have been a third successive slalom triumph. "I think (the rivalry) is really good for our sport," Vlhova told Eurosport. "We are pushing each other all the time... taking our skiing to a higher level and getting better and better." Austria's Katharina Truppe took third, more than two seconds behind Vlhova, for her fourth career World Cup podium, all of them in the slalom. Five-time champion Shiffrin remains top of the overall standings on 700 points, 143 clear of Italy's Federica Brignone. Vlhova moved up to third on 491.

Pistons Drop 25th Straight, Nearing Longest NBA Losing Streak

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Detroit Pistons inched closer to NBA ignominy on Thursday as they dropped a 119-111 decision to the Utah Jazz on their home floor for a 25th straight defeat. The Pistons are now one loss away from matching the NBA's longest single-season losing streak of 26 games -- by the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers and the 2013-14 Philadelphia 76ers. The longest losing streak ever was the 28-game slide of the 76ers that spanned the 2014-15 and 2015-16 seasons. "That's history that nobody wants to be a part of," dejected Pistons point guard Cade Cunningham said. Utah, playing the second night of a back to back without Lauri Markkanen, Jordan Clarkson and Talen Horton-Tucker, had looked to offer the Pistons a golden opportunity to halt the slide. But after a bright start that saw Detroit lead by as many as eight points in the first quarter, the Jazz turned the tide with a 13-0 scoring run that saw them take a 45-32 lead early in the second period. Trailing 64-58 at halftime, the Pistons tied it up at 84-84 in the third quarter before the Jazz pulled away again. Kelly Olynyk led the Jazz with 27 points. Collin Sexton added 19, Ochai Agbaji scored 18 off the bench as six Jazz players scored in double figures. Cunningham scored 28 points and handed out 10 assists for the Pistons. Shooting guard Jaden Ivey scored 24 and Marvin Bagley III another 22 for Detroit, but no other Pistons players reached double figures as the Pistons -- an iconic franchise that won NBA titles in 1989, 1990 and 2004 -- remained without a win since October 28. "I am sick right now," said Cunningham, who was coming off a 43-point performance in a loss to the Atlanta Hawks. "Me personally, six turnovers -- kills us. We had 20 as a team, gave up 27 points off of it. That kills us." Pistons coach Monty Williams called it "a tough one to swallow." Fans at Little Caesars Arena thought so too, chanting "Sell the team" as the final seconds ticked down. In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points and rookie center Chet Holmgren added 23 to lead the Thunder to a 134-115 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers that ended the Clippers' nine-game winning streak. Holmgren's spectacular dunk -- that he jammed home off his own bounce off the backboard -- gave the Thunder the lead early in the third quarter and they didn't trail again on the way to a fifth win in six games. James Harden scored 23 points and Paul George added 22 for the Clippers, who were without forward Kawhi Leonard. Former Thunder star Russell Westbrook came off the bench to score 15 points with a season-high 13 rebounds for the Clippers. In Minneapolis, Anthony Edwards scored 27 points to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 118-111 victory over the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers. Karl-Anthony Towns added 21 points for the Timberwolves as all five starters scored in double figures. Anthony Davis scored 31 to lead the Lakers as LeBron James sat out with tendinitis in his left ankle. The Milwaukee Bucks, fueled by 37 points, 10 rebounds and six assists from Giannis Antetokounmpo, beat the Orlando Magic 118-114 for a sixth straight victory. Damian Lillard added 14 points and eight assists for the Bucks, who have now won 15 straight at their Fiserv Forum arena.

The San Antonio Spurs endured their 21st defeat in 22 games, falling 114-95 to the Bulls in Chicago. Coby White scored 22 points and DeMar DeRozan added 21 for the Bulls. Devin Vassell led the Spurs with 21 points as rookie sensation Victor Wembanyama, back after missing one game with a sore ankle, scored a season-low seven points with five rebounds. That ended the French prodigy's streak of eight straight double-doubles, a league record for a teenager.



Vazquez Sends Madrid to La Liga Summit



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Lucas Vazquez sent 10-man Real Madrid to the top of La Liga with a 92nd-minute winner in Thursday's 1-0 victory at Alaves. Defender Vazquez headed home to lift Madrid above Girona to the number one spot after this season's surprise packages were held to a 1-1 draw at Real Betis earlier in the day. Basque hosts Alaves frustrated Madrid even before the Spanish giants' defender Nacho Fernandez was sent off 10 minutes after the break. With the clock going into second-half injury time, it looked like Girona would lead the Spanish top-flight going into 2024 thanks to Madrid's draw, but 32-year-old Vazquez had other plans. Experienced Germany midfielder Toni Kroos whipped in a corner and Vazquez opened his account for the season with a free header, as Los Blancos top the table on goal difference before La Liga takes a break until January 2. In Seville, Artem Dovbyk's first-half penalty, the Ukrainian's 11th goal of the season, looked to have Girona heading for a fourth straight win and ninth victory in their last 10 matches. But German Pezzella, a World Cup winner with Argentina, levelled with two minutes to play as Betis extended their unbeaten run to 13 games -- nine of which have been draws. Girona, the club part-owned by the owners of Manchester City, dropped points for only the fourth time in 18 games this season. Girona goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga made a smart double save from Willian Jose and Ayoze Perez in the first half before the visitors struck after Savio was fouled in the area by Aitor Ruibal. Dovbyk stepped up and calmly rolled home the spot-kick to continue his fine debut season in Spain. But Girona, making an unlikely title push in only their fourth season in the top flight, failed to clear a late corner and Pezzella slammed the loose ball beyond Gazzaniga. Elsewhere, Real Mallorca beat Osasuna 3-2 for just their third win of the season, sending them five points clear of the relegation zone.

Rams Bolster NFL Playoff Bid With 30-22 Win Over Saints

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Los Angeles Rams took control in the NFL's NFC playoff race on Thursday, fending off a late New Orleans rally for a 30-22 victory over the Saints. Matthew Stafford passed for 328 yards and two touchdowns and rookie Puka Nacua had nine catches for 164 yards and a TD for the Rams, who now have a tiebreaker over the Saints in the battle for the NFC's last two wild card spots. Stafford became the first quarterback in Rams franchise history to have four straight games with two or more touchdown passes and no interceptions. Kyren Williams rushed for 104 yards and a touchdown, and Demarcus Robinson added 82 receiving yards and a touchdown as the Rams improved to 8-7. The Rams scored on each of their first two possessions, with Nacua catching a two-yard touchdown to cap a 95-yard drive before Lucas Havrisik hit a 20-yard field goal to put Los Angeles up 10-0. They were up 30-7 early in the fourth quarter before New Orleans' Derek Carr connected on touchdown passes to Juwan Johnson and A.T. Perry. A two-point conversion by the Saints saw them cut the deficit to eight points with less than four minutes to go. The Rams held on, however, Nacua recovering an onside kick and then delivering a first down that kept Los Angeles' closing drive alive. "It's fun to score," said Stafford, who said the Rams could have piled up even more points. "We could have had 40 tonight, in my opinion," he said. "There were quite a few plays here and there just didn't go our way or didn't hit. But that's part of it." A lot of room for improvement. But I'm proud of our guys, the way we came back and finished the game there at the end." Carr passed for 319 yards and hit Rashid Shaheed for a 45-yard touchdown. The Saints are still in the thick of the playoff race and could yet capture the NFC South division title. They close the regular season with two games against division opponents Tampa Bay and Atlanta.

