

The Iranian and Egyptian Presidents Ebrahim Raisi and Abdel Fattah El-Sisi Held a Phone Call on Saturday to Discuss the Latest Developments in Occupied Palestine and the Importance of Islamic Unity

IRAN NEWS

CEO of Bushehr Province Investment and Development Company Announced That an Iran-Qatar Trade Center Will Be Established in Doha and It Will Be Managed by Bushehr and Fall Under the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission of the Two Countries

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Iranian Economy Continues to Expand Despite Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

THE WORLD BANK
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TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The World Bank in a recent report on Iran's economy dubbed "Iran Economic Monitor" said the Islamic Republic's economy has been expanding despite the sanctions and global economic conditions. According to the WB report, Iran's economy continued to grow moderately for the third consecutive year in the previous Iranian calendar year (March 2022-March 2023) and it is expected to continue this upward trend albeit at a slower pace. "Real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 3.8 percent in 2022/23, driven by expansions in services and manufacturing. Despite sanctions, the oil sector also expanded, aided by the tighter global oil markets," the report said. Favorable weather conditions helped the agriculture sector to marginally grow after the contractions in previous years, the WB stated. "On the expenditure side, private consumption was the main driver of GDP growth. Government consumption contracted to contain the budget deficit following a sharp expansionary policy in 2021/22. Meanwhile, exports and imports both increased, and strong investment in machinery drove investments up, while construction investment marginally improved," the report read. Based on the WB data, the service sector was one of the main drivers of non-oil growth during the last two years. The sector continued its expansion in 2022/23 (2.7 percent, y/y), following a strong expansion in 2021/21 (6.5 percent). This growth was mainly driven by a rebound in "transport and storage" and "wholesale and retail" services, as well as the sustained growth of "information and telecommunication services (ITS)". The WB has put Iran's GDP growth at 2.4 in the current Iranian calendar year. It is expected that the growth of Iran's GDP will continue in the medium term, and the increase in oil production and export will act as one of the growth factors of Iran's economy during this period.

Usurping Zionist Regime Will Be Eradicated

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei says the Palestinian people will triumph and Israel will be eradicated, hailing the people of Gaza and its fighters for standing "like a rock" in the face of an unprecedented brutal war. "With God's help, the righteous front will undoubtedly win and the usurping Zionist regime will be eradicated, and we hope that you, the youth, will see this certain future with your own eyes," he said in Tehran on Saturday during a meeting with a group of visitors from Kerman and Khuzestan provinces. He touched on the events of besieged Gaza Strip during the past two and a half months, describing them "a unique and extraordinary phenomenon in the recent history of the Islamic world, the like of which we haven't had in recent history and perhaps in the last century". "This incident is unique from two sides. From the side of the Zionist regime, it is unique because this kind of brutality, criminality and bloodlust has never been seen in the period I mentioned," Ayatollah Khamenei said. "This kind of child killing, with bunker-busting bombs thrown over patients in hospitals, this kind of cruelty and wickedness is unprecedented," he said. "On the other side - the side of the Palestinian people and Palestinian fighters, this kind of standing, patience, resistance, and driving the enemy crazy has never been seen," the Leader added. "The people of Gaza, the fighters of Gaza stood like a rock, like a mountain. It is an important thing. Without water, food, medicine and fuel, they stood and didn't give up. It is very important." "Not giving up makes them victorious, even though the signs of victory can be seen today," Ayatollah Khamenei added, citing the Holy Qur'an which says "Truly, Allah is with those who are patient." Israel, the Leader said, "with all the equipment and all the facilities, remains powerless against the Palestinian fighters, whose equipment is almost incomparable to the equipment of the Zionist regime". "The failure of the Zionist regime in this incident is also the failure of the United States, and today no one in the world makes a difference between the occupying regime and the United States and England, and everyone knows that they are one and the same." The Leader said the U.S. veto of several resolutions of the UN Security Council for a ceasefire and the cessation of bombings in Gaza was "a shameful act" and "complicity with the Zionist regime to drop bombs on children, women, old men, the sick and other defenseless people". "The great victory of the Palestinian nation and the Front of Righteous and Resistance is that it discredited the West and America and expose the nature of all their false human rights claims, since Israel was not able to commit so many crimes without the support of America." And today the ugly face of the hideous monsters America and England has been revealed to all the people of the world, and the nature of the White House has been exposed and the inner self of the governments of American and England has been revealed." The Leader said governments and nations have a duty to help the resistance in any way possible. "Helping the resistance is everyone's duty, and helping the Zionist regime is a crime and treason," he said. Ayatollah Khamenei expressed regret over the "criminal" assistance of some Islamic states to the Zionist regime, saying Muslim nations will not forget it. The Islamic governments, he said, "have a responsibility to prevent goods, oil and fuel from reaching the Zionist regime, which has even prevented water from reaching the people of Gaza". "Muslim nations should ask their governments to cut off any ties and aid to Zionist criminals, or if they are not able to cut ties permanently, at least put pressure on the evil, cruel and bloodthirsty regime by temporarily cutting them off." Today, the Leader said, the conscience of the world has been hurt in the face of the Israeli barbarism. "People in America and Europe are coming to the streets and some political figures and their university presidents and scientists are protesting their governments' support of the Zionist regime, but despite this, some governments continue to help the brutal regime." Ayatollah Khamenei also said the solution to Iran's problems is elections, warning against certain efforts to discourage people from the ballot boxes. "Some people constantly remind the country's problems to discourage people, while the solution to the problems is elections, and to solve the problems, one should participate in the elections," he said. "Elections are the basis of transformation. Elections prevent dictatorship, chaos and insecurity," Ayatollah Khamenei added. The Leader touched on the concept of the Islamic Republic, explaining that the words "Islamic" and "Republic" are both related to elections. With Iran facing parliamentary and Experts Assembly elections in about two months, Ayatollah Khamenei said the Iranian people "should be prepared for these two important elections in the best possible way". "One is the election of the Assembly of Experts for Leadership, the importance of which lies in the fact that it can choose the right leader for the country when necessary, and over time it can and should take care of maintaining the vital qualifications of leadership in the person of the existing leader. The people of Iran, the people of the provinces should pay attention, be careful and hold these elections in the best way." And as for the election of the Islamic Consultative Assembly which is very important, according to the Constitution, the council is the one that lays the rail tracks for the future of the country. "If the country has problems, to solve these problems, there is a need for legislation and the prudent presence of the Islamic Consultative Assembly. These two elections should be held with dignity," the Leader said. Ayatollah Khamenei said scholars, university professors, seminary instructors, radio and television, journalists, young people and people within their families have a duty to invite people to participate in the elections. "If the participation is weak, the parliament will be weak and a weak parliament will not have full ability to solve the problems. If we want to solve the problems, we must increase participation; this is everyone's duty. Whoever wants to solve the country's problems, this is the way."

UNSC Resolution 2720 on Gaza Positive, But Insufficient



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Foreign Ministry of Iran hailed the positive move by the UN Security Council to adopt Resolution 2720 that demands immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza but said it is not enough to ease the pains of Palestinians. The UN Security Council on Friday adopted the resolution on the ongoing crisis in Gaza, with 13 votes in favor, and the US and Russia abstaining. The Resolution 2720, among other points, demands immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip. In a statement released on Saturday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani described the resolution as a "positive but insufficient" measure. "It's a great pity that after 77 days of lunatic attacks by the Zionist regime against the defenseless people of the Gaza Strip, the US government is still blocking the adoption of a binding UNSC resolution on the cessation of war and ending the Zionist regime's war crimes and genocide committed in Gaza," he added. Kanaani noted that it is practically impossible to send humanitarian aid supplies to Gaza as the Israeli regime continues to bombard the enclave, commits the most unprecedented war crimes in the modern history, and had destroyed over 60 percent of houses and municipal infrastructures in Gaza. "The UN secretary-general's remarks after the adoption of the Resolution attested to such bitter fact." He stressed that Resolution 2720 in no way diminishes the responsibility of the UN Security Council, saying the US government is still held primarily accountable for the continuation of the Israeli regime's barbaric strikes and war crimes against Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank. More than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7. The Israeli regime continues the deadly bombardment of Gaza, with the latest attacks reported in the Nuscirat refugee camp and Khan Younis.

BRICS Members' Trade to Reach \$500b in 2024



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The World Bank has released up-to-date data, showing that trade exchanges among member states of the BRICS group of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa are expected to reach 500 billion dollars in 2024. According to Watcher.Guru website, the BRICS group experienced a rapid surge in 2023 after its member states signed new deals and renewed existing partnerships and agreements. The trade deals among BRICS members now encompass a greater share of international transactions. The new data from the World Bank shows that trade volume among BRICS nations is mounting to reach \$500 billion in the next year that and despite the fact that the amount stands much below the average global trade, the number of BRICS member states is rising gradually but steadily. The alliance has started paving the ground for establishing full-fledged trade agreements, which can enhance the member states' economies. The vital weapon of the BRICS group is the de-dollarization initiative. The bloc plans to strengthen trade accords and then, it wants to develop them in the coming years. Following a successful process in this stage, the BRICS group would be able to pursue the de-dollarization initiative and kick off trade settlements in local currencies. Over 40 countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Algeria, Bolivia, Indonesia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, the Comoros, Gabon, and Kazakhstan expressed interest in joining the forum, according to 2023 summit chair South Africa.

Almost All Saudi Nationals Oppose Arab Ties With Israel

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A new survey has found that 96 percent of Saudi Arabian citizens want Arab countries to cut all types of ties with Israel in response to the occupying regime's war on Gaza. Conducted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a pro-Israel think tank based in Washington, the survey saw almost every Saudi agreeing with the proposal "Arab countries should immediately break all diplomatic, political, economic, and any other contacts with Israel, in protest against its military action in Gaza." The study further found that a big majority of the Saudis (91%) believe that "despite the destruction and loss of life, this war in Gaza is a win for the Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims." The majority of respondents in Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt held favorable views towards the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, but saw a 30-point growth in its popularity in the case of Saudi Arabians, compared to August. The survey said 87% agree with the suggestion that "recent events show that Israel is so weak and internally

divided that it can be defeated someday." Conducted to measure the change in shift of attitudes of Saudi nationals after the bloody war broke out, the survey was conducted from November 14 to December 6. The results of the study are a clear manifestation of the difficulties the United States is going to face as it advocates for intertwined Arab-Israeli cooperation. Prior to the war, the US was actively working towards achieving an agreement to normalize Saudi Arabia-Israel relations. Earlier in September, during an interview with Fox News, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated that the two countries were getting closer to such an agreement "every day." After the war broke out, Riyadh put a pause on normalization talks and has made its diplomatic outreach public as one that seeks "to stop the ongoing escalation." The Israeli genocide in Gaza has significantly suppressed support for allowing contact with Israelis.



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 advisers in Syria on Dec. 2 where two Iranian advisers 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



Iran, Turkiye to Expand Trade, Energy Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has described the increase of cooperation between Tehran and Ankara in the fields of energy, transportation, investment, and border trade as a serious agenda of bilateral relations. During the meeting with Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Ahmet Yildiz in Tehran, Amir-Abdollahian pointed out the friendly and high-level relations between the two neighboring countries and the serious will of the presidents of the two countries to further expand cooperation in all fields. He emphasized the necessity to pursue the existing mechanisms, including the political consultation committee, the joint economic commission, and specialized working groups to promote trade relations between the two countries. Regarding regional issues, Amir-Abdollahian stressed the need for more cooperation to stop the crimes of the Zionist regime in the Gaza Strip as soon as possible.

Malware Used against Iran's Fuel Distribution System Detected



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian experts have detected the malware the enemies had used for a recent cyberattack on the country's fuel distribution system, the head of the Civil Defense Organization of Iran said. In comments at the opening of an exhibition of domestic civil defense industries on Saturday, Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali said the Iranian teams have identified the malware that disrupted the fuel distribution system at Iran's gas stations on December 18. Categorizing the malware as an advanced persistent threat (APT), the general said the malware is being analyzed in Iranian laboratories. He likened the case of the recent cyberattack to a very complicated file of a murder investigation, saying the technical problems are being resolved to ensure the normal operation of the fuel distribution system. More than 55 percent of the cyberattacks across the world employ artificial intelligence, he added, noting that over 30 percent of such attacks on Iran are powered by AI. The general also stressed the need to renovate the countrywide fuel distribution system, which he said is aging and requires updating for safe connections among the processing units, payment systems, and gas stations.



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran and Senegal have signed six memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and agreements at the end of the two countries' fifth Joint Economic Committee meeting which was wrapped up in Senegal's capital Dakar. Co-chaired by Iran's Agriculture Minister Mohammadali Nikbakht and Senegal's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ismaila Madior Fall, the fifth Iran-Senegal Joint Economic Committee meeting was held during December 21-22 after a 12-year hiatus. As reported by the Iranian Agriculture Ministry portal, during the two-day event, the two sides discussed ways of expanding ties in various areas including agriculture, trade, investment, etc. On the sidelines of the committee meeting, Nikbakht met and held talks with senior Senegalese officials including his counterpart and the country's Foreign Minister. Speaking in his meeting with Madior Fall, the Iranian minister said: "Tehran does not have any restrictions for developing relations with African countries and is ready for any cooperation and sharing its experiences with Senegal." "The Islamic Republic of Iran has experienced the most severe sanctions and pressures, and despite them, it has achieved

many successes in the fields of modern technologies, knowledge-based economy, energy, and agriculture, and in this field, it is ready to cooperate with friendly countries based on common interests," Nikbakht said. Madior for his part pointed to the good relations between the two countries based on religious and cultural commonalities, and said: "The meetings of high-ranking officials, including the presidents of the two countries, on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in South Africa, show the will of Tehran and Dakar to develop relations in various economic, commercial, and agricultural fields." He expressed hope that holding the fifth meeting of the two countries' Joint Economic Committee will lead to the all-round promotion and expansion of relations, especially in the economic field, and in this way, a new window will be opened in the cooperation of the two countries for mutual progress. In another meeting with Senegal's Agriculture Minister, Nikbakht invited his Senegalese counterpart to visit Tehran and announced the readiness of his ministry to hold training courses and transfer knowledge to Senegalese experts and farmers.

Iran's Crude Steel Output Rises 7.6% in November



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's steel production reached at 3.0 million tons in November, registering a 7.6 percent increase compared to the previous month, according to the latest report released by the World Steel Association (WSA). The Islamic Republic produced 28.1 million tons of crude steel in the first 11 months of 2023, also registering a 0.6 percent increase as compared to the same period in the past year, the WSA report said. Based on the WSA data, Iran maintained its place as the world's 10th largest steel producer in the mentioned period. The WSA data put the world's 11-month crude steel production at 1.715 billion tons, indicating a 0.5 percent increase compared to the first 11 months of 2022. The world's 71 steel producers managed to produce 145.5 million tons of steel in November 2023, 3.3 percent more than the figure for the previous year's same month. Based on the WSA report, China, India, Japan, the U.S., and Russia were the world's top steel producers in the first 11 months of 2023, respectively. The previous WSA report had put Iran's steel output in the first 10 months of 2023 at 25.1 million tons, 0.1 percent less than the same period in 2022. The Islamic Republic's monthly crude steel output stood at 3.1 million tons in October. The Iranian Steel industry has been constantly developing over the past years against all the pressures and obstacles created by outside forces like the U.S. sanctions and the coronavirus outbreak that has severely affected the performance of the world's top producers. The country is expected to climb to seventh place among the world's top steel producers by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025).

Iran-Oman Trade Targeted to Be \$5b



TEHRAN - Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Abbas Ali-Abadi said the value of trade between Iran and Oman is targeted to become \$5 billion. Saying that signing a preferential trade agreement with Oman is being followed up, the minister said: "Our trade with Oman is targeted to be \$3.5 billion first and then \$5 billion." Iran and Oman have signed two memorandums of understanding (MOU) to boost bilateral cooperation and emphasize the importance of using their national currencies in mutual trade instead of the dollar. The mentioned MOUs were signed during the two countries' 20th Joint Economic Committee meeting in Tehran on December 6. One of the MOUs was signed by Iran's Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Abbas Aliabadi, and Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais Mohammed Al Yousef on supporting joint investment by the two sides. Iran's Ministry of Industry and Oman's Chamber of Commerce also signed an MOU to boost cooperation in technology as well. The two sides have also exchanged views on ways of expanding cooperation in the field of fishery and agriculture, deciding to hold a joint fishery exhibition soon. During the joint committee meeting, Aliabadi announced Iran's readiness to jointly implement key industrial projects with Oman including

the construction of an industrial park, the establishment of power plants as well and cooperation in maritime transport projects among others. The Omani minister on his part emphasized the importance of boosting economic and trade relations between Tehran and Muscat. During his stay in Tehran, Mohammed Al Yousef also met with the Head of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Mohammad-Reza Farzin, and stressed the importance of using Iranian and Omani national currencies in mutual trade. The Omani official said his country wants to have a strong presence in establishing the required infrastructure for banking and monetary transactions in Iran, implementing joint projects, as well as making investments in industrial and mineral projects. Omani investors are also keen to participate in energy projects and to develop Iran's gas fields, he added. The top Iranian banker also said that his country welcomes any measure that helps boost monetary and banking cooperation between the two countries. Farzin stressed the importance of using national currencies by the two countries in their mutual trade instead of the dollar as well. Aiming to expand economic ties, Iran and Oman signed four cooperation documents in various areas including energy, investment, and free zones during the official visit of Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said to Tehran in late May.

2.8m Tons of Commodities Traded on IME Last Week



TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed trade of 2,832,048 tons of commodities with a total trading value of almost \$736m on its physical market. According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,427,313 tons of commodities valued at more than \$542m. On this floor the IME sold 1,139,713 tons of cement, 562,000 tons of iron ore, 554,505 tons of steel, 157,500 tons of sponge iron, 11,015 tons of aluminum, 7,403 tons of copper, 1,330 tons of zinc and 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate. Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 392,748 tons of commodities worth more than \$186m. Commodities traded on this floor included 106,365 tons of bitumen, 95,919 tons of polymeric products, 94,290 tons of vacuum bottom, 53,500 tons of lube cut, 28,532 tons of chemicals, 10,410 tons of sulfur, 3,583 tons of oil, 802 tons of petroleum products and 350 tons of feedstocks. The IME also traded within the same week 11,987 tons of goods on its side market.



Tehran, Baku Rail Transport Rises 47%

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan Shahin Mustafayev has said rail transport between Iran and Azerbaijan has increased by 47 percent in 2023. Mustafayev, who is the head of Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Committee, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Iran's Transport and Urban Development Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash on Saturday. According to Mustafayev, over 700,000 tons of goods have been transported between the two countries through railway in 2023, which is a record high. The official also noted that transit between the two countries has also increased by 57 percent in the current year. In this conversation, the latest developments in the relations between the two countries, especially in the economic field, including transportation and energy, were discussed and opinions were exchanged. The officials also emphasized on accelerating the finalization of joint projects, including the new transit route in Astara border and joint dams.

UNSC Voices Alarm at Spreading Violence in Sudan

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The UN Security Council expressed "alarm" at growing violence in war-torn Sudan on Friday, a day after it reported that seven million people have been displaced by the conflict. In a joint statement, the Council "strongly condemned" attacks on civilians and the spread of the conflict "into areas hosting large populations of internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers." The members of the Security Council expressed alarm at the spreading violence and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sudan, the statement said, reflecting the worsening situation in the country. In addition to the seven million internally displaced people, the UN said Thursday another 1.5 million had fled into neighboring countries. Since fighting broke out on April 15 between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, the city of Wad Madani, 180 kilometers (110 miles) south of Khartoum, had become a haven for thousands of displaced people during the conflict.



Supreme Court Rejects prosecutor's Request, Will Not Rule on Trump Immunity Yet



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. Supreme Court on Friday declined to immediately decide former President Donald Trump's claim that he cannot be prosecuted for trying to overturn his 2020 election defeat, allowing a lower court to continue reviewing the issue. The justices, rebuffing an extraordinary request by U.S. Special Counsel Jack Smith, refused to effectively leap-frog a lower appeals court to speed up a final ruling on Trump's claim of criminal immunity ahead of his trial, due to begin in March. The court issued its decision without explanation in a brief one-page order. No justice publicly dissented. The justices could still decide to consider the issue later. A federal appeals court in Washington has fast-tracked its consideration of the issue, and scheduled oral arguments for Jan. 9. In a statement to supporters, Trump labeled the Supreme Court decision as a victory but added "I will still have to fight for my rights in the Appeals Court." A spokesperson for Smith declined to comment. Prosecutors have accused Trump, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, of attempting to obstruct Congress and defraud the U.S. government through schemes to reverse Democratic President Joe Biden's 2020 election win. Trump has argued that the case should be dismissed on the grounds that former presidents cannot face criminal charges for conduct related to their official responsibilities. U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan rejected that claim on Dec. 1, prompting Trump's appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Trump's appeal suspended his trial, currently set for March. In a bid to avoid delaying Trump's trial, Smith on Dec. 11 urged the Supreme Court to undertake an expedited ruling - even as the D.C. Circuit court races to rule on the issue. If Trump is reelected to the White House on Nov. 5, he could seek to pardon himself of any federal crimes. Trump's lawyers opposed Smith's request, telling the justices in a court filing the special counsel's bid to bypass the normal appellate process amounted to a "rush to decide the issues with reckless abandon." Three of the nine Supreme Court justices were appointed by Trump, who cemented a 6-3 conservative majority.

Turkey Hikes Interest Rates Again and Announces New Tightening Measures



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's central bank delivered its seventh straight interest-rate hike as part of efforts to curb inflation that's seen accelerating to 70% in the coming months. The Monetary Policy Committee, under Governor Hafize Gaye Erkan, lifted the benchmark rate to 42.5% on Thursday, as expected and up from 40%. All but one of 27 analysts surveyed by Bloomberg predicted the move correctly. It marks a slowing of the bank's aggressive tightening, which has lifted Turkey's policy rate from 8.5% since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was reelected in May. At each of its previous four meetings, the MPC had hiked by at least 500 basis points. The tightening cycle will finish "as soon as possible," the MPC said. Erkan and Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek, both appointed in June, have sought to reverse years of loose monetary and fiscal policies that caused investors to flee Turkey, hammered the lira and triggered a cost-of-living crisis. Turkey's real rates remain deeply negative, with year-on-year inflation at 62% in November and not expected to peak until May. But Erkan has urged fixed income investors to focus on projected inflation of 36% at the end of 2024. There are signs she's getting her message across. Foreign holdings of lira bonds have more than doubled since last month, while Turkey's dollar-bond and credit-default swap spreads have fallen sharply.



UN Urges More Gaza Aid; Israel Accused of Creating Distribution Obstacles

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - The U.N. Security Council called for boosting humanitarian assistance for Gaza, but the U.N. chief said the way Israel was conducting its military operation was creating "massive obstacles" to aid distribution inside the battered enclave. After days of wrangling to avert a threatened U.S. veto, the Security Council on Friday passed a resolution urging steps to allow "safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access" to Gaza and "conditions for a sustainable cessation" of fighting. The resolution was toned down from earlier drafts that called for an immediate end to 11 weeks of war and diluting Israeli control over aid deliveries, clearing the way for the vote in which the United States, Israel's main ally, abstained. Washington repeatedly has backed Israel's right to self-defense following the Oct. 7 rampage into Israel by Gaza's ruling Hamas militants, who killed 1,200 people and took 240 hostages back into the enclave. Gilad Erdan, Israel's U.N. ambassador, said the Security Council should have focused more on freeing the hostages and that concentrating on "aid mechanisms" was unnecessary as Israel permits "aid deliveries at the required scale." Hamas and the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority split over the measure, with the former saying it was "insufficient" to meet the stricken enclave's needs and defied international calls for an end to "Israel's aggression." The authority's foreign ministry welcomed the resolution as a step that would help "end the aggression, ensure the arrival of aid and protect the Palestinian people." The United States and Israel, which has vowed to eradicate Hamas, oppose a ceasefire, contending it would allow the Islamist militant group to regroup and rear up. U.S. President Joe Biden's administration, however, has grown increasingly critical of the mounting casualty toll and humanitarian crisis that has worsened as Israel presses on with its ground and air offensive. U.N. Secretary

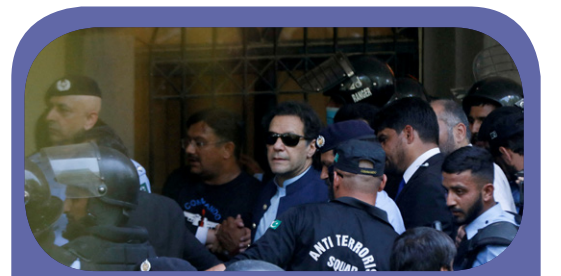
General Antonio Guterres said the way Israel is conducting its operation is "creating massive obstacles to the distribution of humanitarian assistance" in Gaza, where the United Nations says the aid available is just 10 percent of what is needed. Israel says 5,405 aid trucks - bearing food, water and medical supplies - have entered Gaza since the war started. The latest casualty update from Gaza's health ministry said 20,057 Palestinians have been killed and 53,320 wounded in the Israeli offensive that has destroyed huge swaths of the enclave and displaced most of the population of 2.3 million. Israel says 140 of its soldiers have been killed since it launched its ground incursion on Oct. 20. Air strikes, artillery bombardments and fighting were reported across Gaza late into Friday night, as hopes dimmed for an imminent breakthrough in talks in Egypt aimed at getting warring Israel and Hamas to agree to a new truce. Israel's military ordered residents of Al-Bureij, in central Gaza, to move south immediately. The directive signaled a new focus of the ground assault that has devastated the enclave's north and made a series of incursions in the south. Some residents packed up donkey carts and left. But there was no immediate sign of large numbers from Al-Bureij joining the hundreds of thousands fleeing other areas. "Where should we go to? There is no place safe," Ziad, a medic and father of six, told Reuters by phone. "They ask people to head to (the central Gaza city of) Deir Al-Balah, where they bomb day and night." In the south, at least four civilians died in an air strike on a car in Rafah, a Palestinian rescue worker said. A boy, his face covered in blood, and a girl, were carried away, video showed. There was no immediate Israeli comment. The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said at least 18 Palestinians were killed and dozens others wounded in an air strike on a house in Nuseirat, central Gaza, late Friday night.



Poland Calls on West to Rally Around Ukraine in Kyiv Visit

KYIV (Dispatches) - Poland's new foreign minister on Friday urged the West to rally around Ukraine, choosing the war-torn country for his first visit abroad in a sign of support as other allies waver on aid. Ukraine in turn expressed hope for a quick resolution to a blockade from Polish trucks and said the visit marked a "new page" in the two countries' relations that became strained under the previous administration. Air alarms sounded during the meeting, warning of a potential new raid from Russia, which has intensified air attacks in the past weeks. "If the West mobilises, I have no doubt who will win, but it must finally start mobilising," Poland's Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said in a press conference wrapping up his trip. He said Western economies were "twenty times wealthier than Russia" but that Moscow "has switched its economy to a war mode." "We cannot allow Russia to produce more on the basis of a much smaller economy. Because wars are not won by tactical battles, wars are won by production," he said. His visit comes as fatigue builds among Kyiv's allies nearly two years into the war despite Ukrainian officials' efforts. In the U.S., Senate leaders said Tuesday that Washington would not be able to approve new aid for Ukraine before the year's end. Hungary blocked a 50-billion-euro European Union aid package for Ukraine, though Ukraine did win a symbolic victory when the bloc opened formal membership negotiations with Ukraine -- but any actual accession is years away. Sikorski's visit aimed to reassure Kyiv and to resolve a month-long blockade at the Ukraine border by Polish hauliers was top of the agenda. When the war began in February 2022, the EU waived restrictions for Ukrainian road carriers to enter the bloc to ease the cargo traffic in and out of the war-torn country. But Polish truckers say the move undercut their earnings and have been blocking the border with Ukraine -- which heavily relies on the route for its exports and imports. Earlier the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba addressed

the issue. "The first thing to do is to unblock the border, because the situation in which our friendly relations find themselves -- in the shadow of the blocked border -- is unacceptable and harmful," Kuleba told his Polish counterpart. "We hope that this problem will be solved by Christmas, before the end of this year." Polish deputy infrastructure minister Pawel Gancarz said at a briefing later on, speaking alongside Sikorski in Kyiv. The blockade has been a thorn in the relations between Warsaw and Kyiv. Poland had been one of Ukraine's staunchest allies since Russia invaded in February 2022. But ahead of Polish elections in October, the then-governing Law and Justice party lobbied for votes by leveraging fatigue over the conflict. Poland became embroiled in a row with Ukraine over grain imports, and the outgoing government said it would restrict arms deliveries to Kyiv. But the administration led by former European Council president Donald Tusk that took office this month has pledged to double down on support for Ukraine. A promise reinforced by his foreign minister's visit to Kyiv, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky praised. "We hope for the opening of a new page in our relations. We are very strong neighbours with a shared history," Zelensky said after meeting Sikorski. Air raid alerts sounded earlier during the top diplomat's visit. "These air sirens that we hear now is the reason why I am here," Sikorski said. "It's completely unacceptable for a country to attack its neighbour and bomb cities, destroy entire provinces, deport children... In this titanic fight, minister, Poland is on your side," he said. Sirens are frequently heard all across Ukraine, which is the target of daily aerial attacks from Russia. In the latest barrage, Ukrainian armed forces said they downed 24 out of 28 Iranian-made drones, including on the capital Kyiv. But on Thursday night "a residential building in Kyiv (was hit) by a Shahed," Zelensky's chief of staff Andriy Yermak wrote on Telegram.



Pakistan Ex-PM Imran Khan Granted Bail, But Release Uncertain

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's Supreme Court on Friday granted former Prime Minister Imran Khan bail in a case related to a leak of state secrets, but it was not clear how he could be released while serving a three-year sentence for corruption and facing other charges. The 71-year-old former cricket star has been embroiled in a tangle of political and legal battles since he was ousted as prime minister in April 2022. He has not been seen in public since he was jailed for three years in August for unlawfully selling state gifts while in office from 2018 to 2022. Khan remains disqualified from contesting national elections scheduled for Feb. 8 because of the corruption conviction, which a high court refused to suspend on Thursday. Khan nevertheless filed nomination papers for the elections on Friday, his party's media team said. In a written court order, the Supreme Court judges said they could not find "sufficient incriminating material" to show that Khan leaked state secrets intending to benefit a foreign power. The order said Khan's release on bail "during the period of elections would ensure 'genuine elections' and thus enable the people to exercise the right to express their will effectively and meaningfully. There are no exceptional circumstances to decline the concession of bail." But it was not clear how Khan could be released on bail because of the number of arrest warrants issued against him and the three-year sentence. The state secrets charge is related to a classified cable sent to Islamabad by Pakistan's ambassador in Washington last year, which Khan is accused of making public. He denies the charge, saying the contents appeared in the media from other sources. Even if he were unable to contest the election, any release on bail would be a major shot in the arm for his party as it would enable him to lead its campaign in the lead-up to the polls. Khan is widely believed to be the country's most popular leader and won the last general elections in 2018. He says he is being targeted by the powerful military, which wants to keep him out of the polls. The military denies the charge.

Russia's Diplomatic Ties With U.S. Could Break Down Over Asset Seizures

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia may cut diplomatic ties with the United States if Washington confiscates Russian assets frozen over the Ukrainian war, the Interfax news agency quoted Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov as saying on Friday. The United States "must not act under an illusion... that Russia is clinging with both hands to diplomatic relations with that country," Ryabkov said. Russia has described relations with the United States as "below zero" because of U.S. military and financial aid for Ukraine in the war now approaching the end of its second year. Ryabkov said Russia, which sent forces into Ukraine in February 2022 in what it called a "special military operation", would not be the one to initiate a break in diplomatic ties, but such a rupture could be prompted by a variety of factors. "The trigger could be asset confiscation, further military escalation, many other things. I would not go into negative forecasts here," he said, adding that Moscow was "ready for any scenario". Some Western politicians are urging that frozen Russian assets worth some \$300 billion be handed to Ukraine to help rebuild its war-shattered economy. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Friday that any such move would deal a serious blow to the global financial system. He said Russia would "never leave in peace" any country that seized its assets, and in such a scenario it would look at what Western assets it could confiscate in retaliation. Russia has hit back in a variety of ways against Western sanctions aimed at punishing it for the Ukraine war and hindering its ability to finance it. This week, President Vladimir Putin ordered that two European concerns, Wintershall Dea and OMV, be stripped of multi-billion-dollar stakes in gas projects in the Russian Arctic.



Man City Cruise to First Club World Cup Triumph



JEDDAH (Dispatches) - Manchester City won the Club World Cup for the first time to end 2023 with five trophies after a 4-0 win over Fluminense in Jeddah. City's victory extended European clubs' domination of the competition since 2012 and was never in doubt once Julian Alvarez opened the scoring inside the first minute. Nino's first-half own goal realistically ended the Brazilians' dreams of an upset, before Phil Foden and Alvarez rounded off the scoring in the final 20 minutes. City's poor Premier League form before flying out to Saudi Arabia had raised Fluminense hopes that Pep Guardiola's men could be vulnerable. But the growing chasm between Europe's elite clubs and the rest of the world thanks to huge financial imbalances in the global game was instead exposed. European clubs have won 22 consecutive games at the Club World Cup. City laboured for 45 minutes to break down Japan's Urawa Reds in the semi-final before cruising to a 3-0 win. This time, they needed less than 45 seconds. Fluminense's old guard saw them through a tricky semi-final against African champions Al Ahly. But it was one of their experienced heads that was at fault for the opening goal as former Real Madrid captain Marcelo gifted possession to Nathan Ake with a wayward pass. The Dutch defender strode forward and curled a fine effort off the post from outside the box. The rebound fell for Alvarez to chest into an unguarded net. At just 23, Alvarez added to his remarkable haul of silverware that includes the World Cup and Copa America with Argentina at international level, the Copa Libertadores during his time at River Plate, plus Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup and UEFA Super Cup medals during just over a year at City. Fluminense were then dealt the killer blow

when captain Nino turned Foden's cross into his own net after Rodri's pass opened up the Brazilian defence. Ederson was called into action to maintain City's two-goal lead before the break as the Brazilian international made a stunning save from Jhon Arias' header. But his opposite number Fabio was the busier goalkeeper. The 37-year-old kept the score down and saved Fluminense's blushes. Fabio turned Jack Grealish's fiercely struck effort behind before half-time and twice denied Foden early in the second half. City were able to coast through the second period to end a glorious year on a high, but victory could come at a cost. Rodri was forced off with an injury 20 minutes from time. City have lost all three Premier League games this season when the influential Spanish midfielder has been absent and they travel to in-form Everton on December 27. However, that did not take the shine off a marquee 12 months that marks the high-point in a trophy-laden 15 years since City's fortunes were transformed by a takeover from Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan. After clinching the treble of the club's first ever Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup last season, City also lifted the UEFA Super Cup for the first time in August. Guardiola also made history as the first coach to lift the Club World Cup on four occasions and with three different clubs after previously winning the competition twice at Barcelona and once in charge of Bayern Munich. Alvarez was the creator for City's third as Foden slid in to meet his driven cross. And the man deputising for the injured Erling Haaland rounded off the scoring two minutes from time with his 10th goal of the season.

Schwarz Wins Madonna di Campiglio Slalom



MADONNA DI Campiglio (Dispatches) - Marco Schwarz edged to the top of the overall men's World Cup standings as he won Friday's Madonna di Campiglio slalom. Austria's Schwarz came back from sixth following the first run in the Dolomites, clocking a combined time of one minute, 40.51 seconds to nudge Frenchman Clement Noel down to second. Schwarz's first win of the campaign also moved him top of the slalom standings on 140 points. "Winning here is one of the best Christmas gifts I could have given myself," said Schwarz. The 28-year-old leads compatriot Manuel Feller, who finished fifth on Friday, by 35 points in the slalom standings. In the overall standings, Schwarz, who also has three second places this season, jumped eight points ahead of Marco Odermatt who did not take part in Friday's race. Schwarz said at the start of the season that he intended to challenge Odermatt for the overall title by taking on both the speed and technical disciplines throughout the campaign. That will be a gruelling schedule but necessary if he is to have any chance of beating Marc Odermatt, World Cup champion in the past two years. "Taking part in all the races is a lot of work and fatigue," Schwarz said. "But I enjoy skiing, and that helps." Olympic slalom champion Noel was 0.25sec behind Schwarz after being fastest in the first session, with Briton Dave Ryding 0.39sec off the pace in third. "I'm happy with the podium," Noel said. "I'm happy to put two good runs down. (Schwarz) was a little better than me so we'll try to do even better next time." The men's season continues next Thursday and Friday with downhill and super-G races at Bormio.

Sixers Have Too Many Scorers for Raptors to Keep Up

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tyrese Maxey had 33 points and 10 assists and Tobias Harris scored a season-best 33 points to go along with eight rebounds and seven assists to lift the host Philadelphia 76ers past the Toronto Raptors 121-111. Joel Embiid scored 31 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and dished out nine assists for the Sixers, who have won eight of nine. It was the 13th consecutive game that Embiid produced at least 30 points and 10 rebounds. The other time the franchise had three players with at least 30 points in the same game was in 1961 when Dick Barnett, Hal Greer and Dolph Schayes hit that threshold for the Syracuse Nationals. Pascal Siakam led the Raptors with 31 points, Jakob Poeltl added 19 and Gary Trent Jr. had 17. OG Anunoby and Scottie Barnes chipped in with 12 each. The Sixers ripped off a quick 6-0 spurt to open the fourth quarter for a 99-89 lead. Harris threw down a two-handed dunk for a 103-91 advantage with 8:33 remaining. Toronto scored the next five points, including the fifth 3-pointer by Trent, to close within 103-96. Philadelphia came right back with a 7-0 run, capped by a deep trey by Maxey, for a 110-96 lead with 6:26 left. When Embiid knocked down a 3-pointer with 3:45 remaining, the Sixers led 116-100. The Raptors, who had built an early 15-point lead, went ahead 53-48 with 3:51 left in the second quarter after a layup by Poeltl. When Harris dropped in a 3-pointer - his fourth of the half - with 2:41 remaining, the game was tied at 54. The Sixers led 61-58 at halftime thanks in large part to 24 points from Harris. Siakam paced the Raptors with 17. Anunoby hit a 15-foot jump shot with 8:26 left in the third to close within 68-64. Maxey then knocked down a short jumper and Kelly Oubre Jr. made a 3-pointer as the Sixers pulled ahead by nine, 73-64. Embiid hit a trey from the wing with 3:19 to go in the third and the Sixers held a 90-77 advantage. Trent made a 3-pointer from the corner with 59 seconds left to cut the deficit to 92-87. The Sixers led 93-89 at the end of the third after Toronto closed on a 9-1 run.



Ten Hag Backs Hojlund to Break Premier League Duck



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United's Rasmus Hojlund has yet to score in the Premier League but manager Erik ten Hag is backing the Danish striker to break his duck even as the team continue to struggle in front of goal. Hojlund was signed in the close season for a reported fee of £72 million from Atalanta after he netted 16 goals last season. Although the 20-year-old was United's top scorer in the Champions League group stage with five goals, he has not found the net in 13 appearances in England's top flight. "We are open, he is open. His mentality is great. I think he is a very good performer under stress and he deals with that," Ten Hag told reporters ahead of Saturday's trip to West Ham United. "But it's not only about Rasmus Hojlund, it's about Marcus Rashford, it's also about (Alejandro) Garnacho, it's also about Antony, it's also about Bruno Fernandes and Scott McTominay. "Don't forget our full backs, who have to play a big part in that. I'm sure we will improve and especially if our squad is full. If it is better balanced, we should create more chances." United have failed to score in their last three games, losing to Bournemouth and Bayern Munich before a goalless draw at Liverpool. "We know we have to improve, we played good in those games, but we should have created more chances and we should have been more clinical," the Dutch manager said. "It's not about one player, it's about the group of us. As you know, in my philosophy, we have to attack with 11 (players). We have to get the movements better, the decision-making on the ball has to be better and sometimes also we have to be more clinical." Ten Hag still has injuries and illness to contend with as United look to improve on seventh place in the standings. "We have some doubts, some illnesses during the week so we have to see who is available for tomorrow. Hopefully, they are recovered, but we have to see," he said. "Casemiro and Lisandro Martinez are not available before Christmas, so mid-January we expect them back." Mason Mount is similar, into January. Harry Maguire, I expect him earlier and Victor Lindelof is not available. He has had surgery, so he will be out for a couple of weeks."

Napoli's De Laurentiis Pushes for Change After Super League Verdict

ROME (Dispatches) - Napoli President Aurelio De Laurentiis welcomed the European Court of Justice ruling on the Super League project, saying UEFA and FIFA do not understand the business of the sport and the need to grow club revenues. Europe's top court said the ruling bodies had contravened EU law by stopping the formation of a Super League, but clubs and leagues came together to denounce the project, committing to playing in competitions run by UEFA. Spanish clubs Real Madrid and Barcelona are the only clubs still supporting the Super League project and De Laurentiis said he had discussed the situation with Real President Florentino Perez. "The Super League was a wrong move (in 2021), which however brought about this change. Now we need to do some serious thinking," De Laurentiis told Corriere dello Sport. "I spoke with Florentino Perez and we agree to put some real entrepreneurs around the table, not just nominal presidents. Because today football is administered by elderly people, but above all they are without vision." Napoli, the Italian champions, were not among the 12 clubs behind the original plan for the breakaway league in 2021. The three Serie A teams involved were Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan. Milan and Inter pulled out within 48 hours after an outcry from fans and the threat of sanctions. Juve opted to withdraw earlier this year after the club's board changed. The EU's top court said FIFA and UEFA had abused their dominant position by forbidding clubs to compete in a European Super League when they were threatened with sanctions. "The dominant position of UEFA and FIFA, which Europe today censures, has served to bestow bonuses in exchange for consent," De Laurentiis added. "Those who have governed up to now as monopolists have not understood that football is a business and needs growing revenues. "If I invest hundreds of millions to participate in a circus that distributes peanuts, makes no profit and forces me to play more and more to keep an unproductive bandwagon going, the game is not worth it."

