

Iran's Minister of Road and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash Said That Within the Next Few Days, the Second Transit Route Between Iran and the Azerbaijan Republic Will Be Opened

# IRAN NEWS

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani Says That the Country Will Give a Decisive Response to Zionists Over the Martyrdom of an IRGC Force in Israeli Strikes on Syria

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### Russia Allocates 6.5b-Ruble Credit Line to Iran to Expand Banking Ties

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN- Russia reportedly allocated a credit line worth 6.5 billion rubles to Iran during the visit of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Mohammad-Reza Farzin to Moscow.As reported by the Public Relations Department of the CBI, following the trip of Farzin to Russia with the aim of increasing monetary and banking cooperation with this country and also strengthening relations within the framework of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a meeting was held between the directors of Sberbank of Russia and Bank Mellī Iran (BMI), based on that, a credit line worth 6.5 billion rubles was created for Iran to import basic goods from Russia.In this meeting, which was attended by Farzin, directors from Sberbank of Russia and Bank Mellī of Iran emphasized the opening of a 6.5 billion-ruble credit line between Iran and Russia. This credit line is supposed to become operational by Sberbank and BMI to finance the import of basic goods needed by Iran.The credit is based on the brokerage agreements and contracts concluded between the two banks in a minimal form and as the beginning of banking operations.It should be noted that the opening of this credit is the first important step in the direction of the development of cooperation between Iran and Russia after the signing of the free trade agreement between Iran and EAEU.Iran and the member states of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Armenia, signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in a ceremony in St. Petersburg on Monday.Iranian Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Abbas Aliabadi signed this agreement, which is the result of more than two years of negotiations and expert work, on behalf of Iran.On behalf of the EAEU, the deputy prime ministers of the member countries signed the agreement. The signing ceremony was attended by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari, EAEU Minister in Charge of Trade Andrey Slepnev, Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali, and a number of EAEU officials.

### Nuclear Chief Shrugs Off Report on Iran's Uranium Enrichment



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami brushed aside the most recent report from the UN nuclear agency about Iran's enrichment activities as a politically-motivated media program that does not contain anything new.Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a weekly session of the administration's cabinet on Wednesday, Eslami dismissed the new report attributed to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which claims that Iran had reversed a slowdown in its uranium enrichment activities.“The political media move that has been mooted again about Iran's enrichment is nothing new and had already been mentioned in a report from the chair of the Board of Governors,” he stated.Denouncing the reports surrounding Iran's uranium enrichment program as a media hullabaloo with certain objectives, Eslami said the enemies seek to put the spotlight on Iran in order to distract the public attention from the dire political situation they are facing after the war on Gaza.He assured the Iranian people that the AEOI has not taken any new nuclear measure and is doing its routine activities in compliance with the rules and regulations. His comments came after Reuters claimed to have seen a report from the IAEA which says that Iran has “increased its production of highly enriched uranium, reversing a previous output reduction from mid-2023”.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

## West Sees Women as Tools to Gain Profit, Pleasure



TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the Western civilization sees women as tools to gain profit and pleasure.Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a meeting with a large number of women from across the country in the Imam Khomeini Hussainiyah, southern Tehran, on Wednesday, before the birth anniversary of Hazrat Fatima Zahra, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).“The issue of women in Islam is one of the strengths of Islam. Islam has a strong logic and a rational foundation in all areas related to women,” he said.He noted that there are two approaches in such subjects in the world, one being the Western approach which is also prevalent in non-Western countries, and the other being the Islamic approach.“These two [approaches] oppose each other,” he said.But the outstanding issue, according to the Supreme Leader, is that the West avoids getting involved in debates and research about these topics.Many questions in these subjects are not addressed by the West, he said, adding that the Western civilization tries to advance its agenda by creating controversies and commotion, exploiting arts and cinema, and using force, the internet, and so on.The West “is not willing to answer the questions. The reason is that the West has no logic,” he asserted.Elsewhere in his speech, Ayatollah Khamenei described Hazrat Fatima Zahra as the best role model for Muslim women.“The dear women of our Islamic society should try to follow in the footsteps of Fatima Zahra in terms of housekeeping, social and political activity, and wisdom and knowledge,” he said.He said women's presence in different managerial, political, social, and cultural positions has no restriction in Islam.The Supreme Leader also criticized the idea of “gender equality”, saying although it is preferable in some instances, it does not make sense in others.He then introduced the notion of “gender justice” as the ideal to strive for, saying it can be applied everywhere.The Leader of the revolution two years ago in a meeting with the eulogists of Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH), referring to the request of a group of women to hold a meeting on the birthday of Hazrat Zahra (AS), pointed out the appropriateness of such meetings, and last year this meeting was also held on the birthday of Hazrat Zahra (AS).

### President Slated to Visit Turkey in January



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi is scheduled to visit Turkey on the first week of January to hold talks with his Turkish counterpart on regional and international issues. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani broke the news on Tuesday, Turkish media outlets also said that Raisi's trip to Ankara is slated for January 4.In a phone conversation last month, Raisi and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan praised Tehran-Ankara relations as friendly, historical and based on good neighborliness, religious values and shared interests.The two presidents also placed a premium on strengthening and improving the level of bilateral cooperation in different political, economic and cultural fields. Raisi hailed Iran and Turkey as two important and influential countries in the Muslim world and expressed hope that the joint cooperation between the two sides would serve as a model of interaction for Islamic countries.Erdogan, for his part, pointed to the good and constructive relations between Tehran and Ankara, underscoring the elevation of bilateral ties to an “exceptional” level.The two presidents also denounced Israel's brutal aggression on the Gaza Strip and the United States' complicity in the occupying regime's genocidal war against Palestinians in the besieged territory.

### Iran Reserves Right to Respond to Israeli Assassination of Senior Advisor



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations has written to the world body's secretary-general, vehemently condemning the Israeli regime's recent assassination of a senior Iranian military advisor in Syria.Amir Saaid Irvani addressed the letter to Antonio Guterres and president of the UN Security Council on Tuesday.“Iran reserves its legitimate and inherent right, under international law and the United Nations Charter, to respond decisively at an appropriate time deemed necessary,” the envoy wrote.Brigadier General Seyyed Razi Mousavi, a senior commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), was martyred in a missile attack by the Israeli regime against the Sayyeda Zeinab neighborhood of the Syrian capital Damascus on Monday.Mousavi was martyred while serving as part of Iran's military advisory mission in Syria.The mission was the first to rush to Syria's assistance in 2014, when the Arab country found itself in the grip of the United States-created and Israeli-supported Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.Led by Iran's top anti-terror commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani -- who was assassinated by the US in Iraq four years ago -- the mission played an instrumental role in Damascus' successful counterterrorism push that ultimately defeated the terror outfit in late 2017.Irvani denounced the assassination as a “heinous and cowardly act of terrorism.”He noted that “Iranian military advisors...are legally present at the formal request of the Syrian Arab Republic, supporting and assisting in the fight against terrorism.”The envoy reminded that the assassination represented the second assault on Iranian advisors this month, following a strikingly similar attack perpetrated by the Israeli regime on December 2.Irvani called on the Security Council “to fulfill its charter obligation in the maintenance of international peace and security and strongly condemn the Israeli regime's malevolent activities and its acts of aggression and terrorism in the region.”

## Iran Tells Israel to Await Its Revenge for Commander's Assassination

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran will respond appropriately to the Israeli regime over the assassination of a senior military advisor in Syria, vowing to take revenge for the terrorist attack in different times and places.Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif made the remarks at a news conference on Wednesday, after senior IRGC commander, Seyyed Razi Mousavi was killed in an Israeli airstrike in the Sayyeda Zeinab neighborhood of the Syrian capital of Damascus.“Definitely, with the martyrdom of Mousavi, there will be no disruption in our missions to confront the Zionist regime,” the IRGC's spokesman said.He noted that the assassination of Mousavi is a continuation of the violation of international laws by the Israeli regime, calling on the international community to stop the crimes of the occupying regime which endanger international peace and security.Seyyed Razi Mousavi was martyred by the Israeli regime on Monday, while on an advisory mission in Syria.He was one of the companions of Iran's top anti-terror commander, General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the US in Iraq four years ago.Sharif further noted that the martyrdom of Mousavi is a great loss but stressed that Iran will

continue the path of resistance with strength.The IRGC's spokesman also noted that one of the main reasons that the Israeli regime assassinated Mousavi at this point was due to its failure on October 7, when Palestinian resistance movements launched the surprise attack, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, into the occupied territories.He also said Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the Israeli regime was one of the acts of revenge for the assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani, warning that these acts of revenge will continue.The Israeli regime has for years targeted what it calls Iran-linked positions in Syria.Iran maintains an advisory mission in Syria at the request of Damascus with the aim of helping the war-torn Arab country get rid of the foreign-backed militants who have been fighting the democratically-elected Syrian government since 2011. Earlier in December, Israel killed two IRGC military advisors -- Mohammad Ali Ataee Shoorcheh and Panah Taqizadeh -- in an attack in Syria.The IRGC announced in a statement that the two officers were martyred against the backdrop of the relentless savagery of the “fake and child-killing” Israeli regime in Gaza.



# IRAN NEWS



## Urmia to Host Meeting of Region's Culture Minister

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's Minister of Culture said all of the countries in the realm of Persian civilization are invited to take part in the meeting of the regional culture ministers to be held next month. Mohammad-Mahdi Esmaili told Iran Press correspondent on the sidelines of the cabinet session on Wednesday, that the ministry is ready to introduce the historical and cultural features of West Azerbaijan, northwestern Iran, at national and international levels. Esmaili said that the development of relations with regional countries in common points such as the celebration of Nowruz is on the agenda of the ministry. Esmaili also said the Martyr Soleimani symphony would be unveiled in the next few days on the martyrdom anniversary of Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

## Iran Among World's Top 10 Countries in Exporting 11 Products in 2022



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in its latest report said Iran was among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of exporting 11 agricultural products. The report indicates that Iran has enjoyed a significant status in the world's food supply, ranking among the major exporters of food products worldwide. Iran was the largest exporter of figs in the world in 2022, FAO said, adding that the country exported 12,000 tons of high-quality figs to other countries last year, followed by Austria and Uzbekistan which stood in the second and third ranks respectively. The FAO added that Iran was the second largest exporter of pistachios and dates in the world in 2022. According to the statistics, Iran exported more than 45,000 tons of quality pistachios in 2022 while the United States exported 238,000 tons of pistachios in the same year. Iran stood in second place after Iraq in the export of fresh dates in 2022. The country exported 269,000 tons of fresh dates in 2022 while Iraq exported 274,000 tons of dates last year. Iran was also the third largest exporter of watermelon in the world in 2022, exporting 375,000 tons of this product in this period.

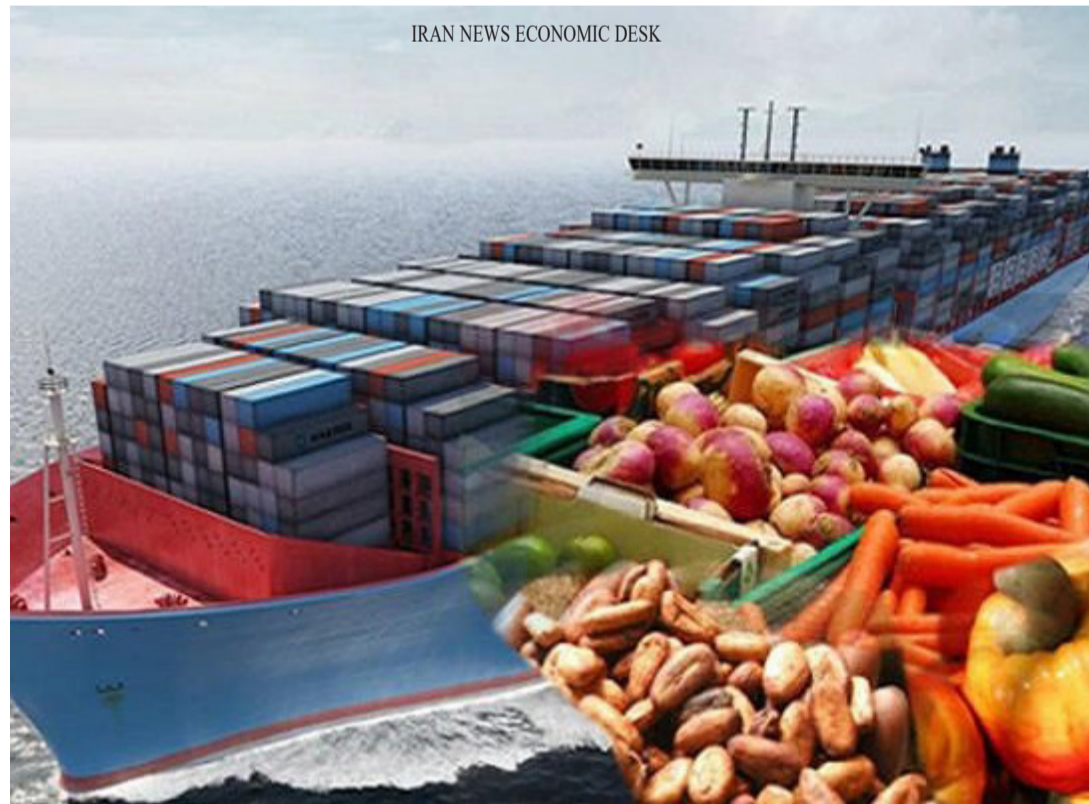


## Iran Foreign Trade Hits \$112b in 9 Months

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign trade has reached as much as \$112 billion in the nine calendar months to December 21, the country's Minister of Economy says, citing figures by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA). Announcing the figure on Tuesday, the minister said that Iran's nine-month foreign trade shows 7% increase compared to that of last year's corresponding period. Khandouzi added that it is for the first time that the IRICA figures regarding Iran's foreign trade include the exchanges of oil, electricity and techno-engineering services. Noting that Iran's exports have been some \$15 billion more than the country's imports in the March-December period, the minister put the country's nine-month exports of oil and non-oil products at \$63 billion, with some \$48 billion of goods imported to the country in the timespan. Meanwhile the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) has announced that the country's oil exports totaled \$26.46 billion in the first nine months of the current calendar year. Iran's total exports-- when including exports of oil, electricity, technical and engineering services, and excluding non-official commodity exports-- reached \$63.97 billion during this period (March

21, 2023 to December 21, 2023), Mohammad Rezvani-Far said on Tuesday. He said foreign trade grew by 7% to reach \$112 billion during the same period, accounting for a surplus of over \$15.5 billion. During this time, Rezvani-Far said, Iran exported 101.904 million metric tons (mt) of goods worth \$36.43 billion -- a 26.48% increase in weight and a 0.68% decrease in value. In contrast, Iran imported \$48.42 billion worth of goods, a 12.29% growth, he added. Meanwhile Iran's gas exports have increased to \$2.374 billion during the seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22), according to Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO). The TPO released its latest figures on Tuesday, showing that Iran's gas export experienced \$1.379 billion hike year on year and reached \$2.374 billion which shows a 139 percent increase. According to the report, gas exports also increased by 3.779 million metric tons (mt) and reached 7.55 million mt, registering 115 percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period. The TPO announced this year's gas price at \$336 per ton which is up 11 percent from last year's price which was reported at \$304 per ton.

## Non-Oil Exports Hit \$36.43b in 9 months



TEHRAN - Iran exported 101.904 million tons of non-oil goods valued at \$36.43 billion during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced. Mohammad Rezvani-Far said that the nine-month non-oil export indicates 26.48 percent growth in weight, but 0.68 percent fall in value, year on year. The official also said that the country's exports in the first nine months of this year, including oil, electricity, and technical and engineering services, and excluding the export via suitcase trade, reached \$63.97 billion. Appreciating the cooperation of the Ministries of Oil, Energy, and Industry, Mining and Trade in providing relevant statistics, he said: "It is for the first time that the statistics of the export of oil, electricity and technical and engineering services along with the export of non-oil goods are published by the customs. This government action is aimed at transparency in the performance of foreign trade." The IRICA head put the value of the export of oil at \$26.46 billion, electricity at \$300 million, and technical and engineering services at \$780 million in the nine-month period. Rezvani-Far further announced that Iran has imported 28.7 million tons of goods worth \$48.42 billion in the first nine months of the present

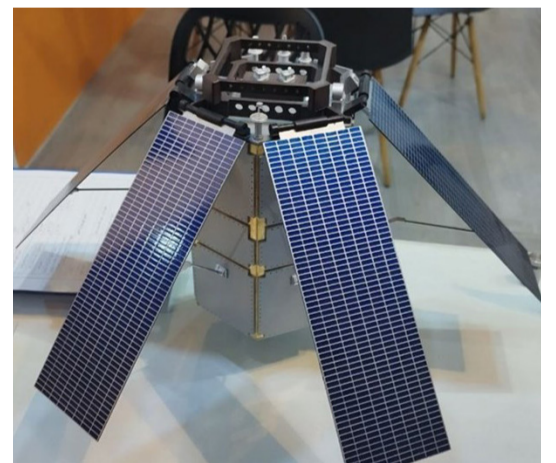
year, of which \$60 million was the value of electricity import. The nine-month import indicates 12.29 percent rise in value and six percent growth in weight, year on year, he added. He named China, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, and India as the major export destinations of Iranian goods in the said time span, and the UAE, China, Turkey, Germany, and India as the main sources of import. The IRICA head said that the value of Iran's trade rose seven percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year. As previously announced by the spokesman of Trade Development Committee of the Iranian House of Industry, Mining, and Trade, the value of Iran's non-oil export rose 10 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20). Ruhollah Latifi said that 122.056 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$53.166 billion were exported in the previous year. China with the purchase of \$14.584 billion of commodities (no change), Iraq with \$10.238 billion (15 percent growth), Turkey with \$7.459 billion (23 percent growth), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with \$5.767 billion (28 percent growth), and India with \$2.146 billion (18 percent growth) were the first five export destinations of Iranian goods in 1401, the official stated.

## Lavrov Reasserts Moscow's Respect for Iran's Territorial Integrity



MOSCOW (Dispatches)- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reasserts Moscow's respect for Iran's territorial integrity following the Islamic Republic's criticism of an Arab-Russian statement backing the United Arab Emirates' unfounded claim about three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf. "Russia cordially, honestly, and unconditionally respects Iran's territorial integrity," the Russian top diplomat said in a phone call with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. "And this is Moscow's unchangeable position," Lavrov added. This is not the first time Russia vows respect for Iran's territorial integrity since December 20, when the final statement of the 6th Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum, which was held in Morocco, reiterated the UAE's baseless claims about the three Iranian islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb. On Saturday, Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the Russian chargé d'affaires to Tehran in protest at the statement, conveying the Islamic Republic's "strong protest" in writing to the Russian envoy over Moscow's repeated support for the "groundless claims" that were included in the statement. The three Persian Gulf islands have historically been part of Iran, the proof of which can be found in and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world. The UAE, however, has repeatedly laid claim to the islands.

## Iranian Space Institute Initiates Khayyam Satellite Imagery Commercialization



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's Space Research Institute has commenced the commercialization process of "Khayyam Satellite Imagery," marking a significant stride in expanding its applications across various sectors. Ahmad Soleimani, the institute's commercialization representative, highlighted Khayyam's potential to competitively pursue market development and emphasized its relevance in sectors such as environmental monitoring and agriculture. Soleimani expressed the institute's active engagement with governmental and private entities, including collaborations with the Ministry of Agriculture for agricultural land mapping and the Environmental Protection Organization for dam water level monitoring. He stressed the importance of addressing Iran's environmental needs through satellite imagery, encompassing areas like grassland monitoring, deforestation, and changes in agricultural land. He stressed the significance of addressing diverse organizational needs, including those of entities such as Iran's National Copper Company, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Industry. Highlighting the global market for satellite imagery traded in square kilometers with dollar prices, Soleimani stressed establishing a competitive market to justify economic feasibility for consumers. The focus extends beyond selling images, intending to create competitive pricing strategies to attract potential buyers. Emphasizing Khayyam's year-long operation in space and the establishment of comprehensive archives, Soleimani underlined the initiative's readiness to cater to diverse organizational needs across various sectors.



## Iran to Become Region's Transit Hub

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) Mohammad Mohammadi-Bakhsh has announced that the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the Islamic Republic and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) will provide Iran with a great opportunity to become the region's transit hub. Referring to the signing of the free trade agreement between Iran and Eurasia, Mohammadi Bakhsh, said that a lot of trade potential will be provided regarding this agreement for developing trade relations between these countries. About Iran's potential in the technical, maintenance and training fields of aviation and airport infrastructure throughout the country, he added that there is a great fortune to develop air cooperation, and this provides opportunities for these countries to develop their transportation ties. On December 25, six years after Iran joined the bloc to expand its trade partners in response to Western sanctions, Iran and the EAEU signed an agreement to initiate free trade. Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Abbas Aliabadi and Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) Mikhail Myasnikov signed the agreement.

### North Korea Kicks Off Key Party Meeting

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea has opened a year-end ruling party meeting attended by leader Kim Jong Un, state media said Wednesday, with key policy decisions for 2024 expected to be unveiled. Abandoning a once-traditional New Year's Day speech, Kim has in recent years used the Workers' Party of Korea's plenary meeting as a platform to outline policies in areas such as security, diplomacy and the economy. This year's meeting caps off a year in which Pyongyang successfully launched a reconnaissance satellite, enshrined its status as a nuclear power in its constitution and test-fired its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). At Tuesday's meeting, Kim defined 2023 as a "year of great turn and great change" as well as one of "great importance", the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported. Pyongyang saw "eye-opening victories and events achieved in all fields for socialist construction and the strengthening of the national power," Kim said, according to KCNA.



### UN Names Outgoing Dutch Minister Humanitarian Coordinator for Gaza



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations named an outgoing Dutch minister its humanitarian coordinator for Gaza following last week's watered-down Security Council resolution which called for aid to be delivered to the strip "at scale." Sigrid Kaag's appointment comes as the people of Gaza face a dire humanitarian emergency, with aid slowed to a trickle by Israel's continued bombardment of the densely populated coastal strip. She will start work on January 8, the UN said in a statement. Last week's UN Security Council resolution called for the "safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale" - but did not call for an immediate end to fighting. The bloodiest ever Gaza war erupted when Palestinian militant group Hamas attacked southern Israel on October 7 and killed about 1,140 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures. They took 250 hostages of whom 129 remain inside Gaza. "United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres today announced the appointment of Ms Sigrid Kaag of the Netherlands as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza," the UN said in a statement. The United States welcomed the appointment and said it looks forward to coordination "on efforts to accelerate and streamline the delivery of life-saving humanitarian relief to Palestinian civilians in Gaza," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. The Security Council adopted the resolution on Gaza on Friday after days of delays and diplomatic wrangling. A draft version of the resolution had said that the aid mechanism to accelerate the delivery of relief would be "exclusively" under UN control. But the final version, passed after Washington abstained, now states it would be managed in consultation with "all relevant parties" - meaning Israel would retain operational oversight of aid deliveries. Kaag has been the Netherlands' deputy prime minister and finance minister since January 2022. She has previously held a number of senior UN jobs including its special coordinator for Lebanon and the Joint Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations Mission in Syria.



### Turkey Parliament Committee Approves Sweden's Bid to Join NATO

ANKARA (Dispatches) - A key committee in the Turkish parliament on Tuesday approved Sweden's bid to join NATO after months of delays, clearing another hurdle in the Nordic country's accession process in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year. Sweden's NATO bid had been stalled for months amid opposition from Turkey and Hungary and recently it was further complicated after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan linked it to Ankara's request for F-16 fighter jets from its ally the United States. Sweden and Finland dropped decades of military non-alignment and sought to join the US-led defence organisation after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Their bids won fast-track approval from all NATO members except Turkey and Hungary. Decisions within the alliance must be unanimous. The two ultimately relented and Finland was accepted as NATO's 31st member in April. Turkey and Hungary remain the only North Atlantic Treaty Organization members left to ratify Sweden's bid 19 months after it applied for membership. On Tuesday, the Turkish parliament's foreign affairs committee approved the measure. "The protocol (on Sweden's NATO accession) passed the committee," opposition CHP party lawmaker Utku Cakirozer, a member of the foreign affairs committee, told AFP after the vote. The move paves the way for a vote by the full parliament, where Erdogan's ruling alliance holds the majority of seats. It was not immediately clear when it would be. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg hailed the parliament committee vote, and said he counted on Turkey and Hungary to complete their ratifications "as soon as possible." "Sweden's membership will make NATO stronger," he said in a statement. Sweden's foreign minister said the next step was the vote in the Turkish parliament. "We look forward to becoming a member of NATO," Tobias Billstrom said on the website of the Swedish public television broadcaster SVT Nyheter. Erdogan in July lifted his objections to Sweden's NATO membership after

Stockholm cracked down on Kurdish groups that Ankara calls terrorists. NATO allies have piled pressure on Turkey, with France, saying the credibility of the alliance was "at stake". In December, Erdogan had linked Sweden's membership to the US Congress "simultaneously" agreeing to sell F-16 fighter jets to Turkey. He also said NATO allies including Canada should lift arms embargoes imposed on Ankara. "Sweden's NATO membership and F-16 sales to Turkey will be handled in coordination to some extent... because unfortunately, neither country trusts the other," Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the Ankara office director of the US German Marshall Fund think tank, told AFP. Turkey's ageing air force has suffered from Ankara's expulsion from the US-led F-35 joint strike fighter programme in 2019. This was in retaliation for Erdogan's decision to acquire an advanced Russian missile defence system that NATO views as an operational security threat. US President Joe Biden's administration has repeatedly promised to move forward with the \$20-billion F-16 sale but lawmakers have blocked it over concerns about Turkey's alleged violations of human rights and long-running tensions with Greece. "There is no strong consensus in the parliament on Sweden's NATO membership, nor in the US Congress on the sale of F-16s to Turkey," Unluhisarcikli said. Erdogan's anti-Israel rhetoric after the start of its war with Hamas had raised concerns in Washington. "Although the issues are not related, Turkey's statements supporting Hamas further complicated the F-16 process," Unluhisarcikli said, adding that the killing of Turkish soldiers by Kurdish militants last weekend could also factor into Sweden's NATO membership. "But if Biden and Erdogan show the necessary will, we can expect the process to be concluded soon," he added.

### Trump Shares Poll Showing Voters Associate Potential Second Term With Revenge



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Republican presidential contender Donald Trump posted a poll on Truth Social on Tuesday, highlighting that the word voters most associate with a potential second term under his command is "revenge." With campaigning ramping up ahead of the first Republican nomination contest, the post followed a separate Truth Social message on Christmas Day, in which the former president called on his political opponents to "rot in hell." The fact Trump re-posted the poll, presented in the form of a word cloud with "revenge" placed centrally in bright red capital letters, suggests his self-described "retribution" agenda is very much on his mind as the United States heads into an election year. The poll was conducted by British pollster J.L. Partners. Trump and many of his allies have been pledging to investigate, incarcerate and otherwise take revenge on his political opponents if he wins the 2024 presidential election in a likely re-match against Democratic President Joe Biden. Facing dozens of federal charges, many related to his attempts to overturn his 2020 election loss, Trump claims he is himself the victim of a revenge campaign orchestrated by Biden and his Justice Department. Trump, 77, the clear frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, denies any wrongdoing. Earlier in December, former Trump advisers Steve Bannon and Kash Patel, both of whom are still close to the former president, said on a podcast that Trump was "dead serious" about exacting revenge against perceived enemies. Trump himself has repeatedly promised retribution against his political opponents during a potential second term, suggesting he would direct federal law enforcement agencies to investigate foes. In an interview with conservative media personality Sean Hannity earlier in December, Trump pledged not to abuse his power or become a dictator "except on day one."



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Kremlin acknowledged a Ukrainian attack had damaged a warship in the occupied Crimean port of Feodosia in what Ukraine and its Western allies called a major setback for the Russian navy. Ukraine said its air force destroyed the Novochockassk landing ship, with President Volodymyr Zelensky joking on social media that the vessel had now joined "the Russian underwater Black Sea fleet." Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu informed "about the damage to our large landing ship" to President Vladimir Putin in "a very detailed report", the president's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists. Russia's defense ministry said that the ship was damaged by guided aerial missiles. Ukraine's military said its air force destroyed the Russian naval ship in a missile attack on the eastern Crimean port. The Ukrainian defense ministry wrote on X (formerly Twitter) that the "Novochockassk landing ship was destroyed in Feodosia tonight". It published an unattributed photo showing flames and smoke in a port at night. "Ukraine's aviation did an excellent job. Crimea is Ukraine. There is no place for the occupier's fleet here," the ministry wrote. In his post on social media, Zelensky wrote: "The occupiers will not have a single peaceful place in Ukraine". The attack comes after Ukraine struck the Black Sea fleet's headquarters in Sevastopol in September, forcing Moscow to move warships to ports further east. British defense minister Grant Shapps wrote on Twitter that "this latest destruction of Putin's navy demonstrates that those who believe there's a stalemate in the Ukraine war are wrong!" "Russia's

dominance in the Black Sea is now challenged," he added. Ukraine nevertheless announced a setback on the eastern front Tuesday. Commander-in-chief Valeriy Zaluzhny said that troops had pulled back in the town of Maryinka, which is close to the key Russian-held city of Donetsk. He said troops were still present on the outskirts, after Russia on Monday claimed to fully control the town. Ukraine's air force said that its tactical aviation attacked the Novochockassk with cruise missiles at around 0030 GMT in the area of Feodosia. Videos posted on social media showed a fire on the horizon in a port area, followed by a loud explosion that sent up a ball of fire and was apparently followed by multiple explosions. Ukraine's armed forces said that "on board of the ship were Shahed drones that Russia uses for attacks on Ukrainian cities". Ukraine frequently carries out strikes in Crimea, particularly targeting the Russian military. In April 2022, it sank the cruiser Moskva, the flagship of the Black Sea fleet. The Novochockassk was previously used by Russia for its military intervention in Syria. The governor of the Russian-annexed peninsula, Sergei Aksyonov, wrote on Telegram: "Sadly, one person was killed and two others were wounded in an enemy attack on Feodosia." Crimea's Krym 24 television reported that two had been hospitalised in a moderately severe condition. Aksyonov said earlier that the city's port was cordoned off following "an enemy attack" that caused a "detonation" and fire. Six buildings were damaged, mostly with broken windows, the governor said, and some local residents have been evacuated.



### At Least 140 Villagers Killed in Weekend Attacks in Nigeria

MANGU (Dispatches) - Gunmen attacked remote villages over the weekend in north-central Nigeria's Plateau state, killing at least 140 people, officials and survivors said Tuesday, the latest case this year of such mass killings blamed on the farmer-herder crisis in the West African nation. The assailants targeted 17 communities in "senseless and unprovoked" attacks on Saturday and Sunday, burning down most houses in the area. Plateau Gov. Caleb Mutfwang said in a broadcast on the local Channels Television. "As I am talking to you, in Mangu local government area, we buried 15 people. As of this morning, in Bokkos, we are counting not less than 100 corpses. I am yet to take stock of (the deaths in) Barkin Ladi," Mutfwang said. "It has been a very terrifying Christmas for us here in Plateau." Amnesty International's Nigeria office told The Associated Press that it has so far confirmed 140 deaths in the Christian-dominated Bokkos and Barkin-Ladi areas of Plateau, based on data compiled by its workers on the ground and from local officials. There were fears of a higher death toll as some people remained unaccounted for. Some of the locals said that it took more than 12 hours before security agencies responded to their call for help, a claim the AP couldn't independently verify, but which echoes past concerns about slow interventions in Nigeria's deadly security crisis, which has killed hundreds this year, including in Plateau. "I called security but they never came. The ambush started 6 in the evening but security reached our place by 7 in the morning," said Sunday Dawum, a youth leader in Bokkos. At least 27 people were killed in his village, Mbom Mbaru, including his brother, he said. No group took responsibility for the attacks though blame fell on herders from the Fulani tribe, who have been accused of carrying out such mass killings across the northwest and central regions where the decades-long conflict over access to land and water has further worsened the sectarian division between Christians and Muslims in Africa's most populous nation.

## Palestinians in West Bank Boycott Israeli Products

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) - Since the war in Gaza began, plenty of posters, stickers and leaflets in the occupied West Bank have urged Palestinians to boycott Israeli products and buy local. "By us, for us," reads the slogan of the new campaign that has spread across towns in recent weeks, as calls to ban Israeli goods also grow in other countries. The slogan is everywhere at one well-known supermarket chain in the West Bank, where "Made in Palestine" fare like water, milk and toilet paper take pride of place. "It's all about highlighting Palestinian products," said Omar Bawatneh, manager of a branch in Ramallah. The chain estimates that sales of Israeli products at its stores have dropped by 30 percent since the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas. On October 7, Hamas militants stormed into southern Israel in an attack that left around 1,140 people dead, most of them civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures. Palestinian militants also abducted around 250 people to the Gaza Strip. Israel says 129 of them remain there. Israel retaliated with a land, sea and air assault on Gaza and vowed to eliminate Hamas. The offensive has killed more than 20,900 people, most of them women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry. Violence in the West Bank, occupied by Israel since 1967, has also flared since the outbreak of the war. More than 300 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank have been killed by Israeli forces and settlers since the Gaza war erupted, according to the Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah. At supermarkets across the occupied territory, young people in particular have "developed a political conscience and are consuming more and more Palestinian products", Bawatneh

said. "They look at the labels, go online to see the list of products to boycott," he added, referring to the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Launched by Palestinian civil society organisations in 2005, BDS advocates political and economic action against Israel over its treatment of Palestinians. The movement is regularly accused of anti-Semitism by Israel and its key backer the United States. But co-founder Omar Barghout told AFP "the BDS movement categorically opposes all forms of racism, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism". He said it drew inspiration from South Africa's anti-apartheid movement. Meanwhile Israeli forces expanded their ground offensive into urban refugee camps in central Gaza after bombarding the crowded Palestinian communities and ordering residents to evacuate. Gaza's main telecom provider announced another "complete interruption" of services in the besieged territory. The military's announcement of the new battle zone threatens further destruction in a war that Israel says will last for "many months" as it vows to crush the ruling Hamas militant group after its Oct. 7 attack. Israeli forces have been engaged in heavy urban fighting in northern Gaza and the southern city of Khan Younis, driving Palestinians into ever-smaller areas in search of refuge. The U.S. said Israel's minister for strategic affairs, Ron Dermer, was meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan to discuss topics including transitioning to a different phase of the war to maximize focus on high-value Hamas targets, improving the humanitarian situation, and planning for governance and security in Gaza after the war.



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## United Fight Back to Beat Villa

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Rasmus Hojlund capped Manchester United's thrilling fightback from two goals down as the Denmark striker netted for the first time in the Premier League to seal a dramatic 3-2 win against Aston Villa on Tuesday. Erik ten Hag's side were in danger of another damaging defeat when goals from John McGinn and Leander Dendoncker put Villa in control by half-time at Old Trafford. United were booed off at the interval but they staged a much-needed revival, sparked by Alejandro Garnacho scoring their first goal in seven hours and twenty minutes. Garnacho struck again to equalize before Hojlund finally ended his goal drought with eight minutes left. It was Hojlund's maiden league goal for United in his 15th appearance and his sixth in all competitions since his August move from Atalanta. Hojlund's cathartic strike ended United's four-match winless run in all competitions and lifted them to sixth in the Premier League. "At half-time I said to the team, 'keep believing'. The atmosphere changed a lot from the first half to the second," Ten Hag said. "If we play our best we can beat anyone. Even when you are two-nil down, it doesn't matter. Keep going, show character. Today they showed we have the personality to do it." Two games without a win have dented Villa's unexpected title challenge. Unai Emery's men remain third, three points behind leaders Liverpool after their first defeat in 11 matches in all competitions. "Two weeks ago I was asked if we were contenders and I said no. Why? Because we are playing several top teams that are contenders more than us," Emery said. "I told the players that the first part of the season was fantastic but I want more." United's dismal 2-0 loss at West Ham had left them with 13 defeats in all competitions this term, their most before Christmas since 1930. That wretched run had increased the pressure on Ten Hag, who was perceived to be fighting to convince British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe to keep faith with him. Ratcliffe agreed to buy a 25 percent stake in United for £1.03 billion (\$1.3

billion) on Christmas Eve. INEOS director of sport Dave Brailsford was in the Old Trafford directors box in the first sign of Ratcliffe's investment. Brailsford's mantra was "marginal gains" during his time in charge of the British Cycling team, making this hard-fought success a vital step in Ten Hag's bid to avoid the sack. Meanwhile Liverpool climbed to the top of the Premier League as Darwin Nunez ended his goal drought to inspire a 2-0 win against struggling Burnley on Tuesday. Jurgen Klopp's side took an early lead through Nunez at Turf Moor and held on despite wasting a host of chances. Nunez's eighth goal this season was his first for 12 games since he netted against Bournemouth in the League Cup on November 1. Diogo Jota, back from a month's injury absence, wrapped up the victory late on to leave Liverpool two points above second placed Arsenal, who have a game in hand. Arsenal can regain top spot with a victory at home to West Ham on Thursday. "Nunez is an incredible finisher but if a striker doesn't score, the whole system is not the same," Klopp said. "You question everything. It's not just the outside world, but you question everything. But it was just in the moment and he has it so it's all good." After successive draws with Manchester United and Arsenal prior to Christmas, this was an essential victory for Liverpool's title ambitions. Chasing a first title since 2020, the Reds still aren't at their flowing best, but what they lack in grace they make up for in grit at present. "42 points, that's really cool because the first part of the season is done and it was absolutely alright what we did," Klopp said. "And if I'm right, we cannot be more than a point away from the top of the table, if Arsenal win. That's obviously in punching distance, let me say it like that." Second bottom Burnley are five points from safety, but it could have different if Zeki Amdouni had given them a shock lead when he raced through the middle for a wayward shot that whistled wide in the opening seconds.

## Rivals Want Man City to Fail More Than Ever'



LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola believes many people now want Manchester City to fail "more than ever" after the club won their fifth trophy of an outstanding year. City return to English domestic action at Everton after adding the Club World Cup with a 4-0 thrashing of Brazilian side Fluminense in Saudi Arabia to their trophy cabinet, having already lifted the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and European Super Cup in 2023. No club in English football history has enjoyed such a successful year, although Guardiola won six trophies when in charge of Barcelona in 2009 when the Catalan side won La Liga, Copa del Rey, Spanish Super Cup, European Super Cup, Champions League and Club World Cup titles. "It is a business, you get credit when you win," City manager Guardiola said ahead of his side's trip to Goodison Park. "You don't win you are nothing, zero, what you have done in the past." The Spaniard added: "As much as you win, they want you to fail. More than ever. I felt that when we won the sextuple in Barcelona. It's normal. They don't want (us to win). In these 14-15 years what we have won, the titles, is unbelievable. "People say 'how good they play, how genius it is'. But they give credit just because we win. They don't have to look further than that." City's victory over Fluminense gave the Manchester side their first Club World Cup and capped a productive five days in Saudi Arabia that manager Guardiola said had "created incredible team building and team spirit". It was all in marked contrast to their recent Premier League form, with a run of just one win in six games leaving City fifth in the table, six points behind leaders Arsenal.

## Djokovic Wants to Emulate Brady and Play On Into His 40s

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic has no plans to hang up his racquet any time soon and is hoping he might be able to emulate American football great Tom Brady by extending his career well past his 40th birthday, the 36-year-old Serbian said. Quarterback Brady played 23 seasons in the National Football League, winning seven Super Bowls with the New England Patriots and Tampa Bay Buccaneers before finally calling it quits at the age of 45 earlier this year. World number one Djokovic, who is preparing for the start of his 22nd season as a professional by playing an exhibition match against Carlos Alcaraz in Riyadh today, said he had already learned plenty from Brady. "Tom Brady is a great example of a champion in his sport and someone that has had such a great career and longevity," the 24-times Grand Slam champion told reporters in the Saudi capital. "He has put a lot of hours and a lot of time into self-care, into recovery, into making sure that in a way every aspect of his body and mind is covered so that he can have a long-lasting, successful career. I know him personally and I learned a lot from him, from his example, and hopefully I can have a career that goes up to 40 or maybe even beyond — let's see." Brady was in Djokovic's box at Roland Garros in June to watch his friend win the French Open, one of three Grand Slam trophies the Serbian captured in 2023 along with the Australian and US Open titles. "I feel great in my own body right now and I've been playing some really high-quality tennis," Djokovic added. "2023 was one of the best seasons I've had in my life and why stop while you're still playing great? So I'll keep going and take (each) year, one by one, and see how far I go." Alcaraz beat the Serbian in a five-set thriller to win this year's other Grand Slam title at Wimbledon and Djokovic welcomed the rise of the 20-year-old Spaniard, especially as Roger Federer has retired and Rafa Nadal is entering his last season. "Our era is coming to an end, but you have Alcaraz emerging which is great, and I was very happy that I had four very good matches with him this year," Djokovic said. "Each match attracted a lot of attention, we had a lot of great highlights and it's good, it's good for our sport." Djokovic will make his final preparations for a tilt at an 11th Australian Open title by representing his country in the United Cup in Perth and Sydney in the first week of the new year.



## Nadal, Osaka in Australia Comebacks



SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal returns from a "winding, tortuous" injury journey in Brisbane this week, while fellow superstar Novak Djokovic kickstarts his bid for an unprecedented 11th Australian Open title at Perth. It appeared last season that the veterans, with 46 Grand Slam crowns between them, may never share a competitive court again. But the prospect is back in play with Spain's Nadal recovering from hip surgeries that sidelined him for almost a year. He begins what is set to be a farewell season at the Brisbane International from December 31-January 7 alongside Andy Murray and world number eight Holger Rune. Top-ranked Djokovic has opted for the mixed teams United Cup in Perth and Sydney, starting Friday, as have fellow top 10 players Stefanos Tsitsipas, Alexander Zverev and Taylor Fritz. Barring last-minute setbacks, Nadal and Djokovic will then grace the courts of Melbourne Park for the Australian Open from January 14, perhaps for the last time together. The 22-time Grand Slam tournament winner Nadal has not played since a second-round loss to American Mackenzie McDonald at the Australian Open this year, leading to what coach Carlos Moya said was "a winding, tortuous road, with many curves". Now 37, Nadal said he expects "nothing" from himself this time around. "I have internalized what I have had throughout my life, which is demand myself the maximum," he said in announcing his return. "Right now what I really hope is to be able not to do that, to accept things are going to be very difficult at the beginning and give myself the necessary time." Since being sidelined, Nadal has been overtaken in the total number of Grand Slam tournaments won by his Serbian arch-rival, who is targeting an all-time record 25th major title in Melbourne. The fourth-ranked Sinner gets his season under way at the Kooyong Classic exhibition event in Melbourne, while Alcaraz has nothing currently scheduled before the Australian Open. Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka also makes her highly anticipated return in Brisbane, having not played since September 2022.

## Jazz Roll to 130-118 Win Against Spurs

SAN ANTONIO (Dispatches) - Lauri Markkanen had 31 points and 12 rebounds, and the Utah Jazz overcame a slow start to beat the San Antonio Spurs 130-118. Jordan Clarkson added 24 points, Collin Sexton had 20 and Walker Kessler scored 11 for Utah. Keldon Johnson led San Antonio with 26 points, Devin Vassell had 22, Jeremy Sochan added 19 and Victor Wembanyama had 15. The Spurs (4-25) have lost five straight since snapping a franchise-worst 18-game losing streak. The Jazz (13-18) have won three in a row and six of eight after starting the season 2-7. Wembanyama returned after missing two of the past three games with a right ankle injury. He was scheduled to play Saturday in Dallas but stepped on a ball boy during warmups and was held out as a precaution. Wembanyama was 6 for 15 from the field and had seven rebounds, five blocks and four assists in 25 minutes. San Antonio brought Johnson, a longtime starter, off the bench for the second time this season and the change keyed a 15-point lead in the first quarter. Starting in place of Johnson, Julian Champagnie had eight points in the first two minutes. He opened with a 3-pointer off a feed from Wembanyama and soared for a dunk on Sochan's assist. Champagnie finished with 16 points. San Antonio opened 6 for 7 on 3-pointers in building a 28-15 lead eight minutes into the game. The Spurs finished 16 for 35 on 3s. That fast start dissipated as Utah went on a 23-9 run bridging the first and second quarters. Clarkson capped the spurt with a pair of free throws as the Jazz captured their first lead at 38-37 with eight minutes remaining in the first half. Markkanen and Clarkson combined for 18 points on 6-for-8 shooting in the second quarter. It was another successful return for Clarkson to his hometown. He entered the game averaging 16.7 points in 26 games against the Spurs. The Spurs have the worst record in the Western Conference and are second in the league to the Detroit Pistons (2-28), who have lost 27 straight — a single-season record.

