

Figures by the Government's Statistics Agency Show That the Country's Year-on-Year Unemployment Rate Went Down to 7.6% in the Third Quarter of Iranian Calendar Year Ending on December 21

IRAN NEWS

Iranian State-Owned Animal Feed Importer SLAL Has Issued an International Tender to Purchase Up to 200,000 Metric Tons of Soymeal, European Traders Said, Adding That Soymeal Can Be Sourced From Brazil, Argentina or India

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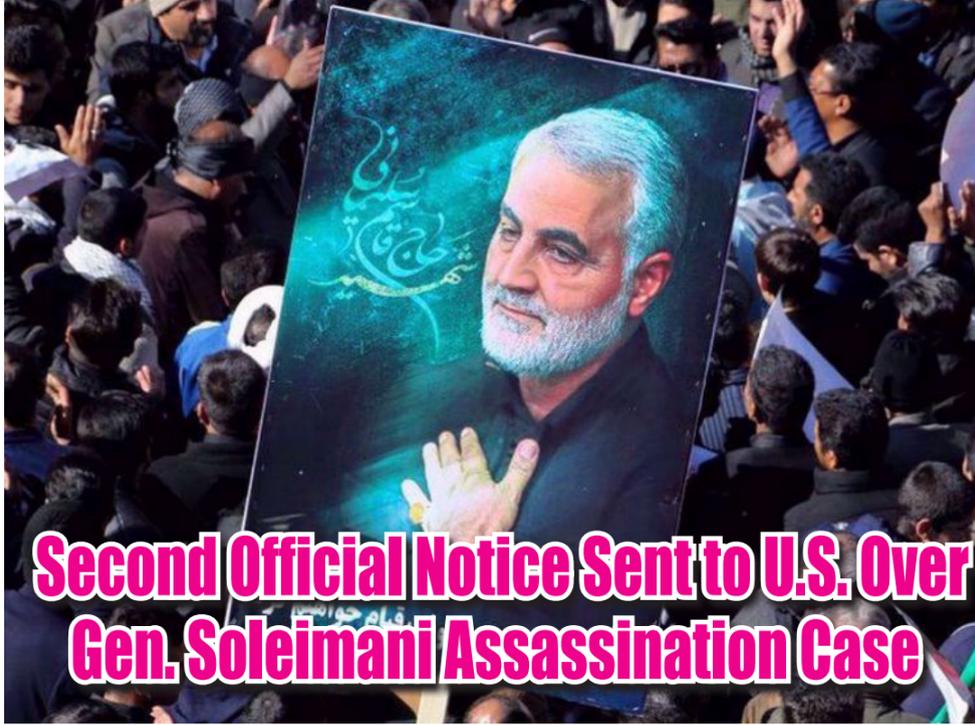
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Iranian Satellite 'Khayyam' Introduces 80 Cutting-Edge Applications



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's Khayyam satellite, launching a new era, introduces an array of 80 groundbreaking applications spanning environment, agriculture, urban planning, and beyond. The many applications of Khayyam's remote sensing data, which serves a variety of industries including mining exploration, environmental analysis, agricultural optimization, water resource management, and disaster monitoring, are explored in this extensive report. June 8, 2022, marked the launch date of Iran's Khayyam satellite from Kazakhstan's Baikonur Cosmodrome. Five years of critical data and imagery covering agriculture, environment, water resources, mining, border surveillance, and unexpected event management are anticipated from the 600kilogram, 500kilometer orbiting satellite. Operated by Iranian experts stationed at communication technology bases, Khayyam's control commands have been active from the moment of launch. In a recent development at the Iranian Space Research Institute, Khayyam's images are poised for competitive commercialization and market expansion, now accessible through the institute's website. Khayyam's applications range from environmental monitoring, agricultural precision, urban studies, and mining exploration to water resource surveillance and natural disaster management. The satellite's environmental applications include observing Earth's surface changes, industry and mine dispersion monitoring, city and population area studies, and assessing pollutant movements in air, water, and soil. It also tracks land degradation, vegetation alterations, dust storm identification, and water body monitoring. Within agriculture, Khayyam optimizes water consumption, monitors land use changes, and aids precision farming by analyzing planting periods, detecting plant diseases, and assessing soil conditions. Urban planning benefits from Khayyam's data by mapping development projects, estimating populations, tracking urban land use changes, and identifying unauthorized constructions. In mining, the satellite oversees site activities, produces topographic maps, monitors environmental encroachments, and aids in mineral volume estimation and transportation routes.



Second Official Notice Sent to U.S. Over Gen. Soleimani Assassination Case

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry has sent a second official notice to the U.S. administration, seeking arbitration over the 2020 assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. drone strike near the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. Tavakkol Habibzadeh, the head of center for Iranian President's Legal and International Affairs, made the announcement on Monday, saying the second notice was written and sent after the United States failed to respond to the first one on holding negotiations. The notice demanding arbitration was written based on the Protection of Diplomats Convention, a 1973 United Nations anti-terrorism treaty on the prevention and punishment of crimes against internationally protected persons, including diplomatic agents. According to Article 13 of the convention, Habibzadeh said, the first notice seeking negotiation is sent to the other party and if it does not respond to it, the second memo is sent to request arbitration. As per the convention, if no response is provided by the Americans within six months from the date of the request for arbitration, the third step will be taken that is referring the dispute to the International Court of Justice, he further explained. Habibzadeh said that about a month and a half ago, the Iranian Foreign Ministry sent the second notice to the United States to request arbitration between Tehran and Washington, and that the US administration has until the end of April to respond to it. General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by then-US President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020. Two days after the attack, Iraqi lawmakers approved a bill that required the government to end the presence of all foreign military forces led by the U.S. in the country. Both commanders were highly revered across the Middle East because of their key role in fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria. On January 8, 2020, the IRGC targeted the U.S.-run Ain al-Asad base in Iraq's western province of Anbar with a wave of missile attacks in retaliation for the assassination of General Soleimani. According to the Pentagon, more than 100 American forces suffered "traumatic brain injuries" during the counterstrike on the base, with the Islamic Republic describing the missile attack on Ain al-Asad as a "first slap."

Indictment Reveals MKO Had Links to French Intelligence Service



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The fourth session of the trial of the members of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) terrorist group was held on Tuesday, during which the prosecutor's representative highlighted the connection between the group and the French government. At the beginning of the open session, chaired by Judge Dehqani in the 11th branch of the criminal court of Tehran province, the prosecutor's representative said that before reading the indictment, some pieces of information would be read out to enlighten the public opinion. He pointed out that documents have revealed the MKO's ringleader Masoud Rajavi's connection with France and the role of the French intelligence service in the explosion at the headquarters of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) in Tehran in June 1981. After the armed action of the terrorist group earlier in June 1981, Rajavi and several members of the MKO discussed whether they should declare that the group had entered the military phase and finally decided to make that announcement, he said. Afterward, he continued, Rajavi proposed to blow up the office of the IRP and the group decided to make preparations for the move. Then Rajavi traveled to France, and the bombing happened after his trip, he further explained, adding that Abrishamchi, Bani Sadr, Rajavi and several others then hijacked a plane to depart Iran for France, the prosecutor's representative added. The high-profile trial of the ringleaders and members of the MKO kicked off in Tehran on December 12. According to the criminal court, some 104 members of the terrorist group as well as a legal entity (the MKO) are sued in the trial for committing inhumane crimes. The MKO has carried out numerous terrorist attacks in Iran against ordinary people and officials since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, killing thousands of people over the past four decades.

Iran's Alborz Warship Enters Red Sea



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Alborz destroyer has passed through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and entered the Red Sea amid rising tensions in the region. The Iranian Navy's 94th flotilla of warships, comprising of Alborz destroyer, entered the Red Sea on Monday amid heightening tensions in the strategic maritime route, Tasnim news agency reported. Since 2009, Iranian warships have been operating in open waters to "secure shipping lines, fight against pirates and carry out other missions," it added. The warship, overhauled and equipped with state-of-the-art systems, joined the Iranian Navy's fleet in 2019. The flotilla's arrival in the Red Sea comes amid rising tensions following Yemen's retaliatory attacks on Israeli-owned and -bound vessels in support of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In a stern statement on Sunday, Yemen's Armed Forces warned the United States that Washington bears full responsibility for the consequences of a deadly attack by the US Navy on Yemeni boats in the Red Sea. The warning came after earlier the same day US Navy helicopters attacked four boats belonging to the Yemeni Naval Forces, sinking three of them and killing at least 10 Yemeni servicemen.

U.S. Stuck in Quagmire of Gaza

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The U.S. plans for the Gaza Strip have stalled because either continuing support for the Israeli onslaught or acceding to a political solution in compliance with the demands of resistance will mark a defeat for Washington, the foreign minister of Iran said. Addressing a cultural event at the University of Tehran on Monday, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the Zionist regime and its allies have two options in Gaza, both of which entail defeats for them. "The first option is the continuation of (Israeli) war (on Gaza), but the continuation of war means the continuation of massacre and the continuation of a humiliating defeat for Israel and the U.S.," he said. "The other option is a



political solution, for which the resistance is now setting conditions and it does not approve of a ceasefire. The U.S. is today stuck in the quagmire of Gaza," Amir-Abdollahian added. He noted that the Zionist regime's leaders and the U.S. politicians who once had the idea of eliminating Hamas are presently sending messages to the resistance movement for negotiations in third countries. "They (Israel and the U.S.) are negotiating on how to run Gaza after the war and how to swap the Palestinian prisoners with the Israeli captives. It shows that the resistance has moved in the correct direction and has been able to win a major victory," the Iranian minister added.

People Throng Kerman to Pay Tribute to Gen. Soleimani



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Vast crowds of people converged on Iran's southern city of Kerman, the hometown of late commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani, to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the martyrdom of the highly-revered commander, who was assassinated in a US strike in Baghdad in 2020. As congresses have been held in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon in commemoration of General Soleimani, Kerman has attracted thousands of people expressing their appreciation of the late commander's service and devotion. People in the hometown of General Soleimani have attended rallies and commemorative ceremonies to pay tribute to the popular figure. General Soleimani, the former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), was assassinated along with his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Units, in a US drone strike ordered by ex-president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020. Both commanders were highly popular because of the key role they played in eliminating the Daesh terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria. In a meeting with the family of General Soleimani on December 31, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei attributed the promotion of the memory of General Soleimani and his characteristics to the admired martyr's sincerity. "The most important role and service of the great martyr has been the revival of the resistance front in the region," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

IRAN NEWS



Iranian Caricaturists Voice Solidarity With Gazan Children

SHIRAZ (IP) - The international exhibition of the works of caricaturists from about 30 countries is being held in Shiraz, the capital of Fars province, in the south of Iran. This exhibition was organized in a bid to support Palestinian children living in the Gaza Strip and declare solidarity and sympathy with them so that the voices of the oppressed Palestinian children will be heard. The barbaric attacks of the Zionist regime on Gaza, in addition to the widespread destruction of Palestinian homes, have left 21,822 martyrs, of which 9,100 are children. The international exhibition of the works of cartoonist artists from about 30 countries with the theme "Children of Gaza" will be held for one week, from December 31, 2023, to January 6, 2024, in the beautiful city of Shiraz. The works of artists from different countries, including Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Armenia, India, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Colombia, Brazil, and Austria, have been displayed in the cartoon exhibition supporting Gaza children in Shiraz.

Iran's Capability to Export Technical, Engineering Services to S. America Highlighted



TEHRAN - Iranian companies enjoy high potentials to export non-oil products and technical and engineering services in the fields of infrastructure, mine, medicine, medical equipment, and agricultural machinery to Latin American states like Brazil, an official said. The chairman of the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce pointed to the high capabilities of Iranian firms in the export of technical and engineering services to other countries and called on responsible officials to prepare the grounds for the competent companies to develop their activities in this area. Fakhreddin Amerian pointed out that the export of non-oil commodities is one of the necessities for boosting the economic situation in the country. He criticized the lackluster performance in the country in the field of exporting non-oil commodities despite the high economic potential existing in the country. Both the public and private sectors should cooperate in line with realizing the economic objectives of the country in the field of export of non-oil goods, Amerian underlined.



FM Hails Firm Pro-Palestine Stance of Yemen's Ansarullah Movement

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian hails firm stance of Yemen's Ansarullah in support of the oppressed Palestinian people in the face of the Israeli regime's crimes and aggression. Amir-Abdollahian made the remark in a Monday meeting with the spokesman for Yemen's Ansarullah, Mohammed Abdul-Salam, who is in Tehran to hold talks with senior Iranian officials. Israel waged the genocidal war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas carried out the cross-border Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the usurping entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. However, 87 days into the invasion, the Tel Aviv regime has failed to achieve its objectives of "destroying Hamas" and finding Israeli captives despite killing 21,978 Palestinians, mostly children and women. The war has also injured 57,697 people. In his remarks, Amir-Abdollahian also voiced Iran's support for the promotion of peace in Yemen and the advancing negotiations with Saudi Arabia. The top Iranian diplomat pledged Tehran's support for the Yemeni people's will and demand. The senior Ansarullah official, for his part, lauded Iran's unwavering political support for the resistance front and briefed the Iranian foreign minister on the latest developments regarding the promotion of peace in Yemen. In a separate meeting

with Abdul-Salam on Monday, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf described the U.S. as the main culprit in Israel's ongoing war in Gaza. Qalibaf added that were it not for the presence of the US and its military support, it would not have been possible for the Israeli regime to withstand the first blow delivered to the regime as a result of Al-Aqsa Storm Operation, launched by the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas on October 7. He reaffirmed Iran's support for the resistance front and called the US the root cause of problems in the Muslim world. Abdul-Salam, for his part, voiced the Yemeni people's strong support for the Palestinians in their battle against the Israeli regime. He hailed Iran's support for the Yemeni people and added that all Yemen's capacities, including its weapons, aim to serve the interests of Muslims. Yemen is currently capable of taking an operational position alongside the resistance front, Abdul-Salam said, adding that his country follows a policy that stands up to the bullying of Israel and the US in the region. Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian on Sunday lauded brave measures by the Yemeni government and nation to support the Palestinian people in the face of Israel's savage attacks. In a meeting with the senior Ansarullah official, the two sides discussed issues of common interest and leading developments in the region.

Iran Begins Exports in Rials to Iraq, Afghanistan



TEHRAN (IP) - The Head of Iran's Central Bank (CBI) announced the beginning of the Iranian export to Iraq and Afghanistan in rials. To neutralize the sanctions imposed on it, Iran has put on its agenda the use of national currency in trade with other countries. China, India, Russia, and Türkiye are also among the countries that plan to use their national currency in trade exchanges with other countries. The Head of CBI Mohammad-Reza Farzin said on Monday that the offshore rial plan has been reviewed at the central bank for many months, and when implemented Iranian businessmen can have exports to Iraq and Afghanistan the exporters' demand to export to the two countries through rial, Iran's national currency. Earlier, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister said that Tehran seeks cooperation within the framework of BRICS with the state members, one of which omits the dollar from business trades and financial transactions. Bagher Kani said: "We have planned many missions and joint work with other BRICS members within the framework of this organization. One of the most important tasks is the de-dollarization of trade and economic transactions and financial cooperation."



Iran, Azerbaijan Exchange of Goods to Grow to 2m Tons

TEHRAN (MNA) - The exchange of goods between Iran and Azerbaijan will increase to two million tons, Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC) says. Kheirollah Khademi pointed to the inauguration of the border bridge between Iran and Azerbaijan and said boosting the trade exchanges with the neighboring states is one of the main programs of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development. The creation of new communication roads to these countries can help boost the infrastructures and increase the economic exchanges to a great extent, the deputy roads minister maintained. The Astar region is one of the highly-used transportation roads between the two countries and a gateway of the Islamic of Iran to the Caucasus and European countries and Russia, he stated. Intensive negotiations were held between the heads of the Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission to increase the transit capacity via the common borders of the two countries, he said, adding, "It is hoped that the newly-inaugurated Astarachay Bridge will help boost the exchange of goods and transit of passengers." A new bridge that connects Astar in northwestern Iran to the city of the same name in the southeast of the Republic of Azerbaijan was put into operation at the common border on Saturday.

Iran-China Trade Exceeds \$13b in 11-Month Period

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The China Customs announced that the trade exchanges between Iran and China stood at more than \$13 billion from January to November 2023, adding that the country's import of products from Iran in November 2023 registered a 24 percent growth compared to the same period last year. The trade exchanges between the two countries in the 11 months of 2023 was \$13.4 billion, registering a seven percent down compared to last year's corresponding period. The two countries' trade exchange surpassed \$14.4 billion from January to November 2022. China imported \$4.2 billion worth of products from Iran between January and November 2023, showing a 30 percent slump compared to the

same period last year. China had imported more than \$6 billion worth of products from Iran between January and November 2022. Crude oil was the main product imported by China from Iran in this period. China exported \$9.2 billion worth of products to Iran from January to November 2023, showing a nine percent growth compared to last year's corresponding period. China had exported \$8.4 billion worth of goods to Iran from January to November 2022. According to this report, China imported \$405 million worth of products from Iran in November 2023, showing a 24 percent up compared to November 2022.



Iran Squad Named for 2023 AFC Asian Cup

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran national football team head coach Amir Ghalenoei announced a 27-member squad for the 2023 AFC Asian Cup. The tournament kicks off in Doha on Jan. 12, 2024, with the tournament's final set to be played on Feb. 10, 2024. Team Melli have been drawn in Group C along with the UAE, Palestine and Hong Kong. Amir Ghalenoei's side will play Burkina Faso in a friendly match on Jan. 5 at the Kish Island in Persian Gulf. Iran squad: Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand (Persepolis), Payam Niazmand (Sepahan), Hossein Hosseini (Esteghlal). Defenders: Milad Mohammadi (AEK Athens), Ehsan Hajisafi (AEK Athens), Ramin Rezaeian (Sepahan), Sadegh Moharrami (Dinamo Zagreb), Saman Fallah (Paykan), Rouzbeh Cheshmi (Esteghlal), Hossein Kanaizadegan (Persepolis), Shoja Khalilzadeh (Tractor), Majid Hosseini (Kayserispor), Aria Yousefi (Sepahan). Midfielders: Saeid Ezatollahi (Vejle Boldklub), Mohammad Mohebbi (Rostov), Saman Ghoddos (Brentford), Mehdi Torabi (Persepolis), Alireza Jahanbakhsh (Feyenoord), Mohammadjavad Hosseini (Sepahan), Omid Ebrahimi (Al-Shamal), Ali Gholizadeh (Lech Poznan), Mehdi Ghaedi (Ittihad Kalba).

BRICS, SCO Memberships Secure Iran's Long-Term Interests



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's active participation in international mechanisms, including the BRICS group of emerging economies and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), will help secure the country's long-term interests, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani has said. "Our entry into BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization provides a framework and platform for the country's diplomacy that enable us to pursue our approaches and viewpoints within these mechanisms," Bagheri Kani said during a conference at Tehran University on Monday. Since the new government took office over two years ago, Iran's bilateral relations have taken a significant "leap" based on the principles of the country's foreign policy, he noted. Bagheri Kani cited consistent communication and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) within the framework of the Safeguards Agreement. "In this regard, we are currently in a good position, because besides being present at the negotiation table, Iran has fulfilled its commitments and has held the United States accountable," he added. The deputy foreign minister further criticized Western powers for orchestrating a narrative against Iran's nuclear activities aimed at rallying global public opinion against the country.

Number of Migrants Arriving to Britain Drops 36% in 2023

LONDON (Dispatches) - The number of migrants who arrived illegally in Britain in small boats in 2023 was 29,437, provisional government figures showed, around 36% lower than the previous year. In 2022 a record 45,775 people were detected arriving on small boats to England's southern beaches after making the dangerous journey across the Channel, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made "stopping the boats" one of his top five priorities, and is seeking to revive a plan to send those who arrive illegally in Britain to Rwanda after it was blocked by the courts. Britain is currently spending more than 3 billion pounds a year on processing asylum applications, with the cost of housing migrants awaiting a decision in hotels and other accommodation running at about 8 million pounds a day.



South Korean Opposition Leader Stabbed in Neck



SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korean opposition party leader Lee Jae-myung was stabbed in the neck on Tuesday while talking to reporters in the port city of Busan. Lee was walking in a crowd of journalists after visiting the site of a new airport when a man in front of him lunged and struck him in the neck, footage on South Korean television channels showed. The 59-year-old was seen collapsing to the ground as people rushed to aid him. One man was seen pressing a handkerchief on Lee's neck. He was "walking to his car while talking to reporters when the attacker asked for his autograph", a witness told local broadcaster YTN, adding that Lee was then struck with what "looked like a knife". Emergency responders were seen carrying Lee into an ambulance. He was later taken to hospital on a helicopter, according to the Yonhap news agency. The agency said he was bleeding but conscious as he was transported to the Pusan National University Hospital. "This is an act of terror against Lee and a serious threat to democracy that should never occur under any circumstances," Kwon Chil-seung, an MP from Lee's Democratic Party, told reporters outside the hospital. "As to Lee's condition, we are waiting for the medical staff's assessment," he added, demanding a "thorough" police investigation into the attack. Police in Busan said Lee suffered a "one-centimetre laceration on his neck" and that he "remains conscious and bleeding is minor", according to South Korean news outlet Chosun Ilbo. TV footage showed police officials wrestling the attacker to the ground. He was seen wearing a hat with Lee's name on it. Yonhap said the assailant has been arrested. Lee lost in 2022 to conservative Yoon Suk Yeol in the tightest presidential race in South Korea's history. Yoon expressed "deep concern over the safety of Lee Jae-myung upon hearing of the attack", his spokeswoman Kim Soo-kyung said. "Yoon emphasised our society should never tolerate this kind of act of violence under any circumstances." A former child factory worker who suffered an industrial accident as a teenage school drop-out, Lee rose to political stardom partly by playing up his rags-to-riches tale. He is widely expected to run for president again in 2027, and recent polls have indicated that he remains a strong contender. But Lee's bid for the top office has been overshadowed by a string of scandals. He avoided arrest in September when a court dismissed a request from the prosecution for him to be taken into custody pending trial on various corruption charges. Lee still faces trial on charges of bribery in connection with a firm that is suspected of illicitly transferring \$8 million to North Korea. He is also accused of breaching his duties, allegedly resulting in a loss of 20 billion won (\$15 million) for a company owned by Seongnam city during his term as its mayor. Lee has denied all allegations against him.



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said that his forces would intensify strikes on military targets in Ukraine, after an unprecedented Ukrainian attack over the weekend on the Russian city of Belgorod. The attack on Saturday, which killed 25 people including five children, came after Moscow launched a large-scale attack on Ukrainian cities. Meanwhile, Kyiv said Russia had targeted the country with a "record" number of drones on New Year's Day. "We're going to intensify the strikes. No crime against civilians will rest unpunished, that's for certain," Putin said during a visit to a military hospital. His comments came at the end of a deadly week in Ukraine, with both sides hitting each other with large-scale attacks. Putin said Russia would continue to hit what he called "military installations". "We are doing that today and tomorrow we will continue doing it," Putin said almost two years into Moscow's military offensive in Ukraine. "What happened in Belgorod is a terrorist act," Putin told wounded Russian soldiers sitting near him in hospital pyjamas and sanitary masks. "There is no other way to call it." He accused Ukrainian forces of targeting "right in the city centre, where people were walking around, before New Year's Eve", and alleged they had "purposefully hit the civilian population". Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov announced Monday that the death toll from the attack on the city had risen to 25, saying medics were unable to save a toddler who was seriously injured in the attack. "This is an irreparable loss for all of us," Gladkov said, adding that 109 people were wounded, 45 of whom were still in medical facilities. Speaking about the situation on the battlefield, Putin said the "strategic initiative" in the drawn-out conflict in Ukraine was on the Russian side since the failure of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in

the summer. He also claimed that Moscow wanted to end the conflict "as quickly as possible" but "only on our terms", according to Russia's state-run TASS news agency. Ukraine said Monday that it had foiled a "record" number of Russian drones on the night of New Year's Eve, after a week of escalation. The Ukrainian air force said Russia launched 90 Iranian-made Shahed drones on the last night of the year, of which 87 were destroyed. Two people were killed when a drone struck a two-storey residential building in the northeastern Sumy region, the Ukrainian interior ministry said Monday, with another person wounded. Kyiv also said Russian shelling killed one person on New Year's Day in the southern Odesa region and another person in Kherson, also in the south. Ukraine's air force said a total of 10 Shahed drones were launched Monday afternoon, of which nine were intercepted. The barrage came after Russia pounded Ukraine in the last days of 2023, killing 39 people in one of the biggest strikes in the war. Meanwhile, Ukrainian shelling of the Moscow-held city of Donetsk killed four people, according to Russian-installed authorities. "As a result of Ukrainian shelling of central Donetsk on New Year's Eve we can say that there are four dead and 13 wounded," the head of Donetsk, Denis Pushilin, said in a video on Telegram. He accused Ukraine of "having an aim to cause as much harm as possible to the civilian population because it used cluster munitions". The United States has supplied Kyiv with cluster munitions, a move that was criticised even by its own allies. Cluster munitions are a controversial weapon designed to disperse or release tiny explosives that can pose a lasting threat even after a conflict ends, in particular for civilians.

EU Visa-Free Travel for Kosovo Enters Into Force



PRISTINA (Dispatches) - A long-awaited European Union visa liberalisation scheme allowing Kosovo nationals to travel to Europe's borderless zone without a visa came into force on Monday with the first travellers hailing it as a great relief. The new regime, which entered into force at midnight (23:00 GMT Sunday), enables Kosovars into the passport-free Schengen zone without a visa for periods of up to 90 days in any 180-day period. The reform is perceived in Pristina as another step towards full recognition and a boost for the ambition of the country that proclaimed independence in 2008 to join the European Union. "This is a great relief... feels good," businessman Rushtit Sopi told AFP before boarding a Pristina-Vienna flight. He was among 20 winners of a quiz organised by the government within a public awareness campaign over the scheme. The 48-year-old owner of a company manufacturing doors and windows flying almost regularly to the EU for business. "Each visa cost me 300 euros (\$331). When I last changed my passport, I calculated that the EU visas alone in it cost me 2,500 euros." European embassies in Pristina, notably those exposed to strong pressure to issue visas, such as the German consulate, had prepared for no visa D-Day. German ambassador Jom Rohde himself issued the last visas to Kosovars a few days ago stressing that the visa era was "finally closing". He also invited locals to visit his country for this summer's Euro football championship. Kosovars had awaited January 1 with great enthusiasm perceiving it as a "historic day" as their country moves closer to the EU, local surveys showed.

Major Japan Quake Kills Four, Triggers Tsunami Waves



TOKYO (Dispatches) - At least four people have been confirmed dead after a major earthquake struck central Japan on Monday, triggering tsunami waves over a metre high, damaging houses and sparking a major blaze. The 7.5-magnitude quake struck Ishikawa prefecture on the Sea of Japan side of the main island of Honshu at 4:10 pm (07:10 GMT), according to the US Geological Survey (USGS). Japanese authorities put the magnitude at 7.6 and said that it was one of more than 50 quakes of 3.2 magnitude or more to rock the region on the New Year's Day holiday - when families get together and visit shrines - over several hours. Television channels interrupted normal services with special programming, including a message from Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who urged people in vulnerable areas to "evacuate as soon as possible" to higher ground. "We realise your home, your belongings are all precious to you, but your lives are important above everything else! Run to the highest ground possible," an alarmed presenter on broadcaster NHK told viewers. Waves at least 1.2 metres (four feet) high hit the port of Wajima, and a series of smaller tsunamis were reported elsewhere, including as far away as the northern island of Hokkaido. Officials in Ishikawa prefecture confirmed four fatalities early Tuesday, according to the Kyodo news agency. The government said it was still assessing the extent of damage from the quake, which shook apartments in the capital Tokyo some 300 kilometres (190 miles) away. Tens of thousands of people were ordered to evacuate, according to the country's fire and disaster management agency, cited by Kyodo. About 1,000 people were staying at a military base, the defence ministry said. Government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi said that there were reports that six people were in the rubble of collapsed buildings, but gave no further details. Images on social media showed cars and houses in Ishikawa shaking violently and terrified people covering in shops and train stations. Houses collapsed and huge cracks appeared in roads. "I have never experienced anything like this before, it was scary. I went out right away but the ground was shaking," an elderly man told broadcaster NHK. "We are in a horrible situation. Please

come and help us," said one person in a video shared on X, formerly Twitter, showing several badly damaged houses. A major fire in Wajima engulfed a row of houses, video footage showed, with people being evacuated in the dark, some with blankets and others carrying babies. "There is a large fire. We cannot immediately tell how many houses are affected by it," a firefighter with the Wajima Fire Department told AFP. Fire engines struggled to reach the scene due to damaged roads and other obstacles, he said. The department was swamped with calls, with "numerous" reports of people injured and trapped inside collapsed buildings, he added. Around 33,500 households around the epicentre, in Toyama, Ishikawa and Niigata prefectures, were without power, local utilities said. Many houses collapsed in the city of Suzu, reports said. In Washington, US President Joe Biden was briefed on the quake, and offered Japan "any necessary assistance" to cope with the aftermath. Several major highways were closed around the epicentre, Japan's road operator said, and bullet train services from Tokyo were also suspended. Flights and mobile phone coverage were reportedly disrupted while many convenience stores were shut. Defence Minister Minoru Kihara said 1,000 military personnel were preparing to go to the region, while 8,500 others were on standby. Around 20 military aircraft were dispatched to survey the damage. The Japan Meteorological Agency warned local residents of possible further quakes during the coming week or so, particularly within the next two to three days. Japan experiences hundreds of earthquakes every year and the vast majority cause no damage. The country has strict regulations intended to ensure buildings can withstand strong quakes and routinely holds emergency drills. But the country is haunted by the memory of a massive 9.0-magnitude undersea quake off northeastern Japan in March 2011, which triggered a tsunami that left around 18,500 people dead or missing. Japan's nuclear authority said there were no abnormalities reported at the Shika atomic power plant in Ishikawa or at other plants after Monday's quake, which sparked a tsunami alert as far away as Russia's Far East.

China Calls on Taiwan's People to Promote Peaceful Reunification

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - The head of China's Taiwan Affairs Office on Tuesday called on Taiwan's people to promote the process of "peaceful reunification", saying it was the common desire of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Song Tao's message, which comes less than two weeks before Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary elections on Jan. 13, follows President Xi Jinping's remarks in his New Year Eve's address that China's "reunification" with Taiwan was inevitable. "The motherland will eventually be reunified, and it will inevitably be reunified," Song said in his New Year's message on his office's website. This is the common desire and common mission of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, Song added. Taiwan's people should "promote cross-strait relations to return to the right track of peaceful development, and promote the process of peaceful reunification of the motherland", he said. Taiwan's government rejects China's sovereignty claims. Both the ruling Democratic Progressive Party and largest opposition party, the Kuomintang, say only Taiwan's people can decide their future. China has offered Taiwan a "one country, two systems" model of autonomy, but no mainstream Taiwanese party supports that idea. Song reiterated China's support for "one country, two systems" and opposition to Taiwan's formal independence or "interference by external forces". His message made no mention of the election, which the Taiwan Affairs Office has cast as a choice between war and peace. China has continued military pressure around the island, ended some tariff cuts for Taiwan and threatened further economic measures as the vote has neared.

Zionists Signal Tactics Shift as U.S. Aircraft Carrier Heads Home

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israeli aircraft and tanks stepped up strikes in southern Gaza overnight, residents said, after it announced plans to pull back some troops, a move the U.S. said signalled a gradual shift to lower intensity operations in the north of the enclave. Israel says the war in Gaza, which has reduced much of the territory to rubble, killing thousands and plunging its 2.3 million people into a humanitarian disaster, has many months to go. But it signalled a new phase in its offensive, with an Israeli official saying on Monday the military would draw down forces inside Gaza this month and shift to a months-long phase of more localised "mopping up" operations. The Israeli official said the troop reduction would allow some reservists to return to civilian life, shoring up Israel's war-battered economy, and free up units in case of a wider conflict in the north with Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah. A U.S. official said the decision appeared to indicate the start of a shift to lower-intensity operations in the north of the Palestinian enclave. Washington has been urging Israel to reduce the intensity of its military operation, amidst international calls for a ceasefire as the death toll mounts. But residents said Israeli planes and tanks stepped up bombardment of the eastern and northern areas of Khan Younis in southern Gaza. The hints at a lowered tempo in northern Gaza came as the U.S. Navy announced that the Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier was returning to its home port in Virginia after being deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean following the

outbreak of hostilities. Artillery fire between Hezbollah and Israel has rattled the border since the start of the Gaza conflict, with Israel's military saying it carried out an air strike on Monday. The Israeli official said the situation on the Lebanese border "will not be allowed to continue. This coming six-month period is a critical moment." Residents of Sheikh Radwan district in Gaza City, in the northern part of the enclave that Israel's offensive focused on first, said tanks had withdrawn after what they described as the most intense 10 days of warfare since the conflict began. Tanks also pulled out of Gaza City's al-Mina district and parts of Tel al-Hawa district, while retaining some positions in the suburb controlling the enclave's main coastal road, residents said. On Monday, Hamas' armed wing claimed to have killed 15 Israeli soldiers after triggering an explosive minefield east of the Tuffah neighbourhood in Gaza city. Tanks remained in other parts of northern Gaza and fighting in central parts of the enclave continued unabated, said residents, citing shelling by tanks of parts of the Al-Bureji refugee camp in central Gaza. Hamas also showed its continued ability to target Israel after more than 12 weeks of the war, launching a barrage of rocket fire at Tel Aviv. Hamas seized 240 hostages on Oct. 7 and Israel believes 129 are still held in Gaza after some were released during a brief truce and others killed during air strikes and rescue or escape attempts. Qatar and Egypt are seeking to negotiate a new truce and hostages deal.





Salah Scores Twice as Liverpool Beat Newcastle 4-2

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Mohamed Salah's second-half brace made up for a missed penalty as Liverpool kicked off the new year three points clear atop the Premier League standings with a 4-2 victory over Newcastle United at a rain-drenched Anfield. Juergen Klopp's team, who began the day level with Aston Villa on points, now have 45 from 20 games. Villa have 42 points while Manchester City, who have played one fewer game, are third on 40. Newcastle are ninth on 29. "It was a sensational game from my team," Klopp told BBC. "We started extremely lively. Super game. I loved so many aspects of the game bar the goals we conceded. "Unbelievable atmosphere. Counter-pressing wise it was for football schools," he added. "They have to watch that, take it and keep it. It was everything good." The 31-year-old Salah, who has 151 Premier League goals for Liverpool, changed his boots at halftime and the switch paid off handsomely. His two goals moved him even with City's Erling Haaland as joint top scorers with 14 goals. He is the joint top on assists, level with Villa's Ollie Watkins on eight. Liverpool dominated the game, and Salah, who had fired a first-half penalty straight at goalkeeper Martin Dubravka, finally broke the deadlock in the 49th minute when Darwin Nunez cut the ball across to the Egyptian for a close-range finish. Alexander Isak scored against the run of play with Newcastle's second shot of the game in the 54th minute when he ran onto a through ball from Anthony Gordon and knocked it past keeper Alisson into the far corner. However, Curtis Jones put the home side back in front in the 74th minute with a tap-in after a pass across goal from Diogo Jota, and Cody Gakpo scored four minutes later. Sven Botman pulled one back for Newcastle in the 81st before Salah, who was playing his last game before departing for the African Cup of Nations, struck from the penalty

spot after Jota had been fouled by Dubravka to seal the win in the 86th. "Crazy match. Both sides created chances," Dubravka, 34, told Sky Sports. "I was there to try to help my team mates. Unfortunately they created so many chances and were clinical." Liverpool were on the front foot against Newcastle virtually from kickoff, and a superb display by keeper Dubravka kept the visitors in the game. The hosts had 18 shots in the first half to Newcastle's one, their most in the first half of a Premier League game since April 2016 against Everton. Liverpool's early chances were met by groans from the Anfield crowd, including Trent Alexander-Arnold's strike following Salah's missed penalty that he launched well over the crossbar. Alexander-Arnold also had a long shot at a tight angle hit the far post. But they finally found the net after the break and the floodgates opened. "It's a great result for us. The game was very intense and we managed to pick up three points and now we are top of the table. We need to stay calm and win every game," Salah told Sky Sports. "The players spoke in the dressing room (at halftime). 'We have to stay calm'. I missed the pen. I didn't want to leave for the national team with that performance." Newcastle have now lost four of their last five league matches and face champions Manchester City on Jan. 13 after their FA Cup third round meeting with fierce rivals Sunderland on Saturday. "A lot happened. Action packed game. We're disappointed with the way we defended," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said. Howe argued Salah's second penalty, awarded when Dubravka dove in to stop Jota and the Liverpool player appeared to take two steps before stumbling, should not have stood. "It shouldn't be given. Martin has pulled his hand away. He's had two steps before going down. For me it's not a penalty," Howe said. "We feel hard done by."

Sauber to Race as Stake F1 Team in 2024 and 2025



LONDON (Dispatches) - Swiss-based Sauber announced on Monday they will race in Formula One as the Stake F1 team until they become the Audi factory outfit in 2026. The team competed as Alfa Romeo last year but the Stellantis-owned brand has now departed. Online betting, entertainment and lifestyle brand Stake will be the exclusive title partner in 2024 and 2025. The crypto casino operator, which teamed up with Sauber in 2023, also sponsors Premier League side Everton and has an endorsement deal with Canadian rapper Drake. "Last season represented the start of Stake's journey in Formula One, and the brand's new role headlining Stake F1 Team represents the natural and exciting next step on this path," said team representative Alessandro Alunni Bravi. Alunni Bravi said at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in November that no Audi branding would be on the car before 2026. The team have an unchanged driver lineup of Valtteri Bottas and Guanyu Zhou for 2024 and will launch their new car, the Sauber C44, in London early next month. Australian online live streaming platform Kick.com, a subsidiary of Easygo Entertainment Pty Ltd that also owns Stake.com, has acquired the chassis naming rights.

Poland Reach United Cup Quarterfinals

PERTH (Dispatches) - Iga Swiatek left Spain reeling as Poland booked a 2-1 win to move into the quarter-finals of the United Cup whilst holders United States were beaten by hosts Australia. The 2-1 victory for Australia propelled them into the last eight as well. World number one Swiatek showed no mercy to Sara Sorribes Tormo in a 6-2, 6-1 singles victory before teaming up with Hubert Hurkacz to clinch the tie with a 6-0, 6-0 mixed doubles thrashing in just 53 minutes. Hurkacz was ambushed in the day's opening singles, losing 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 to Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. The top-seeded Poles finished Group A play with a perfect 2-0 record and await a last-eight opponent. Swiatek, who has lost only seven games in two singles matches to start her countdown to the Australian Open, said playing mixed doubles was good experience. "It's lessons for the future and great practice," the 22-year-old said. "I hardly ever play mixed. You use different skills, it's about feeling the geometry of the court." Hurkacz credited his teammate with doing most of the hard yards. "She carried me throughout the whole match, in every game she was making amazing shots," the world number nine said. Australia had to work hard to join Poland in the quarter-finals but emerged with an excellent over the United States. Alex de Minaur got the ball rolling for the hosts, nullifying the big serve of American Taylor Fritz 6-4, 6-2. The 12th-ranked winner needed four match points and 90 minutes to win. Ajla Tomljanovic was unable to get past world number five Jessica Pegula, with the American levelling the tie after a tight 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 victory. But Australia completed the evening's work in mixed doubles, with Storm Hunter and Matt Ebden defeating Pegula and Rajeev Ram 6-3, 6-1. "We were playing for our lives," Ebden said. Hunter said it was a very special moment. "Playing in front of the home crowd and playing with Matty, a Perth local, it is a dream come true to win and go into the quarter-finals at home," she said. In Sydney, France prevailed by the same score over Germany. Germany's two-time ATP Finals champion Alexander Zverev needed to dig deep to get past Adrian Mannarino 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 and give Germany a 1-0 lead over France. It seemed they would wrap up the tie when former world number one Angelique Kerber took the first set against Caroline Garcia 6-1, but she crumbled to lose the next two 6-2, 6-2 and send it to a mixed doubles decider. Kerber, on her way back from maternity leave, returned to team up with Zverev against Garcia and Edouard Roger-Vasselin, with the French clinching the tie by winning the mixed doubles rubber 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 12-10. Earlier in Sydney, a sharp Casper Ruud won his second straight singles match before backing up in the mixed doubles to steer Norway past Croatia. World number 24 Domna Pevkovic ground past unheralded Malene Helgo 7-5, 3-6, 6-3 to give the Croats a winning start to the Group F tie. But three-time Grand Slam finalist Ruud swept past Borna Coric 6-4, 6-1 in

just 89 minutes to level proceedings, then partnered with Ulrikke Eikeri to beat Vekic and Ivan Dodig 6-2, 3-6, 10-7. It was a much-needed win for Norway, who lost to the Netherlands at the weekend. "I'm motivated for the new year, I'm fresh and I'm ready," said world number 11 Ruud. "Another great singles match. I'm very happy to start the new year that way."



Japan Call on Mitoma to Help Erase Asian Cup Frustration



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Brighton winger Kaoru Mitoma was named in Japan's Asian Cup squad on Monday despite an ankle injury, as coach Hajime Moriyasu looks to erase the "frustration" of their 2019 final defeat. Brighton coach Roberto De Zerbi said last week that Mitoma would be out for up to six weeks after hurting his ankle in a 1-1 draw with Crystal Palace on December 21. But Moriyasu still included the player in his 26-man squad for the Asian Cup in Qatar, which kicks off on January 12. "Given his current injury situation, I don't know if he will be ready to play in the first game or not," Moriyasu said of the 26-year-old. "But I have been told by the national team medical staff and his club medical staff that I will be able to use him early in the tournament when he comes back from injury." Japan warmed up for the Asian Cup with a 5-0 friendly win over Thailand in Tokyo in front of a New Year's Day crowd of over 60,000. They have won the Asian Cup a record four times but they lost 3-1 to Qatar in the final of the 2019 tournament in the United Arab Emirates. Moriyasu said his "fundamental approach hasn't changed" over the past five years but he is determined to lift the trophy this time. "One thing that hasn't changed from the last time is that we will take each game as it comes and prepare as best we can, as we always do," he said. "The thing that has changed is that we have frustration from not winning the last time." Moriyasu named Liverpool midfielder Wataru Endo and Arsenal defender Takehiro Tomiyasu in his Asian Cup squad, along with Real Sociedad attacking midfielder Takefusa Kubo. Celtic's Daizen Maeda and Reo Hatate made the cut but club-mate Kyogo Furuhashi, who scored against Rangers on Saturday, was not selected. Lazio's Daichi Kamada was left out, as was midfielder Ao Tanaka, who scored Japan's opener against Thailand. Only 14 players were retained from Japan's squad for the 2022 World Cup, where they beat Germany and Spain before losing on penalties to Croatia in the last 16. "If you look at the overall level of Japanese football, there are more players playing at a high level," said Moriyasu. "There is fierce competition for places and that means there is a high level of candidates for the national team." Moriyasu fielded an inexperienced line-up missing several overseas-based players against a Thailand side that is also heading to the Asian Cup. Tanaka broke the deadlock five minutes into the second half before goals from Keito Nakamura, Takumu Kawamura, Takumi Minamino and a Thailand own goal gave the hosts a comfortable win. Moriyasu said his players had been proactive in attacking the opposition but urged them to keep improving. "In order to win at the Asian Cup and to beat the very best teams in the world, we have to be dogged in defence and get better at winning the ball back from them," he said. Japan have been drawn in Group D at the Asian Cup and will face Indonesia, Iraq and Vietnam in the first round.

Randle Helps Knicks Outlast Timberwolves

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Julius Randle scored 12 of the final 13 points for the New York Knicks, who squandered most of a 22-point third-quarter lead before holding off the visiting Minnesota Timberwolves, 112-106. Randle finished with 39 points -- two shy of his season high -- and nine rebounds for the Knicks, who snapped a three-game losing streak in OG Anunoby's team debut. Anunoby, who was acquired from the Toronto Raptors on Saturday along with Precious Achiuwa and Malachi Flynn in exchange for RJ Barrett and reserve guard Immanuel Quickley, had 17 points and six rebounds before fouling out in the fourth quarter. Jalen Brunson scored 16 points and collected a career-high 14 assists for the Knicks while Donte DiVincenzo had 15 points and Quentin Grimes added 10 points off the bench. Anthony Edwards scored 35 points while Karl-Anthony Towns had 29 points for the Western Conference-leading Timberwolves, who had a two-game winning streak snapped. Rudy Gobert (10 points, 15 rebounds) posted a double-double. The Timberwolves led by as many as 11 in the first quarter before the Knicks took control by outscoring the visitors 38-17 in the second to take a 61-49 halftime lead. Anunoby's 3-pointer with 4:58 left in the third gave New York its biggest lead at 83-61. Jordan McLaughlin's layup with two seconds left in the quarter began a 19-5 run for Minnesota, which pulled within 99-95 on Towns' 3-pointer with 6:40 left. The teams combined for four straight empty trips before Randle scored on consecutive possessions to extend the Knicks' lead to 103-95. Edwards hit a pair of free throws with 4:32 left, after which the teams went scoreless on their next eight possessions before Randle hit a second-chance 20-footer with 2:09 remaining. Towns' 3-pointer cut the Knicks' lead to 107-102 with 1:14 left and DiVincenzo missed a 3-pointer 23 seconds later, but Towns missed a fallaway shot with 41 seconds to go and Randle followed by converting an old-fashioned three-point play. DiVincenzo's free throw with 13 seconds left provided the Knicks' only point not scored by Randle over the final six minutes.

