

Secretary General of the International Interpol Organization, Referring to Cruel Kerman Terrorist Attack Said That the International Criminal Police Organization, Is Ready to Cooperate With Iran to Bring Perpetrators to Justice

IRAN NEWS


Gov't Spokesman Ali Bahadori-Jahromi Emphasizes That President Ebrahim Raisi Stresses on Using Women's Merits and Capabilities in Various Parts of the Country Because Women Are Source of Pride for the Country

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Iran Slams U.S., Israel for Diverting Attention From Root Causes of Red Sea Situation



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations rejected U.S.'s "unfounded allegations" against Iran concerning Yemen's pro-Palestine operations in the Red Sea, slamming it as a bid to divert attention from "root causes" of the situation in the key maritime waterway. Amir Saeid Iravani said in a social media post on Tuesday that any U.S. "adventurism" in the Red Sea could "endanger regional peace." Iran "issues a stern warning against any US adventurism that could endanger regional peace," the Islamic Republic's mission to the UN said. He warned that the allegations were aimed at diverting "international attention away from the root causes of the current situation in the Red Sea." In the letter, the Iranian envoy reaffirmed Tehran's commitment to maritime security and freedom of navigation, and rejected "unfounded allegations" made by the US and Israel at a UNSC open briefing on the situation in the Red Sea held last Wednesday. "The allegations are unsubstantiated and lack evidence. The Islamic Republic of Iran has always placed great importance on maritime security and freedom of navigation and reaffirms its unwavering commitment to upholding its international obligations and maintaining peace and security in the region," the letter read. That came as U.S. deputy ambassador Christopher Lu urged the UNSC during the Wednesday meeting to take action against Yemen over its pro-Palestine operations that have targeted Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea, and accused Iran of being "deeply involved in planning operations against commercial vessels in the Red Sea." The letter added that the recent incidents in the Red Sea came in response to the Israel's US-backed "genocidal war" in the Gaza Strip and the occupying regime's crimes against Palestinians in the West Bank. It urged the UN Security Council "to uphold its responsibilities to address the causes of the current situation in the Red Sea" and take decisive measures to "compel" the Israeli regime to end its brutal war on Gaza.

Iran Urges for Its Removal From FATF Recommendations



TEHRAN (IRNA) - In a letter of protest to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Iran's Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi has urged for the Islamic Republic of Iran's name to be removed from Recommendation 7 and other documents related to UN Security Council Resolution 2231. FATF Recommendation 7 requires countries to implement targeted financial sanctions to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destructions (WMD) and their financing in compliance with UN Security Council resolutions. UN Security Council Resolution 2231-- adopted in 2015 to implement the Iran nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) -- terminated previous UN resolutions on Iran (1373, 1747, 1803, and 1929) but introduced restrictive measures, including targeted financial sanctions. The resolution's provisions would be applicable to Iran based on one of either two conditions: up to eight years after the approval of the JCPOA and upon the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) verification. Given the JCPOA's approval date of October 18, 2015, the first condition applies to the Islamic Republic. Iran received a note from the UN Security Council Secretariat on October 19, which declared an end to restrictions the council had imposed on Iran's missile program. The FATF is a non-binding regulatory institution formed by the United States and its Western allies, supposedly to counter terrorism financing and safeguard the integrity of the international financial system.



TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says that encouraging people not to participate in the elections is the strategic policy of the enemies of the Islamic Revolution and the U.S. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei received thousands of people from Qom province on the occasion of the uprising of the people of this city against the Pahlavi regime on January 9, 1978. The meeting took place on Tuesday morning on the occasion of the uprising of the people of Qom against the Pahlavi regime on January 9, 1978; a landmark protest that was in response to an article published in Ettela'at newspaper, insulting the founder of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khomeini. Many believe that this demonstration was the start of a wave that ended the Pahlavi regime one year later. In his remarks, the leader of the Islamic Revolution noted that the power of people's role in major events should not be forgotten. He also referred to the resistance of the Gaza people, saying that even though they are in the minority, they have shattered the grandeur of the US, as well as the Zionist regime. Comparing the uprising of the people of Qom against the Pahlavi regime on January 9 with the Gaza events, the Leader cited that the people of Qom suffered a lot of casualties and suffered a lot of damage back then but they started a movement that was able to overthrow an arrogant and oppressive dependent regime dominating Iran. The Leader said the former regime that was overthrown by the Iranian nation on February 11, 1979, and was expelled from a "holy" and "divine" country was a coup regime that was dependent on others. Pointing to efforts, including by US politicians, to whitewash the Pahlavi regime, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Some still do not want to believe this after forty years." He argued that the strategic policy of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, was to bring people to the political arena while the enemy's strategic policy was to repel people from the arena. Not participating in the elections is what the enemies want, he said. "Creating polarization in the society is one of the goals of the foes of the Iranian nation." Elsewhere in his comments, the Leader pointed to the recent deadly terrorist attack in the city of Kerman, saying the Islamic Republic will pursue and punish the perpetrators vigorously. He also vowed a harsh response to the recent Daesh terrorist attack in the city of Kerman which killed 93 people. Ayatollah Khamenei said that the "sorrowful and disastrous" tragedy afflicted the nation and that the Islamic Republic insists on "finding and suppressing the real and behind-the-scene perpetrators of the incident." The Leader emphasized that in the case of Gaza, predictions about the victory of the Palestinian resistance and the defeat of the "evil Zionist regime" are coming true. He said the crimes that Israel is committing against the Palestinians will be recorded in history even after the regime is wiped off the face of the earth. Additionally, he noted, it will not be forgotten that the patience of the Palestinian people and their resilience forced the occupying regime to retreat. "The Zionist regime has not achieved any of its objectives after committing nearly a hundred days of crimes. What does defeat mean? That's what defeat means. They said we will destroy Hamas, but they failed. They said we will transfer the people of Gaza, but they failed. They said we will stop the actions of the resistance, but they failed," Ayatollah Khamenei stated. "The resistance is alive, fresh and ready, [while] the regime is tired, humiliated and regretful with a criminal stamp on its forehead. This is the situation that exists today. It bears a lesson." Meanwhile, the Leader said that the enemies of the Islamic Revolution, the US, world powers and Zionists are pursuing a strategic policy that is the people's non-participation in the elections, saying they want to "drag people out of the field of fighting, competition and battle." Stressing that the predictions regarding the victory of the Gaza Resistance over the Zionist regime are becoming true, Ayatollah Khamenei said that the Zionist regime has been committing crimes for three months which will remain in history even after the Zionist regime disappeared from the earth. The Resistance is alive and ready while the Zionist regime is tired and humiliated, the Leader said.

No Show-Up in Elections "Strategic Policy of Enemies"

Daesh, Like Zionists, Seeks Massacre of Innocent People



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says the Daesh terrorist group seeks to kill women and children just like the Israeli regime that is massacring innocent people in Gaza. Raisi made the statement in a meeting with Chairman of Tajikistan's National Assembly Rustam Emomali in Tehran on Monday. He said all regional countries should actively counter terrorist groups such as Daesh which is nurtured by the U.S. and Israel. He emphasized that Iran and Tajikistan must promote cooperation in the fight against terrorism, organized crimes and smuggling of illicit drugs. The president hailed the appropriate level of growing relations between Tehran and Dushanbe in the past two years and said the expansion of parliamentary ties would play a key role in boosting cooperation in the political and economic sectors as well. Emomali, for his part, said Tajikistan supports the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and condemns Israel's killing of more than 23,000 Palestinian civilians in Gaza since the beginning of its war against the Strip in October. The top Tajik parliamentarian described insecurity as an issue of common concern between Tehran and Dushanbe and a danger to promotion of bilateral trade cooperation. Heading a high-ranking parliamentary delegation, Emomali arrived in Tehran on Monday morning. They said Iran and Tajikistan should make use of their capacities to further expand relations.

Martyr Gen. Soleimani Will Remain Anti-Terror Icon



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Martyr General Qassem Soleimani's role in the fight against Daesh Takfiri terrorists in the region is no more hidden, says Ali-Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. "General Soleimani's struggle in defending the existence of human beings, irrespective of their religious or ethnic identities, saved countless number of innocent people from takfiri groups," Velayati said while addressing the Haj Qassem International Conference on Monday. Velayati began his speech by condoling the families of the victims of a terrorist attack during the 4th assassination anniversary of General Soleimani on January 3. "I offer my condolences for the vicious and terrorist act in Kerman and the martyrdom of a group of compatriots." He also hailed the Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip and congratulated the resistance front for its victories "in confronting the child-killing Zionist regime." The advisor to Iran's leader called the victory of the Islamic Revolution a turning point in bringing awareness among the oppressed people around the world. "The enemies of the revolution had realized the ideological stance of the great Iranian nation under the leadership of Imam Khomeini and a new message of discourse", he underlined. Velayati stated that the revolution and the sacred defense in Iran produced the students in the path of the Islamic awakening, and certainly Martyr Soleimani was a distinguished and outstanding student of this school as described by Iran's supreme leader himself. He said Soleimani's efforts resulted in strengthening the initial cores of the resistance and turning it into a powerful front. "Martyr Soleimani, by understanding the realities and conditions of the oppressed people and nations, took into account all the dimensions and sensitivities of each region based on the Islamic Revolution discourse, and by adhering to the values such as justice, freedom, spirituality, ethics, unity, resistance, anti-tyranny, and anti-arrogance, he tried to minimize class, ethnic and religious differences." Velayati further noted that General Soleimani exposed the true face of arrogance and colonialism by explaining and interpreting the real goals and evil intentions of the domineering regimes, including Zionism for the region and beyond. "He helped people aware of conspiracies being hatched by the global arrogance".

Pure Blood of Gazans Will Hasten Israel's Downfall

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Iranian Army says Israel is shedding the blood of innocent Palestinians to make up for its "humiliating defeat" in the Gaza war, warning that the atrocities will only speed up the regime's demise. Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi made the remarks on Tuesday, as 95 days of bloody aggression against the besieged Gaza Strip has brought no success for the occupying entity. "Under the support of the US and other Western countries, the illegitimate Zionist regime is taking revenge on unarmed and defenseless children, women and civilians by its heavy and historic defeat at the hands of Hamas," he said, referring to the Gaza-based Palestinian resistance group. "Of course, nothing will make up for its (Israel's) humiliating defeat. The pure blood [of the Palestinian people] will hasten the downfall of the Zionist apartheid regime." Israel waged the genocidal war on the Gaza Strip on October 7 after

Hamas carried out an unprecedented operation against the usurping entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. So far, the Tel Aviv regime has killed at least 23,084 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 58,926 others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under the rubble in the Gaza Strip, which is under "complete siege" by Israel. Referring to the recent terrorist bomb attacks in the Iranian city of Kerman, Mousavi said it was carried out by "the black-hearted who are not capable of fighting in the field." On Wednesday, 91 people were killed and hundreds injured in two explosions near the burial site of Iran's late anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani during a ceremony marking the fourth anniversary of his assassination by the US. The Daesh terrorist group claimed responsibility for the deadly bombings.



IRAN NEWS



Iran Seeks Self-Sufficiency in Cotton Cultivation

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Efforts are underway in Iran to reach self-sufficiency in the production of cotton through increased support for farmers, according to a senior official with the Ministry of Agriculture. Chief contractor for Iran's ministry of agriculture's Cotton Project Ebrahim Hezarjaribi said that supportive programs for cotton cultivators is being implemented in Iran, including the use of micro-irrigation systems, no-till farming, cheap loans for harvester purchases, and encouraging the use of early-growing varieties of cotton. He said that in more than 70% of countries in the world, subsidies are given to cotton farmers so that they can benefit from the added value of the crop. This official said that the average cotton yield in Iran has reached above 3,000 kg/hectare. Hezarjaribi added that cotton production in Iran doubled over the five years of the country's the Sixth National Development Plan which ended two years ago, adding that raw cotton production increased from 150,000 metric tons (mt) to more than 300,000 mt.

Tajikistan Seeks to Work With Iranian Companies



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Tajikistan is keen to cooperate with Iranian firms and benefit from their expertise, Chairman of the National Assembly of Tajikistan Rustam Emomali said. He made the remark at a meeting with Rouhollah Dehghani, Iran's Vice President for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy. According to Emomali, more than 150 Iranian companies are currently operating in Tajikistan in various fields, especially in the field of development and power plants. He also showed interest about the products and technologies that are developed by start-up companies in Iran. The chairman stated that there are many opportunities to improve the collaboration between the two countries in this domain. Chairman of the National Assembly of Tajikistan, Rustam Emomali, who visited Iran on January 8, got acquainted with the House of Innovation and Technology of Iran. Meanwhile a memorandum of understanding has been signed between Iran and Tajikistan to establish a joint innovation and technology center. According to Tajikistan's parliament, the memorandum was signed by Rustam Emomali and Rouhollah Dehghani. The document was signed with the aim of fostering scientific and technical cooperation between Tajikistan and Iran, advancing relations in the sphere of technology and knowledge-based economy. The signing took place at the Iran House of Innovation and Technology, which Emomali visited during his official trip to Iran.

INSTC Pivot for Materializing Iran's Sea-Based Economy Goals



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The director general of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) for Transit & Logistics Affairs said the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is the pivot for realizing the objectives of the country's sea-based economy. Khosro Saraei pointed to the special emphasis of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the sea-based economy and added that the high capacities of the corridor and its key role in facilitating regional and international trade will be assessed specifically in a conference on "Iran's Sea-Based Economy" slated to be held on February 12-13, 2024. Iran has an extraordinary international opportunity due to its special and privileged geographical location between two seas, he emphasized. He went on to say that the INSTC will play a

leading role in increasing the efficiency of mixed and intermodal transportation in the regional and extra-regional arenas, Mehr news agency reported. Elsewhere in his remarks, the official referred to the special emphasis laid by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the development of a sea-based economy and called on responsible organizations to pave the way for increasing both domestic and foreign investments in line with the realization of the sea-based economy objectives. Pointing to the rail and road transportation capacities in the country for the materialization of those objectives, he added, "With the studies conducted in this regard, the Chabahar Port is considered as a new gateway for the development of multifaceted services in the International North-south Transport Corridor."

Iran, Russia Can Conduct Payments in National Currencies



TEHRAN (MNA) - Russian and Iranian exporters can handle transactions in national currencies after the two countries integrated their financial message transfer systems, allowing banks to make direct payments without using the SWIFT system. "We have connected the two countries' message transfer systems to each other. This means that the banks of the two countries no longer need Switzerland to connect to each other and commercial banks of both countries can establish intermediary relations. The exporter can issue an invoice in rials to the Russian side and receive money from Russian banks in Iran," Deputy Head of Iranian Central Bank Mohsen Karimi said. Transactions can now be made in the national currencies of Russia and Iran, the deputy chief of the Iranian central bank said. Iranian Central Bank governor Mohammad Reza Farzin said in late December 2023 that Iran and Russia would sign a deal to trade in their national currencies instead of the US dollar in the first quarter of 2024. In March of that year, Iranian Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Ehsan Khandouzi told Sputnik that banking payment systems of Iran and Russia had been fully connected and would enable banks in both countries to open accounts for national companies and carry out direct payments.

Over 33.86m Car Tires Produced in 9 Months



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian tire manufacturers produced 33,868,349 car tires in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2023), indicating one percent rise as compared to the number of tires produced in the same period of time in the previous year. This number of produced tires weighed over 216,815 tons, with a one percent decline year on year, Mehr News Agency reported citing Industry Ministry data. According to the mentioned data, in the said period, 15.779 million passenger car tires were produced, showing a three percent decrease year on year. Production of the tires of agricultural vehicles reached 361,508 with no change compared to the previous year's same period, and that of road building and industrial vehicles increased 48 percent to 41,501 in the period under review. In the first nine months of the present year, 5,805,122 bicycle and motorcycle tires were also produced, registering a five percent decline compared to the previous year. Production of tubes increased by 13 percent to stand at 10,227,898. The tire industry has a 60-year history in Iran. Currently, 11 tire manufacturing companies are active across the country that produce tires for passenger cars, trucks, buses, vans, road construction, and agriculture machinery, as well as bicycles and motorcycles in addition to other types of tubes. Some 15,000 people are directly employed in this industry and more than 250,000 people are indirectly involved in the value chain of this industry. The Iranian tire industry, despite the continuation of sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic conditions, as well as some domestic restrictions, has been following a thriving and successful path over the past few years. In addition to the successes achieved in terms of the output amount, Iranian tire manufacturers have entered new areas including production of the wide-base tires and the tires of SUVs. Wide base tires, which are a new generation of heavy vehicle tires, have been produced for the first time in West Asia by Iranian producers.

Kerman Terror Attack Rooted in Daesh Activities in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The speaker of the Iranian Parliament blamed the presence and activities of Daesh (ISIL or ISIS) in Afghanistan for the recent terrorist attack that killed over 90 people in Iran's southern city of Kerman. The root cause of the tragic terrorist attack in Kerman is the activities of Daesh terrorists in Afghanistan and their plots to foment insecurity in its neighboring countries, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said in a meeting with Chairman of the National Assembly of Tajikistan Rustam Emomali, held in Tehran on Monday. The Iranian speaker noted that it is clear who created, sponsored and promoted the Daesh terrorists, as it is obvious that Iran and others fought against the terrorist group's organized schemes across the region. "In the current circumstances, we definitely need

comprehensive cooperation in the fight against terrorism as well as arms and drug trafficking in Afghanistan," he added. Qalibaf further reminded the Taliban that they won't be able to form a sustainable government without incorporating all ethnic groups and political currents in Afghanistan. "This is the most important issue that the regional nations, particularly the neighbors of Afghanistan, should take into account." For his part, Emomali said the situation in Afghanistan is worrying for Tajikistan and Iran. "Tajikistan believes that a multilateral government must be established in Afghanistan including all political and ethnic groups in that country," he stated. He finally stressed the need for constant interaction and exchange of information in the war on terrorism and drug trafficking.



ICCIMA Meets to Explore Ways of Financing SMEs

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The members of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Investment and Financing Committee met on Monday to discuss ways that Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) can benefit from stock market financing methods. In this meeting the attendees stressed that SMEs can use the new capacities of the capital market to provide financial resources for their projects, which, of course, requires transparency and familiarity with new methods of financing. During the meeting which was attended by Head of the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) Mohammad Goudarzi, the official said: "Tehran Stock Exchange has created a new opportunity for any company that makes more than 100 billion tomans (1.0 trillion rials or about \$2.0 million) to enter the stock exchange. With this situation, small and medium-sized companies with a capital of over 120 billion tomans (1.2 trillion rials or about \$2.4 million) can enter the capital market and be financed through it." Mentioning some of the financing tools that the stock market is providing, Goudarzi said: "One of the financing tools is financing through publishing the shares of a project. The problem with this method, however, is that provincial chambers of the ICCIMA do not have a coherent database. Meaning that it is not clear how much working capital a company has; What companies and what size are active in the chambers of commerce? Which company has the standard for using the capital market resources?" "We do our best to attract companies into the capital market. If a small business has problems regarding financing through the capital market, it can refer to the Tehran Stock Exchange and the Securities Secretariat. Any company with a profit of over 100 billion tomans per year can use these capacities," he added. According to the official, the companies that use the stock market resources to finance their projects will be exempt from paying tax.



Ecuador Declares State of Emergency Amid Prison Chaos

QUITO (Dispatches) - Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa declared a state of emergency for 60 days today after the country's most-wanted prisoner disappeared from the jail where he was being held. The state of emergency and surrounding events are among the first big security tests for Noboa, a young businessman who took office in November promising to crack down on soaring levels of violence in the South American country. "I have just signed a state of emergency decree so that the Armed Forces have all the political and legal support for their actions," said Noboa. "The time is over when drug trafficking convicts, hitmen and organized crime dictate to the government what to do." Ecuador's prison agency said there were "incidents" on Monday at six of the country's overcrowded prisons, where clashes between rival gangs are frequent and have left more than 400 prisoners dead since 2021. On Sunday, Adolfo Macias, leader of the Los Choneros criminal gang, disappeared from the prison where he was serving a 34-year sentence.



China FM Says Ties With U.S. Stabilized Last Year



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's foreign minister said Tuesday that relations with the United States "stabilized" last year, as the two powers seek to put ties on a surer footing in 2024. Beijing and Washington have butted heads in recent years on flashpoint issues from technology and trade to human rights, as well as tensions over Taiwan and competing claims in the South China Sea. In a bid to ease some of the worst tensions in decades, President Joe Biden met Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November for talks that both sides described as a qualified success. And speaking at Beijing's opulent Diaoyutai State Guesthouse on Tuesday, China's top diplomat Wang Yi admitted relations had "encountered serious difficulties at the beginning of (last) year". The veteran diplomat said Beijing "expressed its solemn position, demanding that the United States change its misunderstanding of China and return to a rational and pragmatic China policy." "After hard work, the two sides have restructured communication and dialogue, and bilateral relations have stopped falling and stabilised," Wang added. But Wang's rosy assessment belied continued key sources of tension between the powers. Elections are due this week in the self-ruled island of Taiwan, a key flashpoint between the US and China. Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has not ruled out seizing it by force, while the United States is Taiwan's main security backer and has warned China against acting aggressively towards the self-ruled island democracy. The two sides have also clashed over China's increasingly assertive policy in the South China Sea, which it claims almost in its entirety despite an international tribunal ruling that its assertions have no legal basis. Wang on Tuesday stressed that Biden had pledged to Xi that the US "does not support Taiwan independence" during their meeting last year. He also framed China as a "responsible" power that "always held fast to justice and stood for fairness" as well as "resolutely opposes hegemonism and power politics".

Four Killed in Combined Russian Air Strike on Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia sent dozens of missiles across Ukraine early on Monday, killing at least four civilians and hitting residential areas and commercial sites in its latest combined air attack, Ukrainian authorities said. Two people were killed in the western Khmelnytskyi region, local officials reported, where critical infrastructure had also been struck. In Kryvyi Rih, a 62-year-old was killed and a shopping centre and scores of private homes and apartment buildings damaged after nine Russian missiles hit the south central city, said Oleksandr Vilkul, the mayor. "The mad enemy once again struck civilians," regional governor Serhiy Lysak wrote on the Telegram messaging app. "Directed missiles at people." Ukraine's National Police said a total of 38 people in total had been wounded across the country. Russia said it hit military-industrial targets in Ukraine from sea and air on Monday. "This morning, a multiple attack was carried out with high-precision, long-range, sea and air-based weapons, including the Kinzhal hypersonic missile system, on facilities of the military-industrial complex of Ukraine," the defence ministry said in a daily dispatch. Ukraine said its air defences had destroyed 18 out of 51 missiles, a much lower shoot-down rate than normal, which Kyiv attributed to the large number of ballistic missiles fired by Russia which are more difficult to intercept. "On the one hand, you have lots of missiles not shot down," air force spokesman Yuriy Ilnat said on Ukrainian television. "The explanation is simple: they were flying on a ballistic trajectory, and into the regions where we can't shoot them down." All eight drones launched by Russia were also shot down. The strikes came amid a cold snap sweeping Ukraine, with Vilkul, the Kryvyi Rih mayor, also reporting that 15,000 residents were without power and that local trams and trolleybuses were not running.

Lula Vows No Pardon for Jan 8 Rioters as Brazil Marks Anniversary



RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva vowed there will be no pardon for ex-president Jair Bolsonaro's supporters who rioted in the capital a year ago, as the country marked the first anniversary of the attacks. Speaking in the main entry hall of Congress in Brasilia -- one of three buildings far-right rioters invaded that day, along with the presidential palace and Supreme Court next door -- the veteran leftist said Brazil's democracy needed protecting. "All those who financed, planned and committed this coup attempt must be made examples of and punished. There can be no pardon for those who attack democracy," Lula, 78, told a ceremony that included top figures from all three branches of government. "Pardon would look like impunity, and impunity would look like a free pass for new terrorist attacks on our country. We saved democracy... But democracy must be built and protected every day." Lula, who previously led Brazil from 2003 to 2010, had been back in office for just one week when tens of thousands of Bolsonaro supporters rioted up by the far-right former president's claims of election fraud stormed the halls of power, trashing the premises and calling for the military to oust Lula. The riots were eerily reminiscent of the US Capitol invasion in Washington almost exactly two years earlier by supporters of then-president Donald Trump, Bolsonaro's political role model. The episode laid bare the violent divisions tearing at Brazil in the wake of Lula's narrow win over Bolsonaro the previous October.

Bolsonaro, who was in the United States at the time, is under investigation for allegedly instigating the unrest. He denies involvement. He called the events of January 8 a "setup" orchestrated by the left, in comments Saturday to CNN Brasil. "We repudiated it from the start," he said. "That's never been the way the right behaves." Lula called the former president a "coup-monger" in his speech, recalling relentless efforts by Bolsonaro and his supporters to raise doubts over the credibility of Brazil's electronic voting system. The fallout from the riots continues. Police said they carried out new raids Monday to track down those who planned and financed the attacks. Of the 2,170 people arrested over the riots, 30 have been convicted so far, on charges including armed criminal conspiracy, violent uprising against the rule of law and an attempted coup, with sentences of up to 17 years. The riots were the culmination of months of tension in Brazil around the October 2022 elections, in which Lula narrowly beat Bolsonaro to return to office for a third term. On the surface, the country's divisions are less extreme today: The far-right is still reeling from backlash to the riots, as well as electoral authorities' decision last June to bar Bolsonaro from running for office for eight years over his attacks on the credibility of the election system. But deep-running fissures remain. A Quaest poll published Sunday found 51 percent say the riots were carried out by "radicals who do not represent" Bolsonaro supporters.

Biden, Saudis Call for Israeli Restraint as Gaza Suffers Another Bloody Day



GAZA (Dispatches) - Pressure grew on Israel from its staunch ally the United States and from Middle East powers to ease its assault on Gaza as its forces said they engaged in "tough battles" against Hamas militants in central and southern parts of the enclave. Following talks with Arab leaders, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken landed late Monday in Tel Aviv on the latest leg of a regional tour aimed at preventing the war - now entering its fourth month - from turning into a wider conflagration. Israeli officials have said they are entering a new phase of more targeted warfare after mass bombardments that have devastated the Gaza Strip and killed more than 23,000 Palestinians. There was no respite on Monday, however, with the Israeli military saying a "different mix of forces" was pursuing holdout Hamas fighters in the enclave's north as "intense operational activity" focused on central Gaza and the area of the southern city of Khan Younis. "Handling tough battles in both the center and south," said Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman. "The fighting will continue through 2024." Israeli forces bombarded the eastern part of Khan Younis and the central Gaza Strip amid ground clashes, residents said. They said a strike in Deir Al-Balah killed 18 people overnight and four on Monday, while health officials in the Hamas-run enclave said 247 people were killed overnight. Hamas's military wing the Al-Qassam Brigades said its fighters fired a missile barrage at the Israeli city of Tel Aviv in response to what it called the "Zionist massacres against civilians". And in a further sign the war is spreading beyond Gaza's borders, Israel killed a top commander of Hamas's ally Hezbollah in a strike in south Lebanon on Monday, sources familiar with the group's operations said. Blinken held talks in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia on Monday to try to chart a way forward in the bloodiest chapter ever of the decades-long Israel-Palestinian conflict. It is his fourth mission to the region since the

deadly Oct. 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas militants triggered the massive Israeli assault. Speaking to reporters before flying to Israel following talks with Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the Saudi oasis town of Al Ula, Blinken said he found support among Arab leaders for normalizing relations with Israel. "There's a clear interest in the region in pursuing that but it will require that the conflict end in Gaza and it will also clearly require that there be a practical pathway to a Palestinian state," said Blinken, who stopped in Jordan and Qatar on Sunday. The Saudi crown prince, the kingdom's de facto ruler, stressed the importance of stopping the hostilities in Gaza and forming a path for peace, Saudi state news agency SPA reported. SPA said the crown prince - who prior to the war's outbreak had been leading a rapprochement between his country and Israel - underscored the need to restore stability and to ensure the Palestinian people gain their legitimate rights. Meanwhile, U.S. President Joe Biden, confronted by protesters shouting "ceasefire now" while he visited a church in Charleston, South Carolina, said he had been working "quietly" with the Israeli government to encourage it to reduce its attacks and "significantly get out of Gaza". Though long a fervent supporter of Israel, Biden has previously described Israel's bombing campaign as "indiscriminate". Israel, which says it is in a fight for its very survival, accuses Hamas of operating among civilians. Hamas, which is sworn to Israel's destruction, denies this. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant told the Wall Street Journal his country was both determined to end Hamas rule of the enclave and deter other Iran-backed adversaries. The Israeli offensive has so far killed 23,084 Palestinians, Gaza health officials say, while Israel says Hamas still holds more than 100 hostages of the 240 seized during its attack on Israeli towns on Oct. 7 in which the militants killed about 1,200 people.



India-Maldives Row Escalates, Agency Suspends Flight Bookings to Islands

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - One of India's largest travel platforms suspended flight bookings to the tourism-dependent Maldives after disparaging social media posts against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi embittered relations between the South Asian neighbors. India and Russia send the largest number of visitors to the Maldives, a chain of sun-kissed islands in the Indian Ocean that is home to many luxury resorts. Tourism accounts for almost one-third of its economy, according to the World Bank. EaseMyTrip co-founder and Executive Director Prashant Pitti said bookings to the Maldives were suspended "indefinitely". Even though New Delhi and Male have traditionally had close ties, relations have been tense since President Mohamed Muizzu came to power in November winning the election on an "India Out" campaign. The controversy over comments by three Maldivian now-suspended ministers about Modi comes just as Muizzu embarks for China on his first state visit from Jan. 8-12, breaking from the convention of most Maldivian leaders choosing New Delhi to be their first international port of call. Both Beijing and New Delhi vie for influence in the Indian Ocean nation. "We decided to take this step because any self-respecting nation should do this. The statements which we heard from the representatives of the Maldives government were extremely derogatory to the country," Pitti told Reuters. Pitti said EaseMyTrip is the second largest online travel booking platform in India with a 22% market share. The Maldives government suspended deputy ministers Malsha Shareef, Mariyam Shiuna and Abdulla Mahzoon Majid for calling Modi a "clown", "terrorist" and "puppet of Israel" on social media platform X, in response to a video of him visiting the Indian islands of Lakshadweep, north of the Maldives, to promote local tourism. Pitti said his company will promote Lakshadweep over any foreign location, even though EaseMyTrip might witness a "temporary dip in international tourism". Many Indians, including some celebrities, shared social media posts promoting domestic destinations over the Maldives.

Taiwan Poll Frontrunner Hits Out at Beijing Interference

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan's presidential election frontrunner on Tuesday accused Beijing of using "all means" to influence this weekend's crucial poll, which will set the course of cross-strait ties for the next four years. Lai Ching-te, Taiwan's current vice president, said voters should have no illusions about China maintaining peace, but that he would keep the door open for exchanges with Beijing if he takes power. Saturday's election will be closely watched from Beijing to Washington as voters choose a new leader to steer the island in the face of an increasingly assertive Beijing. China claims Taiwan as part of its territory, rejecting the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government's stance that the island is "already independent". Beijing has maintained a near-daily military presence around Taiwan -- with four Chinese balloons moving across the sensitive median line on Monday, the latest in a series of incursions that Taiwan and conflict experts say is a form of "grey zone" harassment. Lai said that while China interferes in "every election in Taiwan", the latest efforts are the "most serious". "In addition to political and military intimidation, (it is using) economic means, cognitive warfare, disinformation, threats and incentives," he told reporters. "It has resorted to all means to interfere with this election." President Tsai

Ing-wen, who is leaving office after reaching the two-term limit, won a landslide in the last election in 2020. Under her administration, Beijing has refused all high-level communications with Tsai and ramped up political and military pressures against Taiwan. Lai said Tuesday that "as long as there is parity and dignity, Taiwan's door will always be open" for exchanges and cooperation with China under his leadership. "But we cannot have illusions about peace. Accepting China's 'one-China' principle is not true peace," he said, referring to a Beijing doctrine that Taiwan is a part of China. "Peace without sovereignty is just like Hong Kong. It is a false peace." Touting deterrence as a main defence policy, Lai said the DPP's "pursuit of peace relies on strength, not on the goodwill of the aggressor." "The goodwill of invaders cannot be relied on -- if you look at Tibet and Xinjiang in the past, or Hong Kong today, these are all good examples," Lai said. His opponents on Saturday include Hou Yu-ih, a former police officer and mayor with the Kuomintang (KMT) party, which has long encouraged closer cooperation and compromise with China. Hou has said that Lai -- who has previously dubbed himself a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan's independence" -- represents a danger to cross-strait relations. aw-dhc/pdw/cwl

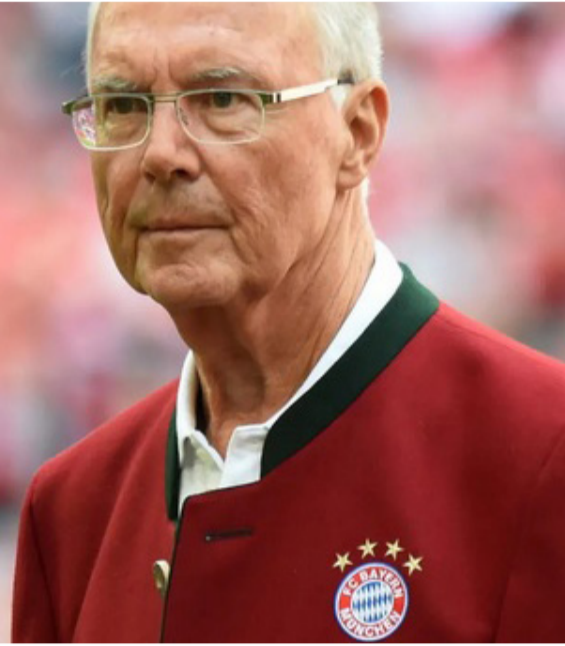


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German Football Mourns Sublime Beckenbauer



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany united to mourn the death of Franz Beckenbauer on Monday, with figures from across the sporting and political landscape bidding farewell to the 'Kaiser'. Beckenbauer, a World Cup winner as both a player and a coach, died on Sunday at the age of 78, with news of his death not announced until Monday evening. Beckenbauer had largely withdrawn from public life in recent years as he battled a number of ailments. His family said the former midfielder died "peacefully" surrounded by his family in the Austrian city of Salzburg. Known as 'Der Kaiser', the German word for Emperor, Beckenbauer was revered as an icon of the game in post-World War II Germany. "We'll miss him" German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Monday. "Franz Beckenbauer was one of the greatest footballers in Germany" Scholz said, saying the former midfielder "inspired enthusiasm for German football for generations". Ballon d'Or-winning midfielder Lothar Matthaeus echoed the Chancellor's words, telling Bild "we will miss him". "The shock is deep, even if I knew Franz wasn't well." Matthaeus was Germany's captain and talisman when Beckenbauer coached the side to victory at the 1990 World Cup. "His death is a loss for football and for all of Germany. He was one of the greats as a player and a coach, but also off the pitch." "Everyone who knew him knew what a great and generous person Franz was. A good friend has left us." Fellow 1990 World Cup winner and current German FA (DFB) sporting director Rudi Voeller expressed his "immense sadness", saying "he will forever remain a luminous figure." "German football loses a great personality" Voeller said. "I lose a great friend." Current Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann credited Beckenbauer for "changing the game" as a 'libero', or free central defender. "His friendship with the ball made him a free man." Franz Beckenbauer could float across the pitch. As a footballer and later as a coach he was sublime.

Beckenbauer's career is closely linked with Bayern Munich, where he started as a youth player in 1958, playing in the Bavarian capital until 1977. "Bayern's world is no longer what it used to be" Bayern wrote on Monday, saying "it is suddenly darker, calmer and poorer". As one of Bayern's greatest players, Beckenbauer had an enduring relationship with honorary president Uli Hoeness -- who he played alongside in the victorious 1974 German World Cup side. "Franz Beckenbauer is the greatest personality that Bayern ever had," Hoeness said on Monday. "As a player, coach, president, person: unforgettable. Nobody will ever reach his level... He was a friend, a unique companion and a gift to us all." Beckenbauer won titles with Bayern as a player and a coach, before stepping into the role of president from 2002 to 2009, establishing the German giants as one of European football's powerhouse sides. Long-time Bayern CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said he was "deeply shocked" at the news. "Franz Beckenbauer rewrote the history of German football and left a lasting impact on it." "He had a great respect for people... Because for Franz, everyone was equal. Rummenigge said "German football is losing the greatest personality in its history" and said the loss was "more than painful." Current Bayern CEO Jan-Christian Dreessen said "the story of Bayern and German football cannot be told without Franz Beckenbauer." Beckenbauer also played for German side Hamburg, winning the 1982 Bundesliga title. The club said Beckenbauer "shaped German football and the sport itself for decades in a way that has rarely been seen before." Berti Vogts, who won the 1974 World Cup alongside Beckenbauer, told AFP subsidiary SID on Monday "it makes me sad we have to part ways so early." "We played together at the U18 level, the national team and were at the World Cup." Fellow 1974 World Cup winner Wolfgang Overath told SID "it's unimaginable that he's no longer there."

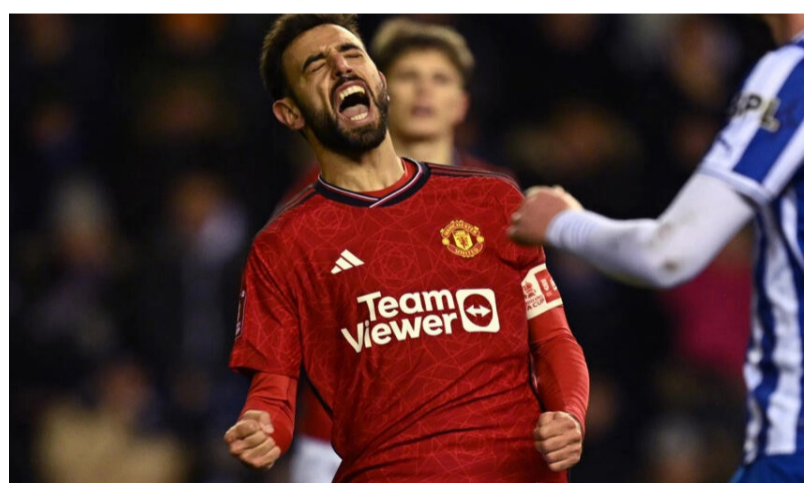
Germany Upsets No. 1 Seed Poland in United Cup



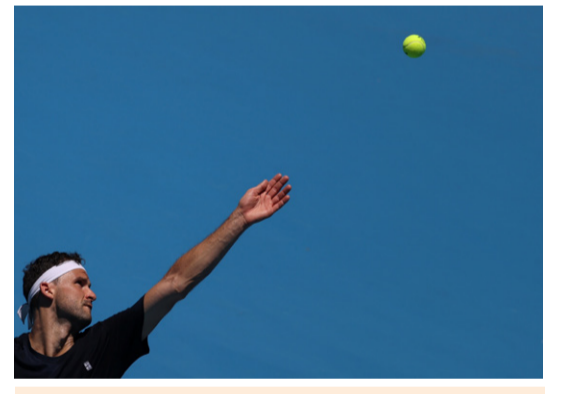
SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Germany fought back from match point and came from behind to upset top-seeded Poland and win the United Cup in Sydney, Australia. Germany, the No. 16 seed, depended on the mixed-doubles team of Alexander Zverev and Laura Siegemund for the third straight day to win the decider of the team tournament. Poland countered with world No. 1 Iga Swiatek and Hubert Hurkacz in the contest, which the Germans won 6-4, 5-7, 10-4 to lift the trophy. Swiatek started the day with a win for Poland, defeating Angelique Kerber 6-3, 6-0. It was Swiatek's fifth singles victory of the week. Zverev followed against Hurkacz -- both are ranked in the top 10 in the world -- in singles play on short rest after teaming with Siegemund to defeat Australia in the semifinals in the early hours of Sunday morning. Down two break points in the second-set tiebreaker, Zverev pulled out a 6-7 (3), 7-6 (6), 6-4 victory in three hours to force the mixed-doubles decider. Hurkacz hit 19 aces but Zverev was up to the challenge, thanks to his own serve. He won 86 percent of the points on his first serve and did not face a break point. Hurkacz was broken just once in seven chances, and that proved the difference in the third set as it gave Zverev a 4-3 lead with little time for Hurkacz to muster a break.

Job Done as Man Utd Avoid FA Cup Upset at Wigan

WIGAN (Dispatches) - Manchester United eased the pressure on manager Erik ten Hag by ensuring there was no FA Cup third round shock in a 2-0 win at League One Wigan on Monday. Diogo Dalot's first-half strike and a controversial penalty from Bruno Fernandes secured United's first away win since November. The Red Devils were also handed a favourable fourth round draw against either non-league Eastleigh or Newport County of League Two in Monday's draw. This competition represents United's final shot at silverware this season and could prove a lifeline for Ten Hag with his side struggling in the Premier League and already dumped out of Europe. "The FA Cup is all about winning, it is knockout. You want to finish the job," said Ten Hag. "That is what I said in the dressing room: 'job done'." The visitors were rarely troubled at the DW Stadium bar an early effort from Thelo Aagaard that tested Andre Onana, who had stayed behind for two more United matches before heading off for Cameroon's Africa Cup of Nations campaign. United slowly started to take control as Sam Tickle produced a brilliant save to deny Marcus Rashford before Scott McTominay prodded inches wide. Rashford has shown flashes of finding his form in recent weeks and it was from the England international's pass that Dalot curled into the far corner on 22 minutes. United should have had the tie wrapped up by half-time as Rasmus Hojlund thundered a header off the crossbar before Alejandro Garnacho's speculative effort also came back off the woodwork. "In the first half I think we created five or six very good chances. I think it was very good football," added Ten Hag. "We should have taken more, but if you don't score you have to stay focused and I think we did that tonight." When the second goal finally came 16 minutes from time, Wigan felt aggrieved as Fernandes made the most of minimal contact from Liam Shaw. Fernandes rubbed salt into the home side's wounds as he then coolly dispatched the resulting penalty to ward off any remaining hope of a giant killing. Next up United will aim to take some positive momentum into their two-week Premier League winter break when Tottenham visit Old Trafford on Sunday. Ten Hag's men desperately need to win to close a nine-point gap on the top four if they are to maintain aspirations of returning to the Champions League next season. And the Dutch coach believes there is a fresh air of optimism around the club following British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe's acquisition of a 25 percent stake in the club. "It is an inspiration. Everyone is optimistic. There is a lot of work to do," said Ten Hag. "It is a journey, it is a project and now we have had to deal with some setbacks but we will keep alive, survive it and strike back."



Dimitrov Rolls Past Holger Rune to Claim Title in Brisbane



BRISBANE (Dispatches) - Grigor Dimitrov captured his ninth career title with a 7-6 (5), 6-4 win over top-seeded Holger Rune in the final at the Brisbane International in Australia. The second-seeded Dimitrov recorded eight aces to dispatch the Dane in two hours, 13 minutes. The Bulgarian's title was his first since winning the Nitto ATP Finals in 2017 and his second in Brisbane (2017). His 23 match wins in Brisbane are more than any other player has. "It's been a while since I held one of these, it's a bit emotional," Dimitrov, 32, said as he lifted the trophy. "My love affair started here many years ago in Brisbane and it continues. I'm very thankful to lift the trophy again." Rune was foiled in his bid for his fifth career title despite notching nine aces in the match. Top-seeded Andrey Rublev of Russia pocketed his 15th career title with a 6-4, 6-4 win over Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori in the final in Hong Kong. Rublev recorded five aces and won 73 percent of his first serve points to capture the match in 78 minutes. Ruusuvuori's bid for his first career title was undone by four double faults and 13 unforced errors. Meanwhile England's Jack Draper breezed to a 6-1, 6-3 win over No. 5 seed Sebastian Baez of Argentina in first-round action at the Adelaide International in Australia. Draper struck 17 winners and didn't face a break point in the 78-minute victory. Up next is Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia, a 6-4, 6-2 winner against Mackenzie McDonald. Russia's Alexander Shevchenko knocked out No. 6 seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry of Argentina 7-6 (4), 4-6, 7-5 and Serbia's Dusan Lajovic rallied for a 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 victory against Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis. Boti Van De Zandschulp of the Netherlands saved the only break point he faced in a 7-6 (5), 6-2 upset of No. 5 seed Christopher Eubanks in Auckland, New Zealand. The Dutchman won 89 percent (25 of 28) of his first-service points and committed only five unforced errors to set up a meeting with Chilean qualifier Alejandro Tabilo, a 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 winner over Croatia's Borna Gojo. Also advancing to the second round were French qualifiers Alexandre Muller and Luca van Assche, Germany's Daniel Altmaier, Portugal's Nuno Borges, Japan's Taro Daniel and Hungary's Fabian Marozsan.

Pacers Survive Celtics But Lose Tyrese Haliburton to Injury

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Benedict Mathurin made two free throws with 0.6 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter to give the Indiana Pacers a 133-131 victory over the Boston Celtics on Monday night in Indianapolis. The game was tied with 2 seconds to play when Indiana inbounded the ball to Mathurin and he was fouled by Kristaps Porzingis during a 3-point attempt. After making two free throws, Mathurin intentionally missed the third. Boston rebounded the miss and called timeout with 0.3 to play. Luke Kometz's tip-in at the buzzer would have tied the game, but the ball hit the rim and bounced out. Mathurin scored a team-high 26 points for the Pacers, who made 19 of their 40 3-point attempts (47.5 percent). Indiana received 17 points from Aaron Nesmith and 16 points and eight rebounds from Myles Turner. The Celtics lost despite a season-high 40 points from Jaylen Brown. Jrue Holiday had 21 points, six rebounds and six assists, and Porzingis finished with 19 points, six rebounds and seven assists. It may have been a costly victory for Indiana. Pacers point guard Tyrese Haliburton slipped during a drive to the basket in the second quarter and had to be helped off the court with a hamstring injury. He did not return to the game. Haliburton had seven points, two rebounds and six assists in 13 minutes before he was injured. Boston played without forwards Sam Hauser (shoulder) and Jayson Tatum (ankle). Tatum collected 38 points, 13 rebounds and six assists when the Celtics beat the Pacers 118-101 on Saturday. Bruce Brown and Andrew Nembhard both returned to the Indiana lineup. Nembhard missed the last three games with a back sprain. Bruce Brown sat out Saturday's loss to Boston because of a right knee bone bruise. The Celtics led 34-33 after one quarter and 68-59 at halftime, but Indiana outscored Boston 44-33 in the third and led 103-101 entering the final quarter. The 44 points the Pacers scored in the third are the most the Celtics surrendered in a quarter this season. Boston missed nine of its 29 free throw attempts.

