

Iran's Minister of Sports and Youth Kyomars Hashemi Visited the Serbian Institute of Sport and Sports Medicine (SISSM) and the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education in Belgrade, Serbia

# IRAN NEWS

TEDPIX, the Main index of the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Gained 9,552 Points (0.44 Percent) to 2,180,516 on Saturday, Which Is the First Day of the Iranian Calendar Week

## 2 DOMESTIC



### Oil Ministry Signed 753 Contracts With Knowledge-Based Firms

> SEE PAGE 2

## 3 INTERNATIONAL

### UN Chief Warns Against Escalation After U.S.-UK strikes on Huthis

> SEE PAGE 3



### Iran-U.S. Trade Stands at \$50.5m in 11 Months



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The value of trade between Iran and the U.S. stood at \$50.5 million in the first 11 months of 2023, registering a 12 percent rise compared to the previous year's same period, Tasnim news agency reported citing the latest statistics released by the American Statistical Association (ASA). The trade between the two countries was reported to be over \$40.4 billion in the same period of 2022. According to the ASA data, the U.S. exported commodities worth \$48.9 million to Iran in the first 11 months of the previous year, up 21 percent year on year. The U.S. had exported \$40.3 million of non-oil goods to Iran in January-November 2022. Iran's exports to the U.S., however, decreased by 85 percent to stand at \$1.6 million during the mentioned period. The Islamic Republic exported \$11 million worth of commodities to the U.S. in the first 11 months of 2022. As reported, U.S. exports to Iran reached \$6.1 million in November 2023, with a 30 percent growth compared to the same period last year. America's imports from Iran this month were also zero. The amount of trade between Iran and America is not significant compared to the total trade of the two countries with the world. Iran ranks 173 among the export destinations of the United States and ranks 206 among the sources of supply of imported goods of this country.



### Iran Serves New Notice on Pakistan for Delay in IP Gas Line Project

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Iran has issued a third notice to Islamabad, renewing its intention to move the arbitration court for not laying the pipeline as part of the IP gas line project. The project has been facing delays since 2014. Pakistan received the latest notice almost 10 days ago, top government officials told The News. "Iran earlier asked Pakistan in Nov-Dec 2022 in its second notice to construct a portion of the Iran-Pakistan gas line project in its territory till Feb-March 2024 or be ready to pay a penalty of \$18 billion. Before that, Tehran sent a notice to Islamabad in Feb 2019 to move an arbitration court for not laying down the pipeline in Pakistan's territory in the stipulated period under the IP gas line project. It threatened to invoke the penalty clause of Gas Sales Purchase Agreement (GSPA). The GSPA was signed in 2009 for 25 years but the project could not take shape." Pakistan has been arguing that it could not materialise the project in its territory because of the US sanctions imposed on Iran, a view which authorities in Tehran have never subscribed, saying the US sanctions are not justified. Iraq and Turkey have been using gas from Iran for long as they have managed waivers on the US sanctions. Likewise, India also got a waiver for importing petroleum products for its economy. Pakistan has, meanwhile, tried to contact the US authorities many times to know whether the US curbs on Iran would have any impact on Pakistan if it becomes a part of the IP gas line but the country has not received any response from Washington. The GSPA (Gas Sales Purchase Agreement) was signed under the French law and the Paris-based Arbitration Court is the forum to decide disputes that arise between the two countries. The French arbitration court does not recognize the US sanctions. "The top authorities in Pakistan have carved out a strategy under which it has been decided to partially implement the IP gas line project by laying down an 81-kilometer pipeline from Gwadar to the Iranian border, a point where Iran has already laid down its part of the pipeline from the gas field. This will help Pakistan avoid the expected penalty of \$18 billion if Iran moves the Arbitration Court." When contacted, a spokesman for the Petroleum Division did not respond to the latest notice and any plan made by relevant authorities. He said both countries are very much on their toes on the project and that Iranian top functionaries may visit Pakistan soon. As per the plan, the 81-kilometer pipeline will connect Gwadar with the IP gas line project and the gas will be used in Gwadar initially. If the US does not invoke any kind of sanctions, then the pipeline will be extended from Gwadar to Nawabshah. If Washington imposes sanctions, then Pakistan will have valid reasons to abandon the project and this is how it would escape the \$18 billion penalty and arbitration court proceedings. To this effect, top-level leadership of both the countries is in constant touch at the ministerial level on a strategy to implement the project and the prime minister will be briefed by the authorities very soon and a go-ahead for the strategy will be sought. The Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) has also been sensitised over the latest notice from Iran and the strategy carved out by the authorities concerned. According to top sources in SIFC, Pakistan has to show seriousness by March-February 2024 towards the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline by laying down the 80-kilometer pipeline from Gwadar to the Iranian border or it would face the \$18 billion penalty. To a question, they said that the Interstate Gas System (ISGS) has funds to lay down the 81-kilometer pipeline to partially become part of the project.

### Instead of Attacking Yemen, U.S. Should Stop Backing Israeli War on Gaza



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran strongly denounces the U.S.'s earlier attacks on Yemen, which came in response to the Arab Peninsula nation's strikes in support of the Gaza Strip that has come under a genocidal and Washington-backed Israeli war. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in a post on X, former Twitter, on Friday, shortly after the United States and Britain attacked targets belonging to Yemen's Ansarullah popular resistance movement. Several American media outlets reported the attacks on Thursday, saying they involved warplanes and Tomahawk missiles. During recent months, Ansarullah and the Yemeni Armed Forces have been staging missile and drone strikes against vessels linked to the Israeli regime or those heading to Israeli ports in support of war-hit Palestinians in Gaza. Since its onset on October 7, the Israeli war has killed more than 23,500 Palestinians, mostly women and children. The United States has been providing Israel with unbridled military and political support in its onslaught against Gaza, arming Tel Aviv with more than 10,000 tons of military hardware. The US has also cast its veto against all United Nations Security Council resolutions that have called for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. Referring to the pro-Palestinian Yemeni strikes, Amir-Abdollahian wrote, "Yemen's measure in support of Gaza's women and children and confrontation against the Israeli regime's genocide is commendable." He also reminded that Yemeni officials, including those from Ansarullah, have vowed not to target any vessel other than Israeli and Israeli-linked ones. "Sana'a is completely committed to [observing] naval and maritime security," read the post by the top diplomat.

### Iran to Implement Monetary Pacts With Afghanistan, Russia



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The deputy governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) for international affairs said the ground has been provided for the exchange of goods using the Iranian rial with Afghanistan and Russia which have signed bilateral monetary pacts with Iran. Given that Iranian businessmen have to exchange goods with the currencies of other countries in dollar and euro in the fields of import and export and face problems in the currency fluctuations, suitable ways have been provided for them to gradually expand their transactions using rials, Mohsen Karimi stated. He pointed to the 'offshore rial' initiative which has recently been launched by the Central Bank of Iran and said it paves the way for domestic importers and exporters to do their business in rial instead of other currencies. In most countries, exporters are duty bound to provide currency for their countries. For this reason, exporters in some countries including Iran are committed to returning the currency to the country which is called a 'currency pact', he said, adding, "As long as exporters carry out their export activities using rial, they will not face any problem in this respect." Afghanistan and Russia have signed bilateral monetary pacts with Iran, he said, expressing hope that the necessary platforms will be paved for importing and exporting goods with neighboring Iraq in rial as well. Earlier, Karimi said that the offshore rial will become operational within the next few months to help economic activists of the country do their transactions with any country in the national currency.

## U.S.-UK Naval Fleet Legitimate Target for Yemenis

SANAA (Dispatches) - A senior official of Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement has warned that the American and British naval fleet will be a "legitimate" target for the country's armed forces following a wave of attack on Yemen in response to anti-Israeli strikes. Mohammad al-Bakhiti, a member of Ansarullah's politburo, made the warning in an interview with Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Manar television channel following deadly strikes by the American and British warplanes on several Yemeni provinces. He stressed that Yemen has entered a new stage of direct confrontation with the United States and Britain. "The American and British naval fleet will be the legitimate target of the Yemeni forces after changing their strategic approach. The US, along with the Zionist enemy, is involved in the crime of genocide in the Gaza Strip, and the battle is now between truth and falsehood." The Ansarullah official said, "Yemen and Lebanon's support for Palestine caused fears to be shattered and the U.S.'s claims to fall flat. We are facing major changes in the region and the Arab governments must prepare themselves for popular changes in the future." Bakhiti also warned Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against any involvement in the US-led escalation in the strategic Red Sea. "If Saudi Arabia and the UAE directly involve in aggression against Yemen, we will target their vital centers. The apparent neutrality of Saudi Arabia towards aggression against Yemen is the result of the fear from Yemen's reaction," he underlined. Early on Friday, the American and British warplanes targeted with 73 missiles five regions of Yemen, including the capital Sana'a and the provinces of Hudaydah, Ta'izz, Hajjah, and Sa'ada, killing at least five people

and wounding six others. On Saturday morning, the U.S. military claimed to have conducted a new attack against a radar site that belonged to Ansarullah resistance movement in the capital Sana'a. Mohammad Nasser al-Atefi, the Yemeni National Salvation Government's Defense Minister, underscored Sana'a's readiness to deter and respond to any Western aggression and said Yemen has the "upper hand" in the Red and Arabian Sea. "As long as the war against the people of Gaza continues, we have surprises and they will happen at the appropriate time specified by our leader," Atefi said, adding, "We advise you to leave the region and do not make false excuses and justifications. Our hands are on the trigger and our spirit is harder than steel." Underlining that the Red Sea is "forbidden" for the Zionist regime, the defense minister said, "We only target Israeli ships or ships supporting it or bound for this regime. We assure international ships crossing the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea that they will not be harmed." The Yemeni Armed Forces have vowed that the any "criminal aggression" by the US and UK against their country will not go "unanswered and unpunished." Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israeli occupation since the regime launched a devastating war on Gaza on October 7 after the territory's Palestinian resistance movements carried out a surprise retaliatory attack, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, against the occupying entity. The relentless Israeli military campaign against Gaza has killed at least 23,357 people, most of them women and children. Another 59,410 individuals have been wounded.



### Iran's UN Mission Condemns U.S.-UK Military Aggression Against Yemen



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Iran's representative office at the United Nations condemned the military aggression against Yemen led by the United States and England while declaring that the illegal actions of the United States and Britain are not authorized according to international law. The representative mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations added on Friday local time that Iran condemns the military aggression led by the United States and England against Yemen. This unjustified war violates Yemen's sovereignty, international laws, the UN Charter and Security Council resolutions, and endangers the peace and security of the region, it added. Iran's representative office pointed out that the illegal actions of the United States and the United Kingdom are not authorized according to international laws or Resolution 2722 of the United Nations Security Council. Their opposition to Russia's amendments to the resolution indicates a pre-planned decision and intention to commit this aggression, it added. The United States and Britain have launched air, ship, and submarine strikes against Yemen amid tensions in the Red Sea, media outlets reported. The strikes came a day after the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution against Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement for its retaliatory strikes in the Red Sea over the Zionist regime's war on Gaza. "U.S., UK forces launch air, ship and submarine strikes against Yemen's [Ansarullah] fighters targeting weapons storage, air defense, and logistic facilities," Al Jazeera reported on Friday. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also confirmed that the Royal Air Force, alongside US forces, and with "non-operational support" from the Netherlands, Canada and Bahrain, carried out the attacks on Houthi fighters in Yemen. Reuters reported. A diplomatic source has told Al Jazeera that Russia has sent a message to UN Security Council members saying that it considers the use of force in Yemen to be a violation of the United Nations Charter.

# IRAN NEWS



## Iran's Ambassador Hands Over Credentials to Spanish King

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Ambassador to Madrid Reza Zabib has submitted his credentials to Spain's King Felipe VI at a special ceremony in Royal Palace. "My mission follows the further expansion of cordial and long-lasting ties between the two countries," Zabib told the King of Spain after presenting his credentials in a ceremony on Friday. In the ceremony, the Iranian ambassador elaborated on the Islamic Republic's stance on the issue of Palestine and the Zionist regime of Israel's crimes in Gaza. He went on to stress that peace in Palestine will be achieved solely if the rights of the Palestinian nation are restored. King Felipe VI, for his part, hailed Iran's ancient and rich history while underlining the importance of enhancing the two countries' historical and friendly relations. Diplomatic relations between Iran and Spain dates back to over four centuries ago.

## Iran, Turkey Co-Produced Film, Preparing for Release



TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance reported a dram to be released soon, coproduced by Iran and Turkey. Mohammad Mahdi Esmaili told reporters in a press conference on Saturday that good cooperation is underway between Iran and Turkey in culture, cinema, and media. With regard to cinema, the two countries enjoy a common cultural and civilizational ground, including poetry and literature. He addressed the domestic capability of Iran and reported the growth of cinema due to the participation of the private sector. "We sought to normalize the activities in culture and art areas, and with the help of people and art practitioners, we entered a period of prosperity; today art and media are experiencing a prosperous period," he said. The minister also reported the construction of an art city in Parand town, around Tehran.



TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister Javad Owji stressed the need for investing \$20 billion in gas pressure boosting projects in the South Pars (SP) field. Delivering speech at the National Conference on Production Growth, Inflation Control with Governance Model and Roadmap for Having Knowledge-Based Big Industries by Taking Opportunities to Produce National Brands to Compete at Regional Level, the minister added, "To this end, there is a need to use domestic expertise and therefore 753 contracts were signed with knowledge-based companies involved in oil industry last year." The number of domestic knowledge-based firms cooperating with the government stood at 150 when the 13th administration took over, but the figure has now risen to 650, he said. Touching upon domestic oil industry's achievements, he said enemies failed to prevent its development in spite of sanctions, adding, "Investment of around \$150 billion in the Pars Special Economic Energy Zone (PSEEZ) in recent years and exports of technical and engineering services to other countries are among the major achievements." Owji said the development process has taken place under all governments, but it has been fortunately accelerated under the 13th administration. The country was faced with big challenges to oil exports in August 2021, when the 13th administration took office and sanctions were ramped up, recalled the minister, adding the challenges were beaten off and completion of 133 partly-finished key projects worth \$28.5 billion was put on the agenda with the aim of increasing production. Elaborating on oil industry's achievements under the 13th administration, he said, "Oil production has jumped 60 percent, natural gas and gas condensate outputs have topped one billion cubic meters (bcm) and 760,000 barrels per day, respectively, petrochemical production capacity has soared to 95 million tons per year, oil refining capacity has witnessed a 230,000-barrel increase per day by launching Phase 2 of the Abadan Refinery development plan, and gas processing capacity has increased by 50 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d) as part of a plan to boost production and processing capacities by putting the refinery of SP Phase 14 into operation." He also referred to implementation of 50 new projects aimed at increasing output and creating added value in upstream and downstream sectors, underlining, "Around 2.2 million barrels will be added to the country's refining capacity when the new projects come on stream."

## India's Jaishankar Likely to Travel to Iran on January 15



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is set to travel to Iran on Monday to hold talks with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian during which they are expected to deliberate on a range of bilateral and regional issues including the unfolding security situation in the Red Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways. Jaishankar's planned visit to Tehran comes against the backdrop of growing global concerns over Houthi militants targeting merchant vessels in the Red Sea amid the Israel-Hamas conflict. The US and the UK have already launched air strikes targeting the Houthi positions in Yemen. The external affairs minister is scheduled to travel to Iran on Monday for a short visit, people familiar with the matter said, adding the two sides are likely to deliberate on a range of bilateral and regional issues including the situation in the Red Sea. India has been closely monitoring the unfolding situation in the Red Sea. The issue figured in a telephonic conversation between Jaishankar and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday. The Indian Navy has already enhanced deployment of its frontline ships and surveillance aircraft for maritime security operations in view of the maritime environment in the critical sea lanes including the North and Central Arabian Sea. "Indian Naval ships and aircraft remain mission deployed for maintaining enhanced surveillance and undertaking maritime security operations," a spokesperson of the Indian Navy said last week. Jaishankar and Amir-Abdollahian are also likely to deliberate on boosting regional connectivity through the Chabahar Port. Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the Chabahar Port is being developed by India and Iran to boost connectivity and trade ties.



## 14th MIDEX Opens in Tehran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN (IP) - The 14th edition of the Architecture, Modern House, and Interior Design Exhibition (MIDEX) was opened on Friday in Tehran with the participation of more than 300 domestic and foreign companies. The international expo provides companies with an opportunity to showcase their brands and products in a large market and develop their network of business partners in new areas. MIDEX 2024 will be underway until January 15 in Tehran International Permanent Fairground, along with training workshops in the relevant areas. China, Italy, Russia, Belgium, England, Germany, Netherlands, and South Korea are the countries that have participated in the MIDEX. Types of prefabricated houses, lighting and smartization, new installation technologies, outdoor furniture and equipment, interior design equipment, curtains, wallpaper, decorative coverings, sports and entertainment furniture, and electronic devices are among the items being showcased in the expo.

## Fishery Exports Surpass 102,000 Tons in 9 Months

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran exported 102,352 tons of fishery products worth \$228.332 million in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2023), the spokesman of the International Relations and Trade Development Committee of Iran's House of Industry, Mining and Trade said. According to Ruhollah Latifi, the Islamic Republic exported 328 tons of ornamental fish, 14,036 tons of carp, 10,765 tons of trout, 349 tons of halva fish and 5,672 tons of flounder in the mentioned nine months, IRIB reported. Iran's aquaculture industry is on a wave of progress and has world ranks in the production of some fishery products. According to the head of the Iran Fisheries Organization (IFO), the country exported \$600 million worth of fishery products in the previous Iranian calendar year 1401. Announcing a positive balance of \$520 million in the previous year, Hossein Hosseini said that there is a capacity of up to \$2 billion in exports for the country's fishery industry. It is worth mentioning that the growth and development of Iran's aquaculture industry has reached the point where the country has become a model for the countries of the region and the world. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) believes that Iran plays a responsible and central role in the fishing and aquaculture industry in the region, and for this reason, it can be considered a model for the countries of the region. Now the world markets have become the target of the export of the country's fishery products, so that, the value of fishery exports also increased by 67 percent in the Iranian calendar year 1400 compared to the preceding year. In addition to the executive role of the IFO, the role of research and knowledge-based activities in this field is very important, and the entry of young specialists and knowledge-based experts in various sectors of the fishery industry has made the sanctions ineffective.



## Taliban Official Calls for Expansion of Healthcare Cooperation With Iran



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Acting Minister of Public Health of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban government Qalandar Ibad has stressed the need for expansion of mutual ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran in the field of healthcare. "We need to cooperate with Iran to reinforce the health and education system of the Afghanistan," Ibad said in an interview on the sidelines of the First Global Health Security Summit in Pakistan which was published on Saturday. He hailed breakthroughs achieved by Iran in the field of public health and fighting infectious diseases, saying that cooperation with the Islamic Republic will be "a good opportunity for Afghanistan". The Taliban official said that cooperation with Iran will enable Afghanistan to benefit from constructive experiences in the field of medical education, pharmaceuticals, and human resource development. The First Global Health Security Summit was held in Islamabad, Pakistan on January 10-11 under the theme "Together for a Healthy Planet". The meeting aims to foster international cooperation, knowledge exchange, and strategic partnerships to enhance global health security.

### Huthis Mistakenly Target Tanker Carrying Russian Oil

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Huthi militants mistakenly targeted a tanker carrying Russian oil in a missile attack on Friday off Yemen, British maritime security firm Ambrey said. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) organization said it had received a report of a missile being fired 90 nautical miles southeast of Yemen's port city of Aden. The master reported a missile landing in the water 400-500 meters away, and being followed by three small craft, the UKMTO advisory note said, adding that there were no injuries or damage. Ambrey said: "This was the second tanker mistakenly targeted by the Huthis whilst carrying Russian oil." Yemen's Huthi militants, who control much of Yemen, have launched wave after wave of exploding drones and missiles at Western commercial vessels in the Red Sea since Nov. 19, in what they say is a protest against Israel's military operations in Gaza.



### Blinken Discusses Human Rights, Taiwan Strait With Chinese Official



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday raised concerns over China's human rights issues in a meeting with senior Chinese official Liu Jianchao in Washington, the State Department said, adding they also discussed "maintaining peace and stability" in the Taiwan Strait. Senior U.S. and Chinese officials have held regular discussions recently to keep communication lines open between the world's two largest economies. Friday's meeting came a day ahead of elections in Taiwan that will test efforts to ease U.S.-China tensions and was the latest in a flurry of US-China interactions following a November summit between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping in San Francisco. Ties between the two sides have otherwise been tense in recent years over a range of issues such as the origins of Covid-19, trade tariffs, Taiwan and human rights. Blinken "emphasized the importance of resolving the cases of American citizens who are wrongfully detained or subject to exit bans in China and raised U.S. concerns about (China's) human rights abuses," the State Department said in a statement. "The Secretary reiterated the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and in the South China Sea," it said. The State Department said the two also discussed North Korea, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the situation in the Red Sea and the Middle East, where observers fear a widening of Israel's war in Gaza after the U.S. and UK's strikes in Yemen. The January 13 presidential and parliamentary contests in Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, represent the first real wild card in 2024 for the Biden administration's goal of stabilizing ties with China. The U.S. is Taiwan's most important international backer and arms supplier even though Washington does not formally recognise its government, maintaining official relations only with Beijing. Taiwan's government has accused China of election interference to sway the vote toward candidates Beijing may prefer. China has labeled those allegations "dirty tricks." Other communication between China and the US from this week included a Wednesday meeting between Liu and White House deputy national security adviser Jon Finer, a phone call on Thursday between U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, and the resumption of long-frozen military talks.

### UN Chief Warns Against Escalation After U.S.-UK strikes on Huthis

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on all sides "not to escalate" the volatile situation in the Red Sea, his spokesman said after Washington and London launched strikes on Yemen's Huthi forces. The barrage of strikes early on Friday against the Huthis, who say they are acting in solidarity with Gaza, follow weeks of disruptive rebel attacks on Red Sea shipping and have stoked fears of the Israel-Hamas war spreading regionwide. "The Secretary-General further calls on all parties involved not to escalate even more the situation in the interest of peace and stability in the Red Sea and the wider region," said Guterres' spokesman Stephane Dujarric. Later, Khaled Khari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, told the UN Security Council "we are witnessing the cycle of violence that risks grave political security, economic and humanitarian repercussions in Yemen and the region." "These developments in the Red Sea and the risk of exacerbating regional tensions are alarming," he said. Russia's ambassador to the UN called the joint U.S.-UK strikes on Yemen's Huthis "blatant armed aggression against another country." "These states all carried out a mass strike on Yemeni territory. I'm not talking about an attack on some group within the country but an attack on the people of the country on the whole. Aircraft were used, warships and submarines," Vasily Nebenzya said of the U.S. and British action, supported by allied countries. But Washington's ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield warned that no countries' vessels were immune to the threat posed by Huthi forces to shipping in the Red Sea. "Whether your ship flies an American flag, or the flag of another nation... all of our ships are vulnerable," she said. "Without Iranian support, in violation of their obligations... the Huthis would struggle to effectively track and strike

commercial vessels, navigating shipping lanes through the Red Sea." Britain's ambassador to the UN Barbara Woodward said London "took limited, necessary and proportionate action in self defense." "This operation took particular care to minimize risks to civilians," she said. Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of people, some carrying Kalashnikov rifles, massed for a major demonstration in Yemen's rebel-held capital Sanaa after U.S. and UK attacks. Crowds under a sea of Yemen and Palestinian flags chanted "Death to America, death to Israel" as they massed in the giant Sanaa square in the historic city's center. The Huthi forces, who seized Sanaa in 2014 and have been at war with a Saudi-led coalition, came under heavy bombardment overnight with a series of military targets hit. Large-scale demonstrations have been a regular occurrence since the Israel-Hamas war flared in October, but Friday's protest was particularly passionate. "If America and its allies decide to declare open war on us, we're ready for it and we won't have any choice but to bring victory or fall as martyrs," Abdel Azim Ali, one of the protesters, told AFP. "We're waiting for the day when we're fighting a war with America," said Mohammed Hussein, another demonstrator. "We're not scared of the American or British air force. We've been bombed for nine years and another attack is nothing new for us," said Abdallah Hassan, who was also in the crowd. The U.S. and UK strikes, which killed five people and wounded six according to the Huthis, followed weeks of Huthi attacks on shipping in the commercially sensitive Red Sea. The Huthis say they are only targeting Israeli-linked vessels in retaliation for the Israel-Hamas war. They have threatened to attack U.S. and British interests in response to the aerial strikes.

### Taiwanese Cast Their Votes for a New President



TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwanese cast their votes Saturday for a new president and legislature in an election that could chart the trajectory of the self-ruled democracy's relations with China over the next four years. At stake is the peace and stability of the island 160 kilometers (100 miles) off the coast of China that Beijing claims as its own, to be retaken by force if necessary. Domestic issues such as the sluggish economy and expensive housing also featured prominently in the campaign. Vice President Lai Ching-te, representing the governing Democratic Progressive Party, known as the DPP, seeks to succeed outgoing President Tsai Ing-wen and give the independence-leaning party an unprecedented third term. Lai cast his vote in his hometown of Tainan. He remarked on the sunny weather, suggesting it's a good time for Taiwanese people to go out and vote. "I encourage everyone around the country to vote with enthusiasm and show the vitality of Taiwan's democracy," he said. Hou Yu-in, the candidate of Beijing-favored Kuomintang, also known as the Nationalist Party, cast his ballot in New Taipei City, a municipality bordering the capital, Taipei. Hou is the mayor of New Taipei, a position from which he took leave to run for president. "What we need during the election campaign process is chaos," Hou told reporters after casting his vote. "But after the vote, we must be united and face the future of Taiwan together." Alternative candidate Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People's Party, who has shown popularity among young voters seeking an alternative to the two major parties, voted in Taipei. Asked by journalists how he felt, Ko, in his well-known dry manner, said he aimed to try his best every day "and plan for the next stage when we get there." Voting began at 8 a.m. (0000 GMT) Saturday and wrapped up eight hours later.

### Dozens Die in Israel Gaza Strikes on Day 98 of War

GAZA (Dispatches) - Telecommunication services were cut across besieged Gaza on Friday, as Israeli strikes killed dozens in southern cities where hundreds of thousands are struggling to survive hunger and cold on day 98 of the war between Israel and Hamas. The fighting between Hamas and Israeli forces raged after a night of heavy Israeli shelling, and came amid growing fears of the conflict widening after U.S. and British forces struck pro-Hamas Huthi forces in Yemen after attacks on Red Sea shipping. In Gaza, an AFP journalist reported strikes and shelling hitting areas between the territory's southern cities of Khan Yunis and Rafah, which is crowded with people who have fled from the north. Overnight Thursday-Friday, the bombardment killed at least 59 people and wounded dozens more across the besieged territory, the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said. The Israeli military said it had killed seven "terrorists" in a strike in Khan Yunis and a further 20 in the Maghazi area to the north. AFP footage showed black smoke billowing over Rafah and Khan Yunis. "Does anyone care about us? Why is everyone silent?" asked one mourner at a hospital where a group of Palestinians had gathered beside white body bags of the latest casualties. Elsewhere in Rafah, resident Fayad Abu Rjeila surveyed the wreckage of a building after an Israeli strike he said had killed civilians in their homes. "They had nothing to do with anything. People who just wanted to live," he told AFP. Israel's military said its ground forces and air

strikes had destroyed more than 700 rocket launchers in Gaza since the war began on October 7. On Friday, all internet and telecommunications services in Gaza were cut as a result of the Israeli bombardment of the Palestinian territory, the main operator Paltel said. "Gaza is blacked out again," it said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. The Palestinian Red Crescent posted that the disruption was increasing the challenges in "reaching the wounded and injured promptly." Israel's bombardment of Gaza has killed at least 23,708 people, mostly women and children, according to the latest health ministry figures. Vowing to eliminate Hamas, Israel has carried out a relentless bombardment, alongside a ground invasion, since Hamas fighters attacked Israel on October 7 and also seized around 250 hostages. The unprecedented attack by the Islamist group resulted in the death of about 1,140 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said a deal had been negotiated with Qatar to get medicines through to hostages still being held in Gaza. On Tuesday, Israeli campaign group Hostages and Missing Families Forum released a report saying the captives were in poor health, some with complex illnesses, others with injuries. The medicines deal "will allow the entry of medicines for the hostages held by the Hamas terrorist organisation in Gaza", Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

Ecuador's Noboa Seeks Tax Hike to Fund Security

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QUITO (Dispatches) - The administration of Ecuadorean President Daniel Noboa has asked lawmakers to weigh an increase in value added tax (VAT) to finance efforts to combat crime gangs, as the armed forces increased operations in violent areas. A dramatic spike in violence this week - including the on-air storming of a TV station, the hostage-taking of 178 prison staff by inmates and the kidnapping of police officers - appears to be a response by gangs to Noboa's plans to tackle a dire security situation, the government has said. Noboa, who took office in November, has declared a state of emergency and named 22 gangs as "terrorist" organizations. A total of eight prison staff have been released since late on Thursday, prisons agency SNAI said in a statement on Friday. Three were being held in Azuay prison in Cuenca, where 21 hostages have also been attended to by the Red Cross. Three were released from a prison in Canar province, while two others were freed in Esmeraldas. Remaining hostages number 170 - 155 are prison guards and 15 are administrative staff. The death of an inmate at a prison in El Oro province is being investigated, SNAI added. The government has said operations to free hostages taken at least seven prisons are ongoing, but there has been scant information about their status, leading to criticism by their families and union. "We want answers," chanted family members protesting outside the headquarters of the Cotopaxi provincial government. "For six days we haven't heard anything about them, we don't know if they've eaten, if they've drunk water, if they've been mistreated," said relative Monica Tito. "Mister President help us, free them!" Videos purporting to show prison staff being subjected to extreme violence, including shooting and hanging, have circulated on social media, but the government has said no hostage has been killed and that some videos had been altered. Reuters could not independently verify the videos. Security has worsened in tandem with serious economic troubles, as the country grapples with domestic liquidity problems, limited options for foreign financing and tens of billions in external debt.

### Ukraine Needs More Attack Aircraft for War Effort

KHARKIV REGION (Dispatches) - Ukraine's ground forces commander said that Kyiv needed more military aircraft for its war effort, such as U.S. A-10 attack jets to support infantry and planes that could fire long-range cruise missiles. Colonel-General Oleksandr Syrskyi spoke to Reuters in an exclusive interview at an undisclosed location in the northeastern region of Kharkiv that borders western Russia. "I would talk about A-10s as an option if they'll be given to us ... this is not a new machine, but a reliable one that has proven itself in many wars, and which has a wide array of weapons for destroying land targets to help the infantry," said the 58-year-old, wearing combat fatigues. The A-10 Thunderbolt is a subsonic attack aircraft produced in the United States that has been in service since the 1970s. Syrskyi's call for more aircraft comes as a major new U.S. package of military aid for Kyiv has been held up by infighting among lawmakers. Syrskyi said the A-10 would provide crucial support for ground forces as they attempt to seize the initiative against a well-resourced enemy. "It is for destroying land-based targets: tanks, artillery ... everything that counters the infantry," he said. Syrskyi added that attack helicopters such as the AH-64 Apache and AH-1 Super Cobra, as well as the UH-60 Black Hawk, could also play an important role. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in February, 2022, Kyiv has pressed Western allies to supply increasingly sophisticated arms and ammunition, including armoured vehicles, tanks, long-range missiles and F-16 fighters. The first F-16 jets are expected to arrive in Ukraine later in 2024,

although their impact on the war could be limited by the strength of Russia's air force. Ukraine conducted a major counteroffensive last summer that failed to achieve a major breakthrough, partly because Russian forces in the east and south of the country had dug in with trenches and other defensive lines. Moscow's forces are now back on the offensive in some parts of the east, where Syrskyi said fighting remained fierce. He added that Russian forces were continually attacking in several parts of the front, with Ukrainian forces conducting small counterattacks. "This is active defence when we are not just sitting on the defensive but constantly counterattacking, and in some directions switching to the offensive," he said. "And the enemy knows this." As well as calls for more aircraft, Ukraine has asked allies to speed up the supply of artillery ammunition, which some units have complained is running short. While drones are increasingly influential on the battlefield, artillery is a mainstay for both armies, and Ukraine is having to balance its use of various calibre shells based on the available supply. "We have developed an expertise with this and adjust to our daily realities," said Syrskyi. Despite near-stalemate along a frontline some 1,000 km (620 miles) long, Syrskyi, who oversaw the defence of Kyiv in early 2022 and Ukraine's lightning counteroffensive in the Kharkiv region later that year, said future breakthroughs were still possible. Asked if there could be a turning point in the war in Ukraine's favour, he said: "I think there are always chances. You just need to find them and use them."





## Wembanyama, Spurs Wallop Hapless Hornets

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Victor Wembanyama racked up 26 points and 11 rebounds in 20 minutes of court time as the San Antonio Spurs rocked the visiting Charlotte Hornets 135-99. The Spurs won consecutive games for just the second time this season, with the other occurrence a two-game sweep at Phoenix on Oct. 31 and Nov. 2. San Antonio notched its biggest winning margin of the year after leading by 21 points at halftime and by 32 early in the third quarter. Doug McDermott added 14 points for San Antonio, with Jeremy Sochan scoring 13, Devin Vassell hitting for 12, Cedi Osman ringing up 11 and Keldon Johnson hitting for 10 points. The contest was the first of a home back-to-back for the Spurs, who host the Chicago Bulls on Saturday. LaMelo Ball, playing his first game since spraining his right ankle on Nov. 26, led the Hornets with 28 points and five steals. Terry Rozier added 16 points, Miles Bridges had 14 and Nick Richards and Bryce McGowens scored 12 apiece for Charlotte, which has lost four straight games and 15 of its past 16. Rookie Brandon Miller was forced from the game in the second quarter when he hit the back of his head on the court when being fouled on a dunk. The Spurs led for all but the first seconds of the game, pulling away to a 25-15 advantage on Malaki Branham's layup at the 1:41 mark of the first quarter. Ball brought Charlotte back to within 28-22 by scoring the Hornets' final four points of the period as part of his 11-point quarter. Two 3-pointers by McDermott, the second with 4:58 to play in the second quarter, capped an 8-0 run for the Spurs that expanded their advantage to

53-35. Later in the period, McDermott canned two more 3-pointers before Sochan's turnaround jumper with 4.8 seconds remaining granted San Antonio a 66-45 lead at the break. McDermott's 12 points in the half, all on 3-pointers in the second quarter, paced San Antonio. Wembanyama had 11 and Vassell 10 for the Spurs. Ball's 16 points before halftime led all scorers, and Rozier had 10 for the Hornets. Charlotte shot just 28 percent from the floor in the half and finished the game at 36 percent. San Antonio shot 51.7 percent from the floor for the night. Meanwhile Klay Thompson returned to the site of his record-setting 3-point performance and turned in another dazzling long-range show, leading the undermanned Golden State Warriors to a 140-131 win over the host Chicago Bulls. Thompson, who set the NBA record with 14 3-pointers in a 2018 visit to Chicago, shot 7-for-15 from beyond the arc en route to a team-high 30 points. Golden State's Stephen Curry saved 15 of his 27 points for the final 6:05. The Bulls took a 13-point halftime lead on the strength of a 45-point second quarter. The Warriors then exploded to a 15-point advantage with a 48-point third period, as Thompson went 5-for-5 from beyond the arc in the period. Golden State went up 122-110 when Curry began his late barrage with a 3-pointer. Shooting for a fourth straight win, the Bulls got within 128-124 with 2:57 left, but Thompson buried his seventh 3-pointer of the game and Curry his sixth over a 44-second surge that broke the game open and allowed Golden State to snap a two-game losing streak.

## Ice-Encrusted Runners Take on Siberian Marathon at -52C



OYMYAKON (Dispatches) - A group of hardy Russians took part on Friday in one of the world's most extreme running contests - a marathon held at -52 degrees Celsius (-62 Fahrenheit). Runners underwent medical checks before the start of the event in Oymyakon, a settlement in Siberia, and were provided with broth, hot tea and snacks at refreshment points along the route. Wrapped up from head to foot against the cold, a total of 38 people competed in the marathon and half-marathon events, local media said. Alisa Matveeva, who ran the half-marathon, said the experience was "very scary" as the lowest temperature she had previously trained in was -20C in Moscow. "It was hard to run for the first 10 km. Then it was easier, because you already understand how to breathe, you remember that you need to remove the ice from your eyes, because your eyes get covered with it," she told reporters. "I'm really glad that I wore a thermal mask and heated insoles, it really just saved me."

## Pinturault Injury Overshadows Sarrazin's Wengen Super-G Success

WENGEN (Dispatches) - Cyprien Sarrazin gave France their first men's super-G victory in a decade, denying Swiss star Marco Odermatt a double on his home snow in Wengen. But the French party was spoiled by the spectacular fall of Alexis Pinturault which ruled the 2021 overall World Cup winner out for the rest of the season. The combined world champion, who became a father a few days ago, came a cropper after a bad landing on a jump and was evacuated by helicopter. "This victory is for Alexis, for his family. I hope he is OK," said Sarrazin after his second win of the season, and first in super-G for a French skier since Pinturault ten years ago. But the French ski federation later confirmed Pinturault's "season is over" after tests revealed a "ruptured anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in his left knee". Pinturault, who has the best track record of skiers on the men's circuit with 34 World Cup successes, had moved up a gear this season, giving up slalom to discover downhill. The 32-year-old achieved his first Top 10 in downhill on Thursday, taking a respectable ninth place on the Lauberhorn. On Friday, Sarrazin, 29, became the first Frenchman to win a super-G since Pinturault in 2014. Sarrazin had finished second in Thursday's downhill behind Odermatt but pipped the overall World Cup leader in the super-G by 0.58sec to claim his second victory of the season. Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde rounded off the podium for a second consecutive day finishing one second off the pace. "Today I played and I really enjoyed my run. I feel great, I'm really proud," said Sarrazin. "At the bottom, I was 90, 95 per cent, telling myself 'stay smart, stay on your feet, you did a great run'." Starting with the number 3 bib, Sarrazin had a blistering run, hitting early speeds of over 134km, and staying on his feet despite clipping the nets at the edge of the Lauberhorn piste on one of its narrowest turns. "It's really good! After the jump, you have to really push, push," Sarrazin excitedly told his teammates after the run which earned him a third World Cup triumph. The victory showed his success in Bormio at the end of

December was no fluke after having the race of his life in the Italian resort to win the first downhill of his career. "From top to bottom he was the fastest and he deserves it. I saw him skiing and I already thought that would be very tough to beat," said Odermatt. Odermatt paid for errors mid-run, and will be hoping to improve in the downhill with the slalom on Sunday. "It was already the longest super-G and tomorrow the longest downhill (on the World Cup tour)," said Odermatt. "I hope the legs will be fresh enough to attack the whole race." Out of sorts Kilde, recovering from a bout of flu, achieved his sixth podium in nine races as he chases his first win this season.



## Musiala, Kane on Target as Bayern Remember Beckenbauer



MUNICH (Dispatches) - Jamal Musiala scored twice and Harry Kane added a late goal as Bayern Munich won 3-0 at home over Hoffenheim on Friday as the club celebrated the life of Franz Beckenbauer. Beckenbauer, who spent the majority of his career at Bayern and helped establish them as a European powerhouse, died on Sunday at the age of 78. He was laid to rest just hours before kickoff, with Bayern honouring his memory with several tributes for the German football legend. Musiala, born two decades after Beckenbauer retired from the game in 1983, scored in each half to ensure the home side honoured his memory in the best possible fashion. "When you play for Bayern you know he's a legend" Musiala told DAZN. "He did a lot for Bayern. We wanted to get the win for him, out of respect. He was before my time a bit, but from what I've seen, videos, and what I've heard, he's a legend." Kane scored in the final minute of regular time, his 22nd league goal after 16 matches since joining Bayern in the summer, to seal the result. Before kick-off on Friday, players and 75,000 fans observed a minute's silence in memory of Beckenbauer, one of only three men to have won the World Cup as a player and a coach. Bayern boss Thomas Tuchel said pre-match the emotions at the Allianz Arena were a "great incentive for the team and for me to dedicate the game to him with a win." Bayern dominated possession early but were rusty in attack, having not played for three weeks. Even the normally reliable Kane mislaid passes and failed to find teammates. Some individual brilliance from Musiala broke the deadlock in the 18th minute, the 20-year-old collecting a short corner and threading an inch-perfect shot across the face of goal and in off the far post. Hoffenheim pushed for an equaliser early in the second half, forcing Bayern captain Manuel Neuer, in his 500th appearance for the club, into several last-ditch saves.

## Hosts Qatar Ease Past Lebanon to Open Asian Cup

DOHA (Dispatches) - Defending champions and hosts Qatar got their Asian Cup campaign off to a flying start with a 3-0 win over Lebanon in the tournament's opening game. Akram Afif rifled in a shot on the stroke of half-time to put the 2022 World Cup hosts ahead, before Almoez Ali doubled their lead after the break and Afif bagged a late third. Over 80,000 fans initially packed into the Lusail Stadium, where a Lionel Messi-inspired Argentina beat France on penalties in the World Cup final 13 months ago. Qatar's win over Lebanon did not have the same drama and some spectators left as early as half-time, even with the home team winning. By the final whistle there were swathes of empty seats. But it was a welcome start for a team that claimed their first Asian Cup five years ago and only changed their coach last month, with Tintin Marquez replacing Carlos Queiroz. Qatar stunned Japan in the 2019 final in the United Arab Emirates, lifting the trophy after winning every game they played at the tournament. But they flopped on home soil at the World Cup, making a first-round exit after losing all three games. Qatar were far more assured against a Lebanon side playing in only their third Asian Cup. Ali, who scored an Asian Cup-record nine goals and was named player of the tournament in 2019, had the ball in the net as early as the sixth minute. The striker latched onto a pass and slipped the ball past Lebanon goalkeeper Mostafa Matar, only for a VAR check to rule him offside. Afif, another star of Qatar's 2019 win, went close when he hit the crossbar with a header on the half-hour mark. But the forward would not be denied as the game crept closer to half-time, slotting the ball home with a right-foot shot after Ali had laid it off to him in the box. Qatar hit their stride after the break and were rewarded with their second goal of the game in the 56th minute. A neat passing move saw the ball worked out to Mohammed Waad on the left, and the defender picked out Ali to head past Matar. The huge crowd began to filter out after Qatar's second goal. They missed a deft finish from Afif for Qatar's third goal in the

96th minute, putting the final touch on an impressive individual performance. Qatar also beat Lebanon in their opening game of the 2019

Asian Cup. They will face Tajikistan in their next game on Wednesday, with China the other team in Group A.

