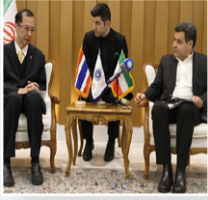


President Ebrahim Raisi Says That the Friday Prayer Leaders, as the Refuge of the People and Personalities, Enlighten and Create Hope Among the Public and Enlighten Public Opinion

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Export to Iraq Reached Some \$6.2b From March 21, 2023, to November 21, 2023, Showing a 30% Growth Compared to the Same Period Last Year, a member of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Has Said.

2 DOMESTIC



Thailand Determined to Increase Trade Ties With Iran

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

N.Korea Tests Solid-Fuel Ballistic Missile With Hypersonic Weapon

> SEE PAGE 3



Iran-EU Trade Surpasses €3.7b in 10 Months



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The value of trade between Iran and the European Union (EU)'s member states reached €3.761 billion in the first 10 months of 2023, according to the data released by the European Union's statistics office Eurostat. Based on the Eurostat data, the trade between the two sides fell 13 percent in the said 10 months in comparison to the preceding year's same period when the figure stood at €4.367 billion. According to Eurostat, Germany accounted for 31 percent of the Iran-EU trade in the first 10 months of 2023. The total trade between Iran and Germany reached €1.168 billion in this period. As reported, the EU's exports to Iran from January to October 2023 stood at €3.114 billion, registering a decrease of 10 percent compared to the same period of 2022 when the EU exports to Iran were reported to be €3.478 billion. The European Union's imports from Iran also reached €647 million in the first 10 months of 2023 with a 27 percent decrease compared to the same period of 2022. EU imported €889 million of goods from Iran in January-October 2022. As previously announced by Eurostat, the value of Iran's exports to the European Union's member states rose 15 percent in 2022, as compared to the previous year. The Eurostat's data show that Iran exported commodities worth €1.055 billion to the union in 2022, while the figure was €922 million in 2021. The EU's exports to Iran also rose seven percent to €4.183 billion from €3.931 billion. According to the Eurostat, the total value of trade between Iran and the European Union reached €5.238 billion in January-December 2022, while the figure was €3.931 billion in 2021. Among European countries, Germany was Iran's top trading partner in 2022, accounting for about 35 percent of Iran's trade with the European Union. Germany exported €1.582 billion worth of goods to Iran while importing €278 million worth of commodities from the Islamic Republic. The country's total trade with Iran was 1.860 billion euros.



Tehran, New Delhi Reach Final Agreement on Chabahar Port Development

TEHRAN - Iran and India reached the final agreement for the development of Iran's southeastern Chabahar port in Tehran on Monday. The agreement to develop the strategic port was reached during a meeting between Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash and Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. In this meeting, the Iranian minister proposed the formation of a joint transportation committee to expand cooperation between the two sides and stated that the formation of this working committee will enable the activation of transit capacities and the use of the North-South corridor. The Indian minister, for his part, emphasized his country's readiness for new investments in the fields of transportation and transit in Iran and invited the Iranian minister to visit India. As Iran's only oceanic port on the Gulf of Oman, Chabahar Port holds great significance for the country both politically and economically. The country has taken serious measures for developing this port in order to improve the country's maritime trade. The port consists of Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti terminals, each of which has five berth facilities. The port is located in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan Province and is about 120 kilometers southwest of Pakistan's Baluchistan Province, where the China-funded Gwadar port is situated. In May 2016, India, Iran, and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement for the strategically-located Chabahar port to give New Delhi access to Kabul and Central Asia. Meanwhile on Monday, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian met with his Indian counterpart Jaishankar. The two foreign ministers discussed developing bilateral relations on Monday. They also reviewed regional and international developments. Jaishankar embarked on a pivotal two-day visit to Iran, a crucial step in fortifying the long-standing relationship between the two nations. The high-level exchange, while not explicitly defined, is expected to encapsulate a host of significant topics pertaining to political, economic, and strategic ties. Jaishankar engaged in discussions with his Iranian counterpart, Amir-Abdollahian, on a range of bilateral, regional, and global issues. The visit, a testament to the ongoing engagement between New Delhi and Tehran, highlights the importance of Iran in India's foreign policy. Given Iran's status as a significant oil producer and India's burgeoning need for energy resources, energy cooperation is likely to be a focal point of the talks. Jaishankar's visit underscores the importance of Iran in India's foreign policy and the ongoing efforts to strengthen the multi-dimensional partnership between the two nations. The visit holds promise for enhanced political cooperation, connectivity initiatives, and stronger people-to-people ties, ultimately paving the way for a fortified bilateral relationship.

Israel Fell Apart on October 7



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Israel's political and security structure suffered a collapse after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas launched its military operation against the regime in October. Speaking during a ceremony, Amir-Abdollahian said that in such a complicated world, everyone witnessed that only Hamas succeeded in destroying Israel's political and security structure through its Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, launched on October 7. He added that Israel changed its goal after failing to defeat Hamas and put the discovery of tunnels and the release of prisoners by resorting to military power. However, the regime faced another defeat also in this field and now is pursuing a path towards political solutions, he said. The top Iranian diplomat emphasized that Israel achieved none of its goals through its attacks against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. He noted that Operation Al-Aqsa Storm was an operation by a liberation movement against the occupation of an illegitimate regime. "The United States, the Zionist regime (Israel), and some Western countries tried to introduce the October 7 operation as a terrorist act, which was dispelled by the constructive diplomacy of the resistance," Amir-Abdollahian argued. The Iranian minister said the United States made a "big mistake" by providing Israel with extensive support, adding that it was a complete miscalculation by Israel and its allies who thought they could destroy Hamas in a short period of time. He once again reiterated that the resistance forces in the region act "independently and based on their own interests" and receive no order from Iran. "Since the beginning of the Israeli regime's genocide in Gaza, the Islamic Republic of Iran said that war is not a solution and that the resistance will act strongly," Amir-Abdollahian said.

Iran Registers Highest Oil Output Rise Among OPEC Members in 2023



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A latest report released by the U.S. Department of Energy stated that Iran has been the top OPEC member in terms of production increase in 2023, with an increase of 330,000 barrels per day (bpd). The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) affiliated with the Department of Energy mentioned in its latest report that the total oil production of Iran was estimated at 2.87 million bpd at the end of 2023. According to the mentioned entity, Iran's oil production stood at 2.54 million bpd in 2022. The figures show that total OPEC oil production was 26.89 million bpd in 2023 which shows 630,000 barrels fall year on year. OPEC produced 27.52 million bpd in 2022. This report has put Iran's oil production in the last month of last year at 3.17 million bpd. Iran was the third-largest OPEC producer after Saudi Arabia and Iraq in December 2023. The 330,000-bpd increase in Iran's 2023 oil production indicates that sanctions have been ineffective on Iran's oil industry. Back in June 2023, Bloomberg reported that the production and export of Iranian oil in 2023 reached record highs since the country came under U.S. sanctions more than five years ago. The report published in late June 2023 stated that Iran was shipping the highest amount of crude in almost five years despite U.S. sanctions. Bloomberg cited energy analysts as saying that Iran's oil exports have surged to the highest level since the U.S. unilaterally re-imposed sanctions on the country in 2018. A Reuters report, also said in June last year, that Iranian crude shipments continued to rise in 2023 with higher shipments to China, Syria, and Venezuela. The report quoted consultants, shipping data, and a source familiar with the matter.

Hezbollah Vows to Continue War of Attrition to Keep Tel Aviv in Defeat Position



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has vowed to continue its "war of attrition" against Israel in support of Palestinian victims of Tel Aviv's US-backed genocidal war in the Gaza Strip. Nabil Qaouk, a member of Hezbollah's Central Council, made the remarks on Sunday during a memorial service of one of the movement's members who was killed in an Israeli airstrike on southern Lebanon last Wednesday. Qaouk said Hezbollah has fought "the longest war of attrition" along the border with Occupied Palestine to support Gaza and defend Lebanon, stressing that war is not aimed at achieving any political gains. "Hezbollah would not fight the longest war of attrition on the border with occupied Palestine for the sake of a political bargain or political gain, but rather for the sake of supporting Gaza and defending the homeland with its sovereignty and protecting its people," he said. He said the initiatives presented by some countries' delegations to Lebanon are Israeli pleas that do not aim at helping Lebanon, but helping the occupying regime. "All the US and other initiatives and diplomatic efforts are meaningless for us unless the aggression on Gaza stops." Qaouk described the US initiatives as an attempt to help Israel get out of the predicament. "What concerns us is to remain in the field and continue with the war of attrition so that the enemy remains in position of defeat." The Hezbollah official referred to Kfar Giladi settlement which, he said, is viewed by Israel as "a symbol of settlement steadfastness," noting that it has become deserted and turned into "a symbol of humiliating defeat" due to Hezbollah's missiles and drones.

Iran Assesses Business ties with Algeria, Pakistan



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's foreign ministry has hosted the 18th session of the Headquarters for the Coordination of Foreign Economic Relations, with the top on the agenda being the business ties with Algeria and Pakistan. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari sat down with the representatives of relevant institutions to assess the current state of affairs with Algiers and Islamabad. In the meeting, Safari referred to the importance of Algeria in Africa and the very good working environment there, saying Iran considers this country as one of the important priorities. "Focus on creating preferential tariffs, issuing technical and engineering services, cooperation in transportation and energy among the areas of interest in the joint cooperation between the two countries," he said. He also emphasized removing obstacles in joint cooperation with neighbors, adding that there must be technical and specialized meetings, detailed and professional planning, and appropriate timing to gradually achieve the defined goals. Mehdi Shoostari, Iran's Assistant Foreign Minister for West Asian and North African Affairs presented a report on the relations with Algeria. "Good cooperation documents have been signed between the two countries, and now there are 14 agreements and 25 memorandums of understanding covering various areas of banking, health, customs, industry and commerce, preferential trade, technology, and knowledge base which we must work on implementing", he stressed. He also called for activating joint commissions between Iran and Algeria, the formation of specialized and technical committees, and the removal of financial and banking barriers to improve the level of bilateral relations. In the second part of the meeting, which was devoted to examining the aspects of cooperation with Pakistan, the Deputy Minister of Economic Diplomacy described the relations as friendly and strategic. Seyyed Rasoul Mousavi, an assistant to Iran's foreign minister and the director-general of the Foreign Ministry's West Asia Department presented a report on ties with Pakistan. "Now there is joint cooperation with Pakistan in 11 sectors and 88 economic issues, some of which require follow-up and provision of infrastructure, including in the field of free trade, organizing markets on border crossings, selling gas and petroleum products, and operating the gas pipeline to this country", he said.

IRAN NEWS



Iranian Company Starts Manufacturing Steel Industry Compressors

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A knowledge-based Iranian company has started manufacturing technologically complicated compressors needed in the country's steel industry amid restrictions on imports of such machines because of Western sanctions. Hamidreza Astaneh, the managing director of Pishgaman Sanaye Asia (translated into English as Asian Industries Pioneers), said that the company has produced two types of compressors as well as their industrial parts which are used in the reduction process in the steel industry, citing a press release from Iranian Presidency Office's department for scientific, technological and knowledge-based economy affairs. Astaneh explained that only three American, German and Japanese companies had been able to produce steel industry compressors and their parts whose manufacturing requires a high-level technical knowhow and advanced technology. He said that the Iranian industries using those products have been able to continue their activities despite sanctions in place that prohibit their purchase from foreign suppliers.

In Striking Yemen, U.S. Showed Its Aggressive Nature



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has censured a series of missile strikes carried out by the United States and its allies on Yemen, saying the move portrays Washington's aggressive and anti-human rights nature. In a phone call with Head of Yemen's Supreme Political Council Mahdi al-Mashat on Sunday, Raisi said all freedom-seeking nations in the world condemn the US aggression against the Yemeni people. He said the Yemenis have resisted the aggression of foreign powers for years and are still playing an effective role in defending the oppressed Palestinians. The president praised the Yemeni people's support for the Palestinians and placed a premium on maintaining security of shipping lines for countries. Raisi said Israel was a genocidal regime for committing crimes against Palestinian civilians, particularly women and children in Gaza. The president reiterated Iran's principled stance on the support for the Palestinian people and emphasized that Israeli aggression will end with the final victory of the Palestinians. In their first assault in the early hours of Friday, the US and Britain, backed by Bahrain, Australia, Canada and the Netherlands, struck more than 60 targets at almost 30 locations in Yemen, killing five people and injuring six others. During the Sunday phone call, the Yemeni official reiterated his country's steadfastness in the fight against Israel in support of the Palestinian people.



Thailand Determined to Increase Trade Ties With Iran

TEHRAN - Thailand's Ambassador to Iran Peckett Bonsad has stressed Bangkok's determination to give a boost to trade ties with Iran, especially with the country's private sector. The ambassador made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran on Sunday with President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Hossein Selahvarzi. Also speaking during the meeting, the ICCIMA president said that one of the main agendas of Iran Chamber of Commerce is to strengthen cooperation with South East Asian countries. Selahvarzi said he believed that more increased interactions between the private sectors of Iran and Thailand will help raise the volume of trade between the two countries. Noting that "we are trying to establish direct links with the Thai Chamber of Commerce," he stressed that the Iran Chamber of Commerce has drafted an agreement and sent to the Thai Chamber of Commerce. When finalized, the

agreement can open a new chapter in bilateral relations, Selahvarzi added. He also highlighted that Thailand can serve as a gateway for Iran's access to ASEAN region and Iran can also provide Thailand with access to the 500-million-people market of this region. The Thai ambassador, for his part, said that he is determined to find ways to further strengthen the level of cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries. He also said that his country is ready to make use of Iran's experiences in using different mechanisms for financial exchanges. The ambassador referred to a visit to Iran by a Thai trade delegation within the next few days and said that the delegation will include representatives from companies active in the areas of renewable energies and production of motorcycles. He said that he expects Iran Chamber of Commerce to make it possible for the Thai businesspeople to meet with their Iranian counterparts.

Iran, Pakistan Ready to Raise Trade to \$5b



BANDAR ABBAS (IRNA) - Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran Mudassar Tipu has expressed the readiness of Islamabad and Tehran to raise trade exchange to five billion dollars as the two have recently signed a five-year document on strategic and economic cooperation. During his visit to Bandar Abbas, southern Iran, where a Pakistani convoy of warships docked, Tipu said his country prioritizes promotion of trade relations with the Islamic Republic. Pakistan and Iran are committed to maintain peace and stability in the region, the ambassador underlined. He went on to stress that relations between his country and Iran carry a message of solidarity, peace, and happiness to the region. He also expressed satisfaction over the growing ties between the two neighboring nations. The Pakistani convoy of warships docked at the First Naval Region of the Iranian Army in the country's southern waters on Saturday (January 13) to represent peace and friendship. The Pakistani flotilla docked in the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas to expand friendly relations and improve the level of educational interactions between the Iranian and Pakistani navies, as well as to communicate a message of peace and friendship to countries of the region.

Gas Flaring in Iranian Fields to Be Zeroed by 2025



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said that the country's oil fields will stop wasting flare gas, which is burned during drilling production processes, within two years, Shana reported. According to Mohsen Khojasteh Mehr, the NIOC has allocated \$5.0 billion to projects for stopping the controversial practice of burning off gases through stacks at oil fields, and these projects have reached 70 percent physical progress. Last week, the Iranian Oil Ministry announced that a major plan for recovering flare gases in East Karun oil fields, which is being implemented in the form of 25 projects in four provinces, has reached 60 percent progress. This plan, which is being implemented with an investment of \$1.1 billion by Bidboland Gas Refining Company, will play a key role in preserving the environment of the region and protecting national wealth. Earlier that week, Oil Minister Javad Owji said the recovery of flare gases in the South Pars gas field is going to be increased to 17 million cubic meters (mcm) per day by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19). Putting the current recovery level of flare gas in the mentioned field at 11 mcm per day, Oji said the figure is going to increase to 40 mcm per day by the end of the current government administration (August 2025). Gas flaring is the process of burning the gas released through certain industrial processes, including oil extraction. In the past, when the demand for natural gas was low and, consequently, producers had little incentive to gather and sell it, it was generally – and more reasonably – dissipated through flaring.

Iran Exports to India Hit \$1.7b in 9 Months

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran exported commodities valued at \$1.7 billion to India during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2023), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced. According to Mohammad Rezvanifar, India was the fifth top export destination of Iranian products in the mentioned nine-month period. Also, exporting commodities valued at \$1.4 billion to Iran, India was Iran's fifth source of imports in the first nine months of the present year, the IRICA head announced. According to the data previously released by the Indian Ministry of

Commerce and Industry, the value of Iran's exports to India increased nine percent in the first seven months of 2023, as compared to the same period of time in 2022. The Indian ministry put the worth of Iran's exports to India at \$393 million in January-August 2023, while the figure was \$361 million in the same time span of 2022. Petroleum products, raw materials for dye production, and various fruits were the top exported goods to India in the first seven months of 2023. India imported \$156 million of petroleum products, \$105 million of raw materials for the production of dyes, and \$70 million of fruits from Iran during this period.



Uzbekistan's New Ambassador Presents Credentials to Iran FM

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Uzbekistan's new ambassador to Iran Nasriev Fariddin Badriddinovich has submitted his diplomatic credentials to Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. Nasriev met with Amir-Abdollahian at the headquarters of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Sunday as he officially started his diplomatic mission in Tehran. The diplomat has served in various posts and missions run by Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs over the past 25 years. He was the Consul General of Uzbekistan in the city of Kazan, Russia, before being appointed as ambassador to Iran.



UK Commits 20,000 Military Personnel for NATO Exercise in Europe

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain will commit 20,000 military personnel to serve across Europe in a major NATO exercise in the first half of this year, as well as warships and fighter jets, the defense ministry said on Monday. The deployment includes 16,000 British army troops who will be based in Eastern Europe from February to June, an aircraft carrier strike group and F35B Lightning attack jets and surveillance planes. NATO's Exercise Steadfast Defender 24 marks the Western alliance's 75th year. "I can announce today that UK will be sending some 20,000 personnel to take part in one of NATO's largest deployments since the end of the Cold War," Defense Secretary Grant Shapps said in excerpts of a speech due to be delivered later on Monday at Lancaster House, published by the defense ministry.



Moscow Launches Hypersonic Missile Attack on Ukraine



LONDON (Dispatches) - Russia launched a 'fearsome' hypersonic missile attack in the early hours of this morning after the UK promised to send thousands of drones to Kyiv. Air defenses shot down Russian missiles in at least five regions across Ukraine, according to local officials from those provinces. "As a result of being hit by the debris of an enemy missile, several private homes and non-residential buildings were damaged, one building was practically destroyed," the police wrote, adding that a dog had been killed but no people were hurt. However, no details were given on whether any targets were hit, and far less information about the attack than usual was provided by officials. The UK has pledged to send the highest number of military drones of any country to Ukraine as Rishi Sunak made a surprise visit to Kyiv. The government announced on Friday that Britain would be increasing its support for Ukraine's fight against Putin to £2.5 billion next financial year - an increase of £200 million. Rishi Sunak said: "Ukraine will never be alone. Putin might think that he can outlast us but he is wrong. We stand with you today, tomorrow and for as long as it takes." Russian forces struck grain silos in the town of Vovchansk in Kharkiv Oblast, destroying the grain inside, regional senior investigator for the Ukrainian police Serhii Bolvinov reported. Two air-dropped gliding bombs were launched over the previous night, hitting grain storage facilities and a processing building. According to Bolvinov, the security guards on duty were not injured and no casualties were reported. "Destroyed crops and destroyed premises - the Russians continue to raid civilian objects," Bolvinov wrote on Facebook. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov has proposed an international working group on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, the minister wrote on Facebook on Jan. 14. Umerov presented the plan at the fourth meeting of national security advisors regarding the Peace Formula in Davos, Switzerland. He suggested creating a group at the level of Ministers of Defense and National Security Advisors to "jointly work out a mechanism for the withdrawal of (Russian) troops." "It's impossible to talk about restoring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine without the complete withdrawal and disarmament of Russian troops and terrorist organizations from the temporarily occupied territories," Umerov wrote.

Denmark's King Frederik X Appears Before Huge Crowds



COPENHAGEN (Dispatches) - Denmark's King Frederik X ascended the throne on Sunday, succeeding his mother, Queen Margrethe II, who formally abdicated after 52 years as monarch, with large and admiring crowds gathered in the capital to witness history. Margrethe, 83, stunned the nation on New Year's Eve when she announced she planned to become the first Danish monarch in nearly 900 years to voluntarily relinquish the throne. The succession was formalized when Margrethe signed the declaration of her abdication during a meeting of the Council of State at parliament. After signing the declaration, the queen rose and gestured to Frederik to take her seat, and said "God save the King" before leaving the room. Denmark, one of the oldest monarchies in the world, does not have a coronation but there were still moments of pomp in the day's events. After the abdication, the new monarch, 55, was proclaimed king by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen on the balcony of the parliament building, Christiansborg castle, with the words "Long live his majesty King Frederik the 10th". Wearing a ceremonial military uniform adorned with medals, Frederik addressed the crowd from the balcony. "My hope is to become a unifying king of tomorrow. It is a task I have approached all my life. It is a task I take on with pride, respect and joy," he said. Visibly moved and several times wiping tears from his eyes, Frederik ended his speech with the words: "United, committed, for the Kingdom of Denmark," his royal motto, a 500-year old tradition supposed to underpin a new monarch's reign. Frederik was joined on the balcony by his Australian-born wife Mary, 51, who is now queen, and their children: Christian, 18, who is the new heir to the throne, Princess Isabelle, 16, and 13-year-old twins Princess Josephine and Prince Vincent.

N. Korea Tests Solid-fuel Ballistic Missile With Hypersonic Weapon

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea said Monday it had successfully test-fired a new ballistic missile tipped with a hypersonic maneuverable warhead, the latest breakthrough in its pursuit of advanced weaponry to threaten South Korean and US targets. The launch, Pyongyang's first known weapons test this year and its first ever test of a solid-fuel hypersonic intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), was detected by Seoul's military Sunday afternoon. A short report in the official Korean Central News Agency said that the solid-fuel IRBM was "loaded with a hypersonic maneuverable controlled warhead." The test was meant to verify "the gliding and maneuvering characteristics" of the warhead and the "reliability of newly developed multi-stage high-thrust solid-fuel engines," KCNA said. KCNA said that Sunday's launch "never affected the security of any neighbouring country and had nothing to do with the regional situation." But it came just days after Pyongyang staged live-fire exercises near the country's tense maritime border with South Korea, which prompted counter-exercises and evacuation orders for some South Korean border islands. It also comes after Kim earlier this week branded Seoul his "principal enemy" and warned he would not hesitate to annihilate South Korea, as he toured major weapons factories. Solid-fuel missiles are easier to hide and quicker to fire, and hypersonic missiles typically allow the user to maneuver them in flight to better hit targets. Both technologies have long been on Kim's laundry list of weapons technology. "North Korea appears to be pursuing the development of hypersonic missiles and IRBMs using solid fuel rocket boosters at the same time," said Chang Young-keun, a missile expert at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy. "Mid- to long-range hypersonic missiles will be particularly useful in striking Guam while evading the US missile

defense system," he added. North Korea's last missile test was of a Hwasong-18 solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on December 18. KCNA released a single photograph of the missile launch with its Monday report, which did not mention Kim being present to oversee the test. US-based analyst Ankit Panda told specialist site NK News that the image suggested the missile featured a so-called "maneuverable reentry vehicle (MaRV)". Pyongyang is trying to develop weapons with enhanced precision and ability to "better penetrate missile defenses," he said. Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points in decades, after Kim enshrined last year the country's permanent status as a nuclear power into the constitution and test-fired several advanced ICBMs. Traditional allies Russia and North Korea have meanwhile boosted ties recently, with Kim making a rare overseas trip to see President Vladimir Putin in Russia's far east in September. Top Russian officials, including Moscow's defence and foreign ministers, also visited North Korea last year, with the flurry of trips both ways fanning concern among Kyiv's allies over the possibility of a potential arms deal. On Sunday, a North Korean government delegation headed by Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui left for an official visit to Russia, KCNA reported. Last year, Pyongyang successfully put a reconnaissance satellite into orbit, after receiving what South Korea claimed was Russian assistance, in exchange for arms shipments for Moscow's war in Ukraine. Despite its difficult economic situation, Pyongyang conducted a record-breaking series of weapons tests in 2023, including its first solid-fuel ICBM - which experts called a major technological breakthrough.

China 2023 Economic Growth Tipped to Be Weakest in Decades

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economy likely grew at its weakest annual rate for more than three decades in 2023, data is expected to show Wednesday, as it was battered by a crippling property crisis, sluggish consumption and global uncertainties. A group of ten experts interviewed by AFP forecast China's gross domestic product (GDP) to have expanded 5.2 percent, which would represent the lowest rate since 1990, outside of the Covid-19 pandemic. The reading would be an improvement on the three percent seen in 2022, though that year saw business activity hammered by tight health curbs designed to contain the virus. After lifting the measures, Beijing set itself a growth target of "around five percent" for 2023. The return of normal life initially sparked a recovery at the start of last year but the long-awaited rebound soon ran out of steam as a lack of confidence among households and businesses battered consumption. An intractable real estate crisis, record youth unemployment and a global slowdown are also gumming the gears of the Chinese growth engine. "The main challenge for China's economic recovery still stems from the property sector," said Jing Liu, chief economist for Greater China at HSBC. The property sector has long accounted for around a quarter of China's economy. It experienced dazzling growth for two decades, but financial woes at major firms such as Evergrande and Country Garden are now fuelling buyer mistrust, against a backdrop of unfinished housing developments and falling prices. Purchasing property has long been seen by

many Chinese as a safe haven for parking savings, but the price drop has hit their wallets hard. "Real estate investment, dwelling prices and new dwelling sales are set to fall throughout 2024 before returning as a modest driver of growth in 2025," said Harry Murphy Cruise, an economist at Moody's ratings agency. That crisis, alongside "sluggish labour market conditions", are dampening consumer confidence, said Helen Qiao, head of Asia Economic Research at Bank of America. A record of more than one in five people aged 16 to 24 in China were unemployed in May, according to officials, the monthly publication of which has since been suspended. The uneven recovery has largely benefitted services, as customers have returned to restaurants, transport and tourist sites. But the level of spending is often lower than 2019, before the pandemic took hold. A rare bright spark is the state-subsidised auto sector, where a wave of electrification has buttressed domestic manufacturers such as BYD, which dethroned Elon Musk's Tesla as the world's best-selling EV maker in the fourth quarter. However, other areas are struggling, notably industry, which has been weakened by ailing demand at home and abroad. Chinese exports - historically a key growth lever - fell last year for the first time since 2016, according to figures published by the country's customs agency on Friday. The decline is partly explained by geopolitical tensions with the United States and efforts by some Western nations to reduce dependence on Beijing or diversify their supply chains.



Maldives Tells India to Withdraw Troops by March

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The Maldivian president told India to withdraw its nearly 100 troops by March 15, a day after returning from China where he signed a raft of deals. New Delhi considers the Indian Ocean archipelago to be within its sphere of influence, but the Maldives has shifted into the orbit of China - its largest external creditor. The March deadline was set during talks with Indian officials in the Maldives on Sunday, a top aide to President Mohamed Muizzu said, honouring the leader's long-standing election pledge. "The president put forth this request at the meeting of the high-level committee between the two nations... the proposal is currently under consideration," Muizzu's Public Policy Secretary Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim told reporters. India has a deployment of about 89 personnel, including medical staff, to operate three aircraft to patrol the archipelago's vast maritime territory. New Delhi's foreign ministry said Sunday diplomats had discussed how to find a "mutually workable solution" to allow continued Indian air operations that it said provided "humanitarian and medevac (medical evacuation)" services. It said a further round of talks would be held, without giving a date. Muizzu came to power in September after pledging to evict Indian forces. On Saturday, after arriving in the capital Male, the president said that while the Maldives may be small, the country will not be bullied. "We are not a country that is in the backyard of another country. We are an independent nation," Muizzu said. "This territorial integrity policy is one that China respects", he said in the nation's Dhivehi language, the Mihaaru newspaper reported. With Beijing and New Delhi tussling for influence, Muizzu was elected in September after pledging to cultivate "strong ties" with China. "We may be small, but that doesn't give you the license to bully us," Muizzu said, in a final comment in English. He has denied seeking to redraw the regional balance by bringing in Chinese forces to replace Indian troops. Muizzu's trip to China this week was his first state visit since becoming president.

AI to Impact 60% of Advanced Economy Jobs

DAVOS (Dispatches) - Artificial intelligence (AI) will impact 60 percent of jobs in advanced economies, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told AFP, shortly before departing for the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "Advanced economies, some emerging markets, are going to see 60 percent of their jobs impacted," she said in an interview in Washington, citing an International Monetary Fund report published Sunday on the topic. "And then it goes down to 40 percent, for emerging markets, 26 percent for low-income countries," she added, referencing the IMF report, which notes that overall, almost 40 percent of global employment is exposed to AI. The IMF report notes that half of the jobs impacted by AI will be negatively affected, while the rest may actually benefit from enhanced productivity gains due to AI. "Your job may disappear altogether - not good - or artificial intelligence may enhance your job, so you actually will be more productive and your income level may go up," Georgieva told AFP. While AI will initially have a lower impact on emerging markets and developing economies, they are also less likely to benefit from the advantages of the novel technology, according to the IME. "This could exacerbate the digital divide and cross-country income disparity," the report continued, adding that older workers are likely to be more vulnerable to the change brought about by AI. The IMF sees an important opportunity for policy prescriptions to help address these concerns, Georgieva told AFP. "We must focus on helping low-income countries in particular to move faster to be able to catch the opportunities that artificial intelligence will present," she said. "In other words, embrace it, it is coming," she added. "So artificial intelligence, yes, a little scary. But it is also a tremendous opportunity for everyone."





Real Madrid Thrash Barcelona to Win Spanish Super Cup

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Vinicius Junior struck a first-half hat-trick to fire Real Madrid to Spanish Super Cup glory in a thumping 4-1 win over rivals Barcelona in Saudi Arabia. Robert Lewandowski scored for Barcelona, who had defender Ronald Araujo sent off in the second half on what coach Xavi Hernandez described as the team's "worst" night. Rodrygo rounded off Real Madrid's rout as they won the competition for the 13th time, avenging last year's final defeat by record 14-time winners Barcelona. "(Vinicius) needed two or three games to get back to his best level, and he's back to it," said Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti. The Italian has now gone level with Zinedine Zidane on 11 trophies won at the helm of Los Blancos, behind only Miguel Munoz on 14. "I'm happy, but now we've got to go for the 12th," Ancelotti told Real Madrid TV. Spanish champions Barcelona were hoping a victory could kick-start their season, as it did last year, but were left soundly beaten, after Vinicius netted two early goals. "(I'm) disappointed, sad ... this is football and today we have to deal with the bitter side of the game," Xavi told Movistar. "We had a lot of hope and excitement going into the final and we've had our worst game of all of them." Xavi turned to a four-man midfield to try and keep the ball to reduce Madrid's opportunities to counter attack with flying wingers Vinicius and Rodrygo - it didn't work. Spain international Pedri started in place of winger Raphinha, who suffered a hamstring injury in the semi-final win over Osasuna. Ancelotti brought in midfielder Toni Kroos, who like in the thrilling semi-

final derby win over Atletico Madrid, was jeered by spectators at the Al-Awwal Park stadium in Riyadh, for criticising players moving to the Saudi league from Europe. One of the first was Cristiano Ronaldo and Vinicius' celebration brought him to mind after opening the scoring in the seventh minute. The Brazilian, recently back after injury, was sent through by a perfect pass by Jude Bellingham and he slickly rounded Inaki Pena before slotting home. Vinicius imitated Ronaldo's classic jump and spin celebration in homage to Madrid's all-time top goalscorer. Three minutes later, Vinicius pounced again, this time set up by Rodrygo who exploited Barcelona's high line and cut the ball across for his compatriot to slide in. Xavi's side scrambled furiously for a response and Ferran Torres hit the crossbar before Andriy Lunin tipped Lewandowski's follow up over. The Ukrainian goalkeeper could do nothing, however, to keep Lewandowski's vicious volley out in the 33rd minute, hammered in hard and low from the edge of the box. However instead of fighting back, Araujo swiftly gifted Vinicius a chance to complete his hat-trick from the penalty spot by tugging back the forward in the box. Vinicius drilled his penalty into the bottom left corner for his first Clasico hat-trick to double his goal tally against Barcelona - he had previously scored only three in 15 games. Xavi rolled the dice in the second half with an attacking triple substitution but Madrid soon had their fourth. Araujo completed a dismal night by earning a red card as he hacked Vinicius in frustration.

Nuggets Cool Down Red-Hot Pacers



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokic was just one of three Denver players to score 25 points and the defending champion Nuggets kept Indiana's high-octane offense in check in a 117-109 NBA victory over the Pacers. Jokic just missed his 13th triple-double of the season, adding 12 rebounds and nine assists. Michael Porter Jr. and Jamal Murray scored 25 points apiece and Aaron Gordon added 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Nuggets, who shot a season-high 64.8% from the field. Jokic continued his ruthlessly efficient scoring, connecting on 12 of 13 shots from the floor. All five Nuggets starters were in double figures by the end of the third quarter and Denver held the NBA's top-scoring offense to its fifth-fewest points this season. Nuggets coach Michael Malone was disappointed by his team's season-worst 21 turnovers, but full of praise for Porter, who drilled seven three-pointers in what Malone called "a complete basketball game." "It was easy looks," Porter said. "My teammates were finding me so I didn't have to work too hard for my shots." Porter said the Nuggets were focused on cooling off the Pacers' red-hot offense. "We knew they wanted to push the pace," he said, joking that the Nuggets had a little extra motivation to prevent former teammate Bruce Brown from getting a win in his return to Denver. Brown, who played a key role off the bench in the Nuggets' title run last season, signed with the Pacers as a free agent. He was awarded his championship ring in a ceremony before the game. "He won a championship with us so he's our brother for life," Porter said. "So it was good to see him." Brown led Indiana with 18 points, 10 rebounds and six assists but the Pacers, who had won nine of their previous 10 games, couldn't maintain a four-point third quarter lead.

Cowboys Crash out of Playoffs With Shock Loss to Packers

MIAMI (Dispatches) - The Dallas Cowboys crashed out of the NFL playoffs with a humiliating 48-32 defeat to the seventh-seeded Green Bay Packers in the wildcard round on Sunday. The Packers, the youngest team in the NFL who snuck into the playoffs on the final day of the regular season with a 9-8 record, totally dominated the Cowboys before allowing two late touchdowns. Quarterback Jordan Love, who took over in Green Bay this season after the departure of Aaron Rodgers, threw for 272 yards and three touchdowns in his playoff debut. Running-back Aaron Jones had three rushing touchdowns and put up 118 yards on the ground and the Packers earned a clash with the top-seeded San Francisco 49ers. "We came in here with the mindset that we were going to dominate," Love said. "A lot of people counted us out and we didn't care about that. We knew what an opportunity we had in front of us and made the most of it tonight." Dallas gave up the most points in a playoff game in franchise history while quarterback Dak Prescott threw two costly interceptions in a nightmare first half which saw the home side fall 27-0 down in the second quarter. The manner and scale of the defeat are likely to raise questions over the future of Cowboys head coach Mike McCarthy, a former Super Bowl winner with the Packers who was hired to end the wait for another Cowboys NFL championship, which has now stretched to 28 years. Green Bay's confidence was evident from the outset as they elected to receive and scored a touchdown on their first drive - Jones rushing in from three yards. Prescott's miserable day began with an interception - cornerback Jaire Alexander picking him off and the Packers taking over 19-yards out and Jones scoring from three-yards on the third play. Green Bay's offense was meeting no resistance as Love delivered a 20-yard touchdown pass to Dontayvion Wicks who had escaped Dallas corner Stephon Gilmore. It got worse for the Cowboys when Prescott's pass was grabbed by Packers safety Darnell Savage who returned it 64-yards to make it 27-0. That was the largest deficit the

Cowboys had ever faced at home in the post-season but they kept a glimmer of hope for the second half with Prescott finding Jake Ferguson with a one-yard pass in the final seconds of the second quarter. After a Cowboys field goal though, Jones ran in his third touchdown, his nine-yard rush making it 34-10. Tony Pollard ran in a touchdown for Dallas but again the Cowboys defense couldn't stop Green Bay as Love found a wide open Luke Musgrave with a 38-yard touchdown pass. The unflappable Love found Romeo Doubs with a three-yard touchdown pass to give the visitors a 32 point lead with 10:23 left in the fourth quarter. The Packers finally eased off, allowing two touchdowns for Dallas - both from Prescott passes to Ferguson. It was far too little, far too little for a miracle comeback as Dallas, after an impressive, 12-5 regular season, fell at the first hurdle in the playoffs.



Salah Rescues Egypt as Nigeria Draw



ABIDJAN (Dispatches) - Mohamed Salah saved Egypt from an embarrassing defeat in their opening game at the Africa Cup of Nations on Sunday, while Nigeria were held by Equatorial Guinea despite Victor Osimhen getting on the scoresheet. Ghana were also in action in Abidjan and suffered a shock 2-1 loss to Cape Verde as three nations with 14 AFCON titles between them all failed to get off to winning starts at this year's tournament. There was drama at the Felix Houphouet Boigny Stadium in Ivory Coast's economic capital as Egypt needed a Salah penalty seven minutes into injury time to snatch a 2-2 draw with Mozambique in Group B. The penalty was awarded following a VAR check for a foul on Mostafa Mohamed, and Salah's strike denied Mozambique a historic first ever AFCON win. "I was sad seeing my players devastated at the end because we deserved the win," said Mozambique coach Chiquinho Conde. His nation had not won a game in four past appearances at the AFCON, and their winless record now spans 13 matches in total. Mohamed had given record seven-time African champions Egypt the ideal start when he scored inside two minutes, but the sapping heat and humidity seemed to get the better of the Pharaohs. Mozambique equalised through a Witness Quembo header on 55 minutes and completed the turnaround when substitute Clesio Bauque burst through to make it 2-1 three minutes later. Salah saved Egypt, but it was not a convincing start to their campaign in Ivory Coast where they are attempting to win a record-extending eighth AFCON crown and a first since 2010, before the Liverpool superstar had made his international debut. "I want to win every match I play and when we don't I am sad, but there are no easy games," said Egypt coach Rui Vitoria. "We were not the best team before the draw was made and we are not the worst now."

Spurs Spoil Ratcliffe's First Visit as Man Utd Co-Owner

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United failed to welcome the club's new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe to Old Trafford with a win as Tottenham twice came from behind to claim a 2-2 draw on Sunday. Ratcliffe was in attendance for the first time since agreeing a deal to take a 25 percent stake of the English giants for \$1.3 billion. Goals for United forwards in the Premier League have been in short supply at Old Trafford this season but both Rasmus Hojlund and Marcus Rashford struck in the first half, either side of Richarlison's equaliser. Rodrigo Bentancur's strike in the first minute of the second half levelled the scores once more. A point moves Tottenham level with north London rivals Arsenal, just outside the top four on goal difference. But they will be the happier with the draw as they remain eight points ahead of United, who edge up to seventh. "Outstanding performance given the challenges we had to put a team out," said Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou, who was missing captain Son Heung-min, who is away at the Asian Cup, among five first-team regulars who were absent. "We're not here because everything is running our way. We've not had an easy year and the only reason we are in the position we are is because the players are willing to put aside adversity." Ratcliffe declared before kick-off that taking a share in his boyhood club is the most exciting investment he has been involved in. But the British billionaire, who was sat alongside legendary former United manager Alex Ferguson in the directors' box, got an early introduction to the rollercoaster ride of owning a football club. Erik ten Hag's men desperately needed the three points to reel in Spurs in the race for a place in next season's Champions League. And the Red Devils could not have wished for a better start. Hojlund took 15 games to score a Premier League goal after his £72 million (\$92 million) move from Atalanta. But the Dane now has two in as many appearances in the English top flight as he blasted a loose ball high past Guglielmo Vicario after just three minutes. Tottenham's absences forced Postecoglou's hand in throwing new loan

signing Timo Werner straight into his starting line-up. The German struggled during a previous spell in England with Chelsea, but was unfortunate not to

have a debut to remember when his goalbound header was flicked to safety by Jonny Evans.

