

India Is Considering the Reinstatement of Crude Oil Shipments From Iran as Houthi Insurgents Step Up Attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Regions Off the Coast of Yemen, Sources in the Know Said

# IRAN NEWS

Russia, China, Iran, and Pakistan Are Gearing Up for a Crucial Meeting on the Situation in Afghanistan, With Plans Indicating That It May Convene by the End of January, Russia's Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, Said

## 2 DOMESTIC



### Iran Exports to China Rise 30% in December 2023

> SEE PAGE 2

## 3 INTERNATIONAL

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

> SEE PAGE 3



### Iranian Army Receives Giant Fleet of Drones



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Islamic Republic of Iran Army has received large numbers of strategic combat, reconnaissance, destruction and radar drones. The delivery of the homegrown unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) took place during a ceremony on Tuesday in the presence of Chief Commander of the Army Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi and Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani. The drones were designed and manufactured by the Iranian Defense Ministry in cooperation with Iran's Army amid Western sanctions. They included strategic multi-purpose Abail-4 and Abail-5 drones, which are capable of carrying out all kinds of reconnaissance, surveillance, electronic warfare, combat and signal data collection missions. Among the delivered UAVs were Arash and Bavar that can perform destruction, along with long-range and precision-strike missions, as well as Karrar, a jet-powered drone with the ability to perform a variety of target, combat and aerial interception missions. The upgraded drones were equipped with self-protection, anti-electronic warfare and indigenous navigation systems, as well as smart precision-strike weapons. They have also special and up-to-date capabilities for use with other weapon and network-based operation systems. Speaking at the ceremony, Mousavi said that the delivery of the drones "will definitely improve the combat power" of the four branches of the Army, namely the Ground Force, Navy, Air Force and Air Defense Force. "Everything in the field of UAVs, ranging from design to use against threats, today relies on the domestic capability and knowledge of the country's young scientists," he added. Mousavi noted that the Iranian Armed forces have in recent years witnessed "auspicious developments," including the delivery of hundreds of drones to the Army. Meanwhile, Ashtiani said that the new UAVs "will have a significant impact on the combat power of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army."



### Leader Calls on Muslim Countries to Cut Off Vital Arteries of Israeli Regime

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has called on Muslim countries to sever their political and economic relations with the Israeli regime, and cut off Tel Aviv's vital arteries. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on Tuesday during a meeting with those in charge of a congress of 24,000 martyrs of Tehran Province. The Leader criticized Muslim officials for making "wrong" statements about Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip, saying they raise issues such as a ceasefire, which is beyond their control and lies in the hands of the evil Zionist enemy. "The issue that is in the hands of the officials of the Muslim countries is to cut off the vital lifelines of the Zionist regime," Ayatollah Khamenei added. "The Muslim countries should sever their political and economic contact with the Zionist regime and not help this regime." The Leader asserted that the Palestinian nation will emerge victorious despite hardships and inappropriate conduct of the authorities of Muslim countries. "The victory of the people of Gaza is definite and that it will happen in the not too distant future."

### Iran Has Sternly Warned Washington Against Attacks on Yemen



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says the Islamic Republic has bluntly warned the United States that its decision to carry out joint strikes with the United Kingdom on targets in Yemen constitutes "a strategic mistake." Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in New York on Monday local time following his bilateral meetings. The top Iranian diplomat has traveled to New York to take part in a meeting of the UN Security Council on Palestine. "We sent out a strongly-worded message and stern warning to Americans. The decision by the United States and the United Kingdom to jointly attack areas in Yemen poses threats to regional peace and security, and expands the scope of [Gaza] war," he added. The Iranian foreign minister noted that satellite images show that approximately 230 merchant vessels and oil tankers were cruising in the Red Sea at the time that the US and UK carried out their strikes against Yemen. "This means that they (Americans and Britons) have well understood Yemenis' point that only ships heading towards ports operated by the occupying Israeli regime will be blocked," Amir-Abdollahian said. He emphasized that he had sharply criticized London for escalation of tensions in the Red Sea and launching military strikes against Yemen, and described the moves as "a strategic mistake" during a meeting with his British counterpart David Cameron on the sidelines of the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in the Swiss city of Davos. On Monday, U.S. and British forces launched strikes at eight different locations in Yemen, with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands, according to a joint statement signed by the six countries.

### Sanctioned Industrial Sectors Show More Growth

TEHRAN (IP) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says the Industrial sectors which had experienced more sanctions, have witnessed more growth. Addressing presidents of Iran's best universities on Tuesday morning, Raisi said: "We have made more progress in the disciplines and industries that were sanctioned." Raisi then stated: "The university should train people who think practically and are problem-solving oriented. The university should also produce science and knowledge and use new technologies for the development of the country." "Iran offers many capacities and we can utilize them efficiently and solve problems," added Raisi. Iran's President reiterated: "A scientist who does not know the needs of his society, even if he is knowledgeable, cannot solve a problem." Today, with the knowledge

that our scientists and intellectuals have, problems can be solved. In every technological field, we took the lead from everyone in the region and the world. He also emphasized that the leader has always said that the threats should be turned into opportunities, and we can see its effects now. Raisi, by pointing to the fact that military and nuclear industries are more sanctioned than automotive industries, said that as nuclear industries were more sanctioned, the progress we had in the sanctioned industries has been much more significant. He also highlighted that the reason was motivation and perseverance in the progress path. In another part of his speech, the Iranian president called for the indigenizing of industries belonging to other countries.



### IRGC Ready to Launch Foreign Satellites



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps is prepared to send the satellites of other countries into space, a commander said. In comments at a TV appearance on Monday night, Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force's Space Division General Ali Jafarabadi hailed the successful cooperation between the IRGC and the administration in the launch of the homegrown 'Soraya' satellite, which was sent into a low Earth orbit (LEO) with the 'Qaem-100' satellite carrier on Saturday. He said the IRGC is prepared for more joint projects with the state-run sectors and to launch other satellites in future. The commander also stated that if the Iranian administration holds negotiations with the neighboring countries that are in possession of research satellites weighing below 100 kilograms, the IRGC will be ready to launch the satellites of the other countries too. The IRGC Aerospace Force has successfully put Soraya into an orbit 750 kilometers above Earth in 11 minutes with Qaem-100, a three-stage satellite carrier running on solid fuel. General Jafarabadi has announced that within the next three years, Iran will test launch the 'Qaem-120' satellite carrier, which is planned to send satellites into an orbit 36,000 kilometers above Earth.

### Israel Must Bear Consequences of Terrorist Acts Against Iranian Military Advisors



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has issued a stern warning to Israel following assassination of a number of the country's military advisors in Syria, saying the regime must bear the consequences of such terrorist acts. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in a letter addressed to the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Monday. His letter came after on Saturday, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said five of its members serving on a military advisory mission in Syria had been assassinated in an Israeli airstrike on a residential building in the Mezzeh neighborhood, west of the Syrian capital city of Damascus. "The Israeli regime must bear the consequences of this and all other terrorist acts it has committed against Iranian military advisors," Amir-Abdollahian said in the letter, adding, "This regime must also be compelled to abandon all its other destabilizing activities in the region." "The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its inherent right, under international law and the United Nations Charter, to respond decisively and proportionately to such acts at the time and place of its choosing," the top diplomat added. The Iranian foreign minister noted that the latest act of terrorism was the third of its kind to be committed against Iranian military advisors in recent months. "This heinous terrorist act has also revealed, once more, the real terrorist nature of the Israeli regime, its destabilizing role in the region, and the threat that it poses to the peace and security of the region and beyond," Amir-Abdollahian stated. Such acts of terror are "aimed at diverting attention away from the Israeli regime's atrocities against the people of Palestine, particularly in Gaza," he noted, referring to the Palestinian territory that has been under a genocidal Israeli war for more than three months. The regime's military aggression has so far killed more than 25,000 Palestinians in Gaza. In another part of his letter, Iran's foreign minister also called for strong condemnation of Israel's acts of terrorism by the UN Security Council.

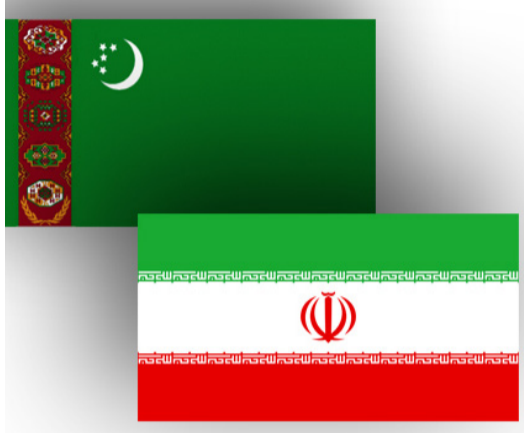
# IRAN NEWS



## FMs of Russia, Iran Discuss Situation in Gaza, Red Sea

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian spoke in favor of a prompt ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and expressed their concerns over the tense situation in the Red Sea during the meeting on the UN sidelines, the Russian Foreign Ministry said. Trend reports: "The sides had a substantial exchange of opinion on the ongoing Middle East agenda," the Ministry said. "The foreign ministers spoke in favor of a prompt ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and providing humanitarian assistance to the residents of the enclave. The sides stated their shared concerns over the tense situation in the Red Sea, which has sharply degraded due to the reckless force actions of the US and a number of joined states against Yemen." The two ministers discussed a wide array of bilateral agenda issues with an emphasis on the implementation of the agreements, achieved at the highest-level, including the December 7, 2023, meeting of presidents of Russia and Iran.

## Turkmenistan's Entrepreneurs Eager to Expand Presence in Iranian Market



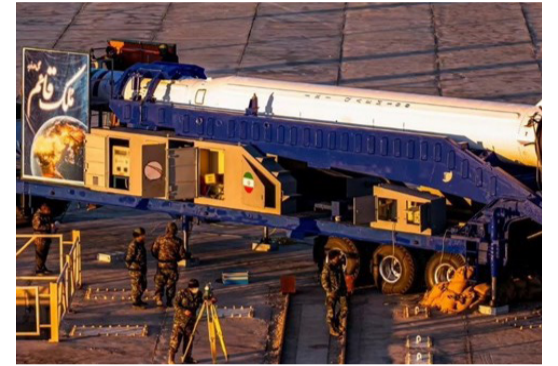
ASHGABAT (Dispatches) - Entrepreneurs from Turkmenistan wish to participate in the Expolran international exhibition to promote their products on the Iranian market. These issues were discussed during a meeting between Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan Mergen Gurdov and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Iran to Ashgabat Ali Mojtaba Roozbahani. At the meeting, the sides discussed ways to further develop trade and economic relations between Turkmenistan and Iran and expand the range of mutual cooperation. During the meeting, the sides also exchanged views on holding regular meetings of the Intergovernmental Turkmen-Iranian Commission on Economic Cooperation, organizing events between the business circles of the border regions of the two countries, as well as joint exhibitions and fairs. Meanwhile, from November 17 to 19 last year, a specialized exhibition called Iran Proze was held at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan in Ashgabat. The exhibition was attended by about 100 Iranian companies operating in various industries, including construction materials, machinery, engineering services, hydroelectric power, energy, oil and gas, petrochemicals, education and trade sectors.



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The value of Iran's exports to China increased by 30 percent in December 2023 as compared to the same month in 2022, according to China's Customs data. Iran exported \$404 million worth of products to China in December 2023, while the figure was only \$311 million in December 2022, Tasnim News Agency reported. As reported, the trade between Iran and China reached \$14.65 billion in 2023, registering a 6.2-percent decline, year on year. According to China's Customs data, the value of annual trade between the two countries had risen seven percent to \$15.5 billion in 2022. Based on the released data, China's export to Iran increased 8.6 percent to \$10.07 billion in 2023 from \$9.27 billion in 2022. The country's import from Iran fell 27 percent to \$4.58 billion in 2023 from \$6.23 in 2022. The two countries' trade balance was about \$5.5 billion in favor of China in the past year. In late December, 2023, the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced that the country exported commodities valued at \$10.3 billion to China during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2023). According to Mohammad Rezvani-Far, China was the top export destination of Iranian goods in

the mentioned nine-month period. Also, exporting commodities valued at \$13.7 billion to Iran, China was Iran's second source of imports in the first nine months of the present year, the IRICA head announced. China is one of Iran's main trade partners that has maintained strong trade ties with the Islamic Republic despite the strict U.S. sanctions. Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi said the 25-year strategic partnership plan between Iran and China has entered a new phase with new agreements being reached between various ministries of the two countries. According to Khandouzi, the mentioned agreements have been reached between the two sides during the visit of Iran's delegation to the 6th China International Import Expo (CIIE). "Specific projects were defined between the government departments of the respective ministries of Iran and China, and agreements were reached on the details of the implementation of the mentioned projects," Khandouzi said. Regarding the private sectors of the two countries, some Iranian companies operating in China and some large Chinese companies operating in Iran faced obstacles, which were discussed and resolved by the relevant authorities, he explained.

## Yemen Acting Independently Against Israel-Bound Ships



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Navy argued that the Yemeni military forces have decided, of their own volition, to bar vessels owned by or bound for Israel from sailing through the Bab al-Mandab Strait without taking orders from anybody. "Yemen is an independent state that has a powerful army and a strong leader, which acts independently and does not take orders from any party," Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri said in reaction to the attacks that the Yemeni forces have been launching against Israeli vessels in the Red Sea. He noted that the "hero Yemenis" have expressed their practical support for the Palestinian people in Gaza where the Zionist regime's onslaught has killed thousands of people since October 7. Yemen allows foreign vessels to sail through the Bab al-Mandab Strait, but has announced that the vessels belonging to the Zionist regime or those bound for the occupied Palestinian territories will be denied entry to the strait unless a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip puts an end to the massacre of Palestinians, the commander said. Praising the Yemeni fighters' gallantry in support of Palestine, the IRGC Navy chief said the Yemeni forces cannot tolerate the martyrdom of Muslim families in Gaza.

## Tanzania Signs Agreement to Pay Its Debts to Iran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Based on an agreement signed between Tanzania and Iran, the African country will pay its debts to Iran, an official with Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran announced on Monday. Ali Fekri, the director-general of the foreign investment-making office of the mentioned organization, said by signing this agreement on the payment of the country's debts, Tanzania pays seven million dollars of its debts to Iran per month, IRIB reported. After signing the mentioned agreement, Fekri told IRIB that this agreement is about the payment of debts that the government of Tanzania had to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the past, which is related to several decades, but because the 13th government follows the policy of developing cooperation and investment with different governments, it was decided that the existing obstacles to facilitate relations should be removed, and Tanzania, considering its long-standing relations with Iran, was among the countries that were interested in this policy. It was decided that the Tanzanian government would pay seven million dollars of its debts in the form of the first installment to start the cooperation, so that the rest of the debts would be paid to Iran every month based on the agreed schedule, the official further announced. Tanzania is considered one of the most important countries in East Africa and Iran is taking new measures to expand economic

ties with this country. In late November 2022, Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) held the first exclusive exhibition of Iranian products and services in Tanzania in collaboration with the Iranian Trade Center in the African country to showcase the Islamic Republic's trade and export capacities. According to Ra'ed Mousavi, the head of the Iranian Trade Center in Tanzania, this exhibition was the most appropriate platform to increase the knowledge of East African countries, especially Tanzania, about the products, services, and technological advancements of Iranian companies. According to Mousavi, companies active in various fields including the agricultural sector, mines and industrial machinery, construction, as well as medicine and medical equipment participate in the first exclusive exhibition of the export capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tanzania. Economic experts believe that the president's visit to Africa provided the basis for increasing Iran's presence in the 60-billion-dollar economy of the African continent and will increase the level of activity of Iranian traders and businessmen in this continent. As reported, during the Iranian calendar years 1384 and 1385 (March 2005-March 2007), the relations between Iran and the African continent increased in terms of trade, but since 1386, the economic relations between Iran and Africa have decreased due to the economic crisis and cruel sanctions against Iran.



## Connecting Electricity Grids of Iran, Turkey, EU Possible



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's minister of energy announced the possibility of electricity connection between Iran and Turkey and also the European Union (EU) via Turkey. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the 19th Iran International Water Industry Exhibition & 13th International Renewable Energies Exhibition, Ali Akbar Mehrabian added that the necessary power transmission lines have been constructed between Iran and Turkey. He further emphasized that producers of renewable power can embark on exporting electricity overseas without any restrictions. The possibility has been provided to export electricity to neighboring Turkey and then to Europe via this country, Mehrabian added. As the largest industrial and commercial event in Iran, the international exhibition of Iran's water industry and water and sewage facilities is held annually with the participation of capable domestic and foreign companies in the field of water and sewage industry. They showcase their latest achievements and products to the professionals and specialists of the industry and guide their future activities and innovations by considering the trend of market demand and the direction of growth of this industry.

## Iranian President Tours IRGC Corps of Cadets



TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi paid a visit to the Imam Hossein University in the capital Tehran to inspect different sections of the academic center and achievements of the corps of cadets of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). On Tuesday morning, the president visited an exhibition showcasing Iran's achievements in the field of soft power as well as projects related to future-oriented research, transformation of humanities disciplines, production of soft power and human capital, and organizational improvement. President Raisi also inspected the state-of-the-art achievements of the cadets of the IRGC in an exhibition showcasing research on artificial intelligence, robotics and cognitive sciences. AI-based technological products such as reconnaissance drones, devices and software for use of Metaverse for training human resources were also among other achievements showcased in this exhibition. Raisi also visited an aerodynamics research center, a hub for advancement of science and technology and an exhibition of achievements in the fields of civil engineering, water, energy, and civil defense during his three-hour tour of the IRGC corps of cadets.

## Venezuela Arrests 32 in Alleged Plot to Assassinate President Maduro

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan authorities have arrested 32 civilians and soldiers after a months-long investigation into their alleged part in a US-backed "conspiracy" to assassinate President Nicolas Maduro, the prosecutor's office said Monday. Venezuelan authorities have arrested 32 civilians and soldiers after a months-long investigation into their alleged part in a US-backed "conspiracy" to assassinate President Nicolas Maduro, the prosecutor's office said Monday. All suspects have "confessed and revealed information about the plans," Attorney General Tarek William Saab told reporters in Caracas. He said they had been accused of treason and "convicted" for their crimes. Maduro loyalist Saab said arrest warrants have been issued for 11 other people, including rights activists, journalists and soldiers in exile, for the alleged plot that also targeted Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino. Padrino told the same press conference that an operation that started last year to uncover details of the alleged conspiracy was kept secret as it coincided with "talks" between Maduro and the United States that resulted in a prisoner swap.



## Moldovan Separatist Leader Calls for Military Readiness



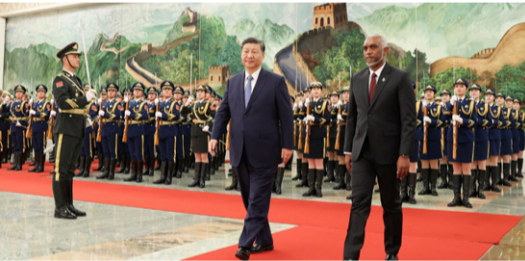
CHISINAU (Dispatches) - The leader of Moldova's pro-Russian separatist Transnistria region called on its defense and intelligence institutions on Monday to maintain a "high level of military preparedness" and hold regular drills for that purpose. Transnistria broke away before the 1991 Soviet collapse and fought a brief war against the newly independent state, one of Europe's poorest countries lying between Ukraine and Romania. For more than three decades, the sliver of land has remained on Moldova's eastern fringe with little turmoil - 2,000 Russian "peacekeepers" remain on the line separating them. But tension has been building since Moldova's government introduced a duty in the New Year on imports and exports, part of its drive to join the European Union. The region, dependent on help from Moscow, says the duties hurt its businesses and Krasnoselsky has denounced it as a "medieval levy." "The Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of Defence are instructed to regularly hold drills and boost security on state borders through modern technical means," Transnistria's president, Vadim Krasnoselsky, said in a broadcast address. Key institutions were told to be "increasingly proactive" in countering military threats and terrorist and extremist activities. "This is for today, right now," Krasnoselsky said. "And it concerns not only the Defence Ministry, but also the Interior Ministry and state security bodies." Moldova's Bureau for Reintegration, the body overseeing talks with Transnistria, said Krasnoselsky's comments were bewildering. "The basis for Tiraspol's alarm signals is unclear," it said, referring to the main town in the region. "The impression is that these signals exist strictly in a virtual environment." Moldova's pro-European president, Maia Sandu, has denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine and alleged that Moscow was plotting to remove her, while Moscow accused her of infusing an atmosphere of Russophobia in the country. Transnistria, in turn, says Ukraine has plotted to kill its leaders and accused Moldova of training Ukrainian fighters. A senior Moldovan official last week said the latest round of infrequent talks with Transnistria, focusing on the new duties, had proved "difficult." A rally against the tax is to take place this week in Tiraspol. Small protests have taken place along the "border" separating the two sides.

## U.S. Calls for Israel to Protect Innocent as Forces Storm Gaza Hospital

GAZA (Dispatches) - The United States called for Israel to protect innocent people in hospitals, medical staff and patients as Israeli forces stormed one hospital and put another under siege as they advanced deep into western Khan Younis in Gaza. Residents said the bombardment from air, land and sea was the most intense in southern Gaza since the war began in October. Troops moved for the first time into Al-Mawasi district near the Mediterranean coast, west of Khan Younis, the main city in southern Gaza. There, they stormed Al-Khair hospital and arrested medical staff. Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf al Qidra told Reuters. There was no word from Israel on the situation at the hospital, and the military spokesperson's office had no comment. The military said later that three Israeli soldiers were killed on Monday in southern Gaza. Qidra said at least 50 people were killed on Sunday night in Khan Younis, while the sieges at medical facilities meant dozens of dead and wounded were beyond the reach of rescuers. White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby on Monday said Israel had a right to defend itself but added: "We expect them to do so in accordance with international law and to protect innocent people in hospitals, medical staff and patients as well, as much as possible." Israel says Hamas fighters operate in and around hospitals, which Hamas and medical staff deny. Israel launched an offensive last week to capture Khan Younis, which it now says is the principal headquarters of the Hamas militants responsible for the Oct. 7 attacks on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies. Israel has vowed to wipe out Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement that rules Gaza and is sworn to Israel's destruction. At least

25,295 Gazans have been killed since Oct. 7, Gaza health authorities said in an update on Monday. International concern has mounted over the Palestinian death toll from Israel's assault on the densely populated enclave and a humanitarian crisis afflicting hundreds of thousands of people. The United States has urged Israel to reduce civilian harm in Gaza, called on it to stop violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and has said it still believes a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is possible. In Brussels on Monday, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz sidestepped discussion of a two-state solution at a meeting with European Union counterparts, opting to show them aspirational videos of future infrastructure projects. Israel has pushed back against calls for a Palestinian state, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday reaffirmed a hard line, saying any Palestinian state would pose "an existential danger" to Israel. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has circulated a discussion paper with a roadmap to peace that calls for a preparatory peace conference organized by the EU and Arab nations. The U.S. and U.N. were also invited to be conveners. Washington on Monday called for an investigation and accountability "as appropriate" following the West Bank death on Friday of a 17-year-old Palestinian American, who Palestinian health officials say was killed by Israeli security forces. The Israel-occupied West Bank has seen a surge of violence in parallel to the Gaza war that erupted in October. The American-born youth's uncle told Reuters he died during clashes with the Israeli military that included stone throwing by Palestinians.

## Chinese Research Vessel Heads to Maldives, Could Concern India



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - A Chinese research vessel is on its way to the Maldives, according to an Indian military official and an independent researcher, as new Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu deepens ties with Beijing, distancing from New Delhi. It is likely to raise concern in New Delhi, which has previously viewed the presence of such vessels close to its shores, including in Sri Lanka in 2022, as problematic. These vessels are not military ships, officially, but India and others worry about the military use of their research. Relations between traditional friends New Delhi and Male have soured since President Muizzu took office in November riding an "India Out" campaign. Both New Delhi and Beijing vie for influence on the tiny Indian Ocean nation but the new government in Male is pivoting towards China and has asked India to withdraw its nearly 80 troops stationed there. The Chinese vessel is en-route to Male, open source intelligence researcher Damien Symon wrote on social media platform X, saying Xiang Yang Hong 03 "is entering the Indian Ocean Region, displaying its destination as Male, the vessel is expected to run an ocean survey operation in the Indian Ocean Region raising concern in India." An Indian military official confirmed Symon's finding and said they are monitoring its movement. The Maldivian president's office, India's foreign ministry and China's defense ministry did not respond to requests for comment. New Delhi has in the past flagged similar visits by other Chinese research vessels with its other littoral neighbor Sri Lanka, which has denied permission for such vessels to dock at its ports since 2022. In 2019, India expelled another Chinese research vessel from its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) after it entered without permission. A senior Indian security official said China's research vessels are "dual use" which means the information gathered by them can be used for both civilian and military purposes, including the deployment of submarines.

## Kyiv Rejects Calls to Cede land to Russia by Slovakia's Leader

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine has rejected suggestions by Slovakia's new Prime Minister Robert Fico that it will need to cede territory to Russia to end the war. "There can be no compromise on territorial integrity, neither for Ukraine, nor for Slovakia, nor for any other country," Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleh Nikolenko wrote on Facebook. "Let's be honest: if Ukraine is not secure, there will be no security, neither in Slovakia nor in Europe in general." In an interview with Slovak radio over the weekend, Fico offered a direct challenge to that idea, and the core position of most of his partners in the European Union. Speaking just days ahead of a scheduled visit to Ukraine, Fico told the public broadcaster both Kyiv and Moscow would need to make painful compromises to bring the war to an end. For Ukraine, that meant accepting at least some of Russia's gains. "What are they expecting? That Russia will leave Donbas and Luhansk? Or that they will leave Crimea? No, that's completely unrealistic. Everybody knows that," Fico continued. The Donbas and Luhansk are territories in eastern Ukraine, over parts of which Russia gained control in 2014, and from where it has expanded its territorial gains since launching its full-scale invasion in 2022. Crimea was also captured, and annexed, in 2014. Widely seen as a pro-Kremlin figure, Fico won election in October, having run on a promise that he would block further military support for Ukraine - which he told the radio interviewer had been under the "total control of the United States" since 2014, when Ukrainians overthrew their pro-Moscow president Viktor Yanukovich. In the European Union, he is closely aligned with Hungary's Victor Orban and has been very open about his intentions to block

Ukraine's bid to join the EU and NATO. That blunt message would be repeated when he meets his Ukrainian counterpart, Denys Shmyhal, on Wednesday in the border town of Uzhhorod, he said. "I will tell him that I am completely against Ukraine's NATO membership and that I will veto it, because the only thing that would lead to is a Third World War." In a reversal of the policy of his predecessor, which saw Ukraine receive an air defense system and fighter jets from Slovakia, as well as other military aid, Fico also promised to tell his Ukrainian host that "he will not be getting any weapons from the Slovak Army" or from "Slovakia's state stockpiles." Instead, he says he would bring an "offer of humanitarian help." Shmyhal's office has not responded to a CNN enquiry about whether the visit will still go ahead. Bringing a very different sort of message Monday to Ukraine was Poland's new Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv. The two leaders discussed possible joint arms production, as well as what Zelensky referred to in a statement from his office as "a new form of our cooperation - aimed at a larger scale of arms purchases for Ukrainian needs," though no further details were given. Tusk told his host Poland would try to help Ukraine's accession to the EU, "so that Ukraine's full membership in the European Union becomes a fact as soon as possible." The two men also expressed confidence that they could achieve lasting solutions to disputes over Ukrainian grain exports and permit-free access to the European Union for Ukrainian truck drivers, which led to blockades for many weeks at border crossings between the two countries.



## Liberia's New President Joseph Boakai Sworn In

MONROVIA (Dispatches) - Liberia's new president, Joseph Boakai, was sworn into office Monday after his narrow win in a November election. Boakai, who at age 79 is the country's oldest sitting head of state, promised to unite and rescue Africa's oldest republic from its economic woes. "Partisanship must give way to nationalism," Boakai told citizens and foreign delegation members who attended his inauguration ceremony in Monrovia, Liberia's capital. He listed improving adherence to the rule of law, fighting corruption and renewing "the lost hope" of citizens as his priorities. The ceremony, however, ended abruptly after Boakai, who wore traditional Liberian attire for the occasion, began to show signs of physical distress while speaking. Officials led him away from the podium after he unsuccessfully tried to continue his address. A spokesperson for Boakai's political party said the president's weakness was caused by heat and had nothing to do with his health. Boakai has dismissed concerns about his age, arguing that it came with a wealth of experience and achievements that would benefit the country. He won a tight run-off election to defeat Liberia's youngest-ever president, George Weah. Public goodwill toward soccer legend-turned-politician Weah waned as he neared the end of his first six-year term. Critics accused him of not fulfilling campaign promises to fix Liberia's ailing economy, stamp out corruption and to ensure justice for victims of the country's back-to-back civil wars between 1989 and 2003. Boakai, who earned a university degree in business administration, has been active in Liberia's national politics since the 1980s, when he served as the agriculture minister. Starting in 2006, he spent 12 years as vice president under Africa's first democratically elected female leader, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. He lost his first run for the presidency in 2017 to Weah, who took over from Sirleaf in the West African nation's first democratic transfer of power since the end of its civil wars. Boakai touted his second presidential campaign as a rescue mission to free Liberians from what he described as Weah's failed leadership.

## Taliban Restricting Unmarried Women's Access to Work and Travel

KABUL (Dispatches) - The Taliban are restricting Afghan women's access to work, travel and healthcare if they are unmarried or don't have a male guardian, according to a U.N. report published Monday. In one incident, officials from the Vice and Virtue Ministry advised a woman to get married if she wanted to keep her job at a health care facility, saying it was inappropriate for an unwed woman to work, it said. The Taliban have barred women from most areas of public life and stopped girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade as part of harsh measures they imposed after taking power in 2021, despite initially promising more moderate rule. They have also shut down beauty parlors and started enforcing a dress code, arresting women who don't comply with their interpretation of hijab, or Islamic headscarf. In May 2022, the Taliban issued a decree calling for women to only show their eyes and recommending they wear the head-to-toe burqa, similar to restrictions during the Taliban's previous rule between 1996 and 2001. In its latest quarterly report, covering October to December last year, the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said the Taliban are cracking down on Afghan women who are single or don't have a male guardian, or mahram, accompanying them. There are no official laws about male guardianship in Afghanistan, but the Taliban have said women cannot move around or travel a certain distance without a man who is related to her by blood or marriage. Three female health care workers were detained last

October because they were going to work without a mahram. They were released after their families signed a written guarantee that they would not repeat the act, the report said. In Paktia province, the Vice and Virtue Ministry has stopped women without mahrams from accessing health facilities since December. It visits health facilities in the province to ensure compliance. The ministry, which serves as the Taliban's morality police, is also enforcing hijab and mahram requirements when women visit public places, offices and education institutes through checkpoints and inspections. In December, in Kandahar province, ministry officials visited a bus terminal to ensure women were not traveling long distances without mahrams and instructed bus drivers not to permit women to board without one, the U.N. said. Women have also been arrested for buying contraceptives, which the Taliban have not officially banned. The Taliban's chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said the U.N. report was based mostly on misunderstandings and accused the mission of ignoring or criticizing Islamic law, or Shariah. With an Islamic government in power in Afghanistan, it must "fully implement all aspects of Shariah for both men and women," Mujahid said in a statement. This means enforcing rules for the hijab, male guardianship and gender segregation for women in education and employment, he said. "If UNAMA criticizes these cases or considers explicit Islamic rulings as an act against human rights, then it is an insult to the beliefs of a people," he said.





## Medvedev Sees Off Borges to Reach Australian Open Quarters

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - World number three Daniil Medvedev struggled to contain the power of Portugal's Nuno Borges at the Australian Open but the Russian emerged with a 6-3 7-6(4) 5-7 6-1 victory to reach quarter-finals. Twice a runner-up at Melbourne Park, Medvedev squandered a big lead in the third set but got back on track in the fourth to set up a last eight meeting with Pole Hubert Hurkacz, who beat French wild card Arthur Cazaux. "Third set was tough physically because he was playing very aggressive," said Medvedev. "Like, as I soon as I would hit one shot in a rally that was not aggressive or deep enough, he would go full power. It was pretty impressive. I didn't play long enough or good enough, missed too much, some double faults." The 27-year-old, who reached the final in 2021 and 2022, was rock solid in the first set, where he did not face a single break point, and pulled away from Borges after building a 4-2 lead to seal the set in 35 minutes. World number 69 Borges, who reached the fourth round by stunning 13th seed Grigor Dimitrov, came out fighting in the second set, mixing up his game with delicate drop shots and traded breaks with his opponent before fading in the tiebreak. The Portuguese 26-year-old looked on course for a straight sets defeat as former U.S. Open champion Medvedev edged ahead in the third after recovering from a break but things began to fall apart for the Russian. After saving four break points to hold for 5-2 he wasted two match points as the double faults began to pile up. Borges continued to serve and volley with devastating effect and claimed five successive games to pull a set back. Fans hoping for an upset were left disappointed, however, as Medvedev steadied the ship and sailed through the fourth set, which he claimed when Borges went long with a forehand. "I hoped it wouldn't be five sets. I'm happy it wasn't," said Medvedev, who was taken the distance by Emil Ruusuvuori earlier in the tournament. "Before this match I was feeling 100% but he made me run." That's why I missed so much in the third set, I was pretty dead. In the fourth I managed to raise my energy levels and now I'm tired again. One day off, I should be okay." Meanwhile it was all familiar faces on the men's side as Carlos Alcaraz led a trio of top seeds through.

Alcaraz charged past Miomir Kecmanovic to reach the last eight at Melbourne Park for the first time but, with two Grand Slams titles to his name, the 20-year-old second seed is already well-acquainted with the business end of majors. Alcaraz looked in brilliant form in the 6-4 6-4 6-0 win over Kecmanovic that took him another step closer to his dream final against another Serb, 10-times champion Novak Djokovic. "I did everything almost perfectly," Alcaraz said. "I'm feeling better and better every day, I'm feeling better and better every match. I'll try to take this as an advantage, the confidence that I have and the level that I'm playing." While the men's seedings have held pretty much firm at Melbourne Park over the last nine days, there has been upset after upset in the top half of the women's draw to leave a field almost entirely denuded of seeds. Czech Noskova, who did the most damage to the top half of the draw by removing world number one Iga Swiatek in the third round, will face Yastremska in what is also her first major quarter-final. Svitolina left the court in tears, the last of the clutch of mothers competing in singles this year to depart. Russian Anna Kalinskaya, who had never been past the second round at a Grand Slam before last week, continued the eviction of the seeds when she beat Italian Jasmine Paolini 6-4 6-2. China's number one Zheng Qinwen ensured at least one would survive into the last eight in the bottom half of the draw by clinically dispatching Oceane Dodin 6-0 6-3 in the final match of the day. In the men's draw, the fairytale runs by lowly ranked players were ruthlessly halted. Ninth seed Hurkacz brought an end to 122nd-ranked Frenchman Arthur Cazaux's hot run on his Melbourne Park debut, which included an upset of Holger Rune. Hurkacz beat the swaggering wildcard at his own game by serving slightly bigger and slightly better in a 7-6(6) 7-6(3) 6-4 win on John Cain Arena. Zverev's five-setter against British 19th seed Norrie was his second of a tournament which has seen a record 32 this year. The German thought he would still have plenty in the tank on Wednesday in the quarter-finals when he faces Alcaraz, who he lost to at the same stage of last year's U.S. Open.

## Messi, Miami Beaten by Dallas in Pre-Season Friendly



MIAMI (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi and Inter Miami slumped to a 1-0 defeat against FC Dallas in a pre-season friendly yesterday before the team set off on a hectic international tour. After a lacklustre 0-0 draw against El Salvador on Friday, Miami delivered another performance to forget in wet, cold conditions at the Cotton Bowl Stadium. Argentine superstar Messi and former Barcelona team-mates Luis Suarez and Sergio Busquets were all substituted after 64 minutes with Miami trailing 1-0. Messi created a handful of openings during his stint on the pitch, with his best effort a rasping 30-yard volley that was parried by Dallas goalkeeper Maarten Paes early in the second half. The World Cup-winner almost created an opening goal for Suarez in the first half, but the Uruguayan's volley with the outside of his right boot rolled wide. Dallas, meanwhile, took the lead through Jesus Ferreira after just three minutes, the US international striker holding off Miami defender Noah Allen before drilling a low angled shot into the bottom corner past goalkeeper Drake Callender. Yesterday's game was the second in a globe-trotting schedule of pre-season friendlies for Miami as they prepare to kick off the new MLS season against Real Salt Lake on February 21. Following the game, the Florida club head to Saudi Arabia for a fixture against Al-Hilal on January 29, and then face Al-Nassr on February 1 — a game that should see Messi line up against old rival Cristiano Ronaldo once more. Miami then travel to Asia to play friendlies against a Hong Kong select team in the Chinese territory on February 4, before taking on Japanese side Vissel Kobe in Tokyo three days later. The Herons return to the United States for a final pre-season game against Argentine squad Newell's Old Boys on February 15.

## Martinez Fires Inter to Italian Super Cup Glory

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Lautaro Martinez shot Inter Milan to a third straight Italian Super Cup after netting in the final moments of yesterday's 1-0 win over furious Napoli in Riyadh. Argentine striker Martinez swept home Benjamin Pavard's low cross in the first minute of stoppage time at Al-Awwal Park, seeing off Napoli who played the final half-hour with 10 men after Giovanni Simeone was sent off for two bookable offences. The 26-year-old's winner was his 21st goal in all competitions this season for Inter, who lost their Serie A lead to Juventus while in Saudi Arabia for the four-team tournament. And he whipped his shirt off in celebration after drawing level with Christian Vieri at ninth place in Inter's all-time goalscoring charts, with 123 strikes since arriving in 2018. "The emotion took over and I couldn't think," Martinez told Mediaset. "It was a unique moment, I scored my 100th goal in the Italian Cup Final and my 123rd goal in the Super Cup, allowing me to match a legend like Christian Vieri." This year's edition was the first to be played in four-team format, but failed to capture the imagination of the Saudi public. Organizers were also embarrassed by a portion of the crowd, reportedly the locals and not travelling Italians, whistling the quickly-arranged minute's silence for deceased former Italy striker Gigi Riva before the start of the second half. Riva, who died yesterday evening, is Italy's top scorer with 35 goals in 42 appearances and shot Cagliari to their only league title in 1970. Martinez's goal gave Inter coach Simone Inzaghi a record-breaking fifth Super Cup win in his career after winning it for the third successive year. Inzaghi overtakes Fabio Capello and Marcello Lippi, two icons of Italian coaching, for Super Cup wins. The 47-year-old also won it twice while managing Lazio, in 2017 and 2019. His victory made Inter the second team to complete the hat-trick after local rivals AC Milan's string of three victories between 1992 and 1994. Inter captain Martinez and the rest of the team took the trophy to the stands where a group fans had travelled from Italy, handing it to supporters as they cheered in victory. However Napoli coach Walter Mazzarri played no part in the trophy ceremony as he was livid at the sending off of striker Simeone, who is deputising for Victor Osimhen while he represents Nigeria in the Africa Cup of Nations. Simeone was dismissed by Gianluca Rocchi in the 60th minute after stepping on Francesco Acerbi's foot

moments after picking up his first booking for clattering into Hakan Calhanoglu. Mazzarri screamed "disgrace, disgrace" at officials before storming off down the tunnel and refusing to speak to media. "The poor quality of referees this season... is there for all to see. I sat with Rocchi before the game and wondered what huge embarrassment he would have to deal with next," said Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis. Simeone will be suspended for Sunday's trip to Lazio, with the Italian champions sat in ninth place in Serie A.



## Tajikistan Reach Asian Cup Last 16



DOHA (Dispatches) - Tajikistan's coach said it was "a big dream" after his side marched into the knockout rounds of their first Asian Cup with a battling 2-1 win over 10-man Lebanon on Monday. China's 1-0 loss to hosts Qatar meant the debutants — who also had two goals ruled out by VAR — went through in second place from Group A on a night of drama. Before the third and final round of games, holders Qatar were the only team to have scored a goal in the group, and any of the other three had a shot at finishing behind them in second. By the end it was 106th ranked Tajikistan who went through thanks to two classy goals in the 80th and 92nd minutes. Lebanon's tournament is over. At the final whistle Tajikistan's players celebrated with the small number of their fans inside the stadium. Coach Petar Segrt said it was "a big dream to go through." "Every day we stay here longer is fantastic. We have our first dream: we make the qualification. We have our second dream: we want to go to the second round. Now we dream again," said the Croatian. "This is football. Every one of us has a dream." In a stadium festooned with their cedar-tree flags, Lebanon took control of the game early but found no more penetration than they had in their previous two games. Tajikistan were mostly restricted to shots from outside the box until the stroke of half time. Midfielder Mabatshoev Shervoni slalomed into the area, his attempted cross taking a huge deflection and looping over the wrong-footed goalkeeper and into the net. But Tajik celebrations were cut short when the referee ruled the goal out for the tightest of off-sides. Their misery was compounded almost immediately after half-time when Bangkok United forward Bassel Jradi arched in a delicious strike from the edge of the area and inside the far post. Lebanon soon had a man sent off when a VAR check upgraded Kassem El Zein's yellow card — for a studs-up, over-the-ball tackle — to a red. With a man advantage, Tajikistan camped out in the opposition half and as the 70th minute approached they once again thought they had scored, but Alisher Dzhalilov's goal was scratched off, again for a slender offside.

## Brilliant Embiid Scores 70 as Sixers Down Spurs

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Joel Embiid became only the ninth player in NBA history to score 70 points or more in a single game as the Philadelphia 76ers defeated the San Antonio Spurs 133-123. A sensational individual performance from the reigning NBA Most Valuable Player led the way to victory for the Sixers and upstaged an impressive 33-point showing from Spurs rookie Victor Wembanyama. Embiid finished with 70 points, 18 rebounds and five assists, shooting 24-of-41 from the field and making 21-of-23 free throws. The Cameroonian star's franchise-record effort vaulted him into an elite band of NBA stars who have posted 70 or more points in a single game, joining Wilt Chamberlain, David Robinson, David Thompson, Elgin Baylor, Kobe Bryant, Donovan Mitchell, Devin Booker and Damian Lillard. "It feels good," Embiid said after the win, paying tribute to his "extremely unselfish" team-mates. "I was hot and they just gave me the ball and made sure they put me in the best positions." Credit to the coaching staff too - I'm just surrounded by amazing people." Tyrese Maxey added 18 points for the Sixers while Tobias Harris finished with 14 — the only other Philadelphia players to crack double figures. Sixers coach Nick Nurse said the 7ft (2.13m) tall Embiid's combination of size and skill made him nearly unplayable. "He can score in so many ways," Nurse said. "His sheer size gets him a lot of stuff around the basket and a lot of free throws. And his shooting touch is the skill that makes it extra hard to stop him. When he gets motivated like that, anything can happen." Wembanyama, the highly rated No.1 Draft pick from France, produced one of his best performances of the season in a losing effort for San Antonio, who remain at the bottom of the Western Conference with a record of eight wins and 35 defeats. Embiid lavished praise on the Frenchman, but would not say if facing up against the highly rated rookie had given him additional motivation. "The big fella, he's amazing, he's great," Embiid said of Wembanyama. "In my opinion he's already up there as one of the best players in the league. Obviously a bright future." Asked whether Wembanyama had fueled his 70-point display, Embiid said: "It doesn't matter who's in the building. That's my mindset — attack, dominate, offensively and defensively. Tonight was no different." Embiid's masterpiece propelled Philadelphia to a sixth straight victory, leaving them third in the Eastern Conference behind Boston and Milwaukee on

29-13. San Antonio's revered coach Gregg Popovich meanwhile saluted Embiid's virtuoso performance. "He's a fantastic player," Popovich said. "He's wonderful — he's playing such an all-round game." Embiid's 70-point was not the only eye-catching individual performance around the NBA on Monday. In Charlotte, Minnesota Timberwolves stalwart Karl-Anthony Towns erupted for 62 points in his team's 128-125 loss to the Hornets. Towns' performance included 10 three-pointers but it was not enough to prevent Charlotte snatching a notable win against the Western Conference leaders. Miles Bridges led the Charlotte scoring with 28 points, followed by Brandon Miller with 27. In Detroit, Giannis Antetokounmpo finished

with 31 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists as the Milwaukee Bucks notched a 122-113 victory over the Pistons. In Dallas, 38 points from Jayson Tatum and a 35-point haul from Jaylen Brown earned the Boston Celtics a 119-110 win over Luka Doncic and the Mavericks. Doncic finished with 33 points while Kyrie Irving added 23 in a losing effort for Dallas. The Cleveland Cavaliers meanwhile clinched a wire-to-wire win over the Orlando Magic in Florida with a 126-99 victory. Donovan Mitchell finished with 25 points for the Cavs but was upstaged by Sam Merrill, who scored 26 off the bench including eight three-pointers.

