

Informed Sources Told That Nine People Were Killed in an Armed Attack on a House in the Sirkan City of Sistan and Baluchestan Province of Iran on Saturday, as No Group Or Individual Has Claimed Responsibility for the Attack

# IRAN NEWS

On the Occasion of National Father's Day and Birthday Anniversary of Imam Ali (AS), the First Shia Imam, Which Fell on January 25 This Year, a Total of 534 Prisoners of Unintentional Crimes Were Freed Across the Country

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### Israeli Regime Officials Must Be Punished



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Congratulating South Africa on its success in taking legal proceedings against the Zionist regime for its genocidal crimes in Gaza, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the Israeli regime's officials must be brought to justice. "I would like to congratulate the South African government and people, the people of Palestine and South Africa's Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor on the country's success in its lawsuit against the Zionist regime with the International Court of Justice," the Iranian foreign minister said in a post on his X account on Friday. His comments came after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an interim ruling in a case lodged by South Africa against the Israeli regime, ordering Tel Aviv to take all measures within its power to prevent genocide in Gaza. "I once again reaffirm the Islamic Republic of Iran's support for the South African government's initiative," Amir-Abdollahian said. "Today, the officials of the fake Israeli regime are the most notorious people for the world's public opinion who have to be brought to justice immediately for committing genocide and unprecedented war crimes against Palestinians," he added. "I should reiterate that the White House's all-out support for the crimes by the Zionists will never be forgotten and will be pursued by the public opinion. I ask all my counterparts in the world to support the action of South Africa at the ICJ," the top Iranian diplomat stated. The Israeli officials have reacted to the court ruling by accusing the ICJ of "anti-Semitic" bias.

### Iran Hails ICJ Ruling Against Israel Genocide Case in Gaza



TEHRAN (Presstv) - Iran has hailed an interim ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the emergency measures requested by South Africa in its genocide case against Israel over the regime's war on the Gaza Strip. In a post on his X account on Friday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian extended his congratulations to the South African government and nation, particularly his counterpart Naledi Pandor, as well as the Palestinian people over the African country's success at the United Nations' top court. He once again reiterated Iran's support for South Africa's initiative and called on his counterparts across the world to also throw their weight behind the African country's move at the ICJ. "Today, the officials of the fake Israeli regime are the most hated people in the world's public opinion. They must be urgently brought to justice for committing genocide and unprecedented war crimes against the Palestinians," the top Iranian diplomat emphasized. Amir-Abdollahian said the world public opinion would never forget the White House's full support for the Zionists' crimes against the Palestinians and would always heed the regime's criminal acts. In its interim ruling, the ICJ ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent genocide in Gaza, saying the regime must ensure its forces do not commit genocide and also ensure the preservation of evidence of alleged genocide. It also urged the regime to report back in one month. The court obliged Israel to take more measures to protect Palestinians but did not order it to end military operations in the Strip. South Africa filed the lawsuit against Israel at the end of December, noting that Israel's actions are "genocidal in character because they are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnic group." The application also said Israeli attacks breach the UN's Genocide Convention, and urged the court to "order Israel to cease killing and causing serious mental and bodily harm to Palestinian people in Gaza." In a telephone conversation with his South African counterpart Cyril Ramaphosa on Thursday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the ICJ has drawn the admiration of all freedom seekers worldwide.



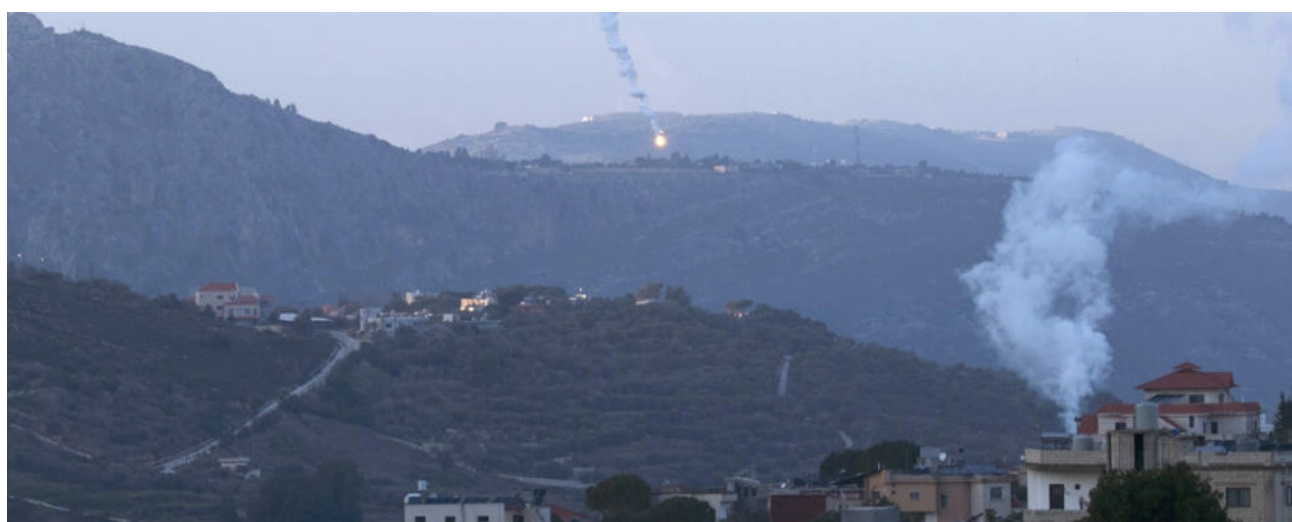
## Zionist Regime Founded on Aggression, Discrimination

TEHRAN - Iran strongly denounces the Israeli regime's "hostile" reaction to the United Nations top court's order for the regime to prevent acts of genocide in the Gaza Strip, which is enduring a brutal Israeli war. Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani made the remarks in a post on X. Earlier, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an interim ruling in a case lodged against the regime by South Africa, ordering Tel Aviv to take all measures within its power to prevent genocide in Gaza. Israeli officials reacted by accusing the ICJ of "antisemitic" bias. "The Zionist regime's hostile reaction [to the ruling] showed that the regime's foundation is based upon aggression and discrimination, and [that] it lends no credence to the international legal norms and regulations," Kanaani wrote. The Israeli regime has been waging the war against Gaza since October 7, 2023, following an operation carried out by the Palestinian territory's resistance groups. Kanaani also commented on a response issued to the ruling by the United States, which has said it believed the genocide allegations were "unfounded." "The type of attitude [adopted] by the US administration [towards the ruling], indicates Washington's instrumentalization of international judicial mechanisms," Kanaani added. The spokesman said, "Although belatedly," the ICJ ruling "serves as a testament to the bitter reality that what is going on in Gaza is an instance of international crimes, including genocide, which is and continues to be committed with the US administration's unlimited support for the Zionist regime." "The U.S. has been providing the war with all-out military and political support. It has armed the regime with more than 10,000 tons of military hardware, and blocked ratification of all United Nations Security Council resolutions that have called for cessation of the Israeli aggression. The spokesman concluded his remarks by saying, "The people of the world are now faced with the question that what additional permission do the international organizations and institutions [tasked with preserving the international peace and security need to force the Zionist regime into stopping the genocide?"

## Hezbollah Fighters Destroy Israeli Military Surveillance System in Night of Fire

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Hezbollah has hit vital Israeli targets, including an air surveillance base on Mount Meron, since early October. Fighters from the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement have targeted and destroyed a surveillance system at an Israeli military outpost, in response to the ongoing Israeli genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip. Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network, citing a Hezbollah statement, reported that the group struck the newly-installed system at an outpost in the town of Zar'it, close to the border with Lebanon, at around 9 p.m. local time (1900 GMT) on Friday. The development came shortly after Hezbollah announced in a separate statement that it had launched surface-to-surface Falaq-1 (Dusk-1) missiles, for the first time since the outbreak of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, against Ma'ale Golan barracks in the west part of the occupied Golan Heights. Lebanese resistance fighters also targeted gatherings of Israeli forces stationed near the Hunin Castle in Margalot in the northern part of occupied Palestinian territories near

the Lebanon border. Moreover, Hezbollah rained down rockets and anti-tank guided missiles on other Israeli military sites and settlements, including Hanita barracks, Avivim settlement, Doviv settlement, Metula and the Shlomi settlement, for over an hour across the border. These attacks came after the Israeli army launched air raids on several areas against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, including Beit Lifa, in which four Hezbollah fighters lost their lives. The Israeli regime launched its devastating hostilities in the Gaza Strip on October 7 after the territory's Hamas-led Palestinian resistance groups carried out a surprise retaliatory attack, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, against the occupying entity. The Israeli military has also been carrying out attacks against the Lebanese territory since then, prompting retaliatory strikes from Lebanon's resistance movement Hezbollah in support of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. The movement has vowed to keep up its retaliatory operations as long as the Tel Aviv regime continues its onslaught on Gaza.



### Iran Condemns E3 Statement Against Sorayya Satellite Launch



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has condemned the statement issued by the three European countries (UK, France, and Germany) about the recent launch of a home-grown Sorayya satellite. Despite interpretations of some countries based on unilateralist inclinations, there is no restriction on Iran's scientific activities in the area of space, Nasser Kanaani said on Saturday. The Islamic Republic of Iran has an absolute right to have access to scientific and research achievements, he said adding that such comments would not prevent the determined Iranian nation from achieving more successes. In his remarks, the spokesman said the Islamic Republic strongly rejects such abnormal attitudes. He went on to say that the Islamic Republic preserves its right to use peaceful technology in line with upgrading its scientific development, so the country does not care about comments of certain countries which are after imposing their opinion on others. On January 20, Iranian Space Agency announced it had successfully placed a home-made satellite into space's orbit. The satellite, dubbed Sorayya which means Pleiades, a space constellation, in Persian, was placed into an orbit of 750 kilometers above the earth's surface. Commenting on the issue, London, Paris, and Berlin said it would let Iran test a technology for developing its ballistic missile program.

### Army Fit to Combat Any Threat to Iran



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - A senior Iranian Army commander gave an assurance that the country's impeccable military preparedness would counter all threats. "The Islamic Republic of Iran's Army is currently at the pinnacle of preparedness and stands against any threat powerfully," Deputy Chief of the Iranian Army for Coordination Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said during a visit to the northern city of Sari. Highlighting the Army's readiness to combat and thwart any type of threat posed by the enemies, the general said the Army owes its perfect combat, defense and deterrent capabilities to its skilled personnel and the homegrown and modern equipment. The Army is tasked with safeguarding Iran's territorial integrity and independence, he stated. In a meeting with a group of top military commanders in April 2023, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei called on the Iranian Armed Forces to keep enhancing their preparedness in all areas and do not cease making progress because the threats of the enemies will never fade away. Ayatollah Khamenei, the commander-in-chief of the Iranian Armed Forces, stressed that military preparedness will act as deterrence against the enemies, calling for vigilance in the face of the elements masterminding plots.

# IRAN NEWS



## Tehran, Minsk Holding Talks on Boosting Bilateral Trade

TEHRAN (MNA) – The commercial attaché of the Iranian Embassy in Belarus said negotiations are underway between officials of the two countries to increase the volume of the mutual trade. Seyhoun said that given the agreements made following the visit of Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber to Belarus and in line with conducting trade negotiations for the import of potash into the country from Belarus, a joint meeting was held with the participation of the representatives of the Belarusian Potash Company (BPC). During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views regarding the new opportunities for cooperation, the optimal use of Iranian logistics advantages, and also increase of the volume of bilateral trade, he stated. At the invitation of the CEO of the Belarusian Potash Company, the Iranian negotiating team visited the mine and potash fertilizer processing plant in the city of Salihorsk in Belarus, he noted. Earlier, Minsk and Tehran agreed on the supplies of 400,000 tons of Belarusian potash fertilizers to Iran, Mehr news agency reported. Back in October, Head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) Mahdi Zeyghami pointed to the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Tehran and Minsk, saying that the agreement will lay the ground for increasing the volume of trade between Iran and Belarus as well as other Eurasian countries. He referred to the development of joint cooperation with Belarus in the fields of mineral, mining equipment and machinery, and tractor manufacturing and revealed that Iran enjoys high capacities to export technical and engineering services and medical equipment to Belarus.

## Iranian Envoy Resumes Mission in Pakistan



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's ambassador to Islamabad, Reza Amiri Moqadam, returned to his diplomatic mission on Friday after the two neighbors resolved a squabble over recent reciprocal attacks on the border areas. The Iranian ambassador has resumed his mission in Islamabad with the message of "friendship and fraternity" between the two states. After receiving a welcome from the Pakistani Foreign Ministry's officials on Friday, Amiri Moqadam said, "The relations between Iran and Pakistan are age-old and historic. The two countries have always had close cooperation and convergence in the bilateral, regional and international areas." Commenting on Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian's upcoming visit to Pakistan, the ambassador said the two neighbors are engaged in high-level interaction. "The promotion of economic and political cooperation between Iran and Pakistan could strengthen border security as well," he noted. The foreign ministries of Iran and Pakistan issued a joint statement on January 22, signaling thaw in the recently strained relations between the two Muslim neighbors. The Iranian foreign minister is scheduled to travel to Pakistan on January 29 at the invitation of caretaker Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan Jalil Abbas Jilani.



## Iran, Uzbekistan Discuss Launching PTA to Boost Bilateral Trade

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Officials from Iran and Uzbekistan emphasized launching a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) to spur bilateral trade and economic activities. The launch of a PTA between the two countries was discussed by the officials of the two countries following a visit by an Iranian trade-economic delegation to Uzbekistan, Mehr news agency reported. In addition, the trade officials of the two countries discussed joint production and investment. Prior to a visit by Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Abbas Aliabadi to Uzbekistan, the Iranian trade delegation traveled to the Central Asian country and negotiated with Uzbek officials on the expansion of trade and industrial relations. During this visit, four committees in the fields of mine, automotive, trade-industry and services held talks and agreements were reached on

joint production and investment. The Iranian trade delegation also held expert-level meetings with the Chamber of Commerce, textile and medical equipment unions of Uzbekistan in line with expanding trade relations between the two countries. The director general of the Russia and Caucasus Department of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) pointed to the visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Uzbekistan in November to participate in an ECO Summit and his meeting with the president of Uzbekistan and said the minister of industry also traveled to this country at the head of a high-ranking trade and economic delegation to develop the trade and economic relations. During this visit, the issue of the launch of a PTA was raised, details of which were put on the agenda of trade officials of the two countries.

## Trade Between Iran, EU States Exceeds €4.2b in 11 Months



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The value of trade between Iran and the European Union member states reached €4.214 billion in the first 11 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 12 percent in the said 11 months in comparison to the previous year's same period when the figure stood at €4.793 billion. As reported, the EU's exports to Iran from January to November 2023 stood at €3.484 billion, registering a decrease of eight percent compared to the same period of 2022 when the EU exports to Iran were reported to be €4.813 billion. The European Union's imports from Iran also reached €730 million in the first 11 months of 2023 with a 25 percent decrease compared to the same period in 2022. EU imported €980 million of goods from Iran in January-November 2022. The Eurostat's data show that Iran's exports to the union however increased by 24 percent in November 2023 compared to the same month in 2022.

## Iran-China Trade Reaches \$14.6b in 2023

TEHRAN (dispatches) - The value of trade between Iran and China in 2023 exceeded \$14.6 billion, registering a 6.2 percent decline compared to 2022, according to China's Customs data. Based on the mentioned data, the two countries exchanged \$14.650 billion worth of products in 2023, while the value of trade between the two countries stood at \$15.5 billion in 2022. Iran's exports to China in December 2023 registered a 30-percent growth compared to the same period a year earlier. China exported \$10.70 billion worth of products to Iran from January to December 2023, indicating an 8.6 percent growth. According to the Chinese customs data, The Asian country exported \$9.270 billion worth of products to Iran from January to December 2022. China's import of products from Iran fell from \$6.230 billion in 2022 to \$4.580 billion in 2023, showing a 27 percent decline. The balance of trade exchanges between the two countries reached about \$5.5 billion in 2023 in favor of China. The

value of the trade between Iran and China in December 2023 hit \$1.251 billion, showing a four percent growth compared to the previous year's corresponding period. 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.



## Iran Exports \$4b Technical-Engineering Services to Iraq



TEHRAN (MNA) – The director general of the West Asia Department of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) said Iran's exports of technical and engineering services to Iraq has reached \$4 billion. Iran's export of technical and engineering services to the Iraqi market has significantly increased since 2012, the official stated. He added that Iran has exported about \$4 billion worth of technical and engineering services to Iraq in five years, from 2012 to 2017. Despite some problems facing Iranian technical and engineering services companies in Iraq, about 88 projects, valued at \$4 billion, have been put into operation by 41 companies in this country, the official went on to say. He also said that Iran's export of non-oil products to this Arab country is on an upward trajectory, YJC reported. He put the annual export value of gas and non-oil goods to neighboring Iraq at about \$10 billion and added that Iran's technical and engineering services exported to Iraq have the highest quality compared to the other countries.



## Iran Accounts for Over 58% of West Asia's Steel Output in 2023

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran produced 31.1 million tons of crude steel in 2023 to account for 58.4 percent of West Asia's total production in the mentioned year, according to the latest report released by the World Steel Association (WSA). The West Asian nations reviewed in the WSA report, including Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, managed to produce 53.2 million tons of steel in 2023. The Islamic Republic's steel production increased by 1.8 percent in 2023 as compared to the previous year, when the production stood at 30.6 million tons, based on the WSA data. West Asia's total crude steel output increased by 1.3 percent in the mentioned year as compared to 2022. Based on the WSA data, Iran maintained its place as the world's 10th largest steel producer in 2023. According to the WSA report, the world's steel producers managed to produce more than 1.888 billion tons of steel in 2023, which is a very slight decrease compared to 2022, and as a result, the World Steel Association has declared the percentage of change to be zero. China with a production of 1.019 billion tons, India with a production of 140.2 million tons, and Japan with a production of 87 million tons were the top three steel-producing countries in the world in 2023. The Iranian Steel industry has been constantly developing over the past years against all the pressures and obstacles created by outside forces like the U.S. sanctions and the coronavirus outbreak that has severely affected the performance of the world's top producers. The country is expected to climb to seventh place among the world's top steel producers by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025).

### Argentina's Milei to Visit Israel, Denounces Hamas

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentina's new President Javier Milei, who has recently embraced Orthodox Judaism, said he would visit Israel as he condemned Hamas' actions in an address to the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. "In the coming weeks, I will be traveling to the Holy Land," Milei said in a speech at the Holocaust Museum in Argentina's capital, evoking a "new chapter in the brotherhood of our two nations." He condemned as "atrocious and unforgivable," the October 7 attack by Islam group Hamas on Israel which resulted in the deaths of some 1,140 people, most of them civilians according to an AFP tally based on official figures. Israel has vowed to crush the militant group and launched a military offensive that the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza says has killed at least 26,083 people, about 70 percent of them women and children. Milei was speaking on the eve of International Holocaust Memorial Day, and on the same day the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that Israel must prevent genocide in its retaliatory war with Hamas and allow aid into Gaza.



### Trump Ordered to Pay \$83m in Damages for Defaming E. Jean Carroll



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donald Trump was ordered by a federal jury to pay \$83.3 million in damages to E. Jean Carroll, who accused the former US president of destroying her reputation as a trustworthy journalist by denying he raped her nearly three decades ago. The seven-man, two-woman jury needed less than three hours to reach the verdict. The payout far exceeded the minimum \$10 million that Carroll had been seeking. The jury awarded her \$18.3 million in compensatory damages and \$65 million in punitive damages. Carroll, 80, sued Trump in November 2019 over his denials five months earlier that he had raped her in the mid-1990s in a Bergdorf Goodman department store dressing room in Manhattan. Trump, 77, claimed that he had never heard of Carroll, and that she made up her story to boost sales of her memoir. His lawyers said Carroll was hungry for fame and enjoyed the attention from supporters for speaking out against her nemesis. Another jury last May ordered Trump to pay Carroll \$5 million over a similar October 2022 denial, finding that he had defamed and sexually abused Carroll. Trump is appealing that decision. In the current trial, Carroll said Trump "shattered" her reputation as a respected journalist who told the truth. She also said punitive damages were appropriate, in part to keep Trump from repeating his denials. US District Judge Lewis Kaplan, who oversaw both trials, said the earlier verdict was binding for the second trial, meaning the only issue for jurors was how much Trump should pay. Trump, a Republican, has used Carroll's case and his other legal travails to bolster his campaign to retake the White House in the November election in a likely showdown against Democrat Joe Biden, who beat him in 2020. Trump faces 91 felony counts in four criminal indictments, including two cases accusing him of trying to illegally overturn his 2020 election loss. He has pleaded not guilty in all of the cases, and has portrayed himself as the victim of politically motivated lies and an out-of-control judicial system. During the Carroll trial, Trump was heard muttering in court that the case was a "con job" and "witch hunt" and that he still did not know who Carroll was, prompting the judge to twice admonish him to keep quiet. Trump stalked out of the courtroom during the closing argument on Friday by Carroll's lawyer, Roberta Kaplan, but returned for his own lawyer's argument.

# WHO Rejects Israel's Claim of Collusion With Hamas



GENEVA (Dispatches) - The World Health Organization denied Israel's charges it had colluded with Hamas by ignoring Israeli evidence of the group's "military use" of hospitals in the Gaza Strip. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also said that such accusations could endanger the UN health agency's staff on the ground. He was responding to claims made Thursday by Israeli ambassador Meirav Eilon Shahar at a meeting of the WHO's board. "WHO refutes Israel's accusation at the executive board meeting yesterday that WHO is in 'collusion' with Hamas and is 'turning a blind eye' to the suffering of hostages being held in Gaza," Tedros said on X. "Such false claims are harmful and can endanger our staff who are risking their lives to serve the vulnerable." He insisted that "WHO is impartial and is working for the health and well-being of all people". Israel charges that Hamas is embedding itself in hospitals in the Gaza Strip and has been using civilians as human shields in the Palestinian territory. In "every single hospital that the IDF searched in Gaza, it found evidence of Hamas' military use," Eilon Shahar said Thursday. "These are undeniable facts that WHO chooses to ignore time and time again. This is not incompetence; it is collusion." And following Tedros' comment, she doubled down: "There is clear evidence of the use of hospitals by Hamas," Eilon Shahar wrote on X Friday evening. There was also evidence, she said, of "the fact that hostages were taken to medical institutions after the brutal

massacre of October 7th". "This includes first hand accounts and CCTV footage. These are not 'false claims'. They are facts. Yet you have said nothing." The Israeli ambassador warned WHO that "by not condemning Hamas or taking any action to prevent them embedding themselves in hospitals and civilian areas, you are putting those who you are supposed to protect in harms way". "They deserve better." War erupted on October 7 when Hamas and other militants from Gaza launched unprecedented attacks on Israel which claimed about 1,140 lives, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures. On Thursday, Tedros was moved to tears as he addressed the WHO's executive board. The fact that 70 percent of the fatalities in the Gaza Strip have been women and children should be motive enough to bring about a "long overdue" ceasefire, he said. "If we look for a solution it's always possible," he added, after pausing to compose himself. "It's only the will that's required." Tedros occasionally becomes emotional when speaking about the impact of war on children, citing his own early years in Ethiopia. "I am a true believer because of my own experience that war doesn't bring solutions except more war, more hatred, more agony, more destruction," he said Thursday, wiping his eyes. "I'm struggling to speak because... the situation is beyond words."

### North Korea Signals Confrontation, No Signs of War Preparation



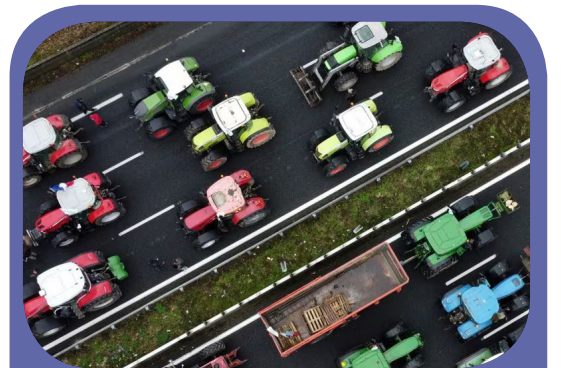
SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea is stepping up confrontation with the United States and its allies, but officials in Washington and Seoul say they have spotted no signs Pyongyang intends to take imminent military action. Kim Jong Un's government is likely to continue or even increase provocative steps, officials and analysts say, after it made strides in ballistic missile development, bolstered cooperation with Russia and scrapped its decades-long goal of peacefully reuniting with South Korea. Analysts at a prominent think tank said in a report this month that Kim "has made a strategic decision to go to war", just as his grandfather did in 1950, taking advantage of a U.S. distracted by wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, and doubts caused by its withdrawal from Afghanistan. But U.S. and South Korean officials do not sense a looming war. "While we are not seeing indications of a direct military threat at this time, we continue to monitor for the risk of (North Korea) military action against (South Korea) and Japan," a U.S. official said. South Korean Defence Minister Shin Won-sik this month rejected as an "excessive exaggeration" claims by some U.S. experts that the likelihood of war on the Korean Peninsula was the highest since the Korean War, which ended in an armistice in 1953 - leaving the North and South still technically at war. Such arguments play into the hands of North Korea's psychological warfare, Shin told a radio station. Japan is closely following Pyongyang's rhetoric and actions, a foreign ministry spokesperson said, declining to specify whether Tokyo believed North Korea was planning some kind of military action. "I can rest pretty damn assured we're not looking at war," said Sydney Seiler, who retired as national intelligence officer for North Korea at the U.S. National Intelligence Council last year. "North Korea just is not ready for it. It's not postured for it." Adding uncertainty to the outlook, Donald Trump is polling strongly against U.S. President Joe Biden ahead of a likely rematch in November's election. As president, Trump threatened to withdraw U.S. troops from South Korea and engaged in both fiery brinkmanship and unprecedented diplomacy with Kim, at one point saying "we fell in love" after the two exchanged letters.

## India Fetes France's Macron at Annual Military Parade



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - President Emmanuel Macron was guest of honor for India's pomp-filled annual military parade, in a state visit aimed at bolstering France's strategic ties with the world's fifth-largest economy. The annual Republic Day event in the heart of New Delhi is a highly choreographed spectacle featuring tank columns, fighter jet fly-pasts, acrobatic motorbike stunts and mounted camel units. This year it coincides with a two-day diplomatic tour that reflects a growing partnership between India and France, after Macron hosted Prime Minister Narendra Modi at last year's Bastille Day celebrations in Paris. Macron has pushed for greater French involvement in the Asia-Pacific at a time when Washington and its Western allies are courting India as a military and economic counterweight to China. Before his arrival in India, Macron's office said India was "a key partner in contributing to international peace and security". New Delhi's top foreign ministry bureaucrat Vinay Kwatra told reporters. Kwatra said both countries were exploring joint satellite launches. He also indicated that no deal had been reached on additional Rafale jet purchases by the Indian navy, nor had there been movement on a long-standing cooperation agreement on civil nuclear energy production in India. A contingent of French soldiers including a Foreign Legion marching band joined the parade, which marks the adoption of France's constitution

in 1950. Indian troops had marched down the Champs-Élysées under Modi's watch during last year's Bastille Day parade. Macron was welcomed in India on Thursday with a parade of elephants and a banquet hosted by Modi - who greeted the French leader with his customary bear hug - at an ornate hilltop maharaja's palace in the city of Jaipur. India's economy and its huge market have helped the Modi government sidestep questions around its human rights record at home, differences over the war in Ukraine and its traditional ties with Russia. Modi's government has been accused of stifling independent media, with India falling 21 places to 161 out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index since Modi took office a decade ago. French journalist Vanessa Dougnac was told this month that she is facing expulsion after more than two decades in India for what authorities have termed "malicious and critical" reporting. "The matter is being dealt with by the relevant department," Kwatra said. "This has been brought to our attention by the French side both prior (to) and during the visit." The visit also comes days after Modi opened a Hindu temple, built on grounds where a mosque stood for centuries before it was torn down in 1992 by Hindu zealots incited by members of his party. Modi said the temple heralded a "new era" for India after a ceremony that embodied the triumph of his muscular Hindu nationalist politics, galvanising loyalists ahead of elections this year. He gifted Macron a miniature replica of the temple as the pair toured Jaipur together on Thursday evening. A Macron adviser signalled ahead of the visit that rights issues would be discussed, adding that there were "no taboo subjects". "But the goal is to discuss them with respect and with the aim of achieving concrete results," they added.



### France Drops Plan to Decrease Farmers' Diesel Discount

MONTAIGU-DE-SALES (Dispatches) - The French government dropped plans to gradually reduce state subsidies on agricultural diesel but that seems not enough for angry farmers surrounding Paris and still threatening to converge on the capital in their tractors. After two weeks of protests that have spread across France, with irate farmers blocking a major highway out of Paris, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal announced a series of measures to ease financial and administrative pressure on farmers. "We have decided to pursue our movement. The prime minister had not responded to all of our questions," Amaud Rousseau, head of FNSEA, France's biggest farming union, told French TV station TF1. Speaking earlier in a mountain village farm near the Spanish border, with his notes on a bale of hay, Attal said: "We will put agriculture above everything else." He said a plan to phase out state support on diesel would be scrapped, red tape simplified and an appeal lodged with the European Union for a waiver on bloc-wide rules on fallow land. "We will stop this Kafka-esque system," said Attal, 34, France's new prime minister, in response to the first big crisis of his premiership. "We will stop this planned trajectory of increasing tax on non-road diesel fuel." Attal also announced a raft of other steps designed to quell the unrest that has seen farmers spray manure over a public building and supermarket, dump hay bales in highways and empty the contents of trucks carrying fresh produce from neighboring countries. France would remain opposed to signing the Mercosur free-trade deal, which farmers say will flood the country with cheaper Latin American meat and produce, he said. France will also push to ease European Union rules forcing farmers to leave some of their land fallow.

# Putin Says Ukraine Shot Down Plane, Deliberately Or in Error

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that a Russian military plane that crashed near the border with Ukraine was shot down by Ukrainian air defenses, whether on purpose or by mistake. Moscow accuses Kyiv of downing the Ilyushin Il-76 plane in Russia's Belgorod region on Wednesday and killing 74 people on board, including 65 captured Ukrainian soldiers en route to be swapped for Russian prisoners of war. It has not presented evidence. Ukraine has neither confirmed nor denied that it shot down the plane and has challenged Moscow's account of who was on board and what happened. "I don't know if they did it on purpose or by mistake, but it is obvious that they did it," Putin said in televised comments, his first on the crash. "In any case, what happened is a crime. Either through negligence or on purpose, but in any case it is a crime." Ukraine disputes Russia's assertion that it was warned in advance that a plane carrying Ukrainian POWs would be flying over Russia's southwestern Belgorod region at that time. It has also said there were discrepancies in a list published by Russian media of the 65 Ukrainians alleged to have been on the aircraft. Russia's Investigative Committee, the country's top investigative body, posted online a video it said showed Ukrainian soldiers preparing to board the Il-76 aircraft. The video has no sound and is accompanied by a single line of explanation that it depicts Ukrainian servicemen boarding the military transport. It gave no location. Ukrainian commentators immediately cast doubt on the video. In his remarks, Putin said the plane could not have been brought down by Russian "friendly fire" as its air defense systems have safeguards to prevent them attacking their own planes. "There are 'friend or foe' systems there, and no matter how much the operator presses the button, our air defense systems would not work," he said. Putin said the missiles fired were mostly likely American or French, but this would be established in two to three days. An adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Putin's comments amounted to a

"classic disinformation" campaign. Mykhail Podolyak said they were aimed at taking away Kyiv's right to secure air defense missiles from its partners. The Investigative Committee earlier reported that Ukrainian identity documents and tattooed body parts had been recovered from the site of the crash. It said body parts were being collected and removed for genetic testing, and some of them bore distinctive tattoos like those worn by captured Ukrainians that Russia had interrogated. It said the evidence collected also included "documents of Ukrainian servicemen who died in the disaster" and documents from the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia. Russia has sole access to the crash site. Reuters could not independently verify its account of what happened and what evidence had been recovered. On Thursday the Investigative Committee said preliminary findings showed the plane was struck by a surface-to-air missile fired from Ukraine. Kyrylo Budanov, head of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry's Intelligence Directorate, told an official group dealing with the treatment of Ukrainian POWs that Kyiv had no "credible and comprehensive information" about who might have been on board the aircraft. "Currently, there is no information indicating that such a number of people could have been on that plane," Budanov was quoted as saying on the group's Facebook page. Ukraine has rejected a Russian assertion that it was forewarned that a plane carrying Ukrainian POWs would be flying over Belgorod region at that time. It has also pointed to discrepancies on a purported list of the names of 65 Ukrainians published by Russian media, saying some of these were soldiers who had returned in a previous swap. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said he was not aware any official list had been published. He told reporters he had no information on what would happen to the body remains. Russia state media said the black box flight recorders from the plane had been delivered to a defence ministry laboratory in Moscow and investigators were already working on them.



## Sinner Dethrones Djokovic to Reach Australian Open Final



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Jannik Sinner downed defending champion Novak Djokovic 6-1 6-2 6-7(6) 6-3 at the Australian Open to hand the top seed a first defeat at his Melbourne Park fortress in six years and power into his maiden Grand Slam final. Fourth seed Sinner stunned Djokovic twice in three matches at the end of last season and he made a rollicking start on Rod Laver Arena by targeting his 36-year-old opponent's shaky serve and error-prone backhand to comfortably win the opening set. Djokovic had not lost at his favourite stomping ground since the 2018 edition when he crashed to South Korean Chung Hyeon and there were worrying signs for the 10-times Australian Open champion as the 22-year-old Sinner roared through the next set with a double break. The Sinner tsunami showed no signs of subsiding in the third set but Djokovic raised his game to stay firm until the tiebreak where the Italian squandered a match point at 6-5 by hitting a forehand into the net to give his opponent a lifeline. Djokovic claimed the next three points to pull a setback to draw loud cheers, but Sinner broke for a 3-1 lead in the fourth set and ran away with the match to snap the Serb's 33-match winning run at Melbourne Park and end his quest for a record 25th major. Meanwhile Daniil Medvedev battled into a third Australian Open final with a come-from-behind five-set defeat of Alexander Zverev to set up a title match against Sinner. The never-say-die Russian third seed was in a precarious position on Rod Laver Arena but fought back to win 5-7, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 after four hours 18 minutes. Ice-cool Italian Sinner will be awaiting him in Sunday's title match after stunning defending champion Novak Djokovic in the other semi-final. Medvedev has been to the final twice before, losing to Djokovic in 2021 and Rafael Nadal a year later. It has been a long and arduous road to get back there, with the 27-year-old surviving

two four-set battles and a pair of five-set matches before meeting Zverev. But he proved once again to have the stamina, grinding down the sixth seed to keep alive his quest to collect a second Grand Slam title after winning the 2021 US Open. He admitted he was "a little bit lost" in the opening two sets. "But during the third set I just kept saying to myself that if I lose this match I just want to be proud of myself," said the 27-year-old, who is into his sixth final at a major. "I want to fight until the end, fight for every point. And I managed to win and I'm very proud." Both men opened with serves to love, but Medvedev then stuttered with two double faults, helping the German to his first break. He collected another to race 4-1 clear with the Russian racking up too many unforced errors. But Medvedev gradually began lifting his intensity and scored a double break to level at 5-5 as the match turned into a baseline slugfest. A third break for Zverev allowed him the chance to serve for the set a second time and he came through a titanic tussle that included one epic rally of 51 shots and another of 40. He drew first blood again in set two, converting a fourth break point in the fifth game. The setback dented Medvedev's resolve, with the German increasingly dictating the rallies, pushing him from corner to corner to consolidate and bank a two-set lead. Medvedev stepped in slightly from his deep baseline position in the third set and it altered the dynamic, with a more aggressive net game pushing the set to a tiebreak that he won. The fourth set went the way of the third, with nothing between the players until another tiebreak, when Zverev buckled on serve when two points away from the final. An increasingly frustrated Zverev saved two break points in the fifth game of the deciding set before surrendering on a third with a netted forehand. It put the Russian 3-2 ahead and he consolidated on serve, with no way back for Zverev.

## Ten Hag warns FFP Will Stop Man Utd Signing New Striker



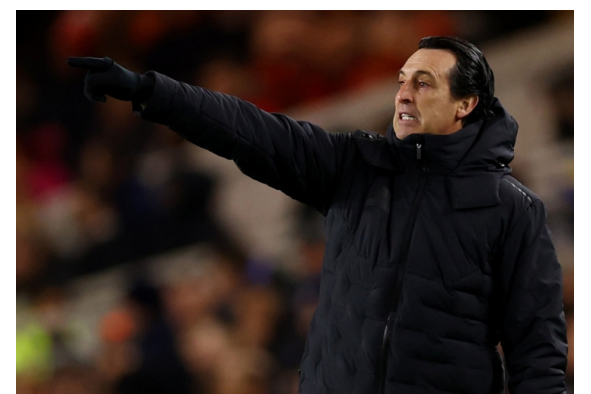
LONDON (Dispatches) - Erik ten Hag said Friday financial fair play (FFP) regulations will prevent Manchester United signing a new striker during the January transfer window to plug the gap left by Anthony Martial's extended absence. Martial has been ruled out until April after undergoing surgery on a groin injury but United, in common with several leading English clubs, have appeared more interested in reducing rather than bolstering their squad as they come to terms with the impact of the Premier League's profit and sustainability rules. "I looked but there is no space," said United manager Ten Hag. "No space on FFP to do something about this lack of quantity in the striker position." Of course, we have (Marcus) Rashford who can play as a striker, I think also we have some other alternatives, creative. "It's clear now Anthony is out for a couple of months. It's a gap in our squad. Clear." Ten Hag was speaking to the media for the first time since United poached Omar Berrada from local rivals Manchester City as their new chief executive. Berrada's arrival at Old Trafford is one of the first major appointments made by United since British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe took a 25 percent stake in the club for \$1.3 billion. United have been without a permanent chief executive since Richard Arnold left at the end of last year. "It gives spirit in this whole club," said Ten Hag of Berrada's move. "Everyone notices that this club is going into a period of changes but it's because we want to achieve high targets, so standards have to change." The Dutchman added: "We understand we have to change, and we started that process last season with the dressing room." But also many departments so I am very happy that I get support. "United's short-term focus is on their FA Cup tie away to fourth-tier Newport on Sunday, with the knockout trophy representing their last remaining realistic hope of silverware this season. The match is set to mark the long-awaited United debut of pre-season signing Altay Bayindir. "Yeah, he will be in the goal," Ten Hag said of the former Fenerbahce goalkeeper. "He played in a big club in Turkey under big pressure, so he knows how to deal with it." "We were all very convinced when we brought him into this club... We're looking forward to Sunday. Altay, very motivated of course and he can't wait for this moment."

## Klopp to Take Sabbatical, Rules Out Ever Managing Another English Club

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp plans to take a break from football for a year once his time in charge at Anfield finishes at the end of the season. Klopp said he lacked the energy to go on as he made a shock announcement on Friday that he will step down in May. The 56-year-old German has previously been linked with taking over his country's national team. But Klopp, who has won the Champions League and Premier League among seven trophies since taking over at Liverpool in 2015, said his immediate plan was for a break and that he would never manage another English club. "Whatever will happen in the future I don't know now but no club, no country for the next year. No other English club ever, I can promise that," said Klopp at a press conference. A journeyman defender who spent the vast majority of his playing career at Mainz, Klopp has become one of Europe's leading coaches for the past two decades. He enjoyed success in seven-year spells in charge of Mainz and Borussia Dortmund, where he won two Bundesliga titles, before joining a crisis-hit Liverpool in 2015. Over the past nine years, he has transformed the club's fortunes on and off the field with the money from repeated success in the Champions League enabling Liverpool to redevelop two stands at Anfield and build a new training ground. "With all the responsibility you have in this job you have to be absolutely on the top of your game and I am doing this for 24 years now," added Klopp. "When you had the career I have it's pretty much impossible to start where I start and arrive in Liverpool. But if it becomes possible it is because you invest everything you have and that is what I did. "I realized my resources are not endless and I preferred to pack absolutely everything into this season then have a break or have to stop. We are not young rabbits anymore and we don't jump as high as we did." Klopp has the chance to go out on a high with Liverpool five points clear at the top of the Premier League and in the running for three other trophies. Thanks to a series of summer signings, the Reds have bounced back to form this season after a turbulent 2022/23 campaign and Klopp said he was leaving with a squad in place that would succeed even without him. "This team is set up for the future... when I said Liverpool 2.0 that didn't include me obviously for the next 10 years, but the team is there, the basis is there. "Whoever comes in, you cannot ever guarantee to win trophies, but has a really good chance to play really good football."



## Ake Strikes Late as Man City Oust Spurs From FA Cup



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City moved into the FA Cup fifth round in dramatic fashion as Nathan Ake's controversial late goal clinched the holders' 1-0 win against Tottenham. As the football world digested the stunning news that Jurgen Klopp will step down as Liverpool boss at the end of this season, the club who might benefit most from his exit finally ended their wait for a first victory at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. City had lost all five of their previous visits to Tottenham's plush arena without scoring a goal since the stadium opened in April 2019. But Dutch defender Ake ensured City would leave north London on a high at last when he stabbed home with just two minutes left in the fourth round clash. "Today we performed incredibly well. Everything pleased me, from minute one to the end." City boss Pep Guardiola said. Guardiola's side have won their last seven games in all competitions to maintain their renaissance after a pre-Christmas wobble. They are five points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool but hold a game in hand and will hope to capitalise on any uncertainty created by Klopp's bombshell announcement. "He's been my biggest rival so I think he will be missed. I'm a little bit pleased because without him I will sleep a little bit better the night before we play against Liverpool," Guardiola said. Klopp and Guardiola have fought an intense rivalry during their time in England, with the City boss largely coming out on top in the silverware stakes. City won all three major prizes last season and remain firmly in the hunt to retain the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup. With star striker Erling Haaland still sidelined by injury, Guardiola's men were initially profligate in north London. Oscar Bobb tied up Phil Foden late in the first half but his strike flashed wide. Julian Alvarez looked certain to score when he latched on Bobb's superb pass in the Tottenham area, but Micky van de Ven threw his body in the way to deflect the shot wide. Guardiola sent on Kevin De Bruyne and Jeremy Doku for the last 25 minutes as the Belgian duo step up their returns from injury. Bernardo Silva's shot was repelled by Guglielmo Vicario before De Bruyne dragged his effort wide after Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg gave the ball away.

## Dazzling Doncic Scores 73 as Mavs Down Hawks

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Luka Doncic matched the fourth-highest scoring performance in NBA history, pouring in 73 points to lead the Dallas Mavericks to a 148-143 victory over the Atlanta Hawks. A masterful individual performance saw the Slovenian star set a Mavs record with 41 first-half points, with the scorching run continuing in the second half as Dallas kept the determined Hawks at bay. Doncic added 10 rebounds and seven assists. He connected on 25 of 33 shots from the floor - including eight three-pointers - and made 15 of his 16 free throws. Doncic ranked the performance "probably at the top" in his career, but with the Mavs coming in on a three-game losing streak he was just focused on getting a victory. "We've been struggling lately," he said. "Mindset was get a win. I was just going, you know, whatever the defense give me." Doncic added. "In the second half they doubled me all the time so I tried to make some plays." His sensational performance spoiled the return of Trae Young, who led the Hawks with 30 points after missing two games in concussion protocol. Doncic's franchise-record effort pushed him into elite NBA territory. Only Wilt Chamberlain and Kobe Bryant have scored more points in a game, Chamberlain with the league record 100 in 1962 and Bryant with 81 in 2006. Chamberlain also owns a 78-point performance and two of 73 - a number also reached by David Thompson and, now, Doncic. Mavs coach Jason Kidd said it was something "extra special" from a player who comes up special on a regular basis. "What he does on the court is different than anybody else," Kidd said, adding that Doncic's ability to keep



feeding his teammates amid his own red-hot scoring made the victory possible. "His ability to make shots, create shots, find open guys - he did that at a high level tonight," Kidd said, adding he never feared Doncic's hot hand would pull the Mavs out of their game plan. "He is the game plan," Kidd said. The Hawks had pulled within three points with less than two minutes to play, but Doncic drove for a layup, drew a foul and converted the free throw to help push the lead back to seven with 58 seconds left. A Young basket cut the deficit to three with 10 seconds to play, but Tim Hardaway Jr. made a pair of free throws to seal it for the Mavs, who were without injured Kyrie Irving.

Doncic's 25 baskets were a career high and he crushed his own franchise record of 60 points, set against the New York Knicks on December 27, 2022. Doncic's effort came less than a week after Joel Embiid poured in 70 in a Philadelphia 76ers win over San Antonio - and it wasn't the only eye-popping outburst of the night. Phoenix guard Devin Booker's 62-point performance, however, came in a losing effort as the Indiana Pacers triumphed 133-131 to halt the Suns' seven-game winning streak. They led by as many as 17 but the Pacers had tied it up with less than a minute to play and Obi Toppin's putback basket off a Pascal Siakam miss sealed the victory as Booker couldn't get his three-pointer to fall as time expired. It was Booker's second game this season of 50 or more points after a 52-point showing against New Orleans earlier this month. He had a career-high 70 against Boston in 2017. Siakam scored 31 points, leading six Pacers players in double figures as Indiana notched a second straight win. Elsewhere, Jaren Jackson scored 30 points and grabbed eight rebounds for the Memphis Grizzlies, who saw a double-digit lead evaporate but held on for a 107-106 victory over the Orlando Magic. Donovan Mitchell scored 32 points to propel the Cleveland Cavaliers to a 112-100 victory over the Bucks in Milwaukee. Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 22 points, pulled down 11 rebounds and handed out nine assists - coming up just shy of a third straight triple-double. Damian Lillard added another 22 points for Milwaukee, who confirmed that Doc Rivers - who guided Boston to the 2008 NBA title - would take over as head coach after the abrupt sacking of Adrian Griffin. Assistant Joe Prunty had stood in as interim coach for two games, the first a win over Cleveland that ended the Cavs' eight-game winning streak on Wednesday.