

Some 800,000 Iranians Have Been Forced to Migrate From Iran's Southern and Central Provinces to the Country's Northern Provinces Over the Past Two Years Because of Issues Related to Climate Change

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian Says That the United States Should Concentrate Its Efforts for Ending the Current Crisis in the West Asia Region on Political Solutions Rather Than Seeking an Escalation in Military Confrontation

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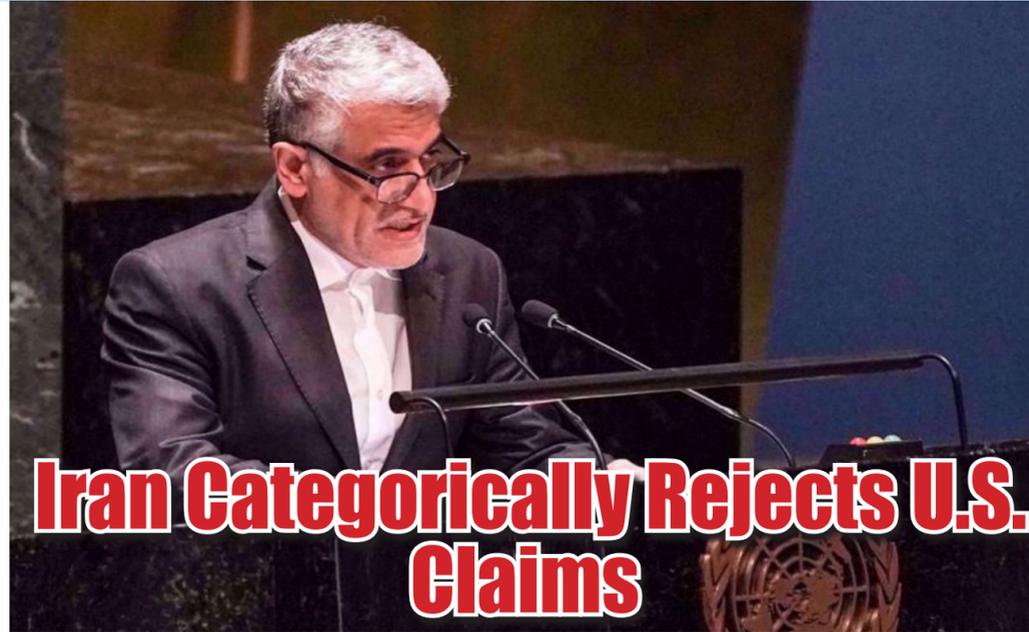


TEHRAN – On Tuesday morning, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei received a group of manufacturer and economic activists. Earlier on Monday, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei visited an exhibition showcasing domestic capabilities to produce homegrown products. Addressing the economic activists and manufacturers and in his speech, the Leader pointed to his visit to the exhibition on Monday and hailed it as an encouraging exhibition and added that one can call the exhibition as sample of Iran's scientific and technology power. He noted that Iran's private sector enterprises have grown considerably and it bespeaks of capability and power of this sector in the country. The Leader also said that the most important task of the government is to improve the business climate and removing hurdles in way of businesses. He reiterated that government should monitor the business situation but it should not interfere in it.

First BRICS Meeting With Official Iran Presence Kicks Off



TEHRAN (MNA) – The first BRICS meeting with the official presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran kicked off on Tuesday morning in Moscow, the capital of Russia. The deputy foreign ministers of the bloc's 10 member countries are participating in the event. For the first time, the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Ethiopia, along with Russia, China, Brazil, India, and South Africa are scheduled to exchange views on BRICS plans in 2024 for three days. The BRICS group of emerging economies has welcomed 2024 by officially adding five developing nations. Specifically, the bloc introduced Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia to kick off the New Year. Last year, the BRICS economic alliance has flourished. In what was undoubtedly a year of growth, the bloc fast-tracked a host of initiatives. Those range from its de-dollarization plans to its first-ever expansion bid. The latter of which is finally set to be made official. Indeed, the BRICS alliance has welcomed 2024 by officially adding five expansion nations to its ranks. Specifically, it introduced Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia to be the first countries to constitute expansion since South Africa was added more than a decade ago. The expansion is set to have massive geopolitical ramifications, as they could be hugely important to its multipolar goals.



Iran Categorically Rejects U.S. Claims

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations has categorically rejected accusations leveled by the United States about the country's involvement in anti-American operations in the West Asia region. Amir Saeid Iravani made the comments in a letter addressed to the UN Security Council's president on Monday. The letter came three days after his American counterpart, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, wrote a letter to the Council, alleging that "militia groups affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran's Armed Forces" were involved in "actions against US personnel and facilities in Iraq and Syria." Iravani asserted unequivocally that "there is no group affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran's Armed Forces, whether in Iraq, Syria, or elsewhere that operates directly or indirectly under the control of the Islamic Republic of Iran or acts on its behalf." "Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran is not responsible for the actions of any individual or group within the region," Iran's UN ambassador added. Over the past years, Iraq's resistance groups have been staging numerous strikes against military bases housing American occupation forces in Iraq and neighboring Syria. Referring to U.S. presence in those countries, Iran's ambassador said, "...the actions undertaken by the United States in Syria and Iraq are illegal and violate both international law and the UN Charter.... Consequently, the U.S. notification submitted to the Security Council in the aforementioned letter ... lacks a legal foundation and fails to legitimize such actions." Iravani's letter came after Iran's permanent mission to the UN reaffirmed in a late Sunday statement that the country has no links to attacks on US forces in the region. The mission's statement was published after a drone attack on a U.S. base located on Jordan's border with Syria killed three American servicemen. The statement said Iran had no link to the attack, adding that the incident was part of the "conflict between the army of the United States of America and resistance groups in the region, which reciprocate retaliatory attacks."

Regional Cooperation; Key to Afghanistan's Prosperity, Stability

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's presidential envoy for Afghanistan who simultaneously serves as Tehran's Ambassador to Kabul, said that neighboring and regional countries play the first role in Afghanistan after the occupation period and can lead Afghanistan to prosperity and stability. At the end of the regional contact group meeting in Kabul, in response to the question about the importance and message of this meeting which has been held by Iran's initiative, Iran's ambassador stated: "The presence of representatives of neighboring and regional countries in the Kabul meeting shows that these countries are willing to help the people of Afghanistan and they are determined to solve the challenges of this country." The Iranian ambassador to Afghanistan added: "Considering the geographical and cultural similarities between Afghanistan and the neighboring countries and the influence of these countries on the developments in Afghanistan, the neighboring countries can play an important role in helping to improve the political, security and economic situation of Afghanistan." Kazemi Qomi said: "The experience of about half a century of intervention and occupation, especially twenty years of American occupation, has only been a devastation for Afghanistan, and this country is facing many problems." The special envoy of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Afghanistan Affairs, stating that the security and stability of Afghanistan and the neighboring countries and the region are tied together, said: "The clear message of the Kabul meeting is that the neighboring countries played the first role in helping Afghanistan in the post-occupation and reconstruction period." Kazemi Qomi stated: "The message of the Kabul meeting initiated by Iran to the international community

is that neighboring and regional countries are at the forefront of helping Afghanistan and with the support of the international community, these countries can lead Afghanistan to prosperity and stability." He also said that the meetings of the regional contact group will continue at Iran's initiative regarding Afghanistan and said: "The conditions of regional cooperation regarding the realization of security and stability in Afghanistan must be realized and it will be implemented with the formation of a special committee for regional cooperation with the rulers of Afghanistan." The special envoy of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Afghanistan also declared the Persian language in Afghanistan and religious commonalities as important assets for strengthening and expanding regional cooperation. Earlier the Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan said discrimination-free governance and good neighborliness could help Afghanistan find its place at the regional and international level. Speaking at the Regional Contact Committee kicked off on Monday Kazemi Qomi said that governance without discrimination inside Afghanistan and peaceful coexistence with neighbors in the region are two essential factors in the progress of the region-oriented process, which will be welcomed by the region and beyond it. He said that the first fruit of the practice is that Afghanistan would find its place in the region and the world's relations. The Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan stressed a regional consensus to counter the roots of extremism in Afghanistan and the region. He stressed that the member states of the committee should reach a consensus on the longstanding threats in Afghanistan, mostly formed during the US invasion of Afghanistan, including human and drug trafficking and extremism.



Iran, Pakistan Vow to Jointly Fight Common Threat of Terrorism



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff Gen. Syed Asim Munir urge joint efforts, more coordination and intelligence sharing to fight terrorism as a common threat to both countries. In a meeting in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi on Monday, the Iranian foreign minister and the Pakistani Army chief discussed the latest developments pertaining to mutual relations, particularly promotion of security and border cooperation. They said Islamabad and Tehran are interrelated through close relations in historical, religious and cultural fields, and stressed the need to improve mutual ties and foster greater understanding of each other's concerns. Amir-Abdollahian and Munir once again expressed the two countries' firm determination to maintain close contact and block every sabotage act against the two nations. They said the fate of the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan are intertwined and reiterated both sides' commitment to promote peace, stability and welfare in common border areas. The Pakistani Army chief stressed the importance of maintaining lasting interaction to address security concerns. Munir said Iran and Pakistan need to respect each other's national sovereignty and territorial integrity as the most important factor connecting the two countries. During the meeting, the two sides also exchanged views about regional issues and the continuation of Israel's war crimes against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Heading a high-ranking political, military and security delegation, Amir-Abdollahian arrived in Islamabad early on Monday for a day-long visit to hold key talks on ways to improve relations. He held a meeting and attended a jointed press conference with his Pakistani counterpart Jalil Abbas Jilani in Islamabad earlier in the day.

Pakistan Thwarts Three Coordinated Terror Attacks in Border Province



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan says security forces prevented three "coordinated" attacks launched by terrorists in Mach town in southwestern Balochistan. Terrorists used rockets and sophisticated weapons to carry out the attacks on Monday which according to some reports killed at least one policeman and injured a truck driver. However, official reports did not confirm the casualties. Security forces immediately responded to the attack, with ensuing gun battle between terrorists and security forces continuing for several hours. Majeed Brigade of the Balochistan's Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the attacks. Balochistan's caretaker Minister for Information Jan Achakzai had earlier attributed the attacks to the terrorists affiliated with the Aslam Acho group. Achakzai said in a social media post that, "The terrorists have now retreated, and our security forces are currently in pursuit. We remain hopeful that all threats will be eliminated before dawn, by the grace of God." According to the police, at least fifteen rockets were fired from nearby mountains which exploded in different areas of Mach town. Terrorists were also reported to have attacked a camp of security forces near the central jail and also entered the Mach railway station. The Inspector General Prisons, Balochistan, Shuja Kasi confirmed that rockets hit the walls of the residential colony of the Mach jail.

IRAN NEWS



Envoy Urges Need for Increased Cooperation Between Iran and Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Saudi city of Jeddah has reiterated the need for developing bilateral relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia at regional and the Islamic world levels based on the potential of the two countries. Hassan Zamegar Abarghouie made the remarks in a meeting with the Governor of Madinah Province Salman bin Sultan Al Saud on Monday. Zamegar underlined in the meeting the need for Iran and Saudi Arabia for promoting economic relations, saying Iran is ready to develop trade ties with Saudi Arabia. He also touched upon the eagerness that exist among the Iranian people to perform hajj and umrah pilgrimage as well as visits to the holy shia shrines in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Sultan Al Saud said in the meeting that high-ranking Iranian and Saudi officials are inclined to expand relations between the two countries. He noted that Saudi Arabia will make efforts to provide all kinds of services to the pilgrims of Masjid al-Haram and those of the Holy Prophet's Shrine.

Iran Economy Can Grow by 2.5 Times in Medium Term



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Samad Hassanzadeh has said the potential capacity of Iran's economy can be developed up to 2.5 times the current capacity in the medium term, producing some \$1000 billion. He made the remarks addressing a ceremony in Tehran on Monday where the country's top entrepreneurs were honored. Hassanzadeh noted that political stability in the most destabilized region of the world, big domestic market, access to regional markets, huge oil and gas reserves, exceptional mining reserves, and educated workforce are among the country's potential for creating wealth and increasing welfare for the Iranian people. He believed that recreation of the economy based on the factors of a knowledge-based, creative and competitive economy is the most urgent requirement of the country. The Iran Chamber of Commerce president said that the government officials have to make use of Iran's political, geopolitical and even military potentials to increase the country's economic power.



Iran Offers Outstanding Services to Migrants

BUSHEHR (IRNA) - Chief of Mission of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the Islamic Republic of Iran has hailed the country for opening its borders to migrants and offering good services to them in various fields. Iran has not only opened its borders to migrants but it has also provided them with the opportunity to work and make investment, while offering them medical, health, and education services, Lalini Veerassamy said on Monday. She made the remarks at the opening ceremony of the first exhibition showcasing products made by foreign nationals across Iran. The exhibition, dubbed "Services, Growth and Prosperity" is taking place in the southern Iranian province of Bushehr. The IOM official said that the exhibition shows that foreign nationals in Iran are

contributing to the development of the country. She thanked Iran for hosting millions of Afghan migrants over the past four decades, and underlined that "our all efforts at the International Organization for Migration are to support the Iranian government, which is providing various services to millions of Afghans and other migrants from foreign countries". Referring to existing potential in Bushehr province for investment in various fields, she highlighted that migrants in Iran can play constructive roles in different industries including oil and gas, agriculture, as well as port and maritime. Veerassamy described the exhibition in Bushehr as an important event, adding that IOM tries to pave the way for migrants' investment based on priorities.

Sponge Iron Export Rises 93% in 9 Months

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The export of sponge iron from Iran rose by 93 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2023), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to the data released by the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA). The ISPA reported that 1.214 million tons of sponge iron was exported in the country during the nine-month period of this year, while the figure was 630,000 tons in the first nine months of the previous year. As the association has reported, the production of sponge iron in Iran rose by 6.5 percent during the first nine months of the current year, from that of the previous year. The ISPA reported that 28.088 million tons of sponge iron was produced in the country during the nine-month period of this year, while the figure was 26.37 million tons in the first nine months of the past year. As previously announced by the ISPA, Iran's export of sponge iron registered a record high of 249.4 percent in growth during the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-July 22, 2022), as compared to the same period of time in the past year. The ISPA reported that the country exported 580,000 tons of the product in the first four months of the present year, while the figure was about 166,000 tons in the four-month period of the previous year. Direct reduced iron (DRI), also called sponge iron, is produced from the direct reduction of iron ore (in the form of lumps, pellets, or fines) into iron by reducing gas or elemental carbon produced from natural gas or coal. Many ores are

suitable for direct reduction. While Iran is fighting the U.S. severe sanctions on its economy, and the country's different industrial and economic sectors have been affected by the limitations and difficulties caused by the sanctions condition, the country's mining sector is moving forward noticeably, overcoming such barriers. Among the mining sector's different products, sponge iron is an outstanding example, as the production of this item is rising more and more in the country. Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), Iran's largest metals and mining holding, has stated that one of the most important reasons for the increase in sponge iron production in Iran is the establishment of new sponge iron plants, adding that in recent years, with its new strategy and with the participation of the private sector, the organization has been able to launch several projects to produce sponge iron. Meanwhile, in July 2022, IMIDRO reported that Iran's Mines and Metals Company (MME) has established China's first gas-based sponge iron production unit using the Persian Direct Reduction (PERED) technology. "As the world's first manufacturer of gas-based sponge iron, Iran is now transferring the technology to the world's biggest steel producer", IMIDRO announced at the time. The deal for the construction of the first gas-based sponge iron plant was concluded between China's CSTM Company and MME Company from Iran as the license owner of PERED technology.



Owji Gives Leader Report on Oil Industry's Achievements



TEHRAN (Shana) - Oil Minister Javad Owji gave Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei a report on the oil industry's main achievements under the 13th administration on Monday. The Leader paid a visit to an exhibition showcasing Iran's homegrown products and knowledge-based companies' capabilities in 40 booths at the Imam Khomeini Husseiniyeh in Tehran. Increase in oil and gas output, investments, first-time production and support for knowledge-based firms, development of the oil industry's upstream sector through big petrochemical holdings' support, completion of the oil industry's value chain, export of technical and engineering services, revival of dead and low-producing wells, and collection of flare gases in collaboration with knowledge-based companies were among the main issues explained by the minister. Knowledge-based companies displayed their latest achievements and products in the energy, oil, and petrochemical industries; auto industry; mining metal industries; communication and information technology as well as satellite manufacturing; food and agricultural industries; medical equipment; handicrafts; air, maritime, rail, and land transport; textile industries; housing; and home appliances. The expertise of knowledge-based companies in designing and manufacturing equipment for oil well drilling, petrochemical industry, and catalysts, and their capabilities in the electricity and power plant sectors were also exhibited.

Iran Foreign Trade Hits \$126b in 10 Months



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The volume of Iran's trade exchanges with other world countries has reached as much as \$126 billion in the 10 calendar months to January 20, according to a report by the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA). The Monday report by Mohammad Rezvaniyar included oil exports, as well as exports of techno-engineering services and electricity in addition to the country's non-oil exports in the period under review. The IRICA figures suggested a \$17 billion surplus in Iran's trade exchanges in March 2023-January 2024. Iran's foreign trade in the timespan also posted a 2.41% rise in comparison to figures reported in last year's corresponding period, according to the report. Liquefied natural gas (LNG), propane and methanol were reported to be Iran's top three export items in this period, with animal corn, cell phones and soybeans being the top three items imported into the country. The report by the IRICA chief also added that China, Iraq, the UAE, Turkey, and India were the top five destinations for Iranian non-oil products, while the UAE, China, Turkey, Germany, and India constituted the top five exporters into Iran in this period.



Over 5m Foreign Tourists Visit Iran in 11-Month Period

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The World Tourism Organization of the United Nations in its latest report said more than five million foreign tourists visited Iran in the first 11 months of 2023, registering a 42 percent growth compared to the same period a year earlier. The international tourism body in a report revealed a boom in Iran's tourism industry in 2023. The arrival of foreign tourists to Iran witnessed a 42% hike from January to November 2023, it said. The report added that over 3.74 million foreign tourists had visited Iran from January to November 2022 and the number rose to more than 5 million in the first 11 months of 2023. The 42% growth in the arrival of foreign tourists to Iran in 2023 came as Iran's tourism industry experienced a significant slump during the outbreak of the coronavirus. Only 880,000 foreign tourists had visited Iran in 2021, but the number grew to 4.11 million in 2022.

Saudi Aramco Halts Plan to Raise Production Capacity

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia has ordered energy giant Aramco to maintain its oil production capacity at 12 million barrels per day, abandoning a planned increase, the firm said on Tuesday. Aramco announces that it has received a directive from the ministry of energy to maintain its maximum sustainable capacity (MSC) at 12 million barrels per day instead of ramping it up to 13 million bpd, the firm said in a statement. "The company will update its capital spending guidance when its full-year 2023 results are announced in March. Saudi Arabia is the world's largest crude exporter and Aramco is the jewel of the Persian Gulf Kingdom's economy. Aramco's profits are expected to finance Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's sweeping economic and social reform program known as Vision 2030, which aims to lay the groundwork for an eventual post-oil future. Riyadh announced the planned production capacity increase in October 2021, the same month it pledged to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2060 - drawing intense scepticism from environmental activists. Aramco has pledged to achieve "operational net-zero" carbon emissions by 2050. That applies to emissions that are produced directly by Aramco's industrial sites, but not the CO2 produced when clients burn Saudi oil in their cars, power plants and furnaces. In the lead-up to the COP28 climate change talks in Dubai last year, Saudi Arabia was among the loudest voices calling for more investment in fossil fuel production, saying it was necessary to fight energy poverty in regions such as Africa.



French Farmers Block Highways to Step Up Pressure on Government



LONGVILLIERS (Dispatches) - Long lines of tractors blocked highways near Paris and across France on Monday, as angry farmers sought to put pressure on the government to do more to help them face inflation, compete with cheap imports and make a living. The protests follow similar action in other European countries, including Germany and Poland, ahead of European Parliament elections in June in which the far right, for whom farmers represent a growing constituency, is seen making gains. "It's just too much, we're really fed up," said 46-year-old farmer Geraldine Grillon, speaking at a blockade on the A10 highway south of Paris. Grillon blamed President Emmanuel Macron and the European Union - where many agricultural rules, and subsidies, are decided - for the farmers' woes. Macron "couldn't care less" about farmers, she said. Behind her, a banner on a stack of hay bales read: "Macron, answer us." It's that type of comment that has prompted the government, wary of seeing the protests escalate and with an eye on the European elections, to drop plans to gradually reduce subsidies on agricultural diesel and promise to ease environmental regulations. France also said it would push its EU peers to agree to ease regulations on fallow farmland and promised that more measures would be announced shortly. With farmers angry over cheap imports, Macron has insisted to the European Commission that it was impossible to conclude trade deal negotiations with South America's Mercosur bloc and understands the EU has put an end to the talks, his office said on Monday. Farmers' organisations, which have in particular objected to the Mercosur talks, said they want more and would block roads as long as needed. "Our objective is to put pressure on the government, so that we can quickly find a solution for a way out of the crisis," Amaud Rousseau, head of the powerful farmers' union FNSEA, said on RTL radio.

Israel to Shift Some Troops North as Negotiators Push for Gaza Ceasefire



GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) - The Israeli army was preparing to shift some of its forces from the Gaza Strip to the restive Lebanese border, as international mediators pushed for a new deal to halt its war with Hamas. With Gazans already facing dire humanitarian conditions, the United Nations chief was set to meet on Tuesday with key donors who paused funding after members of the UN's Palestinian refugee agency were accused of taking part in the October 7 attack that sparked the war. Fears of a widening regional conflict were compounded after Israel's top ally Washington vowed to respond to an attack that killed three US troops in Jordan. Israeli ground forces backed by tanks have been focused on Khan Yunis, the hometown of Hamas's Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar, where the Palestine Red Crescent Society reported artillery fire around the Al-Amal hospital overnight. Sinwar's office, military sites and "a significant rocket manufacturing facility" were raided by troops, the Israeli military said. Chief spokesman Daniel Hagari said Monday that the Israeli military had "eliminated over 2,000 terrorists above and below ground" in the Khan Yunis area, without offering evidence. Israeli strikes across the besieged Gaza Strip killed 128 people overnight, the health ministry in the Hamas-run Palestinian territory said early on Tuesday. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said late Monday that some units in Gaza were "moving up to the north and preparing for what's to come" - a reference to the Israeli-Lebanese border, where there have been almost daily exchanges of fire with Iran-backed Hezbollah militants aligned with Hamas. In the latest efforts to broker a new truce, CIA chief William Burns met top Israeli, Egyptian and Qatari officials in Paris on Sunday. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed hope for the deal. "Very important, productive work has been done. And there is some real hope going forward," Blinken told reporters after the Paris talks. Israel's relentless military offensive

has killed at least 26,637 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the besieged territory's Hamas-run health ministry. Sheikh Mohammed confirmed that the framework discussed in Paris - which he said might lead to a permanent ceasefire - included a phased truce that would see women and children hostages released first, with aid also entering besieged Gaza. A senior Hamas official, Taher al-Nunu, said the Islamist group wanted a "complete and comprehensive ceasefire, not a temporary truce". It was not immediately clear if Hamas officials had received the text of the Qatari proposal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office has called the Paris talks "constructive" but pointed to "significant gaps which the parties will continue to discuss". Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced in Gaza and rely on scarce aid, but there are fears of further shortages because of the rift between Israel and the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA. At least 12 countries - with top donors the United States and Germany joined by New Zealand on Tuesday - have suspended their funding over Israeli claims that some UNRWA staff members were involved in the October 7 attack. An UNRWA source, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity, told AFP it would be "a major disaster" if donors insisted on stopping their support. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who has pleaded for continued financial support to meet "dire needs", will meet donors in New York on Tuesday, his office said, as investigations into Israel's allegations continue. In the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where 1.5 million displaced people have taken refuge, some told AFP the UN support was a lifeline. "We live on aid from UNRWA," said Sabah Musabih, 50. "If it stopped, we would die of hunger."

Vietnam, Philippines Seal Deals on South China Sea Security



HANOI (Dispatches) - Vietnam and the Philippines agreed on Tuesday to boost cooperation among their coastguards and to prevent untoward incidents in the South China Sea, in an announcement during a state visit to Hanoi by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The two Southeast Asian countries have competing claims over some parts of the South China Sea, a conduit for \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne trade that China claims almost in its entirety. The two memoranda of understanding on security covered "incident prevention in the South China Sea" and "maritime cooperation" among coastguards, according to a Vietnamese official who announced the deals during a formal ceremony in the country's presidential palace. The agreements in Hanoi, details of which were not disclosed, could risk angering Beijing, especially if they paved the way for future compromises on disputed claims. China tends to view progress in the resolution of border disputes among other claimants with scepticism. Both Hanoi and Manila have had run-ins with China's coastguard in the past, but altercations have been frequent in the last year between vessels of China and U.S.-ally Philippines, adding strain to deteriorating relations. Before meeting Vietnam's President Vo Van Thuong, Marcos said Vietnam was "the sole strategic partner of the Philippines" in Southeast Asia and stressed that maritime cooperation was the foundation of that relation.

Blinken Warns Ukraine's Gains Could Be Reversed Without More U.S. Aid



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned Monday that Ukraine's gains over two years of fighting were all in doubt without new US funding, as NATO's chief visited to lobby Congress. Tens of billions of dollars in US aid has been sent to Ukraine since the invasion in February 2022, but Republican lawmakers have grown reluctant to keep supporting Kyiv, saying it lacks a clear end game as the fighting against President Vladimir Putin's forces grinds on. As NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg made the case on a visit to Washington, Blinken offered an increasingly dire picture of Ukraine's prospects without US approval of the so-called supplemental funding. "Without it, simply put, everything that Ukrainians achieved and that we've helped them achieve will be in jeopardy," Blinken told a joint news conference with Stoltenberg. "Absent that supplemental, we're going to be sending a strong and wrong message to all of our adversaries that we are not serious about the defence of freedom, the defence of democracy," he said. "It will simply reinforce for Vladimir Putin that he can somehow outlast Ukraine and outlast us," he said. President Joe Biden has asked Congress to approve \$61 billion in new aid to Ukraine. But the talks have bogged down as Republican lawmakers - furious over record flows of migrants over the US border with Mexico - demand major changes in immigration and border control policy in exchange for approving more money for Ukraine. Stoltenberg said he would meet US lawmakers on Tuesday and make the case that support for Ukraine was "in our own security interest." "It will be a tragedy

for Ukrainians if President Putin wins but it will also make the world more dangerous and all of us more insecure," Stoltenberg said. "It will embolden other authoritarian leaders - not only President Putin, but also North Korea, Iran and China to use force," he said. With many Republicans focused on opposing China, Stoltenberg said: "Today it's Ukraine; tomorrow it could be Taiwan." U.S. and NATO officials have acknowledged limited gains in a counteroffensive launched by Ukraine last year. But Stoltenberg said that Ukrainians in the longer term have defied expectations, taking back half of the territory seized by Russia which had expected a swift takeover. "This idea that it doesn't help to help them - actually, the Ukrainians have proved the opposite," Stoltenberg said. Stoltenberg earlier met at the Pentagon with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and top US military officer General Charles "CQ" Brown and later at the White House with Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security advisor. He also appeared on Fox News, a favorite network of Republicans, and made the case that US weapons help U.S. workers as they are made in the United States. Donald Trump, the likely Republican candidate in the November presidential election, and who has often praised Putin, is urging Republican lawmakers to reject the immigration accord being negotiated in Congress - which would also torpedo aid for Ukraine. Stoltenberg visited after Turkey gave its long-awaited green-light for Sweden to enter NATO. Hungary, led by nationalist Viktor Orban, is the remaining holdout but both Blinken and Stoltenberg expected approval soon.



North Korea Fires Cruise Missiles Into Sea

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korea fired multiple unidentified cruise missiles on Tuesday into the sea off its west coast, South Korea's military said, the third time Pyongyang has tested cruise missiles in less than a week. The missiles were launched at around 7 a.m. (2200 GMT on Monday), Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. South Korean and U.S. intelligence authorities were closely monitoring the situation and analyzing the details of the launch, it said. The launch comes amid a rise in tension on the Korean peninsula and follows a barrage of cruise missiles fired by Pyongyang off its east coast on Sunday. Sunday's launch was a test of the new submarine-launched cruise missiles (SLCM) dubbed "Pulhwasal-3-31" and leader Kim Jong Un supervised the test. North Korean state media KCNA reported on Monday. Last week's missiles were also Pulhwasal-3-31, KCNA said, adding that they were the "strategic", which typically refers to nuclear-capable weapons. South Korea's JCS said last week that it believes the firing of "Pulhwasal-3-31" was to test upgrades of existing missiles' capabilities.

UN Peacekeepers Among Scores Killed in Clashes Along Sudan-South Sudan Border

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Fighting between rival communities in a disputed region claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan has killed 54 people, including two UN peacekeepers, the United Nations said on Monday, calling for calm. The clashes in Abyei, a contested oil-rich territory straddling the border of both countries, broke out at the weekend, according to local authorities. The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) said it "strongly condemns these attacks against civilians and peacekeepers." "Currently, according to local authorities, 52 civilians have lost their lives, while 64 others are said to be gravely wounded," it said. It said peacekeepers came under fire on Sunday "while transporting affected civilians from a UNISFA base to a hospital". A Pakistani peacekeeper was killed, and "four uniformed personnel and one local civilian sustained injury", it said. A Ghanaian peacekeeper had been killed on Saturday, UNISFA added, calling for an investigation into the violence. Located between Sudan and South Sudan, Abyei has been a flashpoint since the South gained independence in 2011. According to authorities in the Abyei Special Administrative Area, armed youths and a local rebel militia carried out a series of "barbaric coordinated attacks", starting on Saturday morning. Rou Manyiel Rou, secretary

general for the Abyei Special Administrative Area, said on Saturday that the violence was tied to a long-running "conflict between (the) Ngok and Twic" communities. In a statement published on Monday, Britain, Norway and the United States, the international "Troika" that sponsored South Sudan's independence, said they were "deeply concerned by the escalation of violence in recent months between communities living in and around" Abyei. "All leaders who have influence with involved communities and who fail to use it to support peace are demonstrating their disregard for the interests of their people," the Troika said. The attacks follow clashes in November last year that killed 32 people, including a UN peacekeeper. A regional UN envoy expressed concern in November that fighting within Sudan was drawing closer to the country's border with South Sudan and Abyei. Hanna Tetteh, the UN special envoy for the Horn of Africa, said Abyei's proximity to the fighting between Sudan's rival forces threatened to destabilise the already fragile region and its sometimes volatile local dynamics. She said the Sudan crisis had also "effectively put on hold" talks between leaders from both countries over Abyei's long-disputed status. The 12-year-old UN peacekeeping mission in Abyei currently comprises some 4,000 military and police personnel.



LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard: (+98) (21) 44253448
Public Relations Tel: (+98) (21) 44253450
Editorial Board: 44253449
Public Relations Fax: (+98) (21) 44253395
Advertising Department:

Tel/Fax: (+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
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Nuggets Spoil Doc Rivers' Bucks Debut

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokic had 25 points, 16 rebounds and 12 assists for his 14th triple-double of the season as the host Denver Nuggets spoiled Doc Rivers' debut as Milwaukee's head coach with a 113-107 win over the Bucks. Jokic has 119 career triple-doubles in the regular season (the fourth-highest total in NBA history), with six coming against Milwaukee. The Bucks fired first-year coach Adrian Griffin on Jan. 23 and hired Rivers three days later. They went 2-1 under interim coach Joe Prunty before Rivers coached his first game Monday night. Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points and 12 rebounds, Brook Lopez scored 19, Damian Lillard finished with 18, Khris Middleton contributed 14 and Bobby Portis grabbed 12 rebounds for Milwaukee. Mikal Bridges scored 33 points and Ben Simmons posted a double-double in his 18-minute return from a back injury as Brooklyn Nets pulled 147-114 away from Utah Jazz in New York. Simmons logged 10 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds after sitting out the previous 38 games. Cam Thomas netted 25 points for the Nets, who finished with a season-high point total as they won their second straight game. Rookie Keyonte George scored 21 points, but the Jazz lost for the fourth time in six games. Donovan Mitchell had 28 points and 12 assists to help Cleveland Cavaliers beat visiting Los Angeles Clippers 118-108 and end the Clippers' five-game winning streak. Jarrett Allen had 20 points and 17 rebounds for his 15th straight double-double and Isaac Okoro scored all 17 of his points in the first half for the Cavaliers, who have won 10 of its past 11 games. Evan Mobley returned for the Cavaliers after missing the previous 22 games while recovering from arthroscopic left knee surgery. He finished with 10 points and nine rebounds. Kawhi Leonard had 30 points and eight rebounds to lead the Clippers. Luka Doncic

recorded game highs of 45 points and 15 assists to go with nine rebounds, Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 13 of his 36 points in the fourth quarter, and Dallas Mavericks rallied from down 16 points to fend off visiting Orlando Magic 131-129. There were eight lead changes over the final 7:35, including two on Hardaway 3-pointers. He shot 11 of 17 from the floor overall and 5 of 9 from beyond the arc. Orlando pulled within one twice down the stretch but could not fully bridge the gap. Paolo Banchero led the Magic with 36 points and nine rebounds. He also dished seven assists and made two steals. Reserve Eric Gordon scored 23 points and Devin Booker added 22 as Phoenix Suns sent host Miami Heat 118-105 to its seventh straight loss -- the Heat's longest since the 2007-08 season and Miami's longest under Erik Spoelstra. Booker, who averaged 53 points in his two previous games, got off to a slow start. He scored just eight points in the first half before playing better after the break. Miami was led by Jimmy Butler, who had a game-high 26 points to go with eight rebounds and four assists. Grayson Allen of Phoenix sprained his right ankle in the second quarter and scored just three points. Jalen Brunson pumped in 32 points, Donte DiVincenzo racked up 28 points and New York Knicks didn't miss a beat despite playing without one of its top players, drubbing host Charlotte Hornets for a season-high seventh consecutive victory 113-92. The Knicks had a huge third quarter by scoring 44 points, nearly matching their entire first-half total (46). New York played its first game since standout forward Julius Randle sustained a shoulder injury Saturday afternoon. The Hornets were blowout victims at home for the third time across a four-night stretch despite rookie Brandon Miller's 29 points (matching a career best) and Miles Bridges' 21 points.

Arsenal Boss Arteta Slams Barca Talk as Fake News

LONDON (Dispatches) - Mikel Arteta has slammed reports he was ready to quit Arsenal to become Barcelona manager as "fake news." Reports in Spain on Sunday claimed Arteta had told colleagues he was going to leave the Emirates Stadium to return to Barcelona at the end of this season. Current Barca boss Xavi announced on Saturday he would step down in the summer after a string of disappointing results, leading to Arteta being installed as one of the favourites to replace him. Having come through the famed academy at Barcelona, Arteta has a long-standing connection to the Camp Nou. But the 41-year-old on Monday insisted he is keen to stay put as he aims to lead Arsenal to their first Premier League title since 2004. "I am in the right place. I am with the right people," Arteta told reporters. "I feel really good about it. And, as I said many times, I am invested in a beautiful journey with this football club, with these players, these staff, our people. There is still a lot to do here. We all share that ambition and you can feel it as well, that we want more, that we aren't satisfied and that the club wants to take another push and another level in everything we are doing. This is where we are. We need everyone on board to achieve it and I am certainly on board." Dismissing the Barca reports as completely fabricated, Arteta admitted he had been upset by the story as he prepares for Tuesday's Premier League trip to Nottingham Forest. "That's totally fake news. I don't know where it is coming from and it is totally untrue. I am really upset about it," he said. "I could not believe it. I don't know where it is coming from and it has no source. I understand we are in this industry, but I don't think anyone deserves to hear news like that. I have always been really straight and always said the complete opposite; how happy I am and how much I enjoy where I am now." Arsenal welcome Premier League leaders Liverpool to the Emirates Stadium for a crucial clash. It brings Arteta head-to-head with Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp for the last time in their current jobs after the German stunningly announced on Friday he will leave Anfield at the end of the season. Klopp said he could never manage another club in England but, having served as an assistant under Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, Arteta did not rule out such a switch in the future. Asked if he could see himself managing another Premier League team, he replied: "Today, no. But I don't know. I played for two great clubs in this country (Arsenal and Everton). I moved around in different things. I am extremely young

and I don't know what's going to happen. I think he (Klopp) made this league much better. First of all the person. The character, the charisma, the ideas and his passion for the game is something special. I think he's had a big contribution for the growth of this league."



Messi, Suarez on Target But Miami Beaten in Saudi Friendly



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Luis Suarez bagged his maiden goal for Inter Miami and Lionel Messi scored a penalty but it was not enough to stop the Major League Soccer side falling to a 4-3 defeat against Saudi Pro League side Al Hilal in Riyadh. An 88th-minute header from Brazilian forward Malcom settled an entertaining friendly at the Kingdom Arena after Miami fought back to 3-3 from 3-1 down early in the second half. The game was the latest leg of Miami's globe-trotting pre-season tour ahead of the start of the Major League Soccer season on February 21. Former Fulham striker and Serbian international Aleksandar Mitrovic fired Al Hilal head in the 10th minute, coolly side-footing his finish beyond Miami goalkeeper Drake Callender after a well-worked move that split the defence wide open. Saudi international forward Abdullah Al-Hamdan made it 2-0 after 13 minutes, punishing a botched clearance from Miami defender Noah Allen. Sergio Busquets should have pulled a goal back for Miami in the 26th minute but volleyed over from close range with just Al Hilal goalkeeper Hbib Alwtayan to beat. On 34 minutes though Miami's pressure got its reward. A lofted pass from Jordi Alba over the top caught the Al Hilal defence square, and Julian Gressel latched onto the ball before sliding into the path of Suarez who finished into an empty goal at the far post. The goal was initially disallowed for offside but a VAR check overturned the offside call and the goal stood. Al Hilal restored their two-goal advantage a minute before half-time however when Al-Hamdan crossed into the area for Brazilian forward Michael to nod home after Callender rushed off his line. Miami responded strongly after the break, and drew level with two goals in two minutes soon after the restart. Messi made it 3-2 from the penalty spot in the 54th minute after Mohammed Jahfali was harshly adjudged to have brought down David Ruiz in the area. Al Hilal were still regrouping from the penalty when Miami levelled. Messi swept a long pass into the path of Ruiz, and the winger cut in from the left and uncorked a ferocious strike that made it 3-3. The game seemed destined to end in a draw but Malcom headed home two minutes from time to seal the win. Miami face Cristiano Ronaldo's Al-Nassr in their second friendly in Saudi Arabia on Thursday before heading to Asia for games in Hong Kong and Japan.

Liverpool Keep Quadruple Dream Alive for Emotional Klopp



LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool remain in the hunt to send Jurgen Klopp off with a quadruple after beating Norwich 5-2 in the FA Cup yesterday, with the manager admitting he'd have to be "made of wood" to remain untouched by the affection in which he is held. Klopp was greeted by an emotional rendition of You'll Never Walk Alone before kick-off and banners of thanks in the first match since the German announced his decision to leave at the end of the season. The 56-year-old said on Friday when he made the shock announcement on his impending departure that he hoped the "best memories were still to come" despite having won the Premier League and Champions League during his time in charge. Should Liverpool progress to the FA Cup final, Klopp's final game will be at Wembley and they will be strong favourites to progress to the quarter-finals after being paired at home to Watford or Southampton in the last 16. "It's emotional but I have to pull myself together. I received all the messages. I'm not made of wood," said Klopp on dealing with the emotions of the past few days. "There will be a moment at the end of the season where we will say 'goodbye' and it will be emotional, but between now and then we have a massive job to do." Klopp's opposite number, Norwich boss David Wagner, was the best man at his wedding after the two played together at Mainz. The pair enjoyed a warm embrace in the tunnel before kick-off, but Liverpool showed no mercy on Wagner's men despite Klopp giving the chance to some of his youngsters to shine. James McConnell was handed his full debut in midfield and the 19-year-old set up the opening goal as his teasing delivery was headed in by Curtis Jones at the back post. Norwich hit back almost immediately as Ben Gibson powered past Allison Becker from Gabriel Sara's corner. Liverpool should still have been out of sight by half-time as Darwin Nunez slotted home his 11th goal of the season after great work down the right by Conor Bradley. Bradley, who has impressed in recent weeks deputising for Trent Alexander-Arnold, should have had another assist moments later when Cody Gakpo sliced a glorious chance wide. Ryan Gravenberch then had an effort cleared off the line as Norwich struggled to beat Liverpool's press as they played out from the back. The Reds have so far not missed a beat in the absence of Mohamed Salah at the Africa Cup of Nations to move five points clear at the top of the Premier League and in the hunt for three more trophies in the League Cup, FA Cup and Europa League.

Ivory Coast Stun AFCON Holders Senegal

ABIDJAN (Dispatches) - Hosts Ivory Coast stunned Senegal at the Africa Cup of Nations on Monday, knocking out the reigning champions on penalties in the last 16 to keep their hopes of winning the title on home soil alive. A week ago it looked as if the Ivorians were set for a humiliating group-stage exit from their own AFCON, but now they are into the quarter-finals after beating Senegal 5-4 on penalties following a tie that finished 1-1 at the end of extra time. The elephants scraped into the knockout phase with the worst record of the four best third-placed sides to advance, after finishing the first round with a humiliating 4-0 loss to Equatorial Guinea, their heaviest ever home defeat. They followed that by sacking veteran French coach Jean-Louis Gasset and trying unsuccessfully to bring in former boss Herve Renard on a short-term deal. But instead former player Emere Fae was appointed on an interim basis, hoping to rouse a shell-shocked team for a daunting tie against the holders. It looked like being a trying evening for Ivory Coast in Yamoussoukro as Senegal went ahead in the fourth minute when Habib Diallo brought down Sadio Mane's cross from the left and finished emphatically. Mane then escaped with a yellow card for a dangerous challenge on Ibrahim Sangare soon after, although Senegal also felt hard done by early in the second half. Ismaila Sarr went down in the box in a tangle of legs with Odilon Kossounou, but no penalty was given and the referee did not come across to review the incident on the pitchside monitor. Instead, it was the Ivorians who won a late penalty of their own, a VAR review showing that Nicolas Pepe was chopped down by Senegal goalkeeper Edouard Mendy. Franck Kessie of Saudi club Al Ahli, who was dropped to the bench at kick-off, converted the penalty to force extra time. With no further scoring, it came down to penalties, and Senegal's Moussa Niakhathe was the only player to miss, seeing his effort strike the post. Kessie then netted the decisive kick to take Ivory Coast through to a last-eight tie against Mali or Burkina Faso in the central city of Bouake on Saturday. Neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso clash in the

last 16 in the northern city of Korbogo on Tuesday. "We are feeling a lot of emotion," Ivory Coast striker Sebastien Haller told broadcaster Canal Plus Afrique. "The last few days have not been easy but we had to believe in ourselves."

