

President Ebrahim Raisi in a Message Lauded the Iranian Nation's Participation in Rallies Held Across the Country on Sunday to Mark the 45th Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution's Victory

IRAN NEWS

The First 3-Day Int'l Exhibition for the Development of Knowledge Based Manufacturing in Iran Petrochemical; Refining and Petro Refining Sectors (Iran PETROCHEM 2024) Will Be Opened Today, Feb. 13, on Kish Island

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DOMESTIC

Iran Proposes to Double Tea Imports From Sri Lanka

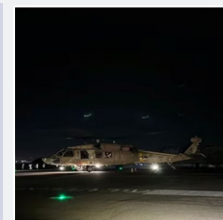


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INTERNATIONAL

Israel Begins Attack on Rafah, 37 Killed



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Iran World's 19th Largest Economy



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The head of Iran's Plan and Budget Organization (PBO) said the country is the 19th largest economy in the world with a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$1.81 trillion (according to the Purchasing Power Parities (PPP)). In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, Davood Manzour put the gross domestic product of the country at \$1.81 trillion. He went on to say that Iran's GDP will reach \$2.5 trillion within the next five years, IMENA news agency reported. On November 27, 2023, the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) reported a 7.1 percent hike in Iran's GDP between June and August, almost half of which was due to the energy sector growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest report put Iran's economic growth in 2023 at 5.4%. In a report on the World Economic Outlook, which is published once every three months, the international monetary body said that Iran registered a 5.4% economic growth in 2023, showing a considerable increase compared to a year earlier.

Hamas Accuses Israel of Using Banned Weapons



GAZA (Dispatches) - The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has condemned the deadly Israeli attack on the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah, saying the offensive was a "deepening of genocide" against the people of Palestine. "The attack by the terrorist enemy army on the city of Rafah is a compounded crime, a deepening of genocide and forced displacement attempts waged against our Palestinian people," Hamas said in a statement on Monday. At least 100 civilians, mostly women and children, have been killed and nearly 230 others wounded in Israel's extensive air raids and artillery strikes on Rafah on Monday. Dozens of people are also trapped under the rubble. In the statement, Hamas said the "terrorist Netanyahu government and his Nazi army" blatantly disregard the decisions of the International Court of Justice issued two weeks ago, which prescribed urgent measures including stopping any steps that could be considered acts of genocide. The movement held the US administration of President Joe Biden along with the Tel Aviv regime fully responsible for the massacre in Rafah, saying Washington gave Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu the green light for the strike. The US provides Israel with money, weapons, and political cover to continue the war of genocide and massacres against the Palestinians, it emphasized. "We call on the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the United Nations Security Council to take immediate and serious action to stop the Zionist aggression and the ongoing genocide crimes against unarmed civilians in the Gaza Strip," the statement read.



Tourism Can Rid Iran of Reliance on Oil: President

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi stressed the need to boost the tourism industry to diversify the sources of national income and diminish the country's dependence on petrodollars. Addressing the 17th edition of the Iran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition, held in Tehran on Monday, Raisi described the tourism industry as a catalyst for the economies of countries. He said tourism has attracted growing attention since it acts as a driving and accelerating force for economic development. To avoid a mono-product economy and end Iran's reliance on the oil income, it is necessary to boost the tourism industry, the president added. He noted that Iran has great capacities for tourism considering its age-old civilization, rich cultural heritage, and diverse climatic situation. The president also stated that the enemies are fomenting Iranophobia to dissuade foreigners from visiting Iran, saying, "The officials and managers of the administration have a duty to facilitate the presence of tourists (in Iran). One of the steps taken in this course has been the abolition of visa" requirements for the citizens of many countries. He emphasized that many countries prioritize the development and promotion of tourism within their regions to bolster their economies. While showcasing Iran's rich natural and cultural tourism assets, the President stressed the importance of exploring this ancient civilization and its invaluable heritage. Raisi expressed that Iran must diversify its revenue sources beyond oil, with tourism being a promising avenue. President Raisi believes that Iran has much to offer visitors, but unfortunately, some are deterred from visiting due to fear-mongering and negative propaganda spread by adversaries. The President emphasized that stakeholders in the tourism sector must streamline processes for tourists visiting Iran. This includes facilitating transportation, accommodation, and dining services to enhance the overall visitor experience and promote tourism effectively. He noted that developing tourism can present Iran in a positive light and counteract negative propaganda. In a different segment of his speech, he announced a significant increase in tourism by over 50% this year, with incentives being provided to support the tourism industry. Raisi further said that this year the country has seen 50% rise in the number of tourists and the government has approved some incentives for those who are active in the tourism industry of the country. He reiterated that some 277 medical centers of the country are ready to host health tourists from any part of the world. Raisi said that his administration has already taken steps to boost tourism as it has dropped visa requirements for citizens of 33 countries seeking to visit Iran. The four-day exhibition is the host for representatives of tourism industries of 11 countries as well as tourism activists of Iran. The World Tourism Organization of the United Nations said in its latest report that 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 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.

IRGC Commander Warns U.S. to Keep Distance From Iran



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh has warned the United States against moving its military assets close to Iran. Speaking to reporters, Hajizadeh said: "We are not warmongers and are not after war." He said the Iranian Armed Forces are fully prepared to counter any threat, adding that the great Iranian nation supports the officials and armed forces. The commander noted that the US has squandered trillions of dollars on the wars in West Asia and is now supporting the Israeli regime in its war on Gaza. "The Israeli regime has killed nearly 30,000 people with the help of the US military," he said. He advised the American people, the people of the West and Europe to be aware of the way their governments are spending their tax money. About 7,300 domestic and foreign journalists and reporters covered the national event, which took place simultaneously in 1,400 cities and over 35,000 villages from all over Iran.

Iran, Syria Share Practical Approach in Supporting Palestinians

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Iran and Syria share a "practical approach" in supporting the Palestinians in the months-long Israeli war on the besieged Gaza Strip. The occupying regime will not be able to continue with its aggression without backing from the United States, the Iranian minister has said.

Amir-Abdollahian made the statement in a meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the capital Damascus on Sunday, which took place as part of the second leg of his regional tour after visiting Lebanon. The two officials discussed Tehran-Damascus relations as well as regional and international issues of concern, including the Israeli war on Gaza. Amir-Abdollahian said Gaza is the "main issue" not only at the regional but also at the international level, adding that Iran and Syria have a "common position," and "practical approach," in supporting the Palestinians as the two sides have over the past four months continued their consultations regarding the issue. Pointing to Iran's extensive diplomatic efforts to support the Palestinian people and stop the Israeli war, Amir-Abdollahian said the Islamic Republic has always declared its firm position on Palestine and emphasized that the war is not a

solution and the genocide of the Palestinians must immediately end. "If the US is true to its claim that it does not seek to expand the scope of war in the region, it should stop backing the Zionist regime, and if the US stops supporting the Zionist regime, the regime will not be able to continue the war even for one day," the top Iranian diplomat stated. Amir-Abdollahian praised the resistance in Palestine as "strong and powerful" and said, "Those who intended to destroy Hamas have now included the resistance movement as a reality in their political strategies and as a negotiating party in the ceasefire talks." The Iranian foreign minister also said Syria is on the front line of supporting the Palestinians and their cause. Assad, for his part, said the Israeli regime and the West are currently at an impasse over the war in Gaza and that the Israeli escalation in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon is nothing but a Western-led attempt to get the illegal entity out of the impasse and save the regime. "It is our duty to stand to the utmost of our ability alongside the Palestinian people because what these people achieved during the recent Israeli aggression on Gaza has not been achieved since the Palestinian issue arose decades ago," the Syrian president said.



Yemen Says Fired Missiles at U.S. Bulk Carrier in Red Sea



SANAA (Dispatches) - The spokesperson for the Yemeni Armed Forces says the country's naval units have launched several missiles that struck a US merchant vessel in the Red Sea just off the coast of the Arab nation. Brigadier General Yahya Saree said in a televised speech broadcast live from the Yemeni capital Sana'a on Monday that the Yemeni military had carried out an operation against Star Iris bulk carrier with a number of "appropriate" naval missiles, and that the strikes were accurate and direct. He added that the missile attack came as part of the Yemeni forces' religious, ethical and humanitarian duties, reiterating that the Arab nation's naval units will continue their attacks in the Red Sea and the Arab Sea against Israeli-affiliated ships until the Tel Aviv regime halts its aggression on Gaza and lifts its tight siege against Palestinians in the territory. Saree further noted that the Yemeni Armed Forces will not hesitate to carry out more operations in response to the relentless Israeli onslaught against the oppressed Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and in response to joint American-British aggression against the Republic of Yemen. Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israeli occupation since the regime launched a devastating war on Gaza on October 7 after the territory's Palestinian resistance movements carried out a surprise retaliatory attack, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, against the occupying entity. The United States and United Kingdom have been carrying out strikes against Yemen after the Biden administration and its allies offered the Tel Aviv regime unqualified support and said that Yemeni forces bear the consequences of their attacks against Israeli-owned ships or merchant vessels heading to the occupied territories.

IRAN NEWS



Public Transportation Fleet to Receive 2,500 Electric Vehicles

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's public transportation fleet is expected to receive 2,500 electric vehicles by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19), an official with the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry said. Referring to a plan for the import of electric cars to the country, the Manager of the electric vehicle project of the Industry Ministry Hasan Karimi-Sanjari said: "It is expected that 2,500 electric vehicles will be added to the public transport fleet before the New Year." According to the official, the mentioned vehicles are already purchased and 600 of them have been cleared from the customs, 600 are still going through customs procedures and 1,500 are being transported into the country.

Israel's Gaza Goals Unattainable



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister says if it were not for the United States' all-out support, Israel would have faced "total collapse" following a historic operation by the Palestinian resistance more than four months ago. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks during a meeting with about 15 officials from different Palestinian groups in the Syrian capital Damascus on Sunday. "The Israeli regime totally collapsed after Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, and if it were not for the US's all-out meddling in the field in support of the Zionist regime and its efforts to resurrect and save it, this collapse would have been completely visible," he said. Amir-Abdollahian said many believe that "the Israeli regime and the US government achieved none of their declared goals since the beginning of the war on Gaza and that they are now forced to hold political talks with Hamas, whom they called for its demise." The top Iranian diplomat also noted that the struggle and resilience of the resistance groups, as well as the sacrifices of people in Gaza and the West Bank, and the practical unity of the Axis of the Resistance in solidarity with Palestine helped the nation defeat the occupying regime. He further appreciated the support provided for the Palestinians by the resistance factions in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Syria, along with independent and brave governments and nations.



Iran Proposes to Double Tea Imports From Sri Lanka

TEHRAN - Iranian tea importers have proposed to double the quantity of tea they take from Sri Lanka under the tea-for-oil barter mechanism, from its current \$5 million to around \$10 million during the winter months, local media reported quoting chairman of the Sri Lanka Tea Board Niraj de Mel. He said that Iran's winter season runs from the months of December to March and there is always high demand for tea during that time. He added that the Iranian New Year, celebrated in the third week of March and Ramadhan will also lead to a high demand for tea. The chairman said that since the start of the tea-for-oil barter mechanism in August 2023, Iran has bought \$25 million worth of tea from Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka intends to pay off \$240 million in 48 months. He said the barter mechanism has been a great success and represents a significant development for Sri Lanka amid its current foreign exchange liquidity crisis. Tea exports to Iran amounted to about \$125 million per year before falling to around \$70 million in 2022, he said. The internal demand for tea in Iran is about 100,000 metric tons

annually, he added. Meanwhile Iran's Ambassador Dr. Delkosh said Iranian foreign policy is based on two aspects. One is to maintain economic cooperation among States and the other is to help strengthen regional and global security. He also said that acting against terrorism and narcotic trade is also included in its foreign policy. Speaking in a meeting with Sri Lanka's Irrigation, Wildlife and forestry Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi during a ceremony marking the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Dr. Reiza also said that Iran and Sri Lanka have had proper diplomatic relations in the past as well as in the present, and it is important for both countries to continue such relations with better understanding. He pointed out that Iran has achieved much in modern science and technology so he hopes to share such knowledge with Sri Lanka. Minister Wanniarachchi said that links between Sri Lanka and Iran have been continuing from the past, and such bondage has immensely contributed to the economic and socio-cultural development of Sri Lanka.

Non-Oil Trade with Neighbors Hits \$50b in 10 Months



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The value of trade in non-oil goods between Iran and 15 neighboring states during the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (started on March 21, 2023) has reached \$50 billion, an official said. The value of trade exchanges between Iran and 15 neighboring states registered a 1.8-percent growth from March 21, 2023 to January 22, 2024, Rouhollah Latifi, the spokesperson for the trade promotion commission of Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade said. He noted that more than 79 million tons of goods, valued at over \$49 billion, were exchanged between Iran and 15 neighboring states in the 10-month period. In this timespan, Iran exported more than 60 million tons of goods, valued at over \$23 billion, to the neighboring states, Latifi added. In return, Iran has imported more than 19 million tons of products, valued at over \$26 billion, between March 21, 2023 and January 22, 2024, showing a 53.4 and 57.2 percent growth in weight and value, respectively, compared to the same period last year, IRNA reported. Five countries, namely Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan were Iran's top five export target markets, he said. Latifi then stated that Iran has imported \$17 billion, \$6 billion, \$1.5 billion, \$778 million, and \$527 million in products from the UAE, Turkey, Russia, Oman and Pakistan, respectively.

Tehran-Minsk Bilateral Cooperation Reaches Brand New Level

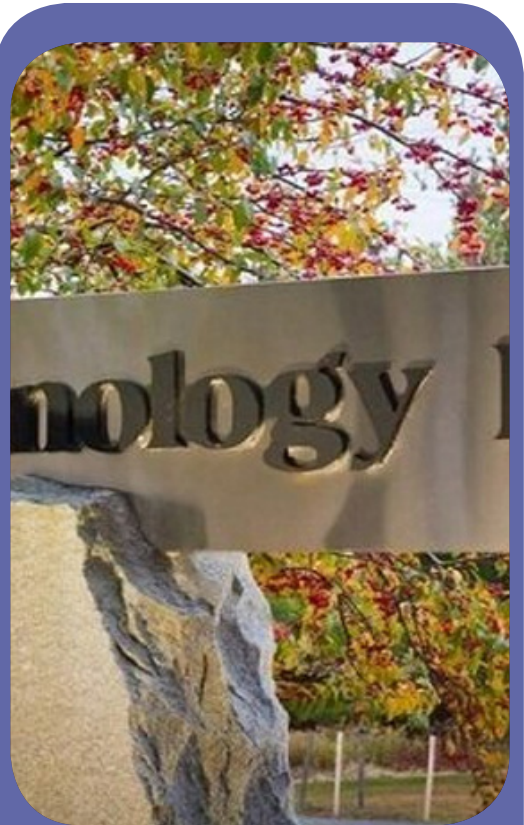
TEHRAN - Bilateral cooperation between Minsk and Tehran has advanced to a brand new level, Belarus' Economy Minister Yuri Chebotar said at a solemn event on the occasion of Iran's public holiday in Minsk on 9 February, BelTA reported. He congratulated the friendly people of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the public holiday - the anniversary of the victory of Islamic Revolution. "Every year, celebrating this day as a symbol of striving for freedom and social justice, Iran reaffirms its commitment to the path of building a strong and independent state, chosen 45 years ago," the minister said. "Having preserved its unique historical and civilizational identity, the Iranian people are confidently moving forward and developing." "Last year our countries celebrated a landmark event - the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. After crossing this historic milestone, bilateral cooperation between Minsk and Tehran has advanced to a brand new level. It is no secret that relations between our countries are reaching a strategic level," Yuri

Chebotar said. "Undoubtedly, the official visit of the Belarusian president to Iran in March 2023 and the visit of Iranian first vice president to Minsk in October 2023 gave a special impetus to the dynamics of the Belarusian-Iranian dialogue. The high dynamics of the delegations' exchange at various levels demonstrates the mutual interest to expand contacts in all areas," the minister pointed out. According to him, an important indicator of the economic barometer of Belarusian-Iranian interaction is the regular meetings of the joint commission on economic cooperation. The latest meeting was held in Tehran in October 2023. The minister believes that the implementation of the agreements reached at the meeting will help boost the mutual trade and expand the range of supplies. "We have already seen significant progress in trade and economic cooperation but the bilateral trade potential has not been fully exhausted. We will continue to make every effort to reach a higher level of cooperation," Yuri Chebotar noted.

Tehran, Moscow Keen to Promote Agricultural Cooperation



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Officials from Iran and Russia stressed expanding cooperation in the fields of agriculture and veterinary medicine. Head of the Iran Veterinary Organization (IVO) Mojtaba Norouzi held a talk with Head of the Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Supervision (Rosselkhozadzor) Sergei Dankvert in Moscow to discuss bilateral ties and issues of mutual interest. The Iranian side called for boosting mutual cooperation and removing trade barriers in the way of the export of Iranian fishery and dairy products to Russia. During the meeting, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was inked between the two sides in the fields of veterinary quarantine, plant protection and expansion of cooperation between the two countries in import and export. An expert-level technical meeting was recently held between the deputy head of the Iran Veterinary Organization and Deputy Head of the Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance Konstantin Savenkov in line with removing the problems ahead of exporting Iran's dairy and aquatic products to the Russian Federation. It was agreed that officials of the two sides will hold online technical briefing sessions in the coming weeks to settle the existing issues.



Iran to Open Its Int'l Science, Technology Park

TEHRAN (IP) - The Director General of Technology and Innovation Support of the Ministry of Science announced Iran's International Science and Technology Park will open with the presence of 200 companies. In the Materials, Metallurgy, and Mining Conference, Alireza Zarasvandi mentioned that the Iran International Science and Technology Park is one of the Ministry of Science's most important technology programs. He stated that the construction of this park is the most significant technology project in Iran. It has received permission from the Development Council of the Ministry of Science and has been established in an area of 44 hectares. They plan to open the park in late February with 200 companies present. According to Zarasvandi, Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology has created a set of missions in the field of technology and innovation. These missions have been sent to the parliament for approval and include objectives such as "creating and developing technology and innovation", "improving economic and knowledge-based flows", "promoting and expanding technological thinking" and "managing and leading infrastructure."

U.S. Defense Chief Austin Hospitalized for Bladder Issue

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who is fighting prostate cancer, has transferred his duties to his deputy Kathleen Hicks, hours after he was taken to hospital for an "emergent bladder issue," a spokesman said. Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks "assumed the functions and duties" just before 5:00 pm (2200 GMT), Pentagon spokesman Pat Ryder said in a statement, adding that Austin was still receiving treatment and that the White House and Congress had been informed. The announcement came weeks after it emerged that Austin, 70, had kept previous hospital stays secret and had not immediately informed US President Joe Biden of his cancer diagnosis, sparking criticism as the United States faces crises in the Middle East and Ukraine. Austin effectively vanished from the public eye for treatment for prostate cancer in December and again in January after suffering complications from the procedure, having initially concealed both the diagnosis and treatment from President Joe Biden and the rest of the government.



Stubb Wins Close-Fought Finland Presidential Election



HELSINKI (Dispatches) - Alexander Stubb of the centre-right National Coalition Party narrowly won Finland's presidential election, defeating liberal Green Party member Pekka Haavisto, who conceded defeat. Stubb is pro-European and a strong supporter of Ukraine who has taken a tough stance towards Russia. He declared himself winner in the run-off vote after securing 51.6 per cent of the votes as 99.7 per cent of ballots had been counted, against Haavisto's 48.4 per cent, justice ministry data showed. Finland's new head of state will be responsible for its security and foreign policy, including the recently approved NATO member's stance towards Russia, with which it shares a long border. In televised remarks Stubb called his victory "the greatest honor" of his life. "The feeling is calm, humble but of course at the same time I am extremely happy and grateful that the Finns in such large numbers have voted and that I get to serve as president of the Republic of Finland," he said. Stubb, a former prime minister, had won the first round on Jan. 28 with 27.2 per cent of the vote ahead of Haavisto on 25.8 per cent. He has also led Haavisto in opinion surveys, most recently by 6-8 percentage points. Haavisto congratulated Stubb as "the 13th president of Finland": "I believe Finland now gets a good president for the republic. Alexander Stubb is an experienced, competent person for the job. No more babble," he said. The vote marks a new era in Finland, which for decades has elected presidents to foster diplomacy, in particular with neighboring Russia, and opted not to join military alliances so it could soothe tensions between Moscow and NATO. But Finns changed their minds after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, in a rapid U-turn that led to the country joining NATO in April last year. Now under the Western alliance's security umbrella, Stubb will replace Sauli Niinisto, who is retiring after two six-year terms in which he earned the nickname "the Putin Whisperer" for his previous close ties with the Russian leader. Stubb will have a central role in defining Finland's NATO policies, while taking the lead on overall foreign and security policy in close cooperation with the government and acting as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. "Warm congratulations to Alexander Stubb. Finland is our close friend and partner," Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said in a post on X.

Israel Begins Attack on Rafah, 37 Killed



DOHA (Dispatches) - Israel launched a special forces operation that freed two Israeli hostages in Rafah amid air strikes early on Monday, which local health officials said killed 37 people and wounded dozens in the southern Gaza city. A joint operation by the Israel Defense Force (IDF), Israel's domestic Shin Bet security service and the Special Police Unit in Rafah freed Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Louis Hare, 70, the Israeli military said. The two men, who were kidnapped by Hamas from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak on Oct. 7, were in good condition and taken to the Tel Hashomer Medical Complex, the military said. "It was a very complex operation," Israeli military spokesman Lt Col. Richard Hecht said. "We've been working a long time on this operation. We were waiting for the right conditions." The hostages were being held on the second floor of a building that was breached with an explosive charge during the raid, which saw heavy exchanges of gunfire with surrounding buildings, Hecht said. At the same time, an air strike was carried out to allow the forces to be extracted, he said. The air strikes caused widespread panic in Rafah as many people were asleep when the strikes started, said residents contacted by Reuters using a chat app. Some feared Israel had begun its ground offensive into Rafah. Israeli planes, tanks and ships took part in the strikes, with two mosques and several houses hit, according to residents. The Israeli military said on Monday it had conducted a "series of strikes" on southern Gaza that have now "concluded," without providing further details. Before previous assaults on Gaza cities, Israel's military has ordered civilians to leave without preparing any specific evacuation plan. U.S.

President Joe Biden told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday that Israel should not launch a military operation in Rafah without a credible plan to ensure the safety of the roughly 1 million people sheltering there, the White House said. Aid agencies say an assault on Rafah would be catastrophic. It is the last relatively safe place in an enclave devastated by Israel's military offensive. Biden and Netanyahu spoke for about 45 minutes, days after the U.S. leader said Israel's military response in the Gaza Strip had been "over the top" and expressed grave concern over the rising civilian death toll in the Palestinian enclave. Netanyahu's office has said that it had ordered the military to develop a plan to evacuate Rafah and destroy four Hamas battalions it says are deployed there. Hamas militants killed 1,200 people in southern Israel and abducted at least 250 in their Oct. 7 incursion, according to Israeli tallies. Israel has responded with a military assault on the Gaza Strip that has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. Netanyahu said in an interview aired on Sunday that "enough" of the 132 remaining Israeli hostages held in Gaza were alive to justify Israel's war in the region. Hamas-run Alqsa Television on Sunday quoted a senior Hamas leader as saying any Israeli ground offensive in Rafah would "blow up" the hostage-exchange negotiations. Egypt warned on Sunday of "dire consequences" of a potential Israeli military assault on Rafah, which lies near its border. "Egypt called for the necessity of uniting all international and regional efforts to prevent the targeting of the Palestinian city of Rafah," its foreign ministry added in a statement.

Pakistan Police Clash With Khan Supporters at Election Protests




ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Police fired tear gas to disperse supporters of jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan after his party urged protests outside election offices where they said rigging had taken place in last week's national vote. Clashes were reported in Rawalpindi city, south of the capital, and Lahore, in the east, while dozens of other protests were held across the country without incident. Police warned earlier they would come down hard on illegal gatherings. There were no immediate reports of injuries from the protests. Independent candidates -- most linked to Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party -- took the most seats in the polls, scuppering the chances of the army-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to win a ruling majority. However, independents cannot form a government and the country faces weeks of political uncertainty as rival parties negotiate possible coalitions. PTI leaders claim they would have won even more seats if not for vote rigging. A nationwide election-day mobile telephone blackout and the slow counting of results led to suspicions the military establishment was influencing the process to ensure success for former premier Nawaz Sharif's PML-N. "Throughout Pakistan, elections were manipulated in a subtle way," PTI chairman Gohar Ali Khan told a news conference Saturday, calling on supporters to "protest peacefully" on Sunday. Authorities warned they would take strict action, saying so-called Section 144 orders were in place -- a colonial-era law banning public gatherings. "Some individuals are inciting illegal gatherings around the Election Commission and other government offices," a statement from Islamabad's police force said on Sunday.



U.S. Senate Advances Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan Aid Bill

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A narrowly divided U.S. Senate moved closer to passing a \$95.34 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan on Sunday, showing undiminished bipartisanship despite opposition from Republican hardliners and Donald Trump. The Democratic-led Senate voted 67-27 in a rare Sunday session to clear the latest procedural hurdle and moved the foreign aid measure toward an ultimate vote on passage in the coming days. The money is viewed as crucial by Kyiv, as it grinds toward the second anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But Senate passage would send the bill on to the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, where it faces an uncertain future. Eighteen Republicans backed the legislation after Trump, the dominant Republican White House candidate, criticized the bill on social media by saying that the foreign aid should take the form of a loan. Trump also sparked exasperation at home and abroad by saying he would encourage aggression against NATO allies who do not pay their dues to the alliance. Ahead of Sunday's vote, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell chided those who he said would disregard U.S. global interests, bemoan American leadership and lament international commitments. "This is idle work for idle minds, and it has no place in the United States Senate," McConnell said. "American leadership matters. And it is in question." Democratic President Joe

Biden, who has been seeking the aid for months, on Friday said Congress would be guilty of "neglect" if it failed to pass the measure. The next Senate action is expected on Monday sometime after 8 p.m. EST (0100 GMT), when lawmakers are due to hold two procedural votes: one to adopt the foreign aid package as an amendment to an underlying House bill; and a second to limit debate ahead of a final vote on passage, which could come on Wednesday, according to aides. The legislation includes \$61 billion for Ukraine, \$14 billion for Israel in its war against Hamas and \$4.83 billion to support partners in the Indo-Pacific, including Taiwan, and deter aggression by China. It also would provide \$9.15 billion in humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, Ukraine and other conflict zones around the globe. House Speaker Mike Johnson, who has a slim 219-212 Republican majority, has indicated that he could try to split the aid provisions into separate measures once the bill arrives from the Senate. But a standalone aid bill for Israel fell victim in the House last week to opposition from Democrats who favor the broader Senate legislation and from hardline Republicans who wanted compensating spending cuts, in a pair of humiliating defeats for Johnson. During a visit to Kyiv on Friday, a bipartisan delegation of House members vowed to do their part to pass the measure.



Thousands in Morocco Protest Ties With Genocidal Israel

RABAT (Dispatches) - Thousands of Moroccans again took to the streets of their capital to call for an end to their country's ties with Israel, which they denounced for "genocide" in Gaza. In late 2020, Morocco established diplomatic ties with Israel under the Abraham Accords brokered by the United States which saw similar moves by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. As part of the deal, Rabat received Washington's recognition of its claim to sovereignty over the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Since the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza began on October 7, several large-scale demonstrations in the North African kingdom have called for the abrogation of the normalisation deal. "Normalisation is treason," and "Stop the massacre," read banners protesters carried in front of Morocco's parliament in the centre of Rabat. AFP journalists estimated more than 10,000 people joined the rally, some of them carrying an immense Palestinian flag. The crowd size matched that of a similar November protest in Morocco's commercial capital Casablanca. "We see 24 hours a day bombardments, children killed, nearly 30,000 dead and nothing stops it. The genocide continues," said Abdelhakim Ziani, 25, a medical student who joined the rally and wants an end to ties between Morocco and Israel. "We can't continue selling and buying from these genocidal people," he said. The demonstration was organised by leftist parties and Islamist movements. Morocco has officially denounced what it said was "flagrant violations of the provisions of international law" by Israel in its war against Hamas, but has not given any indication that normalisation with Israel would be undone. The unprecedented October 7 attack by militants of the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas triggered the war. Their attack resulted in the deaths in Israel of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures. Vowing to eliminate Hamas, Israel has responded with a relentless bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza that the Hamas-ruled territory's health ministry says has killed at least 28,176 people, mostly women and children.

Iraq Resumes Talks With U.S. on Future of Anti-Jihadist Coalition

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq said it had resumed talks with the United States on the future of the anti-jihadist coalition, expressing hope that they would not be disrupted and lead to an outcome soon. A first round of talks opened on January 27 but was swiftly suspended after a drone attack killed three U.S. military personnel at a base in Jordan the following day, leading to U.S. reprisal strikes. "The supreme Iraqi military commission resumed on Sunday its meetings with international coalition forces in Baghdad," General Yehia Rasool, military spokesman for Iraq's prime minister, said in a statement. "As long as nothing disrupts the serenity of these talks, the meetings will take place on a regular basis in order to achieve the commission's works as soon as possible," he added. Rasool said the meetings were aimed at setting up a "timeline" for a "progressive pullout" of coalition forces from Iraq, leading to the end of its mission. The U.S.-led military coalition was formed in 2014 to fight the Islamic State group -- the year the jihadist group overran nearly a third of Iraq's territory and swathes of neighbouring Syria. U.S. and allied troops have been targeted more than 165 times in the Middle East since mid-October, in attacks linked to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The

majority of the attacks have been claimed by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a loose alliance of Iran-backed groups angered by U.S. support for Israel. The United States has retaliated with several deadly strikes targeting these groups. Washington has 2,500 soldiers in Iraq and some 900 troops in Syria as part of the coalition against IS. Its troops in Iraq are deployed at the invitation of Baghdad, but those in Syria are stationed in areas outside Syrian government control. Currently U.S. troops in Iraq provide assistance to government forces to prevent a re-emergence of the IS jihadists. In the statement, Rasool said discussions were now focusing on evaluating the threat posed by IS, which has been defeated in Iraq and Syria but still has sleeper cells that carry attacks. The talks were also centring on "the capabilities of the Iraqi armed forces", he added. In order to replace the international coalition, Iraqi authorities want to engage in bilateral military cooperation with the member states contributing to the force. But the process is likely to be long. A statement Thursday from the coalition said the objective now was "to assess" the progress made in defeating the jihadists, and to "discuss the future transition" of the coalition's mission.



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SPORTS

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Kansas City Chiefs Win Historic Super Bowl

LAS VEGAS (Dispatches) - Patrick Mahomes pulled off another Super Bowl comeback on Sunday as the Kansas City Chiefs snatched a thrilling 25-22 overtime victory over the San Francisco 49ers to win their third NFL championship in five seasons. In a perfectly scripted finale before a celebrity-studded Las Vegas crowd including pop icon Taylor Swift, Mahomes hit Mecole Hardman in the end zone with just three seconds remaining in overtime to seal a dramatic win in what was the longest Super Bowl in history. The win makes Kansas City the first team to win back-to-back Lombardi Trophies in two decades, cementing the franchise's right to be regarded as the NFL's latest dynasty. "It means a ton," Mahomes said. "With the adversity we dealt with this year and to come through, the guys never faltered." Mahomes, meanwhile, warned the Chiefs' rivals that their latest win was just the start of their dynasty. "We're not done," he said. "We've got a young team. We're going to keep this thing going." For long periods, however, it looked as if Kansas City would be denied by San Francisco's ferocious defense. Chiefs star Travis Kelce -- the boyfriend of watching singer Swift -- had a nightmare start to the game, at one stage blowing up on the sidelines at Kansas City head coach Andy Reid in an extraordinary outburst. But with Mahomes pulling the strings, the Chiefs finally battled through a below-par performance to deliver when it mattered once more. It marked the third time that Mahomes has led Kansas City back from double-digit deficits to win the Super Bowl, sealing his reputation as the heir apparent to the legendary Tom Brady. The Chiefs fell behind 10-0 in the first quarter after San Francisco struck first through a 55-yard Jake Moody field goal and a

brilliantly worked trick play that ended with a touchdown for running back Christian McCaffrey. Kansas City were left with just a Harrison Butker field goal to show for their first half efforts to make it 10-3 at the break. Kelce went berserk on the Chiefs bench, with the tight end screaming at head coach Andy Reid in apparent frustration at being kept off the field for the play when an early Kansas City drive ended with an Isiah Pacheco fumble. Kansas City's offense fared little better after the restart, with Mahomes giving up an interception to 49ers safety J'yaire Brown after an overthrown pass intended for Marquez Valdes-Scantling. San Francisco were unable to turn the possession into points, however, as defenses stayed on top, forcing punts on the next three possessions. Kansas City added to their tally with a monstrous 57-yard Butker field goal that crept over the bar to eclipse Moody's record-long first-half effort. With San Francisco's defense still on top, Kansas City needed a stroke of luck and they got it when a muffed punt between 49ers defenders Darrell Luter and Ray-Ray McClellan allowed the Chiefs to recover deep in the red zone. Mahomes wasted no time cashing in, hitting Valdes-Scantling in the end zone from 16 yards, Butker's extra point making it 13-10. The 49ers came roaring back, however, on the next drive, Purdy showing great composure to lead a 12-play 75-yard touchdown drive that ended with a Jennings score. A potentially costly missed extra point left San Francisco 16-13 ahead, and the Chiefs drew level on their next possession with Butker's third field goal to tie it at 16-16. Moody kicked a 40-yard field goal to restore San Francisco's lead at 19-16.

World Record Marathon Holder Kiptum Dies in Kenya Road Accident



NAIROBI (Dispatches) - World marathon record holder Kelvin Kiptum and his coach Gervais Hakizimana died in a car crash in western Kenya that left a third passenger injured, police said Sunday. The 24-year-old was driving from Kaptaget to Eldoret in western Kenya on Sunday night when the car rolled. "The accident happened around 11 pm (2000 GMT). The car had three occupants, two died on the spot, while one was taken to hospital. The two are Kiptum and his coach," said Peter Mulinge, police commander for Elgeyo Marakwet County in western Kenya. "It is Kiptum who was driving heading to Eldoret and the vehicle lost control and rolled, killing the two on the spot. A female passenger sustained injuries and has been rushed to hospital," he told reporters. World Athletics President Sebastian Coe said he was "shocked and saddened to learn of the devastating loss." "On behalf of all World Athletics, we send our deepest condolences to their families, friends, teammates and the Kenyan nation," Coe said in a statement. "An incredible athlete leaving an incredible legacy, we will miss him dearly." Kiptum ran a world record 2:00:35 in the Chicago Marathon in October, taking 34 seconds off fellow Kenyan Eliud Kipchoge's previous record. Kiptum's run marked the third time a men's world record had been set on the streets of Chicago but the first time since Morocco's Khalid Khannouchi in 1999. At the time, Kiptum was only 23 years old and competing in his third marathon. World Athletics said Kiptum had not raced since then, but he had been due to compete at the Rotterdam Marathon in April where he was hoping to become the first man to break two hours for the marathon on a record-eligible course. Kiptum won in his debut in 2022 at Valencia and then in the London Marathon in April last year. Hakizimana, who is from Rwanda, was a runner who trained for years in Kenya, where he met Kiptum in the youth's village of Chepkorio.

Celtics Hold Off Heat in Bruising NBA Clash

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Boston Celtics, fueled by a near triple-double from Jayson Tatum, held off the short-handed but determined Miami Heat 110-106 in an NBA clash that turned testy in a tense fourth quarter. League leaders Boston, who blew out the Heat last month, found the going tougher this time as the Heat cut a 15-point third-quarter deficit to two with less than two minutes remaining. Boston star Jaylen Brown and Miami's Duncan Robinson exchanged heated words after tangling early in the final period, with Brown assessed a flagrant foul. But the Celtics -- stunned by the Heat in the Eastern Conference finals last season -- kept their heads down and polished off Miami. Tatum scored 26 points with 10 rebounds and nine assists. Kristaps Porzingis added 25 points, Brown scored 20 points and Jrue Holiday chipped in 15 for the Celtics, who made 16-of-39 three-point attempts. Tyler Herro scored 22 of his 24 points in the second half. His three-pointer with 1:49 remaining pulled the Heat within 106-104, but Porzingis and Tatum sealed the win at the free-throw line. "They're a good team, they're going to go on runs," Tatum said. "You've just got to withstand it and answer." Tatum said the Celtics are "better than we were last year at this point" but cautioned that the pressure "really kicks up" after next week's NBA All-Star Game break. "We're playing good basketball, but we've still got some ways to go," he said. "But I think we're on the right direction." The Heat were without their scoring and assists leader Jimmy Butler, who was absent from the team after a death in his family. They also lost Terry Rozier and Josh Richardson to injuries. Rozier made an awkward landing on his right leg on a drive to the basket in the third quarter. Richardson departed in the second quarter with a right shoulder injury. In the only other game, Western Conference contenders Oklahoma City snapped a two-game skid with a 127-113 victory over the Sacramento Kings. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 38 points and Jalen Williams added 32 for the Thunder, who bounced back from a lopsided loss to the Dallas Mavericks on Saturday. The Thunder haven't lost three straight all season and they looked determined to keep it that way, jumping to an 18-8 lead midway through the first quarter. "Usually when we lose and we lose big it's because of our first quarter," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "We set the tone early and that gave us the edge the rest of the game." Oklahoma City led by 17 going into the fourth quarter and Sacramento couldn't get the deficit below seven points in the final frame. Kings center Domantas Sabonis had a triple-double of 21 points, 11 rebounds and 14 assists and Malik Monk scored 26 points off the bench. But De'Aaron Fox, who was averaging almost 27 points per game, was held to 15 and the Thunder scored 30 points off 18 Kings turnovers. "We got into a good rhythm," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "We were playing fast, we were getting stops and when we get out in transition we're the best version of ourselves."



Paul Outlasts Giron to Capture ATP Dallas Open Title



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Tommy Paul captured his second career ATP Tour title, defeating fellow American Marcos Giron 7-6 (7/3), 5-7, 6-3 in the final of the Dallas Open. World number 15 Paul won his only prior ATP crown in 2021 at Stockholm but had lost in last year's finals at Acapulco and Eastbourne in his only other ATP championship matches. Paul, who reached his first Grand Slam semi-final at last year's Australian Open, broke Giron for a 2-0 lead in the final set and held from there to take the victory on a service winner after two hours and 32 minutes. Paul dominated the first-set tie-breaker but lost a battle for the second. In a marathon ninth game that lasted more than 12 minutes, Paul held serve when Giron netted a forehand. But Giron then held, broke for a 6-5 second-set edge when Paul sent a forehand long, then held again to force a third set. Paul improved to 2-1 against Giron in ATP encounters, losing their inaugural meeting in a 2021 Miami Open first-round match but taking a round-of-16 affair last year in Canada. Giron, ranked 67th, ousted US top seed Frances Tiafoe and French fourth seed Adrian Panatta to reach his second ATP final, having fallen in the 2022 San Diego championship match. Meanwhile France's Ugo Humbert outlasted Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov to claim his fifth ATP title in as many finals at home in Marseille. Humbert saw off second seed Dimitrov 6-4, 6-3 with a solid serve and an impressive baseline game in the southern port city. "I'm very strong mentally in finals," said the fourth-seeded Humbert, who has now won all five finals he has played on the circuit. "Everything is there. I am pretty solid from the baseline, I serve very well and I am strong mentally," said Humbert, who also won in his home city of Metz last November. Dimitrov, a former world number three now ranked 13, showed signs of fatigue after Saturday's three-hour semi-final battle with Russian Karen Khachanov. Humbert broke in the 10th game to snatch the opening set. He saved break points early in the second set, racing to a 3-0 lead and keeping Dimitrov at bay with 87 per cent of points won behind first serves.

Ivory Coast Beat Nigeria to Take AFCON Title

ABIDJAN (Dispatches) - Sebastien Haller scored a dramatic late winner as hosts Ivory Coast fought back to beat Victor Osimhen's Nigeria 2-1 in the Africa Cup of Nations final and complete the most remarkable of major tournament turnarounds by claiming their third continental title. Nigeria looked set to repeat their 1-0 victory over the Ivorians here at the Ebimpe Olympic Stadium during the group stage when captain William Troost-Ekong -- who had netted a penalty to decide that first meeting -- rose to head in the opener late in the first half. However, Franck Kessie equalized just after the hour mark and Haller turned in Simon Adingra's cross in the 81st minute to spark wild celebrations among the sea of orange in the Abidjan stands. Ivory Coast's success sees them add this year's title to those claimed in 1992 and 2015, while this win also allows them to join Nigeria on three Cup of Nations triumphs overall. Spearheaded by reigning African player of the year Osimhen, the Nigerians had looked the most formidable team in the competition over the last month. But Ivory Coast's sense of destiny was simply too overpowering, as they became the first host country to win the AFCON since 2006. Didier Drogba captained the Elephants team that lost on penalties to Egypt in Cairo in that final 18 years ago, while this time he was among the spectators to witness a stunning victory for his country. "It is greater than a fairytale,"

said coach Emere Fae, who took over a stricken team mid-tournament. "I am struggling to take it all in. When I think about all we have been through, the difficult moments, moments when we were behind, when we came back in the last minute of games. "We are miracle survivors." It is an incredible achievement for a side that was on the brink of elimination in the group stage after losing 4-0 to Equatorial Guinea on January 22. That was their heaviest ever home defeat and the Ivorians then parted company with coach Jean-Louis Gasset, replacing him with Fae, a teammate of Drogba's in 2006. They then began a remarkable turnaround which saw them oust holders Senegal on penalties, beat Mali with a last-gasp goal in extra time, and edge out DR Congo with a Haller goal in the last four. Their supporters packed out the stadium to its 60,000 capacity, with many fans having to watch from vantage points on stairways. Anyone wanting to dampen the excitement levels might have pointed out that Cup of Nations finals tend to be low-scoring affairs. There were just 10 goals scored in the last 11 finals, five of which were decided on penalties after a 0-0 stalemate. Indeed, Ivory Coast's four previous final appearances had all ended goalless before going to penalties, two of which they had won.

