

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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## Comprehensive Partnership Agreement Between Iran, Russia Almost Ready



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran and Russia are in the final stages of finalizing a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement that establishes a long-term partnership between the two nations. Russian Ambassador to Iran, Alexey Dedov, informed Sputnik that the process of finalizing a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement between Russia and Iran is imminent, with the signing of the document expected soon. "This is truly the most important fundamental document, which may determine Russian-Iranian interaction for the coming years, and perhaps decades. We are talking about a new interstate agreement, a comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries," Dedov said. He noted that "work is currently underway on the final development and finalization of this document." The diplomat noted that while it remains challenging to provide specific dates, Moscow anticipates the agreement to be signed "in the foreseeable future." This comes in light of record-high trade relations between both countries.

## 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.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



## Iran to Hit Enemy Ships If Its Ships Attacked

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK TEHRAN - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says that Iran will target the enemies' ships if its ships are attacked by them. Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks in a meeting with IRGC officials on Tuesday morning. Referring to the 45th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the IRGC chief hailed the Iranian nation's glorious participation in the 22 Bahman rallies. The Iranian people have thwarted the enemies' plots by their intelligence and faith, he added. Elsewhere in his remarks, Salami referred to the role of the IRGC in defending the country, stressing that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps will surely emerge victorious if it enters a military war or a cyber warfare. Meanwhile on Monday he said the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) successfully launched a long-range ballistic missile from a warship, the IRGC commander said. He noted that "A long-range ballistic missile was successfully fired from an IRGC Navy military vessel in joint cooperation between the IRGC Aerospace Force and the IRGC Navy." Salami emphasized that "This new achievement increased the range of influence and our naval power to any desired point because our ocean-going ships can appear anywhere in the world." The general said the new achievement has extended the IRGC's range of influence and naval power up to any desired spot. "Our ocean-going warships can be present in every location across the world, and when we can fire missiles from them, there is accordingly no safe spot for a power intending to create insecurity for us," the IRGC chief added. The development comes amid Iran's growing success in expansion of its defensive missile program. The country has used the missiles in attacks in recent years on terrorist targets located as far as the Mediterranean. However, Iran has repeatedly declared that its missile capabilities are solely used for deterrence and defense. In November 2020, the IRGC Navy unveiled plans to dispatch a flotilla of military vessels, including its first oceangoing warship, to the northern parts of the Indian Ocean. The IRGC's oceangoing warship, which is 150 meters long and weighs 4,000 tons, is a multipurpose vessel for long-range operations. It is furnished with missiles, air defense systems, and radars.

## President Stresses Need for Iran's Enhanced Interaction With World Tourism Bodies



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has highlighted the significance of promoting tourism industry, stressing the need for the country's enhanced interaction with international organizations active in the sector. The Iranian president made the remarks during a meeting with Secretary General of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Zurab Pololikashvili on the sidelines of the 17th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition on Monday. "[Obtaining] more knowledge by the World Tourism Organization about Iran and its cultural and civilizational capacities as well as its tourist attractions will play an important role in introducing such capacities to various countries," Raisi said. He hailed the positive cooperation between UNWTO and Iran's Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage and called on Pololikashvili to visit the country's tourist attractions. The president further emphasized that some Western countries seek to spread Iranophobia to achieve their won colonial objectives and stressed the need to counter such plots. The UNWTO chief, for his part, commended Iran's efforts to attach importance to the tourism industry and criticized certain Western media for spreading propaganda against the Islamic Republic. Pololikashvili said he is visiting Iran to introduce the Iranian nation's rich culture and civilization as well as the country's historical and tourist attractions to the world.

## 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



## Quarter of Road Deaths In Tehran Linked to Dangerous Domestic Cars

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - One quarter (23%) of road deaths in Tehran are drivers of domestically manufactured low-quality cars, most notably, the infamous Pride, according to Iran's judiciary. "Contrary to the prevailing trend worldwide, where the highest deaths from accidents occur outside of cities, in Tehran Province, the highest number of fatalities is related to Tehran city, with 23 percent of the deaths being attributed to users of Pride cars," said Abolfazl Nikoukar, social deputy of Tehran province's judiciary. Deputy Traffic Police Chief Teimour Hadianfar recently labeled Iranian cars as "death wagons," lambasting manufacturers for poor quality control, particularly with imported parts sourced from China. Iran's automotive sector, a vital component of the nation's economy, employs around 700,000 workers. Despite its significance, the industry faces growing scrutiny due to persistent safety concerns and a lack of effective regulation. Iran's poor traffic safety record is evident in its annual death toll, estimated at approximately 20,000 deaths. World Health Organization (WHO) data from 2018 revealed that road traffic accident deaths in Iran accounted for 6.5 percent of all fatalities, highlighting the pressing need for comprehensive reforms to enhance road safety nationwide. The statistics come on the eve of Iranian new year, Nowruz, when road deaths typically spike as Iranians travel the country for holidays and family visits.

## Iran Raps U.S. Confiscation of Venezuelan Plane



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Foreign Ministry of Iran condemned the U.S.' move to confiscate a Boeing 747 cargo plane belonging to Venezuela's Emtrasur airline. In a statement on Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani condemned the U.S.' "illegal" seizure and transfer of the Venezuelan Boeing 747 cargo plane. Denouncing the "unjust appropriation" of the plane, the spokesman said it amounts to a hijack, a result of the U.S.' unilateral coercive measures, and a violation of the UN Charter and the basic principles of international law. He also expressed Iran's decisive support for Venezuela's legal and diplomatic efforts and measures to reclaim the plane and have access to its properties. The U.S. government has seized a Boeing 747 cargo plane that officials allege was previously sold by a sanctioned Iranian airline to Venezuela in violation of American export control laws. The Justice Department said on Monday that the American-built plane had arrived in Florida and would be disposed of. The plane had earlier been transferred from Iranian airline Mahan Air to Emtrasur, a Venezuelan cargo airline and subsidiary of a state-owned firm that had previously been sanctioned by the US, according to the AP. American officials claim that the sale, done without U.S. government authorization, violated export control laws. Mahan Air of Iran has for years been subject to U.S. government sanctions.



## Uzbekistan Determined to Boost Ties With Iran in Tourism

By: F. Taherpour

TEHRAN - On the occasion of the presence of delegation from the tourism committee of Uzbekistan and the Bukhara regional government in Tehran to attend the 17th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition, Ambassador of Uzbekistan H.E. Fariddin Nasirev held a reception for presenting potentials of tourism of his country at the Uzbekistan Embassy in Tehran with presentation of the Uzbek national dishes and music. Addressing the participants in the reception, Mr. Nasirev pointed to the good relations between Iran and Uzbekistan which is growing especially after the meeting of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his meeting with Iranian President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi and tourism was one of the fields that both presidents called for boosting cooperation in this field. The ambassador said: "Our delegation is participating in the 17th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industry Exhibition, which is being held at the Tehran International Exhibition Center. We are confident that our country will fully demonstrate its rich historical and cultural potential and tourism potential within the framework of this exhibition." He further said: "During this exhibition, you will have the opportunity to get acquainted with the ancient history of our country, its rich culture, its unique beauty, customs and traditions of our people. As you are well aware, large-scale, irreversible reforms have been implemented in Uzbekistan in recent years. The tourism sector is given priority in the policy of "open doors" led by the head of our country, Mr. Mirziyoyev." Mr. Nasirev the reiterated a simplified electronic visa procedure has been introduced for citizens of another 55 countries, including Iran. He added: "Interregional cooperation between Uzbekistan and Iran is also developing more and more. As a result of high-level visits, a memorandum was signed on establishing direct relations between Samarkand and Isfahan and Bukhara and Hamadan. Favorable conditions have been created for conducting all types of tourism business in Uzbekistan. Tax and customs benefits have been provided, credit and financial assistance have been strengthened. Subsidies are allocated to build new



hotels and attract international brands, increase the flow of tourists." Nasirev concluded his speech by saying: "In order to create comfortable conditions for tourists, the number of hotel beds was increased to 140 thousand, 70 new tourist routes were opened. Twice a week (on Wednesdays and Sundays) direct flights were launched on the Tehran-Tashkent-Tehran route." And he thanked those who contribute to the development of tourism between the two countries. Then Chairman of the tourism committee of the republic of Uzbekistan Mr. Umid Shadiev, addressing the participants highlighted some major actions of Uzbekistan for boosting tourism in the country and cooperation with other countries in this sector as well as tourism potentials of his country for attracting tourists. He added that tourism is one of the best ways for boosting relations and economy and it is also considered as way for strengthening friendship. He then pointed to the unprecedented actions of Uzbekistan in its tourism industry for a sustainable development of the country. He noted that Uzbekistan is the historical center of the Great Silk Road with more than 8,000 cultural heritages as 209 of them are in four famous historical cities of the country which have been registered in the world. He noted that Uzbekistan is not just a historical country and it has many natural tourist attraction scenes and it is a four-season country and tourists can enjoy it. Shadiev then touched upon the cooperation with Iran in tourism industry and said that the presence of tourism related representatives of Uzbekistan in Tehran Exhibition bespeaks of how important Iran is for Uzbekistan as the history of visits between people of the two countries date back to thousands of years ago. He reiterated that Iran and Uzbekistan have great potentials for cooperation in industry and they need bore active cooperation and in a larger scale. Then the governor of Bukhara touched upon the historic importance of his city especially for attracting tourists and pointed to the sisterhood agreement of Bukhara with Hamedan of Iran and invited Iranians to visit this city.

## Iran to Put Foreign Satellites Into Orbit in Two Years



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Communications and Information Technology Isa Zare'pour has said that the Islamic Republic aims to put into space satellites of other countries, using Iranian-made carriers and launchers within the next two years. The minister made the comment on Monday as he spoke about Iran's achievements in the space industry since President Ebrahim Raisi's administration took office in August 2021. Iran's space industry is back on track and has witnessed significant growth over the past two years, the minister said, adding that the number of space launches in the past two years is as equal as the launches carried out over ten years earlier. Iran is self-sufficient when it comes to manufacturing imaging and measurement satellites, and is presently working on increasing the accuracy of its satellites, Zare'pour said. Iranian-made rockets are capable of launching satellites weighing 100 to 200 kg, he said, adding that the country also possesses stations that receive satellite signals. All these cases show that Iran now indigenized the space industry, the minister noted.

## Iranian Ports' Capacity Hits 290m Tons



TEHRAN (MNA) - The capacity of Iranian ports has increased to 290 million tons, according to the head of the country's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO). Ali-Akbar Safaei said the increase in the loading and unloading capacity of the ports has led to the growth of the country's maritime trade by eight percent in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19) compared to the previous year. Stating that 140,000 ships visit Iran's ports every year, he added: "Although private sector fleets are facing sanctions restrictions, Iran's maritime fleet is now among the top 20 countries in the world." Iran's ports, as the major gates of exports and imports, play some significant role in the country's global trade, and the ongoing operation at the ports indicates that they are playing their part perfectly in this regard. Attaching great importance to the role of ports, the Iranian government has always put the development of ports atop agenda of its activities. By examining the regional conditions and capacities of ports, Iran's maritime sector has always put the development and equipping of the country's ports in line with the developments and advances of technology and the latest technologies in the world, and despite the limitations due to the expansion of sanctions, it has been able to increase the capacity of commercial ports through relying on the specialized and experienced manpower and utilizing the power of domestic expert consultants by defining and advancing development projects in the country's ports. In this regard, PMO defined a high number of projects at the beginning of the current government's incumbency to develop and improve the country's ports.



## Iran's Top 100 Companies Account for 60% of Non-Oil Exports

TEHRAN (IP) - The Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) has released statistics on the performance of Iran's leading exporters and importers in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (from March 21, 2023, to January 21, 2024). The data reveals that the top 100 exporters were responsible for 60% of the total value of non-oil exports. According to Ministry of Industry's news portal Shada, these 100 companies exported more than 60.2 million tons valued at over \$24.3 billion, representing 53% by weight and 60% by value of Iran's non-oil exports during this period. IRICA's report highlights that 57 out of the top 100 exporters are engaged in the petrochemicals, oil, and gas sectors. Notably, Iran's National Gas Company, Nouri Petrochemicals, and Pardis Petrochemicals emerged as major players among the top exporters. Iran's National Gas Company exported nearly 14.3 million tons worth over \$5.2 billion, while Nouri Petrochemicals and Pardis Petrochemicals shipped more than 1.4 million tons (\$745 million) and 2.2 million tons (\$697 million) respectively. Of the top 100 exporters, 91 were legal entities, with 9 being natural persons. Furthermore, the first 100 importers accounted for all imports into the country during this period. They brought in around 19.7 million tons of goods valued at over \$20.320 billion, representing 58.35% by weight and 37.46% by value. The report notes that these top importers were legal entities, with Iranian Specialized Trading Company, Ava Tejarat Saba Company, and State Livestock Affairs Logistics leading importers.

## Tehran Hosting G5 Meeting on Women, Family Health

TEHRAN (IP) - The 28th G5 Technical Meeting on Women and Family is underway in a prestigious summit kicked off on Tuesday in Tehran aimed at joint work for women and family health problems. Representatives from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and experts from WHO headquarters in Geneva and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as a delegation from the WHO Country Office headed by Syed Jaffar Hussain, WHO Representative and Head of Mission to Iran attended the event. Bahram Eynollahi, the Iranian Health Minister presented an overview of research and development activities by universities of medical sciences across the country and the overall state of the health system in Iran. The meeting mainly focuses on the adverse impact of sanctions on access to essential medical products and technology in this particular region. The meeting





### Trump Asks U.S. Supreme Court to Delay Election Interference Trial

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Donald Trump on Monday asked the U.S. Supreme Court to put on hold a judicial decision rejecting his claim that he is immune from being prosecuted for trying to overturn his 2020 election loss, arguing that without such a shield "the presidency as we know it will cease to exist." Trump, seeking to regain the presidency in the Nov. 5 US election, asked the justices to pause a Feb. 6 ruling by a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit rejecting his claim of immunity from prosecution. Trump's lawyers in a brief to the Supreme Court warned that "conducting a months-long criminal trial of President Trump at the height of election season will radically disrupt President Trump's ability to campaign" against President Joe Biden ahead of the election. They asked the justices to halt the trial proceedings pending their bid for the full slate of judges on the DC Circuit to reconsider the case, and, if necessary, an appeal to the Supreme Court. A March 4 trial date for Trump in federal court in Washington on four criminal counts pursued by Special Counsel Jack Smith already was postponed, with no new date set. Trump, the first former president to be criminally prosecuted, is the frontrunner for the Republican nomination to challenge Biden, a Democrat who defeated him in 2020.



### Ukraine Urges Poland to Punish Protesting Farmers



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine called on Warsaw to "punish" Polish farmers who forcibly pried open Ukrainian trucks crossing into the EU, spilling mounds of grain onto roads near their border. The farmers began protesting at the border last week, blocking three crossing points in anger at what they see as cheap Ukrainian grain imports. The fresh protests mark another blow to relations between Ukraine and Poland, which had only weeks before managed to quell a similar two-month blockade by Polish truckers. Ukraine's agriculture ministry said it strongly condemned the "deliberate destruction of Ukrainian grain by Polish protesters." "We expect the culprits to be quickly identified and punished," the ministry said. Poland said it had opened a probe into "breaking customs security and destroying property" after the incident. The spilt grain will "probably not be suitable for further use," spokeswoman of the District Prosecutor's Office in Lublin, Agnieszka Kepka, told AFP. Ukraine, once dubbed "Europe's bread basket", has seen its agriculture sector turned upside down by Russia's invasion, with many of its Black Sea export hubs blocked and farmland rendered unusable by warfare. "For two years since the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian farmers have been working under constant enemy fire and suffering huge losses," Kyiv's agricultural ministry said. "They obtain this grain with great difficulty and sometimes at the cost of their lives," it said. The protests represent another awkward blow to the new Polish government led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who has sought to repair ties with Kyiv fractured by the last right-wing government. Tusk was in Paris for talks with French leader Emmanuel Macron on Monday, where he stressed Poland still stood firmly by Ukraine. In Kyiv, outraged officials demanded that Warsaw publicly condemn the incident, chiding what they see as a worrying increase in anti-Ukrainian sentiment. "The lack of reaction from the Polish authorities to the destroyed cargo will lead to more xenophobia and political violence," Ukraine's deputy economy minister Taras Kachka said on social media. Polish police on Monday confirmed they had conducted an inspection at the site and interviewed witnesses. The evidence gathered "will be sent today to the District Prosecutor's Office in Chelm for a criminal law assessment regarding further proceedings in this case", a spokeswoman for the local police, Ewa Czyn, told AFP. Many Ukrainian officials said the Polish farmers were acting in the interests of Russia.



### France, Germany, Poland to Tighten Defense Ties

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The governments of Poland, France and Germany vowed Monday to make Europe a security and defense power with a greater ability to back Ukraine, as fears grow that former US president Donald Trump might return to the White House and allow Russia to expand its aggression on the continent. The foreign ministers of the three countries met in the Paris suburb of La Celle-Saint-Cloud to have talks about Ukraine, amid other issues. They discussed reviving the so-called Weimar Triangle, a long dormant regional grouping that was designed to promote cooperation between France, Germany and Poland. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin on Monday, said he wanted to "revitalize" his nation's relations with its key European partners. "There is no reason why we should be so clearly militarily weaker than Russia, and therefore increasing production and intensifying our cooperation are absolutely indisputable priorities," Tusk said in arguing for the EU to become "a military power" in its own right. Former EU chief Tusk referenced Alexandre Dumas's classic book, "The Three Musketeers", as he said Poland was ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with France and stressed that the philosophy at the heart of relations between the European Union and NATO was based on the principle of "one for all, all for one." "Together with France we are ready to fight for this security" of "all of Europe", he said, flanked by Macron. The diplomatic push came after Trump shocked many in Europe over the weekend by appearing to invite Russia to invade any NATO member not spending enough on its own defense. "You didn't pay? You're delinquent?" Trump recounted telling an unidentified NATO member during his presidency. "No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You gotta pay. You gotta pay your bills." The Republican front-runner's words at a campaign rally were particularly shocking for front-line NATO countries like Poland, which experienced both German and Soviet occupation during World War II and later spent decades under Soviet control. Anxieties run high there over the ongoing war just across Poland's eastern border. Speaking alongside

Tusk in Berlin, Scholz blasted Trump's comments. "NATO's promise of protection is unrestricted -- 'all for one and one for all,'" Scholz said without mentioning the former president by name. "And let me say clearly for current reasons: Any relativisation of NATO's support guarantee is irresponsible and dangerous, and is in the interest of Russia alone." "No one can play, or 'deal,' with Europe's security," the chancellor added. Earlier Monday, Scholz inaugurated a new ammunition factory, underlining Europe's efforts to ramp up weapons production. Tusk also urged European nations to invest more in military projects in order "to achieve as quickly as possible... in the next dozen or so months, much greater air defense capabilities, much greater production capabilities in terms of ammunition." Asked about Trump's remarks, Tusk said they "should act like a cold shower for all those who continue to underestimate this increasingly real threat which Europe is facing". Macron, speaking alongside Tusk in Paris, said Europe's will "to further supply and meet Ukrainian needs is crucial", after leaders of the 27 EU member nations sealed a deal to provide Ukraine with €50 billion (\$54 billion) in support for its war-ravaged economy. This "will enable us to make from Europe a security and defense power that is both complementary to NATO and a pillar of the Atlantic alliance", Macron said. Trump's remarks raised concerns that if reflected, he could embolden Russia to attack other countries besides Ukraine. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg issued a statement Sunday saying that Trump's remarks put American troops and their allies at greater risk. NATO does not require its 31 members to pay bills, but they are expected to invest a certain percentage of their own budgets - ideally, 2% of their gross domestic product - on defense. Some countries, like Poland, have long met the target. Other European nations ramped up their military spending after Russia invaded Ukraine almost two years ago. Germany, with a post-World War II political culture of military caution, was a frequent target of Trump's ire during his presidency for falling short of the 2% target, but Berlin announced plans to step up military spending after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and plans to hit the benchmark this year.



### France Proposes Hezbollah Withdrawal, Border Talks for Israel-Lebanon Truce

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - France has delivered a written proposal to Beirut aimed at ending hostilities with Israel and settling the disputed Lebanon-Israel frontier, according to a document seen by Reuters that calls for fighters including Hezbollah's elite unit to withdraw 10 km (6 miles) from the border. The plan aims to end fighting between the Hezbollah and Israel at the border. The hostilities have run in parallel to the Gaza war and are fueling concern of a ruinous, all-out confrontation. The document, the first written proposal brought to Beirut during weeks of Western mediation, was delivered to top Lebanese state officials including Prime Minister Najib Mikati by French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne last week, four senior Lebanese and three French officials said. It declares the aim of preventing a conflict "that risks spiraling out of control" and enforcing "a potential ceasefire, when the conditions are right" and ultimately envisions negotiations on delineation of the contentious land border between Lebanon and Israel. Hezbollah rejects formally negotiating a de-escalation until the war in Gaza ends, a position reiterated by a Hezbollah politician in response to questions for this story. While some details of similar mediation efforts by U.S. Middle East envoy Amos Hochstein have been circulating in recent weeks, the full details of the French written proposal delivered to Lebanon have not previously been reported. The

three-step plan envisages a 10-day process of de-escalation ending with the border negotiations. One French diplomatic source said the proposal had been put to the governments of Israel, Lebanon and Hezbollah. France has historical ties with Lebanon. It has 20,000 citizens in the country and some 800 troops as part of a U.N. peacekeeping force. "We made proposals. We are in contact with the Americans and it's important that we bring together all initiatives and build peace," Sejourne told a news conference on Monday. The plan proposes Lebanese armed groups and Israel would cease military operations against each other, including Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon. Several non-state groups, including Palestinian factions, have mounted attacks on Israel from south Lebanon during the latest hostilities, though Hezbollah is the dominant power in the area with a fighting force widely seen to outgun the Lebanese army. The Lebanese armed groups would dismantle all premises and facilities close to the frontier, and withdraw combat forces - including Hezbollah's elite Radwan fighters and military capabilities such as antitank systems - at least 10 km north of the frontier, the document proposes. Any such withdrawal could still leave Hezbollah fighters much closer to the border than the 30 km (19 mile) withdrawal to Lebanon's Litani River, stipulated in a U.N. resolution that ended a war with Israel in 2006.



### Indian Police Block Roads to Halt Farmers Marching to New Delhi

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian police blocked roads to halt farmers who were marching to New Delhi to press for the better crop prices promised to them in 2021 when thousands of growers camped out on major highways leading to the country's capital. Some government ministers are expected to meet farm union leaders on Monday to avoid a repeat of the year-long protest, which was aimed at forcing the government to repeal farm laws designed to deregulate vast agricultural markets. The march comes just months before national elections in India, in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is widely expected to win a third term. India's millions of farmers form an influential voting bloc and ruling parties try to keep growers on their side. Television footage showed farmers in tractors driving towards Delhi from the northern Indian breadbasket states of Punjab and Haryana, and barriers including barbed wire fencing and cement blocks put up on the edges of the city to stop them. Police also issued orders prohibiting public gatherings in Delhi. The farmers have come out after a call by union leaders to demand higher support or guaranteed prices for their produce, and press the government to meet its promise to double farmers' income. "We will move peacefully and our objective is that the government listen to our demands," Sarvan Singh Panher, general secretary of Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, told news agency ANI. The government announces support prices for more than 20 crops each year to set a benchmark, but state agencies buy only rice and wheat at the support level, which benefits only about 6% of farmers who raise those two crops. In 2021, when Modi's administration repealed the farm laws after the farmers protested, the government said it would set up a panel of growers and government officials to find ways to ensure support prices for all farm produce. Farmers accuse the government of going slow that promise.

### Indonesia Students Protest Alleged Poll Interference by Jokowi Administration



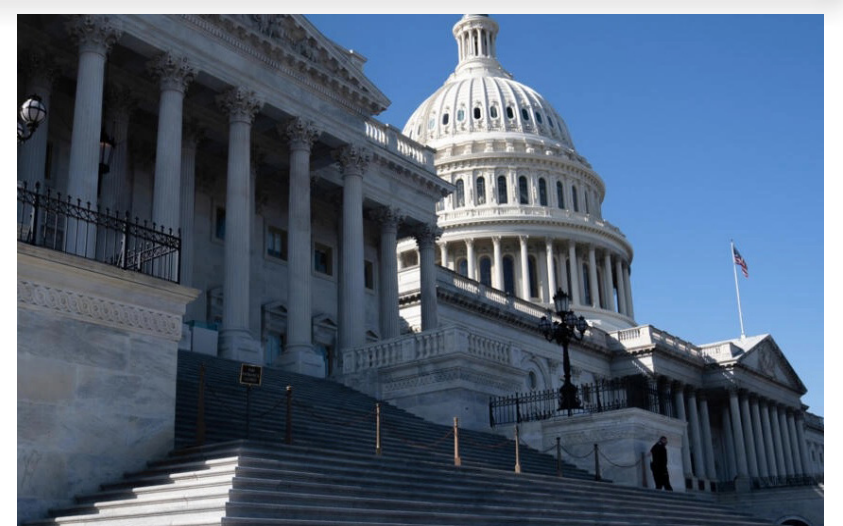
JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Hundreds of Indonesian students and activists staged protests on Monday over what they see as outgoing President Joko Widodo's abuse of power to sway voters in this week's election in favor of frontrunner, Prabowo Subianto, organizers said. Jokowi, as the incumbent is known, has not explicitly endorsed any of the three candidates vying to replace him as leader of the world's third-largest democracy. But he has made highly publicized appearances with Prabowo, and his eldest son is running on the same ticket for vice president. Two opinion surveys last week projected Prabowo could secure more than 50% of the votes on Wednesday, allowing him to win in a single round. Rivals Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo were seen at least 27 and 31 points behind him respectively. Some voters have taken issue with Jokowi's perceived lack of neutrality, saying it undermines Indonesia's democracy by giving one candidate an unfair advantage. Students gathered in Yogyakarta on Java island, banging bamboo instruments and holding posters painted with "bring Jokowi and his cronies to justice". "Jokowi was once called a new hope, we call him a new disaster," one demonstrator said. The protest organizer, Aksi Gejayan Memanggil, said on Instagram, "the ethical and moral breaches by Jokowi show that he is against a critical public voice." Another protest was planned in the capital Jakarta by several rights groups. The presidential office has denied political meddling by Jokowi. The planned protests come after a documentary produced by an Indonesian investigative journalist, Dandhy Laksono, alleged that state officials including police and regional heads, and government welfare resources, have been used to favour Prabowo.

## U.S. House Speaker Rejects Ukraine aid package as senators grind through votes

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson late Monday sharply criticized a \$95.3 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other countries, casting serious doubts about the future of the package just as Senate leaders were slowly muscling it ahead in hopes of sending a message that the US remains committed to its allies.

The Republican speaker said the package lacked border security provisions, calling it "silent on the most pressing issue facing our country." It was the latest - and potentially most consequential - sign of opposition to the Ukraine aid from conservatives who have for months demanded that border security policy be included in the package, only to last week reject a bipartisan proposal intended to curb the number of illegal crossings at the US-Mexico border. "Now, in the absence of having received any single border policy change from the Senate, the House will have to continue to work its own will on these important matters," Johnson said. "America deserves better than the Senate's status quo." A determined group of Republican senators was also trying Monday with a marathon set of speeches to slow the Senate from passing the package. The mounting opposition was just the latest

example of how the Republican Party's stance on foreign affairs is being transformed under the influence of Donald Trump, the likely Republican presidential nominee. Even if the package passes the Senate, as is expected, it faces an uncertain future in the House, where Republicans are more firmly aligned with Trump and deeply skeptical of continuing to aid Ukraine in its war against Russia. As Republican Leader Mitch McConnell and 17 other GOP senators have provided the votes to ensure the foreign aid package stays on track to clearing the Senate, Johnson has shown no sign he will put the package up for a vote. Support for sending military aid to Ukraine has waned among Republicans, but lawmakers have cast the aid as a direct investment in American interests to ensure global stability. The package would allot roughly \$60 billion to Ukraine, and about a third of that would be spent replenishing the US military with the weapons and equipment that are sent to Kyiv. "These are the enormously high stakes of the supplemental package: our security, our values, our democracy," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer as he opened the chamber. "It is a down payment for the survival of Western democracy and the survival of American values."







## Kypson Earns First Tour Win in Delray Beach

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The first ATP Tour match victory of Patrick Kypson's career was a big one. Kypson, a 24-year-old North Carolina native ranked 155th in the world, upset fifth-seeded Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia 6-4, 7-6 (3) on Monday in first-round action of the Delray Beach (Fla.) Open. Kypson made the tournament field as a wild card. He had been 0-3 in tour-level events before Monday, including a first-round defeat last month at the Australian Open. In other action, sixth-seeded Matteo Arnaldi of Italy avoided an upset by overcoming an early deficit to knock off Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka 4-6, 6-4, 6-3. Arnaldi finished with a whopping 21 aces to punch his ticket to the second round. Nishioka had zero, and he also hit just 17 winners compared to Arnaldi's 50. Meanwhile, Nuno Borges of Portugal and Frenchman Constant Lestienne swept their respective opponents. Borges defeated lucky loser Gabriel Diallo of Canada 6-4, 7-6 (1), and Lestienne cruised to a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Australian Aleksandar Vukic. Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor put on a show in front of a friendly crowd, saving two match points in the 12th game of the third set before pulling off a 3-6, 7-6 (7), 7-6 (3) win over Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Griekspoor was on the ropes trailing 6-5, but he battled back and eventually forced a tiebreaker, where he raced out to a 3-0 lead before taking the first-round match. In other action, a pair of Canadians prevailed in straight sets. Felix Auger-Aliassime beat qualifier Maxime Cressy of the United States 7-6 (3), 7-6 (8) and Milos Raonic, playing on a protected ranking, topped Dutch wild card Jesper de Jong 7-6 (5), 6-4. Belgian qualifier David Goffin also moved on, ousting Dino Prizmic, a wild card from Croatia.

Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka and Serbian seventh seed Laslo Djere both shook off opening-set losses to advance to the second round in Buenos Aires. Wawrinka knocked off Argentine Pedro Cachin 6-7 (4), 6-1, 6-2, while Djere rallied to a 4-6, 6-3, 6-0 victory vs. Croatian wild card Marin Cilic. Wild card Facundo Diaz Acosta of Argentina was also triumphant, completing a 6-3, 7-6 (1) sweep of Germany's Daniel Altmaier. Sixth-seeded Argentine Tomas Martin Etcheverry rolled past Roberto Carballes Baena of Spain 6-4, 6-1. Meanwhile Naomi Osaka put last week's first round defeat in Abu Dhabi behind her with a straight sets defeat of 15th seed Caroline Garcia at the Qatar Open. This was former world number one Osaka's second win from the five matches she has played since returning last month after a 15-month time out on maternity leave from the tour. The Japanese four-time Grand Slam winner was exacting a small measure of revenge on Garcia with this 7-5, 6-4 success in Doha as it was the French star Garcia who knocked her out in the first round of last month's Australian Open. And she reckons she is beginning to find her stride again after becoming a mum. "I feel like I'm a much better player now. In Australia, my returns weren't as good and I don't feel like I was as focused as I am now," said the match winner. On coming back physically after pregnancy she added: "It's been a really tough journey. I felt like I was chasing myself in the past and it honestly wasn't really healthy to do. After giving birth, I feel I trained really quickly, I'm a very big perfectionist and it's tough when you don't see results as quickly. I felt like I was driving a car that wasn't mine. So my body didn't feel like the body that I was used to."

## Saudi Boos Showed I Said the Right Thing



LEIPZIG (Dispatches) - Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos doubled down on his criticism of players moving to Saudi Arabia, due to the human rights situation in the country. Kroos was booed and whistled as Real won the Spanish Super Cup tournament in January, which was held in Saudi Arabia. Speaking in Leipzig ahead of Champions League last 16 first leg, Kroos was asked what he thought about the response of the Saudi fans. "For me it was a confirmation that I said everything right in the interviews," the 34-year-old said on Monday. In the summer of 2023, Kroos told Sports Illustrated that the human rights situation in the country was "the one thing that would stop me from making such a change". "People say they play ambitious football there, but it's all about the money". "It's a decision for the money and against football, and from there things start to get difficult for the football we know and love." Several big-name players moved to the Saudi league in the summer, including Kroos' former teammates Karim Benzema and Cristiano Ronaldo. Liverpool midfielder Jordan Henderson, who was criticised for moving to Saudi, has since returned, signing with Ajax in the winter window. Kroos, whose deal in Madrid expires in the summer, said he was still undecided whether to continue, but revealed "I have always said I want to end my career at the highest level." The midfielder also addressed speculation he could return to the Germany side for Euro 2024, to be held on home soil. "All I can say is that I haven't made a decision yet. It depends on many things, how I feel, how the season goes, and the plans that I have." The 2024 World Cup winner stepped down from international football in 2021. Real Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti said Kroos returning for the Euros "could work well" but told reporters "he needs to make the decision and we need to respect it." "His performances this season have been simply fantastic. He always shows his quality. He doesn't have dips in form, he's not up and down. He's a player who should end his career on a high."

## 76ers Hold on, End Cavaliers' Nine-Game Win Streak

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Buddy Hield and Kelly Oubre Jr. each scored 24 points and made key fourth-quarter contributions as the visiting Philadelphia 76ers snapped the Cleveland Cavaliers' nine-game winning streak with the 123-121 victory. Neither team led by more than 10 points in the back-and-forth contest that had 13 ties and 12 lead changes. Philadelphia opened the largest lead of the game with just 1:25 remaining in the fourth quarter -- a cushion it would need down the stretch. After Oubre's 3-pointer put the 76ers ahead 120-110, Cleveland went on a 9-0 run and outscored Philadelphia overall, 11-2, in the final 1:13. Mitchell, who scored a game-high 36 points, attacked the rim looking to send the game to overtime but Paul Reed blocked his shot. Mitchell collected the loose ball and found an open Darius Garland in the corner, but his potential game-winning 3-point attempt was no good. Oubre finished with two blocks, two steals and shot 10 of 14 shooting from the floor. Hield shot 9 of 13 from the floor, including 5 of 8 from 3-point range. He helped the 76ers gain momentum with the score tied at 102-all, first dishing one of his eight assists to Mo Bamba for a dunk. Hield then scored Philadelphia's next nine points, including a pair of 3-pointers. Philadelphia shot 11 of 26 from deep, 48 of 88 from the floor overall, and 16 of 19 at the free-throw line. The 76ers held Cleveland to 47.8 percent shooting from the floor, including 13 of 37 from beyond the arc. Garland finished with 21 points and nine assists in the loss. Jarrett Allen chipped in with 21 points and 10 rebounds while Evan Mobley had 14 points and 10 rebounds. Mobley also blocked four shots. Tyrese Maxey scored 22 points and dished nine assists for Philadelphia. Cameron Payne scored 15 points off the bench, and Reed finished with 13 points and eight rebounds. Meanwhile Luka Doncic recorded his 10th triple-double of the season and the Dallas Mavericks rallied from 11 points down in the fourth quarter to defeat the visiting Washington Wizards 112-104 on for their fifth straight win. Doncic finished with 26 points on 8-of-16 shooting, 15 assists and 11 rebounds. Kyrie Irving also scored 26 points and former Wizard Daniel Gafford added 16 points and 17 rebounds. Deni Avdija led the Wizards with 25 points and Kyle Kuzma scored 23. Tyus Jones had 14 points and a career-high 16 assists. Washington has lost seven in a row. The Wizards led by 10 points to start the fourth and Richaun Holmes' basket gave Washington its biggest lead, 93-82 at the 10:08 mark. Washington went cold however and a pair of Jaden Hardy three-pointers sandwiched around a Doncic fadeaway trimmed the Mavericks' deficit to 95-94 with 6:33 remaining. Maxi Kleber's 3-pointer gave the Mavericks their first lead of the half and the teams traded baskets. Doncic's 3-pointer put Dallas up 102-98 with 4:21 to go, and Kleber's dunk made it 106-100 with 3:11 left. Irving's fastbreak layup increased the lead to 110-102 with 2:07 left. After a timeout, Kuzma made a layup for Washington, but the Wizards could get no closer than within six the rest of the way.



## Chelsea Late Show Deepens Crystal Palace Crisis



LONDON (Dispatches) - Conor Gallagher struck twice to condemn his former club Crystal Palace to a damaging 3-1 defeat on Monday and keep Chelsea in the hunt for European football next season. The injury-ravaged Eagles were on course for a huge win in their battle to remain in the Premier League when Jefferson Lerma's long-range strike opened the scoring. But Palace have won just three times in 19 games and were undone late on after Gallagher equalised within two minutes of the second half. Gallagher fired home his second of the night and Enzo Fernandez added the third in stoppage time to lift Chelsea up to 10th and within two points of seventh. Defeat leaves Palace still just five points above the relegation zone in 15th. "It was extremely cruel but the game is about goals and unfortunately we made mistakes which led to goals," said under fire Palace boss Roy Hodgson. The home side were decimated by key injuries with all three of their star players Eberechi Eze, Michael Olise and Marc Guehi ruled out. Hodgson and the club's board are under attack from the fans and banners held up before kick-off took aim at a "weak club culture" and "weak transfer policy." But Palace more than held their own for the first 45 minutes thanks to another lacklustre Chelsea performance away from home. "We started really flat, we didn't show enough intensity. It was a really tough first 45 minutes," said Chelsea boss Mauricio Pochettino. "Second half we started really well, scored the 1-1 and it allowed us to manage the game." Pochettino had hailed his side's 3-1 FA Cup win at Aston Villa last week as his side's "best performance of the season." However, it was back to the drawing board for the Argentine in the first half at Selhurst Park as Chelsea were pedestrian in possession and were punished. Noni Madueke was easily bullied out of possession on the edge of his own box and the ball fell to Lerma to take aim and fire into the top corner beyond Djordje Petrovic. It took until first-half stoppage time for Chelsea to even register a shot as Gallagher dragged his effort across goal. But that was a warning Palace did not heed.

## Guardiola Hails Haaland's Special Mentality to Seek out Goals

COPENHAGEN (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola believes Erling Haaland's strong mentality is the key to the Norwegian's scoring prowess despite trying to take pressure off the 23-year-old's shoulders. Haaland scored his first goals since November in a 2-0 win over Everton on Saturday after spending two months on the sidelines due to a foot injury. His return allied to Kevin De Bruyne's recent comeback from a five-month absence with a hamstring injury comes at the perfect time for City ahead of their Champions League last 16, first leg away to FC Copenhagen on Tuesday. Haaland has scored 40 goals in just 35 Champions League appearances, including 17 in 16 for City as he fired the English champions to win the competition for the first time last season. "We don't put pressure on him and say 'you have to score goals for us'. No, we said 'get involved with what we do and the rest will come naturally'," said Guardiola at his pre-match press conference. "He is so strong mentally after one goal, he wants a second one and then a third. You see his numbers at his age - in the Champions League even (Lionel) Messi does not have these numbers at his age. It's unbelievable. He has scored goals everywhere all the time. He has a special mentality and attributes and skills. We are delighted to have him. And we are delighted he is back after two months out."

