

Vice President for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy Ruhollah Dehghani Reported the Establishment of a Joint Technology Park Between Iran and Uzbekistan in Samarkand in Upcoming Summer

IRAN NEWS

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaeili During the Weekly Cabinet Meeting Announced That There Has Been Significant Progress in Developing Cultural Relations with Saudi Arabia

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Iran Has Capability to Fight Wars From Distance



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran has acquired the ability to fight in wars from a distance. "War from distance is a war of equipment and technologies, and the Islamic Republic of Iran has succeeded in obtaining these capabilities," Major General Hossein Salami said on Wednesday at the National Conference of High-Speed Vessels at the Persian Gulf University in the southern port city of Bushehr. He also said that Iran's missiles and vessels are equipped with artificial intelligence technologies that are highly accurate. The remarks came two days after the IRGC Navy for the first time test-fired a Zolfaghar-class long-range ballistic missile from one of its aircraft carriers. The missile, with a range of 750 kilometers, successfully struck its designated target in the Kavir Desert in central Iran. Salami further noted that the Islamic Republic has made great achievements in various fields, particularly in the field of military and deterrence. "Today, we can move from Bushehr to the American coasts, which is a sign of the power of the Islamic Republic of Iran," the senior Iranian general asserted. Earlier on Tuesday Salami said that Iran will target the enemies' ships if its ships are attacked by them. 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.

IRGC Simulates Destroying Israeli F-35 Hangars With Ballistic Missiles



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has simulated using ballistic missiles to destroy hangars housing the Israeli regime's United States-procured F-35 warplanes. The simulation took place during an exercise that was carried out by the Corps on Tuesday on the occasion of the National Guards Day, Iran's Tasnim News Agency reported. The drill saw the IRGC firing enhanced versions of its Emad and Qadr ballistic missiles against the F-35 hangars located inside a mock-up of the occupying regime's Palmachim Airbase. The ballistic missiles used during the drill boasted enhanced explosive nosecones as well as increased range and precision. According to Tasnim, the enhanced version of the Emad liquid-fuel missiles struck the targets lying 1,700 kilometers (1056 miles) away with a margin of error of less than four meters. Located 12 kilometers (seven miles) south of the city of Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean coast, Palmachim Airbase serves as the main facility housing the regime's much-vaunted F-35 aircraft. Speaking at the same airbase last month, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu allegedly threatened the Islamic Republic with military action. The Islamic Republic has repeatedly warned that it would never initiate a military action against another party, but would respond decisively and with its utmost power in case it came under attack. Earlier this month, a senior IRGC commander warned the Israeli regime that endangering the Islamic Republic's interests anywhere in the world would not go unanswered. Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan, the IRGC's deputy commander for operations, said, "This fake regime knows very well that it has received the answer to its evils daily. Whenever we decide, we will not hesitate to protect our interests and the Islamic Revolution, respond to Israeli acts of mischief with great force, and preserve the blood of our martyrs."



U.S. Intervention, Support for Israel Could Cause Major Regional Crisis

TEHRAN - Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani has warned that the United States' support for Israel in its genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip could lead to a "major crisis" in West Asia. Ashtiani made the remarks during a meeting with Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Iran Abdullah bin Saud al-Anzi in Tehran on Tuesday, as concerns grow about a spillover of Israel's US-backed Gaza war, which has dragged on for more than four months. "Today's conditions in the region are sensitive and complex," he said. "The US and Westerners' intervention and support can complicate the security conditions in the region and cause a major regional crisis." The defense minister further condemned the Israeli genocide and war crimes in Gaza, stressing that the Zionist regime has not achieved and will not achieve any of its declared objectives in the besieged Palestinian territory. "Palestine is the prime issue of the Islamic world and the entire globe. It is necessary for the Muslim countries, especially the important regional states, to act decisively and take a more coordinated stance in this regard to fulfill their religious and humanitarian duty." Additionally in his remarks, Ashtiani said that Iran and Saudi Arabia, as two Muslim countries and important actors, play an effective role in promotion of regional security and stability. He also emphasized that the Islamic Republic seeks development of relations and constructive interaction with regional states. Regional countries have shared interests and challenges, and thus they should co-exist peacefully and have a common understanding about the issue of security, he added. Ashtiani further expressed Tehran's full readiness to hold defense and security talks with Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries of the Persian Gulf region. Meanwhile, the Iranian defense chief highlighted that Iranian and Saudi armed forces can cooperate with each other in the military, security, intelligence and technical fields. The Iranian Defense Ministry is prepared to expand defense, military and technical ties with Saudi Arabia, he said, adding that such cooperation will serve the interests of both countries and improve security and stability in the region. Anzi, for his part, described Iran and Saudi Arabia as two friendly and brotherly countries and underlined the need for boosting bilateral cooperation in different fields, including the defense and technical ones. Last March, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed under a Chinese-brokered deal to restore diplomatic relations severed in 2016. In a joint statement after signing the pact, Tehran and Riyadh highlighted the need to respect each others' national sovereignty and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of one another. They agreed to implement a security cooperation agreement signed in April 2001 and another accord reached in May 1998 to boost economic, commercial, investment, technical, scientific, cultural, sports, and youth affairs cooperation.

Hezbollah Vows to Expand Anti-Israel Front amid Escalation Threats

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah issued a warning, stating it would broaden its anti-Israel stance if the occupying regime intensified its aggression against Lebanon and Gaza. The secretary general of Hezbollah, Seyed Hassan Nasrallah, made these statements during a televised speech at an event honoring Lebanon's wounded and captured resistance fighters in Beirut on Tuesday. Nasrallah commended the sacrifices of the resistance fighters, emphasizing that their actions have yielded significant achievements for the people and country. He stated, "Our responsibility is to preserve these achievements." Regarding Israel's actions in Gaza and southern Lebanon, Nasrallah expressed, "The existence of Israel is a disaster for the entire region, and a fearful and deterred Israel represents a less dangerous situation for the region's people." He added, "In light of the events in Gaza, it is in the national interests of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt that Israel be defeated in this battle." Nasrallah affirmed that the exchanges of fire in southern Lebanon would cease when the aggression against Gaza stops, asserting, "The resistance's role is to deter the enemy, and our responses will be proportionate." He emphasized, "Anyone who threatens to expand the war

against us will face a similar threat." Nasrallah said, "The resistance today is stronger and more determined to confront the enemy." He further stated that hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers displaced from the occupied territories' north would not be able to return in the event of an escalation. Nasrallah described striking the Israeli-occupied territories in support of Gaza as a "moral and religious" duty for Hezbollah, saying, "What we see today is primarily a sincere response on moral and religious grounds." He added, "What we are doing on the Lebanese front is primarily a national responsibility to prevent Israel's victory." Nasrallah also criticized Israel's failure over the past few months of hostilities in Gaza, praising the steadfastness of the resistance fighters there. "What is happening in Gaza must shake the conscience of all people in the world, and they must feel responsible for the humanitarian catastrophe." The current conflict began when Israel launched a war on October 7, 2023, following the surprise operation by Palestinian resistance groups in response to decades of Israeli aggression. Since then, the regime has killed more than 28,000 people, primarily women and children, and injured over 68,000 in Gaza.



Iran-SCO Trade Value Hits \$37b in 10 Months



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - An official at Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade said the trade exchanges between Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)'s member states in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2023) reached \$37 billion. The trade exchanges between Iran and SCO's member states from March 21, 2023 to January 22, 2024 registered a 41 and 5.5 percent growth in volume and value respectively compared to the same period last year, the spokesperson of Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade for Trade Promotion and International Affairs Commission noted. Regarding Iran's non-oil trade with the member states of the organization, Rouhollah Latifi said more than 64 million tons of non-oil goods, valued at over \$37 billion, were exchanged between Iran and 11 member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization from March 21, 2023, to January 22, 2024. According to him, Iran exported 54.5 million tons of non-oil goods, valued at \$18 billion, to the member states of the organization, showing a 1 and 48.2 percent hike in value and volume respectively compared to last year's corresponding period, IRNA reported. In this period, Iran imported 9.7 million tons of goods, valued at more than \$19 billion, from the 11 member states of the SCO, indicating a 17.9 and a 10.5 percent growth in volume and value respectively compared to last year's corresponding period, the spokesperson added. He went on to say that Iran exported \$11.5 billion, \$1.8 billion, \$1.7 billion, \$1.5 billion, and \$760.4 million worth of products to China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Russia respectively.

Terrorist Sabotage Blast Hits Major Gas Transmission Pipelines in Iran



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji says a "terrorist sabotage" attack has targeted two main gas transmission pipelines in the country's southwestern province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari as well as the southern province of Fars, causing a massive explosion and a subsequent fire. Speaking on the sidelines of a cabinet session in the capital Tehran on Wednesday, Owji said that groups of saboteurs blew up the transmission lines in several locations at around 1 a.m. local time on Wednesday (2130 GMT Tuesday). He went on to note that the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) has well managed to bring the situation under control since early hours of the day. "Personnel at oil and gas installations had already been put on high alert. We knew that enemies would attempt to create challenges for the [Iranian] nation in the wake of recent regional developments and mass turnout of people in rallies marking the 45th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution," Owji said. The Iranian oil minister highlighted that repair work on the affected pipelines is underway, and hopefully the flow on the pipelines will resume in less than 12-14 hours. The terrorist attack on Iran's major gas transmission lines comes as anti-Iran media outlets had been suggesting assaults on the Iranian energy sector over the past few months, and some US Senators had even called for the bombing of Iran's oil and gas infrastructure. Iran says the explosion in a pipeline in the west of the country, in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province, has been a terrorist act. Last year, U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, suggested the US should threaten Iranian oil infrastructure if the conflict between Israel and Palestinian resistance group Hamas continues to escalate. Meanwhile, Saeed Aqli, the head of dispatching operations at the NIGC, said that the act of terror struck the transmission lines in Borujen County in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province.

IRAN NEWS



Tourism Development Will Reduce Reliance on Oil Revenues

TEHRAN (Shana) - Oil minister said the development of the tourism industry can contribute to the country's economy and reduce reliance on oil revenues. Javad Owji made the remarks during his visit to the 17th Iran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground. According to a Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts report, the tourism sector has witnessed a 50 percent progress in the current Iranian calendar year (starting March 21, 2023), mentioned the oil minister, describing the growth as "good news". Tourism experts from different countries have come to Iran to visit the exhibition, Owji quoted the officials as saying. He said the Oil Ministry has all the time supported the tourism industry, particularly in the field of social responsibility in all provinces. The 17th Iran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition opened on Monday and will end on February 15.

Uzbek Envoy Urges Forming Iran-Uzbekistan Cooperation Club



TEHRAN - Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Iran Fariddin Nasriev has stressed the need for the formation of an Iran-Uzbekistan cooperation club. The ambassador made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday with President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Samad Hassanzadeh. Addressing the meeting, the Iran Chamber of Commerce president referred to the current \$500 million volume of trade between Iran and Uzbekistan which he said is insignificant compared to the existing potentials. Iran has unilaterally cancelled visa requirements for Uzbek nationals in a good-will gesture, Hassanzadeh said, calling on Uzbekistan's government to reciprocate Iran's measure so as to facilitate economic, social and tourism connections between the two countries. Underlining the willingness of Iran's private sector to make joint investments in Uzbekistan, he said that Iran possesses high potentials in pharmaceutical industry and produces medicines at world class. He also referred to the active role of Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Chamber of commerce and called for forming a mirror chamber of commerce in Uzbekistan. Uzbek Ambassador, for his part, said that Iran and Uzbekistan should work to increasing the current \$500m trade volume to one billion dollars and both Iranian and Uzbek partners are determined to fulfill it. Nasriev then pointed to the upcoming visit of an Uzbek trade delegation led by Uzbek Energy Minister and said that Uzbekistan is fully ready to expand cooperation with Iran in the transportation and logistics through cooperation with the ICCIMA. He further said that since Uzbekistan annually imports around \$1.5b of medicines, it is willing to launch Iran's pharmaceutical production line in Uzbekistan. He also urged the ICCIMA to hold a business forum for traders who are interested in cooperating and investing in Uzbekistan.



Judiciary Chief Says Iran-Iraq Cooperation Can Boost Security of Muslims

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie has stressed the importance of cooperation between Iran and Iraq to establish security in the Islamic world. Speaking in a meeting with members of Iraq's Coordination Framework late on Tuesday, Ejeie said that the U.S., and the Zionist regime are carrying out malicious actions against Islamic countries, including against Iran and Iraq. Therefore, there is a need for unity and cooperation between the two countries more than ever, he said. He expressed hope that the two countries would use their common capacities to boost security and to solve problems for the benefit of the entire Muslim world. Referring to the Zionist regime's crimes against the people of Gaza and their recent actions in Rafah, Ejeie said that Iran and Iraq should be concerned about the Israeli regime's crimes against the oppressed but strong people of Gaza. He also remembered martyr General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units, who were assassinated by the US military in a drone strike outside Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Malaysia Eyes Attracting 35.6m Tourists by 2026



By: F. Taherpour

TEHRAN - Malaysia is looking for attracting over 27m tourists in 2024 and 35.6m by 2026 and it also seeks ways to boost cooperation with Iran in tourism industry, it was reiterated on Tuesday. On the sidelines of a conference on getting familiar with tourist attractions of Malaysia which was held at Espinas Hotel of Tehran, Malaysian Ambassador H.E. Khairi Omar, Director of Tourism Malaysia Middle East Ms. Rosnah Mustafa, Chairman of Tehran Travel Agencies Association Mr. Amir Pouyan Rafiei Shad and Sales Manager of Air Arabia in Tehran Mr. Ashkan Shahsevari answered the questions of reporters in a press conference. Elaborating the development opportunities in the tourism market between Malaysia and Iran, Ambassador of Malaysia H.E. Khairi Omar said: The development opportunities in the tourism market between Malaysia and Iran can be based on diverse aspects such as culture, history, nature, and various recreational activities. For instance, Malaysia, with its beautiful natural landscapes, historical attractions, and diverse culture, has always been appealing to Iranian tourists. On the other hand, Iran, with its ancient history, unique architecture, and rich cultural treasures, not only attracts Malaysian tourists but also captivates enthusiasts from other nations interested in traveling to Iran. He then touched upon modern attractions in Malaysia, like the iconic Petronas Towers and the second biggest tower in the world Merdeka 118, along with its beautiful islands such as Langkawi and Penang, and the diverse culture of its friendly people, and said that they can offer enjoyable experiences for Iranian tourists. He reiterated according to statistics, in 2022, 7,500 Iranians visited various destinations in Malaysia, increasing to 19,908 in 2023, marking a growth of approximately 163%. He noted that it's important to consider that Malaysian culture is an interesting blend of ethnic minorities and diverse cultures. Islam, as the majority religion, significantly influences their culture, with religious customs, arts, and architecture shaped by Islamic traditions, adding that cultural diversity has transformed Malaysia into a multicultural society, symbolizing balance and harmony among its minorities. When he was asked what plans he foresees for the development of travel markets between the two countries, the ambassador highlighted some points like joint advertising to effectively introduce tourist attractions and travel services, fostering an increase in the number of tourists and cultural exchange; scientific and specialized exchanges for enhancing collaboration in developing tourism infrastructure, hotels, and related services; holding cultural events for attracting tourists and strengthen cultural ties; launching group familiarization. The ambassador reiterated these actions can strengthen the tourism markets of both countries, facilitating positive exchanges between the people and tourism industries of Iran and Malaysia. On measures for deepening tourism relations between Tehran and Kuala Lumpur, he said: Expanding flights between major cities and tourist destinations in Malaysia can be a suitable option, adding currently, regional airlines provide easy access for Iranian tourists to various cities in Malaysia and vice versa and Travel service offices can facilitate travel with attractive tour packages. Then Director of Tourism Malaysia Middle East Ms. Mustafa elaborated strategies of her country for boosting tourism in Malaysia. She said Malaysian tourism consistently focuses on specific tourism sectors, such as business events, ecological

tourism, capacity-based tourism, medical and health tourism, educational tourism, and experiential travel, to attract more tourists, adding that culture, cuisine, arts, and Malaysian heritage will also be utilized to enhance tourism experiences. Ms. Mustafa added in 2024, Malaysia aims to attract 27.3 million tourists and generate revenue exceeding 102.7 billion Ringgit, noting that the strategic plan includes targeting 35.6 million foreign tourists in 2026. She reiterated the Malaysian government aims to transform the country into a top ecotourism destination, aligning with its commitment to achieving the 2030 agenda as part of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG). This commitment involves promoting sustainability of natural resources to stimulate new economic growth through ecological tourism and job creation. The strategic tourism and marketing plan for Malaysia for the period 2022-2026 focuses on promoting domestic tourism and recovering international tourism by strengthening digital tools, innovation, health, and safety, she added. Among the tourism development strategies, "Smart Tourism" holds a special place, she said, adding that advances in digital technology have had a significant impact on how people travel, influencing changes in the operations of tourism-related businesses. According to a study, "Smart Tourism" has the potential to increase Malaysia's tourism revenue from the current \$25 billion to over \$110 billion by 2030 and the ultimate goal of Smart Tourism is to improve resource management efficiency, enhance tourist experiences, maximize competitiveness, and promote sustainability through innovation and technological methods, she stated. On development of tourism between Iran and Malaysia, she said encouraging collaboration between private sectors and creating incentives in both countries through organizing specialized events and even joint investments can be a crucial factor in developing the travel market between Iran and Malaysia. Other factors that can be beneficial for the development of travel between the two countries include: She then pointed to direct flight routes as one of the main solutions for boosting cooperation in tourism between Iran and Malaysia. Explaining the possibilities and new investments in Malaysia's tourism industry, recreation, and related sustainable tourism topics, she said President of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is also the Minister of Finance, has shown special attention to infrastructure and the growth of the domestic tourism sector in the 2024 budget and this budget can support the goal of attracting 26.1 million foreign tourists and reaching an income of 97.6 billion Malaysian Ringgit (20.7 billion US dollars). Then chairman of Tehran Tourism Association Mr. Rafiei Shad announced readiness of the biggest tourism association of the country for developing tourism cooperation between Iran and Malaysia and noted that lack of direct flight is a major hurdle in way of boosting cooperation for exchange of tourists and reiterated that Malaysia should also work to encourage Malaysian tourists to visit Iran. Later Sales Manager of Air Arabia in Tehran elaborated policies of the airline for reinforcing tourism between Tehran and Kuala Lumpur and reiterated the airline with young and high quality fleet and services is ready to offer services to Iranian tourists who want to visit Malaysia, reiterating that Iranians can go to Malaysia from four Iranian cities via Sharjah, the UAE.

Iran-India Annual Trade Exceeds \$1.8b



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The value of trade between Iran and India reached \$1.836 billion in 2023, according to India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The trade exchange between the two countries declined by 26 percent in 2023 compared to its previous year, the figure was reported to be \$2.499 billion in 2022. According to the Indian Ministry data, Iran exported commodities valued at \$699 million to India during the past year, registering no significant change from 2022. Petroleum products were the top goods imported by India from Iran in 2023, and India imported \$221 million worth of such products from Iran this year. The import of Iranian oil products by India in 2023 increased by 26 percent compared to the previous year. Raw materials for dye production and various fruits were also among the top exported goods to India in 2023. India's exports to Iran in January-December 2023 experienced a 35 percent decrease and reached \$1.187 billion. In the previous year, India had exported \$1.847 billion worth of goods to Iran. Rice was the top export product of India to Iran in 2023. India's rice exports to Iran decreased by 34 percent in 2023, falling from \$1.98 billion in 2022 to \$723 million. India's tea export to Iran also declined by almost a third, from \$86 million in 2022 to \$30 million in 2023. The country's fruit exports to Iran however increased by 14 percent and reached \$55 million and spice exports decreased by 28 percent to \$15 million.

Iran's Import of Rice from India Declines 34% in 2023



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's import of rice and tea from India decreased by 34 and 65 percent in 2023 respectively compared to a year earlier, the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry said. The ministry put the total volume of the trade exchanges between Iran and India in 2023 at \$1.836 billion, showing a 26% decline compared to the year before. The total value of the trade exchanges between the two countries in 2022 exceeded \$2.499 billion. According to the report, India exported \$1.187 billion worth of products to Iran from January to December 2023, registering a 35% down compared to 2022. India had exported \$1.847 billion worth of non-oil products to Iran from January to December 2022, the report added. India imported \$649 million worth of products from Iran in 2023, the value of which did not show any significant change compared to a year earlier. According to the report, India's rice export to Iran registered a 34% decline in 2023 and reached \$723 million. This is while India had exported \$1.98 billion worth of rice to Iran in 2022. In addition, Iran's import of tea from India showed a 65% decline in this period.

Iran Supplies 90% of World Saffron Needs

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Ali Hosseini, a member of Iran's National Saffron Council, says the country provides some 80 to 90 percent of the total world needs for saffron. Hosseini said that challenges caused by cold and hot weather have led to 40 to 60 percent decreases in production in three northeastern provinces which are the main hubs of saffron production in Iran. "Our production is in trouble. When there is a problem in production, we cannot think about exporting," he said, urging the need for training saffron growers to remove production problems. A last year report by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said that Iran exports saffron to 59 different world countries. The IRICA report said that the UAE is the main exporter of Iranian saffron, followed by Spain and China, together accounting for more than two-thirds of Iranian saffron exports.



Russia Warns the West of Stealing Its Assets

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia warned the West on Tuesday that Moscow would be very tough if the United States and European Union seized hundreds of billions of dollars worth of Russian assets. After President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, the United States and its allies prohibited transactions with Russia's central bank and finance ministry, blocking around \$300 billion of sovereign Russian assets in the West. The EU on Monday adopted a law to set aside windfall profits made on frozen Russian central bank assets, it said on Monday, in a first concrete step towards the bloc's aim of using the money to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine. "This is theft: It's the appropriation of something that doesn't belong to you," Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Sputnik radio, TASS reported. Zakharova said the response from Moscow would be "extremely tough" as Russia felt it was essentially dealing with thieves. Russia has said that if its property is seized then it will seize U.S., European and other assets in responses.



Indonesians Vote to Replace President Jokowi



JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesians cast their ballots on Wednesday across the Southeast Asian archipelago in an election headlined by the race to succeed President Joko Widodo, whose influence could determine who takes the helm of the world's third-largest democracy. Nearly 259,000 candidates are contesting 20,600 posts across 17,000 islands in the world's biggest single-day election, but all eyes are on the presidency and the fate of Widodo's ambitious agenda after a decade in charge of the \$1.3 trillion economy. The race to replace Widodo, who is popularly known as Jokowi, pits two former governors, Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan, against controversial frontrunner Prabowo Subianto, a former special forces commander feared in the 1990s as a top lieutenant of Indonesia's late strongman ruler Suharto. Two surveys last week projected Prabowo will win the majority of votes and avoid a second round. Those surveys showed Prabowo with 51.8% and 51.9% support, with Anies and Ganjar 27 and 31 points adrift, respectively. To win outright, a candidate needs over 50% of votes and to secure 20% of the ballot in half of the country's provinces. Novan Maradana, 42, an entrepreneur, said after voting in central Jakarta he wanted a candidate who would continue policies currently in place. "If we start over from zero, it will take time," he said. Voters had a six-hour window to cast ballots. Indonesia has three time zones and polling stations across the country. Polling got off to a slow start in Jakarta, with big thunderstorms causing flooding in parts of the capital. The extent of delays was not clear nor whether it would impact voter turnout but Jakarta's disaster management agency shared photographs of a flooded polling station as officials moved voting materials to a safer location. Initial indications of the result are expected to emerge later on Wednesday, based on publicly counted votes from a sampling of polling stations across the country. In previous elections, the unofficial counts tabulated by reputable companies have proved to be accurate. Defence Minister Prabowo is contesting his third election after twice losing to Jokowi, who is tacitly backing and betting on his former rival as a continuity candidate to preserve his legacy, including a role for his son as Prabowo's running mate. After casting his ballot, Prabowo thanked polling staff and said he hoped the "voting process goes well". Undecided voters will be critical to former Jakarta governor Anies and ex-Central Java governor Ganjar, to try to force a runoff in June between the top two finishers.



North Korea Fires Several Cruise Missiles Into Sea of Japan

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired multiple cruise missiles Wednesday, Seoul's military said, part of a string of weapons tests this year that have accompanied increasingly aggressive rhetoric from leader Kim Jong Un. So far this year, Kim has declared South Korea his country's "principal enemy", jettisoned agencies dedicated to reunification and outreach, and threatened war over "even 0.001 mm" of territorial infringement. Pyongyang has also ramped up weapons tests, including cruise missiles, an "underwater nuclear weapon system" and a solid-fuelled hypersonic ballistic missile. "Our military detected several unknown cruise missiles over the waters northeast of Wonsan around 09:00 today (1200 GMT) and South Korea-US intelligence authorities are conducting a detailed analysis," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. It added that the military was "strengthening surveillance and vigilance, and closely watching for any additional signs and activities from North Korea". Earlier this week, North Korea announced it had tested a new control system for a multiple rocket launcher it said would have an "increased" battlefield role. The cruise missile launches have prompted speculation from experts that it is testing the weapons before shipping them to Moscow for use in Ukraine. Pyongyang and Moscow have bolstered ties in recent months, with leader Kim Jong Un making a rare trip to Russia to meet President Vladimir Putin in September. Seoul and Washington have accused the North of supplying Russia with weapons in exchange for technical support for Kim's nascent satellite program, which would violate a raft of UN sanctions on both regimes. Unlike their ballistic counterparts, the testing of cruise missiles is not banned under current UN sanctions on Pyongyang. Cruise missiles tend to be jet-propelled and fly at a lower altitude than more sophisticated ballistic missiles, making them harder to detect and intercept. "It is believed that North Korea exported large quantities of multiple rocket launchers to Russia

last year," Ahn Chan-il, a defector-turned-researcher who runs the World Institute for North Korea Studies, told AFP. He added that there may have been quality issues with some of the exported weapons and that the recent spate of testing could be leader Kim "taking action to address the issue". Kim repeated last week that Pyongyang would not hesitate to "put an end" to South Korea if attacked, calling Seoul the North's "most dangerous and first enemy state and invariable arch-enemy". In January, North Korea fired an artillery barrage near two South Korean border islands, prompting a live-fire drill by the South and evacuation orders for residents. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has vowed a strong response if Pyongyang attacks, calling on his military to "act first, report later" if provoked. The hawkish Yoon has bolstered defence cooperation with the United States and Japan since coming to office in 2022, including expanding joint drills, to counter Pyongyang's growing threats. With a US presidential election later this year, the North could potentially ramp up its provocations to take advantage of American political gridlock. Cheong Seong-chang, director of the Center for Korean Peninsula Strategy at the Sejong Institute, wrote in a report. North Korea could "conduct attacks on (South Korea's) Baengnyeong Island, Daechung Island, and Socheong Island based on their confidence in the advancement of nuclear and missile capabilities," he wrote. Pyongyang has drawn closer to Moscow in areas beyond defence, with a group of Russian tourists - the first known foreign tour group since before pandemic-linked border closures in 2020 - arriving in the North Friday for a four-day visit. It has become harder for Russians to travel to Europe and the United States since sanctions were imposed following the invasion of Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who has also visited Pyongyang, said last year that the North could be recommended as a tourist destination, Tass reported.

Shehbaz Sharif to Be Coalition Candidate for Next Pakistan PM

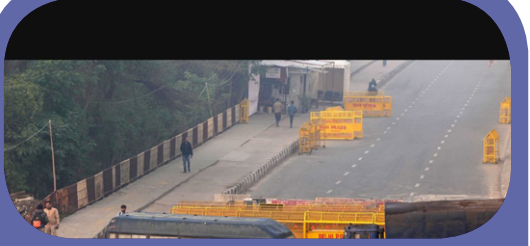


ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will be the nominee for Pakistan's next premier to lead a new coalition alliance formed between different parties, a spokeswoman said after national elections last week returned a hung parliament. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on Tuesday said it would support Sharif's party to form a minority government, ending a stalemate after inconclusive elections in the nuclear-armed nation led to days of political uncertainty. A spokesman for Sharif's party, Mariyam Aurangzeb, said in a post on social media site X, formerly Twitter, that Nawaz Sharif, the elder brother of Shehbaz, had nominated him for the post. Shehbaz Sharif belongs to his brother's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the largest recognized party with 80 seats and PPP is second with 54. Together, the two parties have enough for a simple majority in the 264-seat legislature. "We have decided that we will form government together to take Pakistan out of crisis," the co-chairman of the PPP, former President Asif Ali Zardari, told a news conference, seated besides Shehbaz Sharif and leaders of other political parties. Earlier, Zardari's son and fellow PPP leader, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, had laid conditions on backing the Sharif-led coalition, saying they would support them in electing the prime minister but would not join the government. The conditions to join forces did not bode well for a stable or strong administration in the world's second-largest Muslim country. However, the alliance has ended uncertainty over government formation for now, five days after the Feb. 8 vote gave a split verdict and sparked worries of fresh instability. Independent candidates backed by jailed former premier Imran Khan have won 92 seats, making them the largest group, but they cannot form a government on their own, having run as individuals and not a party, and have ruled out alliances with PML-N or PPP.

Putin's Suggestion of Ukraine Ceasefire Rejected by United States

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin's suggestion of a ceasefire in Ukraine to freeze the war was rejected by the United States after contacts between intermediaries, three Russian sources with knowledge of the discussions told Reuters. The failure of Putin's approach ushers in a third year of the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two and illustrates just how far apart the world's two largest nuclear powers remain. A U.S. source denied there had been any official contact and said Washington would not engage in talks that did not involve Ukraine. Putin sent signals to Washington in 2023 in public and privately through intermediaries, including through Moscow's Arab partners in the Middle East and others, that he was ready to consider a ceasefire in Ukraine, the Russian sources said. Putin was proposing to freeze the conflict at the current lines and was unwilling to cede any of the Ukrainian territory controlled by Russia, but the signal offered what some in the Kremlin saw as the best path towards a peace of some kind. "The contacts with the Americans came to nothing," a senior Russian source with knowledge of the discussions said. A second Russian source with knowledge of the contacts told Reuters that the Americans told Moscow, via the intermediaries, they would not discuss a possible ceasefire without the participation of Ukraine and so the contacts ended in failure. A third source with knowledge of the discussions said: "Everything fell apart with the Americans." The source said that the Americans did not want to pressure Ukraine. The extent of the contacts - and their failure - has not previously been reported. It comes as U.S. President Joe Biden has for months been

pushing Congress to approve more aid for Ukraine, but has faced opposition from allies of Republican presidential nomination frontrunner Donald Trump. The Kremlin, the White House, the U.S. State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) all declined to comment. Putin sent thousands of troops into Ukraine in February 2022, triggering a full-scale war after eight years of conflict in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian forces on the one side and pro-Russian Ukrainians and Russian proxies on the other. Ukraine says it is fighting for its existence and the West casts Putin's invasion as an imperial-style land grab that challenges the post-Cold War international order. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says he will never accept Russia's control over Ukrainian land. He has outlawed any contacts with Russia. A U.S. official, speaking in Washington on condition of anonymity, said that the U.S. has not engaged in any back channel discussions with Russia and that Washington had been consistent in not going behind the back of Ukraine. The U.S. official said that there appeared to have been unofficial "Track II" conversations among Russians not in the government but that the United States was not engaged in them. The U.S. official said Putin's proposal, based on what has been publicly reported, was unchanged from past demands that Russia hold on to Ukrainian territory. The official suggested that there appeared to be frustration in Moscow that Washington had repeatedly refused to accept it. Putin told U.S. talk-show host Tucker Carlson last week that Russia was ready for "dialogue". Intermediaries met in Turkey in late 2023, according to three Russian sources.



India Police Use Tear Gas on Farmers Demanding Higher Crop Prices

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Police in India fired tear gas at hundreds of farmers and their supporters during a protest march towards New Delhi to pressure the government to honor a promise it made in 2021 to pay more for crops. The march is the latest in a series of similar protests which began more than two years ago and comes months ahead of national elections in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi will seek a third term, with farmers forming an influential voting bloc. Farmers had headed south for Delhi a day after talks between farm unions and ministers failed to secure commitments to provide minimum prices for a range of crops. "The government has not been able to make a strong decision on anything ... We thought that giving time is not suitable now," Sarwan Singh Pandher, the general secretary of Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC), told ANI news agency. Hundreds of farmers and their supporters were seen mobilizing on foot and in large convoys of tractors in many parts of the northern breadbasket states of Punjab and Haryana. At midday (0630 GMT), police fired multiple tear gas rounds to disperse the marchers at Shamli, a border crossing between Punjab and Haryana, about 230 km (143 miles) north of Delhi, where many had joined the march. Footage showed protesters trying to break through the barricades by lifting away cement blocks placed there to halt the march, as police used drones to fire tear gas rounds into the crowd. Some protesters were also detained. The outskirts of Delhi were quiet with riot control teams standing guard behind barricades on main roads leading into the national capital, where police have prohibited large gatherings. Farm unions are seeking guarantees, backed by law, for more state support or buying of crops at a minimum price. They also want the government to honor a promise to double their income. Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda told reporters on Monday after talks with union leaders that some issues had been resolved but more discussions were needed. "We are hopeful that we will bring solutions," he said.

Rafah Invasion Could Lead to Slaughter

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - The United Nations warned against an Israeli ground invasion of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, saying an offensive could "lead to a slaughter" in the southern region of the Palestinian enclave where more than 1 million people are sheltering. Israel says it wants to flush out Hamas militants from hideouts in Rafah and free Israeli hostages being held there, and is making plans to evacuate trapped Palestinian civilians. "Military operations in Rafah could lead to a slaughter in Gaza. They could also leave an already fragile humanitarian operation at death's door," said U.N. aid chief Martin Griffiths. "We lack the safety guarantees, the aid supplies and the staff capacity to keep this operation afloat." "The international community has been warning against the dangerous consequences of any ground invasion in Rafah. The Government of Israel cannot continue to ignore these calls," he said in a statement. Talks involving the U.S., Egypt, Israel and Qatar on a Gaza truce ended without a breakthrough on Tuesday as calls grew for Israel to hold back on its planned Rafah assault. "My sincere hope is that negotiations for the release of hostages and some form of cessation of hostilities to be successful to avoid an all-out offensive over Rafah," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters on Tuesday. "That would have devastating consequences," he said. The war in Hamas-run Gaza began when Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people

and capturing 253 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. In retaliation, Israel launched a military assault on Gaza that health authorities say has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians with thousands more bodies feared lost amid the ruins. More than half Gaza's 2.3 million people are sheltering in Rafah, many of them penned up against the border fence with Egypt and living in makeshift tents. Griffiths said they are "staring death in the face." "They have little to eat, hardly any access to medical care, nowhere to sleep, nowhere safe to go," he said. "I have said for weeks now that our humanitarian response is in tatters."





Real Madrid, Man City Cruise to Victories Against Their Rivals

LEIPZIG (Dispatches) - Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz scored a stunning goal after a mazy run as they won 1-0 at RB Leipzig on Tuesday to take a clear advantage into their Champions League last-16 second leg next month. The 24-year-old, filling in for the injured Jude Bellingham, struck against the run of play in the 48th minute. Real goalkeeper Andriy Lunin, replacing the injured Thibaut Courtois, then came to the rescue with a string of saves to protect the lead as the Spaniards made it seven straight wins in the competition this season. "It was difficult for us, that's how it is here," Real coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "The start of the first half and second half were difficult. Lunin played a great game, the best game. "We were dangerous in transitions, we could have scored more but we could also have tied. This is a small advantage," said Ancelotti. In a lively start the home side thought they had gone ahead when striker Benjamin Sesko headed in after three minutes. His effort though was disallowed following a VAR review. The Slovenian had another chance before Real gradually brought some balance to the game and came close themselves through Rodrygo, making his 200th appearance for the club. Leipzig were again more aggressive after halftime but the home crowd was silenced when Real struck on the break. Diaz picked up the ball near the sideline, shook off three players, cut in towards the box and curled a superb shot past keeper Peter Gulacsi. The hosts almost drew level two minutes later but Lunin stopped a Dani Olmo shot before blocking Sesko's rebound effort. With Leipzig taking more risks in search of an equaliser, Real, waiting to break, found openings and almost scored again when Vinicius Jr flicked the ball onto the post in the 72nd. Lunin was kept busy throughout the second half and did well to deny Sesko and Olmo again

before also keeping out substitute Amadou Haidara's effort late in the game. "In the end it was a great solo effort that decided the game," said Leipzig's Gulacsi. "It is frustrating for us because we played well and were not the worse team of the two. It was an open game in the second half and we had our chances." The return leg in Spain is on March 6. Meanwhile in the other match of the night, Manchester City survived a scare to beat FC Copenhagen 3-1 in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie at the Parken Stadium, with Phil Foden scoring late to ensure a two-goal cushion ahead of the second leg. With the Danes still on their winter break, City dominated the opening exchanges and they took the lead in the 10th minute when Kevin De Bruyne scored with a brilliant first-time finish across the keeper and in at the far post. City continued to press and the home side's box began to look like the shooting gallery at Copenhagen's Tivoli fairground until an injury to Jack Grealish briefly derailed them, forcing Pep Guardiola to send on Jeremy Doku instead. The home side shocked the visitors in the 34th minute thanks to a goal from Magnus Mattsson, who probably could not have imagined a better debut when he joined the club from Dutch side NEC Nijmegen on Feb. 1. A poorly hit pass from City keeper Ederson fell to Mohamed Elyounoussi and his blocked shot fell into the path of Mattsson, who curled a beautiful strike inside the right-hand post to send the home fans' plastic cups of beer flying into the chilly night air in celebration. Unfortunately it was not to last and their team fell behind again just before the break when De Bruyne's persistence in a block tackle saw the ball fall to Bernardo Silva, who finished deftly with his left foot.

Lifelong Liverpool Fan Eriksson to Manage Charity Match Against Ajax



LONDON (Dispatches) - Sven-Goran Eriksson will be part of the Liverpool Legends management team when they host a charity match against Ajax Legends at Anfield on March 23, the Merseyside outfit said after the terminally-ill Swede revealed his wish to manage the club. The 76-year-old former England boss, who has also coached Manchester City, Benfica and AS Roma, among other clubs, in January said he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and has a year to live in a "best-case scenario". He later revealed that he and his father have been Liverpool supporters and he always wished to manage the club. "Eriksson will join a dugout of Reds greats, including Ian Rush, John Barnes and John Aldridge, for the annual LFC Foundation charity match," Liverpool said in a statement on Tuesday. "All connected with the club and LFC Foundation look forward to warmly welcoming LFC fan Sven and his family to Anfield - and seeing him in the dugout on the day - for a fantastic fundraising occasion." Jerzy Dudek, Sander Westerveld, Martin Skrtel, Fabio Aurelio, Gregory Vignal, Djibril Cisse and Ryan Babel are among the first batch of players to have been confirmed for the game. Liverpool said 100% of the proceeds raised from the fixture will support the work of LFC Foundation and its charity partners.

Heat Scorch Bucks in Blowout; Tatum Scores 41 in Celtics Romp

LAS VEGAS (Dispatches) - An under-strength Miami Heat thrashed the struggling Milwaukee Bucks 123-97 while Jayson Tatum scored a 41-point double-double as the Boston Celtics cruised past the Brooklyn Nets. Miami shrugged off the injury absences of Jimmy Butler, Terry Rozier and Josh Richardson to produce a shooting clinic in a one-sided rout on the road at Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum. Nikola Jovic led the Miami scorers with 24 points including five three-pointers while Duncan Robinson poured in six threes in his 23-point haul. Miami went 19-of-40 from outside the arc, with six players finishing in double figures. Veteran Kevin Love also got into the shooting groove, making five three-pointers off the bench to finish with 19 points in what was a wire-to-wire win for Milwaukee. But the defeat left recently installed Milwaukee Bucks coach Doc Rivers with plenty to ponder as his team prepares for the All-Star break. Rivers took charge last month after the shock dismissal of predecessor Adrian Griffin, with the brief of helping improve Milwaukee's defense. Yet it was another porous display by the Bucks, who struggled to build any kind of momentum against a well-organized Miami unit. "Speed, pace - they were quicker on everything at both ends," Rivers said after the loss. "You have these things, you hate them, but it is what it is. I thought as bad as it looked defensively, I thought our offense was way worse tonight. It started early. "At half-time I thought it was just awful offense. Right now our team gets its personality from the offensive end and we don't want that, we want to get our personality from playing hard and doing defensive things. And tonight we didn't do that." Giannis Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee's scoring with 23 points while three players - Malik Beasley, Damian Lillard and Bobby Portis - all finished with 16 points apiece. Miami, beaten by Denver in last season's NBA Finals, improved to 29-25 with the win and are seventh in the Eastern Conference standings. Milwaukee fell to 35-20 and are third in the East behind first-placed Boston and second-placed Cleveland. The Celtics meanwhile stretched their unbeaten streak to five games with a 118-110 defeat of the Brooklyn Nets, with Tatum in dazzling form to finish with 41 points, 14 rebounds and five assists. Jaylen Brown added 19 points, while Al Horford and Derrick White added 16 points each as the Celtics improved to 42-12 at the top of the East. The Celtics led from the first quarter, stretching their advantage to 23 points by the third quarter before Brooklyn rallied in the fourth to get within six with less than three minutes remaining. "I was just in a good rhythm," said Tatum, who scored 31 of his points in the first half. In the other early game, the Oklahoma City Thunder blew past the Orlando Magic 127-113. Jalen Williams (33) and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (32) combined for 65 points as the Thunder recovered from an 11-point deficit in the first quarter to run out convincing winners.



Leclerc Hails Healthier Ferrari After First Laps



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz sounded positive yesterday after their first laps in the car they hope will challenge dominant Formula One champions Red Bull this season. The SF-24 car was launched at the Italian team's Fiorano test track with both drivers hoping it would be easier to drive and develop through the longest of campaigns with a record 24 races. Leclerc recalled how last year he had not been happy with the overly sensitive car's behaviour after three or four laps of the shakedown. "This year the car feels healthier and in a better place," he told reporters after three laps "with cameras stuck all around the car and not really pushing to the limit. "In terms of actual feeling of the very first laps, I would say I've had a better feeling this year than I did last year," he added, while cautioning that it meant nothing in terms of performance if rivals had made bigger steps. The sport's most successful team, and the only one to have competed in every world championship since 1950, dropped to third overall last year behind Mercedes and Red Bull. Leclerc said the aim for 2024 was "to be front runners all the time". Spaniard Sainz, who is in his final year at Maranello before making way for Mercedes's seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton in 2025, did two laps. "It was a good installation lap, nothing happened," he said. "So far everything is going smoothly." Sainz was the only driver last season to beat Red Bull, his victory in Singapore denying the champions a sweep of all 22 races. The car is the first fully conceived under team boss Fred Vasseur, who took over from Mattia Binotto in January 2023, and the Frenchman said the team needed to continue last season's strong finish. "We have also to be focused on the weaknesses of 2023 and to be much more opportunistic in terms of points scored and we will be focused on this," he added. Ferrari ended last season with Leclerc runner-up to Red Bull's Max Verstappen in Abu Dhabi but still 17.8 seconds behind the triple world champion whose team had long given up developing their car. Chassis technical director Enrico Cardile said every area of the Ferrari had been redesigned. "We have taken on board what the drivers told us and turned those ideas into engineering reality, with the aim of giving them a car that's easier to drive and therefore easier to get the most out of and push it to its limits," he said. The mostly red car, the 70th that Ferrari have built to compete in Formula One, features yellow longitudinal stripes for the first time since 1968, along with some white. The season starts in Bahrain on March 2.

Hurkacz Survives Marathon in Rotterdam

LONDON (Dispatches) - Polish No. 4 seed Hubert Hurkacz outlasted a hearty challenge from Czech foe Jiri Lehecka and won 6-3, 6-7 (9), 7-6 (9) in the first round of the ABN AMRO Open in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Hurkacz served on match point three times in the second-set tiebreaker, but Lehecka extended the match each time before earning the 11-9 tiebreaker victory. The tables were turned in the second set, when Hurkacz saved match point in the 10th game and three more in the tiebreaker before posting his own 11-9 win. Russian second seed Andrey Rublev had an easier go of it against Belgian qualifier Zizou Bergs, prevailing 7-5, 6-3. No. 5 seed Alex de Minaur of Australia beat Sebastian Korda 6-4, 6-3, and No. 8 seed Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan defeated Croatia's Borna Coric 6-3, 6-4. Hungarian Marton Fucsovics, Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko and Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff also advanced. Meanwhile Serbia's Dusan Lajovic knocked off Frenchman Arthur Fils, the eighth seed, 6-3, 6-4 in first-round action in Buenos Aires. While Lajovic had just one ace to five for Fils, Lajovic also had no double-faults, while his opponent had nine. Lajovic also won 67 percent of his points on second-serve points, while Fils converted only 38 percent on his second serve. The fifth

seed, Argentine Sebastian Baez, had an easier time of it, defeating Spain's Bernabe Zapata Miralles in straight sets 6-3, 6-3. Elsewhere, Colombian qualifier Daniel Elahi Galan rallied past Argentinian wild card Diego Schwartzman 2-6, 6-1, 6-4. Galan saved six of nine break points while converting four of his six break-point opportunities against the former world No. 8. Argentina's Federico Coria pleased the home crowd with a 7-5, 4-6, 7-5 victory over Austria's Sebastian Ofner. Other winners included Argentina's Camilo Ugo Carabelli, Chile's Alejandro Tabilo and Italians Luciano Darderi and Andre Vavassori. Meanwhile Australia's Jordan Thompson fired 10 aces compared to his opponent's one en route to upsetting No. 7 seed Daniel Evans of Great Britain 7-5, 6-0, in the first round in Delray Beach, Fla. The eighth seed also bowed out early, as qualifier Zachary Svajda saved seven of eight break points and beat Australia's Max Purcell 7-5, 6-3. Italian lucky loser Flavio Cobolli rallied past Japan's Taro Daniel 1-6, 6-2, 7-6 (1). U.S. qualifier Nicolas Moreno Del Alboran and Australia's Rinky Hijikata also advanced. In later matches, Moldovan qualifier Radu Albot and the U.S. duo of Alex Michelsen and Marcos Giron posted victories.

