

Due to the Gradual Decrease in Temperature, Gas Consumption in the Domestic Sector Has Reached 329 Million Cubic Meters in Iran, the Head of the Country's Gas Network Management Center Said on Saturday

IRAN NEWS

Israel Reportedly Carried Out Covert Attacks on Two Major Natural Gas Pipelines Inside Iran Last Week, Temporarily Disrupting the Flow of Heat and Cooking Gas to Provinces With Millions of People

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Iranian, Saudi FMs Discuss Developments in Gaza, Rafah



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia have discussed regional and international issues, most notably the recent developments in the city of Rafah in southern Gaza and the humanitarian situation in the strip amid Israel's savage attacks. In a telephone conversation on Friday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud stressed the need to develop a strategic direction in mutual relations given the ongoing regional and international developments and problems facing the Muslim world, particularly the Palestinian issue. Amir-Abdollahian said Israel continues its crimes against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and its moves in Rafah and called for efforts to counter the regime's threats. The United States is complicit in the developments in Gaza and the West Bank and has given Israel the green light to conduct the ground invasion of Rafah, he added. He emphasized that Iran does not believe that war could be a solution to the Palestinian issue. The top Iranian diplomat warned that if the conflict is not solved immediately through political channels, the continuation of Israel's genocide will have "inevitable" adverse consequences on regional security and stability. He called for an emergency meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to discuss the crisis in Gaza. The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is deteriorating at an alarming pace as the Israeli regime keeps pressing ahead with its genocidal war on the besieged territory.

Hamas Urges ICJ to Hold Israeli Regime Accountable for Genocide Crimes



GAZA (Dispatches) - The Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) called on the International Court of Justice to hold the Zionist regime accountable for its brutal actions against the oppressed and defenseless people of Palestine. The International Court of Justice, earlier stated that the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, including the city of Rafah is extremely dire. The ICJ emphasized that the Zionist regime must fully fulfill its obligations based on the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the previous measures issued by this court in support of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) emphasized in a statement: "The International Court of Justice should issue a direct and clear order to stop the genocide and brutal aggression of the Israeli regime against the defenseless civilians in the Gaza Strip." Hamas, welcoming the previous decision of the International Court of Justice against the Zionist regime, in which it asked this regime to adhere to its obligations based on the agreement on genocide and mass killing, added: "Since the ruling of the International Court of Justice against the Zionist regime, more than 28,000 Palestinians have been killed, which shows the Israeli regime's disregard for the international justice system." The Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) also asked the United Nations Security Council to take responsibility for the crimes committed by the Zionist regime in Gaza and prevent the spread of humanitarian disaster in the densely populated city of Rafah. South Africa has recently submitted an urgent request to the International Criminal Court against the Zionist regime regarding its attack on Rafah. Meanwhile, the Zionist regime's attacks on Rafah continue, and seven Palestinians were killed in an attack by the Zionist regime's forces on a house in Rafah, south of the Gaza Strip, on Thursday.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Domestically-Manufactured Anti-Ballistic, Low-Altitude Defense Systems Unveiled

TEHRAN - The Iranian Ministry of Defense has unveiled a sophisticated anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense system as well as a low-altitude air defense (LAAD) system entirely designed and manufactured by the country's military experts and specialists. The new arrivals were showcased during a ceremony in the capital Tehran on Saturday with Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani in attendance. Homegrown Arman (Aspiration) anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense system, also known as Tactical Sayyad (Hunter), reportedly can detect and track 24 targets at a distance of 180 kilometers (111 miles) away and simultaneously deal with six to 12 targets within a range of 120 kilometers (74.5 miles). It is said to be furnished with short-range self-protection capabilities in comparison with Khordad-3 and Khordad-15 systems. The self-protection system is fitted in one of the missile turrets of Arman ABM defense system, making the weapon immune to potential low-altitude threats. The new air defense system also enjoys greater mobility as its radars and missile launchers have been incorporated into a single vehicle. Azarakhsh (Thunderbolt) low-altitude defense system is said to be responsible for providing close-in, low altitude, surface-to-air weapons fires in defense of forward combat areas, maneuver forces, vital areas, installations and/or units engaged in special or independent operations. In the ceremony, Ashtiani said that the new air defense missile system that Iran unveiled on Saturday is so nimble that its operational preparedness time is below three minutes. After unveiling the 'Arman' anti-ballistic air defense missile system today, the defense minister said the agile system can be prepared for operation in less than three minutes. The tactical system is employed for mid-range high-altitude operations, the general noted, adding that Arman can detect targets at a distance of 180 kilometers and engage them in a range of 120 kilometers. Arman, also known as 'Tactical Sayyad', is furnished with a short-range self-protection system in one of its silos that makes the weapon immune to low-altitude threats. General Ashtiani also pointed to another achievement unveiled in the ceremony, saying the 'Azarakhsh' low-altitude missile system is designed to protect the country's vital and important centers against hostile drones and micro air vehicles (MAVs). He noted that Azarakhsh can be installed on various vehicles and carry out round-the-clock operations to bring down diverse targets thanks to its advanced 3-dimensional radar system, optical search mechanism, and advanced seekers. Iran for the first time showcased a replica of the Tactical Sayyad air defense system at the International Military Forum ARMY-2023 in Russia in August 2023. Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient.

Yemen Targets British Oil Tanker in Red Sea With Direct Missile Hit

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen says its naval units have targeted with missiles a British oil tanker in the Red Sea in retaliation for the recent US-UK aggression against the Arab country. Armed Forces spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Saree said in a video statement on Saturday that the retaliatory strikes hit British oil ship Pollux in the Red Sea. He said the attack, which was carried out "with a large number of appropriate naval missiles" in the strategic waterway, was "accurate and direct." Praising the attack as a "triumph" for Palestinians, Saree underscored the continuation of military operations in the Red and Arabian Seas against Israeli shipping until the aggression stops and the siege on the Palestinian people in Gaza is lifted. "Yemeni Armed Forces persist with their military operations, enforcing a blockade on Israeli navigation in the Red and Arabian Seas until a ceasefire is achieved and a siege is lifted in the Gaza Strip," the spokesman said. "The Yemeni armed forces will not hesitate to implement and expand their military operations in defense of beloved Yemen and in confirmation of continued practical solidarity with the Palestinian people," he added. Earlier in the day, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) agency said an incident involving a ship in the Red Sea occurred 72 nautical miles (133 km) northwest of the port of Mokha in Yemen. The ship transiting the Yemeni port "was attacked by a missile and

reports an explosion in close proximity," the agency said, adding that military authorities were responding. The Yemeni Armed Forces also fired missiles at a British ship passing through the Gulf of Aden on Thursday and scored a "direct hit" in their latest operation in solidarity with the Palestinians. Yemen's armed forces have been targeting Israeli ships and those bound for Israeli ports since November in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza which has been subject to five months of ferocious airstrikes and a ground invasion. The Yemeni operations have prompted some shipping companies to detour around southern Africa to avoid the Red Sea, which normally carries about 12 percent of global maritime trade. The Yemeni army says only Israeli, US and British ships are targeted, stating that other countries can rest assured of the safety of their cargoes. Mohammed Abdul-Salam, spokesman for Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement, said on Friday that Sana'a would not surrender to the US hegemonic policies in the West Asia region and would press ahead with its retaliatory strikes on Israeli shipping in the Red Sea in support of Palestinians. Abdul-Salam made the statement in a post on his X social media account after the administration of US President Joe Biden returned Yemen's Ansarullah to a so-called list of "terrorist" groups and imposed harsh sanctions on the popular resistance movement.



Iran-UK Trade Hits \$105m in 2023



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The UK Department of Trade and Industry noted a boom in trade with Iran in 2023, saying the two countries' trade exchanges reached \$105 million last year. In its latest report, the department put the value of the trade exchanges between Iran and the UK in 2023 at £83 million (\$105 million), showing a 4% growth compared to a year earlier. Iran and the UK had exchanged over £80 million from January to December 2022. According to the report, the UK imported £16 million (\$20 million) from Iran in 2023. The country had imported £1 million worth of non-oil products from Iran between January and December 2022. Regarding the export of products, the UK exported £67 million (\$85 million) to Iran in 2023, registering a 6% hike compared to a year before. The UK had exported £63 million worth of products to Iran from January to December 2022.

Arab Countries Increasingly Restricting U.S. Action Against Iran



LONDON (Dispatches) - A number of Arab countries are reportedly "increasingly restricting" the United States and its allies from conducting attacks from their soil against Iran and resistant groups in the West Asia region amid the Israeli onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip. In a report, the Politico magazine cited an anonymous U.S. official as saying that some Arab countries, including the United Arab Emirates, imposed limitations on the United States' use of its military bases within their territories for conducting strikes against Iran and resistance groups. "Amid a rising civilian death toll in Gaza, several Arab countries, particularly those 'attempting a detente with Iran,' are 'increasingly restricting' the US and partners from conducting self-defense operations from their soil," the official said. "This includes limits on retaliatory strikes against attacks in Iraq, Syria, and the Red Sea," the official added. The American online magazine stopped short of disclosing the name and exact number of the Arab countries involved in restricting the US access in the region. According to Politico, the official said that the specific reason the UAE is undertaking such action is that "They don't want to appear like they're against Iran and they don't want to appear too close to the West and Israel for public opinion reasons." The U.S. occupation forces and several of Washington's partners have recently ramped up their terrorist attacks and strikes in the West Asia region in support of the Israeli regime, which has since early October waged a genocidal war against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. More than 28,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed and over 68,000 others injured since the Israeli regime launched its US-backed onslaught on Gaza on October 7, 2023. The resistance groups in the region have in response staged scores of retaliatory strikes against the US occupation bases, leaving at least three soldiers dead and dozens of others wounded. Yemen has also declared an open war against U.S. and British interests since the two countries launched a military campaign against the Arab country in support of Israel. Iran has on numerous occasions asserted that it has no affiliated groups involved in what the U.S. claims to be "proxies" in the region and that resistance groups in West Asia independently act on their own accord and take no orders from the Islamic Republic.

IRAN NEWS



Envoy Defends Armenia's Territorial Integrity

YEREVAN (Dispatches) - After warnings by Armenia of a fresh Azerbaijani military threat, Iran's Ambassador in Yerevan, Mehdi Sobhani, has reiterated Tehran's stance against any territorial alterations in the region. In an interview with Armenpress, Sobhani emphasized, "The final position of the Islamic Republic of Iran is that we cannot accept a territorial change in any way. Any territorial changes should take place on the basis of mutual recognition of the territorial integrity of both countries, and this remains our final position...the territorial integrity of the countries of the region should be respected." Expressing concern over regional stability, the Iranian diplomat stated that Tehran finds it "unacceptable" to witness a volatile situation around Armenia. His comments come as tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to escalate. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian on Thursday rejected Azerbaijan's persistent demands for legislative changes in Armenia, warning of potential "large-scale" military aggression from Baku. Pashinian accused Azerbaijani leadership of pursuing a "policy of military coercion" to seize Armenian territory and extract concessions. He highlighted Azerbaijan's reluctance to demarcate the border, fol

Flotilla 86 Affirmed Iran as World Marine Power



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Navy said that the 86th Flotilla established Iran's position as one of the naval powers of West Asia and the Islamic world. The Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, speaking at a ceremony on Saturday to highlight the achievements of the Iranian Navy, said that the successful mission of the navy group, 86th Flotilla was the turning point of the authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran. "As the flotilla hoisted the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the US coasts, 90% of the Western states used the word 'boat' for the flotilla in their messages, because they think that the Islamic Iran has not and does not have such ability." On September 20, 2022, Iran's 86th Naval Fleet, which included the home-built Dena Destroyer, departed from Bandar Abbas, a port city on the Persian Gulf. It finally anchored at Oman's Salalah harbor on the 236th day of its journey. The flotilla completed a lengthy cruise around the world and sailed across the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic oceans without needing assistance from land for the first time in Iran's naval history.

Iran Exports to UAE Hit \$5.2b in 10 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- Iran exported commodities valued at \$5.2 billion to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023-January 20, 2024), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced. Mohammad Rezvani-Far said that the UAE was the third top export destination of Iranian goods in the mentioned ten-month period. The IRICA head also announced that exporting goods worth \$17.1 billion to Iran, the UAE was Iran's first source of import in the first ten months of this year. On September 10, 2023, the Financial Times reported that trade between Iran and the United Arab Emirates has increased significantly as Abu Dhabi eased restrictions on business activity between the two neighbors. The UAE has eased some limitations on corporate registrations and the issuance of visas to companies from Iran in recent months, Financial Times reported, quoting business people and officials. Iranian financiers are also exploring how to enhance bilateral trade by creating financial mechanisms to fund legitimate transactions, the report added quoting the sources. The UAE is Iran's second-largest trade partner. The trade between Iran and the UAE has recovered from a pandemic slump of \$11 billion in 2020/2021 to \$24 billion in the 12 months ending in March, according to Iranian data. The trade between the two sides has surpassed the \$22 billion recorded in 2012 before U.S.-led sanctions were imposed on the Iranian economy. Iranian officials have said they are now targeting a further increase in bilateral trade towards \$30 billion in the next two years. "Pressure from the UAE central bank has decreased and some

Emirati banks have started opening bank accounts," said Masoud Daneshmand, a former head of the Iran-UAE Chamber of Commerce. "Currently, some Iranian companies that used to be in the UAE but had become inactive have become active again. Some new companies have also started business." In diplomatic exchanges, Iranian officials have been asking their Emirati counterparts to find new mechanisms for financing trade, according to people briefed on these conversations. "Our economic relationship with Iran has long been of major importance," said the UAE's economy minister. "The UAE's trade with Iran is conducted in full compliance with global rules and standards." For years there have been self-imposed restrictions on business with Iran, but these have been gradually eased in recent years, a UAE-based businessman said. "There's a sense of more openness." Iran and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to sign new memorandums of understanding (MOUs) on the avoidance of double taxation and facilitation of mutual investment. The decision was made during a meeting between Iranian Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Ehsan Khandouzi and UAE Minister of State for Financial Affairs Mohamed bin Hadi Al Hussaini on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Board of Executive Directors in Jeddah in mid-May, 2023. During the meeting, the officials emphasized increasing cooperation in the fields of trade and foreign investment; in this regard, it was decided that appropriate measures should be implemented soon in order to sign agreements on facilitating foreign investment and avoidance of double taxation between the countries.

Iran, Kyrgyzstan Voice Opposition to West's Interference in Region



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Top security officials of Iran and Kyrgyzstan have raised their objection to the West's interference in the domestic affairs of regional countries and its efforts to impose its demands and will on them. Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Akbar Ahmadian and Secretary of the Security Council of the Kyrgyz Republic Marat Imankulov held a meeting in Bishkek on Friday. The two sides voiced concern over measures by certain Western countries to finance terrorist groups in Afghanistan and their bids to step up acts of terror in Central and West Asia. They also discussed ways to promote cooperation in various political, security and military fields, especially in the fight against terrorist groups such as Daesh. Ahmadian invited his Kyrgyz counterpart to travel to Iran which was accepted by Imankulov. The SNSC secretary is in the Kyrgyz capital at the head of a delegation to take part in the 6th Summit of Secretaries and Advisors of National Supreme Councils of regional countries on Afghanistan. Top security officials of regional countries, including Iran, Russia, China, India, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, are scheduled to discuss Afghanistan's most important security and political issues and their impacts on the region.

Health Ministry Seeks to Provide Free Treatment for Cancer Patients

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Health, Treatment and Medical Education, in a meeting with Shia Marjas, said that free cancer treatment is one of the goals of the Ministry of Health. Bahram Einollahi, in a meeting with Ayatollah Nouri Hamdani, presented a report on the actions taken by the Ministry of Health such as the implementation of the National Family Health Program and the International Family Health Congress which will be held in March, in Tehran. In this meeting, Ayatollah Nouri Hamadani also said that following the health guidelines and the health-oriented recommendations will increase the capacities and improve the performance of the society. Referring to the esteemed position of morality and spirituality in the field of health, Ayatollah Hamedani said that compliance with guidelines and strengthening the field of health is the key to the sustainable development of health. This evening in the meeting of the Minister, Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani, appreciated the efforts of the Minister of Health in his diligent attention to youth policies and the completion of projects in the field of health, especially large hospitals, to improve people's access to medical services. Einollahi also highlighted some of the achievements of the Ministry of Health during the past two and a half years. He

said: "Fortunately, we were able to contain and manage the coronavirus pandemic, which killed 700 people in the country every day." So, according to the acknowledgment of international organizations, Iran took first place in the prevention and treatment of the Coronavirus pandemic in the region. "The Minister considered attention to the prevention and early detection of cancer as one of the most important agendas of this Ministry, adding: "Cancer is preventable and the national health campaign will be implemented in the next phases for the prevention and early detection of cancer." He emphasized free cancer treatment as one of the goals of the Ministry of Health and noted: "All our efforts are to increase people's access to cancer treatment services, and in recent months, several advanced and new cancer treatment devices have been distributed and installed throughout the country, the last example of which was launched last week in Zahedan." In this meeting, Hojat al-Islam Shahrastani also explained the latest status of the construction of Noor Charity Hospital in Qom, appreciating the diligent efforts of the Minister of Health and the transformational measures implemented by this ministry in this administration, especially in the field of deprivation.



Iranians Umrah Pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia Officially Cancelled

TEHRAN - Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization announced the official cancellation of the Umrah pilgrimage, with refunds for over 30,000 Iranians already registered being processed. The Umrah, an Islamic pilgrimage to the holiest Muslim city Mecca in Saudi Arabia, can be undertaken at any time of the year, in contrast to the Hajj pilgrimage, which has specific dates according to the Islamic lunar calendar. The first group of Iranian pilgrims was scheduled to embark on Umrah in early January after about seven years of diplomatic estrangement between Tehran and Riyadh. The cancellation of the Umrah pilgrimage was attributed to a "technical disagreement" regarding Iranian flight permits for entry into Saudi Arabia. Hesam Ghorbanali, the spokesperson for Iran's flag carrier airline Iran Air (Homa), said at the time that due to the lack of the required permit, the aircraft of the Islamic Republic was unable to travel to Saudi Arabia, claiming that the problem would be resolved within a few days. Now after about a month and a half, Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization announced that all registration fees will be refunded. Since the suspension of Umrah in 2015 and the emergence of disagreements between Tehran and Riyadh, approximately six million Iranians have been awaiting the resumption of Umrah. The minister of culture had previously promised that before the summer of 2024, around 400,000 people would undertake the Umrah pilgrimage.

Sponge Iron Production Up 9.1%



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Production of sponge iron in Iran rose by 9.1 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023-January 20, 2024), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to the data released by the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA). The ISPA reported that 30.024 million tons of sponge iron was produced in the country during the ten-month period of this year, while the figure was 27.519 million tons in the first ten months of the previous year. As previously announced by the Iranian Steel Producers Association, 18.86 million tons of sponge iron was produced in Iran in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22, 2023). Direct reduced iron (DRI), also called sponge iron, is produced from the direct reduction of iron ore (in the form of lumps, pellets, or fines) into iron by reducing gas or elemental carbon produced from natural gas or coal. Many ores are suitable for direct reduction. While Iran is fighting the U.S. severe sanctions on its economy, and the country's different industrial and economic sectors have been affected by the limitations and difficulties caused by the sanctions condition, the country's mining sector is moving forward noticeably, overcoming such barriers. Among the mining sector's different products, sponge iron is an outstanding example, as the production of this item is rising more and more in the country.

Tens of Thousands Rally against Hungary's Orban

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of Hungarians protested in Budapest on Friday at the biggest rally against Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government for years, after a sex-abuse case pardon by President Katalin Novak caused public uproar and led to her resignation. Conservative Orban, who has been in power since 2010, has sought to defuse the week-old scandal that brought down two of his key political allies, the president and former justice minister Judit Varga, but it has continued to dominate domestic media. While the turmoil poses no immediate threat to Orban's rule, with 2026 elections still far off, it comes ahead of European parliament elections in June in which his party is hoping to gain from a rise in far-right support across Europe. The uncovering of the pardon triggered a public outcry and nine online influencers, among them hugely popular singer Azahriah, called for a protest in Budapest's historic Heroes' Square. Tens of thousands of demonstrators, including many young people, squeezed into the huge square, with more filling the avenues leading towards it and others still marching there.



Ukrainian Troops Withdraw From Avdiivka as Ammunition Shortage Bites



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian troops withdrew from the devastated eastern town of Avdiivka, Ukraine's new army chief said in the early hours of Saturday, paving the way for Russia's biggest advance since May 2023 when it captured the city of Bakhmut. The withdrawal, announced as Ukraine faces acute shortages of ammunition with U.S. military aid delayed for months in Congress, aimed to save troops from being fully surrounded by Russian forces after months of fierce fighting, Kyiv said. General Oleksandr Syrskiy, who took the helm of the Ukrainian military in a major shakeup last week, said Ukrainian forces had moved back to more secure positions outside the town that had a pre-war population of 32,000. "I decided to withdraw our units from the town and move to defence from more favourable lines in order to avoid encirclement and preserve the lives and health of servicemen," he was quoted as saying in an armed forces statement. The loss of the town nearly two years into Russia's full-scale invasion may give President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a stronger case to make to the West for more urgent military aid as he addresses the Munich Security Conference on Saturday morning. U.S. President Joe Biden had said on Thursday that Avdiivka risked falling to Russian forces because of ammunition shortages following months of Republican congressional opposition to a new U.S. military aid package for Kyiv. Capturing Avdiivka is key to Russia's aim of securing full control of the two provinces that make up the industrial Donbas region, and could hand President Vladimir Putin a battlefield victory as he seeks re-election next month. Avdiivka has borne the brunt of mounting offensive pressure by Russian forces in the east as wavering Western military aid has compounded the fatigue of troops fighting for almost two years. "We are taking measures to stabilize the situation and maintain our positions," Syrskiy said. There was no immediate comment about the withdrawal from the Russian Defence Ministry, Zelenskyy or the Ukrainian defense minister. Russia stepped up its offensive on Avdiivka in October and Ukraine's positions had been looking increasingly fraught for weeks. The Third Assault Brigade, a prominent Ukrainian infantry assault unit, was rushed into the town to help reinforce troops this week as other Ukrainian forces pulled back from the southeast of the town.

Trump Fined \$355m, Banned From NY Business in Fraud Trial



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A New York judge ordered Donald Trump to pay \$355 million over fraud allegations and banned him from running companies in the state for three years Friday in a major blow to his business empire and financial standing. Trump - almost certain to be the Republican presidential nominee this November - was found liable for unlawfully inflating his wealth and manipulating the value of properties to obtain favorable bank loans or insurance terms. Trump defense lawyer Alina Habba called the ruling a "manifest injustice" and vowed to appeal. As the case was civil, not criminal, there was no threat of imprisonment. But Trump said ahead of the ruling that a ban on conducting business in New York state would be akin to a "corporate death penalty." Trump, facing 91 criminal counts in other cases, has seized on his legal woes to fire up supporters and denounce his likely opponent President Joe Biden, claiming that court cases are "just a way of hurting me in the election." However, Judge Arthur Engoron said the financially shattering penalties are justified by Trump's behavior. "Their complete lack of contrition and remorse borders on pathological," Engoron said of Trump and his two sons, who were also defendants, in his scathing ruling. They are accused only of inflating asset values to make more money... Donald Trump is not Bernard Madoff. Yet, defendants are incapable of admitting the error of their ways," he added, referring to the perpetrator of a massive Ponzi scheme. Trump's sons Eric and Donald Trump Jr. were also found liable in the case and ordered to pay more than \$4 million each, prompting Don Jr. to claim on social media that "political beliefs" had determined the outcome. Engoron also extended the mandate of retired judge Barbara Jones as an independent monitor of Trump's business affairs, as well as ordering the appointment of an Independent Director of Compliance to the Trump Organization, with candidates to be nominated by Jones. "Conditions that Judge Engoron imposed, such as having Judge Jones monitor the Trump companies, may be onerous. I do expect an appeal," said Richmond University law professor Carl Tobias.



Top UN Court Rejects S. Africa Request for More Gaza Measures

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - The UN's top court rejected South Africa's request to put more legal pressure on Israel to halt a threatened offensive against the Gaza city of Rafah, saying it was "bound to comply with existing measures". Pretoria has already filed a complaint against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, alleging that its assault on Gaza amounts to a breach of the Genocide Convention. The court has yet to rule on the underlying issue, but on January 26 it ordered Israel to ensure it took action to protect Palestinian civilians from further harm and to allow in humanitarian aid. South African officials on Tuesday filed a further request to the court, asking it to order new measures in the light of Israel's preparation of a new operation against Rafah. More than half of Gaza's 2.4 million population have sought shelter there from Israel's offensive on the Gaza Strip. The ICJ's judges acknowledged that the recent developments "would exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences" - citing remarks by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. But although Israel needed to act immediately to ensure the safety and security of Palestinians, that did not require "the indication of additional provisional measures", they added. Israel remained "bound to fully comply with its obligations under the Genocide Convention and with the said Order", the ICJ ruling said, referring to its January 26 ruling. Despite the rejection of its latest request, South Africa welcomed the ICJ's latest decision. It affirmed its view that the "perilous

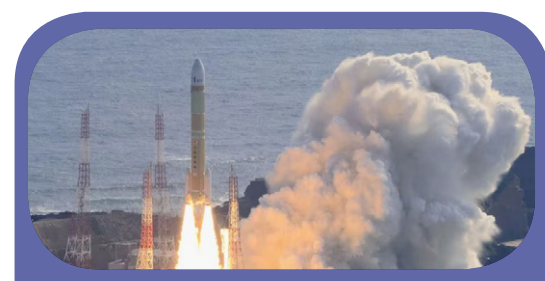
situation" in Gaza demanded the "immediate and effective implementation" of the emergency measures the court ordered in its January 26 decision, it said in a statement late Friday. "The court has unequivocally explained that compliance with the existing provisional measures requires Israel to ensure the safety and security of all Palestinians in the Gaza Strip," said President Cyril Ramaphosa's spokesman, Vincent Magwenya. Hamas's October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures. Militants also took about 250 people hostage, around 130 of whom are still in Gaza, including 30 who are presumed dead, according to Israeli figures. Israel's assault on Gaza has since killed at least 28,775 people, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry. Israel's foreign minister on Friday pledged the country would coordinate with Egypt before launching any military offensive in the southern border city of Rafah. "We will operate in Rafah after we coordinate with Egypt," Israel Katz told journalists on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, where 180 dignitaries have gathered to discuss conflicts around the globe. Fears had been growing for the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled the north of Gaza to Rafah as Israeli troops advanced into the territory to wage war on Hamas. But Israel is now planning a major operation in the overcrowded city. With the border to Egypt closed, nearly 1.5 million Palestinians are essentially trapped there.



France Signs Security Pact With Ukraine

PARIS (Dispatches) - Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a security pact with France in Paris on Friday, having earlier secured a similar deal with Germany hailed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz as a "historic step" anchoring support for Kyiv in its raging battle against Russia. The agreement includes a French aid pledge for up to €3 billion for 2024, after €1.7 billion in 2022 and €2.1 billion last year. Both deals are part of Zelenskyy's drive to shore up help for his forces who are struggling to hold off Russian attacks on the frontline city of Avdiivka. After touching down at Orly airport south of the French capital, Zelenskyy travelled on to the Elysee palace where he met with President Emmanuel Macron to sign the accord. The French presidency said ahead of the meeting that the pact would run for 10 years, and include precise commitments from the French side, including financial pledges. It would strengthen cooperation in the area of artillery, the presidency said, without providing details. The deal is also to help pave the way towards Ukraine's future integration into the European Union and NATO, officials said. With the Ukraine war about to enter its third year, Zelenskyy was to make further pleas for sustained help with financing and armaments at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, where leaders like US Vice President Kamala Harris have gathered. Zelenskyy's European tour comes at a critical time with Ukraine facing mounting pressure on the eastern front because of ammunition shortages and fresh Russian attacks. Fierce fighting raged around the beleaguered frontline town of Avdiivka, which has become a main Russian target ahead of the February 24 invasion anniversary. The long-term future of billions of dollars of Western aid is meanwhile in doubt, with the biggest contributor, the United States, in the throes of

an election year. A possible \$60-billion package of military aid has been held up in Washington since last year because of wrangling in Congress. The EU has also admitted that it will only be able to make good on half of the one million artillery shells it promised to send by March. But Scholz underlined that the security pact inked in Berlin on Friday illustrates that Germany will "not let up" in supporting Ukraine. He also announced a new package of immediate military support worth 1.1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion). "This document ... shows that Germany will continue to help Ukraine with its defence against Russia's attacks. I have often said: for as long as it takes," said Scholz, who also called the signing of the deal "a historic step". The agreement lays out support for a post-war Ukraine to build up a modern army that can repel further attacks from Russia in the future. "Our security agreement is a truly unprecedented bilateral document," said Zelenskyy. G7 nations flagged plans to provide Ukraine with long-term defence support on the sidelines of the NATO summit last July. Alliance leaders failed, however, to set a timetable for Ukraine to join the bloc. A first agreement had been signed with Britain in January, during Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's visit to Kyiv. Zelenskyy is seeking to shake off any war fatigue besetting his allies. Addressing the conference in Munich, Harris said President Joe Biden's administration "will work to secure critical weapons and resources that Ukraine so badly needs". Abandoning Kyiv would be a "gift to (Russian President) Vladimir Putin," she said, on the eve of bilateral talks with Zelenskyy. Ukraine was once the main conflict on the minds of world leaders but Israel's war with Hamas and the ensuing escalating crisis in the Middle East now also require urgent attention.



Japan Successfully Launches Next-Generation H3 Rocket

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan successfully launched its new H3 flagship rocket on Saturday, putting its satellite programme back on track after multiple setbacks including the failure of the rocket's inaugural flight last year. The launch also marks a second straight win for the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) after its moon lander, SLIM, achieved a "pinpoint" touchdown last month. A relatively small player in space by number of launches, Japan is seeking to revitalise its programme as it partners with ally the United States to counter China. The H3 had a "successful liftoff" at 9:22 a.m. Tokyo time (00:22 GMT) and was "on course" with its engines properly working. JAXA said in a live broadcast that showed scientists clapping and hugging each other at the Tanegashima Space Center in southern Japan. All its payloads - two microsatellites and a dummy satellite - were successfully released, the agency later said. The H3 will replace the two-decade-old H-IIA. JAXA and primary contractor Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, hope that its lower costs and greater payload capacity will help them win launch orders from global clients. "This is really good. It's taken some time for the program to get to this point but with this launch they will be fielding inquiries from around the world," said Ko Ogasawara, a professor at the Tokyo University of Science. The H3's first flight in March ended up with ground control destroying the rocket 14 minutes after liftoff because its second-stage engine failed to ignite. JAXA listed three possible electrical faults in a review released in October but could not identify the direct cause. The 63 m (207 ft) H3 is designed to carry a 6.5 metric ton payload into space and reduce per-launch cost to as low as five billion yen (\$33 million) by adopting simpler structures and automotive-grade electronics. By comparison, the H-IIA costs about 10 billion yen per launch. The government plans to launch about 20 satellites and probes with H3 rockets by 2030. The H3 is scheduled to deliver a lunar explorer for the joint Japan-India LUPEX project in 2025 as well as cargo spacecraft for the U.S.-led Artemis moon exploration program in the future. Satellite launch demands have skyrocketed thanks to the rise of affordable commercial vehicles such as SpaceX's reusable Falcon 9 and a number of new rockets are being tested this year.

Putin Foe Navalny Dies in Jail, West Holds Russia Responsible

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Alexei Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin's most formidable domestic opponent, fell unconscious and died after a walk at the "Polar Wolf" Arctic penal colony where he was serving a three-decade sentence, authorities said. The death of Navalny, a 47-year-old former lawyer, robs the disparate Russian opposition of its most prominent leader as Putin prepares for an election which will keep the former KGB spy in power until at least 2030. U.S. President Joe Biden said he was outraged and joined other Western leaders in criticizing Russia over Navalny's death, blaming it on "something that Putin and his thugs did." Navalny rose to prominence more than a decade ago by documenting and speaking publicly about what he said was the vast corruption and opulence among the "crooks and thieves" running Putin's Russia. There are no other opposition leaders in Russia of Navalny's stature. For some young urban Russians, Navalny had offered hope of an alternative future to Putin, who has served as Russia's paramount leader longer than anyone since Josef Stalin. The Federal Penitentiary Service of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District said in a statement that Navalny felt unwell after a walk at the IK-3 penal colony in Kharp, about 1,900 km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. He lost consciousness almost immediately and died shortly afterwards, it said, adding that resuscitation attempts failed. Navalny's spokeswoman, Kira Yarmysh, said there was "almost no hope" that he was alive. Navalny's wife, Yulia, told the Munich Security Conference she could not be sure her husband was dead because "Putin and his government... lie incessantly". "But if this is true, I want

Putin, his entire entourage, Putin's friends, his government to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family, to my husband," she said. The Kremlin said Putin had been informed of Navalny's death. The 71-year-old former KGB spy was shown meeting workers at a factory in Chelyabinsk, in the Ural mountains. He said nothing in public about Navalny. Western leaders paid tribute to Navalny's courage as a fighter for freedom. Some, without citing evidence, accused the Kremlin of murder and said Putin should be held accountable. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the reaction of Western leaders to the death was unacceptable and "absolutely rabid". "We don't know exactly what happened, but there is no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something that Putin and his thugs did," Biden said at the White House. "Russian authorities are going to tell their own story," Biden said. "But make no mistake. Make no mistake: Putin is responsible for Navalny's death." Navalny's movement is outlawed and most of his senior allies now live in exile in Europe. Navalny's lawyer was on his way to the tough penal colony where Navalny was serving sentences that would have kept him in prison beyond the age of 70. Navalny earned admiration from Russia's opposition for voluntarily returning to Russia in 2021 from Germany, where he had been treated for what Western laboratory tests showed was an attempt to poison him with a nerve agent. Navalny said at the time that he was poisoned in Siberia in August 2020. The Kremlin denied trying to kill him and said there was no evidence he was poisoned with a nerve agent.



Alcaraz Into Buenos Aires Semis



BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz reached the semi-finals of the Buenos Aires clay-court tournament with a straight-sets win over Italian qualifier Andrea Vavassori. World number two Alcaraz, playing his first tournament since a shock quarter-final exit at the Australian Open, came through 7-6 (7/1), 6-1 against his 152nd-ranked opponent. Vavassori, who stunned three-time major winner Andy Murray on clay at the Madrid Masters last year, matched the Spanish star blow-for-blow in the opening set. However, Alcaraz then raced into a 5-0 lead in the second set before sealing victory after an hour and 40 minutes on court. "In the first set he played such a high level," Alcaraz said. "It was really tough to return his serve and challenging conditions with the wind. But I think I played better in the second set." His level went down a bit, with his serve as well and I put some returns in, took my chances and I think that was the difference. The 20-year-old Spaniard will face either Chilean third seed Nicolas Jarry or Argentina's Tomas Etcheverry, seeded sixth, for a place in the title match. The other semi-final will be an all-Argentine affair with Facundo Diaz up against Federico Coria. Meanwhile defending champion and world number one Iga Swiatek was handed a walkover into the Qatar Open final where Elena Rybakina will stand in her way of a third successive title at the Gulf event. Four-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek had been scheduled to face Karolina Pliskova in her semi-final. However, the Czech, who won the Cluj tournament in Romania last weekend, withdrew suffering from a lower back injury. Former Wimbledon

champion Rybakina was stronger at the key moments as she beat Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-2, 6-4 to reach Saturday's final. Rybakina, the third seed, converted four of six break points while her unseeded opponent could only exploit one of the nine she had. "I am happy that in the end I managed to finish the match, playing a little better in these important moments," Rybakina, who represents Kazakhstan, said in her on-court interview. Rybakina broke Pavlyuchenkova in the fifth game of the opening set and broke again in the eighth. Pavlyuchenkova saved three set points in the next game but also squandered a break point of her own before succumbing. "The first set it was very close, we were both fighting," said Rybakina. Rybakina broke easily in the second-set opener before holding serve to take a sixth straight game. Pavlyuchenkova held to end that streak and then had six break points in the next game, but could take none of them. She finally converted her eighth break point as she came back from 30-0 down in the eighth game. She then held serve as Rybakina wobbled on her forehand. With Rybakina serving for the match, Pavlyuchenkova had another break point but hit long. She saved one match point but Rybakina then produced an ace to seal victory. The 32-year-old Pavlyuchenkova is finding her form again after a long struggle with a knee injury. "Great to see her back," said Rybakina. "She played really well. It was a really tough match." On facing Swiatek in the final, she added: "She's a great champion so it is going to be very difficult. But I will try to enjoy it and do as much as possible."

Mbappe Tells PSG He Plans to Leave as Saga Draws to Close



PARIS (Dispatches) - France captain Kylian Mbappe has told officials at Paris Saint-Germain that he intends to leave when his contract expires at the end of the season, a source close to the Ligue 1 champions said. The 25-year-old, who arrived in Paris from Monaco in 2017, had extended his contract in 2022 until 2024 but last summer declined to activate a clause allowing him to stay another year at PSG. Mbappe has been widely tipped to move to Real Madrid and, according to a source close to the matter, has already entered negotiations with the Spanish giants. "The terms of the departure have yet to be fully agreed," the source said, adding that the club and Mbappe will make an official statement "when everything is finalised in the next few months". PSG declined to comment when contacted by AFP but it is understood that Mbappe's departure will be formally announced in a few months' time. "PSG are focused on the future," said the source. Mbappe will leave PSG on a free transfer but the blow to the club will be softened by an agreement they reached last summer which will see the player waive bonuses amounting to around €60 to 70 million (US\$65.6 million to US\$76.6 million). After seven seasons at PSG, Mbappe, the club's all-time top scorer with 274 goals, looks set to seal a move to Real Madrid, the club that the player has dreamt of since he was a child.

Klinsmann Sacked as South Korea Coach After Less Than a Year

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Jurgen Klinsmann was sacked as South Korea coach following defeat to Jordan in the semi-finals of the Asian Cup and revelations about a bust-up between star players. The 59-year-old German former striker, a World Cup winner as a player, was in the post for just under a year. "The KFA has decided to change the national head coach following a comprehensive review," Korea Football Association president Chung Mong-gyu said. "Klinsmann has failed to display managerial capability and leadership expected of a national head coach in areas ranging from tactics, personnel management to work attitude and others required to bring about competitiveness to the team." Klinsmann's attitude and competitiveness as head coach has fallen short of people's expectations and it was agreed that this would not be improved going forward, so we have decided to change leadership ahead of 2026 World Cup qualifying games. Klinsmann said it had been "an incredible journey" and thanked his players in a post on social media, just before the axe fell. With fans and South Korean media demanding Klinsmann's dismissal, the KFA's national team committee had on Thursday said that "a change of leadership is necessary". The South Korean team have been in the eye of a storm. On Wednesday came revelations about a fracas between players that left Son Heung-min with an injured finger on the eve of the 2-0 loss to Jordan in the last four in Qatar. Paris Saint-Germain's Lee Kang-in subsequently issued an apology after Yonhap news agency said the 22-year-old had tried to punch skipper and Tottenham star Son. Lee's representatives have denied there was a punch. The conflict was reportedly triggered by younger players - including Lee - rushing through their dinner so they could leave early and play table tennis. This angered some of the older players, including Son, who wanted to honour longstanding tradition that the pre-game dinner be a team bonding experience, triggering the brawl. Lee and Son both played in the Jordan loss, the latter with two of his fingers strapped together.



Sinner in Rotterdam Semifinals



ROTTERDAM (Dispatches) - Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner reached the Rotterdam semi-finals when injury-plagued Milos Raonic was forced to retire at 1-1 in the second set of their last-eight clash. Top seed Sinner took the first set 7-6 (7/4) before the big-hitting 33-year-old Canadian called it quits after two more games. Sinner goes on to face Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor, who defeated Emil Ruusuvuori of Finland, 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) for a place in the final. "Obviously this is not the way you want to win the match," said Sinner. "I wish him a speedy recovery. I was actually playing and I was not realising that he was about to retire but he knows his body really well and he knows his limits so, for sure, it's the right choice for him." Sinner, 22, can take the world number three ranking if he wins the title in the final. If that happens, he would become the highest-ever ranked Italian man. Raonic saw two set points come and go in the opener before he retired as the 2016 Wimbledon runner-up endured another injury nightmare. The former world number three has slumped to 309 in the rankings after missing two years of action due to a combination of back, ankle and knee injuries. Earlier, Bulgarian sixth-seed Grigor Dimitrov edged into the semi-finals, seeing off a determined challenge from Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 6-4. Dimitrov will next face fifth seed Alex De Minaur after the Australian shocked second seed Andrey Rublev 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-3. World number 13 Dimitrov seemed unhappy with his performance, admitting he struggled to read the Shevchenko service. "The way he was serving was just incredible. For some reason I was not really able to find my angles. He was not giving me any time to develop my game," Dimitrov said. "Today was just one of those matches because I was not at my best. Hopefully I can raise my game" for Saturday's semi-final. Dimitrov defeated De Minaur in the last-eight in 2023. The Australian will be hoping to avenge that loss on Saturday when he also celebrates his 25th birthday. "I played him on my birthday last year, and he was rude enough to beat me when I was two match points up," said De Minaur. "I'm playing him tomorrow, which will be my birthday again, so I'm hoping he's a little bit nicer to me. We'll see."

NBA All-Star Returns to East-West Format in LeBron's 20th Game

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo and LeBron James will face off as All-Star captains for the fourth time when the best players from the Eastern and Western conferences square off against each other at the NBA All-Star Game on Sunday evening in Indianapolis. The game will mark another milestone in James' storied career. The 39-year-old is celebrating his 20th All-Star selection, surpassing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for the most all-time. James is averaging 24.8 points, 7.2 rebounds and 7.8 assists per game this season. He earned 10 All-Star selections with the Cleveland Cavaliers, six with the Los Angeles Lakers and four with the Miami Heat. "I give credit and a lot of respect to my fans who have been along with me through this whole 21-year journey," James said. "And voting me in as an All-Star starter for the 20th consecutive time, (I'm) just very humbled. Very blessed to be able to do what I love to do and just try to give back, give back to the game that's given (to) me over two decades. "So, to be able to know this is the first time ever in NBA history to have this many All-Star starts or whatever the case might be, it's very cool." James will start for the Western Conference

alongside Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Donic, Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Phoenix Suns forward Kevin Durant and Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic. The Eastern Conference starting lineup features a pair of Milwaukee Bucks players with Antetokounmpo and guard Damian Lillard. Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton and Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum also are slated to start. Philadelphia 76ers center Joel Embiid was voted in as an All-Star starter, but he will be sidelined by a knee injury. All-Star reserve Julius Randle of the New York Knicks also is out with injury. The Atlanta Hawks' Trae Young and the Toronto Raptors' Scottie Barnes were named as injury replacements for Embiid and Randle. The Eastern Conference team's head coach will be Bucks coach Doc Rivers, and he will decide who takes Embiid's spot in the starting lineup. Some of the top frontcourt options include Paolo Banchero of the Orlando Magic and Bam Adebayo of the Miami Heat. Haliburton might get the biggest ovation when the starters are introduced. He will make his second All-Star appearance and first All-Star start on his home court in Indianapolis.

