

Iran's Supreme Council of Cyberspace Has Obligated Internet Regulators to Identify Widely-Used Foreign Platforms That Meet People's Needs So as to Provide the Conditions for Their Activity in the Country

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Special Envoy to Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi-Qomi Says That Defending the People of Afghanistan Is Fundamental to Tehran's Diplomacy And Described Meeting With Head of Taliban's Political Office in Qatar "Fruitful"

## 2 DOMESTIC

## 3 INTERNATIONAL

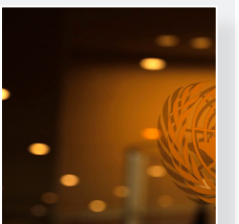


### U.S.-Free Region Requires Concerted Action

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### Iran-EU Trade Exceeds €4.7b in 2023



TEHRAN - The value of the trade exchanges between Iran and the member states of the European Union surpassed €4.7 billion in 2023, the Statistical Office of the European Union dubbed "Eurostat" announced. According to the report, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands were Iran's main European trade partners last year. Belgium and France were Iran's fourth and fifth European trade partners in 2023, the report added. The total value of the trade exchanges between Iran and the 27 member states of the union in 2023 stood at €4.732 billion, registering a 9% decline compared to a year earlier. The value of Iran and the EU's trade exchanges was €5.244 billion in 2022, the report added. The member states of the union exported €4.187 billion and €3.933 billion worth of products to Iran in 2022 and 2023 respectively. They imported €799 million worth of products from Iran in 2023, showing a 24% decline compared to a year earlier. The European Union had imported €1.57 billion worth of products from Iran in 2022. Eurostat further noted that Germany exported €1.199 billion worth of products to Iran and imported €233 million of products from Iran in 2023.

### Meddling in Iran Interests Will Not Go Unanswered



TEHRAN (MNA) - The actions and interference of the domineering countries against the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran in any part of the world will not go unanswered, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson says. Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani termed the historic mission of Iran Navy's 360-Degree a turning point in the history of navigation and navy of the country. Undoubtedly, carrying out this mission was the result of great effort, firm will, self-confidence, advanced military knowledge, efficient management, and courage and perseverance of the commanders and personnel of the Iranian Navy. In addition to guarding and protecting the country's water borders, the Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is also responsible for protecting the security and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran in international seas and waters, Kanaani said. In addition to sending messages of friendship to the world, the 's 360-degree mission showed the domineering and oppressive countries that interfere with the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran in any part of the world will not go unanswered, he added. The Iran army, together with other armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, will not leave any action against the country's national interests unanswered, he said.



### Path of Reform Passes Through Elections

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has called for massive turnout at the upcoming elections across the country, saying the path of reform passes through elections. Speaking at a meeting with a group of people from East Azarbaijan Province in the Imam Khomeini Hussainiyah on Sunday, Ayatollah Khamenei thanked the people of Iran and the organizers for the passionate rally on 22 Bahman and said: "Everywhere in the country, people showed their enthusiasm and vitality. This year, people showed the glory of the revolution to the world on 22 Bahman. Ayatollah Khamenei added: I also sincerely thank those who ensured the security of this extensive nationwide rally. He then noted that everyone should participate in the elections. "Elections are the main pillar of the Islamic Republic. The way to reform the country is through elections," he said. He reminded the candidates that political differences should not affect the national unity of the Iranian nation against the enemies. "Do not assume that the enemy is weak and incapable," the Leader asserted. "An important condition for victory is knowing the capabilities of the enemy, yet not fearing it." Iran is gearing up for parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections slated for March 1. Almost 15,000 candidates have been approved to compete in the parliamentary elections that are held every four years. In the Assembly of Experts elections, 144 candidates are vying for 88 seats at the body, which elects and oversees the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and is in a position of authority to either appoint or dismiss the Leader. In recent months, Ayatollah Khamenei has consistently encouraged people to participate in the elections. Early last month, he said, "Anyone who opposes the elections is opposing the Islamic Republic and Islam." He also censured attempts aimed at demoralizing the people and making them distrustful by claiming that the elections in Iran are meaningless. Meanwhile yesterday Leader further stressed that political differences should not affect the national unity of the Iranians against the enemies. Pointing out that the people should seek the right candidate in the elections, the Leader of the revolution said: Those who enter the election campaign should avoid insults and slander. Ayatollah Khamenei went on to say: Elections in our country have always been conducted safely and soundly, this time will be the same, God willing. The Leader stressed that political differences should not affect the national unity of the Iranian nation against the enemies. The Leader of the Islamic Revolution also stated that the arrogant bloc is undoubtedly against Iran's elections, adding that the elections are the symbol of the Islamic Establishment's republicanism. He stressed that the arrogance and the U.S. oppose both the republicanism and Islamism of the Islamic Establishment as well as the mass participation of the Iranian people in elections.

### Oil Demand Growth Slowing as Non-OPEC Supply Expands

LONDON (Dispatches) - Global oil demand growth is losing momentum, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said as it trimmed its 2024 growth forecast, in sharp contrast to the view held by producer group OPEC. The IEA, which represents industrialised countries, has predicted that oil demand will peak by 2030 as the world shifts to cleaner energy. OPEC, meanwhile, expects oil use to keep rising for the next two decades, Reuters reported. Monthly reports this week from the two forecasters underlined their starkly different estimates for 2024 oil demand. The IEA's monthly report said it expects global oil demand to grow by 1.22 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, slightly down from last month's estimate. OPEC on Tuesday stuck to its much steeper growth forecast at 2.25 million bpd. In the IEA's view, the deceleration this year - about half of the growth in 2023 - is linked to a slowdown in Chinese consumption. The IEA had previously forecast 2024 demand growth of 1.24 million bpd. "The expansive post-pandemic growth phase in global oil demand has largely run its course," the IEA said, adding that a harsher global macroeconomic climate is also likely to constrain growth this year. The Brent oil benchmark has risen about 6% so far this year as attacks on shipping in the Red Sea have raised supply fears, with January outages in major non-OPEC oil producing countries such as the United States adding to concerns alongside a fresh round of supply cuts by the wider OPEC+ group in the first quarter. Gains, however, have been

capped by worries over demand as major economies continue to grapple with high interest rates aimed at curbing sticky inflation. Japan slipped into recession at the end of last year, surrendering its title as the world's third-biggest economy to Germany. Britain's economy, the sixth-largest, also fell into recession in the second half of 2023, official data showed on Thursday. On the supply side, IEA raised its projection for 2024, estimating supply will grow by 1.7 million bpd versus its previous forecast of 1.5 million bpd. The agency cited supply from producers outside OPEC+. The IEA now expects supply to grow to a record high of about 103.8 million bpd, almost entirely driven by producers outside OPEC+, including the United States, Brazil and Guyana. Given the robust outlook for supply outside OPEC+, the IEA expects a slight build in inventories in the first quarter, it said, adding that OPEC+ could be pumping above requirements if the extra voluntary cuts are unwound in the second quarter. A new OPEC+ voluntary cut of 2.2 million bpd for the first quarter took effect last month. OPEC+ crude oil output from all 22 member countries fell by 330,000 bpd to 41.52 million bpd in January, the IEA said, after protests shut in Libyan production and some of the bloc's members deepened output cuts - though not by as much as pledged. The IEA sees demand for OPEC+ crude plus inventories averaging 41.2 million bpd in the first quarter - less than January's output - before rising to 41.5 million bpd in the second quarter.



### Iran to Put Domestic Satellites Into GEO in Next 10 Years



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian telecoms ministry has targeted the launch of home-grown satellites into Geostationary Orbit (GEO) during the next 10 years. Issa Zarepour, the minister of telecoms announced on Sunday. The national satellites will be positioned in the GEO at an altitude of 36,000 kilometers by Iranian-developed satellite carriers, Zarepour added to his remarks. He went on to say that Iran has conducted 11 launches, encompassing research, orbital, suborbital, and operational missions, during the past two years and could place the satellites successfully in orbit. Furthermore, Iran possesses the capability to deploy satellites into the Low Earth Orbit (LEO), the minister underlined, adding that the country is actively pursuing this goal, particularly with regards to the heavy and semi-heavy satellites. After the current Iranian government took office in August 2021, it resumed discussions on space-related matters after a 10-year hiatus.

### U.S.-UK Airstrikes on Yemen Will Only Complicate Regional Crisis



SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement has strongly condemned the United States and Britain over repeated airstrikes on positions in the Arab country, cautioning against further escalation of conflict in the West Asia region. Ali al-Qahoum, a member of Ansarullah's political bureau, said on Saturday night that the insistence of Washington and London to press ahead with their acts of aggression against Yemen at the behest of the Tel Aviv regime will inevitably boomerang on themselves, and will definitely fan the flames of the regional crisis. The remarks came as U.S. and UK forces had launched a new wave of attacks against Yemen, whose Armed Forces have been targeting Israeli interests in the Red Sea in solidarity with Palestinians, earlier in the day. Yemen's official Saba news agency, citing a security source speaking on condition of anonymity, reported that three aerial assaults struck the al-Katheeb neighborhood in the strategic Red Sea port city of Hudaydah, while another targeted the al-Taif coastal area in the Durayhimi district. Moreover, the United States and the United Kingdom carried out an airstrike against a major oil export terminal in Yemen's Hudaydah province. An unnamed security source said the attack hit the Port of Ras Isa. No further details were immediately available. The United States and Britain have been carrying out such strikes on Yemen since Washington and its allies offered the Tel Aviv regime unqualified support and said Yemeni forces bear the consequences of attacks against Israeli-owned ships or merchant vessels heading to the occupied territories. Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israeli occupation since the regime launched a devastating war on Gaza on October 7 after the territory's Palestinian resistance movements carried out the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm. The Yemeni Armed Forces have said they won't stop retaliatory strikes. The maritime attacks have forced some of the world's biggest shipping and oil companies to suspend transit through one of the world's most important maritime trade routes. Tankers are instead adding thousands of miles to international shipping routes by sailing around the continent of Africa rather than going through the Suez Canal.

# IRAN NEWS



## 24th Iran Media Expo Kicks Off in Tehran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The 24th Iran Media Expo started work in the presence of Iran Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mahdi Esmaili here in Tehran on Sunday. During this four-day event, journalists and photojournalists will exchange views on the latest developments in the field of media. Various news agencies, newspapers, news websites, and magazines have showcased their recent achievements in news gathering and information dissemination. The Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) has established its exclusive pavilion at the event. Other participating news agencies include Mehr, ISNA, Fars, IQNA, IBNA, IMNA, Qods, Taqrib, Razavi, Shafaqna, Ana, and PANA. Numerous newspapers, including Kayhan, Hamshahri, and Jam-e-Jam, actively participated in the national event held in Tehran. Additionally, several Iranian news websites, such as Khamenei.ir and dolat.ir, contributed to the cultural event. Al-Manar and Al-Mayadeen are also among the international news agencies present at the 24th Iran Media Expo. Meanwhile, Saba, Resaneh, Bokhara, Noormagz, and Noor News represent Iranian monthlies and journals in the event.

## Iran to Broaden Scope of Naval Power



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A high-ranking military commander unveiled plans to expand the area of influence of Iran's naval power in the direction of the Indian Ocean in order to stymie the US' plots to keep Iran stalled onshore. Addressing a conference in Tehran on Sunday, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh said Iran's maritime development should continue incessantly. Stressing the need to counter the U.S.' policy of halting the rivals at the shore, the commander said Iran's regional and ultra-regional power in the sea must grow in the direction of the Indian Ocean. "The General Staff (of the Iranian Armed Forces) has plans to that end," he added. Hailing the Army and the IRGC naval forces for boosting Iran's defense power in the region, the general said Iran's 86th flotilla of warships that circumnavigated the globe last year could challenge the U.S.' assumptions. In August 2023, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution paid tribute to the Iranian Navy forces who sailed around the world, saying the unprecedented move enhanced Iran's international standing, contributed to security, and reminded the superpowers that high seas belong to all nations. Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized that the accomplishment made by the 86th flotilla has improved Iran's international image, and that its political value is no less than its military value.



## ICCIMA President Highlights Potentials of Chinese Market

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Samad Hassanzadeh has stressed the need for Iran to use the potentials of the Chinese market to make more exports to the country. Speaking during a meeting with the board members of Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce, Hassanzadeh referred to China's consumption market as a sea which can be supplied with different Iranian items. He said that minerals, raw materials, food products and other Iranian items can be exported to China. The Iranian products are high quality enough to be exported to the biggest European markets and their prices are also justifiable for the European buyers, Hassanzadeh said. On the low price of Iranian products, he referred to government subsidies granted to many items including energy and transportation. He also pointed to the low price of the workforce in Iran.



## U.S.-Free Region Requires Concerted Action

photo : Mohammadhosein Movahedinejad

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An Iranian deputy foreign minister highlighted Tehran's strategy for throwing the U.S. out of the region, saying it needs collective efforts and stronger ties among the neighbors. Speaking to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on Sunday, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Baqeri said Iran's main foreign policy agenda is de-escalation of tensions among the neighboring and regional states. "By strengthening quite strategic and deep-rooted bonds with the neighbors, we are definitely resolved to create a stable region with concerted cooperation and collective security," he added. Describing the eviction of the U.S. forces from the region as the "Iranian administration's strategic decision", Baqeri said brotherly and friendly ties among the neighboring countries are needed in order for the expulsion of Americans from the region. Among the countries with which we have and will have favorable relations is Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has unbreakable historical, cultural, and

religious ties with us, he said. The Iranian government has a serious will to develop interaction with regional and neighboring countries, he added. Iran won't allow the outsiders to drive a wedge between Iran and certain neighbors, he said. By consolidating strategic ties with neighboring countries, including Azerbaijan, we have a strong will to create a stable region with cooperation and collective security," he further stressed. The requirement for the withdrawal of the U.S. from the region is to have a brotherly, friendly, and unbreakable bond with the neighboring countries, and this is a strategic and decisive decision of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he continued. In remarks in April 2023, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei pointed to the failure of the enemy's military strategy in the region, warning against the hostile policy of falsification, distortion, humiliation and making the nations pessimistic about their own capabilities.

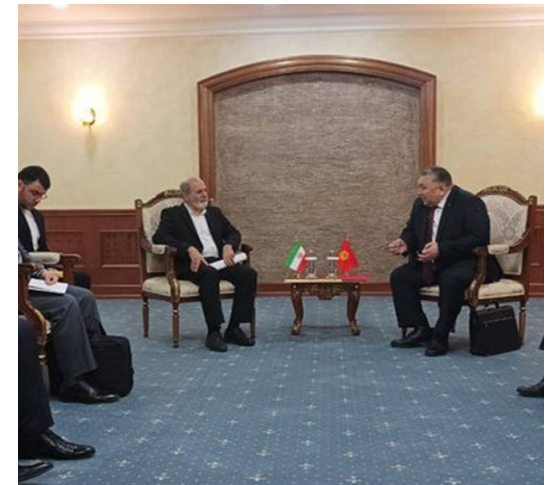
## Iran Exports €92m of Pistachios to Europe in 2023

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran exported €92 million of fresh pistachios to the member states of the European Union in 2023, the EU Statistical Office (Eurostat) said in its latest report, introducing Iran as the second largest exporter of pistachios to Europe last year. Eurostat noted that Iran's export of pistachios to Europe registered a 17% decline compared to a year earlier. Iran had exported over €111 million worth of pistachios to the 27 member states of the European Union in 2022. In 2023, Iran exported mainly pistachio nuts to the member states of the union, the report said, stating that the country exported €65 million and €27 million of pistachio nuts and shells to Europe in 2023 respectively.

Among other member states of the union, Germany was the main customer of Iranian pistachios in 2023 purchasing €49 million worth of Iranian pistachios, followed by Italy and Spain. Italy and Spain imported €7 million and €5 million of pistachios from Iran in 2023 respectively, the report added. According to this report, Iran, after the United States, was the second largest exporter of pistachio products to the European Union in 2023. The United States exported €640 million of pistachio products to the member states of the union in 2023. The US exports of pistachios to Europe registered a 15% decline last year compared to a year earlier.



## Iran to Supply Iraq with 50 MCM/Day



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's ambassador to Baghdad announced that officials from Tehran and Baghdad have agreed on the supply of 40 to 50 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas per day from Iran to Iraq. Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq said that Iran always supports Iraq in the energy field and provides its services to the Arab country whether through the export of gas or the direct export of electricity. Iran has recently carried out the annual repair and maintenance services of the gas pipelines used for the export of gas to Iraq, he noted. Iran's gas flow to Iraq was decreased earlier and now, the gas flow has returned to its normal and previous mode, the envoy added, Mehr news agency reported. Iran emphasizes that there will be an increasing trend of gas flow to Iraq next year (to start March 21, 2024), the envoy added. Earlier, a member of the Presiding Board of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce said that Iran's export of products to neighboring Iraq will reach \$12 billion by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21, 2023).

## 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.

### Taliban Gov't Sets Conditions for Participation in Key Doha Talks

KABUL (Dispatches) - Taliban authorities said today their participation in UN-convened Afghanistan talks would be "unbeneficial" if certain conditions were not met, a day before meetings were due to kick off. Special envoys to Afghanistan were due to launch two days of talks in the Qatari capital on Sunday aimed at discussing more coordinated international engagement with Afghanistan. The meeting is a follow-up to talks held in Doha in May 2023, to which no Afghan civil society members and the Taliban authorities have been invited to the upcoming meeting. However, the day before the talks started the nature and extent of Taliban government participation was still unclear, with officials saying in recent days a delegation was unlikely to attend if certain conditions were not met. On Saturday, the foreign ministry said it had reiterated its conditions to the United Nations: "If the Islamic Emirate is to participate as the sole official representative of Afghanistan and if there exists an opportunity to hold frank talks between the Afghan delegation and the UN about all issues on a very senior level, then participation would be beneficial," a ministry statement said.



### Trump Tells Supporters His \$355m Fraud Fine Is Election Interference



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donald Trump yesterday lashed out at the New York judge who ruled he must pay \$354.9 million in penalties for fraudulently overstating his net worth to dupe lenders, telling thousands of supporters at a campaign rally the decision was an "election interference play." Addressing supporters for the first time since Justice Arthur Engoron Friday hit him with massive financial penalties, Trump made the unsubstantiated claim that the judge was part of a "left wing" conspiracy aimed at stopping him from becoming president again. The former Republican president, the frontrunner for his party's White House nomination, told a crowd in Michigan that "these repulsive abuses of power are not just an attack on me, they are an attack on all Americans". Trump also repeated his lie that his 2020 election defeat to Democratic US President Joe Biden was due to election fraud. Engoron also banned Trump from serving as an officer or director of any New York corporation for three years. The judge said of Trump and his co-defendants: "Their complete lack of contrition and remorse borders on pathological." New York Attorney General Letitia James had accused Trump and his family businesses of overstating his net worth by as much as \$3.6 billion a year over a decade to fool bankers into giving him better loan terms. Trump spoke shortly after Nikki Haley, his last remaining rival for the Republican presidential nomination, who held an event in South Carolina. Haley wasted no time in going after Trump after Friday's ruling, which handed him another legal setback in a civil case that imperils his real estate empire. Trump also faces four state and federal criminal trials, including one scheduled to start in New York on March 25, over alleged hush money payments to a porn star. That means Trump will become the first former US president to stand trial on criminal charges. Haley frequently says "chaos" follows Trump, and that he can't be an effective president or candidate because of his myriad legal problems. "He's going to be in court March and April. He's going to be in court May and June. He said himself that he's going to be spending more time in a courtroom than he is on the campaign trail," Haley told Fox News. Trump is close to clinching the Republican presidential nomination, and the prospect of a likely general election rematch with Biden, after recent nominating contest wins in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada.

### China to Send Coast Guard Ships as Tensions Rise Over Taiwanese Islands



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's coast guard said on Sunday it will strengthen its law enforcement activities and carry out regular patrols around a small group of Taiwanese-controlled islands off the Chinese coast as tensions rise over the deaths of two Chinese nationals. Taiwan on Thursday defended the actions of its coast guard after two people on a Chinese speedboat, which got too close to a frontline Taiwanese island, died when their boat overturned while trying to flee a coast guard ship. Two others survived. Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, has complained in recent years about Chinese fishing boats and other vessels operating in Taiwan-controlled waters, especially around the Kinmen and Matsu islands which sit a short distance from China's coast. China has condemned Taiwan's actions and labelled the incident near Kinmen's Beiding islet "wicked". China's coast guard said in a short statement it will strengthen its maritime law enforcement forces and carry out regular law enforcement patrols and inspections in the waters around Kinmen and Xiamen, one of the Chinese cities Kinmen faces. This is to "further maintain the order of operations in the relevant waters and safeguard the safety of fishermen's lives and property", it added. Late on Saturday, China's Taiwan Affairs Office said the deaths had caused "strong indignation" in China, but that there were no off limits waters: "Fishermen on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have been operating in traditional fishing grounds in the Xiamen-Kinmen maritime area since ancient times, and there is no such thing as 'prohibited or restricted waters'", it said. China's government had goodwill towards Taiwan's people, but will never tolerate Taiwan's disregard for the safety of Chinese fishermen, the office added. Taiwan's China-policy making Mainland Affairs Council said Taiwanese forces will continue to enforce the rules on banning unauthorised Chinese access to Taiwan's waters around Kinmen, but that accusations from China of "rough expulsions" were untrue. However, ships which carry no name, have no certification or port registration carry out "continuous intrusions" and make dangerous moves when trying to flee lead to "unfortunate incidents" nobody wants to see, it added.



## UN Likely to Vote Tuesday on Gaza Ceasefire, U.S. Signals Veto

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - The United Nations Security Council is likely to vote on Tuesday on an Algerian push for the 15-member body to demand an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, said diplomats, a move the United States signaled it would veto. Algeria put forward an initial draft resolution more than two weeks ago. But U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield quickly said the text could jeopardize "sensitive negotiations" aimed at brokering a pause in the war. Algeria requested on Saturday that the council vote on Tuesday, diplomats said. To be adopted, U.N. Security Council resolution needs at least nine votes in favor and no vetoes by the United States, Britain, France, China or Russia. "The United States does not support action on this draft resolution. Should it come up for a vote as drafted, it will not be adopted," Thomas-Greenfield said in a statement on Saturday. Washington traditionally shields its ally Israel from U.N. action and has already twice vetoed council action since Oct. 7. But it has also abstained twice, allowing the council to adopt resolutions that aimed to boost humanitarian aid to Gaza and called for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses in fighting. Talks between the U.S., Egypt, Israel and Qatar are on to seek a pause in the war and the release of hostages held by Hamas. "It is critical that other parties give this process the best odds of succeeding, rather than push measures that put it - and the opportunity for an enduring resolution of the hostilities - in jeopardy," Thomas-Greenfield said. The Gaza war began when fighters from the Hamas

militant group that runs Gaza 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. The likely council vote comes as Israel also plans to storm Rafah in southern Gaza, where more than 1 million Palestinians have sought shelter, prompting international concern that such a move would sharply worsen the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. "The situation in Gaza is an appalling indictment of the deadlock in global relations," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the Munich Security Conference on Friday. When asked to explain, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Guterres was "pointing the finger" at the lack of unity in the Security Council "and how that lack of unity has hampered our ability ... to improve situations around the world." Meanwhile Israeli forces carried out arrests in Gaza's largest functioning hospital, health officials and the military said, as airstrikes hit across the enclave and rain battered Palestinians taking shelter in Rafah. Israeli forces raided the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis on Thursday as they pressed their war on Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group that rules the enclave. "Occupation forces detained a large number of medical staff members inside Nasser Medical Complex, which they (Israel) turned into a military base," said Gaza Health Ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qidra.



## Ukraine Withdraws From Avdiivka, Putin Hails Important Victory

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin called the capture of Avdiivka "an important victory" after Ukraine's military chief said that his troops withdrew from the devastated town in the east of the country after months of intense combat. Although the Russian defense ministry said that Ukrainian units were still entrenched at the town's coke plant, the advance on Avdiivka was Moscow's biggest advance since it took the city of Bakhmut last May. It came days before the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine and amidst Ukraine's acute shortages of ammunition with fresh U.S. military aid delayed for months in Congress. It is also the clearest sign yet of how the tide of the war has turned in Moscow's favour after a Ukrainian counteroffensive failed to break through Russian lines last year. The head of state congratulated Russian soldiers on this success, an important victory," the Kremlin said in a statement on its website. U.S. President Joe Biden warned this week that Avdiivka could fall to Russian forces because of ammunition shortages following months of Republican congressional opposition to a new U.S. military aid package for Kyiv. A White House statement on Saturday said Biden called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday to underscore the U.S. commitment to continue supporting Ukraine and reiterated the need for Congress to urgently pass the package to resupply Ukrainian forces. The White House said the withdrawal had been forced upon Ukraine "by dwindling supplies as a result of congressional inaction," that had forced Ukrainian soldiers to ration ammunition and resulted in "Russia's first notable gains in months." Capturing the city is likely to provide a morale boost for Russia ahead of Putin's bid for re-election next month, which he is almost certain to win. It is also seen as another

step towards securing Moscow's hold on the regional centre of Donetsk, about 20 km (12 miles) to the east, held by Russian and pro-Russian forces since 2014. Russia has not given details of its losses in the brutal fighting, but Ukrainian officials and Western military analysts say its advances have come at a staggering cost in terms of personnel and armoured vehicles. Putin's telegram paid tribute to soldiers who had died in the campaign, saying: "Eternal glory to the heroes who fell in fulfilling the tasks of the special military operation!" Also, it seems that Russia still does not have a full control of the Avdiivka Coke and Chemical plant on the northwestern edge of the town. Ukraine's largest coke producer before the war and now in ruins, it has been the Avdiivka's last stronghold. "Measures are being taken to completely clear the city of militants and to block Ukrainian units that have left the city and are entrenched at the Avdiivka Coke and Chemical Plant," Russian Defence Ministry Spokesman Igor Konashenkov said in a video published on the ministry's Telegram channel. Addressing the Munich Security Conference, Zelenskyy who praised his troops for "exhausting" Russian forces in Avdiivka, implored his Western allies to step up supplies of military aid and suggested the withdrawal was partly caused by a lack of weapons. "Now, (the military) will replenish, they will wait for the relevant weapons, of which there simply weren't enough, simply aren't enough," he said. "Russia has long-range weapons, while we simply don't have enough." In a post on X, Zelenskyy expressed hope that the U.S. Congress would make a "wise decision." "We discussed the current frontline situation," he said of his call with Biden. "I am grateful to have President Biden's full support."



## Thousands of Senegalese March in Authorized Protest

DAKAR (Dispatches) - Thousands on Saturday joined the first authorised protest in Senegal's capital since President Macky Sall postponed elections for his successor, only for a top court to overturn his ruling. In a sign of calming tensions in the West African country, the protests passed peacefully and police largely kept their distance. Sall's last-minute move to delay the February 25 poll triggered traditionally stable Senegal's worst crisis in decades. The Constitutional Council intervened on Thursday and the president, under growing pressure at home and abroad, vowed to organise the elections "as soon as possible", without any date being set. On the streets of Dakar, demonstrators donned black T-shirts emblazoned with "Aar Sunu Election" (Protect our Election), the name of the civil society collective that organised the peaceful protest held in a festive atmosphere. They held up placards reading "Free Senegal", "Respect the election date" and "No to a constitutional coup d'Etat". Gendarmes were out in force around the march area, but they did not wear riot gear as they had during previous demonstrations. Previous protests against the postponement of the ballot were all banned and ended in violence. Three people have been killed, and many arrested. Tensions have eased since the council's ruling and the authorities gave the go-ahead for Saturday's march. "Today's watchword is mobilisation... Senegal has no room for error," presidential candidate Malick Gakou said at the march. Senegal must organise the election in March so that the handover of power to the new president can take place on April 2, the end of Sall's official mandate, he said. His decision to follow the council's call "fills a lot of stress", said rapper El Maestro le Kangham, draped in a Senegal flag. "I don't trust him and I'm waiting to see if he keeps his word," the 34-year-old demonstrator said. "I am proud to see that all Senegalese are united for the same goal, holding the elections as quickly as possible. We are ready to elect a new president," added Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Gueye. At the end of the march, the Aar Sunu Election collective issued a communique calling on its members to "continue the mobilisation, to remain alert, and to monitor the republican process."

# Navalny Family Seeks to Locate His Body

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A spokesperson for Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny confirmed that he had died at a remote Arctic penal colony, adding that he was "murdered" but that it is unclear where his body is. An official death notice given to Navalny's mother stated that he died at 2:17pm local time on Friday, according to Navalny spokesperson Kira Yarmysh. She said an employee of the prison colony said his body was taken to the nearby city of Salekhard as part of an investigation into his death. But when Navalny's mother and his lawyer visited the morgue it was closed, Navalny's team later said on their Telegram channel. The lawyer called the morgue and was told that Navalny's body was not there. An employee at the morgue told Reuters that Navalny's body never arrived. "It's obvious that the killers want to cover their tracks and are therefore not handing over Alexei's body, hiding it even from his mother," Navalny's aides said. "We demand that Alexei Navalny's body be handed over to his family immediately," Yarmysh wrote on X, previously Twitter. Alexei Navalny was murdered. His death occurred on February 16 at 2:17 p.m. local time, according to the official message to Alexei's mother. The cause and the circumstances of Navalny's death remain largely unclear. Navalny ally Ivan Zhdanov said on X that his mother was told he had died of "sudden death syndrome", a broad term that can describe any sudden death from natural causes but which raised as many questions as it answered. Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service on Friday reported that Navalny felt sick after a walk and became unconscious at the penal colony in the town of Kharp in the Yamalo-Nenets region about

1,900 kilometres (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. An ambulance arrived but he could not be revived. The cause of death is still "being established", it said. Another lawyer representing Navalny's family went to Salekhard's Investigative Committee and was told that the cause of his death had not been established and that investigations are ongoing, with the results to be released next week, Yarmysh said Saturday. Maria Pevchikh, head of the board of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said that the opposition leader would "live on forever in millions of hearts": "Navalny was murdered. We still don't know how we'll keep on living, but together, we'll think of something," she wrote on X. Police on Saturday detained several Russians paying tribute to Navalny at makeshift memorials in Moscow and other Russian cities, according to local media and human rights groups. In Moscow, police detained at least 15 people who were laying flowers at a monument for victims of Soviet repression, the independent media outlet Sota said. In one video posted by the outlet, a woman could be heard screaming as a crowd of police officers forcefully detained her, to chants of "shame" from onlookers. Another showed a group of people in plain clothes removing flowers from a monument in the capital's Lubyanka Square overnight, while police blocked off the area. OVD-Info, which reports on freedom of assembly in Russia, said more than 200 people in 21 cities across Russia had been detained at spontaneous rallies and vigils since Friday. Police detained at least 109 people in St Petersburg and at least 39 in Moscow, according to the group.





## Jarry Downs Carlos Alcaraz at Argentina Open

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Third-seeded Chilean Nicolas Jarry cruised to a 7-6 (2), 6-3 upset of No. 1 seed Carlos Alcaraz of Spain in the semifinals of the IEB+ Argentina Open in Buenos Aires. Jarry battled back from a 6-5 deficit in the first set to force a tiebreaker, where he raced out to a 6-1 lead that ended up being too much for Alcaraz to handle. Jarry then won the final three games of the second set to complete the sweep. Alcaraz was the defending champion of the Argentina Open. He didn't record a single ace on Saturday while Jarry recorded seven, and the latter also saved three of four break points. With the win, Jarry punched his ticket to the final, where he will face wild card Facundo Diaz Acosta of Argentina. Diaz Acosta beat countryman Federico Coria 6-2, 6-3 in Saturday's other semifinal. Coria was playing on a special exemption. Top-seeded Italian Jannik Sinner earned a 6-2, 6-4, straight-set victory over Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor to advance to the final in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Although Griekspoor was playing in front of a friendly crowd, it was Sinner who was in full control of the match, saving all six break points he faced while picking up seven aces. Sinner will face Australia's Alex de Minaur, the fifth seed, in the final, a 6-4, 6-3 winner over Bulgarian sixth seed Grigor Dimitrov. No. 3 seed Tommy Paul coasted to a 6-2, 6-2 win over No. 2 seed Frances Tiafoe in an all-American semifinal battle in Florida. Paul racked up eight aces and converted four of four break points to knock off Tiafoe, who took a 1-0 lead in the second set before dropping five straight games to all but seal the outcome. Another American will be headed to the final, as No. 1 seed Taylor Fritz was scheduled to face Marcos Giron. Meanwhile world number one Iga Swiatek won the Qatar Open for the third year in a row after beating Elena Rybakina 7-6 (10/8), 6-2 in the final. Swiatek is the first player to win three straight titles at the same WTA event since Serena Williams completed a Miami Open hat-trick from 2013-15. "You

don't even know how hard it was not to think about it," said Swiatek, whose record now stands at now 13-1 in Doha since her 2020 debut. "I came here and was pretty stressed because I felt the expectations. I wanted to do everything step by step like I always do. I'm really happy. I'm really proud of myself." Swiatek claimed her 18th career singles title, and her first of the 2024 season. Her only defeat in the last 23 matches was to Czech teen Linda Noskova in the Australian Open third round. Rybakina fell short in her bid for a third title of the year. The Kazakh had lifted the trophy last week in Abu Dhabi after winning in Brisbane at the start of January. "I fought till the end," said Rybakina, who defeated Swiatek in all three meetings last year. "Congratulations to Iga for a great week." Swiatek, who received a walkover Friday when Karolina Pliskova withdrew with a lower back injury, entered the final having won her last 21 sets at the tournament. However, she made a dreadful start and fell a double break behind at 1-4 against an in-form Rybakina, on an eight-match winning streak since an early exit at the Australian Open. The third-seeded Rybakina required a medical timeout after accidentally cutting her leg with her racket while serving, the brief stoppage stalling her momentum. The Pole broke twice in succession to bring the set back on serve, but it looked as if Rybakina would snatch it when she won a lengthy 11th game to go 6-5 up with her service game to come. Swiatek rallied once more to force a tie-break but failed to take two set points before having to save one herself. After another missed opportunity, the top seed closed out a 90-minute opening set at the fourth time of asking. She saved two set points early in the second set before putting her foot down to sweep into a 3-1 lead. A second break of Rybakina in the seventh game left Swiatek on the cusp of victory, which she wrapped up in two hours and 19 minutes.

## Ukrainian Seizes World Title, Calls for Olympic Ban on Russians



DOHA (Dispatches) - Ukraine's Vladyslav Bukhov sprung a surprise as he claimed his first world swimming title in Doha and then said Russia should "absolutely not" be allowed at the Paris Olympics. After the 21-year-old edged the two previous world champions to the wall to win the men's 50m freestyle, he said his preparation had been tough. "It's hard, really hard," he said. "We train while Russian rockets are flying round the swimming pool. You never know if you stay alive or not. It's difficult. For all Ukrainians." Asked if Russians should compete at the Paris Olympics in five months, he said: "Absolutely not." "I want to say Russia is dangerous and should not be supported in competition." Bukhov had the slowest reaction time off the starting blocks, but claimed his first world championship medal as he beat Australian defending champion Cameron McEvoy to the touch by one hundredth of a second. Britain's Ben Proud, the winner two years ago in Budapest, was 0.09sec back. "Really tough. Never know who wins," said Bukhov. "I just did my job." Sprint queen Sarah Sjostrom collected her 13th world title when she won the 50m butterfly. The Swede, who claimed her first world title in 2009 in Rome, won in 24.63sec, finishing a decisive 0.81sec ahead of French swimmer Melanie Henique. Egyptian Farida Osman was third.

## Man City Stumble in Premier League Title Race

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Rodri's late equalizer extended Manchester City's year-long unbeaten record at home but a 1-1 draw against Chelsea handed Liverpool and Arsenal a huge boost in the Premier League title race. Raheem Sterling gave Chelsea a first-half lead on his return to the Etihad and City were headed to a first defeat on home soil for 34 games until Rodri's deflected effort seven minutes from time. City move four points behind leaders Liverpool and two adrift of Arsenal, but have a game in hand on both their title rivals. A 3-1 Champions League win in Copenhagen in midweek was City's 11th consecutive victory in all competitions as they appeared well set to defend the treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup they won last season. But Chelsea exposed chinks in the champions' armour. City have kept just seven clean sheets in 24 Premier League games this season. "I think we weren't great in the first half. We conceded another easy goal. I think we have to defend better," said Rodri. "We knew about their counter-attacks and fast players, but we have to defend the counter-attack better. From there, it's always more difficult to come back." Mauricio Pochettino's men have often saved their best performances for the biggest challenges during a difficult season for the Blues. Chelsea took points off all three title contenders at home earlier in the season and finally produced a counter-attacking display on the road that offers Pochettino hope ahead of next weekend's League Cup final against Liverpool. "I feel like the lads are confident," said Chelsea midfielder Conor Gallagher. "We have had some good performances, and then today against a top team. I feel like we are going into the next game with a lot of confidence and we are excited for it." Chelsea should have led much earlier in the first half as Nicolas Jackson failed to beat Ederson when clean through after a slick counter-attack cut City wide open. Pep Guardiola's men did not learn their lesson as another ex-City man Cole Palmer sent Jackson in behind and he picked out Sterling, who coolly cut inside Kyle Walker and fired into the far corner on 42 minutes.



## Leverkusen Go Eight Clear in Bundesliga



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Goals from Jeremie Frimpong and Amine Adli earned Leverkusen a 2-1 win at Heidenheim, sending Xabi Alonso's Bundesliga leaders eight points clear of Bayern Munich in second. Leverkusen's win extended their unbeaten run to 32 games in all competitions this season, equalling the record set by Hansi Flick's Bayern across the 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons. Frustrated by the resolute hosts early, Leverkusen eventually broke through right before half-time when Frimpong's deflected shot found the net. Midfield maestro Florian Wirtz hit the crossbar late but helped seal the result shortly after, laying on a perfect pass for Adli to round the goalkeeper and score. Heidenheim's Tim Kleindienst headed in a goal with three minutes remaining, the first time Leverkusen had conceded in six hours in the league. "Altogether we did it very smartly, other than the late goal we conceded," Leverkusen's Granit Xhaka told Sky. "The team is ripe. We showed again how dominant we can be." Second-placed Bayern, thumped 3-0 by Leverkusen last week, can narrow the gap when they play at Bochum. Elsewhere, RB Leipzig's won 2-0 at home against Borussia Moenchengladbach in a match overshadowed by the death of a spectator who fell ill in the stands. Leipzig tweeted during the game that medical staff had "tried to resuscitate" the individual but were unsuccessful. Once the news was announced, the stadium fell silent for the remainder of the match. Leipzig boss Marco Rose said "I thought the fans reacted well. You realise that other things are much more important than football, like your health." Leipzig midfielder Xavi Simons gave his team the lead with a brilliant goal, bouncing a Dani Olmo pass off his thigh before unleashing a rocket from the edge of the box. Lois Openda doubled Leipzig's lead after 57 minutes, chipping over the goalkeeper's head and into the goal. Openda, who arrived from Ligue 1 side Lens in the summer, has 16 league goals this season and has scored in each of his past five games. Leipzig's win took them one point behind fourth-placed Borussia Dortmund, who drew 1-1 at struggling Wolfsburg, with home midfielder Yannick Gerhardt's second-half header cancelling out an early Niclas Füllkrug goal.

## NBA Future in Good Hands Once LeBron Is Gone

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - NBA All-Stars aren't sure who will be the new face of the league once LeBron James is gone, but they are confident the NBA's future is in good hands. Several top stars spoke Saturday on the eve of the 73rd NBA All-Star Game at Indianapolis, where 20-time All-Star selection James, the NBA all-time scoring leader, represents the Los Angeles Lakers at age 39. James, a four-time NBA Most Valuable Player and four-time NBA champion, has been the top star in an older generation of talent that includes Golden State's Stephen Curry and Phoenix's Kevin Durant. "It will be an amazing league regardless," said Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander. "He has done amazing things for this league and for the game of basketball. You don't want to take him for granted, obviously. But when he's gone, it will still be great." Younger stars are already having an impact on the league with two-time NBA Most Valuable Players Nikola Jokic of Denver and Giannis Antetokounmpo of Milwaukee winning titles and a host of others chasing crowns, including Dallas guard Luka Doncic, Minnesota's Anthony Edwards, Phoenix's Devin Booker, Philadelphia's Joel Embiid and Gilgeous-Alexander among them. "There's a lot of guys to pick from in this group of 24 that are here," Curry said. "You see Luka, Ant, Shai, guys that are really coming into their prime... but have a

perspective of what that means within the on-court/off-court opportunities." The league is in pretty good hands when it comes to young talent that I think gets it and understands the magnitude of the platform we all have and will respect it as they come into their own." Indiana's Tyrese Haliburton expects players who lead their teams to success will spearhead the next generation. "We got a lot of different guys that it could be," he said. "The league is in great hands. It's the most talent that has even been in this league." "To be the face of the league, winning has to come with that. Whatever young guy takes that charge and is winning moving forward, that's probably who it will be." Durant says it's not so much about one face for the future of the NBA as it is a collection of talent who inspire the next generation on and off the court. "I'm going to miss a lot of guys," Durant said. "But you see Shai, Ant, Book, Luka, (Philadelphia's) Tyrese Maxey, Tyrese Haliburton. There are so many guys inspiring the next generation of hoopers after them to become basketball players that you can't just pinpoint it to one or two guys." "It's about pushing the game forward, setting a different standard how we play. These guys are doing it right now." Among those Durant looks forward to watching in the future NBA is 2023 NBA Draft top pick Victor Wembanyama, the 7-foot-4 (2.24m) French rookie for San Antonio.

