

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani Says that the African Union's (AU) Statement Condemning the Israeli Crimes Against Palestinians Could Help End the Tel Aviv Regime's War in the Gaza Strip

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Short Film "Return of Noora" Directed by Alireza Saadi Is Scheduled to Be Screened at the 17th Edition of Grande Festival International, "Corti a Ponte" to Be Held on May 8-20 2023 in Italy

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IRGC Navy Adds New Home-Made Combat Vessels to Its Fleet



BANDAR ABBAS (Dispatches) - The Naval Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has received two new home-made combat vessels equipped with medium and long-range missiles. The two vessels, named Martyr Bagheri and Martyr Shirazi, joined the IRGC Navy's fleet during a ceremony held on Monday in the port city of Bandar Abbas, the capital of Hormuzgan province in southern Iran. IRGC Navy Commander Commodore Alireza Tangsiri, who was present at the ceremony, said that the two vessels belong to Martyr Soleimani class of domestically-made advanced warships. Martyr Bagheri and Martyr Shirazi vessels are each 67 meters in length and are equipped with home-made long and medium-range missiles, Tangsiri said, adding that they can navigate 5,500 nautical miles (9,500km). Weighing 600 tons and having 4 engines, the newly-added vessels can navigate at a speed of 32 nautical knots (about 60 km/h), he said. The IRGC commander also explained that the surface-to-surface missiles placed at these vessels have a range of at least 700 km. The air defense system of the vessels has a range of 90 km, he added.

Iran Urges U.S. to Stop Hypocrisy on Israel's Offensive Against Rafah



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister says the United States needs to put an end to its Gaza war hypocrisy and stop its empty rhetoric about the establishment of a ceasefire in the strip while provoking the Israeli regime to attack the city of Rafah. "The Americans must stop being hypocritical and talking about a ceasefire while encouraging the Zionist regime to attack Rafah," Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said. He also said Israel continues its war crimes against the people of Palestine in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and has caused a critical situation in northern and southern Gaza, particularly in Rafah. According to Amir-Abdollahian, the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has presented a comprehensive plan on behalf of the Gazans to stop the Israeli genocide in the strip and lift its siege, secure a prisoner swap deal, and reconstruct the war-ravaged territory. "However, the resistance leaders have warned that any military action against the residents of Rafah will have severe reciprocal consequences," the top Iranian diplomat emphasized. He also argued that the Israeli regime has failed to achieve its desired goals in Gaza, and "this is the reason it still continues to beat the drum of war and threat." Amir-Abdollahian reiterated that Iran strongly supports any solution to the ongoing crisis that would improve regional security and safeguard the Palestinian people's rights. Israel's relentless bombing of Gaza has forced the local residents to flee toward the southern city of Rafah, bordering Egypt. The Israeli military has been carrying out airstrikes on the border city and has announced plans to launch a ground invasion. Meanwhile, Egypt is constructing a walled enclosure along its border with Gaza, sparking concerns over potential Palestinian displacement as Israel considers expanding its offensive into Rafah.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



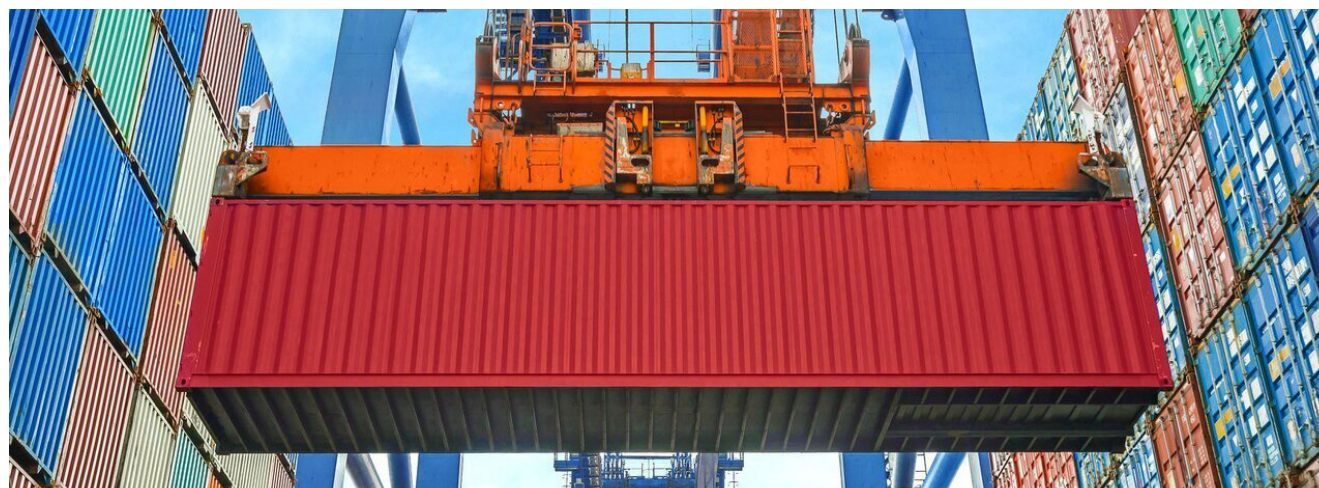
Iran Using All Its Diplomatic Sway to Halt Israeli War on Gaza

TEHRAN - Iran has used all its diplomatic power to halt the Israeli regime's war against Gaza since the beginning of the crisis in the besieged territory, according to the Foreign Ministry spokesman. Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Nasser Kanaani said Tehran believes that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) can play an active and impactful role concerning the crisis in Gaza. Kanaani pointed out that Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, in a telephone conversation with the secretary general of the OIC, officially asked to host the second extraordinary session of the organization in Tehran. He also pointed to a resolution sought by Algeria at the UN Security Council demanding an immediate truce in Gaza, lamenting that the US has already announced its opposition to the resolution and wants to prevent the Security Council from maintaining international peace and security by using its "veto" power. "What is happening in Gaza is not only a blatant crime and genocide, but also a threat to international peace and security, and the international community and global assemblies must stop these actions," he stated. "We will continue our dialogues with neighboring and non-neighboring countries and these are only part of Iran's efforts." Foreign Ministry spokesman also termed the relations with the most border and neighboring countries as "very good and dynamic". In light of the growing ties in the field of economy, trade interactions is developing with the various countries including neighboring, regional, and distant states, Kanaani said. "Maximizing regional, multilateral mechanisms is considered one of the outcomes of the Iranian foreign policy." Membership in some important mechanisms, including BRICS, expanding ties with the Eurasian Economic Union, and signing comprehensive long-term plans with some countries shows that the country is dynamic in boosting its trade and political relations, he underlined. Due to the wise guidance of the leadership and based on the Iranian government's attention on expanding relations with neighboring countries and Asia, and establishing dynamic and balanced relations with different countries, Iran has seen significant prosperity in the development of its relations, Kanaani noted. The Iranian administration has taken the development of economy-oriented relations seriously, he said, noting that Iran will pursue this issue. Regarding strengthening relations and security cooperation between Iran and Iraq, Kanaani said that relations between Iran and Iraq are in their best condition and the two neighboring countries have extensive cooperation in various fields. Kanaani said that the security agreement is one of the security collaborations between the two sides, adding that great steps have been taken in this direction, and the executive committee of the two sides is active. Iran believes presence of foreign forces in Iraq does not help the security of Iraq, and Tehran is basically against the presence of foreign forces in the region, he said. He added that foreigners' presence disturb the security of the region. On South Africa's request to add new orders to its complaint in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the Foreign Ministry spokesman said Tehran believes that the court is being "seriously tested" as to how it will fulfill its responsibility. "The order issued by the court laid a serious responsibility on the occupying regime to stop all its criminal actions," he said. "Regarding South Africa's second complaint, the court's view is that the initial order is sufficient. We expect the court to be serious concerning the initial order, consider the regime responsible, and complete its initial action with additional steps. This is the expectation of the nations of the world." Kanaani further said Iran backs the set of legal actions taken by other countries to prosecute the Zionist regime, including the African Union's summit on Sunday which called for an immediate end to the crimes of the regime.

Iran Exports to EAEU Members Rises 11% in 10 Months

TEHRAN - The value of Iran's exports to the members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) increased by 11 percent in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023-January 20, 2024) as compared to the same period last year, the spokesman of the International Relations and Trade Development Committee of Iran's House of Industry, Mining and Trade said. According to Ruhollah Latifi, the Islamic Republic exported 3.370 million tons of commodities worth \$1.337 billion to the members of the Eurasian Economic Union in the mentioned 10 months, IRNA reported. Exports to the EAEU also increased by 19 percent in terms of weight, according to Latifi. According to the official, fishery, agricultural, and food products account for 42 percent of Iran's export value to Eurasia, and the average value of each ton of Iran's export goods to this union was \$723 in the mentioned period. The exports of fishery, agricultural, and food products to the EAEU in the said 10 months increased by 17.2 percent in weight and 16.4 percent in value compared to the same period last year. The Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Belarus were the top destinations for Iranian goods in the mentioned period, respectively. Iran

and EAEU reached a preferential trade agreement in 2018 based on which about 862 commodity items are currently subject to preferential tariffs. The agreement came into effect on October 27, 2019. Back in July, the minister in charge of trade of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) said that the EAEU's cooperation with Iran is actively expanding in various fields, and trade between the two sides has doubled over the past four years. Andrey Slepnev also said that trade between the union and the Islamic Republic of Iran rose 22 percent in 2022. The important thing is that bilateral trade exchanges are balanced, that is, almost as much as the Eurasian Economic Union supplies goods to Iran, Iran also exports goods to the member countries of this union, the official noted. Emphasizing that the EAEU attaches great value to Iranian goods, the minister in charge of trade of the Eurasian Economic Commission said: "Agricultural products now account for 75 percent of the trade exchanges of this union with Iran." "Industrial goods have a special place in the framework of cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and Iran, and therefore, we are developing trade exchanges in the field of minerals, industries, and chemicals", he added.



President Raisi Tours iHiT Exhibition of Iranian Technology Products



TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has visited an exhibition of knowledge-based technology products held by the Iran House of Innovation and Technology (iHiT) at the Tehran International Exhibition Center. As part of his supervision on various government departments, Raisi toured the exhibition as part of a visit to Iranian Presidency's Deputyship for Science and Technology on Monday. The fair showcases more than 2,000 knowledge-based products in different sectors such as agriculture machinery, transport, water and energy, smart homes, electricity, laboratory equipment and medicines. Nearly 690 companies are exhibiting their products in an area of 3,500 square meters. The iHiT headquarters is located at Tehran International Exhibition Center and acts as a hub for export of Iran's science and technology products. Branches of iHiT have already been established in countries like Kenya, Syria, China, and Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkiye and Iraq. The center has been established with the aim of promoting hardware infrastructure as well as trading and exporting knowledge-based technologies. One of its important missions is to introduce the capabilities of Iranian knowledge-based companies to international markets.

Gaza War a Pretext for U.S. Return to Region



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's highest-ranking military commander denounced the U.S.' attempts to find a pretext for its regional presence, saying this time Washington has used the Israeli regime's war on Gaza as an excuse. In comments at an event on Monday, held in Iran's southern port city of Bandar Abbas to unveil two new patrol and combat vessels, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri said the regional situation is delicate and critical. The aggressive U.S. army that had apparently withdrawn from the region to some extent is looking for excuses to immediately return to the region, the commander warned. He said the Al-Aqsa Storm operation that Palestinian fighters launched outside Gaza on October 7 provided a pretext for the U.S. to deploy forces to the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and the western parts of the Indian Ocean and justify its unwavering support for the child-murdering Zionist regime's crimes. On the fate of the Gaza war, General Baqeri said the Zionist regime will definitely suffer an irreparable and unprecedented defeat, adding, "No power will be able to change the fate of this war." He also hailed the Iranian armed forces' deterrent power as a reliable shield protecting people and their security, giving an assurance that the military forces take every single threat seriously and are prepared to combat any threat.

IRAN NEWS



Iran, Tatarstan Trade Turnover Increases 25%

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Iran's Consul General to Kazan, Russia, Davoud Mirzakhani, has said that the trade turnover between Tatarstan and Iran during 2023 has increased by 25% compared to the same period of the previous year, reaching \$200 million. In an interview with Russia's Tatar-Info news agency, Mirzakhani said that the volume of trade between Iran and the Republic of Tatarstan in 2022 was about \$182 million. Referring to the signing of the free trade agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union, of which Russia is a member, he said that by the implementation of this agreement after its approval in the parliaments and the removal of the customs tariff on about 7,000 items of goods, bilateral trade is expected to increase significantly. Stating that Iran has achieved 97% self-sufficiency in the production of medicine, he added that Iran has achieved good global ranks in the production of petrochemical products, agriculture, steel, cement, copper, and car production, and is the 17th largest economy in the world. Iran's Consul General to Kazan emphasized that Iran has not achieved these improvements in a normal situation and a calm geopolitical environment, but it has achieved them under the most severe US sanctions, which is a very important point.

Iran Not to Tolerate Presence of Unauthorized Immigrants



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of the Iranian National Immigration Organization Abdollah Mobini has said that the country will not tolerate the presence of unauthorized immigrants. Speaking on the sidelines of a visit to the 24th Iran Media Expo on Monday, the official said that the presence of unauthorized immigrants has led to some incidents in Iran, which indicate that the issue should not be ignored. "We are determined to send all of them [the unauthorized immigrants] back," he said, stressing that Iran will not even tolerate the presence of a single unauthorized immigrant on its soil. Mobini said that the terrorist incidents in Kerman and Shahcheragh proved that the issue of undocumented immigrants must not be ignored, and Tehran has even informed international organizations that these immigrants have to leave Iran. The official added that Iran is hosting as many as 3.5 million documented immigrants of different nationalities, who have ID cards. Some 670,000 of these immigrants are school students, around 170,000 of them study in Iranian universities, and 300,000 others are young children, Mobini said.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Nuclear Industry Helps Iran Cope With Sanctions

TEHRAN - The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) is using its nuclear industry to mitigate the effects of the sanctions imposed against Iran, said Vice President and AEOI Chief Mohammad Eslami. VP noted that in the last three years, the AEOI has repaired various kinds of equipment in other sectors using its own vehicles and devices. These pieces of equipment are normally made and serviced by foreign firms, but the sanctions prevent them from doing so. Eslami also said that over 150 facilities in different industries, such as mining, oil, gas, petrochemicals, and cellulose, are using tools and equipment made by the AEOI. He announced that the AEOI plans to apply nuclear, laser, and plasma hybrid technologies to major industrial and economic projects. It should be noted that Iran's nuclear program has various applications in fields like agriculture, health, electricity, and more, and that the country has achieved self-sufficiency in the nuclear fuel cycle, from uranium exploration to yellowcake production. Eslami further reported the operationalization of the Emergency Control Room

Simulator designed in the country and installed in the Bushehr Nuclear Plant, in southern Iran. He said that the emergency control room simulator system of Unit 1 of Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant was designed and constructed fully indigenously. Eslami said that the emergency control room is a part of the main plan of Unit 1 of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, which is used in case the main control room goes out of reach. All the components of the ECRS, including hardware and software components, are made by the AEOI experts, he reiterated. In late 2020, the Iranian parliament decided to implement a strategic plan to tackle the sanctions, citing the non-implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed between Iran and six countries and the imposition of sanctions on Iran. According to the decision of the Iranian parliament, as of February 23, Iran suspended the implementation of additional steps and an additional protocol provided for in the nuclear deal. As a result, the control mechanism of the IAEA decreased by 20-30 percent.

Iran Exports to India Stands at \$1.8b



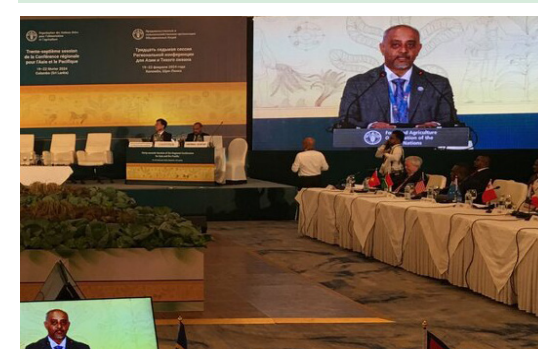
TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran exported commodities valued at \$1.8 billion to India during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023-January 20, 2024), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced. According to Mohammad Rezvaniyar, India was the fifth top export destination of Iranian products in the mentioned ten-month period. Also, exporting commodities valued at \$1.6 billion to Iran, India was Iran's fifth source of imports in the first ten months of the present year, the IRICA head announced. As announced by India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the value of trade between Iran and India reached \$1.836 billion in 2023. The trade exchange between the two countries declined by 26 percent in 2023 compared to its previous year, the figure was reported to be \$2.499 billion in 2022. According to the Indian Ministry data, Iran exported commodities valued at \$699 million to India during the past year, registering no significant change from 2022. Petroleum products were the top goods imported by India from Iran in 2023, and India imported \$221 million worth of such products from Iran this year. The import of Iranian oil products by India in 2023 increased by 26 percent compared to the previous year. Raw materials for dye production and various fruits were also among the top exported goods to India in 2023. India's exports to Iran in January-December 2023 experienced a 35 percent decrease and reached \$1.187 billion. In the previous year, India had exported \$1.847 billion worth of goods to Iran.

Italian University Ready to Expand Academic Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Luiss University of Italy has announced readiness to reinforce scientific and academic cooperation with Iranian universities. Andrea Prencipe, the rector of the Rome-based university, met with Mohammad-Reza Sabouri, the Iranian ambassador to Rome, on Thursday. During the meeting, Prencipe said that a number of Iranian students are studying at Luiss University. He expressed the university's readiness to attract more Iranian students. Sabouri, for his part, highlighted scientific and academic achievements and capabilities of the country in various fields, including economics, management, political science, and international relations, announcing Iran's readiness to exchange professors and students with Luiss University. A total of 435 Iranian institutions are among 11,989 institutions ranked in Webometrics world ranking 2024. Tehran University is the top among Iranian institutions. Its ranking has improved from 305 in 2023 to 285 in 2024, Mehr news agency reported. Tehran University of Medical Sciences (445), Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Science (606), Sharif University of Technology (639), Amirkabir University of Technology (792), Iran Science and Technology (890), Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (920), Iran Medical Sciences University (940), Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (940), and Shahid Beheshti University (967) are ranked second to tenth, respectively,

in the country. The Ranking Web is not a ranking of the websites of universities. It is a Ranking of Universities. It uses both webometric (all missions) and bibliometric (research mission) indicators. According to the results of the 2023-2024 edition of the University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP), 71 Iranian institutions were included in the ranking compared to 64 institutions in the 2022-2023 edition. URAP World Ranking is based on six academic performance indicators including number of articles, citations, total document, scientific productivity, research impact, and international collaboration. In the academic performance ranking of 71 universities in Iran, Tehran University was ranked first nationally with a global rank of 231, IRNA reported. Tehran University of Medical Science (277), and Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Science (436) were ranked second and third, respectively. In the 2023 edition of URAP, the University of Tehran was ranked first nationally with a global rank of 231. The main objective of URAP is to develop a ranking system for world universities based on academic performance indicators that reflect the quality and the quantity of their scholarly publications. The most recent ranking gathered data about 3,000 Higher Education Institutes (HEI) in an effort to rank these organizations by their academic performance. The overall score of each HEI was based on its performance over several indicators.

Iran Attending FAO Int'l Conference on Agrifood Systems Reform



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Islamic Republic of Iran is taking a step to reshape agrifood systems across the Asia-Pacific region by dispatching a high-level delegation to the 37th Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific being held from February 19 to 22 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The conference aims to address the complex challenges stemming from prolonged pandemics, climate emergencies, and volatile markets that have significantly impacted millions of agrifood producers and consumers in the region. Headed by Alireza Mohajer, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture for Agronomy, the Iranian delegation is set to participate in the multilateral effort for regional agrifood system reform. Technical support for the delegation is being provided by the FAO Representation in Iran. Yubak Dhoj GC, FAO representative ad interim to the Islamic Republic of Iran, highlighted that "FAO in the Islamic Republic of Iran is contributing to sustainable agriculture and biodiversity conservation while strengthening the community resilience against natural disasters and climate change impacts." "This country's high-level participation in this important conference will help guide FAO's work here in Iran and right across the Asia and Pacific region, as all FAO Member Nations share a common goal of achieving the SDGs by 2030, particularly those goals relating to hunger, poverty and inequality," he added.

Iran in Talks with 21 Countries to Launch Joint Free Zones

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Hojjatollah Abdolmaleki stated that cooperation documents have been inked with six countries for setting up joint free zones. He noted that giant strides have been taken in the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi to make the balance of trade at free zones positive. He put the country's total non-oil exports in the free- and special economic zones in 2022 at about \$18 billion. Iran is one of the countries that has designed a perfect model for the launch of joint free zones, he said. Abdolmaleki further pointed out that priority has been given to the neighboring states for launching joint free zones, stressing that cooperating with countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Russia and China has been put on the agenda of the organization.



China Agrees to Lift Ban on Spanish Beef Imports

CORDOBA (Dispatches) - China has agreed to lift a ban on imports of Spanish beef, the foreign ministers of both nations said Sunday after talks. Beijing has since 2000 imposed a ban on the European Union from exporting beef products due to the emergence of several cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or "mad cow" disease, in several members of the bloc that year. "It is good news, especially for Spanish farmers," Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi told a joint news conference with his Spanish counterpart Jose Manuel Albares in Cordoba in southern Spain. The announcement comes as farmers in Spain have for the past two weeks taken part in EU-wide protests over heavy regulation, high costs and cheaper imports which they say have left them struggling to make ends meet. "When you take into account the size of the Chinese market, the impact is going to be extraordinarily positive," Albares said. "This is a measure which we have long been asking for and which benefits the entire countryside. It is hard to find a market like the Chinese market."



India Offers Protesting Farmers Support Prices on Corn, Cotton, Pulses



MUMBAI (Dispatches) - India has offered guaranteed support prices for pulses, corn and cotton in a bid to break a deadlock with protesting farmers. Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said after week-long clashes with security forces keeping the farmers out of the capital. Tear gas and barricades were used to deter the farmers, who form an influential voting bloc, months ahead of a general election due by May, in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeks a record third term. Sunday's comments followed marathon talks with farmers' unions after the farmers, who are demanding a minimum price for their produce, were halted at a distance of about 200 km (125 miles) from New Delhi. Goyal said the government had proposed five-year contracts between co-operative societies it promotes and farmers who diversify their crops to grow toor dal, urad dal, masoor dal and corn, for the purchase of such crops at a minimum support price. "These organisations will buy the produce and there will be no limit on quantity," Goyal told reporters in the northern city of Chandigarh, adding that a similar price guarantee would also be offered to farmers who diversify and produce cotton. The farmers unions said they would decide on the proposal within a day or two, after conferring among themselves to reach a consensus. Police have used tear gas and barricades to stop thousands of farmers from marching to New Delhi to press their demand that the government set a minimum price for all their produce to ensure their livelihoods.



ADDIS ABABA (Dispatches) - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva accused Israel Sunday of committing "genocide" against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and compared its actions to Adolf Hitler's campaign to exterminate Jews. In response, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the 78-year-old's comments "shameful and grave" and said his government had called in Brazil's ambassador in protest. But his comments drew praise from the Palestinian militant group Hamas, which described the remarks as "an accurate description" of what people were facing in the Gaza Strip that it controls. Lula told reporters in Addis Ababa, where he was attending an African Union summit, that what was happening in the Gaza Strip "isn't a war, it's a genocide". "It's not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It's a war between a highly prepared army and women and children," added the veteran leftist. "What's happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people hasn't happened at any other moment in history. Actually, it has happened: when Hitler decided to kill the Jews." Lula, a prominent voice for the global south whose country currently holds the rotating presidency of the G20, previously condemned Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel as a "terrorist" act. But he has since grown vocally critical of Israel's retaliatory military campaign. Netanyahu called Lula's remarks "Holocaust trivialisation and an attempt to harm the Jewish people and the right of Israel to defend itself". "The comparison between Israel to the Holocaust of the Nazis and Hitler is crossing a red line," he said in a statement. "Israel is fighting to defend itself and ensure its future until total victory and it is doing that while upholding international law." "I have decided with Foreign Minister (Israel) Katz

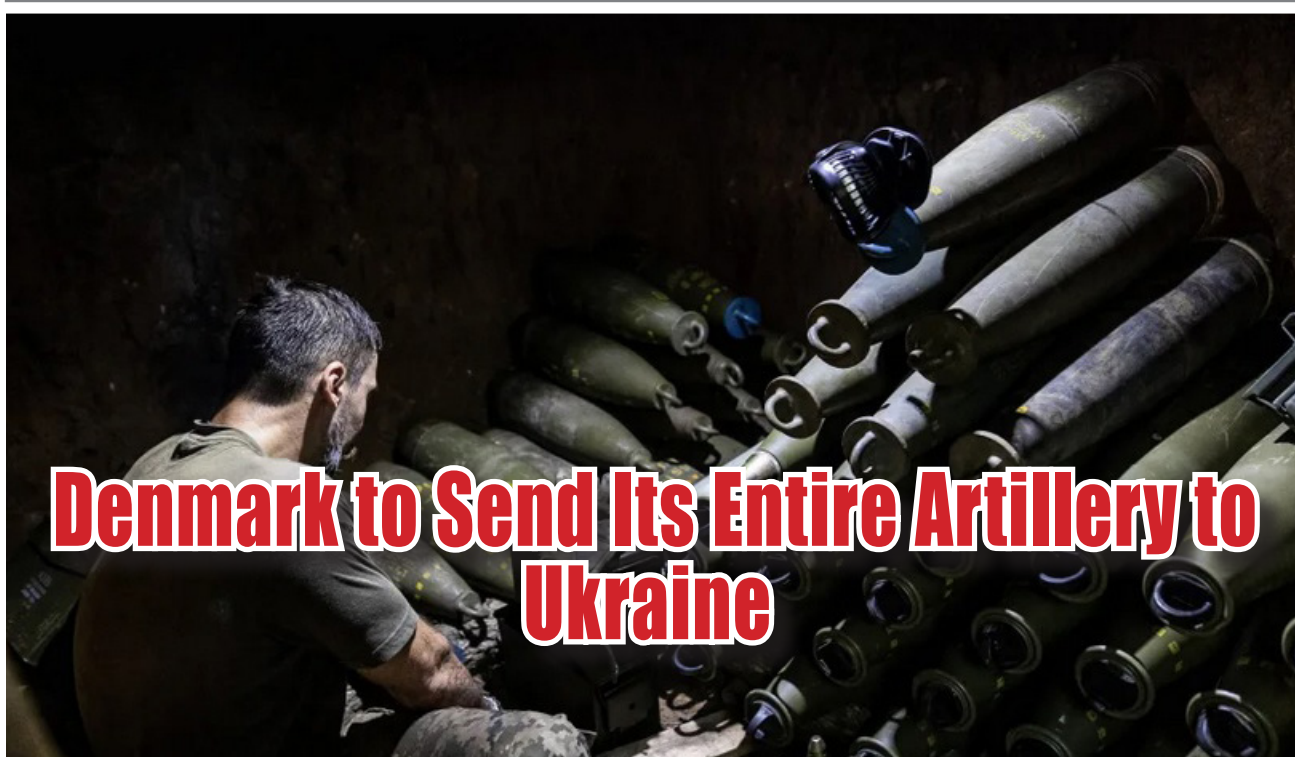
to summon the Brazilian ambassador in Israel for an immediate reproach." Katz wrote on the X social media platform that the meeting would take place on Monday. Israeli President Isaac Herzog hit out at "leaders who atrociously accuse the nation state of the evil of Hitler's deeds", without naming his Brazilian counterpart. To do so was an "immoral distortion of history", he added. Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant meanwhile called Lula's comments "outrageous and abhorrent". "Brazil has stood with Israel for years," he wrote on X. "President Lula supports a genocidal terrorist organisation - Hamas, and in doing so brings great shame to his people, and violates the values of the free world." Israel's assault on Gaza has killed at least 28,858 people, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry. Lula criticized Western countries' recent decisions to halt aid to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, after Israel accused some of its employees of involvement in the October 7 attack. Lula, who met with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh Saturday on the sidelines of the summit, has said Brazil will increase its own contribution to the agency, and urged other countries to do the same. "When I see the rich world announce that it's halting its contributions to humanitarian aid for the Palestinians, I just imagine how big these people's political awareness is and how big the spirit of solidarity in their hearts is," Lula said. "We need to stop being small when we need to be big." He reiterated his call for a two-state solution to the conflict, with Palestine "definitively recognised as a full and sovereign state."

West Bank Tensions Obstacle to Peace



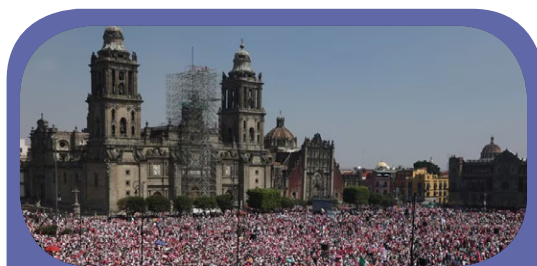
MUNICH (Dispatches) - EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the situation in the Israel-occupied West Bank posed a major obstacle to finding a long-term solution for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. "The West Bank is the real obstacle for the two-state solution," Borrell said at the Munich Security Conference. "The West Bank is at boiling... we could be on the eve of a greater explosion," he said. Around 490,000 Israelis live in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, in dozens of settlements that are deemed illegal under international law. The settlers live alongside around three million Palestinians in the territory. Palestinians view the Israeli settlements as a war crime and a major obstacle to peace, but many national-religious hardliners see living there as fulfilling a divine promise. Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7, the number of clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinians in the West Bank has increased. Borrell said the EU needed to "support the Arab initiative" to establish a Palestinian state, including both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Borrell's comments come after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a plan for international recognition of such a state, following reports of such an initiative in The Washington Post. The US newspaper reported that US President Joe Biden's administration and a small group of Arab nations were working out a comprehensive plan for long-term peace between Israel and the Palestinians. It included a firm timeline for the establishment of a Palestinian state, the report said. A question mark remained over who would lead a post-war Palestinian state. The US has pinned its hopes on a reformed Palestinian Authority to be a better partner for Israel. The Palestinian Authority, which holds limited authority in the West Bank, is led by Mahmud Abbas and his party Fatah. Gaza has had its own separate administration run by Hamas since 2007 when Abbas loyalists were ousted from the territory. Speaking at the Munich conference, the Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said the Palestinian Authority "does not have a partner in Israel". "We need to move from talking about two states to implementation of two states," Shtayyeh said.

Denmark to Send Its Entire Artillery to Ukraine



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Denmark is sending its "entire artillery" to Ukraine, the Danish prime minister has said. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Mette Frederiksen appealed to other European nations to do more to help Ukraine in its fight against Russian President Vladimir Putin's invading forces. "They are asking us for ammunition now. Artillery now. From the Danish side, we decided to donate our entire artillery," she said. "I'm sorry to say, friends, there are still ammunition in stock in Europe," she continued. "This is not only a question about production, because we have weapons, we have ammunition, we have air defense that we don't have to use ourselves at the moment, that we should deliver to Ukraine." It comes as Ukrainian forces withdrew from the key eastern town of Avdiivka amid severe munitions shortages. The Danish announcement will come as particularly welcome news in Ukraine as its military has been starved of artillery shells, forcing it to scale back some operations. Brigadier General Oleksandr Tamarskiy told Reuters in December: "There's a problem with ammunition, especially post-Soviet (shells) - that's 122 mm, 152 mm. And today, these problems exist across the entire front line," he said. Meanwhile, in more positive news to alleviate the ammo famine, the Czech

Republic says it could supply 800,000 shells to the Ukrainian military. Czech President Petr Pavel said in a speech at the Munich Security Conference on 17 February that it had a stockpile of about half a million 155 mm and 300,000 122 mm shells, which can be on the Ukraine frontline in a few weeks "if funding is found quickly." Denmark has been a key supporter of Ukraine since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022. According to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, the Nordic country's military aid commitments increased by 3.5 billion euros, or around \$3.8 billion, since November - making it one of the biggest military donors by percentage of GDP, the institute says. Denmark has pledged 8.4 billion euros, around \$9 billion, in military aid. With a crucial \$60 billion US aid package stalled in Congress, European support is becoming ever more important for Ukraine. Earlier this year, the European Union agreed to a new 50 billion euro, or around \$53.9 billion, aid package for Ukraine. "This locks in steadfast, long-term, predictable funding for Ukraine. The EU is taking leadership and responsibility in support for Ukraine; we know what is at stake," President of the European Council Charles Michel said at the time, per Reuters.



Mexicans Turn Out in Doves to Protect Democracy Ahead of Elections

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Huge crowds filled Mexico City's main square in support of the nation's electoral authority, accusing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of trying to weaken the body ahead of a presidential election in June. The protests, one of several in recent years meant to "protect" the National Electoral Institute (INE), come after Lopez Obrador sent a sweeping package of constitutional reforms to Congress, which would include an overhaul of the INE. Organizers said 700,000 people turned out, which could mark one of the largest protests against Lopez Obrador as his administration comes to a close. The Mexico City government, which is controlled by Lopez Obrador's MORENA party, said just 90,000 people attended. The disparity in counting turnout has also occurred at previous pro-INE demonstrations. Lopez Obrador has made it no secret the package is meant to influence debate before June 2 voting in which his political successor Claudia Sheinbaum is likely to win, though the president has said it is unlikely most reforms will pass. One would turn the INE into the National Institute of Elections and Consultations, which would take over the country's local electoral bodies and shrink the number of counselors heading the group. It would also require electoral judges be elected by popular vote. "Authorities are seeking to eliminate (autonomous institutions), to subordinate them or take them over," Lorenzo Cordova, the former head of the INE, said to the crowd. "We've seen a ferocious attack against these institutions." The president has long shared his dislike of the INE, including accusing the electoral body of helping to engineer his defeats when he ran for the presidency in 2006 and 2012. Protesters on Sunday accused Lopez Obrador of meddling in an attempt to concentrate power in the hands of his party's government, though Lopez Obrador has said he will respect the results of the election. Demonstrators also used the protests to speak out against other hallmarks of Lopez Obrador's administration, including what they allege is a failure to curb widespread violence and social spending programs.

Haley Bashes Trump for Continued Silence on Navalny Death

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Donald Trump's last remaining Republican rival for the U.S. election in November bashed the ex-president for his continued silence over the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his recent outburst over NATO. "The fact that he won't acknowledge anything with Navalny - either he sides with (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and thinks it's cool that Putin killed one of his political opponents, or he just doesn't think it's that big of a deal," Nikki Haley said on ABC's This Week. "Either one of those is concerning. Either one of those is a problem," added the Republican candidate, who is trailing far behind Trump in the race for their party's nomination. Navalny's still-unexplained death at 47 in a prison in Russia's Arctic has drawn powerful condemnations from leaders around the world, starting with US President Joe Biden, who has squarely blamed Putin. But Trump, Biden's likely opponent in November, has yet to say a word about it at any of several public appearances since Navalny's death was reported Friday. The Trump campaign, asked for comment, has directed reporters to a post on Trump's Truth Social platform that says, "America is no longer respected because we have an incompetent president who is weak and doesn't understand what the world is thinking." The post does not mention Navalny, Russia or Putin. The lack of comment comes days after Trump stunned Western allies by saying he would "encourage" Russia to attack members of the NATO military alliance who had not met their financial obligations. The suggestion cast a pall over a major global security conference in Munich, drawing a warning from NATO Secretary-General Jens

Stoltenberg that Trump should not "undermine" the alliance's security. Biden also lashed out at Trump's remark as "dangerous" and "un-American." Haley, the former UN ambassador under Trump, has not spared Biden from foreign policy criticism, but she called her former boss' NATO comment "bone-chilling." "All he did in that one moment was empower Putin," she told ABC. "He sided with a guy that kills his political opponents, he sided with a thug that arrests American journalists and holds them hostage, and he sided with a guy who wanted to make a point to the Russian people: 'Don't challenge me in the next election or this will happen to you.'" She said the episode underscored the need for Congress to pass a bill to provide military assistance to Ukraine, after Trump successfully urged Republicans to oppose an earlier bill that included aid for Kyiv. "Let's remind the American people that Putin said once he takes Ukraine, Poland and the Baltics are next.... Those are NATO countries. That immediately puts America at war," she said.





East Defeat West in Battle of NBA All-Stars

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The NBA wanted more competition. It got more points instead — more than ever before. And once again, the All-Star Game was all offense. All-Star MVP Damian Lillard of the Milwaukee Bucks scored 39 points and the Eastern Conference beat the Western Conference 211-186 on Sunday night, with the winners putting up the most points in the game's 73-year history. The previous mark: 196 by the West in 2016. "We had fun," East captain Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Bucks said. It was a flurry of records: The total points of 397 smashed the record of 374 set in 2017, while the East made 42 3-pointers to break the mark of 35 set by Team LeBron in 2019. The sides combined for 193 points in the first half to break the any-half record of 191 set last year, and the East tied an any-half record by scoring 104 by intermission. Jaylen Brown of the Boston Celtics had 36 and Tyrese Haliburton from the hometown Indiana Pacers finished with 32 for the East, while Antetokounmpo had 23 and Jayson Tatum finished with 20. Perhaps unnoticed: Karl-Anthony Towns of the Minnesota Timberwolves scored 50 points for the West. The West scored a ton of points, too: At 186, it had the fourth-most by any team in All-Star history. And obviously, the most ever in a loss. The East tried 97 3-pointers; the previous record was 90 by Team LeBron in 2019. The teams combined for 66 3s made and 168 3s attempted (previous records were 62 and 167 in 2019). The teams combined for 163 field goals made and 289 attempted (previous records were 162 in 2017 and 286 in 2016). Lillard made some

history, too. He defended his 3-point shootout title on Saturday night — then won MVP on Sunday night. The only other player to win a Saturday event and All-Star MVP in the same weekend was Michael Jordan in 1988, when he won the dunk contest as well as the MVP trophy. "Dame put on a show," Tatum said, "and I was happy for him." The highlights were from everywhere. Lillard pulled up from halfcourt in the third quarter — swish. Luka Doncic tried a shot from about 70 feet late in the first half; it hit near the top of the backboard. Towns even threw an alley-oop to Stephen Curry; the Warriors star is much more of a shooter than a dunker, so he simply laid it in instead. The only drama in the fourth was about the record — and really, that wasn't in doubt. The East had 160 points through three quarters, only needing 37 more to set the team All-Star record. Brown's 3-pointer with 1:54 left broke the mark, giving the East 197. Haliburton made the shot that sent a scoreboard to the 200-point mark for the first time in any sort of official NBA history, connecting from deep with 1:27 left. Lillard said the East wanted the record. And Lillard ended it in style — a 44-footer to close the scoring. He made 11 3-pointers on the night, with the official distance of those recorded at 347 feet. A typical NBA 3-pointer is 24 or 25 feet; Lillard averaged 31 1/2 feet on his 3s Sunday night. Durant said he was watching Lillard on the West bench while sitting with the Los Angeles Clippers' Kawhi Leonard. "We were in awe," Durant said. Defense was optional, sometimes accidental. There were 14 steals, most of those coming off wayward passes. And there were even three blocked shots.

Sad Pacquiao Accepts His Olympic Dream Is Over



MANILA (Dispatches) - A "saddened and disappointed" Manny Pacquiao conceded Monday his Olympic boxing dream was over after the ring great was denied a berth at this year's Paris games. The International Olympic Committee rejected a special request for Pacquiao to take part, the Philippine Olympic Committee announced Sunday. Pacquiao, 45, who hung up his gloves in 2021 before an unsuccessful presidential run, said he respected the decision of the IOC, which has an age limit of 40 for Olympic boxers. "While I am very saddened and disappointed, I understand and accept the age-limit rules," said a statement from Pacquiao, who won world titles at eight different weights during a glittering professional ring career spanning more than a quarter of a century. The Philippines last year asked the IOC for a "universality place" for Pacquiao, who has never boxed in the Olympics. Universality places are usually awarded to athletes from smaller countries who struggle to secure slots in the Olympics through normal qualification. Philippine Olympic Committee president Abraham Tolentino claimed Sunday the IOC decision would deprive the country of a "sure podium or first ever gold" in Olympic boxing. Pacquiao said he will continue to support and cheer for Filipino athletes competing in the Olympics. He also reminded his fans that despite his retirement, he intends "to bring pride and honour to my country inside the boxing ring in the near future".

Sinner a Winner Again and Powers to Rotterdam Open Crown

ROTTERDAM (Dispatches) - Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner powered to his first Rotterdam Open title, breaking down a determined defensive effort from Australia's Alex De Minaur to win 7-5, 6-4 in a high-quality battle. The win extended the Italian top seed's unbeaten streak to 15 — including his run to glory in Melbourne — and takes him to a career-high third in the world rankings. "We have done a really good job some weeks ago and now we did a very, very good job here," said Sinner, referring to his Australian Open triumph. "I'm really proud of my level that I played throughout this whole week. We have been in a tough situation but we handled it in the right way," he added. De Minaur, seeded fifth, had not beaten Sinner in six previous attempts but came into the match in the form of his life and went toe-to-toe with his opponent in the early exchanges. Sinner's consistency and power off both wings eventually pierced De Minaur's defence and the Italian broke serve at 2-2 after some entertaining rallies. De Minaur broke back in the 10th game, after saving two set points with some extraordinary retrieving. A long rally at game point left Sinner lying on the floor gasping for breath after diving unsuccessfully for a powerful backhand drive up the line from his opponent. The confident Sinner recovered quickly and had his own break points in the next game, converting the second as De Minaur ill-advisedly left a volley that dropped on the baseline. Serving a second time for the set, Sinner this time made no mistake, closing it out to the delight of a packed Rotterdam crowd. There was no let-up in intensity at the start of the second set, De Minaur scrapping back everything Sinner threw at him and the two players trading breaks to level at 3-3. A tired-looking De Minaur backhand into the bottom of the net gifted Sinner another break of serve in the next game and this time the Italian held serve to move within one game of the title. The gritty De Minaur fought to the end but Sinner was ultimately too strong and finished it off 6-4. The two are friends off the court and former doubles partners and they embraced at the net as the Rotterdam crowd gave them a thunderous ovation. "It's very tough to play against you. It's better when we are on the same side playing

doubles," quipped Sinner. De Minaur's run to the final included a pulsating semi-final against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov, later describing it as his "best match on tour." "I asked him jokingly if he's going to lose a match this year. He's playing an incredible level and just too good. I'll get you back next time!" said De Minaur. De Minaur said he had taken "another big step in the right direction" and pledged to "fight for bigger and better things." Sinner's path to the final was serene, with injury-prone Canadian veteran Milos Raonic withdrawing at the start of the second set in the quarter-final and then a straightforward win over local boy Tallon Griekspoor in the semis.



Rohit Relishes India's Big Test Win With Young Team



RAJKOT (Dispatches) - India skipper Rohit Sharma on Sunday said winning a Test with a huge margin over England was "quite satisfying" after youngsters stood up to deliver in the absence of frontline players. The hosts hammered England by 434 runs in Rajkot on day four for their biggest-ever Test victory to lead the five-match series 2-1. Yashasvi Jaiswal hit an unbeaten 214 and put on a marathon 172-run stand with debutant Sarfaraz Khan, 68 not out, to set up the dominant win. India are without star batsman Virat Kohli, who opted out of the series due to "personal reasons" and KL Rahul missed two matches after the opener with injury. "Big victory, obviously it's a very good feeling to win a game like that and especially with such a young team as well," Rohit told reporters. "Two debutants and not a lot of Test matches among the playing XI... (was) not going to be an easy one for us to just come out here and win this series, especially with a lot of our frontline players missing." He said, "Lot of credit to these young guys who have come in and showed lot of character. Looks like they belong here and going to stay here as well. So quite satisfying if you win a Test match like that." The 22-year-old Jaiswal, a left-hand batter, smashed his second double ton in consecutive matches to lead the series batting with 545 runs. He tore into the England bowling attack, hitting 12 sixes including three hits over the fence off veteran pace bowler James Anderson. Jaiswal "is playing well, it's good for us and he is in good form", said Rohit. Sarfaraz, 26, impressed with his fearless batting as he scored 62 and another debutant in wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel made 46. A prolific batsman in the domestic circuit, Sarfaraz got his Test cap from former captain Anil Kumble with his teary-eyed father looking on. "There is nervousness on debut but I didn't find him nervous," said Rohit. He said when Sarfaraz received the cap in the morning of day one, "he was very emotional but he was involved in the game the moment (the) match started. He was looking to make a difference with his batting, fielding and energy. "India played without senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin on day three after he left the Test midway hours after his 500th Test wicket to be with his ailing mother. Off-spinner Ashwin returned on day four and got one wicket to be part of India's triumph. "Good of him to make a way and come here and be part of the team on this day," said Rohit, adding it "shows the kind of person he is... wanting to put everything ahead for the team."

Bayern Suffer Nine-Year Low in Shock Loss

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich slumped to a shock 3-2 loss at lowly Bochum on Sunday, suffering a third successive defeat for the first time since 2015 and leaving them eight points behind Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga title race. The result followed a 3-0 league defeat to Leverkusen last weekend and a 1-0 loss against Lazio in the Champions League as coach Thomas Tuchel came under renewed pressure. Tuchel was bullish after the match, saying "the loss today wasn't justified. We were extremely unlucky." Bayern were also reduced to 10 men with 13 minutes remaining when Dayot Upamecano elbowed Kevin Stoeger in the box, picking up a second yellow, giving away a penalty and seeing red for the second match in a row. Stoeger blasted the penalty past Manuel Neuer to give Bochum a 3-1 lead. Harry Kane scored with three minutes remaining to get Bayern back into the match and even had a chance to equalise late, but directed a tame header straight at Bochum goalkeeper Manuel Riemann. Bayern had beaten Bochum 7-0 in three of their past five meetings and the visitors scored early, Jamal Musiala blasting in after 14 minutes. It was the German champions' first goal in over three hours of football. Kane had a chance shortly after when one-on-one with Riemann but skied his

shot into the stands. Tuchel lamented his side's wastefulness in attack, telling DAZN "we had more than enough high-quality chances which those guys would normally put away." The home side absorbed waves of Bayern pressure before Takuma Asano levelled after 38 minutes, shooting a low shot past Neuer on a counter attack. Bayern fell behind just six minutes later, Keven Schlotterbeck heading in a corner. The visitors turned the screws early in the second-half but the match was delayed for 12 minutes by fan protests against the Bundesliga's investment plan, after which Bochum held their own against the German giants. With just over 10 minutes remaining, Upamecano clashed with Stoeger contesting a corner and was sent off. In teeming rain, Stoeger hit his penalty low and hard to the right, past Neuer's outstretched hand. Bayern's teenage forward Mathys Tel set up Kane after 87 minutes, getting Bayern back into the match but then Kane wasted a golden chance to seize a last-gasp point. Stoeger said: "It's an enormous relief. We thought we could get a point and we got three." "I think all of Bochum is proud of the performance we delivered." Bochum coach Thomas Letsch added: "To win against Bayern is especially nice, given they're a team stacked with talent."

