

Economy Minister Says That Iran Activates New Financial Channels to Neutralize Imposed Sanctions in Interaction With Neighboring Countries as New Payment and Financial Banking Messengers Methods Will Be Introduced Soon

IRAN NEWS

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres Said That the Conference on Disarmament Has Consistently Failed to Deliver on Its Promises, Warning That the Threat of a Nuclear War, Which Appeared on Humanity Last Century, Has Resurfaced

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2

DOMESTIC

Iran, Burkina Faso Urged to Use Potentials of Chambers of Commerce

> SEE PAGE 2

3

INTERNATIONAL

NATO Allies Rule Out Sending Troops to Ukraine

> SEE PAGE 3



Polls Boost Iran's National Power



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) called on all Iranians to take part in the upcoming countrywide elections to contribute to the elevation of national power and security. In a statement on Tuesday, the IRGC invited Iranian people of all social strata to vote in the parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections on March 1. Elections would guarantee a boost to national security and power, raise social capital, strengthen the capacities and opportunities for the settlement of problems, pave the way for development, and stymie the plots of enemies, the statement said. The IRGC described a maximum and enlightened turnout in the elections as a main element of religious democracy in Iran, saying the votes have always brought about power, might and credit for Iran in delicate junctures and have disappointed the enemies. The fact that Iran has held 40 elections in the past 45 years indicates the popular nature of the establishment, the public trust in the ballot boxes, and the determination of people to prove their national unity in spite of different political leanings, it stated. The parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections in Iran will be held on coming Friday. There are currently 290 seats in the Iranian Parliament, known as Majlis, elected by direct vote of people in nationwide elections for four years. The Assembly of Experts is a high-ranking body that elects and oversees the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution. Members of the assembly are directly elected to office by people for an eight-year term. It holds biannual meetings to appoint a new chairman.

FM Calls Israel Real Source of WMDs Proliferation in Region



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has called the Israeli regime "the real source of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)" in the region, reiterating that the regime in Tel Aviv is the most serious and immediate threat to humanity. Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in a Monday gathering of members of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Switzerland, where he called for the mobilization of international efforts against threats posed by the Israeli regime to global peace and security. "It is necessary that the entire nuclear arsenal of this regime be eliminated and all of its nuclear facilities be placed under safeguards and verification mechanisms of the International Atomic Energy Agency," he said. The minister said that the Israeli administration led by Benjamin Netanyahu has been emboldened by the support of the US and certain Western countries during its ongoing war on Palestinians in Gaza as the regime has threatened to use nuclear weapons against the territory's ruling resistance movement Hamas. "...It was not a slip of the tongue by a minister of Netanyahu's cabinet who recommended using the nuclear option to eliminate the Hamas liberation movement. Netanyahu had already spoken about the need to confront Iran with 'a real nuclear threat' in his United Nations General Assembly speech in September 2023," said the top Iranian diplomat. In his remarks, Amir-Abdollahian said former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons against Iranians during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s had turned the country into the largest victim of WMDs since the end of the Second World War, and called for real action against the menace. Also in his remarks, Amir-Abdollahian expressed hope that Iran's rotating presidency over the Conference on Disarmament, which will start on March 18, would lead to more cooperation among members of the initiative.



Iran Calls on UNHRC to Hold Israel, Supporters to Account for Crimes in Gaza

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has called on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to hold to account the Israeli regime and its supporters, including the United States, for the occupying entity's crimes and atrocities against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in an address to the 55th session of the UNHRC in the Swiss city of Geneva on Monday as he criticized Israel's decades-long aggression and Western-backed violation of Palestinians' rights in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. "Today, the world is witnessing an all-out support of the United States and a number of its allies for the Zionist regime. Such backing amounts to actual complicity in genocide," Amir-Abdollahian said. "The United Nations Human Rights Council, as the highest manifestation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should hold the Zionist regime and its supporters accountable for their crimes against humanity," he added. The Iranian foreign minister stressed that the impunity of Israeli leaders over the past eight decades has been the main reason behind the continuation and escalation of the occupation and killings by the regime. Amir-Abdollahian said the trial and punishment of the perpetrators of the most serious international crimes against the Palestinians should be high on the agenda of competent international institutions, especially the International Criminal Court. Underlining that the realization of human rights goals in the international arena is facing several serious challenges, including systematic and widespread homicide by the world's only apartheid regime, namely the Zionist regime, the top Iranian diplomat called on the international community "not to allow the genocidal and gruesome crimes to become a normal

routine." "The international record of human rights has been stained and blackened as the number of women martyred in Gaza has reached thousands and this shameful massacre of women and children continues in the form of genocide," Amir-Abdollahian said. "Restoring the position of human rights in the world requires that we do not allow the occupying regime to continue the genocide of Palestinians by continuing air, sea and land attacks and plunging Gaza into famine," he added. During his address, the Iranian foreign minister also highlighted the Islamic Republic's role in the fight against terrorism and extremism, stressing the need for concerted efforts and international cooperation in the war against terrorism as a global menace. "Eradication of terrorism requires, above all, an end to the instrumental use of terrorism by certain powers, including the US. It is most unfortunate that several Western states continue to host terrorist elements. This is another example of contradiction and hypocrisy when it comes to supporting human rights," Amir-Abdollahian said. Condemning unilateral and coercive measures against nations as a violation of basic human rights, he said, "The imposition of unilateral sanctions against nations is an illegal measure that is tantamount to a crime against humanity." Stressing the Islamic Republic's steadfastness in respecting human rights and human dignity, Amir-Abdollahian praised Iran as a country that has been at the forefront of the fight against terrorist groups and has had many martyrs on this path. Heading a diplomatic delegation, Amir-Abdollahian arrived in Geneva early on Monday to attend the 55th regular session of the United Nations Human Rights Council and the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament.

Hezbollah Targets Israel's Meron Base

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Israel media outlets say on Tuesday that Hezbollah fired more than 100 rockets in just 24 hours. The Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement has fired a barrage of rockets at an Israeli military base in the northern part of the 1948 Israeli-occupied territories in response to the regime's deadly airstrikes on eastern Lebanon. Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network, citing a brief Hezbollah statement, reported that the group targeted the Mount Meron base on Tuesday. The sensitive Israeli air traffic control base has been targeted by Hezbollah several times amid the ongoing Israeli onslaught on Gaza. Hezbollah said in the statement that the rocket attack came in retaliation for brutal aggression against Gaza, and in response to Israeli airstrikes a day earlier on the outskirts of Buday village near Baalbek, which claimed the lives of at least two resistance fighters. Israel media outlets said Hezbollah launched a volley of rockets from Lebanese territories towards the Mount Meron base, noting that the sound of several loud explosions was heard in the area. They noted that Hezbollah had fired more than 100 projectiles in less than 24 hours. There were no immediate reports of casualties and the extent of damage caused. Hezbollah fired a volley of rockets from Lebanon on Monday at an Israeli military base in Syria's occupied Golan Heights, in response to the deadly airstrikes in Lebanon's Baalbek. Two Lebanese security officials and a source close to the resistance group told AFP news agency that two Hezbollah members were killed in the Israeli aerial raids. One of the Lebanese security sources said Israeli strikes hit a building used by Hezbollah in a Baalbek suburb, and a warehouse near Baalbek belonging to the group. Later on Monday, an Israeli strike on a car in southern Lebanon killed at least one person, local rescuers said, without providing further details. The Israeli regime has been intermittently attacking southern Lebanon since October 7, when the occupation entity launched the devastating campaign of death and destruction in Gaza. In retaliation, Hezbollah has mounted near-daily rocket attacks on Israeli positions. More than 270 people have been killed on the Lebanese border, most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including 44 civilians. At least ten Israeli troops and six settlers have been killed in the area. The fighting has forced the evacuation of tens of thousands from the northern part of the occupied territories, which have been pummeled by rocket fire and shelling carried out by Hezbollah and allied Palestinian groups. Hezbollah has urged residents in southern Lebanon to take their CCTV camera systems offline to prevent Israel from hacking into those devices installed outside homes and shops in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah has already fought off two Israeli wars against Lebanon in 2000 and 2006. The resistance forced the regime to retreat in both conflicts.



President Emphasizes Defending Rights of Iranian Nation



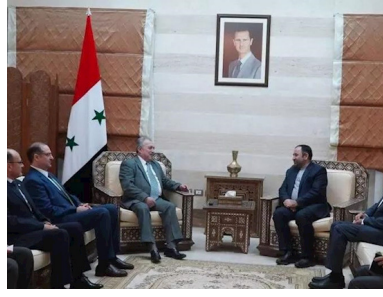
TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi advised the Presidential Department for Legal Affairs to, while following the fulfillment of all the rights of the government, empower the executive bodies from the legal point of view, so that they can prevent the occurrence of actions contrary to the laws in the executive bodies. Raisi visited the Presidential Department for Legal Affairs as the 18th meeting of the supervision of ministries and executive bodies, and while visiting the exhibition of the actions and achievements of this department, he also listened to the report on the performance and actions of the different parts of this department and proposed practical recommendations in order to improve its efficiency and performance. The President advised the Presidential Department for Legal Affairs to, while following the fulfillment of all the rights of the government, empower the executive bodies from the legal point of view, so that they can prevent the occurrence of actions contrary to the laws in the executive bodies. Emphasizing on taking measures to prevent incomplete approvals or those that are against the existing laws and regulations, Raisi added, "In case of a dispute regarding the legal contradiction of some approvals, the supervisory bodies should try to coordinate and cooperate and use expert experts and take into account the rights of the people". In addition to filing a lawsuit against the cruel US sanctions in the Hague, the President described the trial of the terrorist group of People's Mojahedin Organisation, following up on the martyrdom case of Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, cancelling the arbitration in the Crescent case and asserting the rights of the Iranian nation among the commendable actions of the legal deputy and said, "So far, the dominant approach in the country's international legal cases has been a defensive approach, while in some cases, it is necessary to take an offensive approach in defending the rights of the Iranian nation and facing aggressive countries in order to assert their rights".

Iran Stresses Bolstering Cooperation among Countries Waiting to



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's minister of industry emphasized strengthening cooperation and interaction among countries waiting to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). Addressing the participants on the sidelines of the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s 13th Ministerial Conference in the UAE's capital of Abu Dhabi, Abbas Aliabadi said, "Participating in the meeting of the ministers of the unofficial group of the governments joining the WTO is a source of pride for me. We are very glad with the timely establishment of the group in 2018 and this move is an important step towards strengthening the cooperation among countries that are waiting to take membership in the organization." He hailed the efforts of Uzbekistan during its presidency of the organization and maintained that Uzbekistan's commitment to facilitating dialogue and cooperation between the countries joining the organization deserves praise, IRNA reported. Iran is determined to further strengthen the efficiency of the organization, he highlighted. "We believe that this unofficial group operates as an important forum for exchanging know-how and getting awareness of the wide range of the issues at the organization." The World Trade Organization (WTO)'s 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) was launched in Abu Dhabi on Monday with the aim of reviewing the functioning of the multilateral trading system and taking action on the future work of the organization.

IRAN NEWS



Tehran, Damascus Call for Implantation of Inked MOUs

DAMASCUS (IP) - The Prime Minister of Syria stressed the implementation of the memorandums signed with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran has strategic cooperation with Syria, and Tehran's support for the legitimate government of this country during the Syrian crisis and assistance to the government of Bashar al-Assad in the process of fighting against various terrorist groups is proof of this. After the defeat of ISIS, the relations between Syria and Iran have now expanded and diversified, and there are clear prospects for the development of these relations in all fields. According to Iran press, Syrian Prime Minister Hossein Arnous said in a meeting with the Iranian Ambassador to that country Hossein Akbari on Monday that the Syrian government is eager to take all measures to develop bilateral cooperation with Tehran and remove obstacles to this cooperation. The Syrian Prime Minister also pointed to the importance of launching joint projects in line with the national interests of the two countries and added that Damascus is trying to create new horizons for cooperation with Tehran in all fields. The ambassador of Iran in Damascus also announced the willingness and readiness of many Iranian companies to operate in the Syrian market and support its vital sectors and said that Iran will provide any solution to support the Syrian economy to deal with Western sanctions and remove the blockade of this country will continue to help.

10 Countries Keen to Expand Trade-Economic Ties With Iran



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's minister of industry, mine and trade said ten countries have shown interest in developing and broadening economic, trade and industrial interactions with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Abbas Aliabadi said he held talks on the sidelines of the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s 13th Ministerial Conference in UAE's capital of Abu Dhabi, with industry and commerce ministers of more than 10 countries who voiced their keenness to expand their relations with Iran in the fields of trade, economy and industry. The Iranian industry minister held talks with his counterparts from Serbia, Ivory Coast, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Nepal, Qatar, Iraq, Oman and Lebanon. During the bilateral meetings, the industry ministers of these countries stressed the expansion of the trade, economic and industrial interactions with Iran, IRNA reported. In his meeting with the Chinese minister of trade and commerce, Aliabadi stated that China is Iran's major trade partner, adding that Tehran attaches great importance to promoting its relations with Beijing in the fields of trade and economy. The Chinese trade minister, for his part, said that his country favors the expansion of the economic ties with Iran. China has always backed Iran's accession to the World Trade Organization and will continue to do so, China's trade minister emphasized. The World Trade Organization (WTO)'s 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) was launched in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, on Monday with the aim of reviewing the functioning of the multilateral trading system and taking action on the future work of the organization.

Iran, Burkina Faso Urged to Use Potentials of Chambers of Commerce

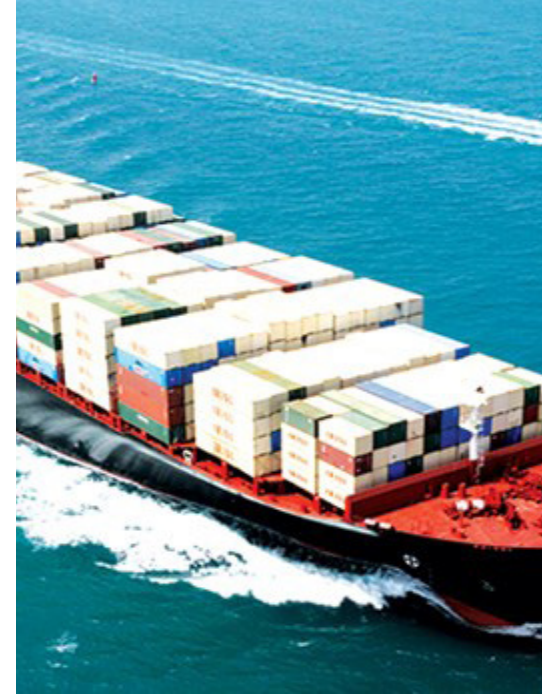


IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Samad Hassanzadeh has urged the need for Iran and Burkina Faso to tap into the potentials of their chambers of commerce to give a boost to bilateral trade. Hassanzadeh made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran on Monday with Burkina Faso's Ambassador to Iran Kaboureh Mohammadi. Noting that lack of information about Burkina Faso's potentials is a major point of weakness, he said that Burkina Faso's economy relies on trade and once Iran is provided with the necessary information about the country's economic laws, the two countries can further expand trade ties. The Iran Chamber of Commerce president also voiced Tehran's readiness to render techno-engineering services to Burkina Faso. He also said that Iran has made significant progress in the pharmaceuticals and medical services and the ground is prepared for more

cooperation between the two nations in these areas. Hassanzadeh also added that Iran seeks overseas farming in Burkina Faso. He invited the president of Burkina Faso Chamber of Commerce and Industry to pay a visit to Iran for expansion of bilateral relations and implementing the agreements made in a joint commission of the two countries. The ambassador of Burkina Faso, for his part, hailed Iran's potentials in the areas of mining, agriculture and petrochemicals, adding that the two countries can cooperate in these fields. He also stressed the need for further cooperation in the areas of health and pharmaceuticals, noting that Iran can launch pharmaceutical factories in Burkina Faso. The ambassador welcomed Iran's overseas farming in Burkina Faso and joint exports of agricultural products to other countries. He proposed to manage an online meeting to introduce his countries trade potentials to the Iranian businesspeople.

10 Countries Account for 84% of Iran's Foreign Trade



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, Iraq, India, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Oman, Germany and Afghanistan made up 84 percent of Iran's total foreign trade value in 11 months, the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said. Of Iran's total foreign trade, 136.64 million tons of goods, valued at \$88.441 billion, were exchanged with the aforementioned 10 countries in the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023, to February 22, 2024), the report added. They were Iran's top 10 trade partners in this period, accounting for 84 percent of the country's total trade exchanges, the IRICA added. In this period, Iran's trade exchanges with Turkey registered a 15 and 30 percent decline in value and volume respectively, it said. According to the report, Iran's trade exchanges with Germany in this period showed a 46 percent decline in volume and a 9 percent hike in value, Mehr news agency reported. Russia had the most trade exchanges with Iran, registering a 54 and 24 percent growth in terms of volume and value respectively, the IRICA added.

Tehran-Moscow Gas Cooperation Planned

TEHRAN (Shana) - Iran-Russia cooperation in the gas sector has been planned and could come to fruition, said Iran's ambassador to Moscow. Kazem Jalali pointed to the materialization of the plan to turn Iran into a gas hub in partnership with Russia thanks to the two countries' top global positions in terms of gas reserves and production and added, "It was suggested in the past that Tehran and Moscow cannot cooperate in the economic fields, but the comment proved wrong in recent years." He said, "When I was departing for Moscow to begin my diplomatic mission, some people told me that Iran and Russia could never cooperate in the economic areas as energy is the pillar of their economy and the two states are rivals in this sector. To me, this is a

wrong suggestion as economic cooperation is not limited to the energy sector and the two countries can cooperate in many fields." The theory proved wrong in practice, underlined the ambassador, referring to the current cooperation between Iran and Russia in various sectors. Jalali said, "If the two countries had not faced the five barriers of cognition, transit, logistics, monetary and banking, and customs problems, bilateral relations would have expanded in many areas." The Russians made the highest investments in Iran in 2023, the envoy quoted the Economy Ministry as saying, adding the investments have been mainly attracted by the oil industry. Iran and Russian can also cooperate to export gas, he concluded.

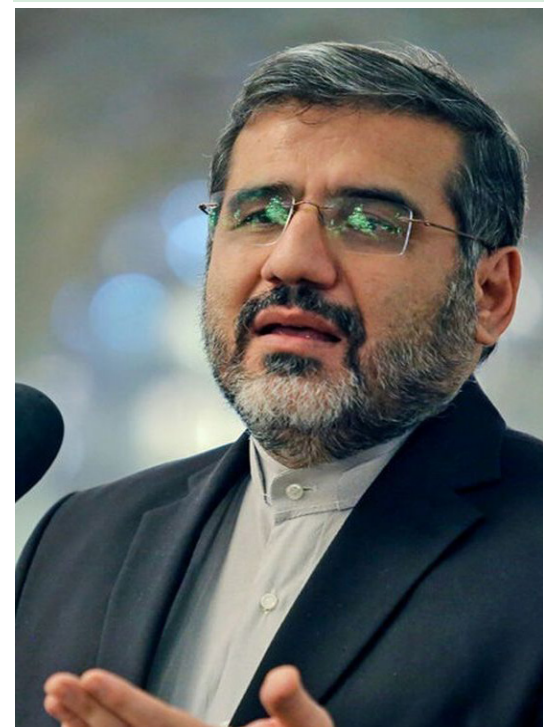


PHOTO Ghanbarpour

Iran, Finland Stress Enhancing Bilateral Ties

GENEVA (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Finnish counterpart Elina Valtonen, in a meeting, have emphasized on improving the relations between the two countries to the best level. Amir-Abdollahian and Valtonen met and exchanged views on bilateral and multilateral issues on the sidelines of the 55th meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council in the Swiss city on Tuesday. The top Iranian diplomat congratulated Finland for holding of the successful presidential elections and expressed Tehran's readiness for a joint roadmap to improve the relations between the two countries. He pointed out some commonalities for bilateral cooperation, including between knowledge-based companies as well as in the field of agriculture. Amir-Abdollahian also discussed the Gaza crisis where 70% of those killed in the Israeli genocidal campaign are women and children. Valtonen, for her part, expressed satisfaction with the meeting and thanked Amir-Abdollahian for inviting her to visit Iran. She also welcomed the continuation of dialogue with the Islamic Republic in areas of common interest. On Gaza, the top Finnish diplomat described the alarming humanitarian situation there as a common concern of the two countries and stressed the need for continuing efforts to prevent a human tragedy.

Iran Calls for Practical Measures to End Gaza Crisis



TEHRAN (IRNA) - In an extraordinary meeting of OIC ministers of information in Turkey, Iran has sought to encourage OIC members to take practical measures in the wake of the crisis underway in Gaza. Some 30 ministers had attended the meeting and other countries also had a strong presence, Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaili said after returning from Turkey. The minister said that the Islamic Republic of Iran sought practical measures of other OIC members in dealing with the crisis in Gaza which he said has left 30,000 innocent Palestinians killed so far. "More than 120 days past the crisis in Gaza, we are witnessing a kind of inaction," he noted. The Zionist regime has to pay the price of its atrocities in the international arena which is at least cutting its economic and political ties and using all other international means to isolate this criminal regime, the minister added.

Famine Imminent in Northern Gaza

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - Famine is "imminent" in northern Gaza, where no humanitarian group has been able to provide aid since January 23, the World Food Programme warned Tuesday, as Israel wages war on Palestinian militant group Hamas. With a dire humanitarian emergency unfolding in the Gaza Strip and the main UN aid agency there struggling to cope, other bodies have called for help in reaching the thousands of Palestinians in desperate need. "If nothing changes, a famine is imminent in northern Gaza," WFP's deputy executive director Carl Skau told the UN Security Council, while his colleague from the UN humanitarian office OCHA, Ramesh Rajasingham, warned of "almost inevitable" widespread starvation. As aid remains blocked from entering northern Gaza by Israeli forces, and only enters the rest of the territory in dribs and drabs, UN aid chief Martin Griffiths last week wrote to the Security Council calling on members to act to prohibit "the use of starvation of civilian population as a method of warfare."



China Urges Largest Nuclear States to Negotiate a "No-First-Use" Treaty



BEIJING (Dispatches) - States with the largest nuclear arsenals should negotiate a treaty on no-first-use of nuclear weapons against each other or make a political statement in this regard, the Chinese foreign ministry's arms control department said. Director general of the department, Sun Xiaobo, called on nuclear states to fulfill their "special and priority responsibilities" on nuclear disarmament according to the U.N. Conference on Disarmament, which seeks to prevent nuclear war, official news agency Xinhua said on Wednesday. During the forum's weekly meeting in Geneva on Monday, Sun said the body should define a roadmap or timetable for an international legal instrument that would protect non-nuclear-weapon states from the threat of nuclear weapons. "Nuclear-weapon states should negotiate and conclude a treaty on no-first-use of nuclear weapons against each other or make a political statement in this regard," Sun said. China and India are currently the only two nuclear powers to formally maintain a no first use policy. Russia and the United States have the world's biggest nuclear arsenals. Sun also called for a universal, non-discriminatory, non-proliferation, export control order to address global security challenges, and promote more compliance in the field of biochemistry to maintain the authority of the arms control treaty system. The U.N. disarmament forum should also respond to emerging scientific and technological challenges such as artificial intelligence, outer space and cyber, he said. Sun described the international strategic security situation as facing new challenges, and that countries with the strongest military power have repeatedly "broken treaties" in order to "seek their own absolute superiority."



NATO Allies Rule Out Sending Troops to Ukraine

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The United States and key European allies said on Tuesday they had no plans to send ground troops to Ukraine, after France hinted at the possibility, and the Kremlin warned that any such move would inevitably lead to conflict between Russia and NATO. French President Emmanuel Macron had said on Monday that Western allies should exclude no options in seeking to avert a Russian victory in Ukraine, though he stressed there was no consensus at this stage. His comments, made at a hastily convened meeting of European leaders in Paris on ways to boost flagging support for Kyiv, come amid battlefield gains by Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces in eastern Ukraine as well as growing shortages of ammunition and manpower on the Ukrainian side. However, Germany, Britain, Spain, Poland and the Czech Republic distanced themselves from any suggestion they might commit ground troops to the Ukraine war, now in its third year. "There will be no ground troops, no soldiers on Ukrainian soil sent there by European countries or NATO states," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Tuesday. German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius was equally adamant. "Boots on the ground is not an option for Germany," Pistorius told reporters during a visit to Vienna. The White House later reiterated that it too had no plan to send ground troops, instead urging U.S. lawmakers to approve a stalled security aid bill that would ensure Ukrainian troops got the weapons and ammunition needed to continue their fight. Seeking to clarify Macron's remarks, French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said on Tuesday the president had in mind sending troops for specific tasks such as helping on mine clearance, production of weapons on site, and cyberdefence. "This could require a (military) presence on Ukrainian territory, without crossing the threshold of fighting," Sejourne told French

lawmakers. Scholz did say that European leaders now appeared willing after Monday's talks to procure weapons from countries outside Europe as a way of speeding up military aid to Ukraine. Germany has become the second biggest supplier of military aid to Kyiv since Russia launched its full-blown invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, but is extremely wary of steps that would draw the NATO alliance into direct conflict with Russia. The Kremlin issued a swift warning about what was at stake. "The very fact of discussing the possibility of sending certain contingents to Ukraine from NATO countries is a very important new element," spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, commenting on Macron's remarks. Asked about the risks if NATO members did deploy troops to fight in Ukraine, Peskov said: "In that case, we would need to talk not about the probability, but about the inevitability (of a direct conflict)." Russia and the United States - the big power behind NATO - have the world's largest arsenals of nuclear weapons. President Joe Biden has cautioned that a conflict between Russia and NATO could trigger World War Three. The possibility in particular of German troops being deployed to ex-Soviet territory is hugely sensitive for Russia, whose fierce resistance to Hitler's invasion during World War Two is an integral part of national identity. Putin has even cast Russia's actions in Ukraine as a struggle against "Nazis", a stance Kyiv and the West dismiss as cynical and absurd. A senior Ukrainian official welcomed Macron's decision to raise the possibility of sending Western troops to his country. "This shows, firstly, an absolute awareness of the risks posed to Europe by a militaristic, aggressive Russia," Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said in a written comment on Macron's statement.

Qatar Commits 10b Euros to Boost French Startups




DOHA (Dispatches) - Discover how Qatar's 10 billion euro investment in French startups and funds is set to deepen economic and military ties, impact key sectors, and strengthen bilateral relations between the two nations. During a state visit to Paris, Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani and French officials unveiled a grand plan to invest 10 billion euros in French startups and investment funds over the period from 2024 to 2030. This investment, aiming at sectors like energy transition, semiconductors, aerospace, artificial intelligence, health, and tourism, symbolizes a significant strengthening of the bilateral relationship between Qatar and France. The announcement was part of a French-Qatari joint communique that highlighted the multifaceted cooperation between the two nations. This massive investment pledge follows a series of discussions on enhancing bilateral cooperation, including technology, health, and humanitarian aid. With this move, Qatar and France are not only reinforcing their economic partnership but also their military ties, as both countries have shown a keen interest in collaborating on defense and security matters. By targeting crucial sectors such as the energy transition, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence, the investment is set to spur innovation and growth in areas vital for the future. This strategic focus reflects a shared vision for development and progress, highlighting the comprehensive scope of collaboration Qatar and France are aiming for. The initiative is expected to create numerous opportunities for startups and established companies alike, fostering an environment of entrepreneurial vitality and technological advancement. The investment is a testament to the strong bilateral relationship that has been nurtured over the years. It underscores the mutual interest in fostering economic growth and technological innovation, marking a new chapter in the ongoing partnership between Qatar and France.



Trump, Biden Win Michigan Primaries

DEARBORN (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden easily won the Democratic presidential primary in Michigan on Tuesday, but a protest vote by Democrats angry over his support for Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza exceeded organizers' expectations. Donald Trump won the state's Republican presidential primary by a large margin, strengthening his grip on the party's White House nomination as Nikki Haley, his last remaining rival, came in a distant second. Although Biden and Republican former President Trump had been expected to easily win their separate party primaries, the vote count for both was being closely watched for signs of wavering support. In Michigan, home to a large Arab American constituency, Democratic voters had been urged to mark their primary ballots as "uncommitted" on Tuesday in protest at Biden's Gaza policy. Early returns showed the number of "uncommitted" voters had approached 40,000 after 31% of Democratic ballots were counted, according to Edison Research. That figure far exceeded the 10,000 target for uncommitted voters that protest organizers had been hoping for. Many in Michigan's Arab American community who backed Biden in 2020 are angry, as are some progressive Democrats, over Biden's support for Israel's offensive in Hamas-ruled Gaza where tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed. "Our

movement emerged victorious tonight and massively surpassed our expectations. Tens of thousands of Michigan Democrats, many of whom who voted for Biden in 2020, are uncommitted to his re-election due to the war in Gaza," the Listen to Michigan campaign, which urged people to vote uncommitted, said in a statement. Campaign organizers vowed to take what they called their antiwar agenda to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August. Michigan pollster Bernie Porn said it remained to be seen how big of an issue the Middle East would be for Biden in November when the situation could look different. In a statement late on Tuesday, Biden said, "I want to thank every Michigander who made their voice heard today. Exercising the right to vote and participating in our democracy is what makes America great," he said. The statement made no mention of Gaza or the "uncommitted" vote. "Donald Trump is threatening to drag us even further into the past as he pursues revenge and retribution," Biden said. Early returns showed Biden and Trump with solid overall leads. With 31% of the estimated Democratic vote counted, Biden had 80% support, with "uncommitted" getting 14%. With 32% of the estimated Republican vote counted, Trump had 67% support to Haley's 28%, Edison Research said.



OPEC+ to Consider Extending Voluntary Oil Output Cuts

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC+ will consider extending voluntary oil output cuts into the second quarter, three OPEC+ sources told Reuters, to provide additional support for the market, and could keep them in place until the end of the year, according to two of them. Last November, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies led by Russia agreed to voluntary cuts totalling about 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) for the first quarter this year, led by Saudi Arabia rolling over its own voluntary cut. Oil prices have found support this year from rising geopolitical tensions due to attacks by the Iran-aligned Houthi group on Red Sea shipping, although concern about economic growth and high interest rates has weighed. Brent crude was trading near \$83 a barrel on Tuesday. Extending the output cuts into the second quarter is "likely", one of the OPEC+ sources, who declined to be identified by name, said. Two of them said a longer extension until the end of the year was possible. OPEC and the Saudi Energy Ministry did not respond immediately to requests for comment. Under the current agreement, the total cuts by the group are set to decline 3.66 million bpd from the beginning of April. OPEC+'s de facto leader Saudi Arabia has said that the cuts could continue past the first quarter if needed. The issue has yet to be discussed formally by OPEC+, two of the sources said. A decision on extending the cuts is expected in the first week of March, sources have said, with individual countries expected to announce their decisions. OPEC+ has implemented a series of output cuts since late 2022 to support the market, amid rising output from the United States and other non-member producers and worries over demand as major economies grapple with high interest rates aimed at curbing sticky inflation.

Italy's Meloni Loses Control of Sardinia in Election Defeat

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni suffered her first significant electoral setback since taking office in 2022, results showed on Tuesday, with her rightist bloc losing power on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia. Alessandra Todde, a member of the left-leaning 5-Star Movement who was backed by the Democratic Party (PD), won 45.4% of the vote at Sunday's election, edging out Paolo Truzzu, a candidate handpicked by Meloni, who took 45.0%. With a handful of ballots still to count, Truzzu conceded defeat while Todde celebrated victory alongside PD chief Elly Schlein and former Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, who heads the 5-Star. "The winds are changing," Schlein said. Todde, a former industry undersecretary and a successful businesswoman, will be the first female president of the island and the first president of any region from the 5-Star Movement. It was also the first time the centre-left had managed to flip a region since 2015, giving a boost to opposition parties ahead of four more regional ballots slated for 2024 and nationwide elections for the European parliament set for June. "Sardinia has shattered the myth of Meloni's political invincibility," said Francesco Galietti, founder of the political risk firm Policy Sonar. Meloni had insisted that the outgoing governor, who was backed by the League, be replaced on the ballot by a politician from her own party, but he proved an unpopular choice. The prime minister's bloc, including her Brothers of Italy party, the League and Forza Italia, won all four regional elections held in 2023 and still control 14 of Italy's 20 regions. Polls show the rightist coalition also leads at a national level, but the League is looking increasingly fragile, raising questions about the future of its leader Matteo Salvini. His party won just 3.7% of the vote in Sardinia

against 11.4% in the last regional ballot on the island in 2019. By contrast Sunday's vote will give hope to the 5-Star and the PD that they can take on the right, at least at the local and regional level, so long as they bury their frequent differences and form a united front. Sardinia, one of Italy's two main islands, has around 1.44 million adult residents. The turnout was estimated at 52.4%. The next regional vote in Italy will be in Abruzzo, a central area east of Rome, on March 10, where the PD and 5-Star have again joined forces. Meloni's Brothers of Italy is leading national opinion polls at around 28%, while the PD has about 20% and 5-Star 16%.





Five-Goal Haaland Crushes Luton

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City's Erling Haaland scored five times as the FA Cup holders ran riot in a 6-2 rout of Luton in the fifth round on Tuesday. Aided by Kevin De Bruyne's trio of assists, Haaland completed his treble inside the first 40 minutes at Kenilworth Road. Jordan Clark struck twice to briefly reduce Luton's deficit to just 3-2. But any Luton hopes of an incredible comeback were ruthlessly erased by Haaland as the Norway striker scored twice more after the interval to send City into the quarter-finals. Mateo Kovacic netted to cap City's second six-goal haul this season after their 6-1 thrashing of Bournemouth in the Premier League in November. Haaland now has 27 goals in all competitions this season, making a mockery of the critics who took a swipe at him after a misfiring display in a recent draw against Chelsea. It was the second time Haaland had hit five goals in a single game for City after his heroics in the Champions League last 16 second leg win against RB Leipzig in March 2023. Saluting De Bruyne's role in his demolition of Luton, Haaland said: "Kevin is massive. It's a pleasure playing with him. We know what we both want from each other." On his own form since returning from a foot injury that sidelined him for two months, Haaland added: "I'm getting back to my best. Finally I'm feeling good. It's an amazing feeling. It's coming, we're coming. Exciting times ahead. We are ready to attack." Guardiola added: "What can I say? Erling is on fire, and Kevin. The connection was perfect. Kevin needs players like Erling and Erling needs players like Kevin." City have won 14 of their last 15 games in all competitions as they try to emulate last season's Premier League,

Champions League and FA Cup treble. Haaland and De Bruyne are rounding into form in time for Sunday's crucial Premier League showdown against Manchester United at the Etihad Stadium. City needed just three minutes to take the lead this time as Haaland finished off a flowing move. Matheus Nunes clipped a clever pass to De Bruyne and he picked out Haaland inside the Luton area, where the City striker fired past Tim Krul with ease. De Bruyne was the provider again in the 18th minute when Haaland bagged his second goal. Taking Haaland's lay-off on the halfway line, De Bruyne unfurled a sumptuous pass that sent the Norway star clean through on goal for a typically predatory finish. Haaland completed his treble in the 40th minute, accelerating onto yet another sublime De Bruyne assist before dinking a deft finish over Krul from 12 yards. It was Haaland's eighth hat-trick for City and his first away from the Etihad since signing from Borussia Dortmund in 2022. Clark reduced the deficit five minutes later with a superb long-range curler and scored again in the 52nd minute. But De Bruyne and Haaland proved impossible for Luton to stop. Kyle Walker's eye-catching pass with the outside of his foot set De Bruyne free in the area and he unselfishly teed up Haaland for a 55th minute tap in. Haaland got his fifth three minutes later, taking Bernardo Silva's pass and shooting low under Krul's weak attempted save. Kovacic smashed a 20-yard drive past Krul in the 72nd minute to put a bow on City's evening. Abdul Fatawu's stunning strike gave Championship leaders Leicester a surprise 1-0 win at Premier League side Bournemouth.

Bahrain Could End Verstappen's Run at the Top

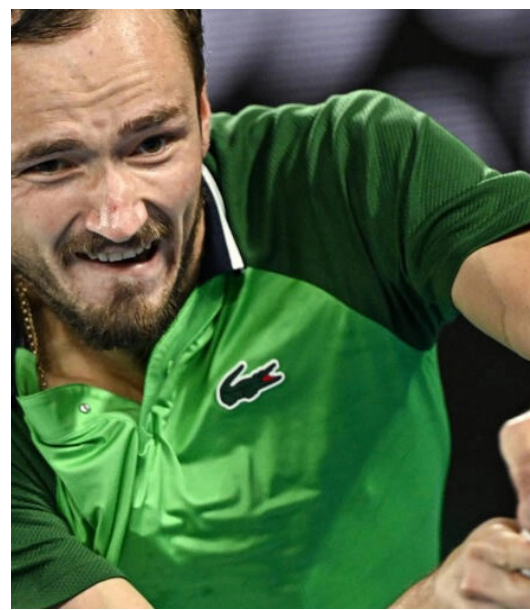


MANAMA (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen has led the Formula One standings since May 2022 and while Red Bull's triple world champion remains favorite for the Bahrain season-opener, there is always the possibility of the record 39-race run coming to an end. The 26-year-old and Red Bull enjoyed the most dominant campaign ever last year, the team winning all but one of the 22 races. Verstappen, who started 2023 by leading Sergio Perez to a one-two victory at Sakhir, won 19 of them and surpassed Michael Schumacher's 2000-02 record of 37 successive races in the championship lead. The Dutch driver signed off with seven wins in a row and the evidence from last week's pre-season testing in Bahrain suggested the streak was set to continue as the sport heads into a record 24-race championship. "We had a good few testing days and learned a lot from the car," said Verstappen. "Of course, we don't want to get ahead of ourselves and we still need to make sure we do everything right to have a strong first weekend." "All in all, I am excited to get the season underway and start racing again." Red Bull are celebrating their 20th season but the anniversary comes with a question mark over team principal Christian Horner, who is under investigation for undisclosed allegations of misconduct toward a female colleague. Horner has denied the allegations and his future is expected to be decided imminently. Rivals will be keen to seize on any weakness but are likely to be engaged in a battle to be best of the rest. Ferrari have shown encouraging speed and put in impressive mileage, with Carlos Sainz going fastest on the second day of testing and team mate Charles Leclerc topping the final day's timesheets.

Medvedev Makes Winning Return in Dubai

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev returned to action for the first time since his Australian final defeat with a straight sets win over Alexander Shevchenko in Dubai. Elsewhere 18-year-old Jakob Mensik beat Borna Coric 48 hours after becoming the youngest finalist at a tour event since 2021, in Doha. The man who ended the Czech teenager's dream run in Qatar on Sunday, Karen Khachanov, was also among the round of 32 winners. World number four Medvedev got his title defence at the hardcourt ATP 500 event up and running, overcoming Shevchenko 6-3, 7-5. The Russian top seed shrugged off his month-long absence - part holiday, part injury - breaking his Kazakh opponent in three consecutive return games in the first set before reeling off four games in a row from 3-5 in the second set to complete an 88-minute triumph. In January, Medvedev reached his second Australian Open final. He lost to Rafael Nadal in the Melbourne decider two years ago, and this time had to settle for second best in the season's opening Grand Slam to Jannik Sinner. He was forced to skip his title defence in Doha last week because he was dealing with a number of physical issues - with his foot, adductor, and shoulder. "In general, to be honest, I am happy with my level, because it is not easy to come back after an injury. You always try to straight away put your game back, but it's not easy and I'm happy to beat such a good opponent and am looking forward to the next round," said Medvedev courtside. He added: "When you take a week or two off, but it's something you planned, then it's kind of easy tennis-wise, just a couple of points or games to get back. I did take a week and a half off by myself and then when I came back I started feeling pain here and there, not practising 100 per cent. It's very tricky, because when you come into a match you have to forget about it and when you think about something other than tennis you are going to lose the match." Medvedev will meet next Lorenzo Sonego after the Italian despatched wild card Sumit Nagal of India 6-4, 5-7, 6-1. Mensik let slip a match point and then saved one in his 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (9/7) victory over Coric to book a date next with Spain's world number 24 Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. Meanwhile Novak Djokovic said he was excited to be back in Indian Wells to compete at the BNP Paribas Open for the first time since 2019 after US travel restrictions

related to Covid-19 had kept him away. The world number one is seeking an unprecedented sixth title at the Masters 1000 event that begins next week and is regarded as the biggest tennis tournament outside of the four Grand Slams. "It has been five years, way too long to not be part of the Tennis Paradise tournament, one of the best tournaments in the world without a doubt," Djokovic said in a video from the small, picturesque city in the Southern California desert. "It's probably the favourite Masters tournament of so many players including myself. I can't wait to come and perform once again in front of some of the best tennis fans that we have on the tour." The Serb won the first of his 24 Grand Slams at the Australian Open in 2008 and backed that up a few months later by capturing his first Indian Wells crown. "The first time I won the title in Indian Wells, it was one of the greatest titles of my career at that point. I remember I played Mardy Fish in the finals," he said.



Pochettino Hits Back at Bottle Job Jibe



LONDON (Dispatches) - Mauricio Pochettino has hit back at "unfair" and "annoying" criticism of Chelsea after his side were labelled billion-pound bottle jobs. Chelsea were given the "blue billion-pound bottle jobs" label by former Manchester United defender Gary Neville after Sunday's 1-0 defeat to Liverpool in the League Cup final. Neville, working as a commentator for Sky Sports, was scathing of Chelsea's lethargic performance in extra-time at Wembley as an inexperienced Liverpool line-up extended the Blues' wait for their first domestic trophy since 2018. Despite spending over £1 billion (RM6.04 billion) on signings since Todd Boehly's consortium bought Chelsea in 2022, the west London club have gone backwards over the last two seasons. But Pochettino refused to accept Neville's swipe, telling reporters yesterday: "The problem is so annoying when after eight months always people talk about one billion. I feel that's a little bit unfair. The new owners arrived with the right intention and they want to build something that is different from the past. For me the players have an amazing quality, they only need time. It's not an excuse for me because if I am here or not, it's not dependent on me. I think we are doing an amazing job." Chelsea are languishing in 11th place in the Premier League and have been booed off by their frustrated fans several times this season. Boehly has already sacked Thomas Tuchel and Graham Potter during his short reign and Pochettino cannot afford an embarrassing FA Cup fifth round exit at home to second tier Leeds today. But, adamant Chelsea will get it right in time, Pochettino said: "We cannot see maybe great results. But I think with time we are going to have an amazing team." "We are young, we are learning. People that work here for many years say they start to feel in a different way how the club is. But unfortunately we cannot relate in points. Always this type of process needs time." Asked if he expects the club's ownership to remain patient, Pochettino replied: "Why not? I am confident until they tell me something. I feel the support from them. When I go up (to receive his runners-up medal at Wembley), I was so upset, nearly crying when I arrived there. And then Todd sent a very, very nice text to me, and then I met (co owner) Behdad (Eghbali) and he was really good."

Magic Lock Up Nets, 108-81

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Franz Wagner scored 21 points and Moritz Wagner added 16 as the Orlando Magic held the visiting Brooklyn Nets to a season-low point total in a 108-81 win on Tuesday. Cole Anthony and Markelle Fultz scored 12 points apiece for Orlando, which led by as many as 33 and won for the fourth time in its past five games. Wendell Carter Jr. added 10 points and seven rebounds. Brooklyn committed 20 turnovers and fell to 1-3 under interim coach Kevin Ollie. The Nets played without Cam Thomas (right ankle sprain) and Ben Simmons (lower back injury maintenance). Dennis Schroder led Brooklyn with 15 points, while Trendon Watford added 14 and Nic Claxton had 10. The Nets trailed by 14 at intermission and scored a total of 37 points in the second half. Paolo Banchero missed his second consecutive game (illness) for the Magic, who connected on 52.7 percent of their shots from the field and 9 of 25 (36 percent) from 3-point range. Brooklyn was held to 38.8 percent shooting, including an 8-of-31 (25.8 percent) mark from beyond the arc. The Nets' past four losses have come by a combined 120 points. Orlando led 33-25 after playing a turnover-free first quarter and shooting 10-for-13 from inside the arc. Franz Wagner scored 13 of his 17 first-half points in the second quarter to help Orlando take a 58-44 lead into halftime. Schroder had 12 points before the break to lead

the Nets. The Magic stretched their lead to 78-51 after Carter's turnaround jumper capped a 20-7 run to open the second half. Orlando outscored Brooklyn 30-15 in the third quarter after shooting 63.2 percent from the floor. Orlando held a commanding 88-59 advantage at the end of the third quarter and moved ahead 103-71 on Anthony Black's 3-pointer with 6:08 left in the game. Brooklyn guard/forward Mikal Bridges was limited to four points on 2-of-14 shooting after scoring 42 points in a 129-101 win over Orlando on Dec. 2. Meanwhile Max Strus sank a 3-pointer from well beyond midcourt as time expired to lift the host Cleveland Cavaliers to a 121-119 victory over the Dallas Mavericks. Strus matched Donovan Mitchell by making seven 3-pointers on the evening. Strus, in fact, sank four in a 67-second sequence late in the fourth quarter before answering P.J. Washington's go-ahead layup with 2.1 seconds left with his improbable shot. Mitchell collected 31 points, seven rebounds and six assists to offset seven turnovers. Strus finished with 21 points and Jarrett Allen recorded 19 points and nine rebounds for the Cavaliers, who have won two in a row overall and completed a season sweep of the Mavericks. Cleveland recorded a 113-110 victory in Dallas on Dec. 27. Strus' heroics spoiled a banner night by Dallas' Luka Doncic, who recorded 45 points, 14 assists, nine assists and three steals.

