

Iran's Total Foreign Trade, Including Exports of Crude Oil and Techno-Engineering Services, Reached \$138.8b in 11 Calendar Months to February 19, According to Head of the Country's Customs Administration

IRAN NEWS

Iran Has Lashed out the U.S. and the Europeans for Their Silence Over the "Genocide" in Gaza, After Israeli Forces Fired on People on an Aid Convoy in Gaza City and Killed More Than 100 Palestinians on Thursday

2 DOMESTIC

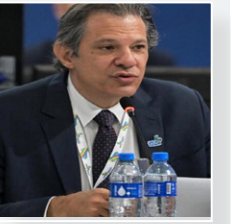


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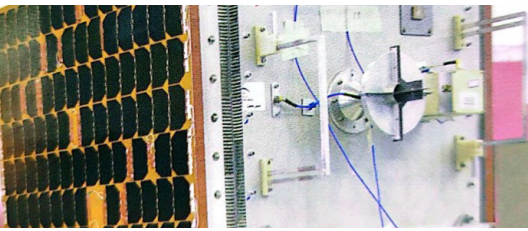
3 INTERNATIONAL

Divided G20 Blocked by Impasse Over Ukraine, Gaza



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Iran Successfully Launches Domestically-Built Pars 1 Research Satellite Into Space



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has successfully put into orbit the domestically-built Pars 1 research-sensing satellite. The 134-kilogram satellite was launched by a Soyuz rocket from the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Russia's far eastern Amur region on Thursday. Equipped with three cameras, Pars 1 will scan Iran's topography from an orbit of 500 kilometers above the Earth's surface. The satellite is designed and manufactured by experts and young scientists at the Iran Space Research Institute with the cooperation of knowledge-based companies. It receives data from ground sources in three spectral ranges of visible, short-wave infrared and thermal infrared. Speaking on television, Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology Issa Zarepour said that the satellite will be added to the country's sensing satellites and that its sent images and data will be used for multiple purposes. Elaborating on the country's space program, he added that Iran has launched 12 satellites into space over the past 25 months. "The country's space industry is rapidly advancing forward... upgrading its place," Zarepour said. Additionally in his remarks, the minister said that Iran is constructing West Asia's largest launch base in the country's south. He also noted that the first satellite launch from the base will be carried out in the next Iranian calendar year (beginning on March 20) or at the latest by the end of President Ebrahim Raisi's term. He pointed out that Iran decided to build the base as the country's current launch bases do not have the capability of injecting satellites at the right inclination for a sun-synchronous orbit.

North-South Corridor Strategic for Entire Region



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Vice President Mohammad Mokhber has said the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the development of southern Iranian ports play an "important and strategic role" for the entire region. Mokhber made the remarks during a meeting with Alexander Novak, the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, in Tehran. The vice president stressed the importance of "defining and executing joint projects" with Russia as a means to further strengthen cooperation between the two allies. "Implementing some of these projects presents an exceptional opportunity for the region. The establishment of the North-South Corridor and the development of southern Iranian ports have significant strategic implications, not only for both countries but for the entire region," Mokhber said. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a 7,200-km-long network of routes for facilitating transit of cargo between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe. Mokhber said that Iranian authorities are assessing the progress of the corridor and the Rasht-Astara railway line, a key part of the corridor in northern Iran, on a weekly basis given the importance of these major projects. Iran and Russia view the 162 km (100-mile) railway along the Caspian Sea shoreline as a crucial component of the INSTC. Novak, for his part, reiterated that expanding cooperation with Iran is very important to Russia. He noted that bilateral relations have significantly improved under the government of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Iranians Vote in Parliamentary, Assembly of Experts Elections

TEHRAN - Iranians on Friday voted in parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections, with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei calling on the electorate to turn in big numbers to please friends and disappoint enemies. The polls opened across Iran at 8 a.m. local time (0430) on Friday with more than 61 million people eligible to vote across the country. Ayatollah Khamenei cast his ballot at a polling station in Tehran in the first minutes of voting. "We ask the Almighty God to make today a happy day for the Iranian nation and that the results of the efforts of our dear people and those involved in the various issues of the elections may reach the desired results and benefit the Iranian nation," he said after voting. "Our dear nation should know that today the eyes of many people in the world, both individuals and politicians and those who hold prestigious national and political positions, are on Iran and you. They want to see what you are doing in this election and what will be the result of your election. Both our friends and people who are interested in the Iranian nation, as well as ill-wishers from all sides, the eyes observe the issues of our country and our beloved nation. Pay attention to this; make friends happy and disappoint the ill-wishers." The Leader repeated his recommendation to the voters in the previous elections to head to the polls and vote as early as possible. "The second recommendation is to vote for as many people as you need, not fewer, in any constituency. For example, in Tehran, vote for 30 people in the Islamic Consultative Assembly and for 16 people in the Assembly of Experts of the Leadership," he added. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who cast his vote at Interior Ministry's polling station, hailed elections in the country as a national

celebration and a symbol of unity. "The people's vote is decisive, [as] all sectors of the country are determined by the people's vote, and this is one of the honors of the Islamic Establishment," Raisi said. "This election is a national celebration and a symbol of national cohesion and unity, and all political groups have come today with their candidates to mark a glorious day for the Iranian nation," he added. Drawing an analogy between the elections in Iran and other countries, Raisi said, "The winner is the Iranian nation and there are no losers, whether they (the candidates) get the votes or not. Because they fulfilled their duty, which is participation in the elections." Voters are taking part in the parliamentary elections to choose 290 members of the legislative body from over 15,000 candidates. Elected members will serve for a term of four years in the parliament. In another election being held simultaneously, participants are voting for 88 members of the Assembly of Experts, a body with an eight-year mandate that is in charge of overseeing the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and is in a position of authority to either appoint or dismiss the Leader. Spokesman for the Iranian police Brigadier General Saeed Montazer-al-Mahdi said 190,000 police forces were on duty to ensure the security of the elections. "There is no law enforcement or security problem envisaged," Montazer-al-Mahdi said, adding, "Everything is under control from the borders to the center, and the country's border guards are on full alert and monitor border traffic." Article Six of the Iranian Constitution reiterates that the administration of the affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran should be based on the public opinion expressed by the means of elections.

Democracy, Human Rights in Iran Much Stronger Than in Britain



LONDON (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has emphasized that the Iranian government and system rely on the people's support, noting that unequivocally, democracy and human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran today are much stronger than those in the UK. Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Britain Channel 4 News. The top Iranian diplomat underlined, "If a referendum, is to be held in Iran and at the same time in Britain on people's support of their regime, have no doubt Britain will be the loser." In reaction to the claim that 75% of voters will not participate in the upcoming election in Iran and they lost faith in the Iranian government, Amir-Abdollahian said, "Firstly, how did you come up with 75% for such a claim? Secondly, since the victory of the Revolution until today, every year we have had at least one free election with the participation of all people in Iran. The third point is that, in Iran, we encourage people to participate. However, we do not impose punitive policies on those who do not participate in the election. While in many Western countries, if a person does not participate in the election, they face temporary social deprivation or even fines." He added, "No, your statistics are completely the opposite. We have a high turnout. In our region, Iran is one of the strongest democracies. However, the riots that you mentioned, I addressed in my yesterday's speech (on the United Nations Human Rights Council). I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, do you remember? Months ago, following the tragic death of a dear Iranian girl, what an uproar it caused in the Human Rights Council? A fact-finding committee was formed. Five months into genocide and massacres of Palestinian women and children in Gaza, by bombs from Western countries; bombs provided by the United States, Britain, and some other countries to Israel, so many women and children are being killed. Why no one in the Human Rights Council thinks of forming a fact-finding committee?"

Iran's Envoy Slams Germany for Anti-Iran Remarks



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in Geneva has criticized Germany for anti-Iran remarks about human rights. In reaction to the anti-Iran remarks made by the German foreign minister in the 55th high-level session of the Human Rights Council on February 27, Hamid Ahmadi rejected the allegations against Iran, saying that Germany has a history full of widespread human rights violations both inside and outside of its borders. These days, such a history and memories have been revived for the Iranian people and the international community with the support of the country's high-ranking officials for the crimes of the Israeli occupation forces in the occupied Palestinian territories, he added. Ahmadi further noted that as the occupying Israeli forces brutally bombed homes, hospitals, and humanitarian infrastructure in Gaza, the Chancellor of Germany traveled to Tel Aviv and expressed his support for such atrocities. While the international community is in shock and horror over the deaths of thousands of Palestinian children, the German foreign minister travels to Tel Aviv to express his support for the deaths of thousands of Palestinian children and the Zionist regime's crimes. German leaders who claim to defend women's and girls' rights have approved financial, military, and political aid in support of the Israeli regime while thousands of Palestinian women and girls have been killed or forced to migrate because of Israel's brutal bombings in Gaza and other parts of Palestine, he highlighted. While all human infrastructure, hospitals, and schools in Gaza have been destroyed and every living thing in this region of the world is being killed by occupying Israeli forces, German leaders support the regime after the International Court of Justice ruled against Israel to stop genocide in Palestine, he said.

Yemen to Introduce Military Surprises in Red Sea Operations

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen's armed forces will introduce "military surprises" in their Red Sea operations, Ansarullah leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi says. "Our military operations will continue and advance and we have surprises that our enemies will not expect at all," al-Houthi said in a televised speech on Thursday. Yemeni forces have repeatedly launched drones and missiles against Israeli and Israel-bound ships since mid-November, saying they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians against Israel's war on Gaza. Al-Houthi said 54 ships have been targeted in Yemeni operations in support of Gaza so far, adding rarely does any ship associated with the Israeli enemy pass through Bab al-Mandab. "We have launched 384 missiles and drones at the ships that were moving towards the occupying regime in the Red Sea," he said. The United States and Britain began striking Yemen last month in order to dissuade the country from targeting Israeli ships which carry arms and logistics for the onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip. Al-Houthi said the Americans and the British have received "painful blows" from the Yemeni armed forces in retaliation. "The American and British attacks have not affected our military power in any way. On the contrary, the process of increasing and expanding our attacks continues. The Americans are now admitting their failure to achieve their aggressive goals against our country and are surprised by our strength," he said. Al-Houthi said what insures the navigation security in the Red Sea is for any country not to participate in the Israeli aggression against Gaza. He said the Americans and those who drag the United States towards the militarization of the Red Sea are the ones who undermine international navigation. Yemenis watch an address by Ansarullah leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi in capital Sana'a, January 11, 2024. Al-Houthi also criticized the silence of the regional countries on the "crimes committed by the Zionists against the Palestinians". He said if Muslims and Arabs helped the people of Gaza, "these people could finish off the enemy in the war fronts". "Why is the Islamic Ummah's level of support for the Palestinian people not the same as that of the United States and the West for the Zionist enemy?" he asked. Arab countries, al-Houthi said, cannot shirk their responsibility, "because this has serious consequences for them". "Genocide and heinous crimes in Palestine reveal the truth of Zionists' hatred of Muslims, especially Arabs. The Arabs are the first to be targeted by the Zionist Jews and they should act quickly... unfortunately, among the Arabs, they are very indifferent to the conspiracies against them." Al-Houthi also said most Arab-Islamic countries have not done anything about the Israeli threat to the Islamic Ummah, adding "Iran was the first country to support Palestine against the Zionist enemy". The Islamic Ummah, he said, should wake up from its slumber and fulfill its responsibilities with wisdom and insight. "The Islamic Ummah should learn from the resistance of Iraq, which defeated America. The Ummah should learn from the efficiency and effectiveness of the Yemen front, which even the enemy has admitted."



IRAN NEWS



IRCS Ready to Help Flood-Hit Pakistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The president of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) sent a message of condolence to his counterpart in the Pakistan Red Crescent, expressing the Society's readiness to support the flood-affected people in the port city of Gwadar. In a message to his Pakistani counterpart Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari on Wednesday, Pir Hossein Kolivand expressed Iran's readiness to send relief and medical teams to help humanitarian operations in Pakistan. Heavy torrential rains wreaked havoc in the port city of Gwadar, Kech district, and other parts of Balochistan, suspending normal life and traffic on the coastal highway that cut off Gwadar and Omara from Karachi and other parts of the province. It was the hardest rain spell in Gwadar district after 2010 when heavy rains lashed due to a cyclone that hit the coast of Gwadar. The officials said that during the last 12 hours, the coastal district has received over 100 millimeters of rain which is unusual.

Iran, Qatar Discuss Latest Efforts Aimed at Cessation of Israel's War on Gaza



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Qatar's foreign ministers have discussed the latest political efforts that have been taken towards potential cessation of the Israeli regime's ongoing war of genocide against the Gaza Strip. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani held the discussion during a telephone conversation on Thursday. The top diplomats addressed the initiatives that had been proposed so far towards potential establishment of a ceasefire, exchange of captives, and transfer of international humanitarian supplies to the war-hit people of Gaza. More than 30,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed as a result of the military onslaught so far. Israel launched the campaign on October 7 last year following al-Aqsa Storm, a surprise operation by Gaza's resistance movements against the occupied territories, during which hundreds were taken captive. A week-long humanitarian ceasefire in late November saw an exchange of 240 Palestinian abductees held by Israel with 105 captives, including 81 Israelis and 24 foreigners, in Gaza. Israel believes 130 captives still remain in Gaza, while there are roughly 7,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails, many of whom have been detained without charge. On Tuesday, Qatar's Al Jazeera television network reported details of an alleged prisoner swap deal between Israel and Hamas, under which the occupying regime would free 400 Palestinian abductees in exchange for the release of 40 held in captivity by the Gaza-based resistance group. The swap deal, which will be accompanied by a six-week-long truce, came as part of recent talks in Paris among Israeli, American, Egyptian, and Qatari representatives, the report said.

Iran, Russia Sign 19 Cooperation Documents



TEHRAN - Iran and Russia signed 19 cooperation documents during the closing ceremony of the 17th Joint Economic Commission between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation in Tehran. The final document was signed by Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji and Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, the commission co-chairs, and 18 others were inked by other officials. Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for Engineering, Research, and Technology Vahid-Reza Zeidifard and Russian Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin signed the document to cooperate in scientific and technical fields of the oil and gas industry. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed by the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Russia's ZN Vostok (ZNV) and an MoU was also inked by Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) and the Russian side. Other memorandums aimed at promoting cooperation between the two countries' energy sectors, universities, free trade zones, and knowledge-based companies and research centers were also signed. Owji made the announcement on Wednesday while speaking at the 17th meeting of the intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation between Russia and Iran. The meeting, held in the Iranian capital Tehran, was chaired by Iran's oil minister and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak. The Iranian minister said that the two sides signed 15 documents that call for mutual cooperation in nearly a dozen fields. "We have signed memoranda of understanding in

political, economic and transportation fields, with some of them calling for cooperation in oil and gas sector," he said, adding that Iranian and Russian representatives, at the Wednesday meeting, also agreed to implement the MoUs previously signed by the two countries. According to the Iranian minister, other fields of cooperation discussed at the meeting include agriculture, transportation, generators, wagons, turbines, and the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway. Expansion of cooperation on space and peaceful nuclear energy programs were also discussed, while ways were explored to remove obstacles in banking and monetary fields as well as customs, among other issues, he said. Iranian and Russian officials have held talk, discussing a host of issues including the Rasht-Astara railway project, with both sides stressing the need for speeding up the construction of the crucial railway. Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazpash hosted Russian Presidential Aide Igor Levitin and his accompanying delegation on Wednesday, according to a press release by the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development. The two sides discussed several issues including transit and transportation between Iran and Russia, exploring ways to boost cooperation in those fields. They particularly stressed the need for accelerating the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway, a project in northern Iran that will be key to transit of cargo through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Iran's to Launch Pars-2 Satellite by Mach 2025



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's Space Agency has unveiled a plan to launch the Pars-2 satellite by the end of the upcoming Iranian calendar year, which concludes on March 21, 2025. Head of Iran's Space Agency Hassan Salariyeh confirmed that the design and construction of the Pars-2 satellite will be finalized within the next year, ensuring its readiness for launch. The Pars-2 satellite is distinguished by its remarkable imaging accuracy of 8 meters. Salariyeh made these remarks during a press conference held following the successful launch of the Pars-1 satellite. He highlighted that Pars-1 was launched into orbit by the Russian Soyuz satellite carrier, accompanied by nearly 18 other primary satellites. Salariyeh underscored the competitive landscape of global satellite launches, and elaborated on the Pars satellite, characterizing it as an optical imaging satellite tailored for capturing high-resolution images of Earth's surface, with resolutions spanning 5 to 15 meters. These capabilities render it invaluable for applications in meteorology and agriculture. Salariyeh reaffirmed the agency's dedication to serving various industries, citing ongoing satellite projects like Pars-1, Tolou-3, Zafar-2, Pars-2, and Pars-3, each tailored with specific resolutions for distinct purposes. He disclosed that out of the recent 11 launches, 10 were domestic, with the twelfth being international. Despite the delay, Pars-1 was successfully launched. Looking ahead, Salariyeh expressed optimism about future launches from the Chabahar Space Center, stating, "God willing, from next year, we will have sun-synchronous launches." He concluded by restating the completion timeline for Pars-2's design and construction, highlighting its 8-meter imaging accuracy.



FM Meets Oman's Deputy FM in Tehran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has met with Oman's Deputy Foreign Minister for diplomatic affairs Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali bin Issa Alharthy. The meeting took place in the Iranian capital Tehran on Wednesday, according to the Telegram page of the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman. In this meeting, Amir-Abdollahian highlighted the tangible growth of relations between Tehran and Muscat, expressing gratitude for Oman's positions in supporting the Palestinian people and Gaza. The Deputy Foreign Minister of Oman also expressed satisfaction with the meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister and conveyed warm regards from Oman's Foreign Minister. He presented a report on their discussions within the framework of the tenth meeting of Strategic Consultation Committee between the two nations, evaluating the state of bilateral relations as satisfactory. Alharthy praised the Islamic Republic of Iran's positive stance toward Palestine and its support for the people of Gaza and expressed hope that ongoing efforts to achieve a comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza would yield results swiftly.

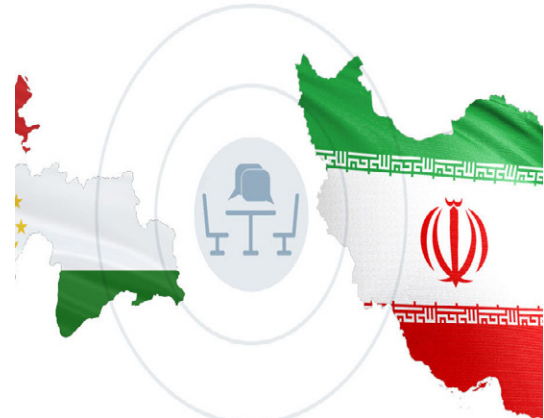
Iran's Armed Forces Reliable Sources of Security in Region

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says the armed forces of the Islamic Republic have become reliable and trustworthy forces in providing security for Iran and the countries of the region. This credibility is due to the power of faith and connection to the divine absolute power among the Iranian forces, President Raisi said in a meeting with a group of Air Force commanders. The president touched on the unique features of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic, saying their strength, capability and bravery has empowered the country and stabilized national security. President Raisi touched on the evolution and transformation that the Islamic Revolution created in the hearts and souls of the officers and commanders of the Iranian armed forces. This transformation, the president said, became evident during the Holy Defense of the 1980s against Iraq, the defense of the country's

borders, and the support of the forces defending holy shrines. He cited belief in God and people, and their self-belief among the principles and hallmarks of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic, especially the Air Force. He called the self-sufficiency of the Air Force in building up-to-date and advanced defensive and offensive equipment such as radar, drone and missile systems as a manifestation of the force's self-belief. The president reiterated the government's commitment to providing resources needed to strengthen the country's defense base, saying any effort to this end is an investment for security and creating deterrence against the enemy. Raisi also hailed "good" steps taken by the Air Force to develop combat and military equipment and capabilities by using the capacity of technological and knowledge-based companies.



Iranian, Tajik Energy Ministers Discuss Joint Projects in Video Talks



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Energy Ali Akbar Mehrabian and his Tajik counterpart Delir Juma in a video conference have reviewed joint projects. During a virtual meeting with the Minister of Energy and Water of Tajikistan on Wednesday, Mehrabian emphasized the follow-up of the document of Iran-Tajikistan joint cooperation in the 16th Joint Commission of the two countries. He thanked the government of the Republic of Tajikistan for holding the 16th Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic, Trade and Scientific Commission and the Iran-Made Expo in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe. Emphasizing the readiness of Iranian companies to be active in the projects of Tajikistan, Mehrabian referred to the services of Iranian companies in all fields, especially in the field of large turbines and technical sectors, noting that Iranian companies can help to speed up projects in Tajikistan. Talking about the Sangtuda 2 Hydroelectric Power Plant and the construction of a solar power plant in the Vorukh region were among other topics at the virtual meeting of the two sides.

More Than 40 Killed in Fire in Bangladesh Capital

DHAKA (Dispatches) - At least 43 people were killed and dozens injured after a fire blazed through a seven-storey building in an upscale neighborhood in the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka late Thursday, health authorities said. "So far 43 people have died from the fire," Bangladesh's health minister Samanta Lal Sen told AFP after visiting the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and an adjoining burn hospital. Police inspector Bacchu Mia said one more person died at Dhaka's main police hospital to bring the death toll to 44. Sen said at least 40 injured people were being treated in the city's main burn hospital. "None of them are out of danger," he told AFP. Fire department official Mohammad Shihab said the blaze originated in a popular biriyani restaurant in Dhaka's Bailey Road at 9:50pm Thursday (1550 GMT), and quickly spread to the upper floors, trapping scores of people. Firefighters brought the blaze under control in two hours, he said. They rescued 75 people alive, a statement from the fire service said.



China Slams Foreign Criticism of Upcoming Hong Kong's Article 23 National Security Law



HONG KONG (Dispatches) - China on Thursday criticized British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and other foreign politicians for "smeared" an upcoming Hong Kong security law, as local authorities said feedback on the law had been largely positive. The law, known as Article 23, will target crimes including treason, theft of state secrets, espionage, sabotage, sedition and "external interference", including from foreign governments. A public consultation period on the proposed legislation ended this week, with the city's legislature, dominated by pro-Beijing lawmakers, expected to soon approve the draft laws. The Hong Kong Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on Thursday "to express their strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" to British Foreign Secretary Cameron and other politicians' making "irresponsible remarks" on the legislation of Article 23. The ministry said they were "maliciously smearing and attacking Hong Kong's human rights, freedoms and rule of law". The statement followed remarks from Cameron on Wednesday that Britain had raised its concerns with the Hong Kong authorities. "Vague references to 'external forces' and the new offence of 'external interference' threaten the legitimate and lawful diplomatic and consular activity as protected in the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations", Cameron said. The U.S. State Department also said in a statement on Wednesday that it was closely monitoring the legislation and its implications for U.S. citizens, investments, and companies operating in Hong Kong. "We are particularly concerned by Hong Kong authorities' proposal to adopt broad and vague definitions of 'state secrets' and 'external interference' that could be used to eliminate dissent through the fear of arrest and detention," department spokesperson Matthew Miller said. "We are also concerned that Hong Kong authorities will apply Article 23 extraterritorially in their ongoing campaign of transnational repression to intimidate and restrict the free speech of U.S. citizens and residents."



Divided G20 Blocked by Impasse Over Ukraine, Gaza

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - The first G20 finance ministers' meeting of the year ended without a joint statement due to deep divisions over the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, officials said. Host country Brazil has an ambitious agenda to use the rotating G20 presidency to amplify the voice of the global south and tackle inequality and climate change. But that was overshadowed by what it called an "impasse" at the two-day meeting in Sao Paulo. "It isn't possible (to reach) a final statement," Finance Minister Fernando Haddad told a news conference. "The impasse, as usual, is over the ongoing conflicts," he said, without explicitly mentioning Russia's invasion of Ukraine or Israel's military campaign against Palestinian militant group Hamas in the Gaza Strip. "We had nurtured the hope that more sensitive geopolitical issues could be debated exclusively" by the group's foreign ministers, who held a meeting in Rio de Janeiro last week that likewise failed to produce a joint statement. Haddad said that on financial issues, the G20 group -- which represents 80 percent of the global economy -- was unified. "But since the meeting last week in Rio de Janeiro didn't reach a joint statement, that ended up contaminating the establishment of consensus" at what Brazil had hoped would be a purely economic policy meeting, he said. German Finance Minister Christian Lindner had earlier said his country planned to insist any final statement address Russia's two-year-old war in Ukraine. The war has split the G20, with Western countries condemning the invasion and pouring military and financial aid into Ukraine. Russia -- also a G20 member -- has meanwhile courted support from fellow emerging powers such as Brazil, China and India. The group is also divided over Gaza, with the United States and Western allies reluctant to condemn Israel, even as non-Western members grow increasingly critical of a spiraling humanitarian crisis there. "We can't have business as usual at the G20 when there's a

war in Ukraine, Hamas terrorism and the humanitarian situation in Gaza," Lindner told journalists. "We oppose avoiding those issues. Even if we're central bankers and finance ministers, we represent the values of our countries and must defend the international rules-based order." The meetings are meant to lay the groundwork for the annual G20 leaders' summit, to be held in Rio in November. Despite a push from Western countries for the group to condemn President Vladimir Putin's invasion, the G20's last summit, held in New Delhi in September, ended with a watered-down statement that denounced the use of force but did not explicitly name Russia. The divisions do not look to have abated. "Obviously, we want to name Russia as the aggressor, and Ukraine as the victim," a French official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. On the global economy, the group voiced cautious optimism for a "soft landing" from the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, in an unsigned "Chair's Summary" released by Brazil in lieu of a joint statement. But "uncertainty remains high," it warned. "The global economy continues to face multiple challenges that reinforce each other and whose solutions require renewed multilateral cooperation. Among those are conflicts in many regions of the world; geoeconomic tensions; persistent inequalities, poverty, malnutrition and diseases," it said, in the only reference to the ongoing wars. It also cited "elevated debt vulnerabilities," "tighter financing conditions," and "challenges imposed by climate change." "Global growth is projected to stabilize in 2024 and the coming years at a subdued level," it said. Brazil had sought to push an international plan to ensure the world's super-rich pay what Haddad called their "fair share" of taxes, urging G20 nations to adopt a shared stance on preventing billionaire tax-dodging by July.

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.



Putin Warns West of Risk of Nuclear War

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin told Western countries they risked provoking a nuclear war if they sent troops to fight in Ukraine, warning that Moscow had the weapons to strike targets in the West. The war in Ukraine has triggered the worst crisis in Moscow's relations with the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Putin has previously spoken of the dangers of a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia, but his nuclear warning on Thursday was one of his most explicit. Addressing lawmakers and other members of the country's elite, Putin, 71, repeated his accusation that the West was bent on weakening Russia, and he suggested Western leaders did not understand how dangerous their meddling could be in what he cast as Russia's own internal affairs. He prefaced his nuclear warning with a specific reference to an idea, floated by French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday, of European NATO members sending ground troops to Ukraine - a suggestion that was quickly rejected by the United States, Germany, Britain and others. "Western

nations) must realise that we also have weapons that can hit targets on their territory. All this really threatens a conflict with the use of nuclear weapons and the destruction of civilisation. Don't they get that?" said Putin. Speaking ahead of a March 15-17 presidential election when he is certain to be re-elected for another six-year term, he lauded what he said was Russia's vastly modernised nuclear arsenal, the largest in the world. "Strategic nuclear forces are in a state of full readiness," he said, noting that new-generation hypersonic nuclear weapons he first spoke about in 2018 had either been deployed or were at a stage where development and testing were being completed. Visibly angry, Putin suggested Western politicians recall the fate of those like Nazi Germany's Adolf Hitler and France's Napoleon Bonaparte who had unsuccessfully invaded Russia in the past. "But now the consequences will be far more tragic," said Putin. "They think it (war) is a cartoon," he said, accusing Western politicians of forgetting what real war meant because they had not faced the same security challenges as Russians had in the last three decades.



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.

Ukraine Repels Russian Attacks But Situation Is Difficult

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian forces have pushed back Russian troops from the village of Orlivka, west of Avdiivka, but the situation on the eastern front remains difficult, Ukrainian army chief Oleksandr Syrskyi said. Orlivka is less than 2 kilometres (1-1/2 miles) northwest of Lastochkyne, which was occupied this week by Russian forces. Russian forces last week captured the eastern Ukrainian city of Avdiivka after a months-long assault and are pressing on other areas along the front line, Ukrainian authorities say. Ukraine's military said this week it had withdrawn from two more villages near Avdiivka, losing more territory as support from its Western allies runs short. "The enemy continues active offensive actions in many areas of the front line. The situation is particularly tense in the Avdiivka and Zaporizhzhia sectors," Syrskyi said on the Telegram messaging app. He said Russian assault units were trying to break through the Ukrainian defences and capture the settlements of Tonenka, Orlivka, Semenivka, Berdychi and Krasnohorivka. Syrskyi, who visited troops on the eastern front, said some commanders had revealed certain shortcomings in their "situational awareness and assessment of the enemy", which affected the sustainability of defence in certain areas. "I took all measures to remedy the situation on the ground, with the allocation of additional ammunition and material resources, as well as the necessary reserves," Syrskyi said. Russia's Defence Ministry, in its daily account of front-line activity, said its forces had secured more advantageous positions in the Avdiivka sector and inflicted losses on Ukrainian units around Orlivka and nearby villages. Reuters was unable to verify accounts from either side. A Ukrainian commander in the area described a "significant difference" in fighting

since Avdiivka changed hands. "Russians have slightly fewer opportunities to engage aviation. But artillery and FPV (First Person View) drones are used in large quantities," Maksym Zhorin, deputy commander of the Third Separate Assault Brigade, wrote on Telegram. "Beneath all this, there is a frenzy of infantry. Sometimes we observe groups of up to 40 people running through a field in a seemingly disorganised manner." The Third Brigade, in a separate posting, said its forces had pushed into the town of Krasnohorivka on armoured vehicles and forced dozens of Russian troops to flee.





Medvedev Cruises Into Dubai Semis

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Top seed Daniil Medvedev, after a battle in the second round, had a smoother outing in defeating Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 6-2, 6-3 in the quarterfinals of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships. Medvedev had needed three sets to oust Italian Lorenzo Sonego a day earlier, but the Russian rode 15 winners, three aces and just six unforced errors to dispatch Spain's Davidovich Fokina in one hour and 17 minutes. Fifth seed Ugo Humbert of France outlasted No. 3 Hubert Hurkacz of Poland, 3-6, 7-6 (8), 6-3 to advance to the semifinals against Medvedev. Humbert saved three match points in the second-set tiebreak. He hit 24 winners in the match lasting two hours and 24 minutes. Two other seeded players advanced when their unseeded opponents retired due to injury during their quarterfinal matches. No. 2 Andrey Rublev of Russia eliminated American Sebastian Korda 6-4, 4-3 (retired), and No. 7 Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan moved past the Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka 6-4, 4-1 (retired). Fourth-seeded Alejandro Tabilo won an all-Chilean second-round matchup in Santiago, Chile, beating Tomas Barrios Vera 6-2, 7-5. Tabilo won 91 percent of his first-serve points and did not face a break point. Tabilo advances to a quarterfinal match against Italy's Luciano Darderi, who downed Argentine qualifier Juan Manuel Cerundolo 6-3, 3-6, 6-3. Second-seeded Sebastian Baez of Argentina rallied past Peru's Juan Pablo Varillas 4-6, 6-4, 6-2. Baez's quarterfinal foe will be eighth-seeded Jaume Munar, who routed Spanish countryman

Albert Ramos-Vinolas 6-3, 6-1. In the other quarterfinals, third-seeded Arthur Fils of France will face Spain's Pedro Martinez, and top-seeded Nicolas Jarry of Chile will go up against French qualifier Corentin Moutet. Third-seeded Alex de Minaur of Australia overcame a slow start and emerged with a 1-6, 6-3, 6-3 win over fifth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece in the quarterfinals at Acapulco, Mexico. De Minaur is one win away from his second final of the year, having lost the championship match at Rotterdam, Netherlands, two weeks ago. His semifinal opponent will be Great Britain's Jack Draper, who eliminated Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic 6-2, 6-2. Second-seeded Holger Rune of Denmark eked out a 7-6 (2), 7-6 (0) victory over Germany's Dominik Koepfer. Rune had a set point at 5-3 of the first set but wound up needing two tiebreakers to advance. Next up he will oppose either sixth-seeded Casper Ruud of Norway or Ben Shelton of the United States. Meanwhile defending champion Alex De Minaur claimed his first career win over Stefanos Tsitsipas to reach the semifinals of the ATP hardcourt tournament in Acapulco, Mexico. Australia's De Minaur had come up empty in 10 prior meetings against Tsitsipas, and it looked like more of the same when the Greek raced through the first set 6-1. But third-seeded De Minaur, coming off a runner-up finish to Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner in Rotterdam this month, rallied for a 1-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory and booked a last-four clash with Britain's Jack Draper.

Rashford Asks Critics to Have a Bit More Humanity



LONDON (Dispatches) - Marcus Rashford says he can take "any headline" but asked his critics to show a "bit more humanity" before they question his commitment to Manchester United and love of football. The England forward has struggled this season, scoring just five times for his under-performing club side — in stark contrast to last season, when he scored a career-best 30 goals for United. Rashford has also faced criticism over his off-field conduct. Reports in late January suggested Rashford had spent an evening at a Belfast nightclub before missing training with United. And United manager Erik ten Hag branded Rashford's decision to go to a separate nightclub event after October's 3-0 derby defeat by Manchester City "unacceptable". But Rashford, writing in The Players' Tribune yesterday, said he wanted to put his side of the story. "So 99 per cent of the time, I can ignore the noise," he said. "But sometimes, certain lines get crossed, and I can't help but want people to just understand who I am as a person." He added he understands the media "game": "They're not really writing about me," he said. "It's like they're writing about this character, 'Marcus Rashford'. It can't just be about me as a 26-year-old lad on a night out, or a lad getting a parking ticket. It's got to be about how much my car costs, guessing my weekly salary, my jewellery or even my tattoos. It's got to be about my body language, and questioning my morals, and speculating about my family, and my football future. There's a tone to it that you don't get with all footballers. Let's just leave it at that." Rashford said he felt some of the criticism goes back to the coronavirus pandemic when he launched a high-profile campaign to tackle child food poverty.

Curry's Bounce-Back Game Carries Warriors Over Knicks

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Golden State star Stephen Curry found his groove, scoring 31 points and grabbing 11 rebounds to lead the Warriors to a 110-99 NBA victory over the New York Knicks. Curry was red-hot going into the All-Star break but had shot just 31.5 percent in his last three games — including connecting on just 21.6 percent of his shots from three-point range. After going 0-for-7 in the first half of the Warriors' win over the lowly Washington Wizards on Tuesday, Curry burst out of the gates in this one, tallying 11 points with seven rebounds in the first quarter. He opened the scoring at Madison Square Garden with the first of his eight three-pointers and had 17 points and 10 rebounds by halftime. Jonathan Kuminga added 25 points for Golden State, who grabbed a quick 14-0 lead and never trailed. Jalen Brunson scored 27 points to lead the Knicks, who had the deficit down to four midway through the fourth quarter but with key contributors Julius Randle and OG Anunoby sidelined could never gain the upper hand. "I thought our whole team defended at a high level tonight," said Warriors coach Steve Kerr, who singled out Moses Moody's defense on Brunson. "We're playing confidently right now, we got off to a great start and that set a really good tone." In other early games, two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 24 points and pulled down 10 rebounds for Milwaukee in the Bucks' 111-99 victory over the Hornets in Charlotte. Malik Beasley made five three-pointers on the way to 19 points for the Bucks, who pushed their winning streak to four games and completed a season sweep of the Hornets. It wasn't as lopsided as their other three victories over Charlotte this season — all by more than 30 points — but it was a convincing win nevertheless. Milwaukee never trailed and led by as many as 25 over a Charlotte team led by Brandon Miller's 21 points. Antetokounmpo and the rest of Milwaukee's starters sat out most of the fourth quarter. "I thought overall our focus was really good," Bucks coach Doc Rivers said. "What I like is we're having defensive runs. We'll be trading baskets and then we'll get one, two, three, four, five stops in a row." Another sparkling effort from rookie sensation Victor Wembanyama

helped the San Antonio Spurs snap a five-game losing streak with a 132-118 victory over Western Conference contenders Oklahoma City. French star Wembanyama scored 28 points with 13 rebounds and five blocked shots. The fourth quarter featured four lead changes, but with three and a half minutes remaining Wembanyama produced a pair of three-pointers and a big block of a three-point attempt by Thunder rookie Chet Holmgren, and the Spurs pulled away for the win. Wembanyama said 39 assists were testament to the Spurs' chemistry. "We're just playing with heart. I think it's one of the best ways to come back home after a month away," Wembanyama said as the team returned home after a nine-game road trip. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points, Jalen Williams added 26 and Holmgren contributed 23 for the Thunder, who slipped a game behind the Minnesota Timberwolves for top spot in the Western Conference.



Pogba Handed Four-Year Doping Ban



ROME (Dispatches) - France star Paul Pogba said he was "shocked and heartbroken" after being given a four-year ban from football by Italy's anti-doping tribunal following a positive test for testosterone last August, his club Juventus said. A spokesman for the club told AFP it had been notified of the decision against the 30-year-old World Cup winner, who had been provisionally suspended in September. "We received notification from the tribunal this morning," the spokesman said. Italy's anti-doping body did not immediately respond when contacted by AFP. Pogba announced he would appeal the ruling, which risks bringing a premature end to his career. "I am sad, shocked and heartbroken that everything I have built in my professional playing career has been taken away from me," he posted on Instagram. Declaring the verdict was "incorrect", he denied ever using performance-enhancing substances. "When I am free of legal restrictions the full story will become clear, but I have never knowingly or deliberately taken any supplements that violate anti-doping regulations", he insisted. "As a consequence of the decision announced today I will appeal this before the Court of Arbitration for Sport." The ban means Pogba will not be able to play again until the 2027/28 season, by which time he will be 34. Anti-doping prosecutors had called for the four-year ban to be imposed on the former Manchester United midfielder, who tested positive following Juventus's opening match of the Italian Serie A season against Udinese on August 20, during which he was an unused substitute. A month later a B sample confirmed the presence of testosterone, and he had been provisionally suspended since. Pogba's representatives said the testosterone came from a food supplement prescribed by a doctor he consulted in the United States. The ban could have been limited to two years if Pogba had been able to prove he was not at fault, or even just a few months if the use of the substance took place "out of competition and (was) not related to his level of performance". Pogba, who returned to Juventus for a second spell in 2022 after six years at United, was a key member of the France team that won the World Cup in Russia in 2018, scoring in the final against Croatia. His positive doping test came as he was trying to put behind him a difficult first season back at Juve, in which he struggled with fitness problems and made just 10 appearances, while also missing France's defence of the World Cup in Qatar due to injury.

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.

