

Ebrahim Raisi, the Current Iranian President, Has Been Re-Elected for the 6th Term of Assembly of Experts by Winning 82.5% of Votes in South Khorasan Province in East of the Country

IRAN NEWS

Head of the National Crisis Management Organization of Iran Has Announced That 16 Counties and 1,947 Villages in the Southeastern Iranian Province of Sistan-Baluchestan Have Been Stricken by Flood in the Last Few Days

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IRAN ELECTION TURNOUT OVER 40%



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Primary results from the Iranian parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections show that the turnout has surpassed 40 percent. Citing unofficial statistics, Iranian media reported on Saturday that the rate of participation in the nationwide vote for the 12th term of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) and the 6th term of the Assembly of Experts was over 40%, with the results of the vote counting in a number of constituencies yet to be released. The polls opened at 8 a.m. local time (0430) on Friday and the voting began at 59,000 polling stations across the country, with more than 15,000 candidates competing for 290 seats in the Iranian parliament, and 144 candidates vying for positions at the eight-year-term Assembly of Experts, an 88-member body in charge of overseeing the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution with a position of authority to either appoint or dismiss the Leader. Voting for the two elections ended at midnight local time after 16 straight hours. A total of 61.17 million people, comprising 30.94 million men and 30.22 million women, were eligible to vote in the two elections, with the Iranian Interior Ministry saying more than 25 million cast their ballots at the polls. The voting was initially scheduled to end at 18:00 local time but was extended three times, with each extension lasting for two hours. In a message on Saturday, President Ebrahim Raisi expressed his gratitude to the Iranian people for their remarkable turnout. Raisi said the enthusiastic and conscious presence of Iranians in Friday's vote was a "big no" to the global arrogance after its historic defeat in last year's riots, which broke out following the death of a 22-year-old woman in the capital Tehran.

HEZBOLLAH POUNDS ISRAELI MILITARY SITES IN RETALIATION FOR AGGRESSION ON GAZA



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Hezbollah has conducted multiple strikes against Israeli military positions in the northern sector of the 1948 Israeli-occupied territories, in yet another retaliatory operation amid the war on Gaza. Lebanon's al-Mayadeen television, citing a brief Hezbollah statement, reported that the group launched two surface-to-surface Falaq (Dusk) missiles at Kharbet Ma'ar base late on Friday, and the projectiles hit the designated targets precisely. Hezbollah fighters also struck a gathering of Israeli soldiers inside the Ruwaisat al-Alam outpost in the occupied Kfar Chouba Hills, causing casualties among the troops. Moreover, the Lebanese resistance group targeted Israeli forces stationed near the al-Menara military site, leaving several soldiers injured as a result. It also rained down rockets on other Israeli military sites, including one in the occupied Lebanese village of Hounin and al-Baghdadi outpost. A gathering of Israeli troops came under a drone strike as the troops were about to take a position in the Ma'ayan Baruch kibbutz. Additionally, Israeli soldiers positioned near Ramim barracks were targeted with a salvo of rockets. There were no immediate reports about possible casualties and the extent of damage caused. The Israeli regime launched the devastating war on Gaza on October 7 after the territory's Hamas-led Palestinian resistance groups carried out a surprise retaliatory attack, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, against the occupying entity. The Israeli military has also been carrying out attacks against the Lebanese territory since then, prompting retaliatory strikes from Lebanon's resistance movement Hezbollah in support of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. The movement has vowed to keep up its retaliatory operations as long as the Tel Aviv regime continues its onslaught on Gaza.



Raisi in Algeria in First Visit of Iranian President in 14 Years

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi arrived in the Algerian capital to take part in a meeting of the world's leading natural gas producers and to enhance the Islamic Republic's cooperation with regional and international alliances. Heading a high-ranking politico-economic delegation, Raisi departed Tehran for Algiers in the early hours of Saturday to attend the 7th meeting of the leaders of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). During the visit, which comes at the official invitation of Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, the Iranian chief executive is scheduled to meet with other top officials from the 19-member gathering of the world's leading natural gas producers. The two presidents are also set to sign several memoranda of understanding on the sidelines of the international meeting. Raisi's trip marks the fourth visit of Iranian presidents to the North African country, which took place with a gap of about 14 years after former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit in 2010. The GECF, which is comprised of 13 permanent members and seven observers, was established in 2008 based on an initial proposal by Iran as one of the world's largest holders of natural gas reserves. Raisi's trip comes on the backdrop of Iran's efforts to boost relations with countries in North Africa, including Sudan, with which Iran had strained relations in recent years, and with Egypt, a country that has had no diplomatic relations with Iran since 1979. Speaking to reporters before his departure, Raisi stressed that Iran, as one of the largest producers and exporters of gas, and thanks to its extensive connections with the countries of the Persian Gulf region and Central Asia, can become a "regional hub" for gas production and export. "This capacity should be introduced to the world in order to provide the basis for strengthening Iran's interaction with other gas-producing and exporting countries," he added. Pointing to his upcoming meetings with Tebboune and the visit to the African country after 14 years, the Iranian president said, "In

the eyes of our people, Algeria is a country that has fought colonialism and Iranian people have very good memories of the Algerian nation's steadfastness and resistance against colonizers." Touching on Algeria's position in North Africa and the Islamic world, Raisi said Algeria has a privileged position in the African continent and strengthening the bilateral relations can effectively help to improve the level of Iran's relations with African countries, especially the countries in the north of the continent. "Africa in general and the Islamic countries of this continent in particular have a privileged position in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and I hope that this trip can play a significant role in strengthening the relations between West Asia and North Africa," he said. Referring to the important role of the two countries in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), OPEC and the GECF, Raisi said, "The active role of Iran and Algeria in regional organizations and the Islamic world has brought us closer to each other." The Iranian president added that the need to counter unilateralism, which is emphasized by Iran and Algeria as well as many other independent countries of the world, and also their common views in supporting the rights of the oppressed Palestinians in Gaza are among the factors that have led to the proximity of Tehran and Algeria to each other. Raisi stressed that supporting the rights of Palestinians in Gaza as a main issue in the Muslim world and the international community will also be discussed in the bilateral meeting between the presidents of Iran and Algeria. Describing the Algerian and Iranian markets as a good opportunity for their businessmen, Raisi added, "In the meeting with the president of the friendly and brotherly country of Algeria, the important issue of strengthening relations and the cooperation between the two countries in the field of oil, gas and petrochemicals, in which both countries have good capacities, will also be discussed."

IRAN DISMISSES INVOLVEMENT IN UKRAINE WAR



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iranian ambassador to the United Nations categorically refuted the accusation of Iran's involvement in the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In a letter to President of the UN Security Council Yamazaki Kazuyuki on Friday, Saeed Iravani categorically rejected the "unfounded allegations leveled against the Islamic Republic of Iran in the joint statements delivered by the Permanent Representative and the Foreign Minister of Ukraine." The Iranian envoy said Ukraine has "erroneously claimed Iran was providing military support to the Russian Federation in the Ukraine crisis, in contravention of UNSC Resolution 2231." "The Islamic Republic of Iran has constantly taken a stance of impartiality since the outset of the Ukraine conflict and this principled position remains unchanged. Furthermore, Iran has consistently advocated for peace and the immediate cessation of hostilities in Ukraine and continues to do so," Iravani underlined. "Therefore, any claim regarding Iran's involvement in the sale, export, or transfer of arms in contravention of its international obligations and UNSC Resolution 2231 is completely unfounded and categorically rejected. Iran once more reaffirms its unwavering commitment to adhering to international humanitarian law," he stated. "I would also like to take this opportunity to reject the identical allegation and inappropriate reference made against my country in a joint statement delivered by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in connection with the Security Council briefing on 10 January 2024 under the agenda item entitled 'Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine,'" the ambassador added. He also called on the UNSC president to circulate the letter as a document of the Security Council.

UNEA-6 APPROVES IRAN-PROPOSED RESOLUTION ON COMBATING SAND, DUST STORMS



TEHRAN - The sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) has endorsed the draft resolution "Combating Sand and Dust Storms," which was proposed by Iran and endorsed by the international conference in Tehran in September 2023. The sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) was held from 26 February to 1 March 2024 at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The UNEA-6, which was attended by over 180 states, put on the agenda various topics such as the multilateral approach to climate change, biodiversity loss, pollutants, and waste. The UN Environment Assembly received some 19 resolutions and two proposals. Iran's proposed draft resolution dubbed "Combating Sand and Dust Storms" was submitted to the UNEA-6 to pursue the implementation of the decisions made in the Tehran international conference in September 2023. Ali Salajegheh, the deputy president of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the head of the Department of Environment, presiding over a high-ranking delegation of experts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and his own organization, took part in the UNEA-6. The Iranian official held meetings with representatives and ministers from China, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Qatar, Turkey, Azerbaijan Republic, Iraq, and Uzbekistan. Salajegheh also met with the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme Inger Andersen during the international assembly. Over the course of the mentioned meetings, the Iranian delegation and other parties held talks on issues such as relationships with neighboring states concerning environmental affairs, common environment-related concerns, as well as regional and international environmental issues.

Palestinian Factions Pledge to Continue Struggle Against Israel

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Palestinian factions have pledged to continue their struggle to confront the Israeli regime's atrocities against Palestinians, especially its genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip. In a statement on Friday, the factions reiterated their adherence to "confronting the Israeli aggression and genocidal war being waged against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and al-Quds with the US support and complicity." They also stressed the need for spirited resistance to thwart Israeli plots to forcibly displace Palestinians from their homes in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and al-Quds, emphasizing the illegality of settlement expansion activities per the UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Israel launched the genocidal war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas waged the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in response to the Israeli regime's intensified violence against Palestinians. Since the start of the offensive, the Tel Aviv regime has killed 30,228 Palestinians and injured 71,377 others. Last week, UN experts also warned that "any transfer of weapons or ammunition to Israel that would be used in Gaza is likely to violate international humanitarian law and must cease immediately." Meanwhile, representatives from the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement, including top members Mousa Abu Marzook and Husam Badran, met on Friday with Mikhail Bogdanov, the Russian president's special representative for the Middle East and Africa, to discuss Israel's ongoing genocidal war on Gaza. During the meeting, the delegates lauded Russia's supportive stance on the Palestinian issue and briefed Bogdanov on the fallout of the brutal Israeli aggression on the Palestinian territory, and its vicious crimes against civilians there. They underscored that resistance fighters will continue to defend the Palestinian nation until final liberation. The meeting comes as representatives from various Palestinian factions within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), including the Fatah movement, as well as delegates from Hamas and the Islamic Jihad resistance groups have gathered in Moscow to overcome an internal split.



IRAN NEWS



IRAN'S RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF PETROLEUM INDUSTRY WINS GECF AWARD

TEHRAN (Shana) - Iran's Research Institute of Petroleum Industry (RIPI) was awarded for doing unique research into flare gas collection and putting the research into practice on the sidelines of the 7th Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Summit of Heads of State and Government in Algiers, the capital of Algeria, on Friday. Azim Kalantari-Asl, the RIPI head, received the GECF Award for Long-Term Commitment to Natural Gas in 2024, during a ceremony attended by Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji. Last week, Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs and Trade Ahmad Asadzadeh said, "Given the great efforts and follow-up made by the Department for OPEC Affairs and Relations with Energy Communities to publicize Iran's achievements amid sanctions, the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry has been selected for a GECF award on the sidelines of the summit." GRI has a scientific-technical committee comprising the GECF member states' representatives, which has started work before the institute's official inauguration, mentioned the deputy, adding the committee has so far studied 30 plans submitted by the member states and picked five to implement. Among the selected plans is one of the five presented by Iran under the title "Plan for Flare Gases Management and Collection", said Asadzadeh, adding GRI has given the first priority to the Iranian plan.

IRAN-TURKEY TRADE EXCHANGES EXCEED \$500M IN JANUARY 2024



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The value of the trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in January 2024 surpassed \$500 million, registering a two-percent hike compared to January 2023, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) said. The institute put the value of the trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in January 2024 at \$501 million. According to the report, the two countries had exchanged \$493 million of non-oil goods in January 2023. Turkey exported \$324 million of products to Iran in January 2024, showing a 35-percent growth compared to last year's corresponding period. The neighboring country had exported \$240 million worth of goods to Iran in January 2023. Iran was Turkey's 7th export target market in the first month of the current year with 1.6% of Turkey's total exports sent to Iran. According to the statistics, Turkey had imported \$253 million worth of goods from Iran in January 2023. The trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in 2023 hit \$5.49 billion, showing a 14% decline compared to a year earlier, the report added.



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's oil minister said international peace and de-politicization of the energy trade are key factors in the development of the gas industry and materialization of the security of supply and demand of the natural gas in the global market. Speaking at the extraordinary ministerial meeting of the 7th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) held in Algiers, Javad Owji said geopolitical tensions and unilateral and multilateral sanctions are against principles of energy security. He added that the people in the developing countries are the main victims of any threat to the energy security. He went on to say that the regional and geopolitical developments, took place in the recent two years, have shown that the natural gas and its international trade is still considered as the vital factor in the security of the energy of the human communities in the world. The oil minister emphasized that promoting of the status of the forum at the world's gas market and playing a more effective role is an inevitable necessity for the growth and development of the developing countries. "Accordingly" he said, "I suggest that cooperation of member states of the forum should be improved at the strategic, managerial and technical levels." Iran's oil minister invited member states to take part at the 26th Ministerial Meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum which is slated to be held in Iran late in 2024. Meanwhile on the sidelines of the meeting and speaking to reporters Owji said that the average annual increase in Iran's gas production from 2012 to 2022 was over two times the average rise

in the global output in spite of brutal sanctions imposed on the country. Owji added Iran registered a 5.2 percent rise while the global increase stood at 2.5 percent. Statistics released by reliable international organizations show that natural gas production in Iran has witnessed an upward trend since 2011, said the oil minister, adding illegal U.S. sanctions have failed to stop or reverse Iran's gas output growth. Touching upon the recent sabotage on Iran's oil industry, the enemies attacked the gas transmission pipelines in winter to cause dissatisfaction among the public, but the oil experts fixed the damaged pipelines at the shortest time possible and thwarted the terrorists' plots. According to the statistics, global natural gas trade is predicted to increase 36 percent by 2050, said Owji, adding it shows gas is a reliable and economical energy for many of the world economies. He, however, added the increasing need for energy caused by global population and economic growth should be met by finding solutions and diversifying energies according to conditions and potentials of each country. To that end, huge investments in natural gas supply chain, supportive macro policies, market stability, and free access to financial resources are required, the oil minister underlined. Owji said Iran, as one of the largest holders of proven gas reserves in the world, is ready to cooperate with all member states of the GECF in exploration, drilling, development, production, natural gas distribution, joint ventures, natural gas swap, technical and engineering exports, technical know-how transfer, and human resources projects.

IRAN URGES MULTILATERAL COOPERATION TO TACKLE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS



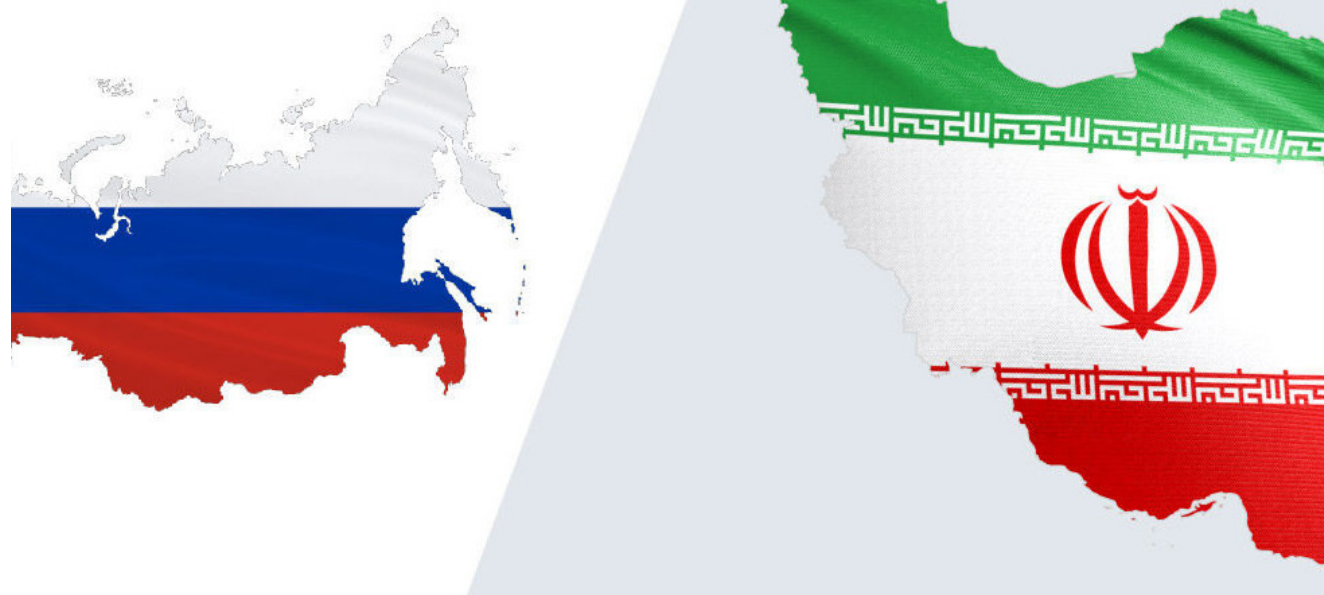
TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Head of Iran's Department of Environment (DoE) called for broader bilateral and multilateral cooperation for resolving the environmental problems in the region and the world. Ali Salajeqeh, who is also Iran's Vice President, made the remarks at the second day of his visit to the Kenyan capital of Nairobi for participating in the 6th United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). In his meeting with the executive secretary of the United Nations Environment Assembly, Salajeqeh pointed out that resolving the environmental problems in the region and world require an increase in the bilateral- and multilateral cooperation. He met and held talks with the environment ministers of Malaysia, China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Republic of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Kenya to discuss bilateral ties and issues of the mutual interests. Meantime, Secretary of the Nationwide Headquarters to Counter the Dust Phenomenon Ali Mohammad Tahmasbi, who has traveled to Kenya along with the head of the Department of Environment (DoE) to take part in the 6th edition of the UN Environment Assembly, said that 19 resolutions was proposed at the assembly and one of them was Iran-proposed resolution about the dust particles. The 6th United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) kicked off in Nairobi, Kenya on February 26 for reviewing the 19 draft resolutions and two draft decisions previously approved and sent by the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR).



Iran, Russia to Open Joint Innovation Center Soon

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of the Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology Hassan Zamanian has said that the joint innovation center of Iran and Russia will be inaugurated soon. Speaking in a meeting with Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation Konstantin Mogilevsky, Zamanian pointed to the problems that Iranian medical science students are facing in Russia and called for the establishment of an office in the Russian Science Ministry for Iranian students. "We believe that Western-ranking institutions deliberately announce the achievements of our universities less than they actually are so that we do not get high positions in the ranking," he said. Meanwhile, Mogilevsky pointed to the high capacity of Iranian universities in the field of research and technology. The areas of cooperation will be determined in the joint committees and will soon be signed by the high-ranking officials. He stressed the

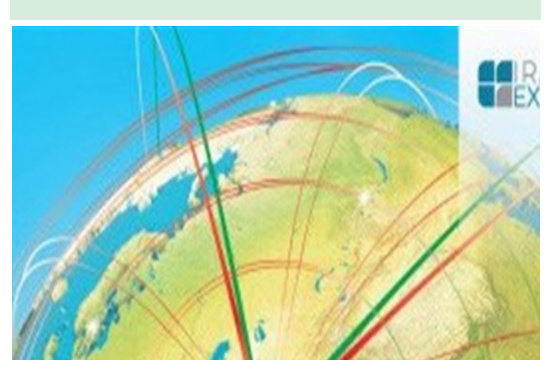
geographical proximity and countering the West's sanctions as the reasons for the closeness between Iran and Russia in recent years. There has been scientific and academic cooperation between the two countries, he added. Meanwhile Iran and Russia have inked an initial document on comprehensive health cooperation between the two countries. The agreement was signed by Mohammad-Hossein Niknam, a special aide to Iranian minister of health, and Sergei Glagolev, the Russian deputy health minister, on the sidelines of the 17th Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission Cooperation in Tehran on Friday. The agreement followed several rounds of talks between the two sides on different areas including shared production of medicine and medical equipment, health researches, modern and digital technologies, medical education, academic cooperation, training health experts, and management of pandemic and non-pandemic diseases.



IRAN ONE OF MOST SUCCESSFUL MEDICINE EXPORTERS IN REGION

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The head of the Iran Food and Drug Administration (IFDA) described Iran as one of the most successful medicine exporters in the region. Seyyed Haidar Mohammadi made remarks at the opening ceremony of the respiratory medicines factory where he also said that Iran has a lot to say in the pharmaceutical industry. "We are one of the most successful drug exporters in the region," the IFDA chairman said. "With the sanctions against our country in place, if we wanted to even just import the drugs that we have managed to produce, it would not be possible for us," he added. Mohammadi continued, "In the meeting I had with the Deputy Minister of Health of Russia, he was surprised at Iran's progress in the pharmaceutical industry despite tough and long-term sanctions." He further revealed and condemned the lies told by Western countries who claim to have not sanctioned drugs and medicine for Iranians.

IRAN EXPO 2024 an Opportunity to Spur Exports of Gems, Precious Stones



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The IRAN EXPO 2024 provides a suitable opportunity for the participation of activists working in the field of gems and precious stones, the head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) for knowledge-based products and services export promotion office said. The activists of this industry will showcase their export potential and capabilities to the visiting foreign delegations. At the initiative taken by the office, a conference on the opportunities for the export of gems and precious stones was held at Milad Hall of Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds to review the export opportunities of the target countries and identify the market of countries owning the industry. Head of the office Mohammad Reza Karimzadeh emphasized that Iran, benefiting from diversified mineral resources and proper capacities in the field of precious stones and also experienced experts in the field of designing, manufacturing and exporting, can take advantage of the opportunity to export these products overseas. He called on both the public and private sectors to cooperate to spur the export of these products abroad. He described as important to take advantage of the good experiences of countries such as China, Thailand, Italy and the Netherlands in the field of precious stones. Karimzadeh pointed to the necessity of the development of specialized laboratories in the field of gems and precious stones and added, "We should concentrate on processing the product and training expert manpower in this sector observing requirements of international standards."

GAZA OFFICIALS REPORT 4 MORE CHILD MALNUTRITION DEATHS

GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) - Four more children have died of "malnutrition and dehydration" in war-torn Gaza, the Hamas-ruled territory's health ministry said on Friday, the latest such reported deaths as famine warnings mount. The deaths occurred at Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza, ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra said in a statement, noting that the number of child "malnutrition and dehydration" deaths now totalled 10. Earlier Friday, a spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA told reporters that "if something doesn't change, a famine is almost inevitable" in Gaza. "Once a famine is declared, it is too late for too many people," said the spokesman, Jens Laerke. Global attention turned to the dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza on Thursday, when the health ministry said more than 100 people were killed after desperate Palestinians rushed an aid convoy. Israeli troops opened fire as Palestinian civilians scrambled for food supplies during a chaotic melee.



HAITIAN GANG LEADER VOWS TO FIGHT PRIME MINISTER, VIOLENCE SURGES



PORT-AU-PRINCE (Dispatches) - Haitian gang leader Jimmy Cherizier, also known as Barbecue, warned on Friday he would keep trying to oust Prime Minister Ariel Henry, and asked families to keep children from going to school to "avoid collateral damages" as violence surges in parts of the capital. Heavy gunfire and traffic disruptions were seen in some areas of Haiti's capital, where more people fled homes close to the fighting as burnt buses lay on the streets and burning barricades filled the air with thick, gray smoke. "The battle will last as long as it needs to. We will keep fighting Ariel Henry. To avoid collateral damage, keep the kids at home," the gang leader said at a press conference. Cherizier is a former police officer who heads an alliance of gangs and disrupted the country when he blocked its biggest oil terminal in 2022. He has faced sanctions from both the United Nations and the United States Department of Treasury. By late Friday, there were reports armed men had attempted to take control of the capital's main container port, as gangs threatened to attack more of the city's police stations. Reuters was unable to immediately verify these reports. A video, meanwhile, went viral on social media appearing to show two murdered policemen, which SYNAPHA police union leader Lionel Lazare told Reuters depicted the killing of some of the four officers who were slain on Thursday. Members of another police union, the SPNH, gathered outside the force headquarters earlier in the day calling for the recovery of the bodies. In a statement, Prime Minister Henry's office said it was "outraged by the acts of violence and terror orchestrated by armed bandits," and expressed condolences to victims' families, saying the government would continue to work to resolve the conflict. Violence ramped up during Henry's visit to Kenya this week. The two countries signed earlier in the day a security deal that Nairobi hopes will satisfy a domestic court's objections to its plan to send 1,000 police officers to lead a U.N.-approved mission aimed at tackling gang violence in Haiti.

IMPUNITY ENDEMIC IN S. SUDAN AHEAD OF PLANNED ELECTIONS



GENEVA (Dispatches) - Armed conflict, violence and entrenched impunity persist in South Sudan as it prepares to hold its first elections, the UN commission investigating human rights in the country said Friday. The world's newest nation has struggled to find its footing since gaining independence from Sudan in 2011, battling violence, endemic poverty and natural disasters. "As South Sudan prepares to end its fragile political transition and to hold its first elections in December 2024, armed conflict and gross human rights violations persist," the commission said in its annual report to the UN Human Rights Council. "Millions of people have been displaced, deprived, traumatised, and continue to live in fear," said the report covering events in 2023. As South Sudan's transition neared completion, the risk of further mass violence and accompanying gross human rights violations remained ever-present. "Patterns of violence, violations and entrenched impunity continue to blight the lives of an extremely vulnerable population. The already-dire humanitarian situation will deteriorate further," the report concluded. The commission, established by the Rights Council in 2016, is charged with gathering evidence on alleged gross rights violations and related crimes, with a view to ending impunity. One of the poorest countries on the planet despite large oil reserves, South Sudan has spent almost half of its life as a nation at war, and has also endured persistent natural disasters, hunger, economic meltdown and communal conflict. The commission saw a risk of further gross violations if the factors behind the conflict were not addressed. Unchecked mass violence and ongoing repression threaten the prospects of durable peace, and must be urgently addressed, the report said. "Our investigations again found an absolutely unacceptable situation in South Sudan, whereby families and communities are devastated by human rights violations and abuses by armed forces, militias and state institutions acting with impunity," said commission chair Yasmin Sooka.



Nicaragua Files Case at World Court Against Germany for Aiding Israel

THE HAGUE, March 1 (Reuters) - Nicaragua has filed a case at the International Court of Justice against Germany for giving financial and military aid to Israel and for defending the U.N. Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA), the U.N.'s top court said on Friday. Nicaragua asked the ICJ, also known as the World Court, to issue emergency measures requiring Berlin to stop its military aid to Israel and reverse its decision to stop funding UNRWA. The German Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The court usually sets a date for a hearing on any requested emergency measures within weeks of a case being filed. According to Nicaragua's claim, Germany is violating the 1948 Genocide Convention and the 1949 Geneva Conventions on the laws of war in the occupied Palestinian territories. "By sending military equipment and now defunding UNRWA which provides essential support to the civilian population, Germany is facilitating the commission of genocide," Nicaragua said in its legal filings. Major donors to UNRWA, including the United States and Germany, suspended funding after allegations that around 12 of its tens of

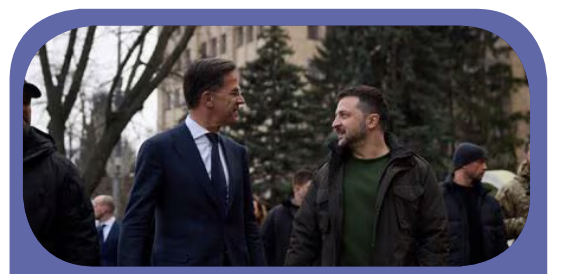
thousands of Palestinian employees were suspected of involvement in the Oct. 7 attacks in Israel by Hamas. Nicaragua's filing adds that emergency measures were needed because of Berlin's "participation in the ongoing plausible genocide and serious breaches of international humanitarian law" in the Gaza Strip. This claim builds on the case South Africa brought against Israel for allegedly committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Last month the ICJ said South Africa's claims that Israel violated the genocide convention were not implausible and ordered emergency measures, including a call for Israel to halt any potential acts of genocide in Gaza. Israel has denied allegations of genocide and said it has the right to defend itself. Under the genocide treaty countries not only agree not to commit genocide but also to prevent and punish any possible genocide. It also makes complicity in genocide and attempting a genocide a violation of the treaty. Germany is one of the largest arms exporters to Israel together with the United States, according to U.N. experts.

U.S. Military to Airdrop Food and Supplies Into Gaza



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden announced plans to carry out a first military airdrop of food and supplies into Gaza, a day after the deaths of Palestinians queuing for aid threw a spotlight on an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in the crowded coastal enclave. Biden said the U.S. airdrop would take place in the coming days but offered no further specifics. Other countries, including Jordan and France, have already carried out airdrops of aid into Gaza. "We need to do more and the United States will do more," Biden told reporters, adding that "aid flowing to Gaza is nowhere nearly enough." At the White House, spokesperson John Kirby stressed that airdrops would become "a sustained effort." He added that the first airdrop would be likely be military MREs, or "meals ready-to-eat." "This isn't going to be one and done," Kirby said. Biden told reporters that the U.S. was also looking at the possibility of a maritime corridor to deliver large amounts of aid into Gaza. The airdrops could begin as early as this weekend, officials said. At least 576,000 people in the Gaza Strip - one quarter of the enclave's population - are one step

away from famine, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Gaza health authorities said Israeli forces had killed more than 100 people trying to reach a relief convoy near Gaza City early on Thursday. Palestinians face an increasingly desperate situation nearly five months into the war that began with a Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7. Israel blamed most of the deaths on crowds that swarmed around aid trucks, saying victims had been trampled or run over. An Israeli official also said troops had "in a limited response" later fired on crowds they felt had posed a threat. With people eating animal feed and even cactuses to survive, and with medics saying children are dying in hospitals from malnutrition and dehydration, the U.N. has said it faces "overwhelming obstacles" getting in aid. While it is unclear which type of aircraft will be used, the C-17 and C-130 are best suited for the job. David Deptula, a retired U.S. Air Force three-star general who once commanded the no-fly zone over northern Iraq, said airdrops are something the U.S. military can effectively execute.



NETHERLANDS' RUTTE SIGNS SECURITY DEAL IN UKRAINE

KHARKIV (Reuters) - Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte signed a security deal with Ukraine in the northeastern city of Kharkiv on Friday and said the Netherlands would help fund the supply of 800,000 artillery shells to hold back Russian forces. Rutte met President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on a surprise visit to Kharkiv, just 40 km (26 miles) from the Russian border, and became the seventh Western leader to sign a 10-year security agreement with Ukraine in the last two months. "The Netherlands will contribute to the Czech Republic's initiative to purchase 800,000 artillery shells, he told a news conference, saying they would arrive within weeks. Ukraine is critically short of artillery rounds as its troops try to hold back Russian forces who are again on the offensive in the east, two years after Moscow launched its full-scale invasion. The Czech Republic said last month it had sourced 500,000 rounds of 155 mm shells and 300,000 122 mm rounds from three countries, which could be delivered to Ukraine in weeks if funding was secured. The shells would plug a big hole in Ukraine's stockpiles with a vital package of U.S. military assistance stuck in Congress facing months of Republican opposition. Rutte said the Netherlands would donate 150 million euros (\$162 million) to the Czech initiative, taking the total raised so far to 250 million euros. The security agreement he signed with Ukraine included 2 billion euros (\$2.2 billion) in military aid from the Netherlands this year, as well as other defence assistance over the next 10 years, Zelenskyy said. The visit to Kharkiv was a rare one by a senior Western politician as the city is regularly attacked by Russian air strikes and is much closer to the Russian border than Kyiv. The two leaders visited an underground classroom established to allow schoolchildren to attend classes in person, safe from missile strikes.

G7 Still Working on Ways to Tap Frozen Russian Assets

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - The United States and its allies will keep seeking options to tap \$300 billion in frozen Russian sovereign assets, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said after days of rancorous talks failed to seal a deal to aid Ukraine's war effort. Yellen told Reuters in an interview on Thursday that any action would need an airtight legal rationale, which emerged as a sticking point in negotiations this week on the sidelines of a meeting of Group of 20 (G20) finance ministers hosted by Brazil. Yellen said she challenged French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire to help develop the options sought by Group of Seven (G7) leaders in time for their June summit after Le Maire publicly rejected her view that there is a legal case for monetizing the assets. G7 officials have struggled for a year over what to do with Russian sovereign assets to help Ukraine, which Moscow invaded two years ago. The debate spilled into the public during this week's G20 meeting, revealing deep divisions among G7 allies. Russia has threatened major retaliation if the West seizes its assets. Some European countries fear doing so could set dangerous precedents and undermine faith in Western currencies, although Yellen has called a massive shift out of those currencies "highly unlikely." In the interview she said that while some Europeans were skeptical about asset seizure, there were options such as using the assets as collateral for loans and a new proposal to issue a syndicated loan, which she described as an "interesting option." "There are complicated legal issues here. We agree that whatever we do has to have a firm international legal rationale, as well as domestic rationale," Yellen said. "We're going to continue to work. (Le Maire's) staff are working with ours. We urged him to help us come up with options, options that we can present to the leaders." Yellen said G7 leaders had asked their staffs "to come up with as many viable options as we can, and to analyze both the benefits and costs associated with them." The decision on "what to do - the go-no-go - is up to them,"

she said, adding that it was unclear if the leaders would reach such a decision at their summit in Italy in June. Yellen said it was critical not to jeopardize the work of Belgian clearing house Euroclear, which holds most of the Russian assets. "Euroclear is an infinitely important financial utility, and we must be exceptionally careful not to do anything that endangers its functioning," she said. The U.S. Treasury secretary said she remained convinced that "countermeasures" legal theory offered a strong case for unlocking the value of the Russian assets, a view shared by many prominent experts. Under international law, countermeasures provide a lawful means for states to respond to violations of their rights.





Rublev Defaulted From Dubai After Angry Tirade

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Russia's Andrey Rublev was defaulted from the Dubai ATP tournament for allegedly using obscene language in an angry tirade at a line umpire on Friday, gifting Alexander Bublik a place in the final. Most of the deciding set was dominated by arguments between Bublik and chair umpire Miriam Bley over the timing of the introduction of new balls. However, it was Rublev who lost his cool at 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/5), 6-5, yelling towards a line umpire, and getting accused by a different one that the second seed swore at his colleague in Russian. Rublev insisted he was speaking in English and that he did not use any foul language but the 26-year-old was defaulted. Bublik tried to convince Bley and ATP supervisor Roland Herfel to continue play but the call was made and the match was over. The result also means Bublik has secured his top-20 debut and will become the first Kazakh man to crack the world's top 20 in the history of the ATP rankings when the new standings are released on Monday. "I would have preferred to lose 7-6 in the third than to win the match like this," said Bublik after the match. "We could have played one of the greatest matches we played against each other in front of a packed crowd in Dubai. It's a pity it's ended like this." Up next in the final for the seventh seed is French fifth seed Ugo Humbert, who ended the title defence of Daniil Medvedev with a 7-5, 6-3 win in one hour and 51 minutes. Rublev found sympathy from Spanish player Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, a quarter-finalist in Dubai, who described the sanction as "shameful": "Very unfair that they disqualify Rublev without first ensuring that what the line judge understood is correct," the

world number 24 wrote on X. "That rule should be reviewed and changed. Shameful. We need VAR in tennis." Rublev fought back from 0-3 down in the first set and played a solid tiebreak to take the lead in 50 minutes, surviving 17 winners off of Bublik's racquet. The second set followed a similar pattern, with Bublik claiming an early break of serve but failing to maintain his advantage as Rublev forced a tiebreak. This time though, the big-serving Kazakh snatched the last four points of the breaker to take the semi-final into a decider. Bublik, who came into the match with an 8-0 record in deciding sets this season, dropped serve in the opening game of the final set, and got into a lengthy argument with Bley about the timing of new balls coming into play. He also received a code violation for unsportsmanlike conduct for using obscene language in anger after getting broken. Despite continuing to debate the issue with Bley during changeovers, Bublik managed to break back on a horrendous overhead miss from Rublev, who had seven break point opportunities to extend his lead over his opponent but couldn't convert and the set was suddenly even at 4-all. After Bublik held serve for 6-5, Rublev screamed towards a line judge in anger and soon received his marching orders. Bublik believes implementing electronic line-calling at all tournaments will help avoid such incidents moving forward. "We have this proof every week that when the tournament is with electronic line-calling, we don't have these troubles. Players are not getting crazy. It's our passion. We play for this. We live for this. We grew up dreaming to be playing these stadiums," Bublik explained.

Bayern Held in Freiburg to Boost Leverkusen Title Hopes

FREIBURG IM BREISGAU (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich were held to a 2-2 draw at Freiburg, an 87th-minute equalizer from Lucas Hoeler giving leaders Bayer Leverkusen a chance to go 10 points clear. Mathys Tel's 35th-minute stunner had cancelled out an impressive opener from Freiburg captain Christian Guenter, before Jamal Musiala's spectacular solo effort looked to have snared the three points for Bayern. Hoeler however had other ideas, chipping a volley through a crowded Bayern penalty area and past a helpless Manuel Neuer. Bayern manager Thomas Tuchel criticised his players' "body language and lack of bite" in the first half an hour, telling DAZN "we played completely without structure and had no discipline and weren't in our positions." Calling his side "panicky", Tuchel said: "We did things that we've never trained, that we've never spoken about." "We played like it was the 85th minute and we were a goal down." Musiala told DAZN he felt "frustrated". "Since I've been at Bayern it's been in my head that we must win and we hate to lose. We want to win the Bundesliga, we want to win titles," he said. Bayern have now failed to win away from home in four matches dating back to January in both the Bundesliga and Champions League. Tuchel's side face Lazio at home in the last 16 of the Champions League on Tuesday, staring down an early exit with a 1-0 deficit from the first leg in Rome. Xabi Alonso's unbeaten Bayer Leverkusen can go 10 points clear of the Bavarians with a win against lowly Cologne in their derby clash on Sunday as they chase a first-ever Bundesliga title. "We played a good game" Freiburg's Vincenzo Grifo told DAZN. "It's clear that you have to suffer against Bayern." Guenter blasted the hosts into the lead after 12 minutes, unleashing a spinning rocket from outside the box and into the bottom right of the goal. The goal was the Freiburg captain's first of the season and the club's only strike from outside the box this campaign. Not content to allow Guenter to dominate the highlights reel, Tel hit back with a dream goal of his own, curling in a long-range effort on his second league start

this season. With 15 minutes remaining, and Bayern dominating possession but failing to carve out clear chances, Musiala dribbled past three Freiburg defenders and blasted a low shot into the right corner. "Simply instinct" said Musiala of the goal. "You try and you dribble and see what you can create." Despite holding the lead Bayern grew passive, dropping deep to hold onto their slender lead. With just three minutes of regular time remaining, Hoeler held off several Bayern defenders and chipped a volley over Neuer and into the goal. The draw spoilt the first day at work for Bayern sporting director Max Eberl, who said during his unveiling this week the side would still push Leverkusen for the title. The point sees Freiburg finish the night in ninth place in a crowded Bundesliga table, with only five points separating seventh and 15th places.



ODERMATT SEALS GIANT SLALOM CROWN WITH ASPEN WIN



ASPEN (Dispatches) - Newly crowned Alpine Skiing World Cup overall champion Marco Odermatt won his 11th straight giant slalom race to clinch this season's discipline title. The 26-year-old Swiss ace took the giant slalom crown after clocking a combined time of 2min 7.87sec to pip compatriot Loic Meillard by 0.14sec in Aspen, Colorado. Norway's Atle Lie McGrath finished third, 0.81 behind Odermatt, who clinched his third overall crown last weekend with victory in the giant slalom at Palisades Tahoe in California. Odermatt, who won the last three giant slaloms of the 2022-2023 season, is a perfect 8-0 in the event this year. Friday's win left him with 800 points, an unassailable 470 points clear of Croatia's Filip Zubcic. "I think it was the most difficult victory of the season," the Swiss world number one said after Friday's win, revealing that he "didn't feel very good" at the start of the race. With the overall and giant slalom crowns now secured, Odermatt remains on course to win two more titles. The Swiss leads the standings in the downhill and super G categories. He is also on track to complete a clean sweep in the giant slalom if he wins the three remaining giant slaloms left on the calendar - a feat not achieved since Swedish legend Ingemar Stenmark in the 1978-1979 season. "Of course I'm thinking about it, it would be great," Odermatt admitted on Friday before cautioning: "But even for tomorrow, I don't know what the level of my batteries will be. It takes so much energy for me to be focused every race." With 12 wins in all disciplines this season, Odermatt could also eclipse his record-equalling tally of 13 set last year which he shares with Stenmark (1979) and Austrian duo Hermann Maier (2001) and Marcel Hirscher (2018).

OKAFOR FIRES MILAN TO WIN AT LIVID EIGHT-MAN



MILAN (Dispatches) - Noah Okafor struck late to fire AC Milan to a 1-0 win at Lazio on Friday in a fiery Serie A match in Rome which finished with the outraged hosts down to eight men. Switzerland forward Okafor forced home his fifth league goal of the season with two minutes remaining, pushing Milan up to 56 points in third place and further strengthening his team's position in Italy's Champions League spots. Stefano Pioli's Milan are still 13 points behind league leaders Inter Milan, who host Genoa on Monday, but are just one behind second-placed Juventus. Juve are at Napoli in Sunday night's big game and have Milan breathing down their necks after a poor recent run of form. Okafor's strike was the most exciting moment of football in a niggly game in which Lazio had two players sent off in stoppage time, with a cascade of boos from dumbfounded home fans greeting the final whistle. "It was a game with a lot of fouls, we didn't have much rhythm," said Pioli to DAZN. It will make relations with Milan's American ownership slightly easier for Pioli as rumours continue to swirl about him being replaced in the summer after owner Gerry Cardinale said he was "not satisfied" on Thursday. "It's a big win looking at the matches being played this weekend... we're trying to make this season a positive one as we still have big goals to reach," added Pioli. Lazio drop down to ninth, level on 40 points with Napoli, after a defeat which was dreadful preparation for Tuesday's return leg with Bayern Munich in the Champions League last 16. Maurizio Sarri's side lead Bayern by a single goal after winning the first leg in the Italian capital 1-0 last month and his players will need to pick themselves as they are eight points from the top four. Lazio's task against Milan was made harder when Luca Pellegrini was dismissed for a second bookable offence in the 57th minute after yanking back Christian Pulisic, sparking a pushing match between both sets of players. Defender Pellegrini thought that play had been stopped after Valentin Castellanos had been cluttered by Ismael Bennacer and was furious at being sent off. And Adam Marusic was given a straight red card for dissent in the fourth minute of added time before Matteo Guendouzi was also sent off for reacting to being fouled. Lazio owner Claudio Lotito was so angered by referee Marco Di Bello's performance that he said the club would take action against the decisions made against his team. "When the system isn't reliable we should ask ourselves some questions," said Lotito.

Mbappe Taken Off at Half-Time as PSG Draw at Monaco

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said he took Kylian Mbappe off "for the good of the team" as the France captain was substituted at half-time in Paris Saint-Germain's 0-0 draw away to Monaco on Friday. Mbappe was not injured and emerged from the PSG dressing room at the start of the second half in a tracksuit, smiling and talking on the phone before taking a seat in the stand to watch the remainder of the game. Without him, PSG were perhaps fortunate to leave the principality with a draw which nevertheless allows them to stretch their lead at the top of the French table to 12 points from Brest, who are in action on Sunday. They edge a step closer to retaining the French title, but the focus for Luis Enrique's side is principally on Tuesday's Champions League last-16 second leg away to Real Sociedad, into which they take a 2-0 lead from the first meeting last month. It remains to be seen what role Mbappe will play in that game, given that he has now either started on the bench or been replaced in each of his club's three matches since he told the Qatar-owned club he would leave at the end of this season. "It was 100 percent the coach's decision, because sooner or later we will have to get used to playing without Kylian Mbappe,"

Luis Enrique said. "I took this decision for the good of the team." Mbappe informed PSG in mid-February that he intended to depart when his contract expires in June, after seven years at the Parc des Princes, with Real Madrid his likely next destination. Luis Enrique responded to that by leaving the 25-year-old on the bench for their next game at Nantes, although Mbappe came on to score a penalty in a 2-0 win. He then started last week's home meeting with Rennes and wore the captain's armband in the absence of usual skipper Marquinhos, but was substituted on 65 minutes with PSG trailing at the time in a game they ended up drawing 1-1. On Friday he was replaced by Randal Kolo Muani at the break at the Stade Louis II without any obvious sign of an injury, although he did go down under a challenge from Monaco defender Guillermo Maripan during the first half. "I am not going to play this game. For me there is no problem, this is just how I want to handle things," added PSG's coach, the former Barcelona and Spain boss. PSG were grateful on more than one occasion to goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma for keeping them on level terms, while Wissam Ben Yedder hit the woodwork for Monaco in the second half.

