

An Official at Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade Said That the Country Exported \$4.3b Worth of Food and Agricultural Products Overseas in the Nine Months of the Current Iranian Calendar Year

# IRAN NEWS

President Ebrahim Raisi Has Called on Mosques in Muslim States to Enlighten People About the Situation of the Oppressed Palestinians in the Gaza Strip Who Are Subjected to the Genocidal Israeli War

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## 2 DOMESTIC

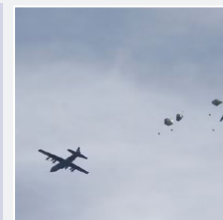
### Oil Minister, OPEC Chief Discuss Recent Developments in Global Oil Market



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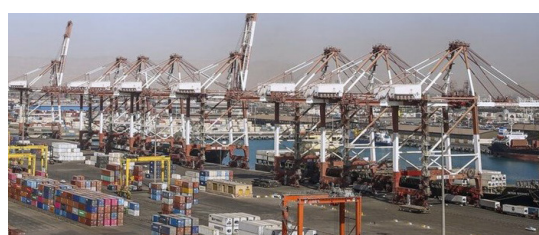
## 3 INTERNATIONAL

### Trump Wins Michigan, Missouri's Republican Primaries



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### Iran Trade Exchanges With 10 Trade Partners Hit \$88b in 11 Months



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's trade exchanges with its 10 trader partners in the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023 to February 24, 2024) reached \$88 billion. Some 136 million tons of goods, valued at \$88 billion, were exchanged between Iran and its 10 trade partners in the 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year. Iran's trade exchanges with China, Afghanistan, Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Pakistan and Oman in the 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year registered a considerable hike in terms of volume and value respectively. In this timespan, Iran had the maximum trade exchanges with Russia, showing a 54 and 24 percent hike in volume and value respectively. Also, Iran's trade exchanges with India registered a 20 percent hike in volume between March 21, 2023, and February 22, 2024. China, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia, Oman, Germany and Afghanistan were Iran's top 10 trade partners in the 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year, accounting for 84 percent of the country's total value of the trade exchanges, Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said. The Islamic Republic of Iran's new administration has attached importance to expansion of trade exchanges with neighboring countries to activate great potential of cooperation among neighbors, like-minded countries, Southeast Asian and African states, an Iranian official emphasized. To this end, Arab littoral states of the Persian Gulf are among the main priorities of economic and trade cooperation; therefore, Tehran has stepped up efforts and started negotiations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman.

### Red Crescent Dispatches Teams to Aid Flood-Stricken Sistan and Balouchestan



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Red Crescent Society of Iran has mobilized operational teams from other provinces to provide assistance in flood-hit southeastern province of Sistan and Balouchestan. Mohammad Ali Kavosi, the head of the Red Crescent Society of South Khorasan, confirmed the deployment, stating, "10 Red Crescent operational teams from the province have been dispatched to Sistan and Balouchestan." These teams, consisting of five members each, accompanied by a rescue vehicle, swiftly departed from the counties and headquarters of the Red Crescent Society of South Khorasan to aid those affected by the floods in Sistan and Balouchestan. According to reports, 200 relief teams were dispatched to flood-hit areas of Sistan and Balouchestan to provide services to the victims, according to the Secretary General of the Iranian Red Crescent. Explaining the latest situation in the flood-hit areas of Sistan and Balouchestan, Yaghoob Soleimani, Secretary General of the Iranian Red Crescent said, "After the flood occurred in the south of Sistan and Balouchestan, Red Crescent relief teams were dispatched to provide services to the victims." More than 150 rescue teams are providing relief aid in this area, he said, adding that 50 teams from South, Razavi, and North Khorasan provinces, as well as Kerman province, have been dispatched to provide relief. The 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-Balouchestan have been stricken by flood in the last few days.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



### Iran Ready to Become Energy Hub, Safe Route for Gas Distribution

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says Iran is ready to become an energy hub and a secure conduit for gas distribution and transit between producers and markets. Raisi made the remarks while addressing the 7th summit of the leaders of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) in the Algerian capital, Algiers on Saturday. Highlighting Iran's abundant natural gas reserves, strategic geographical location, and advanced technological capabilities, Raisi outlined Tehran's regional strategy focused on augmenting natural gas production and exports. He emphasized Iran's commitment to providing regional nations with enhanced access to this clean and economically valuable energy source. "Relying on its huge reserves of natural gas, its transit position and high technology, the Islamic Republic of Iran intends to develop bilateral and multilateral cooperation with all countries in the global gas market, especially the neighboring countries from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf and its neighbors in the East and the West to find a role that fits these capacities," he emphasized. He further stressed that the capacities within Iran's gas industry have laid a solid foundation for collaboration among GECF members in both upstream and downstream sectors of natural gas, as well as in its trade. The Iranian president extended invitations to international investors, as well as those from GECF member countries, to participate in Iran's energy sector projects, particularly in the natural gas industry. The GECF, 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. Elsewhere in his address, Raisi condemned the continuation of Israel's crimes against the Palestinians in Gaza and support of the US and some Western countries for the ongoing genocide in the Strip.

He presented practical solutions and proposals in order to stop Israel's killing machine, saying, "The current war is the confrontation of the axis of evil against the axis of honor." "On one side of the front, there is an army that is waiting for more and stronger weapons and bombs from the U.S., and on the other side of the front, there are children who miss a bite of bread." Raisi said the crimes committed by Israel, the US and their allies should be dealt with in an international court and they should be punished. He emphasized that Israel should be expelled from the United Nations and all regional and international assemblies and be subject to global sanctions by nations and governments. "The complete termination of overt and covert relations with this regime is the least that Muslim nations expect from their statesmen, which must be done immediately," he pointed out. The Iranian president warned that those who remain silent vis-à-vis the ongoing developments in Gaza will be slapped hard in the future, emphasizing that Palestine is now the "yardstick of humanity, morality and conscience of human society". He emphasized that the establishment of the Israeli regime was an arrogant project with the purpose of maintaining the dominance and influence of the West in the West Asia region. The Palestinian people's resistance has inflicted an irreparable blow to the Israeli regime, Raisi said, urging all countries to support the oppressed and powerful people of Palestine through all possible means. "The United Nations Security Council, which is designated as the guarantor of peace and security under the United Nations Charter, has been unable to establish a ceasefire due to the relentless support of the United States for the Zionist regime's war machine," he pointed out.

### GECF Final Declaration Puts Focus on Iran President's Proposals



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Heads of State of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) issued a final declaration at the end of their 7th summit in Algeria, placing emphasis on proposals put forward by the Iranian president, including adopting new policies aimed at breaking monopoly on gas trade technologies. The GECF heads of state concluded their daylong summit on Saturday in the Algerian capital, Algiers, approving the declaration "in the spirit of solidarity and cooperation", emphasizing the importance of several proposals which Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi put forward, according to a report by the IRNA on Sunday. Raisi said that the world is facing numerous challenges which require integration among governments to enable them to take the path of development. "It is essential that the GECF member states adopt new policies to create conditions for breaking the monopoly on technologies related to gas trade", he noted, proposing that the GECF secretariat creates a mechanism that will help member states exchange technical knowhow and experiences in the gas industry. The Iranian president also said that his country's regional strategy is to increase the production and export of natural gas and help raise regional countries' access to this valuable and clean fuel. He announced Iran's readiness to turn into an energy hub in the region and provide a safe route for the distribution and transit of gas between producers and consumption markets. Participants in the GECF summit, which brought together representatives from the member states as well as observer and guest countries along with OPEC and several regional energy blocs, expressed resolve to "promote natural gas as an abundant, affordable, flexible and reliable energy source", according to the text of the Algiers Declaration. "The leaders welcomed the inauguration in Algiers of the headquarters of the Gas Research Institute to expand cooperation in, inter alia, natural gas technologies, scientifically-guided research, and innovation-led capacity-building for the benefit of GECF Member Countries", the declaration said.

### British PM Sunak "Responsible" for Sinking of Cargo Ship in Red Sea

SANAA (Dispatches) - A ranking Yemeni official says UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his government "bear responsibility" for the sinking of the Rubymar, a British container ship that sunk in the Red Sea almost two weeks after it was struck in a retaliatory attack by Yemen's Armed Forces. The UK-owned Belize-flagged bulk carrier, the M/V Rubymar, came under the Yemeni military's attack on February 18 with several naval missiles in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait - a strategic waterway linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Yemeni authorities said the Rubymar, which had been abandoned for 12 days, sank late Friday as stormy weather took hold over the Red Sea, with the US Central Command (CENTCOM) releasing an image of the vessel on its side and confirming that it was going under. Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of Yemen's Supreme Political Council, said in a post on his X social media account on Saturday that Sunak and his government are responsible for the sinking of the British vessel over their support for the Israeli regime's genocidal war against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. Houthi underlined that the British government has a "chance to salvage" the Rubymar by authorizing humanitarian aid to enter Gaza, which has been under Israel's incessant bombardment over the past five months. "We say to Sunak: You and your government bear responsibility for M/V Rubymar and the responsibility to support genocide and siege in Gaza," the Yemeni official said in an Arabic-language post on X. "You have a chance to salvage the M/V Rubymar by sending a letter of guarantee... that the relief trucks agreed upon would enter Gaza." The sinking of the Rubymar, which carried more than 41,000 tonnes of fertilizer and previously leaked fuel, could cause ecological damage to the Red Sea, with Yemeni officials having warned multiple times about "a major environmental disaster if it sinks." Yemen's military has been targeting Israeli ships and those bound for Israeli ports since November last year in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza which has been subject to five months of war that has so far killed more than 30,320 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 71,533 others. The Yemenis have made it clear that they will not hesitate to carry out qualitative operations against all hostile targets in defense of their homeland and in reaffirmation of their unwavering support for the Palestinian nation. They said earlier that strikes targeting those ships in the Red Sea will not stop unless the regime ends its genocidal campaign against the besieged Palestinian territory. International shipping companies, however, are safe to sail in the area if they are neither owned by Israel nor destined for ports in the occupied Palestinian territories, according to the Yemeni Armed Forces.



### Sirik Nuclear Power Plant to Join Iran Power Grid in 18 Years



TEHRAN - Sirik nuclear power plant is expected to put into operation in 18 years, Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami has said. Sirik nuclear power plant has been planned to have four 1250-MW reactors, Eslami said on Sunday. The first phase of the construction of the power plant is underway, he added. By the decree of the President Raisi, the necessary studies regarding the project have been carried out, the official stated. Designed to have an electricity generation capacity of 5,000 megawatts, the power plant is part of broader plans to develop the Makran coastal region. Eslami has earlier said. On February 1, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) announced the start of construction of a 5 GW nuclear power plant in Sirik County, Hormozgan Province (southern Iran). The project involves the construction of four units, each with a power generation capacity of 1,250 MW. Construction of the new power plant is expected to take about nine years and will require a total investment of US\$20bn. The AEOI has set a long-term target of developing 20 GW of nuclear capacity in the country by 2041. Iran currently possesses one operational nuclear power plant, located in the southern province of Bushehr. The power plant started in 2011 (commissioning in 2013) and has a generation capacity of 915 MW (additional 1 GW reactors are currently under development at the site). In October 2023, Iran also announced the start of construction of the 300 MW Karun nuclear power plant, located in the south-western Iranian province of Khuzestan. Iran seeks to produce 20,000 megawatts of nuclear energy by 2041. The country has one active nuclear power plant, a 1,000 megawatt plant that went online with help from Russia in 2011. It's also building a 300-megawatt plant in oil-rich Khuzestan province, near the western border with Iraq.

# IRAN NEWS



## Iran, Turkey Sign MOU on Scientific, Industrial Fields

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Vice Presidency for Science and Technology and the Turkish Ministry of Industry and Technology signed a memorandum of understanding on scientific, industrial, and technological cooperation in Ankara. According to a report by Iran's Vice Presidency for Science and Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Mehmet Fatih Kacar, Deputy Minister of Industry and Technology representing the Iranian body signed a memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to emphasize the importance of science, industry, technology, and innovation in the development of the national economy and promoting scientific and industrial cooperation and technology based on the principles of equality and mutual benefit. The exchange of scientists, researchers, academics, and experts in the fields of science and technology, holding conferences, symposiums, workshops, and other joint meetings and exhibitions related to science and technology are among the cooperation programs in this memorandum of understanding. The two sides are also committed to encouraging and facilitating the development of communication and direct cooperation between government institutions, universities, research centers, and other institutions and organizations of the two countries.

## Tehran, Tashkent Mull Over Boosting Ties in Economic Sectors



TEHRAN (MNA) - The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tashkent met with the Minister of Energy of Uzbekistan and both sides emphasized strengthening relations in various economic sectors. Mohammad Ali Eskandari, the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tashkent, met and held talks with Jorabek Mirzamahmudov the Minister of Energy of Uzbekistan. In this meeting, the Uzbek minister emphasized the implementation of mutual understandings and the development and strengthening of relations between the two countries in various economic sectors. Referring to the quality of Iranian goods, the Iranian envoy stressed the high capacities of Iranian companies to implement Uzbekistan's engineering-technical services projects.



## Oil Minister, OPEC Chief Discuss Recent Developments in Global Oil Market

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Owji held talks with Secretary General of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Haitham Al Ghais on the sidelines of the 7th meeting of heads of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) in Algeria. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on the latest situation of the global oil market, factors affecting the oil market and the key role of oil on the budget of the OPEC member states. Prediction of crude oil prices for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th quarters of the current year was another topic discussed by the two sides. They also talked about the geopolitical implications affecting the global prices of oil, the increase of demand for oil in the international market caused by economic growth and the amount of investment in oil projects, SHANA reported. Owji and Haitham Al Ghais emphasized the OPEC member states' compliance with their commitments at OPEC and OPEC+ (a coalition of OPEC and non-OPEC producers). Owji accompanied Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on his visit to Algeria to participate in the 7th meeting of heads of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). Meanwhile later Iranian and Iraqi oil ministers discussed the integrated development of joint fields, trade of gas and oil products, payment methods, and development of infrastructure on Saturday. Owji and Hayan Abdel-Ghani, who held

talks on the sidelines of the 7th Gas Exporting Countries Forum Summit of Heads of State and Government in the Algerian capital Algiers, decided to give first priority to the integrated development of shared fields with smaller volume and second priority to main and larger joint fields. Bilateral cooperation on collecting flare gas and drilling oil fields were also reviewed during the ministers' talks. Owji and his Venezuelan counterpart Pedro Tellechea also met in the Algerian capital Algiers on Saturday and agreed to broaden cooperation in the petroleum industry. The two officials, who held talks on the sidelines of the 7th Gas Exporting Countries Forum Summit of Heads of State and Government, expressed their satisfaction with progress of the signed contracts. New oil and gas contracts, renovation of other refineries and petrochemical complexes in Venezuela, export of Iran's oil equipment and technical-engineering services to the Latin American country, expansion of economic relations in trade of oil as well as oil and petrochemical products were among the issues Owji and Tellechea discussed. The Venezuelan oil minister expressed his appreciation to Iranian companies for their great performance in projects for developing the Venezuelan port Jose, revamping El Palito refinery, overhauling facilities, and equipping gas compressor stations.

## Iran, China Trade Improving After 10-Year Slump



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Noting that the volume of trade between Tehran and Beijing has declined since a record high in 2014, Majidreza Harii, the chairman of Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce, said that trade exchanges between the two countries are on an upward trajectory once again. Speaking in an exclusive interview with Iran Chamber of Commerce Newsroom, he said that Iran-China trade volume stood at a record \$51.8 billion in 2014 but then it began to shrink. Harii attributed the decline in trade exchanges between Tehran and Beijing to lowering oil prices, as he said crude oil and condensates account for a main part of exchanges between the two countries. He believed that a large part of Iran's non-oil exports to China are also based on oil products. With the growth in the oil prices and the volume of Iran's oil exports to China over the past two years, the two countries are nearing previous record levels, he noted.

## President Slams Regional Governments for Keeping Up Relations With Israel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has slammed some governments in the West Asia region for failing to cut their relations with Israel despite the regime's continued onslaught on the Palestinians in Gaza. Raisi said in a meeting with Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani that governments in the region are in fact funding the Israeli war on Gaza by maintaining their economic relations with the Tel Aviv regime. "One should see what answer some Arab and Muslim governments have for their nations for the indifference to the genocide of the oppressed people of Palestine," he said in the meeting which was held on the sidelines of a major energy summit in Algiers, Algeria. Raisi said the governments that insist on keeping up relations with Israel amid the Gaza war will finally "receive a slap in the face" because of their wrong decisions. He said the inaction on Gaza gives the Israeli regime and its main supporter the United States enough time to continue committing crimes in Gaza. The Iranian president is in Algiers to attend the seventh summit of the leaders of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, a major international energy bloc where Iran and Qatar are among key members because of their vast natural gas resources. Iran has supported Qatar's role

as a mediator in negotiations in recent months that have been aimed at working out a ceasefire in Gaza. In the meeting with Sheikh Tamim on Saturday, Raisi described bilateral relations between Iran and Qatar as "good" and said the two countries should work for a speedier implementation of agreements they have signed in the past. Sheikh Tamim, for his part, said the Qatari government is proud of the fact that relations between the Arab country and Iran are at their "best ever". He said that a brutal attack by the Israeli regime on Thursday in Gaza that killed more than 100 people waiting to receive humanitarian aid will not be deleted from the historical memory of the world. During his stay in Algiers on Saturday, President Raisi also met with presidents of Tunisia, Mozambique and Iraq. In his meeting with Tunisia's Kais Saied, the Iranian president said Tehran is ready to supply scientific and technological know-how to Tunisia as part of its plans to expand economic relations with Muslim countries, especially those in North Africa. Raisi said in the meeting with Mozambique's Filipe Nyusi that Iran is keen to activate an intergovernmental economic committee with the East African country to help expand bilateral relations.

## Tehran, Moscow Agree on New Contracts for Oil, Gas Fields Development



TEHRAN (Shana) - Oil minister and Russia's energy minister agreed on signing new contracts to develop oil and gas fields. Javad Owji and Nikolai Shulginov exchanged views on the implementation of oil and gas contracts the two countries signed before on the sidelines of the 7th Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Summit of Heads of State and Government in the Algerian capital Algiers. Representatives of some Russian companies, including Gazprom and Zarubezhneft, also attended the meeting, during which establishment of a gas hub within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the Eurasian region, gas trade between Iran and Russia and also other countries in the region, construction of infrastructure needed for brisk trade, and connection of electricity grids of Iran and Russia were also discussed. Speaking in a joint press conference with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak on Wednesday, Owji said the contracts signed with Russian companies to develop eight oil fields have helped Iran add more than 200,000 barrels to its daily production. In his response to a question posed by Russia's Energy Intelligence reporter about the outlook for Russian companies' participation in Iran's oil projects, the minister added the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) started its negotiations with Russia's leading companies several months ago and contracts for development of eight Iranian oil fields have been so far signed with Russian companies.

## Russia Invites Iranian Economic Enterprises to Take Part in SPIEF

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Russia invited Iranian firms and economic enterprises to participate in the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) within the framework of the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Cooperation Commission. More than 200 Russian public and private sector companies, headed by Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, traveled to Iran on February 26-28, 2024 to strengthen bilateral ties between the two countries in the fields of trade and economy. The Roscongress Foundation, the organizer of the St. Petersburg Economic Forum, invited Iranian firms and economic enterprises to partake in the forum, slated to be held in St. Petersburg on June 5-8, 2024. On the sidelines of the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission, an expert-level meeting was held between the Roscongress Foundation, Iran and Tehran Chambers of Commerce, Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI), Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines, and International Energy Research Institute. The Iranian and Russian officials exchanged views on the possible formats of cooperation at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum 2024 and other projects of the Roscongress Foundation.



## Thousands Protest Against Socio-Economic crisis in Tunisia

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Thousands protested deteriorating living standards outside the prime minister's office in Tunis following a call from Tunisia's main trade union confederation. "The economic and social situation continues to worsen," the confederation's head, Nouredine Taboubi, said in a speech to protesters. Taboubi said the state's ability to service its foreign debt in 2023 had been "to the detriment of the people and resulted in shortages of basic products." He criticized the implementation of "diktats from the International Monetary Fund" (IMF) at the expense of ordinary Tunisians. The Tunisian economy is at a standstill with growth of 0.4 percent and an unemployment rate of 16.4 percent in 2023, according to the National Institute of Statistics. Unemployment stood at 15.2 percent at the end of 2022. President Kais Saied has ruled by decree since a July 2021 power grab and last year rammed through a constitution that gave his office unlimited powers and neutered parliament. Weathering a grave economic crisis, Tunis concluded an agreement with the IMF in October 2022 for a two billion dollar loan facility. But loan tranches stalled when the president rejected reforms demanded by the IMF.



## Germany Investigates Eavesdropping on Officers After Russian Media Play Recording



FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Germany said it was investigating an apparent eavesdropping of a call, after Moscow said a recording of German officers showed them discussing weapons for Ukraine and a potential strike by Kiev on a bridge in Crimea. A German defense ministry spokesperson said on Saturday the Federal Office for Military Counterintelligence was investigating what appeared to be a case of eavesdropping, and that it was possible that the recording had been altered. Chancellor Olaf Scholz, speaking on a visit to Rome, called the potential leak "very serious" and said it was "now being clarified very carefully, very intensively and very quickly." Margarita Simonyan, a Russian state TV journalist and the head of Russia Today, posted the audio on her Telegram channel, and said it revealed German officers "discussing how to strike the Crimea bridge", which links Russia to the Ukrainian peninsula it seized and annexed in 2014. Reuters listened to the 38-minute recording but could not independently confirm its authenticity. Participants in the call discuss the possible delivery of Taurus cruise missiles to Kyiv, which Scholz has publicly so far firmly rejected. They also talk about the training of Ukrainian soldiers, and possible military targets. Scholz, speaking on a visit to Rome, told journalists the potential leak was "very serious". "That is why it is now being clarified very carefully, very intensively and very quickly. That is also necessary," he said. Russia's embassy in Berlin did not respond to an emailed request for comment on Saturday about allegations of possible spying. A Russian foreign ministry spokesperson said on social media on Friday: "We demand an explanation from Germany", without detailing its particular concerns. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke to journalists on Saturday about "cunning plans of the Bundeswehr (German armed forces), which became apparent due to the publication of this audio recording. This is a blatant self-exposure", Lavrov said. Roderich Kiesewetter, a member of the German parliament, told the Handelsblatt newspaper that he considered the reports to be authentic.

## Eight Killed in Russian Drone Attack on Odesa



ODESA (Dispatches) - A Russian drone attack whose multiple victims included an infant and a two-year-old could have been avoided if Ukraine was not facing delays to weapons supplies, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said. Seven Western leaders have signed 10-year security agreements with Ukraine in the last two months as Kyiv fights to plug a big hole in stockpiles with a vital package of U.S. military assistance stuck in Congress and facing months of Republican opposition. "When lives are lost, and partners are simply playing internal political games or disputes, limiting our defence, it's impossible to understand," Zelenskyy said. As emergency services posted images of bodies being pulled from the rubble of an apartment block in the southern port city of Odesa, he also used his nightly video address to deliver a strong message to his new army chief, Oleksandr Syrskyi, who replaced Valeriy Zaluzhnyi in a shakeup last month. "The commander-in-chief has carte blanche for personnel changes in the army, in the headquarters, for any changes," Zelenskyy said. He said he expected a "detailed report and specific proposals for further changes" from Syrskyi when he returns from the front early in the week. Rescue workers pulled eight bodies out of the rubble and were still searching for more late in the night. Zelenskyy said earlier that an Iranian-supplied Shahed drone destroyed 18 apartments in a single apartment block. Oleh Kiper, the regional governor, said the adults killed included three men aged 35, 40 and 54, and two women aged 31 and 73. Eight people were wounded, including a three-year-old girl. Zelenskyy said Russian attacks using Iranian-supplied Shahed drones "make no military sense" and were intended only to kill and intimidate. "The world knows that terror can be opposed," he said. "Delaying the supply of weapons to Ukraine, missile defence systems to protect our people, leads, unfortunately, to such losses."

## Gaza Truce Talks Expected as Offensive and Aid Crisis Rage on



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Mediators expected to reconvene in Cairo and search for a formula acceptable to Israel and Hamas for a lasting ceasefire in Gaza, sources with knowledge of the talks said, after foreign governments resorted to airdrops to aid desperate civilians in the Palestinian enclave. Israeli and Hamas delegations were expected to arrive in Cairo on Sunday, two Egyptian security sources said, although another source briefed on the talks said Israel would not send a delegation until it got a full list of hostages who are still alive. Hopes for the first pause in fighting since November rose last week after a previous round of talks mediated by Qatar and Egypt in Doha and indications from U.S. President Joe Biden that agreement was close. A senior U.S. official said on Saturday that the framework for a six-week pause in fighting was in place, with Israel's agreement, and now depended on Hamas agreeing to release hostages it has held in Gaza since its attacks on southern Israel on Oct. 7. "The path to a ceasefire right now literally at this hour is straightforward. And there's a deal on the table. There's a framework deal. The Israelis have more or less accepted it," the official told reporters. "The onus right now is on Hamas." Biden has said he hopes a ceasefire will be in place by the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which starts on March 10. Biden and other world leaders are under growing pressure to ease the increasingly desperate plight of Palestinians after five months of war and Israeli blockade of Gaza. The United Nations says a quarter of the population - 576,000 people - is one step from famine. Gaza health authorities said Israeli forces killed 118 people trying to reach a relief convoy near Gaza City on Thursday, prompting global outrage over the humanitarian catastrophe. A day later Biden announced plans for the U.S. airdrop on Saturday, which also involved Jordanian forces. Other countries including Jordan and France had already conducted airdrops of aid into Gaza. The U.S. has for months been calling for

Israel to allow more aid into Gaza, something Israel has resisted. Some experts said being forced to resort to costly, inefficient airdrops was the latest demonstration of Washington's limited influence over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. Israel denies restricting humanitarian aid for Gaza civilians. The U.S. military aircraft released 38,000 meals over Gaza, falling far short of the assistance needed by the territory's 2.2 million people. U.S. authorities said it was the first of what would be a sustained effort. Israel disputes the health ministry's death toll in the food convoy catastrophe and said most victims were trampled or run over. Israel launched the offensive in response to the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, whose militants poured over the border from Gaza, killing 1,200 people and abducting another 253, according to Israeli tallies. The assault has devastated Gaza. Much of the Hamas-run enclave has been laid to waste and more than 30,000 people have been killed and tens of thousands more injured, according to Gaza health authorities. Fighting raged in the early hours of Sunday, as residents reported the sound of heavy shelling and tanks advancing around Khan Younis, a city in the southern Gaza Strip. Around Rafah, another southern city where more than 1 million Palestinian have been seeking refuge on the border with Egypt, authorities said 25 people were killed on Saturday and into Sunday morning. They included 11 who died when an Israeli airstrike hit a tent near a hospital and another 14 in one family, who died when a strike hit a house. Hamas has not backed away from its position that a temporary truce must be the start of a process towards ending the war altogether, the Egyptian sources and a Hamas official said. However, the Egyptian sources said assurances had been offered to Hamas that the terms of a permanent ceasefire would be worked out in second and third phases of the deal. The duration of the initial pause of about six weeks had been agreed upon, the sources said.

## Trump Wins Michigan, Missouri's Republican Primaries



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donald Trump easily won the Republican caucuses in Michigan, where the party has been riven by infighting that some Republicans fear could hurt his campaign in the key battleground state as he gears up for the election in November. The former U.S. president also won the Missouri Republican caucus on Saturday, according to a projection by the Associated Press. In both states Trump trounced Nikki Haley, his last remaining rival for the Republican presidential nomination, moving him closer to becoming his party's White House standard-bearer and a likely general election rematch with President Joe Biden, a Democrat. In Michigan, Trump beat Haley in all 13 districts taking part in the nominating caucuses, according to the state Republican Party. Overall, Trump won with nearly 98% percent support: 1,575 votes to just 36 for Haley. Pete Hoekstra, the Michigan Republican Party's chair, called it "an overwhelming, dominating victory." More than 1,600 party insiders participated in the presidential caucus in the western Michigan city of Grand Rapids, where they were choosing delegates for Trump or former U.N.

Ambassador Haley for the party's national nominating convention in July. Republicans were also holding caucuses in Idaho on Saturday, one of the final contests for Haley to alter the course of the race prior to Super Tuesday on March 5, the biggest day in the primaries, when 15 states and one territory will vote. With victories in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, the U.S. Virgin Islands, South Carolina, and now Michigan and Missouri under his belt, Trump is far and away the frontrunner in the race, with Haley hanging on thanks to support from donors keen for an alternative to the former president. For this election cycle, Michigan Republicans devised a hybrid nominating system, split between a primary and a caucus. Trump won the primary convincingly on Tuesday, securing 12 of 16 delegates up for grabs. He took all of Michigan's remaining 39 delegates at stake on Saturday. At one of the 13 caucus meetings, the participants - knowing Trump would win easily - decided to save time by simply asking anyone who backed Haley to stand up. In a room of 185 voting delegates, 25-year-old Carter Houtman was the only person who rose to his feet.



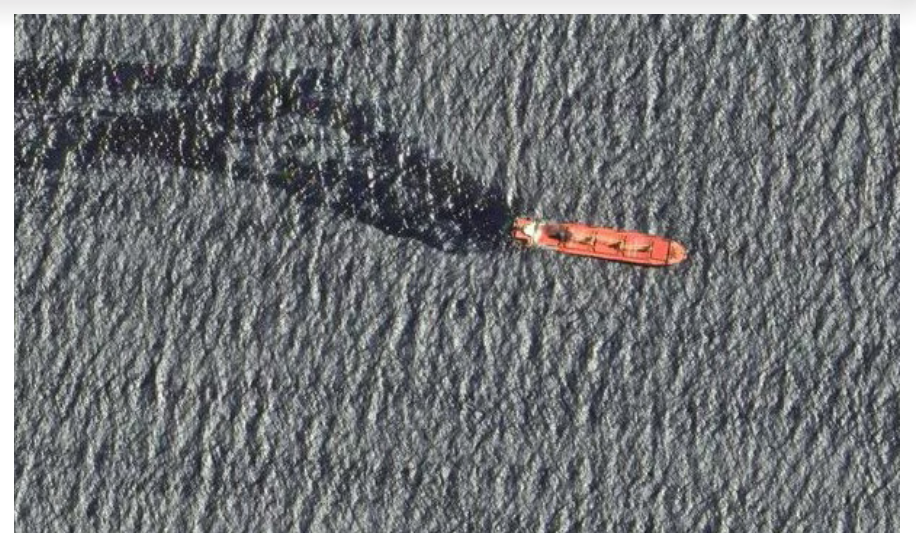
## OPEC+ to Consider Extending Voluntary Oil Output Cuts

DAKAR (Dispatches) - Several hundred people rallied in the Senegalese capital Dakar on Saturday calling for the country's postponed presidential elections to be held before April 2, the date when incumbent Macky Sall's term is set to end. The protesters gathered at a sandy lot in a working-class neighbourhood for the protest, called by the "Resistance Front", an alliance of opposition parties and campaigning groups. Many brandished Senegalese flags and portraits of the opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, jailed since July for "incitement to insurrection" and barred from running in the presidential vote. Sonko has endorsed Bassirou Diomaye Faye, who is also in jail but who was cleared to be on the ballot. The crowd shouted "Macky Sall dictator" and "Free Sonko", singing a song in his praise. Several speakers representing some of the election candidates addressed the crowd, including former prime minister Aminata Toure, a member of the "Bassirou President" coalition. "What we are asking President Macky Sall is to organise these elections before April 2 and to give the keys to the palace to his successor face to face, so that we can begin to rebuild our country," he said. The West African country was thrown into a political crisis on February 3 when Sall postponed the presidential election planned for February 25. His announcement, denounced as a "constitutional coup d'etat" by the opposition, sparked huge protests that resulted in four deaths. On February 15, the constitutional council overruled Sall, and ever since the country has been waiting for a new date. "We want an election before the 2nd (of April) with the 19 candidates retained by the Constitutional Council and for Senegalese democracy to continue to shine," said one demonstrator, 27-year-old trader Assane Camara.

## Ship Sunk by Houthis Threatens Red Sea Environment

ADEN (Dispatches) - A UK-owned ship attacked by Houthi militants last month sank in the Red Sea, the U.S. military confirmed on Saturday, as it echoed a warning from Yemen's internationally recognized government that the vessel's cargo of hazardous fertilizer posed a risk to marine life. The Belize-registered Rubymar is the first vessel lost since the Houthis began targeting commercial ships in November. Those drone and missile assaults have forced shipping firms to divert ships to the longer route around southern Africa, disrupting global trade by delaying deliveries and sending costs higher. The sinking bulk carrier also "presents a subsurface impact risk to other ships transiting the busy shipping lanes of the waterway," U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said in its statement on social media platform X. The Houthis, who control the north of Yemen and other large centers, say their campaign is a show of solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. The Houthi attacks have prompted a series of strikes against their positions by the United States and Britain, and have led other navies to send vessels to the region to try to protect the vital Suez Canal trade route. The Rubymar went down in the southern Red Sea late on Friday or early on Saturday, according to statements from the Yemen government and CENTCOM. The U.S. military previously said the Feb. 18 missile attack had significantly damaged the bulk vessel and caused an 18-mile (29-km) oil slick. The ship was carrying about 21,000 metric tons of fertilizer, CENTCOM said on Saturday. Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, the foreign minister in Yemen's internationally recognized government

in Aden, said in a post on X: "The sinking of the Rubymar is an environmental catastrophe that Yemen and the region have never experienced before. The internationally recognized government, which is backed by Saudi Arabia, has been at war with the Houthis since 2014. The release of such large amounts of fertilizer into the Red Sea poses a serious threat to marine life, said Ali Al-Sawalmih, director of the Marine Science Station at the University of Jordan. The overload of nutrients can stimulate excessive growth of algae, using up so much oxygen that regular marine life cannot survive, said Al-Sawalmih, describing a process called eutrophication. "An urgent plan should be adopted by countries of the Red Sea to establish monitoring agenda of the polluted areas in the Red Sea as well as adopt a cleanup strategy," he said. The overall impact depends on how ocean currents deplete the fertilizer and how it is released from the stricken vessel, said Xingchen Tony Wang, assistant professor at the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Boston College. The ecosystem of the southern Red Sea features pristine coral reefs, coastal mangroves and diverse marine life. Last year, the area avoided a potential environmental disaster when the United Nations removed more than 1 million barrels of oil from a decaying supertanker moored off the Yemen coast. That type of operation may be more difficult in the current circumstances.





## Liverpool Strike Late to Beat Forest

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Darwin Nunez headed in a 99th-minute winner as injury-hit Liverpool moved four points clear at the top of the Premier League with a 1-0 win at Nottingham Forest, while Tottenham came from behind late on to beat Crystal Palace. Liverpool's resources have been stretched to the limit by injuries in recent weeks as they attempt to win a quadruple in Jurgen Klopp's final season. The Reds were again without a host of star names including Mohamed Salah, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Alisson Becker and Diogo Jota. But there was some light at the end of the tunnel with Nunez and Dominik Szoboszlai making their returns as second-half substitutes. The Uruguayan made the telling impact with virtually the last touch of the game, rising to flick home Alexis Mac Allister's cross and secure Liverpool's first win at the City Ground since 1984. "In the last second the guy who looks like a former Liverpool player thought I'll score a goal and decide the game," said Klopp. "The goal was set up by a guy who was the calmest on the whole pitch. I saw it only live but I'll never forget it. He was calm. He chips the ball there. Super assist and super-important goal." Victory pulls Klopp's men four points clear of Manchester City, who face Manchester United and five ahead of Arsenal, who travel to Sheffield United. Defeat leaves Forest still four points above the relegation zone and with the threat of a points deduction for breaches of financial rules still hanging over the club. Tottenham have made a habit of late fightbacks at home

under Ange Postecoglou and needed another to inflict Oliver Glasner's first defeat as Palace boss with a 3-1 win. Eberechi Eze's precise free-kick gave the Eagles a shock lead on the hour. Timo Werner's first Spurs goal set up the grandstand finish when he tapped home Brennan Johnson's low cross. Cristian Romero then headed Tottenham in front before Son Heung-min sprinted clear to seal the three points. "Persistence, some quality, belief," said Postecoglou. "The reaction was outstanding." Spurs remain five points behind fourth-placed Aston Villa, who needed Lucas Digne's late winner to beat relegation-threatened Luton 3-2. Ollie Watkins struck twice for Villa in the first 38 minutes to take his tally for the season to 21. Luton's prowess from set-pieces looked to have salvaged a point as goals from Tahith Chong and Carlton Morris levelled. But substitute Digne headed in Moussa Diaby's cross at the back post in the 89th minute to take Villa ever closer to a first taste of Champions League football. Chelsea fans chanted for the sacking of Mauricio Pochettino after a 2-2 draw at Brentford. Nicolas Jackson's towering header powered the Blues into an early lead. But Brentford are now five games unbeaten against their wealthy west London rivals. Mads Roerslev levelled early in the second half before Yoane Wissa's overhead kick put the Bees in front. A header from Axel Disasi saved a point for Chelsea but that did not save Pochettino or his superiors from the wrath of the away support.

## Odermatt Rallies to Push Giant Slalom Win Streak to 12



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Marco Odermatt pushed his Alpine World Cup giant slalom winning streak to 12 in swashbuckling style, storming from third place after the first run to win again in Aspen. The newly crowned overall World Cup champion from Switzerland had clinched the giant slalom season title with his 11th straight victory in the discipline in Aspen on Friday. But his streak - which stretches back through last season - looked to be in danger when he finished third in Saturday's first leg, .32sec behind leader Alexander Steen Olsen of Norway. After a costly mistake early in the second leg, Odermatt responded with a scintillating performance on the lower sections to win with a total time of 2min 03.20sec. Compatriot Loic Meillard, second after the first run, was second, .34sec back, and Norway's Timon Haugan was third, .58sec adrift. Steen Olsen, meanwhile, endured a disastrous second run that left him 17th. "I knew I had to attack after the first run," Odermatt said. "I attacked, I took all the risks, but at the top of the course, I almost went out." It's hard for me to realize and analyze what I did in this run," added Odermatt, who is now a perfect 9-0 in giant slaloms this season, having closed out last season with victories in the last three races in the discipline. Odermatt has matched the record for wins in a season across all disciplines of 13, a mark he shares with Ingemar Stenmark (1979) and Austrian duo Hermann Maier (2001) and Marcel Hirscher (2018). He is poised to capture two more season titles, topping the standings in both the downhill and super-G. If he can win the two remaining giant slaloms, he could become the first since Swedish legend Stenmark in 1978-79 to produce a clean sweep.

## Madrid Bothered by Bellingham Red Card in Controversial Valencia Draw

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said his side were "bothered" after midfielder Jude Bellingham was sent off after the controversial final whistle in the 2-2 La Liga draw at Valencia. England's Bellingham was shown a red card after protesting after referee Jesus Gil Manzano blew for time an instant before Bellingham hit what would have been a 99th minute winner at the Mestalla. Manzano blew as Brahim Diaz whipped in his would-be assist. Madrid players, coaches and substitutes flooded the pitch to confront the referee and Bellingham earned a red card. "I think what's just happened is unprecedented. It's never happened to me," Ancelotti told reporters. "We had possession of the ball and the match should have been finished when Valencia had the ball." "What bothers us is the red card for Bellingham because he didn't say anything insulting. He was frustrated of course," said Ancelotti, adding that Bellingham had used a common English swearword when telling the referee it was a goal. Madrid's second draw in three league games leaves the 35-time Spanish champions seven points clear of second-placed Girona, who head to lowly Mallorca. On Wednesday, Ancelotti's outfit welcome RB Leipzig in the Champions League last 16 second leg, with a 1-0 aggregate lead. The hosts in central Spain led 2-0 after just half an hour as striker Hugo Duro and Roman Yaremchuk deservedly put Valencia in the lead. Real's reaction came five minutes into first half injury time with Vinicius Junior's first goal. The Brazil attacker then equalised with 14 minutes to play. The game marked his return to a ground where he was racially abused last season and Vinicius celebrated both goals with gestures towards the Valencia crowd, including raising his fist to the air after one effort. Madrid pushed forward for a winner as Valencia's Mouctar Diakhaby attempted to clear but his right leg was trapped under Tchouameni in the 89th minute. Guinea's Diakhaby was stretched off after players from both sides were visibly shaken by his injury. After the incident, the referee added seven minutes of injury time. Almost two further minutes had been played when Bellingham thought he had claimed three points. The draw gives Girona a chance to cut the deficit to four points.



## Humbert Continues Fine Final Form to Clinch Dubai ATP



DUBAI (Dispatches) - Fifth seed Ugo Humbert maintained his perfect record in finals by beating Alexander Bublik 6-4, 6-3 to claim the Dubai ATP title. The Frenchman joins Ernests Gulbis and Martin Klizan as the only men in the Open Era to win their first six four-level finals, with his victory over Bublik earning him a second trophy of the season. The 25-year-old will make his top-15 debut at 14 when the updated rankings are released on Monday. "I played a fantastic level during all the week, but today was not easy," said Humbert during the trophy ceremony. "I have a good statistic in finals, but that's because I have a really good team around me," he added. Humbert had a tough path to the title in Dubai. He came back from a set down in his opener against his compatriot Gael Monfilis, before knocking out Andy Murray, saving three match points against Hubert Hurkacz, and upsetting champion and top seed Daniil Medvedev in straight sets in the last-four. Humbert joins Jannik Sinner as the only multiple-title winners in 2024. He also won in Marseille last month. He added a second ATP 500 trophy to his cabinet, following his success in Halle three years ago. Meanwhile, Bublik, who reached the final when Andrey Rublev was shockingly defaulted late in their semi-final, will rise to a career-high 19 in the world thanks to his exploits in Dubai. "This week had everything for me and I'm really happy to be here. Thank you, Ugo for reminding me how it is to lose a final," said the 26-year-old Bublik on court. "Honestly, before the final, I thought if I would win, I would dedicate this title to my son. "So I'm sorry, maybe next time," he added. The players were neck and neck for most of the opening set but a risky second serve from Bublik led the Kazakhstani big-hitter to double fault and hand the frame to Humbert on the 47-minute mark. Humbert put pressure on the Bublik serve to break serve in game four of the second set and was soon up 4-1. Bublik tried to get in Humbert's head as the Frenchman was serving for the championship, stepping well inside the baseline to return serve. Humbert held his nerve, saving break point and securing victory in his first meeting with Bublik on his second match point with a blinding forehand winner. Humbert threw himself to the ground in disbelief to celebrate his hard-fought title run. Although Bublik had entered the final with an impressive 56 aces struck through four matches, it was Humbert who out-aced his opponent on Saturday, striking nine of his own to Bublik's eight during the 85-minute final.

## Verstappen Cruises to Unbelievable Red Bull One-Two in Bahrain

SAKHIR (Dispatches) - Three-time world champion Max Verstappen began his title defence in flawless fashion when he guided his Red Bull team to a crushing one-two triumph, ahead of team-mate Sergio Perez, at the Bahrain Grand Prix. In a statement of emphatic superiority, the 26-year-old Dutchman came home 22.5 seconds clear of Perez, who started from fifth, to ease some of the pressure on team boss Christian Horner. Pole sitter Verstappen held off the Ferrari of Charles Leclerc to lead into the first corner, and it was business as usual from there to the flag as he enjoyed the perfect start to his quest for a fourth consecutive title. By claiming the 33rd pole of his career, fastest lap and race win, Verstappen delivered the 12th 'hat-trick' of his career leaving only the seven-time champions Michael Schumacher and Lewis Hamilton ahead on 22 and 19 trebles respectively. It was Verstappen's eighth successive win, his 55th race victory and 99th podium finish as Red Bull dominated an uneventful race on a cold evening at Sakhir's Bahrain International Circuit. It also extended his run as championship leader to 40 races since the 2022 Spanish Grand Prix. "Unbelievable!" said Verstappen. "I think today went better than expected and we had a lot of pace. It was super-enjoyable to drive and we stayed out of trouble. It's a good start to the year - it couldn't be better. It was a lot of fun. And it's

very special to have days like today as it doesn't happen often, when everything is all ok with the car. It felt great today." Team-mate Perez praised the team. "The team definitely had good momentum. We've got to keep it up now for the coming weekends," he said. "It was the maximum we could achieve - a tricky race with the tyre management and plenty to learn from the race." Carlos Sainz, whose seat at Ferrari is to be taken by Hamilton next year, finished a pugnacious third ahead of team-mate Charles Leclerc, who profited from a rare error by Mercedes George Russell in the closing laps. "I felt really good today and had good pace. We had a clear plan and it worked well," said Sainz. "I managed my tyres and then I could overtake a few cars on the way to the podium. A good step forward compared to last year." Russell finished fifth ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris, Hamilton in the second Mercedes, Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren and the Aston Martin duo two-time champion Fernando Alonso and Lance Stroll. After days of speculation, Red Bull boss Horner arrived hand in hand with his wife, former Spice Girl Geri Halliwell - a show of unity following the release on Thursday of a cache of alleged messages from him to a female member of staff. That had come just 24 hours after he had been cleared by Red Bull's internal investigation into allegations of inappropriate behaviour.

