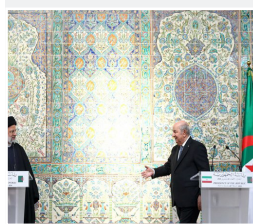


Floods in the Southeastern Iranian Province of Sistan and Baluchestan Have Inflicted Over \$40m in Damage to the Province, According to the Director of the Province's Crisis Management Headquarters

IRAN NEWS

Managing director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr Says Oil Production at Southern Oilfields Will Rise by 60,000 Barrels Per Day (bpd) After a New Phase Goes Into Force

2 DOMESTIC

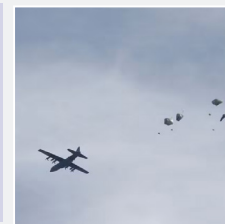


Iran, Algeria Sign 6 Cooperation Deals

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3 INTERNATIONAL

Gaza Truce Talks Expected as Offensive and Aid Crisis Rage on



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IRAN SELF-RELIANT IN ENSURING NATIONAL SECURITY

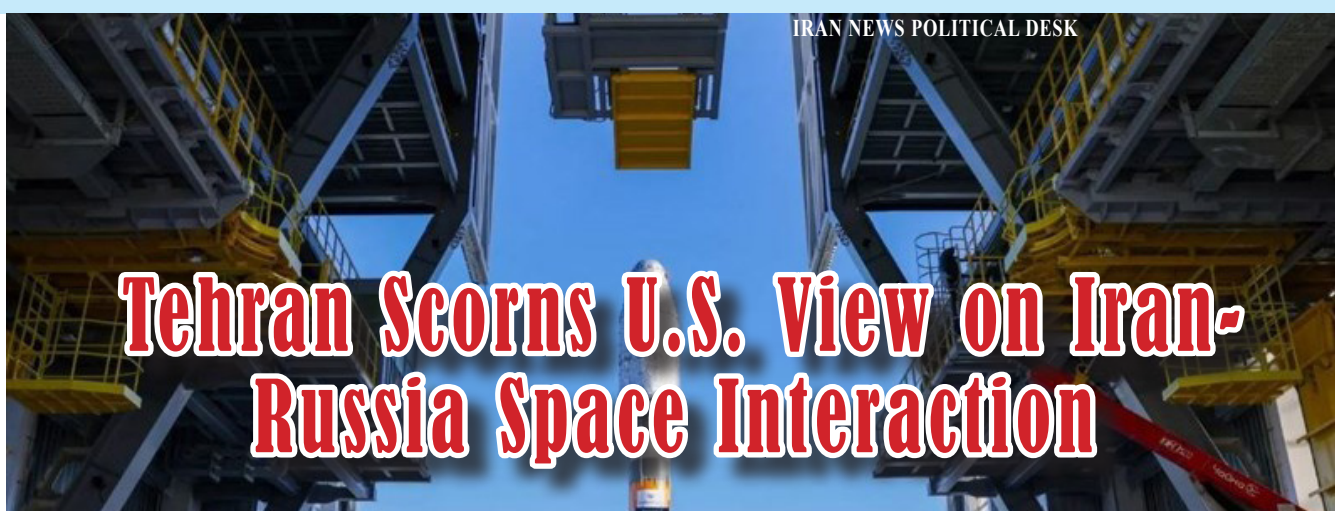


TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says Iran's security is "endogenous" and the Islamic Republic does not rely on any global power to ensure its national security. Raisi made the remarks in an address to the graduation ceremony for the cadets studying in the academies of Iran's Armed Forces which was held in Imam Hassan al-Mujtaba University of Officer and Police Training in Tehran on Monday. He said Iran's security stems from the presence of people in various scenes and from awareness, awakening, and vigilance and presence of the armed forces. "Our security does not depend on other countries and conventional powers in the world," the president asserted. He argued that security is Iran's most vital need as he pledged to strengthen the defense prowess of the country. "Defense power, economic stability and cultural capability are three important components of national strength," Raisi emphasized. He added that the enemy is hell-bent on hindering the Iranian nation's progress through acts of sabotage, sanctions and threats but Iranians are resolute on moving in the path of development. "In this war of wills, the will of the great Iranian nation has achieved victory so far and it will continue to be victorious in the future," the president stated. He said the Iranian nation's presence in various scenes and its accountability have foiled all the enemies' plots over the past 45 years. Elsewhere in his address, Raisi noted that the United States and the Israeli regime have the most despised armed forces in the world, emphasizing that Palestine and Gaza are now the leading issues of humanity.

SUDAN REBUFFS WSJ CLAIM ABOUT IRAN SEEKING NAVAL BASE ON RED SEA COAST



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali al-Sadiq Ali has dismissed Western media allegations about Iran's attempt to establish a permanent naval base on the Northeast African country's Red Sea coast. "I have read the article published in American daily newspaper The Wall Street Journal. The news story is false and fabricated," Ali told the Arabic service of Russia's Sputnik news agency on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2024 in the southwestern Turkish city of Antalya. He made clear that Iran has "never asked Sudan to establish a base there. I paid a visit to Iran lately, and the issue was never raised during my stay." Earlier in the day, The Wall Street Journal claimed that Iran had sought permission from Sudanese authorities to set up a permanent naval base on its Red Sea coast. The newspaper quoted a senior Sudanese intelligence official as saying that Iran offered Sudan advanced weaponry, including a helicopter-carrying warship, in exchange for consent to build the base. The official, Ahmed Hassan Mohamed, alleged that the base would have allowed Iran to "gather intelligence" and "station warships" near the vital Suez Canal and the Israeli-occupied territories. Last October, Iran and Sudan agreed to restore diplomatic relations after seven years. The two sides agreed to deepen their ties in different areas that would serve the interests of both Muslim nations and would be conducive to regional stability. Sudan cut diplomatic ties with Iran in 2016 following the storming of the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran.



Tehran Scorns U.S. View on Iran-Russia Space Interaction

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesperson brushed aside the U.S.' objections to aerospace cooperation between Tehran and Moscow after Iran launched a homegrown satellite with a Russian carrier. Asked about the U.S.' criticism of the launch of the Iranian Pars-1 satellite from a spaceport in Russia, Nasser Kanaani said at a weekly presser on Monday that nobody is allowed to raise doubts about the peaceful cooperation between Iran and Russia. Dismissing the U.S. concerns, the spokesman said, "The defense and space cooperation between Iran and the Russian Federation is conventional and in accordance with international law." "Iran has extensive cooperation with Russia. It is the right of countries to cooperate within the framework of international relations," he stated. Brushing off the "baseless" claims made by the U.S., Kanaani said there are "political motives" behind the American allegations against Iran-Russia cooperation or the comments about regional crises, such as the Ukraine war. "Iran will maintain cooperation with friendly countries within the framework of its rights," the spokesman underlined. His comments came after the U.S. alleged that the launches of Iranian satellites violate the UN Security Council resolutions. Kanaani also highlighted the importance of the upcoming emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), saying the 57-member bloc is "facing a test" on Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip. He made the remarks at a weekly press briefing on Monday, one day before an extraordinary meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers on the Gaza war in the Saudi city of Jeddah. It is the second such meeting in Saudi Arabia as the country hosted a similar event last year. "This cruel war continues in the shadow of warmongering by the Zionist regime's officials and the unlimited support of the United States. The OIC is facing a test tomorrow to show how much of its capacity it will use in support of Palestine," he said. "The leaders of Muslim countries are expected to take a strong and unanimous decision that requires an effective step to defend Palestine, with

an urgency of stopping the war." Also in his remarks, Kanaani commented on an anti-Iran statement issued by the Ministerial Council of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) after its meeting in the Saudi capital of Riyadh. The statement repeated the UAE's claim on the three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. The top diplomat said that Iran has always emphasized its sovereignty over the islands based on international law. "The GCC is not in a position to comment on this matter. Issuing unilateral statements negates the positive atmosphere in relations between Iran and the countries in this region. Iran expects its neighbors to adopt a realistic approach and avoid false comments." The three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs have historically been part of Iran, proof of which can be found and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world. However, the United Arab Emirates has repeatedly laid claim to the islands. Also in its statement, the GCC Ministerial Council made claims about the Persian Gulf Arash natural gas field, which Iran shares with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. It alleged that only the two Arab countries have the right to exploit natural resources from the field. Kanaani said that Iran has repeatedly announced its principled position on the matter based on international law. "Making one-sided claims will not create any rights for the claimant. We have emphasized the continuation of technical and legal negotiations with the Kuwaiti authorities," he added. "Raising such issues in unilateral statements is not acceptable at all." Intl. community accountable for Israel's provocations in Lebanon Regarding Israel's ground invasion of southern Lebanon and possibility of escalating tensions, the spokesman said the Israeli regime, due to its terrorist nature, is seeking to fuel tension and spread insecurity in the region. "Any action taken by Israel against other parties is an action aimed at jeopardizing regional peace and security."

IRAN WILL NEVER BOW DOWN TO ENEMIES



BANDAR ABBAS (IRNA) - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy's Rear Admiral, Alireza Tangsiri says the country's forces never shy away from enemies as they are serving the people just like our dear martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the nation. Tangsiri, while attending a funeral ceremony for Martyr Reza Zarei in Kormon, a village in Shamil District of Bandar Abbas, vowed no retreat in dealing with enemies. Let the ill-wishers of the world know that we will not succumb to enemies, and with the grace of God, we will avenge the blood of our loved ones, he stressed. Tangsiri praised IRGC member Reza Zarei for sacrificing his life for the defense of the holy shrine in Syria just like his colleagues Martyr Abdul Hamid Salari and Martyr Khalil Takhti Nejad who had also sacrificed their lives in Syria. The death doesn't make us afraid ever since we put on this holy uniform, the IRGC commander emphasized, adding that we will give our lives to defend Islam, our security and honor. "The honor that God gives to the family of a martyr is everlasting", he said. Rear Admiral Tangsiri also appreciated the people of Hormozgan for their massive presence in the funeral ceremony. Reza Zarei, identified as one of the guards of the 1st region of the IRGC Navy, becomes the third martyr from Hormozgan province. He was on an advisory mission to Syria and was killed in an Israeli airstrike on Banias, a small city and port located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

IRAQI PM LAUDS IRAN ROLE IN HELPING FIGHT AGAINST DAESH



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - The prime minister of Iraq has lauded Iran's role in helping the Arab country's fight against the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group, saying the two neighbors have many common grounds. According to Iraq's Al-Ahed news agency, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani made the comments in an interview with al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue, which was published on Sunday. "The Islamic Republic of Iran is our neighbor and we have many religious and social commonalities. During the fight against Daesh, Iran stood by us," Sudani said. He added that the government of Iraq is trying to get the viewpoints of different parties present in the country close together. The Takfiri terrorist group began a campaign of terror in Iraq in 2014 and then took control of vast swathes in lightning attacks across the region. Iraq declared victory over the terrorist group in December 2017 after a three-year counter-terrorism military campaign, in which Hashd al-Sha'abi, also known as Popular Mobilization Units, played a major role. Last December, Iraq's former prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, admitted that late commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, played a pivotal role in the anti-terrorism fight in his country, saying Iraq would have failed to defeat Daesh terrorists if it was not for General Soleimani's assistance. Elsewhere in his interview, Sudani reflected on the presence of foreign forces in Iraq within the framework of a so-called US-led international coalition. "All conditions and issues, which had caused the international coalition to be present in Iraq are now gone," the Iraqi prime minister said. He added that his government will continue efforts to end the presence of foreign troops in Iraq. Sudani noted, "The mission of foreign [military] advisors will come to an end according to a timetable to be drawn up by the Higher Military Committee."

Israeli Attack on Lebanon Will Ignite New Version of 2006 War

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement has warned that any Israeli act of aggression against the Arab country would ignite an advanced version of the 33-day war fought back in the summer of 2006, when the occupying regime suffered a humiliating defeat. "The Zionist enemy continues to threaten us with military aggression, and we respond by means of steadfastness, resistance, and retaliatory strikes," Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem said at the sixth International Conference for the Union of Resistance Scholars in the Lebanese capital city of Beirut on Monday. "We, hereby, declare that if they commit a foolish act and attack our territories, there would then be a new version of the 2006 July war," Sheikh Qassem said. He added that scholars and thinkers from various Muslim countries have come together to raise their voices loudly in support of the heroic and honorable Axis of Resistance, stressing that resistance fighters will eventually emerge triumphant despite all the hardship and challenges they are enduring on the path to their final objectives. The top Hezbollah official described the surprise and large-scale Operation al-Aqsa Storm launched by Gaza-based resistance factions against Israel as the Palestinians' natural and legitimate reaction to the 75-years-long occupation of their land by the Zionist regime. "The Zionist regime is an aggressive and usurping entity that has been set up in the region in order to bring it under complete control and destroy it later on. The United States wants to be in charge of our region, as it can assert marked sway and influence in such a case," Sheikh Qassem said. He went on to say that Israel could not have managed to continue its relentless ground and aerial strikes against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip without the US military and intelligence support, denouncing the ongoing atrocities as pre-planned and meant to decimate the entire population in the coastal area. Sheikh Qassem also cast doubts on Western calls for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, describing them as theatrical and deceitful. He underlined that Hezbollah conducts operations against Israeli military outposts in the 1948 occupied territories in retaliation for the bloody aggression against Gazans and all out of its humanitarian and religious duties towards the oppressed Palestinian nation. Hamas: Arab, Muslim nations duty-bound to foil starvation plot against Gaza For his part, Osama Hamdan, a senior representative of Hamas in Lebanon, stated that Arab and Muslim nations are duty-bound to join forces and frustrate the Israeli regime's policy of intentionally starving Palestinians in Gaza. "Our people have withstood the ongoing Israeli aggression against Gaza for the last 150 days through unwavering resilience and unshakable determination. Gaza-based resistance factions conducted Operation al-Aqsa Storm at the time when the occupying regime was about to liquidate the Palestinian cause and resistance front."



IRAN NEWS



AFGHANISTAN CALLS FOR OPENING ECONOMIC OFFICE IN CHABAHAR PORT

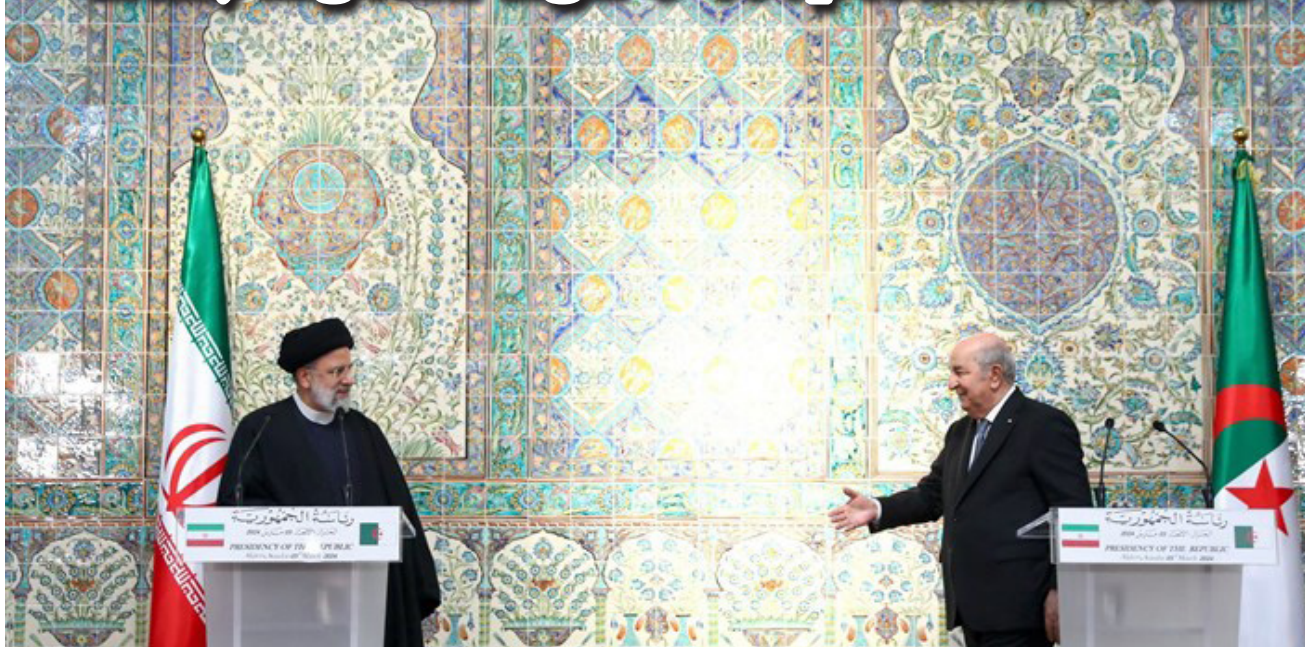
KABUL (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's ruling government has called for opening an economic representative office in Iran's southeastern port of Chabahar. The Ministry of Commerce of Afghanistan's ruling government has announced that its delegation to Iran has called for opening an office in Chabahar Port. An Afghan delegation led by Muhammadullah Bakhtiar, the ministry official in charge of international transit, has recently visited Chabahar where he had a meeting with Hojatollah Abdolmaleki, an aide to Iranian president. In their visit to Chabahar, the Afghan delegation held talks with the Iranian side on operationalizing the transportation chain and facilitating the conditions for the activities of Afghan businesspeople.

IRAN FULLY PREPARED FOR CLOSE TIES WITH PAKISTAN



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said Tehran embraces close cooperation and growing relations with Pakistan in accordance with its policy of good neighborliness. In a message on Sunday, Raisi congratulated Shehbaz Sharif on his election as the prime minister of Pakistan for a second term. "Iran is fully prepared for stronger and deeper relations in all areas of bilateral ties with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as a brother and neighbor within the framework of its permanent policy," Raisi said. He also expressed confidence that the mutual cooperation will grow in light of deep-rooted, age-old and cultural bonds between the two neighboring nations. The Iranian president also hoped that the new government of Pakistan would ensure growth and prosperity in the Muslim country. Pakistani legislators on Sunday elected Shehbaz Sharif as the country's prime minister for a second term following the last month's election. Pakistanis voted on February 8 in polls marred by allegations of large-scale rigging and delayed results. On Sunday, the National Assembly, as the lower house of parliament is called, met to elect the premier. Shehbaz secured 201 votes in the 336-member National Assembly, comfortably prevailing over rival Omar Ayub Khan, who won 92. The winner needed at least 169 votes.

Iran, Algeria Sign 6 Cooperation Deals



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran and Algeria signed six cooperation agreements during Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's official visit to Algiers. After a meeting of high-ranking delegations in Algiers on Sunday, co-chaired by the presidents of the two nations, six agreements were signed to promote cooperation in the oil and gas industries, scientific and technological activities, knowledge-based economy, tourism industry, sports, and the media sector. Speaking at a joint press conference with his Algerian counterpart, Raisi hailed Algeria for hosting the 7th summit of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). "The relations between Iran and Algeria are beyond political relations and stem from deep religious, cultural and civilizational ties," the Iranian president added. Highlighting the common political positions of Iran and Algeria, especially in defending the rights of Palestinians, Raisi said, "What is happening in Gaza today is genocide and a war crime, and the root of this crime is the 75-year history of occupation (of Palestine) by the Zionists." Expressing deep regret over

the continuation of relations between a number of Islamic countries and the Zionist regime, Raisi said, "Cutting off political and economic relations with this regime is one of the factors that will create deterrence against the criminality of this regime." "The international court should issue a verdict as soon as possible, so that the (Israeli) bombings (of Gaza) are stopped quickly, occupation is ended and the Zionists and the supporters of this regime are punished and brought to trial," he noted, his official website reported. Pointing to the negotiations held at the meeting of the high-ranking delegations of Iran and Algeria, Raisi said, "The high-ranking officials of Iran and Algeria are determined to develop economic and commercial relations along with the development of political relations, and the very good capacities of the two countries are a suitable basis for raising the level of economic relations." Raisi also expressed Iran's support for the Algerian government's positions to establish peace, stability and security in the region.

TEHRAN, ACCRA SIGN DEAL ON AIR TRANSPORT COOPERATION



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran and Ghana inked an agreement in the field of air transportation cooperation. According to a bylaw approved by the Iranian Cabinet of Ministers to present the license for negotiating with Ghana in line with developing the air transport relations between the two countries, a high-level Ghanaian delegation, headed by the director general of the Ghanaian Ministry of Transport, traveled to Iran to discuss broadening the mutual relations in this field, the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) said. Accordingly, the CAO embarked on the provision of a draft of the bilateral agreement in the air transport field and creation of a legal framework for the establishment of direct flights between the two countries, IRNA reported. Earlier, the head of the CAO said that negotiations had been held between Iran and 20 countries on the development of air transportation cooperation on the sidelines of the 15th ICAO Air Services Negotiation Event (ICAN2023). Despite the economic war the US and its allies have waged against Iran over the years, the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization has so far stood on its own feet in the field of repair and maintenance, design and construction of planes using the technical know-how and experience of knowledge-based companies, he stated.

Tehran, Damascus to Launch a Joint Free Zone

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Syria's Ambassador to Iran Shafiq Dayoub said a joint free zone will be launched between Iran and Syria in the near future. The relations between the two countries are 'historical and strategic' and serve the security of the region, he said, emphasizing that Tehran and Damascus will continue to develop their friendly ties. Speaking at a conference on the opportunities in the Syrian market, the envoy expressed hope that the cooperation between the two countries will be expanded in all areas, especially in the economic, scientific and cultural fields. A new chapter of cooperation has opened between the two countries, he said, hoping that the agreements inked between the two sides will produce positive results. The development and reconstruction of the damaged factories, overhauling and reconstructing renewable electricity power plants, launching new production lines to produce medicines and construction of residential units are among major projects in Syria, Dayoub maintained.

The Syrian government attaches great importance to its relations with Iran in the fields of science, technology and technology parks, he stated. Iranian products have high quality and are offered to the international markets with fair and reasonable prices, he said, adding, "We intend to introduce the products of the two countries to consumers." He invited Iranian companies to participate in the tender notices in Syria. Highlighting the significance of participating in the exhibitions of the two countries, Syria's ambassador said the exhibitions are the most important platforms for introducing the products of the two countries, IRNA reported. The Conference of Introducing the Opportunities of Entering the Syrian Market was held at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran with the participation of the Syrian envoy, Director General of West Asia Office of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran Abdolamir Rabiavi and a number of economic activists of the two countries.



IRAN ATTENDS MILITARY EXPO IN QATAR

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Ministry of Defense of Iran is among 67 VIP delegations that have attended the Doha International Maritime Defense Exhibition and Conference (DIMDEX) 2024 in Qatar. Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani has traveled to Doha to take part in the military exhibition and hold meetings with Qatari officials. The Defense Ministry of Iran is one of the exhibitors in the event. In its pavilion, the ministry has showcased Iran's capabilities and products in the aerospace, missile, electronic, telecommunications, aviation and defense industries. The 8th edition of DIMDEX is underway from March 4 to 6. The Middle East Naval Commanders Conference (MENC) is a side event of DIMDEX that includes academics and industry experts from around the world to discuss the latest regional and international trends in maritime defense and security on strategic and operational levels.

CBI APPROVES SETTING UP JOINT BANK WITH SYRIA



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vice chairman of the Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce Ali Asghar Zebardast has said that the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has approved setting up a joint bank with Syria, noting that agreements between Iran and Syria are carried out by the governments of the two countries, but the private sector will enforce it. Zebardast made remarks regarding the joint Iran-Syria Chamber at the Conference of Introducing Opportunities of Entering the Syrian Market in the Iranian capital city of Tehran on Sunday. He mentioned that the joint Iran-Syria Chamber has held numerous meetings recently and expressed hope that the agreements signed between the two countries would be implemented soon. Zebardast pointed out some of the issues faced by traders from the two countries, including money transfer. He also revealed that the CBI has approved the establishment of a joint bank and issued the license for setting up the bank. Zebardast called on the Syrian officials to cooperate with the Iranian side to eliminate the trade barriers facing traders from both countries. He stated that Syria's annual import value is approximately \$5 billion, while the value of trade between Iran and Syria is between \$250 million and \$270 million, noting that to develop economic ties, the two sides should use the potential of the private sector more. The Conference of Introducing Opportunities of Entering the Syrian Market was held at Morvarid Hall of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran and was attended by Syrian Ambassador to Iran Shafiq Dayoub, Director General of West Asia Office of the TPOI Abdolamir Rabiavi, and several economic activists from both countries.

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, Tunisia 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.



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.

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.



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.

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.



HUNDREDS PROTEST IN SENEGAL TO DEMAND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS BE HELD BEFORE APRIL 2

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.

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." Zelenskyy identified the youngest victims of the attack as four-month-old Tymofiy and Mark, aged two. Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said the infant was found dead alongside his mother and posted a photograph of a rescue worker next to a bloodied blanket, a baby's arm visible on one side and an adult arm extending out the other. Smoke poured from rubble strewn across the ground where the drone had ripped a chunk several storeys high out of the building. "My husband quickly ran out to help people ... then I saw people running out and I understood people had died in there," said Svitlana Tkachenko, who lives in a neighbouring building. Clothes and furniture were scattered in the ruined mass of concrete and steel hanging off the side of the apartment block. Ukraine's State Emergencies Service posted photos including of a dead toddler being placed in a body bag by rescuers. "This is impossible to forget. This is impossible to forgive," it said in a statement. It said five people, including a child, had been rescued alive. Several thousand long-range, winged, Shahed drones have been fired at targets inside Ukraine since Moscow's full-scale invasion two years ago.



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SPORTS

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Foden Reaches New Heights as City Win Manchester Derby

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola said Phil Foden has become a "world class" talent capable of deciding big games after the 23-year-old scored twice in Manchester City's 3-1 win over Manchester United on Sunday. Marcus Rashford's wonder strike had fired United into a shock lead at the Etihad. Erling Haaland was then guilty of a miss that will go down in Premier League folklore when he fired over an open goal just before half-time. But Foden ensured City ceded no ground in the title race as he blasted into the top corner to level and then produced a composed finish 10 minutes from time. Haaland atoned for his earlier miss in added time as City moved to within one point of Liverpool ahead of a top-of-the-table clash between the two next Sunday. "I always had the feeling he would score goals and now he is winning games. To become a world class-player at that age you have to win games," said Guardiola. "He lives to play football. That's why with 18, 19 years old he proved things but now he's more mature. He always scored goals but now scores goals that win games and when you do this, you reach another level as a player." An 11th league defeat of the season for United leaves Erik ten Hag's men 11 points adrift of the top four with 11 games remaining. United could have few complaints after being outplayed and having just one shot on target, even if it was a spectacular one. Rashford rounded on his critics this week as he hit back at questions of his commitment. The England international has been a pale imitation of the forward

who scored 30 goals last season for most of this campaign, but showed a glimpse of the quality by smashing in off the crossbar from long range. Guardiola's men dominated from that moment on, but were kept at bay for nearly an hour by wayward finishing and some fine goalkeeping by Andre Onana. Twice the Cameroonian foiled Foden when clean through, while Rodri was also denied by a smart stop low to his left. United's lead remained intact until half-time but only thanks to a moment that will be replayed for years. City finally cut the visitors' massed defence to shreds as Rodri's cross was headed back across goal by Foden, inviting the finishing touch from Haaland. However, he incredibly turned the ball over with the goal gaping from point-blank range. The rearguard action from the Red Devils was finally undone as Foden produced a strike to match Rashford's in the first half. Ten Hag was furious that a foul had not been awarded to Rashford at the other end, but he appeared to go to ground too easily under contact from Kyle Walker. Rodri picked out Foden, who cut inside and arrowed a blistering shot into the top corner. A slick one-two between Foden and Julian Alvarez opened up the United defence for the decisive goal as the England international fired in his 18th of the season. "That's my aim, to turn up in the big games," said Foden, who has now scored six goals in nine Premier League games against United. "That's what I want to do. I think this season I'm proving that."

ALCARAZ OUTLASTS NADAL IN MADE-FOR-NETFLIX EXHIBITION



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz and Rafael Nadal warmed up for the ATP Indian Wells Masters with a lively exhibition in Las Vegas won by Alcaraz 3-6, 6-4, 14-12. The contest at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, carried live by streaming service Netflix, was a chance for both Spanish stars to test their fitness. Nadal, a 22-time Grand Slam champion, missed most of last year with a hip injury sustained at the Australian Open. He made his comeback at the Brisbane International in January before a small muscle tear forced the 37-year-old to pull out of this season's first Grand Slam in Melbourne. He shelved plans to return to action at the Qatar Open in February, saying he was "not ready to compete." He told interviewer Mary Joe Fernandez he felt "much better than expected" after pocketing the first set against Alcaraz. And he had enough in the tank to save five match points in the match tiebreak before Alcaraz finally finished it out. It was an encouraging performance before Indian Wells, where Nadal is a three-time champion. In his most recent Indian Wells appearance, Nadal finished runner-up to American Taylor Fritz in 2022. The Spanish veteran will play his first-round match at Indian Wells on Thursday. Alcaraz, who will be seeded in the California desert, will have a first-round bye. Alcaraz, ranked second in the world, will be trying to become the first man to successfully defend his Indian Wells title since Novak Djokovic's three-peat from 2014-2016. But the 20-year-old Spaniard has had his own injury concerns of late, retiring from his first-round match at the Rio Open less than two weeks ago after he rolled his right ankle on just the second point of the match against Thiago Monteiro. It was another setback for the two-time Grand Slam winner, who fell to Alexander Zverev in the Australian Open quarter-finals and lost to Chilean Nicolas Jarry in the semi-finals at Buenos Aires.

Celtics Overwhelm Warriors While Clippers Edge T-Wolves

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - NBA overall leader Boston delivered a devastating and historic performance in routing the Golden State Warriors 140-88 on Sunday, stretching the Celtics' win streak to 11 games. It was the third-largest blowout victory in Celtics history, a legacy dating to 1946. Boston's Jaylen Brown scored 25 of his 29 points in a record-shattering first half while Jayson Tatum celebrated his 26th birthday by scoring 22 of his 27 points during the first two quarters of domination. "It's up there. Great birthday. Got to do what I love in front of the best fans in the world and get a win," Tatum said. The Celtics became the first club in NBA history to win three games in the same season by 50 or more points. The Celtics routed Indiana 155-104 in November and last month blasted Brooklyn 136-86, taking both in Boston. Despite Latvian big man Kristaps Porzingis being sidelined by a left quad bruise, the host Celtics seized an 82-38 lead after the second quarter, their largest half-time edge in team history and the Warriors' largest-ever half-time deficit. "It was a lot of fun," Boston's Derrick White said. "It was a good start. You never expect something like that to happen." The Celtics made 10 3-pointers in the first quarter, their most in any quarter this season, and closed the period on a 23-1 run over six minutes to seize command at 44-22. The Warriors shot 34.9% (15-of-43) in the first half, 3-of-18 from 3-point range, and made eight turnovers while the Celtics shot 60% (30-of-50) in the first half, 15-of-24 from beyond the arc, and made only one turnover. Top players saw little of the court in the second half. Boston stretched the lead to 115-62 after three quarters and reserves cruised to the finish as the Celtics improved to 29-3 at home this season. Eastern Conference leader Boston improved the league's best record to 48-12 while Golden State slid to 32-28, ninth in the Western Conference. "We have a lot of experience. We've grown, we've matured," Brown said. "We're primed and we're ready." There's a lot of respect for the Golden State Warriors, but we feel like it's our time now. The Minnesota Timberwolves (42-19) fell from the West lead after losing at home 89-88 to the Los Angeles Clippers while Oklahoma City (42-18) secured the top spot by winning at Phoenix 118-110. Kawhi Leonard's two free throws with 13 seconds remaining gave the Clippers an 89-86 lead. Minnesota's Anthony Edwards drove to the basket for a dunk with three seconds remaining but the T-Wolves never got the ball back. Leonard led the Clippers with 32 points while Edwards led Minnesota with 27. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points to lead Oklahoma City while Bradley Beal

paced the Suns with 31 points and Jusuf Nurkic grabbed a club-record 31 rebounds for Phoenix. At Dallas, Mavericks star Luka Doncic posted a triple double in a losing cause as the Philadelphia 76ers took a 120-116 triumph. Tobias Harris scored 28 points, Tyrese Maxey added 24 and Kelly Oubre Jr. had 21 off the bench for the Sixers (35-25), who remain without injured reigning NBA MVP Joel Embiid. Slovenian Doncic finished with 38 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists while Kyrie Irving added 28 points for Dallas, which fell to 34-27, eighth in the West. At Cleveland, Donte DiVincenzo scored 28 points and Josh Hart had a triple double with 13 points, 19 rebounds and 10 assists to spark New York's 107-98 victory over the host Cavaliers. New York's Jalen Brunson was hurt in the game's opening seconds, holding his left knee before limping off the court - adding to injury issues that have benched three top forwards. The Cavaliers were without Donovan Mitchell due to a sore left knee.



RASPADORI FIRES NAPOLI PAST JUVE



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

De Minaur Sinks Ruud to Retain Mexican Open Crown

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Third seed Alex de Minaur successfully defended his Mexican Open crown, romping to a 6-4 6-4 victory over Casper Ruud in the Acapulco title clash. The result helped the 25-year-old Australian snap a four-match losing run in finals and bag his eighth ATP Tour title - his seventh on hard courts - to secure his place in the top 10 of the world rankings that will be updated today. "It's been an amazing week," said De Minaur, who finished runner-up to Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner in Rotterdam last month. "It's probably a week I didn't really expect. I came into Mexico not feeling my best and just kept telling myself to keep giving myself chances. I think today I played my best match of the tournament by far. Acapulco has been a very good place for me and my tennis career. First time I've won an ATP 500, first time I've defended a title in my career. I feel at home here." The world number nine drew first blood for a 2-1 lead in the opening set as sixth-seeded Norwegian Ruud, who battled through tough three-setters against Ben Shelton and Holger Rune in the prior two rounds, appeared slightly off the pace. But like he did in those matches, Ruud responded strongly to grab an early break in the second set, only for De Minaur to pull level at 2-2 before getting his nose in front in the seventh game with a stinging forehand winner.

With the momentum swinging his way, De Minaur wrapped up the match with a solid service game and celebrated being the first man to man retain the Acapulco title in 12 years. De Minaur will put any further partying on ice, however, as he said he would jet off to San Diego where his girlfriend Katie Boulter of Britain will play in the final against Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk. Meanwhile Britain's Katie Boulter won the biggest title of her career, beating Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk 5-7, 6-2, 6-2 to claim the WTA San Diego Open title. The 27-year-old, whose only previous WTA crown came at Nottingham last June, moves into the world rankings top 30 for the first time in her career. Boulter had upset third seed Emma Navarro of the United States in the semi-finals. Kostyuk, ranked 34th, had beaten top-seeded Jessica Pegula to reach the final but struggled after winning the first set against the big-hitting Briton. After rain forced a delay in the final, Boulter handed the hard-fought first set to the Ukrainian on her seventh set point after she double faulted. Meanwhile eighth seed Yuan Yue outlasted sixth seed Wang Xiyi 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) to win her first WTA title, capturing an all-

