

The Foreign Ministers of Iran and Turkey During Their Meeting in Jeddah Weighed Plans to Resume the Passenger and Cargo Rail Service Between the Two Neighbors

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Telecoms Minister Issa Zarepour Says the Country Thwarted More Than 20 Sabotage Attempts Targeting Its Communications Infrastructure on March 1 When Nationwide Elections Were Held

VOL. XXIX, No. 7922 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SUNDAY MARCH 10, 2024 ESFAND 20, 1402

## 2 DOMESTIC

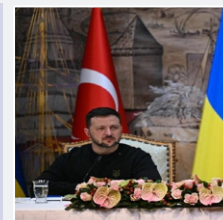


### Iran Ranks 1st Among 70 Countries in Collecting Flare Gases

> SEE PAGE 2

## 3 INTERNATIONAL

### Turkey Ready to Host Ukraine-Russia Peace Summit



> SEE PAGE 3

### Iran Confiscates U.S. Oil Cargo in Persian Gulf



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has seized a U.S. oil cargo over a lawsuit filed by patients with a rare skin disease, whose lives are at risk due to inhumane U.S. sanctions. The U.S. oil cargo was carried by the Marshall Islands-flagged Advantage Sweet in the Persian Gulf. Reports said the confiscation took place upon a court ruling in favor of the patients afflicted with epidermolysis bullosa (EB) or butterfly patients. In their complaint, the EB patients, who are characterized by extreme fragility of the skin and mechanically induced blistering, claimed damages against the U.S. They said that the Western sanctions, especially those by the US, have prevented a Swedish company from selling medicines to Iran and caused severe physical and mental harm to them. The United States reinstated its sanctions against Iran in May 2018 after leaving a United Nations-endorsed nuclear agreement with the Islamic Republic and five other countries. Since then, Mölnlycke Health Care, a Swedish medical device company headquartered in Gothenburg, has stopped selling pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, including special bandages for EB patients, to Iranian companies, citing the unilateral U.S. sanctions. The move has deprived EB patients of essential medical items, killed many of them, and inflicted serious physical injuries such as amputation to some of the patients.

### Iran Armed Forces Maintain Full Intelligence Dominance Over Enemies



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Iranian Army says the Islamic Republic's Armed Forces maintain complete dominance in the field of intelligence over the enemies and are fully prepared to defend the country's national interests. Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi made the remarks during a ceremony attended by high-ranking military officials and commanders for the delivery of new combat-defensive equipment to the Iranian Navy in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas on Wednesday. A total of 42 items of watercraft equipment and weapons joined the Navy's fleet. Praising the Iranian Army's remarkable progress in the field of military industry, Mousavi said the assistance provided by the country's government, the Defense Ministry, universities and knowledge-based companies contributed to the fulfillment of such goals, making "Iran and Iranians proud." The U.S., which supports the child-killing regime of Israel, is "busy forcing others to adopt baseless positions through deception and coercion, and they reveal their seditious nature in different ways," the top commander said. "Iran's Armed Forces, with complete intelligence dominance over adversaries, are ready to defend the country's national interests at any required level, and on this path, they will not back down an iota from the country's soil and the ideals of the Islamic Revolution," he added. Domestically-developed guided missile destroyers, Azarakhsh (Thunderbolt) speedboats, minesweeper helicopters and Sanjar drones were among dozens of new military equipment delivered to the Iranian Navy on Wednesday. During the ceremony, 16 items of achievement were also unveiled in the field of defensive military equipment, marine sensors, underwater and subsurface telephone system, oxygen generating devices, jamming and surveillance systems as well as wiretap and interception systems.



### Iran Makes Tangible Proposals for End to Gaza War

TEHRAN - The foreign minister of Iran put forward a number of practical proposals for collective action by Muslim nations to mount pressure on the Zionist regime and force it to stop the brutal onslaught on Gaza. Addressing the extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held in Jeddah on Tuesday to address the Israeli regime's aggression against Palestine, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian called for "decisive and effective" action against the illegitimate Zionist regime. "In the shadow of the unity of the Islamic world, concerted efforts should be made to force the White House and this (Israeli) regime to cease the ongoing war and genocide, and reopen routes for sending humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in Gaza," he said. "What is rightfully expected by public opinion from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is that it does not limit itself to mere condemnation of the crimes committed by the occupying Zionists. Instead, by passing effective and efficient resolutions and implementing objective and impactful measures, the organization is expected to take concrete actions that will lead to the cessation of the crimes, bloodshed, and massacres in Palestine," he added. "At the present moment, what can more effectively restrain the illegitimate Israeli regime is the decisive and practical action of Islamic countries, exerting pressure on the Zionists. This includes the implementation of deterrent sanctions and, in the case of those who are still engaging with the regime in question, severing diplomatic, economic, and commercial relations, expelling the ambassadors of this regime, and recalling their ambassadors in occupied Palestine," the Iranian foreign minister stated. "The ongoing and unprecedented nature of the crimes committed by the Zionist

regime attests to the deliberate pursuit of a policy aimed at the annihilation of the Palestinian nation," he warned, adding, "The regime's recent attempt to attack Rafah aligns with this policy." "Undoubtedly, engaging in any form of economic cooperation and providing financial, military, or political assistance to this regime implies active collaboration and support for the crimes committed by the Zionists. It facilitates the continuation of their heinous acts, including the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians. In today's meeting, while offering full support to the actions taken by the South African government against the apartheid regime of Israel at the International Court of Justice, we must underscore the imperative of completely terminating any cooperation with this regime and a broader boycott of products produced by Zionist companies," Amir-Abdollahian noted. "We believe that the Palestinian nation, as the primary inhabitants of this land, possess the right to determine their own fate and future. No external party should impose its will or political agenda on them. The Palestinian people should decide the future of Gaza and the entirety of Palestine through a Palestinian-Palestinian framework, free from foreign interference and imposition. Without acknowledging this reality and a genuine commitment to upholding the inalienable right of the Palestinian nation to self-determination, any plan or initiative is destined for failure," he said. "The Islamic Republic of Iran holds the belief that the only practical method, grounded in robust human, moral, rational, democratic, and legal foundations accepted worldwide, is conducting a referendum among the original residents of Palestine, encompassing Muslims, Jews, and Christians," Amir-Abdollahian added.

### President Warns of Outburst of Anger Among World's Youths Over Israeli Crimes



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has warned of an outpouring of "anger" by the world's youths over the continuation of the Israeli crimes against Palestinians. Raisi made the remarks in an interview with Algeria's national television, which was published on Wednesday, during his recent visit to the North African country. "Today, the Zionist regime's oppression has exhausted the patience of not only the people of the region but also the people of the world," he said. "I think that if this situation persists, the anger of the youths of all nations, whether in the US and Britain or other countries in different continents, will be vented in another form," he further commented. Raisi pointed to the recent self-immolation of an active-duty member of the US Air Force in protest at Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip and the mass rallies held in European countries in support of Palestinians, expressing regret that their call for the end of Israel's crimes has fallen to deaf ears. The US and UK governments do not want to hear the voices of their own people and the world nations, therefore, they seek to expand the scope of the Gaza war, he explained. Additionally in his remarks, the Iranian chief executive urged all countries to unite against the usurping entity and "remove the cancerous tumor from the region." "We believe that the pure blood of the Palestinian martyrs and the oppressed will mark the end of the Zionist regime," he added. Raisi further said that the Israeli crimes against humanity and its war crimes in Gaza do not conform to any international law or convention. "The current situation in Gaza ... is a great scandal for the West, which unmasks the true face of the US," he asserted. The Iranian president also lashed out at nuclear-armed Western countries for their double standards. He said they express concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear program while keeping mum on the Israeli regime that has hundreds of atomic warheads in possession, pointing to a threat in November 2023 by Israel's so-called heritage minister Amichai Eliyahu to use atomic bombs against Gaza.

### Hezbollah Launches Heaviest Rocket Attack



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Fighters from the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement have launched heavy rocket barrages at an Israeli kibbutz in the northern sector of the 1948 occupied territories in response to an air raid that killed three civilians in southern Lebanon. Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network, citing a brief Hezbollah statement, reported that resistance fighters fired dozens of Katyusha-type rockets at Kfar Blum kibbutz in the Upper Galilee region on Tuesday evening. It said the rocket fire was in retaliation for a deadly Israeli attack on a house in the southern Lebanese town of Houla, which killed all members of a three-strong family. A Hezbollah rocket struck the yard of a home in Kfar Blum, causing damage, local Israeli authorities said. A municipality spokeswoman said, "It is a very heavy barrage." Earlier, Hezbollah had fired a large barrage of rockets at the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona. The resistance fighters also targeted the Avivim moshav, located less than one kilometer from the Blue Line with Lebanon, with a salvo of rockets "in response to Israeli attacks on villages and civilian homes in southern Lebanon." Al-Mayadeen TV reported that more than 50 rockets were fired from southern Lebanon toward the Upper Galilee region, noting that the majority of the projectiles successfully struck designated targets in the Israeli-occupied lands. The Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement has warned that any Israeli act of aggression against the Arab country would ignite a new version of the 33-day war fought back in the summer of 2006. Israeli media outlets said the rocket barrages were one of the heaviest to be launched toward the Upper Galilee since the start of cross-border confrontation on October 8, noting that the attacks caused a power outage in the area.

### Iran, Uzbekistan Stress Boosting Economic Ties

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's first vice president in the meeting with Uzbekistan's Minister of Energy expressed hope that economic interactions between the two sides would be expanded significantly as strong economic support is the key to stable political interactions. In a meeting with Uzbekistan's Minister of Energy Jo'rabek Mirzamahmudov, Iran's first vice President Mohammad Mokhber stated that the three meetings between the presidents of the two countries in the past 2 years show Tehran-Tashkent's determination to promote all-round communication between the two sides. Mokhber said: "We hope that the economic interactions will expand following the political relations of the two countries because the political interactions will remain stable with strong economic support." He stated: "He clarified that the agreements signed in the presence of the presidents of the two countries should be implemented as soon as possible and new cooperation agreements should be pursued." Referring to the very high cooperation capacities of the two countries in various fields, especially transportation and energy, Mokhber continued: "The achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the industrial sectors, energy, electricity, transportation, modern technologies, and knowledge-based companies can well define new areas for cooperation." He also pointed to the two important corridors of Iran, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, as well as Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Oman, noting that these exchange routes should be activated more than in the past and the issues in the preferential trade agreements should be resolved. The first vice president stated that the solution for monetary and banking issues, transportation and transit plays an essential role in stable economic relations, adding: "In the financial and banking field, interactions can be carried out with the national currency of the two countries and there is no reason to use the currency of a third country, which is very important to strengthen the value of the national currency of Iran and Uzbekistan, and the central banks of the two countries should provide the necessary banking mechanism in this regard." Mokhber further noted that regarding the expanding transit interactions, the airlines of the two countries should become more active, and the process of issuing visas between the citizens and business activists of the private and economic sectors of Iran and Uzbekistan should be facilitated. Mirzamahmudov, the Minister of Energy of Uzbekistan, also considered the historical meetings of the presidents of the two countries in the past two years as an indication of the deepening of relations, noting: "In their meetings, the presidents of Iran and Uzbekistan agreed to increase the volume of financial and economic exchanges from 500 million dollars to 1 billion dollars and shortly 2 billion dollars, they have emphasized that the implementation of the agreements between the two countries should be provided." He added: "The President of Uzbekistan has ordered that in addition to following up on past agreements, new possibilities for financial and economic interactions with Iran will be reviewed and finalized during this trip, and Uzbekistan is fully prepared to use the great capacities of Iran in the fields of technology, knowledge, trade and Use investment."



# IRAN NEWS



## Iran, Tajikistan Agree on Joint Medicine Production

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian and Tajik ministers of health have discussed bilateral cooperation in the health sector to manufacture medicines. Iranian Health Minister Bahram Einollahi met his Tajikistani counterpart, Abdullozoda Jamoliddin Abdullo, on the sidelines of the first international conference on family health in Tehran on Tuesday. During the meeting, Einollahi said a new chapter has opened in cooperation with Tajikistan, stressing the importance of forming a joint working group for pursuing bilateral ties in the area of health and other fields. Exchanging students and professors, holding scientific conferences, and working on research projects will help promote cooperation, he underlined. He also said the Islamic Republic is ready to export medical equipment to Tajikistan, jointly manufacture medicine, and exchange medical experiences with the Persian-speaking country. For his part, the Tajik minister appreciated Iran's effort to hold such an international medical conference.

## New Chapter Opens in Iran-Azerbaijan Ties



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Highlighting the opportunities for stronger cooperation between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said Tehran's policy entails the enhancement of relations with Baku in all fields. In a meeting with his Azeri counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov, held on the sidelines of an OIC meeting in Jeddah on Tuesday, Amir-Abdollahian said, "The Republic of Azerbaijan holds an important position in Iran's neighborhood policy, and the two nations share kinship ties beyond historical and neighborly connections." The Iranian diplomat expressed satisfaction with the development of bilateral relations, adding, "Fortunately, a new chapter has opened in the relations between the two countries, promising opportunities for mutual cooperation. There are many prospects for collaboration that benefit both nations." Highlighting Tehran's policy to enhance relations with Baku in all fields, Amir-Abdollahian said Iran is ready to host the next meeting of the joint commission of the two countries. He also underscored the importance of joint efforts and actions to make regional multilateral structures more active in advancing the common interests of regional countries, the Foreign Ministry's website reported. For his part, Bayramov described continuous bilateral consultations with his Iranian counterpart as useful and productive. He said the Republic of Azerbaijan's policy is to maintain close relations with its neighbors, and Iran holds a special position in this regard. Pointing to the joint projects, Bayramov expressed hope that these projects would be implemented and come on stream as soon as possible. The two senior diplomats finally discussed various regional development, including the crisis in Palestine.



## Iran, Saudi FMs Meet in Jeddah Ahead of OIC Gathering on Gaza

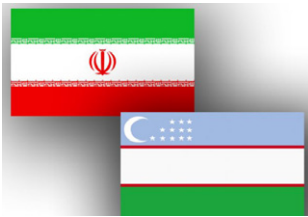
TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has met with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, in the city of Jeddah, calling for the enhancement of Tehran-Riyadh ties in diplomacy and economy. The two top diplomats' meeting took place on Tuesday ahead of an emergency gathering of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)'s foreign ministers discussing Israel's five-month genocidal war on Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. Amir-Abdollahian expressed his satisfaction with the level of cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, voicing the Islamic Republic's readiness to boost bilateral relations by putting forward common priorities in cooperation between the two countries. The Iranian foreign minister underlined as one of the "important priorities" the consolidation of economic and trade relations in addition to the facilitation of commercial activities between Tehran and Riyadh. The top Iranian diplomat also thanked his Saudi counterpart accepting Iran's proposal to hold the emergency meeting on Gaza and hosting the summit, underscoring the significance of adopting a "coherent and strong" position by the OIC member states in support of Palestinians and ending the Israeli crimes in the besieged territory. "Our expectation is that in this summit, in addition to common positions, effective steps will be taken to support Palestine and end the genocide," Amir-Abdollahian said. The Saudi foreign minister, for his part, pointed to the dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza and emphasized the importance of the Jeddah summit in line with continuing efforts to end the war against Palestinians.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



## Iran Ranks 1st Among 70 Countries in Collecting Flare Gases

TEHRAN - The Iranian oil minister said the country's oil and gas industry ranks first among the major gas exporting and producing countries in collecting flare gases. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Javad Owji pointed to the recent Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) held in Algeria and said a comprehensive report was given at the forum on the situation of gas reserves and gas production among member states which supply 70 percent of the world gas. According to the secretariat of the GECF, the average natural gas production growth stands at 2.5 percent, with Iran managing to register a 5% gas production growth, he added, ISNA reported. The next edition of the GECF will be held in Iran in November 2024, the oil minister revealed, adding that Iran presented its up- and downstream capabilities in the oil and gas industry at the Algeria forum. In addition, Iran unveiled a new format of contracts in developing the country's gas fields to attract foreign investors, Owji highlighted. He then said Iran's infrastructure for transiting gas from the North-South and East-West corridors is ready. The minister pointed to the GECF Award for Long-Term Commitment to Natural Gas in 2024 given to Iran for doing unique research into flare gas collection and putting the research into practice on the sidelines of the 7th Gas Exporting Countries Forum Summit of Heads of State and Government in Algiers, the capital of Algeria, on Friday. Iran was selected as the host for the 26th Ministerial Meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum in October



2024 in the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the 7th GECF Summit, during which "we unveiled the format of our new gas contracts" and introduced Iran's capabilities in upstream and downstream sectors of the oil and gas industry, he continued. The development of Iran's gas fields through attracting foreign investment was also discussed during the meeting, said Owji, adding the Oil Ministry has attracted the highest amount of foreign capitals in the current Iranian calendar year (starting March 21, 2023) when compared to other ministries. Iran reached good agreements with the GECF member states on exports of technical and engineering services, sales of gas products, development of gas fields, and construction of gas pressure stations, transmission pipelines, and storage facilities. Mohamed Hamel, the Gas Exporting Countries Forum secretary general, elaborated on the Iranian president's proposals for investment and said the suggestions will be put on the agenda, Owji mentioned. Shifting to the official inauguration of Sephehr and Jofeir oil fields in southwestern Iran, the minister said the ceremony will be held in the presence of the president in the near future, concluding that the two fields add 50,000 barrels to the country's daily output. He further pointed out that Iran concluded good agreements with the member states of gas exporting countries in the fields of exporting technical and engineering services, selling gas byproducts, developing gas fields, and developing gas pressure-boosting stations.

## Iran, Uzbekistan to Ink Comprehensive Transport Cooperation Document

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Officials from Iran and Uzbekistan reached an agreement to sign a comprehensive transport cooperation document in near future in line efforts to strengthen bilateral ties in the fields of transport and transit. In a meeting with Uzbek Energy Minister Jurabek Mirzamakhmudov in Tehran, Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash emphasized promoting cooperation in the fields of transport and transit. Bazrpash pointed to the expert-level meetings held between officials of the two countries in these fields and said that Iran is committed to implementing the memoranda of understanding (MoUs) inked between the two sides on the development of the International East-West Transport Corridor. Bazrpash went on to say that Iran is ready to construct rail and road projects in Uzbekistan and that a memorandum of understanding has been signed in this regard

within the framework of exporting technical and engineering services to the Central Asian country, Mehr news agency reported. The visiting Uzbek minister, for his part, said that his country attaches great importance to enhancing its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran in all fields. Mirzamakhmudov said his country is ready to provide the conditions needed for the activity of the Iranian companies and economic enterprises in Uzbekistan. He put the value of the trade exchanges between Iran and Uzbekistan in 2023 at \$500 million and expressed hope that it will increase in 2024. Outlining a road map for the development of bilateral cooperation in the transit sector will certainly play an important role in the expansion of the trade ties, he emphasized. The two sides agreed to provide a comprehensive transportation cooperation document as soon as possible.



## Iran Ready to Export Technical, Engineering Services to Uzbekistan



TEHRAN (Shana) - Oil Minister Javad Owji on Tuesday voiced Iran's readiness to export technical and engineering services to Uzbekistan. Owji, who made the statement in a meeting with Uzbekistan's Minister of Energy Jurabek Mirzamakhmudov in Tehran, added the Iranian companies and manufacturers are ready to participate in Uzbekistan's oil projects. Iran is currently cooperating with 42 countries in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors, said the oil minister, adding Iran's oil industry has become self-sufficient in spite of unilateral U.S. sanctions and the country's oil and gas fields are developed by domestic knowledge-based companies. Owji said Iran is drilling oil and gas fields at a depth of 6,000 meters in the absence of foreign experts. The Uzbek energy minister said he has closely observed Iran's capabilities and achievements in international energy exhibitions, which displayed its modern oil and gas equipment. He said Uzbekistan's officials have adequate information about the Iranian companies' great experiences in oil and gas exploration, extraction, transmission, and refining sectors, calling for Iran to share its expertise and technical know-how with his country. Mirzamakhmudov, who is in Iran to follow up the agreements signed by Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his Iranian counterpart Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi, said the Uzbek government is keen to expand relations, particularly in the oil sector, with Iran.

## Iran, Vietnam Working to Reach Agreement on Preferential Trade



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) Mehdi Zeighami has said that the Islamic Republic of Iran and Vietnam have expressed hope to reach an agreement on preferential trade. During a meeting with Vietnam's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Minh Hang on Tuesday, Zeighami pointed to the importance of the Vietnamese market for Iran, saying that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi emphasizes the development of economic ties with East Asian countries, and Vietnam is among the 15 countries that Iran prioritizes for trade. Zeighami invited Vietnamese government officials, private sector representatives, and businesspersons to participate in the Iranian international trade event, the 2024 Iran Expo exhibition. Iran has signed preferential trade agreements with many countries, he said, adding that the Islamic Republic of Iran is willing to sign preferential trade agreements with the Vietnamese side, which would help to develop trade between the two nations. Nguyen Minh Hang, for her part, called for strengthening economic and trade ties with Iran, expressing Vietnam's willingness to hold a joint commission between the two countries to discuss further opportunities for collaboration. She also emphasized Vietnam's goal of developing a roadmap for trade with Iran, including the possibility of signing preferential tariffs with Iran, given that Vietnam has already signed tariff-free agreements with many other countries.

### U.S. Issues Sanctions on Companies Over Wagner Group Links

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States unveiled sanctions on two companies over their roles supporting Russian mercenaries the Wagner Group, noting that Moscow has tried to use affiliated businesses to secure revenues and further its interests in Africa. "The United States remains focused on disrupting the networks that enable Russia's illicit and destabilizing activities in Africa," said U.S. Treasury Under Secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, Brian Nelson. In a statement, the Treasury said those targeted "sought monetary gain from illicit natural resource extraction." They also allegedly supported the Wagner Group and others affiliated with its former owner Yevgeny Prigozhin. Prigozhin died in August 2023, after the plane he was in crashed on a flight from Moscow to Saint Petersburg. He died alongside his top aides in the incident, two months after they attempted to topple Russia's military leadership, angering President Vladimir Putin. Among the entities targeted on Friday were Bois Rouge, also known as Wood International Group, a timber company based in the Central African Republic.



### As UN Urges Sudan Truce, Russia and China Cite Gaza



UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - The United Nations Security Council on Friday called for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Sudan, prompting China to remind it not to forget about the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and Russia to accuse the United States of double standards. Russia abstained, while the remaining 14 council members voted in favor of the British-drafted resolution that called for an immediate cessation of hostilities during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which begins early next week. War erupted in Sudan on April 15, 2023, between the Sudanese army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The U.N. says nearly 25 million people - half Sudan's population - need aid, some 8 million have fled their homes and hunger is rising. Washington says the warring parties have committed war crimes. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people were killed in one city alone in Sudan's West Darfur region last year in ethnic violence by the RSF and allied Arab militia, according to a U.N. sanctions monitors report seen by Reuters in January. Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador, Anna Evstigneeva, accused the U.S. of "double standards" by "dragging out the adoption of a document on a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip," where health authorities say more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in the past five months. "The USA time and again uses it to veto, plays for time and demands that we wait for some results from its direct diplomacy on the ground. Nothing of the sort is proposed for Sudan," she told the council before the vote. The United States has vetoed three draft council resolutions since the war began on Oct. 7 when Hamas attacked Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking 253 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Washington's ally Israel retaliated with an air and land assault on the Palestinian militants in Gaza. "While adopting a resolution on a ceasefire during the month of Ramadan in the Sudan, the Security Council must not forget that the people of Gaza are still suffering under bombardment," China's deputy U.N. ambassador, Dai Bing, told the council. "The international community must push for immediate ceasefire." The United States did not respond in the council to Russia and China's remarks on Gaza. The U.S. is currently negotiating a draft resolution that backs "an immediate ceasefire of roughly six-weeks in Gaza together with the release of all hostages," but it has said it is not in a rush to put the text to a vote.

### Tear Gas Battle as Greek Students Protest University Reform



ATHENS (Dispatches) - Greek students clashed with police in Athens Friday as thousands protested a controversial bill on private universities, which they say will favor the rich. Riot police fired tear gas and used batons to keep students away from parliament ahead of a vote on the bill. Some protesters hurled stones and Molotov cocktails and setting bins on fire. Media reported that at least eight people had been injured and nine arrested. The proposed measure will make degrees from approved private institutions equivalent to public university diplomas. The bill will also allow foreign universities to open in Greece using a nonprofit status despite charging tuition fees. Police said around 17,000 people marched to parliament in central Syntagma Square for the latest in weeks of student protests against the reform. Organisers put the turnout at 30,000. "No to education for the few and chosen, free education for all," many chanted. Demonstrator Iraklis Marinopoulos, 19, said the reform would "undermine" public university degrees and threaten regional colleges in smaller Greek cities. "Wealthier students will be able to enroll with lower grades. They will just pay and obtain a degree," he told AFP. Athina, a 20-year-old engineering student, said private institutions would eat into the meagre funds for public universities and devalue public university degrees. The government says the new bill will enable Greek public universities to enter into partnerships with foreign academic institutions, improving their international appeal. It has also said it will introduce stricter rules for private institutions. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told parliament the reform would enable Greek students "to study at international universities without leaving home." It was "a step that opens new horizons to the new generation," he argued.

## Turkey Ready to Host Ukraine-Russia Peace Summit



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose NATO-member country has sought to balance its close relations with both Ukraine and Russia, offered during a visit Friday from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to host a peace summit between the two countries. Erdogan, who has repeatedly discussed brokering a peace deal, said at a news conference in Istanbul following his meeting with Zelenskyy that he hoped Russia would be on board with Turkey's offer. "Since the beginning, we have contributed as much as we could toward ending the war through negotiations," Erdogan said. "We are also ready to host a peace summit in which Russia will also be included." Ukraine remains firm on not engaging directly with Russia on peace talks, and Zelenskyy has said multiple times the initiative in peace negotiations must belong to the country which has been invaded. Zelenskyy said any peace negotiations must align with a 10-point plan he has previously suggested, which includes food security, restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression, and security guarantees for Ukraine. "Any proposals for settling this war must start with the formula proposed by the state defending its land and its people," he said. "We want a fair peace." The Ukrainian leader expressed hope that at the inaugural peace summit expected to be held this year in Switzerland, the possibility of reopening all Ukrainian ports, not only in Odesa but also in Mykolaiv in southern Ukraine, will be considered. Zelenskyy, who visited shipyards where corvettes for the Ukrainian navy are being built, said on X that agreements were reached on joint defense projects with the Turkish government and corporations. He said on Telegram that they also agreed to simplify trade and remove barriers to business. Erdogan said the two discussed stability in the Black Sea shipping corridor and he reiterated Turkey's support for Ukraine's "territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence." The visit comes as Zelenskyy and other officials continue to press other nations for more munitions and weaponry to halt the advance of Russian troops trying to make deeper gains into the Ukraine-held western part of the Donetsk region and also penetrating into the

Kharkiv region north of it in the third year of war. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he was attending a meeting of the foreign ministers of France, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, that "drop by drop" aid to Ukraine no longer works. "If things continue as they currently happen, it's not going to end well for all of us," Kuleba said. "What is required is an unrestricted and timely supply of all types of weapons and ammunition to ensure that Ukraine beats Russia and the war in Europe does not spill over." An envoy from China, which has frustrated Ukraine and its Western allies by boosting trade with Russia and portraying the conflict and its causes largely from Moscow's point of view, was in Kyiv on Thursday during a European visit for talks on settling what it calls the Ukraine crisis. Li Hui, the special representative for Eurasian affairs, met with officials from Russia, the EU, Switzerland and Poland before his stop in Ukraine and was scheduled to go on to Germany and France. Shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Turkey hosted a meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers as well as unsuccessful talks between negotiators from the two countries aimed at ending the hostilities. Later in 2022, Turkey, along with the United Nations, also brokered a deal between Russia and Ukraine that allowed the shipment of millions of tons of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea. Russia, however, pulled out of the deal last year, citing obstacles to its export of food and fertilizers. During Li's visit to Kyiv, Ukrainian officials described the horrors of the war: "It is very important that you hear firsthand about the situation on the front line, what is happening and where we are," Andriy Yermak, the head of the presidential office, said, according to a Ukrainian statement. It wasn't clear how Li reacted to the presentation. China released a terse statement Friday saying only that Li arrived in Kyiv by train at noon, held candid and friendly talks, and departed by train the same evening. The war has created a sharp division between China and the West. The Chinese government avoids using the words "war" or "invasion" to describe Russia's attack and cites NATO expansion as a root cause of the conflict.

## Israeli Settlements Expand by Record Amount



GENEVA (Dispatches) - Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories have expanded by a record amount and risk eliminating any practical possibility of a Palestinian state, the U.N. human rights chief said. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said that the growth of Israeli settlements amounted to the transfer by Israel of its own population, which he reiterated was a war crime. The U.S. Biden administration said last month the settlements were "inconsistent" with international law after Israel announced new housing plans in the occupied West Bank. "Settler violence and settlement-related violations have reached shocking new levels, and risk eliminating any practical possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian State," Turk said in a statement accompanying the report which will be presented to the Human Rights Council in Geneva in late March. Israel's diplomatic mission in Geneva said that the report should have included the deaths of 36 Israelis in 2023. "Human rights are universal, yet Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorism are ignored by the Office (of the High Commissioner) time and time again," it said in a statement. The 16-page report, based on the U.N.'s own monitoring as well as other sources, documented 24,300 new Israeli housing units in the occupied West Bank during a one-year period through to

end-October 2023, which it said was the highest on record since monitoring began in 2017. It also said there had been a dramatic increase in the intensity, severity and regularity of both Israeli settler and state violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, particularly since the deadly Hamas attacks on Israel on Oct. 7. Since then, more than 400 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces or by settlers, it said. Israel, which captured the West Bank in the 1967 Middle East war, claims a biblical birthright to the land where settlements are expanding. Its military says it is conducting counter-terrorism operations in the West Bank and is targeting suspected militants. Turk's report noted that the policies of Israel's government, which is the most right-wing in the country's history and includes religious nationalists with close ties to settlers, appeared aligned to an "unprecedented extent" with the goals of the Israeli settler movement. It has documented cases of settlers wearing full or partial Israeli army uniforms and carrying army rifles while harassing or attacking Palestinians, in a blurring of the lines between them. Sometimes they were shot at point-blank range, it said. The five-month-old Gaza war has put a renewed focus on a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as foreseen by the Oslo accords from the early 1990s.



### Nigeria's President Sends Troops to Rescue More Than 250 Kidnapped Students

KURIGA (Dispatches) - Nigeria's President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on Friday sent troops to rescue more than 250 pupils kidnapped by gunmen from a school in the country's northwest in one of the largest mass abductions in three years. The Kaduna state attack was the second mass kidnapping in a week in Africa's most populous state, where heavily armed criminal gangs on motorbikes target victims in villages and schools and along highways in the hunt for ransom payments. Local government officials in Kaduna State confirmed the kidnapping attack on Kuriga school on Thursday, but they have still not given figures as they said they were still working out how many children had been abducted. At least one person was shot dead during the attack, local residents said. Sani Abdullahi, a teacher at the GSS Kuriga school in Chikun district, said staff managed to escape with many students when the gunmen known locally as bandits attacked early Thursday firing in the air. He told local officials 187 pupils had been snatched from the main junior school along with another 100 from the primary classes. Three local residents also said between 200 and 280 children and teachers had been snatched. "Early in the morning... we heard gunshots from bandits, before we knew it they had gathered up the children," local resident Musa Mohammed told AFP. "We are pleading to the government, all of us are pleading, they should please help us with security." The Kaduna abduction and the mass kidnapping a week ago from camps for people displaced by jihadists in northeast Borno state illustrate the challenge facing Tinubu who promised to make Nigeria safer and bring in more foreign investment.

## Haiti Ex-Coup Leader Guy Philippe Demands PM Resign, Wants Presidency

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Guy Philippe, who helped lead a coup in Haiti in 2004 and returned to the Caribbean island last year after serving a prison sentence in the U.S., demanded on Friday that the country's prime minister resign and said he wanted to become president. Months of violence have pushed the government in Haiti to the brink of collapse, with increasingly powerful gangs demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry who remains outside the country, seemingly unable or unwilling to return. "He should resign," Philippe, a 56-year-old former police chief, said in an interview with Reuters over Zoom from Haiti. "I think he should stay where he is now ... and let Haitians decide their fate." Henry's spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Henry left Haiti last week to secure Kenya's leadership for a long-delayed U.N.-backed security mission he first requested in 2022 to help fight the gangs. He is believed to still be in Puerto Rico, where he arrived on Tuesday. The government extended on Thursday a state of emergency around the capital Port-au-Prince as the violence forced thousands to flee their homes and the main airport to close. Authorities first announced the state of emergency on Sunday after armed gangs broke thousands of inmates out of prison. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Henry on Thursday to support a political transition for the country, where the healthcare system is near collapse, children are unable to attend school, and thousands have been killed, kidnapped or driven from their homes. There have been



widespread reports of rape and torture by the gangs. In 2004, Philippe was one of the main leaders in the successful overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. He had a failed run for president in 2006, before winning a senate seat in 2016, though he was arrested and extradited to the United States before he could be sworn in. Philippe was deported from the U.S. to Haiti in November after serving six years of a prison sentence for money laundering derived from drug trafficking. He said his conviction would not get in the way of his political future, citing the experiences of former South African leader Nelson Mandela, former Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Asked if he wanted to be president, Philippe said: "Yes! I'm going into politics. I was a senator, I've been elected by my people, I will go again in elections." "Mandela was in prison, Hugo Chavez was in prison, Lula was in prison ... and so if my people believe and trust me, I will be their leader," he said. Since his return to Haiti, Philippe has traveled the country rallying support and calling for the government to step down. In a February report, the Geneva-based Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime named Philippe as an important figure among Haiti's "strongmen who straddle the line between vigilante leaders and political bosses, accumulating considerable power." Philippe said his recent return to the country meant he did not have deep connections to the gangs and he was not behind the gang violence.



## Grizzlies Edge Nets, Snap Five-Game Skid

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Luke Kennard scored a season-high 25 points as the Memphis Grizzlies held on in the final minute and snapped a five-game losing streak with a 106-102 victory over the Brooklyn Nets in New York. A week after absorbing a 111-86 loss to the Nets in Memphis, the Grizzlies won for just the third time in 17 games thanks to Kennard. He was one of six Memphis players who scored in double figures. Kennard made a season-high six 3-pointers, including one from top of the key that gave the Grizzlies a 99-90 lead with three minutes left. He shot 8-for-11 overall, 6-for-9 from long range, handed out seven assists and scored at least 20 points for the first time this season. After Kennard's final triple, the Nets pulled within 103-99 on two free throws by Cameron Johnson with 30 seconds left. Following a five-second violation by Memphis, Dennis Schroder split two free throws with 20.9 seconds to go to make it 103-100. Two free throws by Mikal Bridges got Brooklyn within 105-102 with 6.7 seconds left before Kennard hit a free throw on the next possession to ice it. Jake LaRavia added 14 points and 10 rebounds for the Grizzlies, who dominated the glass throughout the game and finished with a commanding 50-33 rebounding edge. Lamar Stevens added 13 points, Santi Aldama finished with 12, Vince Williams Jr. contributed 11 and Trey Jemison had 10 for the Grizzlies, who shot 46.3 percent overall. Nic Claxton scored 21 points, but Brooklyn fell 2 1/2 games behind the 10th-place Atlanta Hawks for the Eastern Conference's final play-in spot. Johnson added 18 points as the Nets dropped to 3-4 under

interim coach Kevin Ollie, shot 44.3 percent from the field and were a dreadful 17-for-30 (56.7 percent) at the foul line. Bridges was held to 14 points and shot 4-for-14 after getting 38 points in Brooklyn's win over Atlanta on Saturday. Schroder and Lonnie Walker IV added 13 points apiece for the Nets, who were denied their first three-game winning streak since early December. After the Grizzlies took a 53-52 lead into halftime following a basket by Stevens with 15.6 seconds remaining in the second quarter, Kennard's triple put the Grizzlies ahead 71-63 with 5:53 remaining in the third quarter. Claxton's baseline dunk snapped a 75-75 tie with 2:07 left in the third, but a 12-footer by Stevens with 73 seconds left put Memphis ahead 80-77 entering the fourth. Meanwhile Rudy Gobert scored 25 points and grabbed 16 rebounds for the Minnesota Timberwolves, who held on for a 119-114 win over the Portland Trail Blazers in Minneapolis. Mike Conley added 19 points and seven assists for Minnesota, which snapped a two-game skid. Karl-Anthony Towns finished with 14 points. Anfernee Simons led Portland with 34 points and 14 assists. Rookie Duop Reath tallied a career-high 26 points on 10-for-14 shooting for the Trail Blazers, who lost for the first time in three games. Portland played without Jerami Grant (quadriceps), Deandre Ayton (hand) and Matisse Thybulle (hip). Timberwolves top scorer Anthony Edwards finished with 13 points on 4-of-10 shooting. Edwards left the game because of a right elbow contusion but later returned to the court.

## Murray Bored With Repeated Retirement Questions



INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches) - Andy Murray has expressed frustration at repeatedly being asked about a possible retirement after laying out his end-of-career master plan only weeks ago. The 36-year-old former number one and treble Grand Slam champion, suffered a second-round defeat on Friday at the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters, losing 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 to fifth seed Andrey Rublev. Murray, who has been playing with a metal hip since undergoing resurfacing surgery in 2019, said in recent weeks that he wants to play through to an unspecified date in the summer, with some suggesting that his swan song could come at Wimbledon. In Dubai last month he indicated he hoped to compete in the French Open in May, which would be his first appearance at Roland Garros since 2020. The two-time Olympic champion said he was also eyeing the Paris Games, which will be staged on clay at Roland Garros after Wimbledon between July 27 and August 4. While speculation rages, Murray just wants to get on with his job on court. "I feel like no one is listening to me," he joked in reference to being asked the retirement question after every match. "I'm planning on finishing in the summer. I don't know what more I'm supposed to say. 'I've been getting asked about it for 18 months or so; it's obviously something I have thought about, but hadn't made a decision on.'" He added: "Once I have made the decision, I expressed that, and no one is listening to it. 'So I don't really understand why I keep getting asked, to be honest.'"

## Dejounte Murray Scores 41 as Hawks Top Grizzlies

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Dejounte Murray scored a game-high 41 points to help lead the visiting Atlanta Hawks to a 99-92 win over the Memphis Grizzlies. Bogdan Bogdanovic added 16 points for the Hawks, who won their third straight game. Clint Capela collected 15 points and 11 rebounds, while De'Andre Hunter scored 12. Jaren Jackson Jr. led Memphis with 21 points, followed by Vince Williams Jr. and Jake LaRavia, who each finished with 14 points. Santi Aldama and Lamar Stevens each scored 13 for the Grizzlies, who saw their two-game winning streak snapped. With the score tied at halftime, Atlanta opened the second half on an 11-2 run, capped by Bogdanovic's jumper that gave the Hawks a 57-48 lead at the 9:02 mark. After a Memphis timeout, the Grizzlies tied the score thanks to a 9-0 run. The trend continued as Atlanta answered with a 12-0, eight points coming from Murray, as the Hawks took a 69-57 lead with 4:42 to go in the third. Trey Jemison's dunk with 2.4 seconds left trimmed Memphis' deficit to 80-72 heading into the fourth. In the fourth quarter, Aldama's dunk cut the Hawks' lead to 90-88 with 4:14 left, before Murray's floater pushed the lead back to four. With Atlanta's advantage down to two again, Bogdanovic's 3-pointer gave the Hawks a 95-90 lead with 3:18 remaining. LaRavia's floater trimmed Memphis' deficit to three, but the Grizzlies didn't score again as Murray's floater and Capela's free throws cemented the win down the stretch. In the first quarter, Memphis jumped out to a 31-18 lead before Trent Forrest's mid-range jumper with 23.5 seconds left trimmed Atlanta's deficit to 11 heading into the second quarter. Jackson's floater gave the Grizzlies a 44-37 lead with 2:41 remaining in the first half, but a 9-2 Atlanta run helped knot the halftime score at 46. Murray led the Hawks with 21 points on 9-for-11 shooting from the floor in the first half, while Jackson paced Memphis with 17 points in the first half. Atlanta's win evened the season series. Memphis won in Atlanta 125-119 on Dec. 23. Meanwhile Jalen Brunson returned to the Knicks and scored a game-high 26 points to lead New York to a wire-to-wire 98-74 win over the visiting Orlando Magic in a clash with pivotal Eastern Conference playoff implications. With their fourth win in the last 12

games, the Knicks moved a half-game ahead of the Magic -- who had their five-game winning streak snapped -- into fourth place in the East. The top four teams in each conference have home-court advantage in the first round of the playoffs. Brunson missed Tuesday's 116-100 loss to the Atlanta Hawks with a left knee bruise suffered in the opening minute of Sunday's 107-98 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers. Precious Achiuwa (15 points, 14 rebounds) posted a double-double and added five blocks for the Knicks, who allowed their fewest points in a game since a 103-65 win over the Washington Wizards on April 13, 2012.



## Verstappen Takes Saudi Pole



JEDDAH (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen took pole position for the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix before calling into question his future with Red Bull after his mentor was threatened with suspension in another dramatic twist in the Christian Horner saga. The three-time world champion clocked a fastest lap of one minute 27.472 seconds to outpace Ferrari's Charles Leclerc by three-tenths of a second with his team-mate Sergio Perez third in a tense floodlit qualifying session. It was Verstappen's 34th pole position and his first at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit. However, his performance on the track was overshadowed again by bitter wrangling off it. His mentor and Red Bull advisor Helmut Marko is facing an inquiry and possible suspension after he was suspected of being the source of leaks to news media about Red Bull's investigation into the conduct of team boss Horner. Verstappen, 26, was unequivocal in his support for the 80-year-old Marko. "My loyalty to him is very big. I have always expressed this to everyone within the team, to everyone high up, that he is an important part in my decision-making for the future within the team," said the Dutchman. "It is very important that he stays within the team. I feel like if such an important pillar falls away, what I have said to the team, that is not good for my situation as well. For me, Helmut has to stay." Marko admitted to Austrian broadcaster ORF that a suspension was not out of the question. "I would say that it is difficult to judge, or let's say that in the end I will decide myself what I'm doing," he said. "The theoretical possibility (of a suspension) still exists. It's a very complex matter. We want peace in the team." Horner, 50, was cleared by Red Bull following an internal investigation into claims by a female member of staff that she had been the victim of "inappropriate behaviour". She was suspended by the team on Thursday as Horner, who has strenuously denied claims of wrongdoing, told reporters it was "time to look forward and draw a line" under the controversy. There have also been reports of a major bust-up at last week's Bahrain Grand Prix between Horner and Jos Verstappen, the father of Max. Verstappen senior said Red Bull will "explode" if Horner remains in his position. Max Verstappen leapt to the defence of his father, a former F1 driver.

## Joshua Defeats Ngannou With Brutal Second-Round KO

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Two-time world champion Anthony Joshua knocked out mixed martial arts star Francis Ngannou in just the second round of their widely-hyped heavyweight clash on Saturday, with his promoter quickly declaring him the division's "number one" fighter. Joshua had his Cameroonian opponent on the canvas in the first round and twice more in the second in a brutal and brief exhibition of punching power. Ngannou, 37, a former UFC heavyweight champion, was taking part in only his second professional boxing match, having lost a split decision to Tyson Fury in an October fight that saw him put the WBC champion on the canvas in the third round. "I thought this fight was something for the broadcasters to get behind," Joshua told DAZN after his quickfire victory. "When I saw the fight with Tyson Fury, I thought, 'I want some of that'. He is a great champion and this doesn't take anything away from his capabilities. I told (Ngannou) not to leave boxing. He's two fights in and he fought the best." Joshua, a former unified WBO, WBA and IBF heavyweight champion, went into the fight on the back of three successive wins. Before that, however, he lost back-to-back fights to Oleksandr Usyk, who will take on Fury for the undisputed heavyweight title in Saudi Arabia in May. The fight only got under way at 3:30 am local time (0030 GMT), but weary fans enjoyed a sensational start when Joshua quickly sent

Ngannou to the canvas in the opening round with a brutal right to the chin. It got worse for the Cameroonian when he was knocked down again in the second round, just managing to beat the count. His resistance lasted only a few more moments after he was sent to the canvas again for the third and final time. Ngannou lay on his back for some time and needed medical treatment inside the ring before being helped back to his stool. Joshua, 34, was reportedly being paid \$50 million for his clash with the MMA star, whose rags-to-riches story had captivated the sport. Ngannou grew up in abject poverty, working as a child labourer in a sand quarry for under \$2 a day. He then made his way to Europe, even sleeping rough in a car park in Paris before a local coach took him under his wing and steered him to boxing. Joshua's victory immediately sparked feverish talk of a mega-fight with either Usyk or Fury. "You're looking at the number one heavyweight in the world," said promoter Eddie Hearn. "On this form, there is no man that can beat him. Tyson Fury, please beat Usyk, because you will get the biggest fight in the history of the sport. 'He destroyed Francis Ngannou. He's a beast and I cannot wait for him to beat Tyson Fury.' Joshua's trainer Ben Davison told the BBC that "the only way to find out who is the best is to get the winner of Fury and Usyk. That's the only thing that makes sense."

