

The Commander of the Iranian Border Police Says That Over 4,000 Terrorist Moves Were Neutralized on Borders Since the Beginning of the Current Iranian Year Which Ends on March 20

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Judiciary Spokesman Masoud Setayesh Said That Iran's Judiciary Is Perusing Iranian Nation's Violated Rights Through Imposed Sanctions at National and International Levels

VOL. XXIX, No. 7926 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY MARCH 13, 2024 ESFAND 23, 1402

2 DOMESTIC

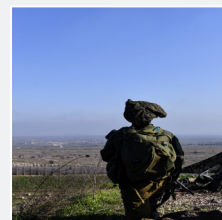


Tehran Hosts 17 States Attending Int'l Congress on Family Health Program

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

Hezbollah Stages Drone Strike on Israeli Outpost in Golan Heights



> SEE PAGE 3

IRAN, CHINA, RUSSIA STAGE JOINT NAVAL DRILLS IN GULF OF OMAN



TEHRAN - The navies of Iran, China and Russia on Tuesday began joint drills in the Gulf of Oman, their fifth common military exercise in recent years. The war games starting on Tuesday coincide with heightened tensions in the region as Israel's war on Gaza rages for a sixth month and Yemen's Houthi rebels have launched retaliatory attacks on certain ships in the Red Sea in response. Russia's defense ministry said the exercises that will run through Friday and involve warships and aviation would focus on the protection of "maritime economic activity". State media reported that a grouping of ships from Russia's Pacific Fleet, led by the Varyag cruiser, arrived at the Iranian port of Chabahar on Monday ahead of the drills that will see representatives from the navies of Azerbaijan, India, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan and South Africa act as observers. For its part, China's defense ministry said the drills - called "Maritime Security Belt - 2024" - were aimed at "jointly maintaining regional maritime security". "China will send ... guided-missile destroyer Urumqi, guided-missile frigate Linyi and comprehensive supply ship Dongpinghu to participate in the exercise," the ministry added in a statement, without providing further details. Iranian state media, meanwhile, reported that the exercise's goal is to strengthen "the security of international maritime trade, combating piracy and maritime terrorism", among others. The drills come as a United States-led naval coalition has been operating in Red Sea waters since December 2023 trying to counter the Houthi attacks. Separately, some 20,000 troops from 13 NATO members are conducting drills in the north of new member Sweden as well as its neighbours Finland and Norway.

IRAQ TO BUILD BARBED WIRE FENCE ON BORDERS WITH IRAN



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq has begun setting up a barbed wire fence to protect its borders with Iran. The action was taken a few days after the Iraqi Minister of Interior, Abdul Amir Al-Shammari, declared that Iraq's border with Syria had been entirely secured using surveillance cameras. The barbed wire barrier between Iraq and Iran would run from the eastern Diyala governorate to Wasit and Sulaymaniyah, a security source in Iraq told Baghdad Today on Sunday. The source explained that surveillance towers and modern infrared cameras will be installed along the border to stop smuggling and any infiltrations. In 2022, Iran bombarded more than once the sites of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups, whom Tehran accuses of participating in the protests that shook Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, after she was arrested by the Iranian morality police. The two countries concluded a security agreement last March, but Tehran demands that Iraq disarm Iranian Kurdish opposition groups by September 19 and evacuate them to camps. The Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hussein, stated earlier that these groups have been in the Kurdistan region of Iraq for four or five decades. Hussein also elaborated that these groups have been moved from the border areas with Iran to remote camps in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.



Iran Calls for Expulsion of Israel From UN Body Over Palestinian Women's Rights Violations

TEHRAN - Iran's Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensiyeh Khazali has called upon the United Nations to remove Israel from the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) over the occupying regime's decades-old atrocities against Palestinian women and violations of their rights. In her address to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York on Monday, Khazali said Palestinian women are struggling for survival amid an ongoing and well-documented genocide in Gaza, noting that more than 22,000 women and children have lost their lives as a result, while nearly 3,000 others have become widowed. She cited a UN Women report that two mothers are killed in the Gaza Strip every hour since hostilities began on October 7 last year, stating, "The free people of the world expect the regime responsible for decades of displacement, rape and murder of millions of [Palestinian] women and children, not to have a seat in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women". The Iranian vice president also underlined the need for an immediate action to eliminate poverty and hunger of oppressed Palestinian women. While the women's loyalty to the resistance front is endless, their trust in the international community is rapidly fading away, Khazali pointed out. At least 31,000 Palestinians, most of them

women and children, have been confirmed killed and over 72,000 others injured so far during Israel's genocidal war, which began following Operation al-Aqsa Storm by Gaza-based resistance movements on October 7, 2023. The Israeli military campaign has devastated large swathes of Gaza, destroyed hospitals and displaced half of the population of 2.4 million in the world's "largest open-air prison." Israel has also imposed a "complete siege" on the coastal sliver, cutting off fuel, electricity, food and water to the Palestinians living there. Elsewhere in her speech, Khazali highlighted that Iranian women, irrespective of cruel and unilateral sanctions, have managed to take great strides in removal of deprivation and the country has seen rapid progress in the years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. "All Iranian pregnant women and women with breastfeeding babies as well as children under the age of 7 enjoy free health insurance. This service is not only offered to Iranian women, but is also abundantly available for refugees, in a way that our universities of medical sciences stand first as regards provision of such services," she said. The Iranian official finally noted that gender justice in education has grown to hit 97% in the Islamic Republic, emphasizing that 60% of Iranian teachers and 40% of specialist doctors are females.

Tehran Rejects Politically-Motivated UN Report on 2022 Riots

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's High Council for Human Rights has rejected the allegations raised in the report of a so-called UN fact-finding mission on the 2022 riots across the country. In a report published on Friday, the mission accused Iran of committing "crimes against humanity - specifically those of murder, imprisonment, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts" during the foreign-backed unrest. In response, Iran's High Council for Human Rights dismissed the report as "unreliable, illegal, biased and politically-motivated." "The so-called fact-finding committee published an undocumented, biased, and politically-motivated report without any legal basis, which was compiled in an unprofessional manner and based on unverifiable claims, and which is deeply in line with the political goals of some Western countries," the council said in a statement. The council further lamented that "politicization of human rights by some Western countries has reached its peak," with those countries having developed a "sick habit of exploiting self-made political and human rights mechanisms and covering up their motivations and desires" under such reports. It added that such a trend will end up sacrificing human rights and dashing the hopes of the people of the world toward international human rights mechanisms. The mission, the statement continued, was formed as a result of lobbying and political exchanges of some Western countries, and its report has been prepared under the pressure of those countries. "The main role in this political campaign was played by the German government, the same country that equipped Saddam [Hussein]'s regime with weapons of mass destruction, namely chemical weapons, as a result of which more than 13,000 Iranian citizens were martyred and more than 100,000 people injured," the statement read. It continues, "With various methods, including granting citizenship, immunity, and providing intelligence and financial support, Western countries have created a safe haven for terrorists. These individuals have the blood of thousands of Iranian citizens on their hands, including women and children. Western nations aid and abet them in their brutal acts, sabotage, and their evasion of punishment." Moreover, the statement added, these countries have unilaterally imposed systematic sanctions, violating the rights of Iranian women and children. In fact, they have committed crimes against humanity and even label Iran's fight against rioters and terrorist activities as crimes against humanity. Regarding the Israeli regime, the statement said, "While, the Zionist regime has perpetrated widespread crimes against the people of Gaza, violated all international humanitarian principles and human rights, caused the deaths of over 30,000 people and injuring 72,000 more, destroyed hundreds of thousands of residential, medical, and educational centers, as well as places of worship and infrastructure, which constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, those who claim to support human rights and uphold related international mechanisms remain silent and do not even dare to acknowledge the situation as a 'crime against humanity'."



RAMADAN PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY TO FIGHT ARROGANT POWERS, ISRAEL



TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says the holy month of Ramadan will be an opportunity for Muslim nations to take effective steps to fight arrogant powers and the Israeli regime. In a message on Monday, President Raisi extended his congratulations to leaders of Muslim countries on the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. The usurping Israeli regime has occupied the Palestinian territory for more than seven decades and committed heinous crimes, he said. Over the past months, he added, the regime has killed more than 30,000 innocent civilians, particularly children, in the Gaza Strip. The Iranian president emphasized that the heads of Muslim countries have the duty to encourage and promote peace and fraternity among Muslims and develop the atmosphere of spirituality and unity among the members of the Islamic Ummah. He added that the holy month of Ramadan provides a great opportunity for all Muslims to resort to divine teachings, particularly those of the Holy Qur'an, to prepare the ground for elevation of their countries in all fields. Raisi expressed confidence that the continuation of the Muslim Palestinian people's battle against Israel and constant firm support by the Muslim world would lead to the liberation of Palestine, al-Quds and al-Aqsa Mosque. He hoped Muslim nations would forge their bonds and improve relations to globally promote Islam.

BAGHDAD, TEHRAN NEGOTIATING TO IMPORT GAS FROM TURKMENISTAN



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iraqi Minister of Electricity says Baghdad is negotiating with Tehran to use Iran's wide and nationwide lines to transport Turkmenistan's gas. Referring to the challenge in connecting lines transporting gas from Turkmenistan to Iraq only through the Iranian network, he explained, "We are negotiating with the Iranian side to use their network to transport these quantities, as these 20 million from Turkmenistan will provide continuous Turkmenistan next summer," according to Iraqi News Agency. He added that "the agreement with Iran, which has been in place for years, provides for supplying Iraq with 51 million M3 per day, and this amount covers our need if the flow is stabilized by them, and the 20 million M3 from Turkmenistan can be used when reducing the flow from the Iranian side." He pointed out that "the Ministry of Electricity paid all gas dues to the Iranian side and downloaded them to a special account at the Iraqi Trade Bank, but due to international sanctions, the payment process was not completed and now the gas is being exchanged for Iraqi black oil according to an agreement that was made and is being carried out smoothly." He pointed out that "the Iranian side has reduced the quantities of gas flowing in winter, especially in the last two months, and it was not possible due to the cold weather and the internal need for double quantities, as well as the maintenance of pipelines", adding that "the ministry hopes for the return of natural flows with the entry of the holy month of Ramadan, which will result in a clear improvement in processing hours".

IRAN NEWS



U.S. FINED AROUND \$2.5B FOR SPONSORING TERRORIST ATTACK IN IRAN

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An Iranian court ruled that the US government should pay \$2,478 million in fines for sponsoring a terrorist group that carried out a fatal bomb attack in Iran's southern city of Shiraz in April 2008. The so-called 'Tondar (Thunder) terrorist group and its ringleader Jamshid Sharmahd have been convicted for killing 14 Iranian citizens and injuring over 200 others in the bomb attack at the Sayyid al-Shuhada Husseinia of Shiraz on April 12, 2008. A total of 116 plaintiffs, including the families of victims of the bombing, had lodged a complaint against the terrorist group, its ringleader, and its state sponsor at the 55th division of the court of Tehran on international legal lawsuits. The court's judge announced his verdict on Monday, ruling that the US government – the sponsor of the terrorist group – should pay a total of \$2.478 billion in compensation to the families of the victims of the terrorist attack.

IRAN TO DEEPEN TIES WITH BRAZIL BASED ON MUTUAL INTEREST



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's new ambassador to Brazil Abdollah Nekunam says the Islamic Republic is to further expand relations with Brazil in the framework of mutual interest. Nekunam started his mission in Brazil as of Tuesday. Nowadays, countries are able to maintain close relations not due to proximity but owing to enjoying mutual interest, the diplomat wrote on his social media account. Nekunam met with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian before departing Tehran for Brasilia to start his diplomatic mission. During the meeting, Amir-Abdollahian stressed the importance of relations between the two countries in political, economic and international fields. He also underlined cooperation in the BRICS group of emerging economies. Nekunam has served as Iran consular in Munich, Hong Kong, and Macao.

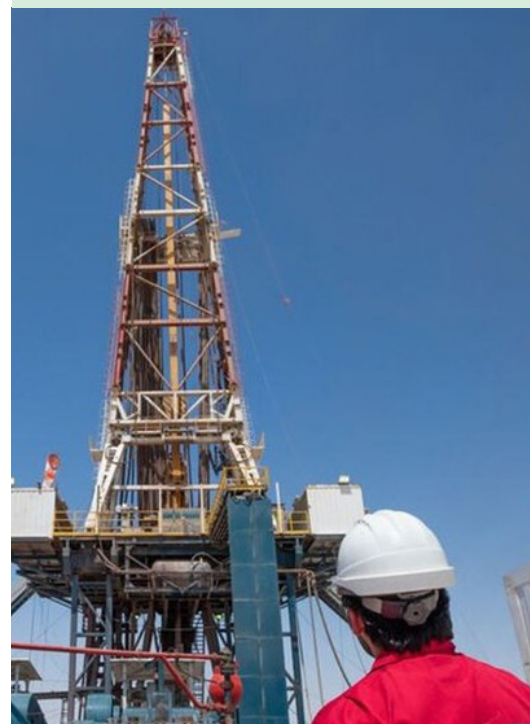
Tehran Hosts 17 States Attending Int'l Congress on Family Health Program



TEHRAN - The First International Congress on Primary Health Care (PHC) and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) through the Family Health Program took place in the Iranian capital, with the participation of representatives from 17 countries and several international bodies, including the World Health Organization (WHO). During the congress, several panels were organized to discuss the role of governments in the family health program and the impact of social issues on health. These panels were held as scheduled. Mohammad Reza Vaez-Mahdavi, a member of the board of scientific directors at Shahid Beheshti University, which hosted the congress, emphasized the significance of addressing justice and equality in health and discussed the biological implications of inequality on health outcomes. In another panel focused on newborn babies' health, Dr. Gagan Gupta, a health specialist from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), highlighted the need to prevent the leading causes of death among newborns and their mothers. UNICEF is committed to promoting child survival and ensuring equitable access to medical and health services, Gupta added. Additionally, Shirley Mark, the regional adolescent health specialist at the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, spoke about the remarkable developments in indicators related to mothers' and newborns' health in Iran, adding that Iran, as a successful model, can

share its experiences with other countries. The congress, held in Tehran on March 5, provided a platform for representatives from participating countries and international organizations to exchange their latest findings related to PHC and UHC through family health program during the two-day event. Meanwhile Health Minister Bahram Einollahi reportedly was set to leave for Kazakhstan on Tuesday to attend the 7th Health Ministers meeting of the Shanghai Corporation Organization (SCO) member states. Einollahi is scheduled to give a speech at the 7th Health Ministers meeting of the Shanghai Corporation Organization (SCO) in Kazakhstan. The meeting will focus on environmental health and promoting healthy drinking water. Health Ministers from China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as the European Directorates of the World Health Organization, will participate in the meeting. Einollahi will also meet with the Health Minister of Kazakhstan to discuss and establish joint health cooperation between the two nations. During the 7th Health Ministers meeting of SCO member states, representatives of the member countries will sign three documents, including cooperation in safe drinking water and wastewater disposal. Additionally, comprehensive plans and basic measures on healthcare for member countries for 2025-2027 will also be signed.

IRAN'S OIL EXPLORATIONS UP 300% IN 2 YEARS



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The explorations manager of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said the country's oil explorations registered a 300% growth in two years of the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi, who assumed office in August 2021.

Mehdi Fakour said the oil explorations have shown a considerable hike in various sectors as compared to the past five years. He added that the oil explorations made in the first two years of the current administration have registered a 300% hike. The feasibility studies of some explorations have started in the country, he said, adding that negotiations have been made with a number of industrial production companies. Currently, the oil exploration activities in the country are at a satisfactory level, Fakour added. Earlier, CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company Mohsen Khojastehmehr said that the company has a 100-year vision for exploration, emphasizing that the company is determined to carry out maximum exploration operations to discover and maintain the country's reserves.

Iranian, Russian Top Officials Discuss Regional Issues

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Minister's Senior Advisor for Special Political Affairs and Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry discussed the latest developments in Gaza, Syria, Yemen and Libya. Ali Asghar Khaji and the Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry Alexander Kinschak have reviewed regional issues in Gaza, Syria, Yemen and Libya. Kinschak who traveled to Tehran with the accompanying delegation met and held talks with Ali Asghar Khaji in the Iranian capital city of Tehran on Monday. The two sides discussed the latest developments in the region, especially the Zionist regime's crimes against the oppressed people of Gaza, as well as issues related to Syria, Yemen, and Libya. They discussed the importance of ongoing and broad consultations on regional matters, exchanging opinions on the recent developments in Syria, including the political and field status, and strategies that can help to enhance the

economic and humanitarian condition. They also talked about the continuation of the Syrian political process. During the meeting, Khaji described the brutal attacks of the Zionist regime against the oppressed people of Gaza, and the killing of thousands of women and children as a result of the US support from the Zionist regime. He added that the Zionist regime has achieved nothing but the brutal killing of civilians and committing crimes against humanity, and has expanded its military attacks and aggressions to Syria and Lebanon in the light of the passivity and silence of international bodies. Referring to the latest development in Yemen, Khaji warned of the destructive impact of illegal US and British attacks on peace efforts in the country. The two sides stressed the importance of preserving Libya's unity, solidarity, and sovereignty, expressing hope that the political crisis in Libya would end with the Libyan people's will.



IRANIAN REFINERY EQUIPPED WITH INDIGENIZED CONTROL SYSTEM TO GO ON STREAM

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The chief executive of Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company said the country's first refinery equipped with an indigenized control system will become operational in the early months of the next Iranian calendar year (to start March 21, 2024). Speaking at the closing ceremony of a scientific festival, Reza Noshadi revealed the final stage of the construction of the second phase of the Ilam Gas Refinery. Highlighting the use of advanced technologies in gas pressure-boosting stations, he added that the homegrown gas turbine has reached a level of development that it is more efficient than the similar type made by the German company SIEMENS. Benefiting from the most experienced manpower and engineers in the oil and gas industry, all sanctions imposed against the country in this industry have been foiled, he further said, IRNA reported. Earlier, Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji said that increasing investment, completing semi-finished oil projects, and boosting oil, gas volume, refining and petrochemical output have been the most important measures taken by the Oil Ministry since two years ago when the current administration assumed office.

IRAN'S STEEL OUTPUT REGISTERS 39.9% GROWTH IN JANUARY



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran produced 2.6 million tons of steel in January 2024, showing a 39.9 percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period, the World Steel Association (WSA) said in its latest report. Accordingly, Iran ranked 9th among the top steel producers in the world. The major steel manufacturers in the world produced more than 148 million tons of steel in January, registering a 1.6 percent hike compared to the same period last year, the report added. Despite the decrease in the production of steel by major steel producers, steel production in countries including Iran, Russia, India, Turkey, South Korea and Japan increased in this period. The report indicated that Iran and Turkey accounted for the largest steel production growth in January 2024, registering a 39.9 and 24.7 percent hike respectively, followed by India, South Korea, Russia and Japan, IRNA reported. According to the report, China, India and Japan were the top three steel producers in the world. China produced 77.2 million tons of crude steel in January 2024, registering a 6.9 percent decline compared to the same period last year.

INDIA CONDUCTS FIRST FLIGHT TEST OF DOMESTIC MISSILE

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India successfully conducted the first flight test of a domestically developed missile with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology, India Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on messaging platform X. Indian scientists have integrated the technology - which delivers multiple warheads to different targets fired from the same missile on the Agni-V platform - and is the latest in India's nuclear-capable Agni missile series. Agni-V has a range of 5000 km (3100 miles), making it India's sole contender for Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) long range category. America, Britain, France, China and Russia are among the countries that already use MIRV missiles, while Pakistan tested it in 2017, according to Washington-based non-profit advocacy group, the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. The Indian MIRV missile was developed by the country's military research arm, the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

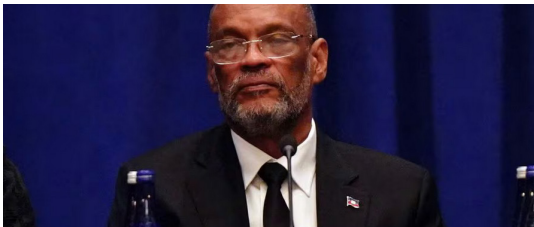


KREMLIN, NATO AT ODDS OVER POPE'S CALL FOR UKRAINE TO SHOW WHITE FLAG



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Kremlin said a call by Pope Francis for talks to end the Ukraine war was "quite understandable", but NATO's boss said now was not the time to talk about "surrender". Ukraine's Foreign Ministry summoned the Vatican ambassador, known as the papal nuncio, to express its "disappointment" with Francis' comments in an interview recorded last month that Ukraine should have "the courage of the white flag" to negotiate an end to the conflict. The ministry said the pope's comments "legalise the right of might and encourage further disregard for the norms of international law". As the West grapples with how to support Ukraine and the prospect of a sharp change in U.S. policy if Donald Trump wins November's presidential election, Putin has essentially offered to freeze the battlefield along its current front lines, a premise Ukraine rejects. "It is quite understandable that he (the pope) spoke in favour of negotiations," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. He said President Vladimir Putin had repeatedly said Russia was open to peace talks. "Unfortunately, both the statements of the pope and the repeated statements of other parties, including ours, have recently received absolutely harsh refusals," Peskov said. Russia says it sent its troops into Ukraine in February 2022 in a "special military operation" to ensure its own security. Kyiv and the West decry it as a colonial-style war of conquest. Moscow's offers to negotiate have invariably been predicated on Kyiv giving up the territory that Moscow has seized and declared part of Russia - more than a sixth of Ukraine. Peskov said Western hopes of inflicting a "strategic defeat" on Russia were "the deepest misconception", adding: "The course of events, primarily on the battlefield, is the clearest evidence of this." But NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said negotiations that would preserve Ukraine as a sovereign and independent nation would only come when Putin realised that he would not win on the battlefield. "If we want a negotiated, peaceful, lasting solution, the way to get there is to provide military support to Ukraine," he told Reuters at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Asked if this meant now was not the time to talk about a white flag, he said: "It's not the time to talk about surrender by the Ukrainians. That will be a tragedy for the Ukrainians."

HAITIAN PM TENDERS RESIGNATION AFTER JAMAICA TALKS



KINGSTON (Dispatches) - Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry has resigned as head of the Caribbean nation, the leader of a regional body said, an unelected role the 74-year-old neurosurgeon has held since the 2021 assassination of the country's last president. "We acknowledge his resignation upon the establishment of transitional presidential council and naming an interim prime minister," said Caribbean Community (CARICOM) chair and Guyanese President Irfaan Ali, thanking Henry for his service to Haiti. Henry traveled to Kenya late last month to secure its leadership of a United Nations-backed international security mission to help police fight armed gangs, but a drastic escalation of violence in the capital, Port-au-Prince, during his absence left him stranded in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico. Ali said the presidential council would have two observers and seven voting members, including representatives from several coalitions, the private sector, civil society and one religious leader. The council has been mandated to "swiftly" appoint an interim prime minister, he added, and anyone who intends to run in Haiti's next elections will not be able to participate. Henry's resignation comes as regional leaders met earlier on Monday in nearby Jamaica to discuss the framework for a political transition, which the U.S. has urged last week to be "expedited" as armed gangs sought to topple his government. Regional leaders, speaking with representatives from various sectors of Haitian society, have looked into establishing the transition council intended to pave the way to the first elections since 2016. Henry, who many Haitians consider corrupt, had repeatedly postponed elections, saying security must first be restored. Haitian senators' last terms expired at the start of 2023. "We all know that urgent action is needed on both the political and security tracks," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said earlier Monday, calling for the creation of a "broad-based, inclusive, independent presidential college."

Hezbollah Stages Drone Strike on Israeli Outpost in Golan Heights



AMMAN (Dispatches) - Lebanon's Hezbollah group said it carried out a drone attack against an Israeli air defense outpost across the border in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. It said the rare attack, in which it deployed four drones, hit their target with "accuracy" in what it said was another operation in support of Palestinian militant groups in Gaza. Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967. The Hezbollah and the Israeli military have been exchanging fire along Lebanon's southern border since October, when Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel in support of its Palestinian ally Hamas, which is at war with Israel in the Gaza Strip. Israeli strikes had been mostly limited to the southern border region of Lebanon, although they have edged further north in recent weeks. Hezbollah last month said it fired rockets against the same target in the Golan Heights. The armed group has used surface-to-air missiles on several occasions since Oct. 7 to target Israeli aircraft. It has also launched its own surveillance drones into northern Israel. The Israeli military said two hostile aerial targets crossed from Lebanon into Israeli territory in the northern Golan area "fell in open areas". It also said Israeli warplanes struck a Hezbollah military site in the border area of Jibbain and overnight hit another Hezbollah outpost in the Taybeh area. Three fighters of the Lebanese Islamist militant group Jamaa Islamiya, an ally of Hezbollah, who were killed in an Israeli strike in southern Lebanon on Sunday, were buried on Monday, the group said. More than 60 civilians have been killed in Israeli shelling on Lebanon, along with more than

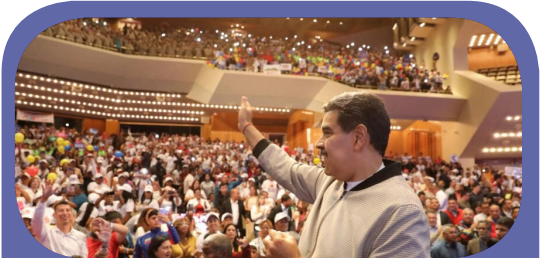
200 Hezbollah fighters, according to medical and security sources. Meanwhile Israel was checking on Monday whether it had killed Hamas's deputy military leader in an airstrike in Gaza, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) said, as prospects faded for a ceasefire to coincide with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. If his death is confirmed, Marwan Issa will be the highest-ranking official from the Islamist militant movement killed by Israel in five months of war that has pulverised the coastal enclave and killed tens of thousands of Palestinians. Issa, known as the 'Shadow Man' for his ability to stay out of sight, was one of three top Hamas leaders who planned the Oct. 7 attack on Israel that triggered the war and who are believed to have been directing Hamas's military operations since then. Speaking at a briefing with reporters, IDF spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said Israel had bombed the Al-Nusseirat refugee camp in central Gaza on Saturday night following intelligence about the location of Issa, second-in-command of Hamas's military wing, the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam Brigades. Two Hamas leaders -- Issa and another commander responsible for Hamas weapons in Gaza -- used the underground compound that Israeli jets struck in a joint operation with Israel's Shin Bet security service, Hagari said. "Beside them in the tunnel there were other terrorists," he said but added that it was still not clear whether Issa had been killed. A Palestinian source said the Israelis had hit a place where they thought Issa was hiding, but could give no details of his fate.

U.S. Faces Increasingly Fragile World Order



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. intelligence agencies said the country faces an "increasingly fragile world order," strained by great power competition, transnational challenges and regional conflicts, in a report released as agency leaders testified in Congress. "An ambitious but anxious China, a confrontational Russia, some regional powers, such as Iran, and more capable non-state actors are challenging longstanding rules of the international system as well as U.S. primacy within it," the agencies said in their 2024 Annual Threat Assessment. The report largely focused on threats from China and Russia, the greatest rivals to the United States, more than two years after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, as well as noting the risks of broader conflict related to Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza since the Oct. 7 attacks. China is providing economic and security assistance to Russia as it wages war in Ukraine, by supporting Russia's industrial base, the report said. It also warned that China could use technology to try to influence this year's U.S. elections. "China may attempt to influence the U.S. elections in 2024 at some level because of its desire to sideline critics of China and magnify U.S. societal divisions," the report said. In her testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines urged lawmakers

to approve more military assistance for Ukraine. It was "hard to imagine how Ukraine" could hold territory it has recaptured from Russia without more assistance from Washington, she said. The threats report noted that trade between China and Russia has been increasing since the start of the Ukraine war, and that Chinese exports of goods with potential military use rose more than threefold since 2022. Republican House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson, an ally of former President Donald Trump, has so far refused to call a vote on a bill that would provide \$60 billion more for Ukraine. The measure has passed the Democratic-run Senate. Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns, like Haines, said continuing support for Ukraine would send a message to China about aggression toward Taiwan or in the South China Sea. "It is our assessment that (Chinese leader) Xi Jinping was sobered, you know, by what happened. ... He didn't expect that Ukraine would resist with the courage and tenacity the Ukrainians demonstrated," Burns said. Haines noted concerns that the conflict in Gaza between Israel and Hamas could spread global insecurity. "The crisis in Gaza is a stark example of how regional developments have the potential of broader and even global implications," Haines said.



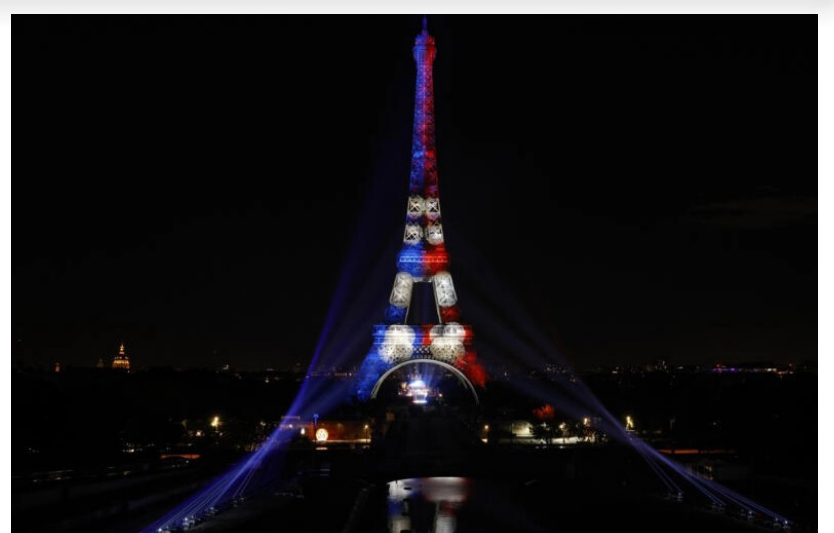
MADURO SELECTED AS RULING PARTY ELECTION

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has been selected to seek a third, successive term in July 28 elections, a senior ruling party official said Monday. A vote by the PSUV party concluded that Maduro would be its presidential candidate, said Diosdado Cabello, considered the number 2 in the ruling movement which was founded by the late Hugo Chavez and has been in power for 25 years. Maduro, 61, has not made any announcement himself, but has been widely expected to seek reelection in a vote from which his main opposition challenger has been barred from running. "We will continue to travel throughout our country in the construction of more and more force and citizen organization to achieve electoral victory this year," Maduro said in his weekly television program after Cabello's announcement on X, to which he made no reference. A formal PSUV announcement had been scheduled for March 15, but that appears to be a mere formality now. Maduro's re-election to a six-year term in 2018 -- widely considered fraudulent -- was not recognized by the United States and dozens of other countries, and was met with a string of sanctions. Many countries instead recognized his poll rival Juan Guaido as interim president. Four years later Maduro, 61, is still firmly in charge of the oil-rich nation after his rival's shadow government collapsed and the war in Ukraine choked energy supplies and shifted global priorities. He enjoys support from a political patronage system, the military, as well as Cuba, Russia and China. Last week, Venezuela's electoral authority CNE announced elections will be held on July 28 in the South American country in dire economic straits.

French State Hit by Intense Cyberattack

PARIS (Dispatches) - Cyberattacks of "unprecedented intensity" have targeted several French government institutions just months before the Paris Olympics but have been contained, the prime minister's office said. The latest cyberattack to hit France follows a warning from Attal's defense adviser just last week that the Olympics games in July and European Parliament elections in June could be "significant targets". Prime Minister Gabriel Attal's office said several state bodies were targeted but did not provide details. "Many ministerial services were targeted" from Sunday "using familiar technical means but of unprecedented intensity," Attal's office said. A security source told AFP that the attacks "are not currently attributable to Russia," an obvious suspect for many given Paris' support for Kyiv since the invasion of Ukraine. The PM's staff added that a "crisis cell has been activated to deploy countermeasures", meaning "the impact of these attacks has been reduced for most services and access to state websites restored." Specialist services including information security agency ANSSI were "implementing filtering measures until the attacks are over". Several hacker groups claimed responsibility for the attacks on Telegram, a messaging app, including one calling itself Anonymous Sudan which said it had launched a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack on French government network infrastructure. "We have conducted a massive cyberattack... the damage will be widespread," said the group,

which posts with an avatar of a hooded Guy Fawkes mask in front of a desert scene with pyramids. Guy Fawkes is famous for his 1605 plot to blow up Britain's parliament, and his image has become a widespread symbol for revolutionary protest. "A lot of different digital government sectors have been affected, including very important websites, with their respective subdomains," it said. Anonymous Sudan is a known outfit that has carried out attacks in the past year against websites in countries including Sweden, Denmark and Israel. Purportedly based in Sudan, it says it targets what it deems to be anti-Muslim activity with some signs that it is sympathetic to Russia. Specialist website Numerama said Anonymous Sudan's exact motivations were "unclear", adding however that it had a track record of "targeting enemies designated by Moscow". A DDoS attack involves using a computer or network of computers to make a massive number of requests of a target system, overwhelming its ability to respond to legitimate users. According to US cybersecurity firm Cloudflare, Anonymous Sudan is one of many groups employing DDoS attacks and organisations can protect themselves against its methods. The latest cyberattack also follows a call from Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu last month to step up protection against "sabotage and cyberattack" by Russia, in an internal note seen by AFP that said his ministry was top of Moscow's target list.





Djokovic Stunned by Lucky Loser Nardi at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches) - World number one Novak Djokovic was stunned 6-4 3-6 6-3 by lucky loser Luca Nardi in the third round of Indian Wells on Monday, a victory which the 20-year-old Italian described as a "miracle". Nardi, who grew up idolizing Djokovic and is ranked 123rd in the world, played the match of his life to defeat the Serbian, dropping his racket and putting his hands over his face after firing an ace out wide to seal the win. The defeat ends Djokovic's bid for a record sixth title at the tournament in the California desert. "This is a miracle," said Nardi, who lost to David Goffin in qualifiers on Tuesday and only got into the main draw after Tomas Etcheverry withdrew due to injury. "I'm a 20-year-old guy, 100 in the world and I beat Novak. Crazy. Just crazy." Nardi came out flying under the lights on centre court, drawing Djokovic to the net with a short ball and then rifling a forehand past him for an early break and a 3-2 lead. Djokovic was well short of his best and a service return from the 24-times Grand Slam champion found the net to hand Nardi the first set. The top seed broke Nardi twice in the second set and held at love to level the contest but his opponent, who had a poster of Djokovic on his wall growing up, refused to back down. Nardi hit a backhand that Djokovic could not put back in play for a crucial break and a 4-2 advantage in the decider before pulling off the upset. Nardi will next face American Tommy Paul. Earlier, Gael Monfils produced a stunning display of shot-making and showmanship to rally from a set and 3-0 down to beat former champion Cameron Norrie 6-7(5) 7-6(5) 6-3 to reach the last 16. The 37-year-old Frenchman electrified the crowd with his creativity to set up fourth round meeting with ninth seed Casper Ruud. Norrie, who won

the tournament in 2021, piled up 60 unforced errors and could not solve the unpredictable Monfils puzzle in the three hour and 15 minute affair. "I feel better and better, to be honest," said Monfils, who was sidelined with a wrist injury for part of last season. "I've been playing weeks after weeks, which has been a long time I am able to do that. I feel good. So far the body is holding, so I'm happy with that." American Taylor Fritz, the tournament's 2022 champion, breezed past Sebastian Baez 6-2 6-2 and Grigor Dimitrov's career renaissance got another big lift with a 6-3 6-3 win over France's Adrian Mannarino. Seventh seed Holger Rune beat Lorenzo Musetti 6-2 7-6(5) and 17th-seeded American Paul sailed past Ugo Humbert 6-4 6-4 in other third-round action. Meanwhile reigning Grand Slam champions Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff reached the fourth round of the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters with challenging straight-set wins. But former number one and 2018 tournament winner Naomi Osaka failed to join them, with the Japanese player eliminated 7-5, 6-4 by Elise Mertens, who now takes on Gauff. The Belgian saved three break points in the final game, advancing on her second match point which drew an Osaka error. Osaka, a four-time winner at the majors, is making her return to tennis this season after giving birth. Earlier, double Australian Open trophy-holder Sabalenka defeated Emma Raducanu 6-3, 7-5 but double-faulted on a match point and needed three more winning chances before finally going through. The 2023 runner-up to Elena Rybakina here got a tougher than expected challenge from 2021 US Open champion Raducanu, who has returned to tournament tennis this year after an eight-month injury layoff.

RONALDO'S AL NASSR DUMPED OUT OF ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo scored in extra time but Al Nassr side were dumped out of the Asian Champions League quarter-finals on penalties by Al Ain on Monday. The 39-year-old Portuguese was the only Al Nassr player to score in the shootout as his Saudi side went out 3-1 on penalties, the tie having ended 4-4 on aggregate. It was a frustrating night for the former Manchester United and Real Madrid forward, who missed a sitter from three yards with the goal gaping in normal time in Riyadh. Beaten 1-0 in the first leg in the United Arab Emirates, Ronaldo took the quarter-final to penalties when he held his nerve from the spot in the 118th minute. His calmly taken spot-kick made it 4-3 on the night to the hosts, who had Ayman Yahya sent off in the 98th minute. But the home team failed with three of their four efforts in the shootout to send Al Ain into the last four of Asia's top club competition. The Brazilian international defender Alex Telles, also formerly of Manchester United, was among the Al Nassr players to fluff his lines during the shootout. Harry Kewell's Yokohama F-Marinots host Chinese side Shandong Taishan on Wednesday with a 2-1 lead from the first leg.

MASSA TAKES LEGAL ACTION AGAINST F1



LONDON (Dispatches) - Former Ferrari driver Felipe Massa filed a lawsuit against Formula One in London's High Court seeking damages for missing out on the 2008 world championship title. Brazilian Massa, 42, lost out to Lewis Hamilton by just a single point in a season where the sport was rocked by the "crashgate" scandal at the Singapore Grand Prix. Renault staged a win for Fernando Alonso by ordering Nelson Piquet Jr to crash in their other car. Ferrari's Massa, leading at the time of Piquet's smash, finished 13th, before losing the championship by the finest of margins. Piquet revealed the following season that he was under instruction by his bosses to deliberately crash. Massa has also brought proceedings against governing body the FIA, and the sport's former supremo Bernie Ecclestone. He is reportedly seeking £62 million (\$80 million) in damages to reflect the difference in salary, as well as sponsorship and commercial opportunities he would have received as a world champion. Ecclestone confessed in an interview last year that according to the rules, the results from Singapore race should not have stood for the championship standings and as a result, Massa would have been declared champion. "Mr. Massa is seeking declarations that the FIA breached its regulations by failing to promptly investigate Nelson Piquet Junior's crash at the 2008 Singapore Grand Prix, and that had it acted properly, Mr. Massa would have won the drivers' championship that year," said a statement from Massa's lawyers. "Mr. Massa also seeks damages for the significant financial loss he has suffered due to the FIA's failure, in which Mr. Ecclestone and FOM (Formula One Management) were also complicit."

Jokic Leads Nuggets Fightback Over Fired-Up Raptors

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokic grabbed a 35-point triple-double as the Denver Nuggets staged a dramatic second-half fightback to defeat the short-handed Toronto Raptors 125-119. Two-time Most Valuable Player Jokic produced a towering display to drag Denver back into contention after the NBA champions trailed by 22 points in the second quarter. A fired-up Toronto looked poised to score a notable upset after starting strong to open up a double-digit advantage. But Serbian star Jokic seized control of the game in the third, scoring 19 points as Denver outscored Toronto 42-30 to trim the visitors' lead to five points heading into the fourth. Denver's domination continued into the fourth and they finally took the lead midway through the final frame when Jamal Murray's layup put them 108-107 ahead. Denver outscored Toronto 32-21 in the fourth quarter to close out the win. "In the first half they scored a lot and we didn't play any defense," said Jokic after completing his 21st triple-double of the season. "We just needed to match and exceed their physicality and that's how we turned the game to our advantage." "We were just fighting. The whole crew showed their character today. We're not quitters." Jokic led Denver's scoring while point guard Murray added 26 points with 12 assists and five rebounds. Aaron Gordon and Michael Porter Jr. finished with 19 points each. R.J. Barrett led Toronto's scorers with 26 points, with Kelly Olynyk chipping in with 24. In Cleveland, Kevin Durant finished with 37 points with eight rebounds and six assists as the Phoenix Suns overturned a 19-point deficit to down the Cavaliers 117-111. Devin Booker added 27 points for Phoenix while Bradley Beal weighed in with 24 to give the Suns a battling victory on the road. Darius Garland led Cleveland's scoring with 30 points. Cleveland had surged into a big early lead after a 41-point first quarter, extending their advantage to 63-44 with just under five minutes remaining in the second. But Phoenix roared back to outscore the Cavs 19-7 in the final minutes of the half to close the gap to within seven points. Phoenix kept up that momentum in the third period, outscoring the Cavs 34-21 to take the lead and then holding on down the stretch to close out the victory. Phoenix improved to 38-27 to remain in sixth place in the Western Conference. In San Antonio, the Golden State Warriors shook off a slow start to take down the Spurs 112-102, two days after losing 126-113 to the Texan club. San Antonio led by 11 points in the first quarter and held a 10-point lead early

in the third. But a trademark high-scoring third quarter from Golden State -- outscoring the Spurs 32-18 -- swung the game back in the visitors' favor. With the Warriors missing the injured Stephen Curry, Jonathan Kuminga led their scoring with 22 points, while Klay Thompson added 21 and Chris Paul 19. San Antonio's French rookie Victor Wembanyama finished with 27 points, 14 rebounds, three assists and two blocks. In Chicago, Luka Doncic finished with 27 points, 14 assists and 12 rebounds to claim his 17th triple-double of the season as the Dallas Mavericks cruised past the Bulls 127-92. The tone was set in the first quarter as the Mavericks erupted to outscore Chicago 44-16 to open up a commanding 28-point lead. Dereck Lively II had 22 points off the bench while Daniel Gafford added 20 and Kyrie Irving 14. Dallas improved to 37-28 to sit in eighth place in the Western standings. Chicago, ninth in the Eastern Conference, fell to 31-34.



Pochettino Calls for Chelsea Unity After Newcastle Win

LONDON (Dispatches) - Mauricio Pochettino called for the Chelsea fans to trust his players after a 3-2 win over Newcastle propelled the Blues back into contention for European football next season. Pochettino had faced open revolt from among his own support during last weekend's 2-2 draw at Brentford. The former Tottenham boss has suffered a difficult first season at Stamford Bridge, which included losing the League Cup final to a severely depleted Liverpool last month. Chelsea remain 11th in the Premier League table, but closed to within four points of West Ham in seventh, which should at least secure a place in the Europa Conference League. "We need to stick together," said Pochettino, whose side face Leicester in the FA Cup quarter-finals on Sunday. "Until the end we are going to fight to try to give our fans the best things. It helped a little bit today we scored from the beginning, the fans were good and behind us. They need to trust in us." Newcastle's 12th defeat of the season leaves the Magpies just one point better off than Chelsea in 10th. The pressure is also rising on Eddie Howe as Saudi-backed Newcastle have failed to build on finishing fourth last season to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in 20 years. "All three goals are similar in their characteristics. We didn't defend those situations well enough and if you do that you are going to lose games," said Howe. "I

know we can hit the heights of previously, but we are not doing it anywhere near often enough." There were promising signs for Pochettino as some of his much-criticised expensive young recruits showed glimpses of their potential. Nicolas Jackson is now up to 12 goals in his debut season as he cleverly flicked in Palmer's shot after less than six minutes. However, it was the story of Chelsea's season that they failed to build on that flying start and allowed Newcastle to go onto control the rest of the first half. The visitors were dealt an injury blow midway through the first period when Anthony Gordon was forced off. But Alexander Isak produced a quality finish, fired low into the far corner, to bring Newcastle level two minutes before half-time. The one new signing Chelsea have been able to rely on all season is Cole Palmer and the England international restored his side's lead in emphatic fashion just before the hour mark. Palmer collected Enzo Fernandez's pass, cut inside and unleashed a powerful effort for his 11th Premier League goal of the season. Mykhailo Mudryk, by contrast, has been a constant frustration for a number of Chelsea managers since joining for £88 million (\$113 million) just over a year ago. The Ukrainian had been on the pitch only five minutes when showed his blistering pace to burst through the heart of the Newcastle defence and turn in just his sixth goal in 46 Chelsea

appearances. Jacob Murphy's rocket of a shot into the top corner set up a nervy finish for the hosts. But it was too little, too late for the visitors in the latest disappointment of an underwhelming campaign.

