

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian Described Zionists' Actions in Gaza as a Blatant Violation of Human Rights Principles, Noting That Such Atrocities Are Clear Examples of Combined Crimes Against Humanity, Genocide, Apartheid, and Ethnic Cleansing

# IRAN NEWS

In a Telephone Conversation With Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani on Wednesday Night, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi Expressed Hopes for Closer Relations Between Tehran and Baghdad Through the Determination of the High-Ranking Officials of Both Countries

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## ISRAEL WILL RECEIVE SLAP IN THE FACE FOR SYRIA ATTACK



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the Israeli regime will receive a slap in the face for an attack on the premises of the Iranian embassy in Syria's capital earlier this week. In an address to officials of the Iranian administration and other branches of government on Wednesday, the Leader said the attack would fail to save Israel from its defeat in Gaza where it has been engaged in nearly six months of aggression against the Palestinians. "The cowardly efforts by the Zionist regime like the one they carried out in Syria will not save them from defeat. They will of course receive a slap in the face for this move," he said. "The Zionist regime's defeat in Gaza will continue and this regime will approach demise and collapse," said Ayatollah Khamenei. He said that demonstrations planned for this year's Quds Day, which will be marked on April 5 on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, will mobilize supporters of Palestine not only in Muslim countries but in non-Muslim countries who have been pushing for an end to the Israeli aggression on Gaza. "This year's Quds Day will be an international revolt against the usurper Zionist regime," the Leader said. Ayatollah Khamenei described the crimes committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza as "unprecedented in history" and said the scale of crimes even caused uproar among people who have been brought up in the Western culture.

## PAKISTAN TO SEEK U.S. SANCTIONS WAIVER ON GAS PIPELINE PROJECT WITH IRAN



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The government of Pakistan appears determined to finish a multibillion dollar gas transmission project with Iran, despite stiff opposition from the U.S. Petroleum Minister of Pakistan Musadik Malik stated that Islamabad urgently needs the gas transfer project with Iran and intends to pursue exemptions from US sanctions by presenting both technical and political justifications for the project's completion. During a congressional hearing in Washington last week, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Donald Lu was explicit in his declaration that Washington opposes the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project and is making concerted efforts to thwart its construction. Experts believe that Islamabad's stance on the gas transfer project with Iran is not merely a matter of preference, but rather a necessity given the current circumstances. We have to look into things a little deeply. Turkey and Iraq are currently purchasing Iranian gas, yet they are not under US sanctions. We have to see what mechanism they are using, Turkey, Iraq and the Iranian governments, so that we can adopt the same mechanism to avoid any sanctions from the United States because we have to provide energy for our people. They need cheap energy.

## Millions in Iran, Worldwide Rally on Quds Day to Support Palestinians



TEHRAN - Millions of people in Iran and across the world rally on the International Quds Day, marked on the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan, to express their solidarity with Palestinians and condemn Israeli atrocities. Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif, the spokesman of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and the director-general of Intifada headquarters in Tehran, said pro-Palestine rallies are held in more than 2,000 locations across the country. In Tehran, the rallies included a funeral procession held for the martyrs of an Israeli airstrike on the consular section of the Iranian Embassy in the Mezzeh neighborhood in Damascus on Monday. The bodies of the seven martyrs, including Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a commander of the IRGC's Quds Force and his deputy General Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, were repatriated on Wednesday night. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei led prayers over the bodies of the seven military members of IRGC during a ceremony attended by top military brass in Tehran on Thursday. From different walks of life and various social strata, the demonstrators in Tehran held the national flags of Iran and Palestine as well as banners that read, "Free Palestine," and "Al-Quds must be liberated." The mass rally in the Iranian capital was also attended by Palestine's Islamic Jihad Secretary General Ziyad Nakhalah and Abd al-Aziz al-Muhammadawi, chief of staff of Iraq's anti-terror Popular Mobilization Units, better known as Hashd al-Sha'abi. "Definitely, what is unfolding today among all the groups of the Axis of Resistance in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran is the declaration of Israel's decline," Muhammadawi, known as Abu Fadak, told

reporters on Friday. "We are waiting for the mandate of Leader of the Islamic Revolution [Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei] on what to do; we are awaiting his order today." Muhammadawi also underlined that Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip will be victorious and the occupying regime will be destroyed. The event in Tehran was also participated by a group of Nigerian students carrying banners in support of Palestine, the Islamic Republic, and Leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky. Meanwhile the Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami declared Friday that the IRGC will punish the Zionist Israeli regime for the terrorist attack on Iran's consulate in the Syrian capital. Salami made the remarks at the Quds Day rally in Tehran on Friday. "The Zionist regime is like a dagger that the satanic British regime stabbed the body of the Islamic nation with 75 years ago," Salami said, adding that "Zionist regime is still alive with the United States' artificial respiration." "Whenever this Western artificial ventilation is removed from the nose of the Zionist regime, this regime's protected life would end and collapse. This issue is near and not far," he added. "The Zionists think that the more they massacre the Muslims, their position will be strengthened, but this is just a dream," the IRGC commander further said. "The messages we receive from inside Gaza say that they have no problem in their steadfastness against the Zionists," he went on to say, adding that "They [Gaza Resistance groups] say, be firm, we will bury the regime in Gaza." Finally, the land of the Palestinians will return to themselves, and there is no way to save the Zionists," further asserted the IRGC chief.

## Liberation of al-Quds Is First Issue

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says Iran considers defense as the legitimate right of all resistance groups and loudly supports resistance movements in Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen and all Islamic countries. "We believe that all those who think of resistance, defense of their land and protection of women, children and religion should be supported and encouraged anywhere in the world," he told ambassadors and charge d'affaires of Islamic countries in Tehran Thursday. Speaking on the eve of the International Quds Day, Raisi said the liberation of the occupied al-Quds is the first issue and the focus of mutual thinking, cooperation and companionship among Muslims. He touched on the worldwide hatred of the enemies of the Palestinian nation, saying all indications point to a different Quds Day this year. The International Quds Day, marked on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, features large-scale rallies and marches held each year to demonstrate unwavering support for the Palestinian people in their struggle against Israeli occupation. "The Quds Day this year is not only related to Muslims, but also to all awakened consciences in the world and truly global," the president said. The liberation of al-Quds, he said, is the axis that can unite all Muslims and one of the important secrets for the unity of Islamic countries. Unity and integrity of Muslims is very important, emphasized by the Holy Qur'an, which can help stand against the global domination system and neutralize organized crimes against Islamic countries, the president added. Muslims, President Raisi said, should trust God and their own possessions instead of outside powers. "Today, we have many assets in Islamic countries, and with unity and integrity, we can stand against the domination system. Resistance and standing is the recipe that has worked in the region and will work from now on." The president said Iran considers the strengthening and authority of Islamic countries as its own strengthening and all Muslim countries. "Also, we consider the smallest insecurity in any Islamic country as insecurity in all Islamic countries," he said. "We like security, peace, tranquility and progress for all nations and countries and for the Islamic world. We believe that the cooperation and like-mindedness of Islamic countries can lead to growth, excellence and progress in Islamic countries," he added. The president said cementing relations with neighbors is one of the main pillars of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. "The Islamic Republic of Iran warmly welcomes the cooperation of all its neighbors and Islamic countries, and the priority of our foreign policy is to strengthen constructive interaction and promote common and mutual interests with Islamic countries." Raisi said the big problem of the region and Islamic countries is the meddling of outside powers. "If it were to the Islamic countries, they could easily resolve inter-regional issues and even regional and extra-regional issues by exchanging opinions and understanding." "Outsiders put their policies, views and interests before the interests of Islamic countries and never think about providing happiness and solving the problems of people and Islamic countries," he said. "The base of the arrogant powers is on supremacy and domination over the region and Islamic countries so that these countries cannot do anything in line with their interests without their opinion and permission," he added. Arrogant powers, President Raisi said, see their interests in creating discord, spreading terrorism, hatred, and domination. "This is while the interests of Islamic countries are in real cooperation and interaction with each other."



## IRAN EXPECTS EU'S SWIFT ACTION TO CONDEMN ISRAELI STRIKE ON DIPLOMATIC PREMISES



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Iran expects the European Union to take a "realistic and immediate" move to condemn the recent Israeli terrorist attack on the country's diplomatic premises in Syria. In a telephone conversation on Wednesday, Amir-Abdollahian and European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell discussed the Israeli terrorist attack on the Consular Section of Iran's embassy in Damascus, which killed seven military members of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). He added that Israel attacked the diplomatic premises in violation of all international laws and principles as European officials have been urging Iran to exercise self-restraint. Referring to the killing of six Syrian citizens, including a mother and her child, in addition to the Iranian military advisors in the attack, the top Iranian diplomat emphasized that Israel completely breached regional peace and security as well as security of diplomats and diplomatic missions. Amir-Abdollahian wondered how the EU would react if a similar attack had hit a Western embassy in Ukraine. On Monday, Israeli warplanes bombed the Consular Section of the Iranian Embassy in the Mezzeh neighborhood in Damascus. A senior commander of the IRGC's Quds Force, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, and his deputy General Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi were among the seven Iranian martyrs of the terrorist attack. Amir-Abdollahian further said Israel's genocide and war crimes continue in Gaza with the US support.

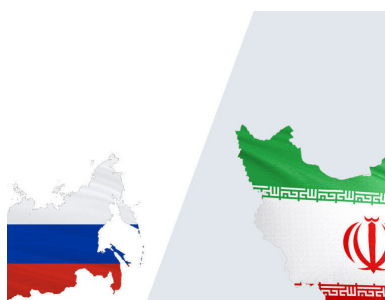
## IRAN THWARTS TERRORIST ATTACK TO OVERTAKE SOUTHEAST MILITARY BASES



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Jaish al-Adl terrorists suffered 18 fatalities in attacks on public places and military and law enforcement bases in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says. The overnight attacks were launched with the intention to seize IRGC headquarters in the towns of Chabahar and Rask, but they were thwarted by Iran's security forces who lost 10 members, an IRGC statement said Thursday. According to the statement, "a number of terrorists and armed bandits affiliated with foreign intelligence services" launched simultaneous attacks on five public places as well as military and law enforcement bases in Chabahar and Rask in the early hours of Thursday. They "were met with the tact, patience and intelligence of the security forces," the statement said. "After making sure that the people are away from the danger of the attackers and any harm, the zealous fighters of the Southeast Security Base of the IRGC Ground Forces engaged with them with the participation of the police command forces and during a decisive operation all the terrorists and armed bandits were killed and complete security and peace was restored to the areas," it said. "In the operation, 18 terrorists and armed criminals were killed, 10 security forces were martyred, and a number of others were injured," it added. Deputy Interior Minister Majid Mirahmadi told national broadcaster IRI, "The terrorists failed to succeed achieving their goal of seizing the IRGC headquarters in Chabahar and Rask." The Jaish al-Adl terrorist group has claimed responsibility for several attacks in recent years on Iranian security forces in Sistan and Baluchestan. The area, which borders Afghanistan and Pakistan, has long been the site of frequent clashes between Iranian security forces and Takfiri terrorists as well as drug traffickers. The group attacked a police station in the town of Rask, killing 11 security personnel. Iran responded to the attack, targeting two bases of the terrorist group in Pakistan with missiles.



# IRAN NEWS



## IRAN, RUSSIA CLOSE TO FINALIZING A COMPREHENSIVE NEW TREATY

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Second Asia Department Zamir Kabulov has said that Tehran and Moscow are working on the final version of a comprehensive new treaty, which they are close to signing. The treaty, which is being prepared on the orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, aims to establish a long-term strategic partnership. Russia Today wrote on Wednesday: While Kabulov did not provide a specific timeline for the signing of the agreement, he mentioned that the project had reached a high level of readiness at the beginning of the year. However, it has been delayed due to revisions by the Iranian side. The two countries have been actively supporting each other on the international stage, and their cooperation has extended to various fields, including trade, energy, and education. During a meeting in Moscow in December 2023, Putin and Raisi discussed bilateral ties, global challenges, and cooperation in depth, spending five hours on these topics.

### IRAN'S ONE-YEAR FOREIGN TRADE HITS \$153B



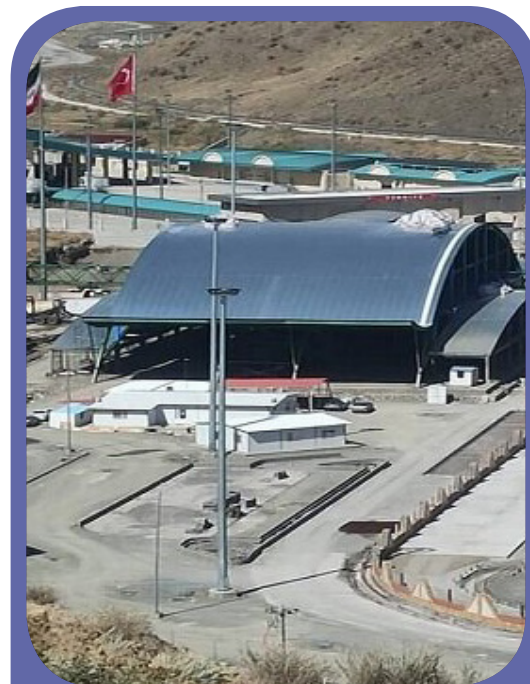
TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has exchanged as much as \$153 billion with different world countries in the past Iranian calendar year to March 19, according to the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Mohammad Rezvanifar said that Iran's annual trade marks a 2.6% growth when compared to that of the preceding year.

Iran has exported an aggregate \$86.89 billion worth of goods in the period under review and imported a total of \$66.28 billion in the one-year period, the official noted.

He added that the country's annual exports excluding oil, electricity and techno-engineering services stood at 136.4 tons worth some \$49.23 billion which is down 8.87% in terms of value while increasing 9.82% in terms of tonnage.

Rezvanifar put Iran's annual oil exports at \$35.87 billion.



### IRAN, TURKEY OPEN NEW TRANSIT GATE AT SHARED BORDER

TEHRAN (MNA) - An economic official in Iran's West Azarbaijan province said that the new transit and export border crossing between Iran and Turkey under the name of Razi Khoy-Kapykoy has opened. Javad Karmi, Deputy Coordinator of Economic Affairs of Governor of West Azarbaijan told Iranian media that, "With the support and development-focused approach of the 13th government [under President Ebrahim Raeisi] in the province, the new transit and export border gate of Iran's Razi Khoy-Kapıköy in Turkey was inaugurated." He said that the opening of the new border gate came as part of recent memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Iran and Turkey. "In the recent meeting, a 30-clause memorandum of understanding was signed between Iran and Turkey, which contained the special attention of both sides to the development of comprehensive cooperation in economic fields," Karami said. "The development of infrastructures, opening of new border crossings, as well as the creation of a new transit and export border in Kapi Koi - Razi Khoy, were among the most important part of these MoUs, the implementation of which will lead to a good expansion and promotion of regional international trade between the two sides," The West Azarbaijan economic official said.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



### Turkish Companies' Presence in Iran's Oil Industry Welcome

TEHRAN - Iran welcomes Turkish companies' participation in projects of its oil industry, said Oil Minister Javad Owji. Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a meeting with Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Alparsalan Bayraktar, Owji pointed to Turkish companies' willingness to involve in Iran's upstream projects, particularly development of oil fields, adding bilateral agreements and the \$30 billion annual trade volume underlined by the two countries' presidents were discussed during the meeting. "The official negotiations between the National Iranian Gas Company and Turkey's BOTAŞ started today," mentioned the oil minister, saying the two sides exchanged views on technical issues related to extension of gas exports to Turkey. According to Owji, Bayraktar offered a list of Turkish companies, which are eager to engage in Iran's oil projects. Several oil contracts worth more than \$33 billion have been recently

signed with Iranian knowledge-based companies, said the oil minister, adding the energy sector can contribute largely to the achievement of Tehran-Ankara \$30 billion trade target. Bayraktar said his visit to Tehran reveals Turkey's firm determination to extend the contract on importing gas from Iran. Gas plays a vital role in Turkey, as it meets the energy needs of a major part of the household, commercial, and industrial sectors of the country, he added. "We are seeking to diversify our gas import routes," pointed out the visiting energy minister, referring to Iran as one of the leading gas suppliers to Turkey. The official pointed to Turkish companies' investment in development projects of Iran's gas fields and renovation of gas transmission infrastructure as one of the main topics he discussed with his Iranian counterpart. The two sides will surely continue their talks, he concluded.

## Iran-China Trade Tops \$2.87b in January-February 2024

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Trade exchanges between Iran and China in the first two months of 2024 saw a 37 percent increase in comparison with the similar period the previous year, a report says. The value of trade between the two countries in January and February this year amounted to \$2.879 billion, according to IRNA which cited the Chinese customs data. The trade exchanges between the two countries were valued at \$2.098 billion in the first two months of 2023. It said China exported 2.05 billion dollars worth of goods to Iran in January and February this year, showing a 45 percent hike when compared to the previous year. Beijing exported 1.41 billion dollars worth of goods to Tehran in the first two months of 2023. With a 20 percent increase, the value of China's imports from Iran

in the two months of 2024 reached 829 million dollars. Beijing imported 688 million dollars of commodities from Tehran in the same period the previous year. Analysts believe that the value of China's imports from Iran is much higher because the figures related to the purchase of Iranian oil by Chinese refineries are not included in the official statistics of the country's imports from Iran. According to the Chinese customs data, in the first two months of this year, the total value of China's foreign trade reached 930 billion dollars with a growth of 5.5 percent compared to the same period last year. During this period, China exported 528 billion dollars worth of goods while its imports amounted to 402 billion dollars.



### IRAN DISCOVERS GIANT SHALE OIL RESERVES IN SEVERAL REGIONS



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) says the country has discovered shale oil deposits in 10 different locations.

The director of exploration at the NIOC, Mehdi Fakour, announced that the company's specially designed model will enable the extraction of oil from these giant resources in Iran's provinces.

Fakour stated that in the previous Iranian calendar year (which ended March 19, 2024), more than 2.5 billion barrels of oil were added to Iran's crude oil and natural gas reserves with new exploration activities.

He added that the new discoveries will be announced by the oil minister soon.

Domestic companies possess significant potential for extracting oil shale resources, Fakour emphasized.

Furthermore, he announced the development of a unique and localized model in the country, which has yet to be adopted elsewhere globally.

The official went on to say that the extraction of shale oil in the United States costs approximately \$40 per barrel. However, the new model implemented in Iran for shale oil production in western province of Lorestan will cost around \$25 per barrel.

In 2017, Iran had discovered shale oil reserves amounting to 2 billion barrels in Lorestan.

Shale oil is unconventional oil produced from oil shale rock fragments by pyrolysis, hydrogenation, or thermal dissolution.

Iran is believed to have 158 billion barrels of established conventional oil reserves, the fourth largest in the world.

### IRAN-TURKEY TRADE REACHES \$930M IN 2 MONTHS



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in the first two months of 2024 reached \$930 million, showing a one percent increase compared to the same month last year. According to the latest figures released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), Iran's trade with the neighboring country stood at \$919 million in January-February 2023. According to TURKSTAT, Turkey's exports to Iran in the mentioned two months reached \$580 million, recording a 23 percent increase compared to last year's corresponding period. Turkey exported over \$469 million worth of products to the Islamic Republic in the first two months of 2023. Turkey's imports from Iran however registered a 22 percent decline and fell from \$450 million in January-February 2023 to \$350 million in the first two months of 2024. The trade exchange between Iran and Turkey stood at \$5.490 billion in 2023 with a decrease of 14 percent. Based on the data previously released by the Turkish Statistical Institute, the value of Iran's exports to Turkey increased by 19 percent to reach \$3.35 billion in 2022. Turkey had imported over \$2.82 billion worth of commodities from the Islamic Republic in 2021. Based on the mentioned data, Iran's imports from the country also marked an 11-percent rise to hit \$3.07 billion in the past year, in comparison with 2021, when the figure was \$2.77 billion. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, the trade between the two countries registered a 15-percent rise in 2022 compared to 2021. The value of trade between the two neighbors reached \$6.42 billion in 2022, while the figure stood at \$5.59 billion in the preceding year.



## CUBA SECURES FOOD RATIONS IN BID TO EASE TENSION AFTER PROTESTS

HAVANA (DISPATCHES) - CUBAN PRESIDENT MIGUEL DIAZ-CANEL SAID ON THURSDAY HIS COMMUNIST-RUN GOVERNMENT HAS SECURED SUPPLY OF KEY SUBSIDISED FOOD RATIONS AS HE MOVED TO DEFUSE TENSIONS JUST TWO WEEKS AFTER PROTESTERS TOOK TO THE STREETS OVER WIDESPREAD SHORTAGES. DIAZ-CANEL, WHO APPEARED ON THE MID-DAY TV NEWSCAST, SAID HIS GOVERNMENT HAD UNDERTAKEN AN "ENORMOUS EFFORT" TO ENSURE THE SUPPLY OF FOOD FOR THE ISLAND'S POPULATION OF 11 MILLION. "APRIL AND MAY ARE GOING TO BE MONTHS WITH BETTER PROSPECTS," HE SAID. "THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO BE COMMITTED TO GUARANTEEING THE PEOPLE THEIR LEVELS OF ESSENTIAL FOODS." CUBA HAS SINCE FIDEL CASTRO'S 1959 REVOLUTION PROVIDED ITS CITIZENS WITH A MONTHLY RATION OF BASICS SUCH AS RICE, BEANS, SUGAR, COOKING OIL AND COFFEE, THOUGH THOSE DELIVERIES HAVE BEEN SCALED BACK OVER THE YEARS AS AN ECONOMIC CRISIS HAS LED TO SHORTAGES AND HIGH PRICES.



## MODI SETS AMBITIOUS INDIA ECONOMIC GOALS FOR PROBABLE THIRD TERM



NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, confident of winning a national election starting this month, has set an ambitious target of roughly doubling the economy and exports this decade, according to a government document seen by Reuters. Modi has highlighted economic growth as one of his biggest achievements in election rallies and has "guaranteed" making the economy the third largest in the world from fifth now if he wins a third term in a row as polls predict. He has already asked officials to finalise plans by around May to expand the economy to \$6.69 trillion in nominal terms by 2030, from around \$3.51 trillion currently, according to the October document. Though short on concrete details of how to achieve that, it has been a basis for officials' meetings. When he took office for a second term five years ago, Modi promised to take the economy to \$5 trillion by the current fiscal year, but partly due to COVID-19 related disruptions, meeting that target is virtually impossible now. For the next six years, Modi's goal is to raise per capita income to \$4,418 from around \$2,500, the document says, without specifying the spending or reforms needed to achieve that. Modi's office and the finance ministry did not reply to requests seeking comment. Independent economist Saugata Bhattacharya said if the real GDP can grow by 6-6.5%, inflation stays around 4.5% and the rupee continues to depreciate against the dollar by 1-1.5% every year, the economy can double in seven years in nominal dollar terms. "The issue that a vision document should address is the set of structural reforms required to sustain this or a higher real GDP growth rate over a long time, a very difficult feat," he said. The economy is, however, expected to have grown by around 8% in the last fiscal year ended March 31, the fastest among major countries, on the back of strong manufacturing and construction activity driven by government spending.

## GERMANY ANNOUNCES MILITARY OVERHAUL WITH EYE ON CYBER THREATS



BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany's defence minister announced a restructuring of the military, including a new central command and a dedicated branch for cyber space, furthering a Bundeswehr overhaul launched in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "No one should have the idea of attacking us as a NATO territory. We have to convey this credibly and truthfully," Boris Pistorius told a press conference in Berlin. The minister said the Bundeswehr will need an additional 6.5 billion euros (\$7.06 billion) in the 2025 budget, as cabinet works to find the funds needed to hit a long-neglected NATO spending target in the coming years. Under the new structure, the central command will combine two previously separate commands for domestic and foreign deployments, providing NATO with one point of contact, while the cyber space branch will focus on hybrid threats such as disinformation campaigns. The restructuring comes after Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a sea change for Germany's military in the wake of the war in Ukraine, vowing to modernise the military and boost defence spending to meet NATO's target of 2% of gross domestic product. Pistorius did not make any announcement on a possible reintroduction of military service in Germany, something which has been debated in light of the war in Ukraine. He said the aim was to present a paper on various possible models later this month.



## Biden Urges Netanyahu to Protect Civilians in Gaza

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Joe Biden threatened on Thursday to condition support for Israel's offensive in Gaza on it taking concrete steps to protect aid workers and civilians, seeking for the first time to leverage U.S. aid to influence Israeli military behavior. Biden's warning, relayed in a call with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday, followed a deadly Israeli attack on World Central Kitchen aid workers that spurred new calls from Biden's fellow Democrats to place conditions on U.S. aid to Israel. Israel said the attack was a mistake. The U.S. president, a lifelong supporter of Israel, has resisted pressure to withhold aid or halt the shipment of weapons to the country. His warning marked the first time he has threatened to potentially condition aid, a development that could change the dynamic of the nearly six-month-old war. Biden "made clear the need for Israel to announce and implement a series of specific, concrete, and measurable steps to address civilian harm, humanitarian suffering, and the safety of aid workers," the White House said of the leaders' phone call. It said the call lasted about 30 minutes. The president "made clear that U.S. policy with respect to Gaza will be determined by our assessment of Israel's immediate action on these steps," the White House said in a statement. Washington is Israel's top weapons supplier and the Biden administration has mostly provided a diplomatic shield for it at the United Nations. At a briefing after the call, White House spokesperson John Kirby declined to elaborate on any specific changes the U.S. would make in its policy toward Israel and Gaza. He said Washington hoped to see an announcement of Israeli steps in the "coming hours and days." By suggesting a shift in U.S. policy toward Gaza was possible if Israel did not address the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian enclave, Biden channeled his

own frustration along with mounting pressure from his left-leaning political base in the Democratic Party to stop the killings and alleviate hunger among innocent civilians. Asked about possible changes in U.S. policy, Netanyahu spokesperson Tal Heinrich told Fox News: "I think it's something that Washington will have to explain." Later, the White House welcomed moves by Israel to open the Ashdod port and Erez crossing to increase deliveries of humanitarian assistance and to step up deliveries from Jordan directly into Gaza. But these steps, said White House spokesperson Adrienne Watson, "must now be fully and rapidly implemented." On Monday, Israel launched an attack that killed seven workers with the World Central Kitchen group, founded by celebrity chef Jose Andres. Andres told Reuters in an interview on Wednesday that the Israeli attack had targeted his aid workers "systematically, car by car." Israel said on Thursday that it would adjust tactics in the Gaza war after describing the attack as the result of a misidentification and that inquiry findings would be made public soon. The White House had described Biden as outraged and heartbroken by the attack but, prior to Thursday's call, the president had made no fundamental change in Washington's steadfast support for Israel in its conflict against Palestinian Hamas militants. During the call, Biden "underscored that an immediate ceasefire is essential to stabilize and improve the humanitarian situation and protect innocent civilians," the White House said. Biden urged Netanyahu to empower his negotiators to conclude a deal to bring home hostages captured by Hamas in its deadly Oct. 7 attack that triggered the Israeli offensive, it added. In Brussels, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Israel "must meet this moment" by surging humanitarian assistance and ensuring the security of those who provide aid.

## NATO Allies Aim to Send More Air Defense Aid to Ukraine



BRUSSELS (Reuters) - NATO alliance members agreed to scour their arsenals for more air defence systems to protect Ukraine from Russian ballistic missile attacks, as the alliance marked a 75th anniversary overshadowed by the war on its borders. "Allies understand the urgency," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said after Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met NATO counterparts and appealed for new additional air defence systems, especially U.S.-made Patriot missiles. "Allies will now go back and look into their inventories, look into if there are any ways they can provide more systems, in particular Patriots, but also of course ensure that the systems which are already there have the ammunition but also the spare parts (they need)," Stoltenberg told a news conference. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said more support for Ukraine was especially important as countries like China, North Korea and Iran were supporting Russia's efforts to build up its defence industrial base. "I believe based on what I heard today that everyone, including the United States, is going to double back, and if necessary double down, on finding the resources that Ukraine continues to need," Blinken said at a news

conference, citing the need for air defence, as well as for artillery and munitions. Neither official spelled out any specific pledge or aid target. Earlier, at a ceremony with birthday cake and marching bands could not mask the sombre mood in Brussels, Kuleba told reporters: "I didn't want to spoil the birthday party for NATO, but I felt compelled to deliver a very sobering message on behalf of Ukrainians about the state of Russian air attacks on my country." Overnight Thursday, a Russian drone attack struck residential buildings in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv and an energy facility in the region, killing several people and cutting power for 350,000 residents, Ukrainian officials said. "NATO's biggest battles to fight are still in the future, and we have to be ready for them," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis told reporters. A NATO official said Russia was likely recruiting about 30,000 additional personnel per month and could absorb losses on the battlefield and continue attacks. Russia, however, was still lacking munitions and manoeuvre units required for a successful major offensive, the official said on condition of anonymity.



LOME (Dispatches) - Togo's opposition on Thursday called for a three-day mass protest to demonstrate against the government's decision to delay this month's legislative elections. Tensions between President Faure Gnassingbe's government and the opposition have heightened following parliament's approval of a contested constitutional reform critics say is a bid to keep Togo's leader in power. The presidency announced Wednesday that more consultations were needed over the reforms and suspended the April 20 legislative and regional elections without giving a new date. Four opposition parties and a civil society group issued a statement calling for protests on April 11, 12 and 13. "The signatories vigorously condemn the regime's manoeuvre, which attempts by all means to endorse its own constitutional coup," the opposition statement said. The reform dispute has fuelled debate over the rule of Gnassingbe, who has been in power since 2005 after succeeding his father, who governed for three decades after a military coup. Fearing an attempt to keep Gnassingbe in power, opposition leaders say they want the government to withdraw the reform, which allows the National Assembly to elect the president directly. Nine members of the opposition group Dynamique Monseigneur Kpodzo were detained by police in Lome after campaigning in a market about the illegality of the reform, party spokesman Thomas Kokou N'soukpo said. Public prosecutor Talaka Mawama said an investigation had been launched against "individuals caught distributing leaflets and chanting slogans inciting popular revolt" on Wednesday. After a week of political tensions, Gnassingbe had already sent the law back to parliament for a second reading. "The Togolese are angry and they want this constitutional bill to be withdrawn altogether. Otherwise they are creating disorder," said Nathaniel Olympio, head of the opposition Party of the Togolese. "This time, this constitutional coup will not pass... This time the Togolese people will stand up and say 'no'."

## Yellen Warns China Industrial Subsidies Pose Risk to World Economy

GUANGZHOU (Dispatches) - U.S. Treasury chief Janet Yellen warned during a visit to China on Friday that Beijing's subsidies for industry could pose a risk to global economic resilience. Yellen arrived in the city of Guangzhou on Thursday for several days of talks with Chinese officials on what is her second visit to the world's number two economy in less than a year. Speaking on Friday, she expressed concerns about China's "overcapacity" - that its huge subsidies for industry risk creating an excess of goods that then flood global markets - undercutting American and other countries' firms. "Direct and indirect government support is currently leading to production capacity that significantly exceeds China's domestic demand, as well as what the global market can bear," she told a gathering of the American business community in the city. "Overcapacity can lead to large volumes of exports at depressed prices," she said. "And it can lead to overconcentration of supply chains, posing a risk to global economic resilience." Yellen in the morning told the governor of Guangdong - a vast province emblematic of the reforms and development that drove China's breakneck growth - that the US was committed to a "healthy economic relationship." But, she stressed, that required "a level playing field for American workers and firms", as well as "open and direct communication on areas where we disagree." "This includes the issue of China's industrial overcapacity, which the United States and other countries are concerned can cause global spillovers," she said. Beijing has dismissed concerns over its vast state support for industry, last month condemning an EU probe into its subsidies for EVs as "protectionism" and part of a Western effort to politicise international trade. Washington's worries about a flood of exports come

as US President Joe Biden pushes to boost domestic manufacturing in clean energy - with policymakers warning that China's excess capacity could harm the growth of those industries. The Biden administration is very sensitive to the US auto industry's concerns about China and EVs, especially in an election year, said Paul Triolo, associate partner for China at Albright Stonebridge Group. "It is likely that the administration will take some action to show it is willing to act pre-emptively to prevent future problems from China's overcapacity in EVs," he told AFP. But he warned that Beijing would likely "react badly", given the impact on US automakers remains to be seen. During her trip, Yellen plans to meet with Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Vice Premier He Lifeng, as well as central bank governor Pan Gongsheng and Finance Minister Lan Fo'an. Talks with He will see the two dive deep into both countries' economic conditions and address more sensitive areas such as national security and Beijing's alleged support for Russia's defence industrial base. Beijing and Washington have clashed in recent years on flashpoint issues ranging from technology and trade to human rights, as well as over the self-ruled island of Taiwan and the South China Sea. Relations have stabilised somewhat since Presidents Biden and Xi Jinping met in San Francisco in November for talks that both sides described as a qualified success. Yellen's July 2023 visit helped restart dialogue after a period of heightened tensions, notably over Taiwan, and culminated in the launching of bilateral working groups on economic and financial policy. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is also expected to make another China trip in the coming weeks, a sign that both sides are returning to more routine engagements.







## Palmer Fires Chelsea to Last-Gasp Win Over Man Utd

LONDON (Dispatches) - Cole Palmer scored twice deep into stoppage time to complete a hat-trick as Chelsea stunned Manchester United 4-3 on Thursday, all but ending their hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League.Erik ten Hag's men appeared set for a vital win after storming back from 2-0 down to lead 3-2 in a breathless game containing a combined 47 shots.But boyhood United fan Palmer turned the game on its head, levelling from the penalty spot in the 100th minute and then netting the winner moments later in a frantic end to the game at Stamford Bridge.United were still ahead at 99 minutes 17 seconds, the latest a side has ever led in a Premier League match they have gone on to lose. The bitter defeat leaves sixth-placed United 11 points off fourth-placed Aston Villa with just eight games to play and facing a season outside Europe's elite club competition.But it lifts Mauricio Pochettino's side to 10th spot in the table, keeping them in the hunt for a European place after an inconsistent season.Pochettino said his team had started well but the way they conceded "affected the team in an emotional way".The Argentine, in his first season at Stamford Bridge, praised 21-year-old Palmer, who has been the club's standout player since he joined in September."The impact is amazing," he told the BBC. "He is doing a fantastic job. It is difficult to talk more about him. Today he showed the mentality and the quality."I said 'Cole, two minutes more and to believe'."Meanwhile Alexis Mac Allister fired Liverpool back to the top of the Premier League as the Argentine's "wonder goal" inspired a tense 3-1 win against lowly Sheffield United.Jürgen Klopp's side were growing anxious

after Darwin Nunez's early opener was cancelled out by Conor Bradley's own goal in the second half.But Mac Allister eased the nerves around Anfield with a brilliant finish from the edge of the area and Cody Gakpo sealed the points in the closing moments.On a potentially pivotal evening in the title race, Liverpool moved two points clear of second placed Arsenal with eight games left for each of the three teams involved in a gripping battle for supremacy. Arsenal's 2-0 win against Luton had knocked Liverpool out of pole position on Wednesday, with third-placed Manchester City's 4-1 rout of Aston Villa keeping them in the hunt.But Liverpool, unbeaten in their last 28 home league matches, are now a step closer to being crowned English champions for a record-equalling 20th time and first since 2020."We needed Macca's wonder goal to turn it around. The impact he can have is massive," Klopp said of Mac Allister, who is the first Liverpool midfielder to score or assist in six consecutive games since Steven Gerrard in 2013.Klopp's treble chasers have already won the League Cup and face Atalanta in the Europa League quarter-finals as they eye a memorable farewell for the German in his last season.However, they will have to improve on this erratic display to hold off Arsenal and champions City, who are three points adrift of Liverpool."Our general game until I think we made the changes was not great. That's what we have to admit," Klopp said."It's tricky, they had such a low block, but you have to do better."That's how it is. You have to change games from the bench when needed and so I'm really happy with that."

## FORMER SOUTH AFRICA JUNIOR INT'L SHOT DEAD IN HIJACKING



JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) - Former South Africa junior international Luke Fleurs, who played for the country's most popular club Kaizer Chiefs, has been killed in an attempted hijacking in Johannesburg, police officials confirmed on Thursday. The 24-year-old was shot in the chest at a petrol station on Wednesday night and the assailants drove off in his vehicle."While waiting to be served by the petrol attendant, he was confronted by two armed males," police spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Mavela Masondo told reporters, adding no arrests had yet been made.Centre back Fleurs played every minute for South Africa at the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021, and that same year was called up to the senior team for World Cup qualifiers against Ethiopia, though he did not make it off the bench and was uncapped."We woke up to the heartbreaking and devastating news of the passing of this young life. This is such a huge loss for his family, friends, his teammates and football in general. We are all grieving this young man's passing," South African Football Association president Danny Jordaan said in a statement.South Africa's Minister of Sport, Arts & Culture, Zizi Kodwa said he was "saddened that yet another life has been cut short due to violent crime".Fleurs joined Chiefs from SuperSport United in October, having come through the Ubuntu Football Academy in Cape Town. The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here.

## Sixers, Warriors Boost NBA Playoff Hopes With Key Wins

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Tyrese Maxey scored 37 points and Joel Embiid added 29 to ignite the Philadelphia 76ers in a 109-105 victory at Miami and boost their NBA playoff chances.Maxey added 11 assists and nine rebounds, just missing a triple double in 41 minutes on the court as the Sixers improved to 42-35, eighth in the Eastern Conference but only a game behind sixth-place Indiana.The top six in each conference take NBA playoff berths while teams in the seven to 10 positions face play-in games for the last two available spots.Maxey had missed the past two games for Philadelphia with a hip injury, but in his first game alongside Embiid in more than two months, the duo were dominating."I'm tired," Maxey said. "Normally when you come back you get to play 32 minutes but (coach Nick) Nurse asked me and I said I'm all good. I can play as much as you need me to."Philadelphia, 2-0 since the return of reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Embiid from a knee injury, fell out of the top six while the Cameroonian big man was injured but hope to climb back into the top six in their final five games.Miami, led by Terry Rozier's 22 points, fell to 42-34, seventh in the East.In the Western Conference, the Golden State Warriors stretched their win streak to six games with a 133-110 victory at Houston, boosting their lead over the only team that can knock them out of a play-in spot.Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson each scored 29 points to lead the Warriors, who led 65-50 at half-time and rolled in the second half.The Rockets lost their 13th consecutive meeting with Golden State, a club they have not beaten since February 2020.At 42-34, Golden State holds the 10th and final West play-in spot while Houston slid to 38-38, four games behind the Warriors with six games remaining.Paul George scored 28 points and James Harden added 20 to lead the host Los Angeles Clippers over defending champion Denver 102-100 despite a triple double by Nikola Jokic in a losing cause.Two-time NBA MVP Jokic had 36 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists and the Nuggets grabbed a 31-20 lead after the first quarter before the Clippers battled back."Big win, especially because we've been losing at home," George said. "We had a slow start. We've got to be better but it's a big win. This is a champion-caliber team. They are defending champs. I thought we did a great job of just staying in the game and we fought hard."The Clippers' bench outscored Denver's reserves 34-9."We've got guys that we can plug in and they give us a big boost,"

George said. "They give us great energy. Those guys gave us a lift when we were flat in the first quarter and they got us into the game."Each team was missing a top star with Jamal Murray out for Denver and Kawhi Leonard missing for the Clippers.Denver fell to 53-24, a half-game behind Western Conference leader Minnesota and a half-game ahead of third-place Oklahoma City.Elsewhere, Kyrie Irving scored 26 points and Luka Doncic added 25 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists to power the Dallas Mavericks over visiting Atlanta 109-95.Dallas, 46-30, remained fifth in the West, a game ahead of Phoenix in the fight for a top-six finish and a secure playoff spot.And New York's Jalen Brunson scored 35 points and passed off 11 assists while Josh Hart contributed 31 points, nine rebounds and eight assists to spark the Knicks over visiting Sacramento 120-109.The Knicks, 45-31, closed the game on a 28-14 run to swipe the victory, snapping a three-game losing streak to pull level with fourth-place Orlando and a half-game behind third-place Cleveland in the East.

New York announced forward Julius Randle will have season-ending right shoulder surgery. He dislocated the shoulder in January but delayed an operation in hopes of returning for the playoffs.



## MBAPPE PRESENCE AT OLYMPICS VERY DIFFICULT



PARIS (Dispatches) - France coach Didier Deschamps has cast doubt on Kylian Mbappe's chances of representing his country at this year's Paris Olympics, saying that it would be "very difficult" to compete at the Games straight after Euro 2024."It is very difficult from a psychological and physical viewpoint to take part in two competitions like that one after the other, in the summer, without having any holiday," Deschamps admitted on Thursday. The France coach confirmed that some members of his squad for the European Championship are likely to also feature in the Olympics squad, which will be named by Thierry Henry. However, Deschamps said the Euro "remains the priority" and that the identities of those players featuring at the Olympics would need to be known before the continental championship, which starts on June 14. "We don't want any interference with our preparations, so once we are in our training camp at Clairefontaine, it needs to be clear who is going and who is not going," Deschamps said.It is understood that Paris Saint-Germain superstar Mbappe, the France captain, is very keen to represent his country at the Olympics, along with Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann. Yet the European Championship in Germany does not finish until July 14, with the Olympic football tournament beginning on July 24.That means there would be no time for a break in between, at least if France go deep into the Euro.Men's football at the Summer Games is for players aged under 23, although three overage players can feature too, paving the way for the 25-year-old Mbappe and other senior French stars to take part. However, football's world governing body Fifa does not oblige clubs to release players for the Olympics, which could complicate Mbappe's situation even more.The forward has already told PSG he plans to leave when his contract expires at the end of this season and Real Madrid is expected to be his next destination.

His new club is unlikely to be thrilled at the prospect of Mbappe going to the Games rather than taking a holiday ahead of the start of the new season — the final of the Olympic tournament is set for August 9.

## Borges Delights Home-Country Crowd in Estoril

LONDON (Dispatches) - Home-country favorite Nuno Borges upset No. 3 seed Lorenzo Musetti of Italy 7-6(4), 6-3 to advance to the quarterfinals of the Millennium Estoril Open in Estoril, Portugal.Borges, who is seeking his first ATP Tour win, saved two set points serving at 5-6 in the first set during the one-hour, 37-minute match on clay courts. Down 3-1 to open the match, Borges rallied to set up the tiebreaker.Also upset was No. 5 seed Arthur Fils of France, who was eliminated by Chile's Cristian Garin, 2-6, 6-4, 6-5.The tournament's top seeds, No. 1 Casper Ruud of Norway and No. 2 Hubert Hurkacz of Poland advanced in straight sets. Ruud defeated Botic van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands 6-1, 6-2, and Hurkacz topped Great Britain's Jan Choinski 7-6 (5), 6-4 to reach the quarterfinals.Other winners were Richard Gasquet of France and Spaniards Pedro Martinez and Pablo Llamas Ruiz.Roberto Carballes Baena defeated No. 7 seed Dan Evans of Great Britain 6-4, 7-6 (3) in the second round in Marrakech, Morocco.The Spaniard scored on 72 percent of his points on first serve and also fought off six of seven break points.Mariano Navone of Argentina fought off Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka 3-6, 7-5, 6-2 to advance to the quarterfinal round.Also moving on was American qualifier Nicolas Moreno De Alboran, who beat Belgium's David Goffin 6-3,

6-4.Meanwhile Danielle Collins extended her winning streak to 10 matches, winning twice to reach the quarterfinals of the Credit One Charleston (S.C.) Open.First, Collins upset second-seeded Ons Jabeur of Tunisia 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 in a second-round match that had been pushed back to Thursday due to rain. Then Collins blitzed Sloane Stephens 6-2, 6-2 in a matchup of unseeded U.S. players.Collins, a 30-year-old Floridian who is retiring at the end of the season, captured the Miami Open championship last week.Next up for Collins will be a match against 11th-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium, who got past seventh-seeded Elina Svitolina of Ukraine 6-4, 6-1. Earlier Thursday, Mertens defeated France's Varvara Gracheva 6-4, 3-6, 6-2.The United States' Jessica Pegula cruised into the quarterfinals with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over Poland's Magda Linette.In other third-round action, Belarus' Victoria Azarenka, the 12th seed, rallied past the United States' Taylor Townsend 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4 to reach the quarters. Third-seeded Maria Sakkari of Greece downed Australia's Astra Sharma 6-4, 6-1, and fourth-seeded Daria Kasatkina of Russia eliminated 15th-seeded Anhelina Kalinina of Ukraine 6-1, 6-4.Ninth-seeded Veronika Kudermetova of Russia toppled fifth-seeded Beatriz Haddad Maia of Brazil 7-5, 6-1, and Romania's Jaqueline Cristian beat 10th-seeded Emma Navarro of the

United States 6-3, 5-7, 6-1.Stephens won her second-round match earlier Thursday, defeating 14th-seeded Leylah Fernandez of Canada 6-4, 6-4.Home-country favorite Camila Osorio, the sixth seed, moved into the quarterfinals at Bogota, Colombia, with a 7-6 (4), 6-4 victory over Romania's Anca Alexia Todoni.

