

President Ebrahim Raisi Has Told his Turkish Counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan That Muslim Countries, Including Turkey, Need to Cut Their Economic Relations With the Israeli Regime to Force an End to the Israeli Aggression in Gaza

IRAN NEWS

Iran Foreign Minister Has Underlined the Need for Greater Pressure on Israel to Stop the War and Genocide in Gaza, and End the Policy of Starving Gazans and Imposing Famine on the Residents of the Coastal Territory

2 DOMESTIC

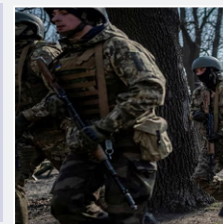


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Major Russian Air Strikes Destroy Kyiv Power Plant



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Colonial Powers Disapprove of Enhanced Iran-Pakistan Ties



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says colonial powers are opposed to the enhancement of bilateral ties between his country and neighboring Pakistan, stressing that enemies are seeking to drive a wedge between the two Muslim nations. Raisi made the remarks in a telephone conversation with his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday night, where he congratulated the Pakistan Peoples Party's co-chairperson for winning a second term as Pakistan's president. "The development of Iran-Pakistan relations is not agreeable to colonial powers, and they are seeking to drive a wedge between the two Muslim countries," Raisi said. Cooperation in the joint fight against terrorism should be enhanced, and enemies should not be given the chance to advance their agendas and disrupt friendship between Tehran and Islamabad, the Iranian president added. He also lauding the faith and fervor of young Muslims in thwarting various plots such as those unleashed by the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group. Raisi went on to describe the ongoing Israeli atrocities in Gaza as "great sadness" for Muslim countries and all freedom-loving people worldwide, stressing the necessity for independent countries to join forces and exert pressure aimed at stopping the crimes of the Israeli regime. For his part, Zardari felicitated the Iranian government and nation on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, and denounced the Israeli airstrike on the consular section of the Iranian Embassy in the Syrian capital city of Damascus. "The vast cultural and historical similarities between the two countries are a suitable ground for the expansion of cultural, commercial, economic relations and the exchange of diverse and numerous capacities between the two sides," the Pakistani president said.

Iran-U.S. 2-Month Trade Grows 112%



TEHRAN (MNA) - The U.S. Bureau of Statistics, in its latest report, pointed to a 112 percent growth in the trade exchanges between Iran and the United States in January-February 2024. Iran and the U.S. exchange of trade in January-February 2023 had been reported to be \$9.6 million, and the figure reached \$20 million in the first two months of 2024, rising more than threefold. The United States exported over \$16.6 million of products to Iran in January-February 2024, showing a 74 percent hike compared to the same period last year. According to the report, the U.S. had exported \$9.5 million worth of products to Iran in the same period last year. The U.S. import of products from Iran hit \$3.8 million in the mentioned two months, 38 times more than the figure for last year's corresponding period. Iran ranked 148th among the U.S. export target markets in January-February 2024, the report added. According to this report, American exports to Iran in the second month of this year reached \$9.4 million with a growth of 46 percent compared to February of the previous year. This month, America imported \$0.4 million worth of goods from Iran, which is four times more than the same month last year.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



Israel to Be Punished for Attack on Iran's Consulate

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the Israeli regime "must be punished and will be punished" for its deadly strike on the Iranian consulate in the Syrian capital of Damascus. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a speech at Imam Khomeini's Grand Mosalla in the Iranian capital of Tehran on Wednesday after leading the Eid al-Fitr prayers, which marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. The Leader pointed to the Israeli missile attack on the consular section of the Iranian Embassy in the Syrian capital of Damascus on April 1. Ayatollah Khamenei said, "The evil Zionist regime committed another mistake... and that was the attack on the Iranian consulate in Syria. The consulate and diplomatic missions in any country are considered to be the territory of that country. When they attack our consulate, it means they have attacked our soil." "The evil regime made a mistake and must be punished and will be punished," the Leader stressed. The Israeli attack killed two senior Iranian military personnel who were on an advisory mission to Syria as well as five of their accompanying officers. Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, and his deputy General Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi were among the seven martyrs of the terrorist attack. Ayatollah Khamenei condemned the Israel regime's months-long war against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip and said it shows the evil and wicked nature of the Western civilization. "In this year's events, Western governments exposed the evil nature of Western civilizations. During the last six months in Gaza, the Western governments, themselves, put on display this evil nature before the eyes of the world," the Leader said. "They killed children in their mothers' arms and patients in hospitals. Their strength does not match that of the resistance fighters, so they claim the lives of old

men, families, children and women, and killed more than thirty thousand innocent people." The Leader added, "Where are those whose cacophonous voice on human rights deafen the ears of the world? Are these not human beings? Don't they have any rights?" Ayatollah Khamenei underlined that the Western governments have for years invariably helped and supported Israel, and also backed the regime in international circles and provided it with all kinds of aid. "They should have prevented the crimes of the regime in this disaster. But the Western governments did not fulfill their duty. Some spoke in support of the people [in Gaza], but in practice they not only failed to prevent but also contributed to [the war], especially the arrogant and cruel governments of the US and UK," the Leader noted. Later in the day, the Leader received a group of Iranian authorities, ambassadors of Muslim countries, and people of various social strata. Ayatollah Khamenei hailed pro-Palestine rallies in Iran and across the world on Quds Day, the last Friday of Ramadan, as an "extraordinary, political and international move." The Leader stressed that Gaza is at the top of the issues of the Islamic world and everyone must feel responsible. "The hearts of nations go out to Gaza, even the non-Muslims. You see these rallies and demonstrations that are staged across the world in favor of the Palestinians and the people of Gaza; these marches are unprecedented. We have not seen anything like this," Ayatollah Khamenei said. Pointing to the mass rallies in the US, Europe and Africa in support of Palestinians on Quds Day, the Leader noted that, "It seems something new is being done, a new development is taking place in the Muslim world." Denouncing as "regrettable" the support provided by certain Muslim countries to the Israeli regime in its months-long war on Gaza, the Leader said, "This is a betrayal of the Islamic Ummah. It is also a self-betrayal, because they are strengthening the waning Zionist institutions and this empowerment will be to their own detriment."

UN Condemnation of Israeli Airstrike Could Have Obviated Retaliation



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's mission to the UN has said that the UN Security Council condemnation of Israel's attack on its consular section in Syrian capital could have prevented the need for retaliation. "Had the UN Security Council condemned the Zionist regime's reprehensible act of aggression on our diplomatic premises in Damascus and subsequently brought to justice its perpetrators, the imperative for Iran to punish this rogue regime might have been obviated," it said on the social media platform X Thursday. Iran has pledged retaliation for the Israeli airstrike that killed seven Iranian military advisors at its diplomatic annex in Damascus along with six Syrians on April 1. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said Wednesday "the evil Zionist regime must be punished and will be punished" for the aggression. "The consulate and diplomatic missions in any country are considered to be the territory of that country. When they attack our consulate, it means they have attacked our soil," he said. Last week, the United States, Britain and France opposed a Russian-drafted UN Security Council statement that would have condemned the attack. "Russia had drafted a press statement condemning the Israeli attack on the diplomatic premises in Syria but was stopped by the insistence of our Anglo-Saxon colleagues," Moscow's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya told reporters. "This serves as a clear illustration of the double standards employed by the Western 'troika' and their actual, rather than declarative, approach to legality and order in the international context," Russia's deputy UN Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy said in a post on X. The UN Security Council has issued statements in the past condemning attacks on diplomatic premises. Press statements by the 15-member council have to be agreed by consensus. Diplomats said the US, backed by France and Britain, claimed that many of the facts of what happened in Damascus remained unclear and there was no consensus because of the Western troika during the meeting.

Iran Raps UK Stance on Israeli Strike



TEHRAN (PressTV) - British Foreign Secretary David Cameron has called the Iranian foreign minister to appeal for "restraint" by the Islamic Republic which has vowed to avenge an Israeli attack on Tehran's consular section in Damascus. The UK's top diplomat, however, got a dressing-down from his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Thursday over Britain's refusal to condemn the aggression. "Regarding the Israeli regime's airstrike on the consular section of the Islamic Republic of Iran embassy in Damascus, Amir-Abdollahian criticized the inaction of Britain in condemning" the attack, official news agency IRNA reported. Last week, Britain joined the United States and France in opposing a Russian-drafted UN Security Council statement that would have condemned the Israeli attack. In their phone talks on Thursday, Cameron and Amir-Abdollahian discussed the latest developments in the region and the relations between the two countries, IRNA said. "Tehran has never sought to escalate tension in the region, but the Israeli regime's terrorist attack on the Iranian embassy in Damascus and the silence of the United States and England means encouraging [Israeli prime minister Benjamin] Netanyahu to continue waging war and expanding it in the region," he said. The Iranian minister "stressed the need to immediately stop genocide and war crimes in Gaza and the West Bank as the only effective way to return peace to the region", IRNA said. Amir-Abdollahian also touched on Britain's participation in a US-led military campaign in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden against Yemen which has been targeting Israeli interests in solidarity with the Palestinians in recent months. "The root of the crisis is not in the Red Sea but in the genocide in Gaza," he said, rebutting London's claim to the contrary.

Punishing Aggressor a Necessity

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's foreign minister has told his German counterpart that "legitimate defense with the aim of punishing the aggressor is a necessity" after Israel's April 1 airstrike on the Iranian consular section in Damascus. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Annalena Baerbock held phone talks on Thursday, during which the top Iranian diplomat also criticized Germany for its "neutrality" on the Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip. Iran has pledged retaliation for the Israeli airstrike that killed seven Iranian military advisors at its diplomatic annex in the Syrian capital. "When the Israeli regime completely violates the immunity of individuals and diplomatic places in violation of international law and the Vienna Conventions, legitimate defense is a necessity," Amir-Abdollahian said, according to a statement issued by the foreign ministry in Tehran. The statement said the two ministers discussed the latest developments in the region and bilateral relations, emphasizing the necessity to maintain the path of dialog. "The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is always based on avoiding tension," Amir-Abdollahian said. Iran, the minister said, expected Germany to clearly condemn the Israeli crime in killing its military advisors. "If a similar missile attack had taken place on one of the diplomatic places in the war zone in Ukraine, would the reaction of the United States and Europe have been the same?" he said. Amir-Abdollahian addressed Baerbock's remarks about the need for a ceasefire in the Gaza war and the failure of efforts to halt the Israeli invasion of the besieged Palestinian territory. "The reason why Germany's efforts to establish a ceasefire in Gaza have been fruitless should be found in the lack of German neutrality in this genocide," the Iranian minister said. "Israel is an occupying regime and Palestine has the right to legitimate defense. In this regard, the only way to solve the current problems is to end the genocide and war crimes in Gaza," he added. Amir-Abdollahian welcomed the resolution of misunderstandings between Tehran and Berlin regarding human rights. In February, Baerbock appealed for an extension of a UN mission about 2022 riots in Iran during her speech to the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. "We expect Germany not to repeat baseless accusations against Iran and to defend the rights of thousands of women and children in Gaza and other parts of the world, where women's rights are constantly violated," Amir-Abdollahian said. Baerbock spoke with her Iranian counterpart about "the tense situation in the Middle East" and the need for restraint, the German foreign ministry said. "Avoiding further regional escalation must be in everyone's interest. We urge all actors in the region to act responsibly and exercise maximum restraint," the ministry wrote on X, formerly Twitter. The Iranian foreign ministry readout said Baerbock congratulated the advent of Eid al-Fitr, stressing that the Muslim festival carries the message of peace. "In this tense situation, Germany requests restraint from the Islamic Republic of Iran," she said, it added. As for the Israeli attack on Iran's consular section in Damascus, the German foreign minister said her country "clearly emphasized that diplomatic places enjoy complete immunity", the Iranian foreign ministry statement said. The German government, she said, has tried and is trying to end the war in Gaza through a political solution, according to the statement.



IRAN NEWS



Export of Minerals, Construction Materials from Iran's Chabahar Port Up 23%

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Nearly one million tons of minerals and construction materials were exported from Iran's Chabahar Port in the 12 months of the previous Iranian calendar year (ended March 19, 2024), showing a 23% growth compared to a year earlier. The director general of the Ports and Maritime Department General of Sistan and Baluchestan Province said that 987,810 tons of minerals and construction materials were exported from the Chabahar Port to other countries in this period, the website of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development reported. Given the high potential and capacity of Chabahar for harboring giant vessels with a loading capacity of 120,000 tons, appropriate services of operators and tariff incentives of the Iranian Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) for warehousing the mineral products, the strategic Chabahar Port can turn into a hub for exporting minerals and steel products in southeastern parts of the country, Qassem Aaskarinasab noted. Chabahar, which sits at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, is Iran's first deepwater port that puts the country on the global oceanic trade route map. The port lies to the west of Iran's border with Pakistan, about as far as Gwadar, a competing port developed by China in Pakistan that lies to the east of the border.

Iran Has High Potential to Boost Non-Oil Exports



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An official at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) said the country enjoys high capacities to enhance non-oil exports, especially given the high potential of the private sector. Payam Baqeri called on the government to throw its weight behind the private sector and economic enterprises of the country in line with spurring trade and economic activities. He went on to say that high-quality Iranian products are highly welcomed not only in neighboring countries but also in most other countries. Iran's non-oil products have been welcomed by 15 neighboring countries, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states and also some African states, he said. Baqeri urged all responsible organizations and officials to cooperate with one another in order to materialize the economic objectives of the country, IRNA reported.



Iran Trade With OIC Hit \$61b

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's trade with member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) reached \$61 billion, last year (beginning on March 21, 2023), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) has announced. The IRICA chief, Mohammad Rezvanifar said that the value of the trade exchanges between Iran and the 56 members of the OIC member states reached \$61 billion during last year, registering a 0.19 percent hike compared to its previous year. He said that the volume of the trade exchanges between Iran and the OIC member states between March 21, 2023, to March 19, 2024, stood at 94 million tons, registering a 4.22% decline compared to the previous year. Iran exported \$29 billion of products to these countries and imported \$32 billion worth of products from them, according to IRICA Chief. In his remarks, this official said that Iran's export of products to the OIC members during the mentioned time registered an 11% decline in value while the import of products from these countries increased by 13% compared to a year earlier. Among the OIC member states, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Oman, Afghanistan, Malaysia, and

Indonesia were Iran's major trade partners, the IRICA chief added. Back in May 2023, the former head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) stressed the need for establishing a joint Islamic market among OIC members over the next 10 years. Addressing a gathering of the heads of OIC member chambers of commerce on the sidelines of the "Russia - Islamic World: Kazan Forum 2023" in Russia, Gholam-Hossein Shafeie said: "An important issue that has been discussed a lot in the past and the organization should pay attention to it in the current situation is the creation of a common Islamic market in the next 10 years, which can be achieved by concluding a free trade agreement among Islamic countries and removing tariff and non-tariff barriers." Experts have worked on the Islamic market plan, and using the experiences and studies of these experts can definitely be a way forward," he added. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which was formed in 1972, today has reached a position where, according to statistics, the future of the world's energy would be in the hands of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Shafeie said in his speech.

Iran's Nuclear Electricity Generation Capacity to Rise to 3,000 MW



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's nuclear power generation capacity will increase to 3,000 megawatts upon the completion of the construction operation of two new nuclear power plants, the commissioner of the 2nd and 3rd phases of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant said. Expanding on the latest situation of the construction of the two new nuclear power plants in the southern province of Bushehr, Masoud Nasouri said that the two, each with an electricity generation capacity of 1,057 megawatts electricity, are under construction in the vicinity of the first nuclear power plant in this province. Elsewhere in his remarks, the commissioner pointed to the construction of the internal wall of the nuclear reactor at the second nuclear power plant and added that a contract has been concluded for the construction of the main nuclear reactor of the second unit of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant. Once the construction operation of the two new power plants is completed, the country's nuclear electricity generation capacity will increase to 3,000 megawatts, Nasouri stated.

2nd Iran-Africa Summit to Be Held on April 26



TEHRAN (dispatches) - The economy ministers of more than 30 African countries are expected to take part in the second Iran-Africa summit which is scheduled to be held in Tehran on April 26. High-profile officials, including ministers of economy, from over 30 African countries are to participate in the international event. In a meeting on foreign economic relations of the Islamic Republic on Tuesday, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari stressed the importance of holding the summit. The event could be regarded as an opportunity to help develop the export of goods and technical and engineering services, he added. Over the past 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has never given up on its principled policy towards Africa due to political and cultural commonalities, despite the sanctions, pressure, and disruptions of the West, and has always maintained itself alongside the people and countries of Africa. During the Iranian calendar years 1384 and 1385 (March 2005-March 2007), the relations between Iran and the African continent increased in terms of trade. Still, since 1386, the economic relations between Iran and Africa have decreased due to the economic crisis and cruel sanctions against Iran. Surveys show that in the past years, due to the lack of restoration of economic relations with Africa, the amount of trade with the countries of this continent has remained at the level of \$1.2 billion, but according to Ghanadzadeh facilitating the trade route with Africa is happening now and it is expected that the trade figure with this continent will reach \$10 billion in the next three years. In fact, good steps have been taken to use Africa's capacity, and Africa can be a suitable market for Iranian goods, Ghanadzadeh stated. The official referred to the beginning of the 13th government's measures to develop relations with the African continent and said: "Over the past [Iranian calendar] year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), a series of measures have been initiated, which were resulted in the visit of about 60 African trade delegations, active presence in the exhibitions of this continent, the opening of 10 trade centers, and the dispatch of three commercial attaches."



Iran Exports \$310 Million of Fishery Products in One Year

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran exported \$310 million of fishery products in the previous Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023 to March 19, 2024), registering a 3% surge compared to a year earlier, the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) reported. Nearly 149,000 tons of fishery products were exported from the country last year, showing a 12% growth compared to a year earlier. In this period, more than \$98 million of shrimps were exported from the country, accounting for 32% of the total export value of the fishery products, the report added. Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and China were the main buyers of the Iranian shrimp in this period. IRICA pointed out that 24,000 tons of fishery products, valued at \$72 million, were imported into the country, showing a 121 and a 113 percent hike in weight and value respectively compared to the same period the year before, IRNA reported. Iran mainly imported fishery products from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ghana and Seychelles in Africa in the previous Iranian calendar year, IRICA added.

Iran Seeking Observer Status in EAEU

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali has said that the Islamic Republic is seeking to gain an observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in the near future. Jalali made the remark at the second International Russia-Iran Cooperation in the Changing World, which was held in the presence of a group of Iranian and Russian experts in the Russian capital Moscow on Thursday. He also expressed hope that a free trade agreement, which Iran and the EAEU signed in late December, is implemented as

soon as possible following approval by parliaments of the member states of the EAEU. The ambassador further pointed out to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), noting that this mega-project can be beneficial for EAEU members economically and would help boost security and peace in the region. Elsewhere in his remarks, Jalali referred to the Israeli regime's crimes in Gaza, calling them a clear example of injustice, noting that Iran is highly critical of the current world order that is based on unilateralism.



Hamas Still Seeking Hostage Deal

DOHA (Reuters) - Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said on Thursday his Palestinian militant group was still seeking a deal for a ceasefire and hostage release after an Israeli strike killed three of his sons in an attack in Gaza. Speaking in Qatar while receiving condolences, Haniyeh said "the interests of the Palestinian people are placed above everything" when asked if the strike would affect the talks on a truce and hostage release. "We are seeking to reach a deal but the occupation is still procrastinating and evading a response to the demands," he told Reuters. Israeli forces carried out Wednesday's attack without authorisation from top commanders or senior leaders, Israeli media said on Thursday, raising fears among families of hostages it would derail efforts to secure their release from Gaza.



IRAN NEWS

Defense Relationship Part of U.S.-Iraq Talks in Washington Next Week



WASHINGTON(Reuters) - The security and defense relationship between the U.S. and Iraq will be an important part of talks when Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani visits Washington next week but is not the prim ary focus of the visit, a senior State Department official said on Thursday. The official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity, said the emphasis of Sudani's visit would be economic ties, even as Washington and Baghdad are in talks over ending the U.S.-led military coalition in the country. U.S. forces and Shi'ite Muslim armed groups have engaged in tit-for-tat attacks in recent months amid regional conflict linked to Israel's war in Gaza, leading to Sudani in January announcing his intention to end the U.S. military presence. The senior State Department official said the defense and security relationship will be part of the discussions during Sudani's visit, when he will meet both with President Joe Biden and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin as well as Secretary of State Antony Blinken. "It is likely to be a very important part of our - of the discussion," the official said. "It is not the primary focus of the visit ... but it is almost certainly going to come up." The visit's focus will instead be the economy and issues including education, environment and U.S. support for development, the official said, without providing details. "We're going to have a full range of discussions about our relationship and where it's going," the official said. The U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 to topple Saddam Hussein and withdrew in 2011, only for troops to return in 2014 to help fight Islamic State (IS) after the extremist Sunni Muslim militant group overran large parts of the country. Washington and Baghdad began talks in January to reassess the U.S.-led military coalition presence there. The official said those talks were likely to lead to a second joint security cooperation dialogue later this year.

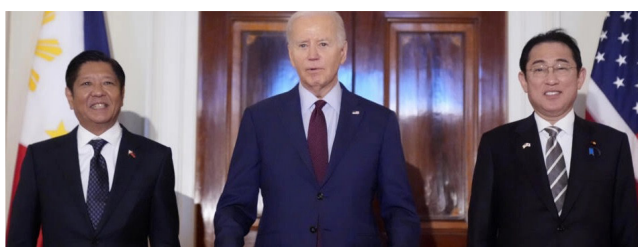


Major Russian Air Strikes Destroy Kyiv Power Plant

KYIV (Reuters) - Russian missiles and drones destroyed a large electricity plant near Kyiv and hit power facilities in several regions of Ukraine on Thursday, officials said, ramping up pressure on the embattled energy system as Kyiv runs low on air defences. The major attack more than two years since Russia's full-scale invasion completely destroyed the Trypilska coal-powered thermal power plant near the capital, a senior official at the company that runs the facility told Reuters. Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow had been obliged to launch the strikes in response to Ukrainian attacks in recent weeks on energy targets inside Russia. Footage on social media showed a fire raging at the large Soviet-era facility and smoke belching from it. Reuters was able to confirm the location of the video as the Trypilska station. "We need air defence and other defence support, not eye-closing and long discussions," President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Telegram, condemning the attacks as "terror". The Russian defence ministry said it hit fuel and energy facilities in Ukraine in what it described as a massive retaliatory strike using drones and high-precision, long-range weapons from air and sea. The strikes were a response to Ukrainian drone attacks on Russia's oil, gas and energy facilities, it said. Putin told his ally, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko that the attacks were a part of Russia's objective of the "demilitarisation" of Ukraine - one of the objectives of the Kremlin's 2022 invasion of its neighbour. "Unfortunately, we observed a series of strikes on our energy sites recently and were obliged to respond,"

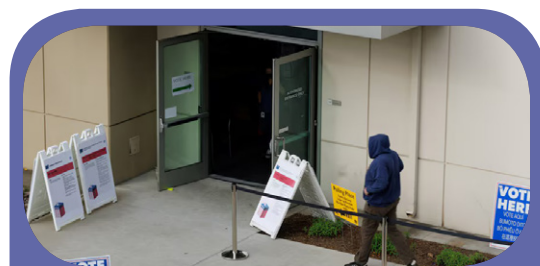
Russian news agencies quoted Putin as telling Lukashenko. "The strikes on energy are linked in part with solving one of the tasks we set for ourselves, and that is demilitarisation. We believe above all that in this way we will affect Ukraine's military industrial complex and in a very direct way." Russia, he said, had refrained from carrying out such attacks in winter "out of humanitarian considerations". Kyiv's appeals for urgent air defence supplies from the West have grown increasingly desperate since Russia renewed its long-range aerial assaults on the Ukrainian energy system last month. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was blunt in repeating calls for more U.S.-made Patriot systems. "What is there to discuss?" he told the Ukrainian state news agency Ukrinform during a visit to Slovakia. "There is only a single question: Give us Patriot systems! If we had Patriots, we would not have lost all of this today." Item 1 of 5 A firefighter works at a compound of power infrastructure facilities, which was hit by Russian missile and drone strikes, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, at an undisclosed location in Ukraine April 11, 2024. Press service of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine/Handout via REUTERS The attacks, which hammered thermal and hydroelectric power plants, sparked fears about the resilience of an energy system hobbled by a Russian air campaign in the war's first winter. Ukraine's air force commander said air defences took down 18 of the incoming missiles and 39 drones. The attack used 82 missiles and drones in total, the military said.

Biden Says U.S. Support for Philippines, Japan Ironclad Amid China Tensions



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Joe Biden said Thursday that U.S. defense commitment to Pacific allies was "ironclad" as he gathered Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House in the midst of growing concern about provocative Chinese military action in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. and the Philippines have had a mutual treaty in place for more than 70 years. Biden's forceful reinforcement of the American commitment comes in the midst of persistent skirmishes between the Philippine and Chinese coast guards in the disputed South China Sea. "The United States defense commitments to Japan and to the Philippines are ironclad. They're ironclad," Biden said as he began three-way talks at the White House with Kishida and Marcos. "As I said before, any attack on Philippine aircraft, vessels or armed forces in the South China Sea would invoke our mutual defense treaty." Relations between China and the Philippines have been repeatedly tested by confrontations involving the two nations' coast guard vessels in the disputed South China Sea. Chinese coast guard ships also regularly approach disputed Japanese-controlled East China Sea islands near Taiwan. The so-called "gray-zone" harassment by China has included shining military-grade lasers at the Philippine Coast Guard, firing water cannons at vessels and ramming into Philippine ships near the Second Thomas Shoal, which both Manila and Beijing claim. In 1999, Manila intentionally ran a World War II-era ship aground on the shoal, establishing a permanent military presence there. Biden, in a wide-ranging phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping last week, raised concerns about China's

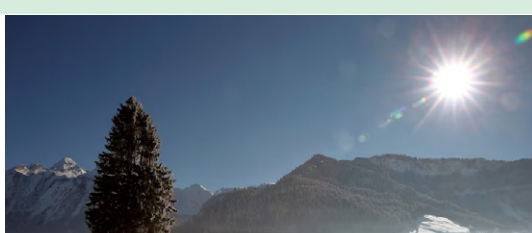
operations in the South China Sea, including efforts to impede the Philippines from resupplying its forces on the Second Thomas Shoal. Chinese officials have bristled at criticism over their action in the South China Sea and blamed the US for exacerbating tensions. "No one should violate China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, and China remains steadfast in safeguarding our lawful rights," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said Thursday. The White House billed the first-ever trilateral summit with Japan and the Philippines as a potent response to China's attempts at "intimidation" and said it would send a message that China is "the outlier in the neighbourhood," according to an administration official. The White House said in a statement that Biden and Marcos during the talks "underscored their commitment to international law in the South China Sea" and reaffirmed their countries' treaty obligations to defend each other. The leaders also announced joint patrols in the Indo-Pacific this year, a follow-up on law enforcement drills carried out last year by the allies in waters near the South China Sea. The U.S. Coast Guard will welcome Philippine and Japanese coast guard members onto a U.S. Coast Guard vessel during the patrol for training, according to the White House. The summit followed Biden's one-on-one talks and glitzy state dinner Wednesday at the White House for the Japanese premier, a diplomatic honor meant to recognise Tokyo's growing clout on the global stage. White House officials said they were aiming to send a clear signal that the Democratic administration remains determined to build what it calls a "lattice-work" of alliances in the Indo-Pacific even as it grapples with the Israel-Hamas war and Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Biden also hosted Marcos for a private meeting at the White House ahead of the three-way talks. "Today's summit is an opportunity to define the future that we want, and how we intend to achieve it together," Marcos said. Biden also announced that the three nations were launching a new economic corridor in the Philippines as part of the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment that would help develop clean energy, port, agriculture and other projects in the country. Biden said the leaders were forging a "new era" and predicted "a great deal of history in our world will be written in the Indo-Pacific in the coming years."



Despair Makes Young U.S. Men More Conservative Ahead of U.S. Election

AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - A large global survey issued on Friday showed a surge in despair and disillusionment with established politics, particularly among young American men, the only U.S. population group to turn more conservative over the past decade. The study by the international research agency Glocalities, shared with Reuters, offered context for November's U.S. presidential poll and a plethora of votes worldwide, including a European Union parliamentary election in June. It surveyed respondents to determine their position on a scale of optimism between 'hope' and 'despair', and on another between 'control' and 'freedom' - in other words, conservatism and liberalism. On average, the world became more liberal between 2014 and 2023, even as it became more pessimistic, according to more than 300,000 surveys in 20 countries representing nearly 60% of the global population. Young people the world over feel especially let down by society, said Martijn Lampert, head of research at Glocalities, adding that "the surge in despair among young adults in the U.S. far outweighs the rise in despair among young adults in EU countries". Most strikingly, young U.S. men were the only population group in the United States or seven EU member states actually to have become more conservative since 2014 - or, in the poll's terms, to favour more control rather than freedom. In total, 14,526 Americans were polled between 2014 and 2023, including 2,242 men aged 18-34. Worldwide, "feelings of hopelessness, societal disillusionment and rebelling against cosmopolitan values partly explain the rise of radical right anti-establishment parties", Lampert said, citing elections in several European countries.

European Court Ruling Puts Cautious Swiss in Climate Bind



GENEVA (Dispatches) - Switzerland for all its snow-capped mountains and crisp Alpine air has failed to protect its people from the ravages of climate change, as a top European court ruled this week. Behind the picture postcard exterior, critics say, is a country that has done too little for the planet and acted as a business hub for some of the most powerful international corporations in fossil fuels and mining. Political analysts and academics also say entrenched conservatism and a political system governed by popular referendums will complicate reform even after Tuesday's ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. It found in favour of over 2,000 Swiss women - a third of them over 75 - who said their country's inaction in the face of rising temperatures puts them at risk of dying during heatwaves. The ruling cannot be appealed and the Swiss Federal Office of Justice, which represented the government before the court, said it must be implemented. It said it would analyse the ruling to determine the measures the country needed to take. Immediately after the court decision, the Swiss Green Party called for climate targets for specific industries, including the financial sector. "People may have slightly beautiful dreams about Switzerland," Lisa Mazzone, the party leader, said. "Switzerland is the country of commodity trading. Switzerland is the country with a strong financial sector with a lot of investment in fossil fuels," she added. Swiss-based commodity trading companies handle 40% of all oil trades and 60% of the metal trading business, according to data published by industry association Suissexchange. The group of Swiss women known as KlimaSeniorinnen did not make Swiss trading central to their case, although their Greenpeace-backed campaign that lasted many years called for tougher regulation to curb transactions fueling global warming.

UK Economy's Growth Points to Exit From Recession

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain's tepid economy is on course to exit a shallow recession after output grew for a second month in a row in February, and January's reading was revised higher, official data showed on Friday. Gross domestic product expanded by 0.1% in monthly terms in February, as expected in a Reuters poll of economists. January's reading was revised to show growth of 0.3%, up from 0.2% earlier, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said. The data confirm Britain's economy started 2024 on a stronger footing, with the three-month average growth rate rising to 0.2% in February from zero in January - the highest such reading since August. The figures are also likely to reinforce the Bank of England's cautious tone around the prospect for interest rate cuts, with the economy on track to slightly exceed the central bank's expectation for a 0.1% expansion in the first quarter. Britain fell into recession in the second half of last year, leaving Prime Minister Rishi Sunak with a challenge to reassure voters that the economy is safe with him before an election expected later this year. "These figures are a welcome sign that the economy is turning a corner," finance minister Jeremy Hunt said in response to Friday's data. The opposition Labour Party, far ahead in opinion polls, said Britain was worse off with low growth after 14 years of Conservative government. Business surveys suggest growth continued in March. The ONS said Britain could now escape recession even if GDP contracts sharply in March by around 1% - assuming there are no revisions to prior months' data. Despite the tentative recovery, GDP remains below its level of June 2023, before

the latest downturn took place, and has stayed broadly flat since early 2022. "While recession concerns are disappearing into the rear-view mirror, the longer-term outlook is still difficult, with the lagged impact of earlier interest rate hikes and chronic supply side constraints likely to continue limiting the UK's growth potential," Suren Thiru, economics director at ICAEW, an accountancy industry body, said. Economic output was 0.2% lower than its level in February 2023 - a little better than the 0.4% gap predicted by economists. The services sector which dominates the economy grew by 0.1% in monthly terms in February, as expected. But manufacturing output exceeded forecasts, rising 1.2% on the month. Construction sank 1.9%, the biggest drop in just over a year.





Liverpool Stunned by Atalanta in Europa League

PARIS (Dispatches) - Liverpool's hopes of winning the Europa League were left hanging by a thread after they lost 3-0 at home to Atalanta in the first leg of their quarter-final tie on Thursday, while Bayer Leverkusen beat West Ham United to extend their unbeaten record this season. Liverpool are hoping to make this season's Europa League final in Dublin on May 22 their final game before Jurgen Klopp steps down as manager, but they face a monumental task to turn their last-eight tie around after a stunning Atalanta performance. Liverpool, who started with Mohamed Salah and Dominik Szoboszlai among the substitutes, saw Harvey Elliott come agonisingly close to opening the scoring with a shot that hit the bar and struck the post on its way back out. Atalanta then took the lead seven minutes before half-time when Davide Zappacosta's low ball in from the right was finished off first-time by former West Ham striker Gianluca Scamacca. The same player made it 2-0 on the hour with a fine finish from Charles De Ketelaere's assist. Salah, who had come on at the start of the second half, then had a goal disallowed for offside before Atalanta made it 3-0 with seven minutes left. Caoimhin Kelleher spilled a shot by Ederson and Croatian midfielder Mario Pasalic, who once belonged to Chelsea

but did not play a first-team game, followed in to score. The stunning victory for the side who sit sixth in Serie A ends Liverpool's 33-game unbeaten run at home. "It hurts, we didn't lose here for a long time," said Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk. "They punished us for being sloppy in possession. This will definitely hurt tonight and then from tomorrow we need to switch it back on to get a result." Recent history suggests there is still hope for Klopp's side, as they won 5-0 away to Atalanta in Bergamo in the Champions League group stage in 2020/21, a campaign in which they also lost to the Italian side at Anfield. In Germany, Bundesliga champions-elect Leverkusen made it 42 games without losing in any competition this season as they beat West Ham 2-0 to seize control of their quarter-final tie. Jonas Hofmann and Victor Boniface both came off the bench to score late goals for Xabi Alonso's side, with the opener arriving in the 83rd minute and the second coming in injury time. The victory continues what could be a stunning week for Leverkusen, who are 16 points clear of Bayern Munich in Germany and can win their first Bundesliga title by beating Werder Bremen at home on Sunday. Alonso told reporters "the anticipation is huge -- it couldn't be bigger."



Alonso Extends Aston Martin Contract

LONDON (Dispatches) - Fernando Alonso has signed a new contract with Aston Martin, the Formula One team said on Thursday. The deal tied Spaniard Alonso, 42, to Aston Martin for at least the next two seasons. "There has been much said and written about my future in Formula One in the past few months, but today I'm delighted to announce that I'm here to stay with Aston Martin Aramco in a multi-year agreement," Alonso said. "I said at the start of the year that I would decide if I wanted to continue racing first and then sit down with the team. From the moment I joined the team in 2023 I felt extremely at home. In just over 15 months we have already achieved so much together, with some memorable podiums and battles." Alonso, twice Formula One world champion, moved to Aston Martin for the 2023 season from Alpine and secured six podium finishes in the first eight races for his new team. "This multi-year agreement with Fernando takes us into 2026 when we begin our works power unit partnership with Honda." Team Principal Mike Krack added in a statement: "Securing Fernando's long-term future with Aston Martin Aramco is fantastic news. We have built a strong working relationship over the last 18 months and we share the same determination to see this project succeed. We have been in constant dialogue over the last few months and Fernando has been true to his word: when he decided he wanted to continue racing, he talked to us first. Fernando has shown he believes in us, and we believe in him." Alonso secured his 100th podium by finishing third at the 2023 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, becoming one of only six Formula One drivers to achieve the feat.

Djokovic, Sinner Into Monte Carlo Quarters

MONTE CARLO (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic avenged last year's Monte Carlo Masters defeat by Lorenzo Musetti to reach the quarter-finals along with Jannik Sinner, while Daniil Medvedev launched into a furious tirade during his defeat. World number one Djokovic made a poor start and endured a second-set wobble before coming through 7-5, 6-3 against the 24th-ranked Musetti, the man who beat him at the same stage 12 months ago. "I don't think I am still at my top level but it was a great test today against a great player, a very talented player," Djokovic said. "I am really glad to overcome the challenge and look forward to the next one." Djokovic goes on to play Alex de Minaur, the 11th seed from Australia, in the last eight. The Serbian top seed dropped serve in the opening game against Musetti before working his way back to level at 4-4, and then snatched the set on a double fault by his opponent. Djokovic broke twice early in the second set either side of losing his own serve to surge 4-1 ahead. Musetti clawed back to within a game but Djokovic broke again for 5-3 before closing out the win. Djokovic has struggled to find his best form in recent times in Monte Carlo. He has not won the tournament since the last of his two titles in 2015, failing to advance beyond the quarter-finals in seven subsequent appearances. Australian Open champion Sinner improved his record to 24-1 this season with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Jan-Lennard Struff. The world number two broke at 4-4 en route to pocketing the first set and won nine of the final 11 games to sweep to victory. "I broke him quite early and then he broke me back. I knew it was going to be really tough, but I guess I returned really well, especially on second serves. I can be very happy," said Sinner. Sinner next faces Holger Rune who defeated the Italian in the semi-finals last year before finishing runner-up to Andrey Rublev. Rune made the last eight after a three-hour 30-minute 7-6 (11/9), 3-6, 7-6 (7/2) win over Grigor Dimitrov. Medvedev tore into the officiating for the second day running as he was beaten 6-3, 7-5 by Karen Khachanov. Medvedev was hit with a point penalty to start the final game after berating chair umpire Carlos Bernardes and then became embroiled in a heated discussion with the

tournament supervisor. The world number four had already been warned after hurling his racquet when he double-faulted to lose his service game and leave Khachanov a game away from victory. Medvedev, who took issue with two line calls in his second-round win on Wednesday, felt aggrieved when a Khachanov forehand was not called out during a rally that resulted in the latter earning two break points at 5-5.



Xavi Hails Great Victory as Barcelona Grab Advantage Against PSG



PARIS (Dispatches) - Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez hailed his side's 3-2 win away to Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final yesterday, insisting it showed the Catalans could once again compete with the very best teams in Europe. "We had time to prepare for this game and everything turned out very well, in defence and in attack. We are proud of the team. Paris played very well, but we kept their threat to a minimum," Xavi said after substitute Andreas Christensen's 77th-minute header gave Barca the victory at the Parc des Princes. Raphinha had given the visitors the lead at half-time, only for PSG to turn the game on its head with goals by Ousmane Dembele and Vitinha in the first six minutes after the restart. However, Raphinha volleyed in a Pedri pass to equalise before Christensen's winner. "It is a great victory against one of the best teams in the world. It is very difficult to defend against this team because of how they press you, but we did it very well," added Xavi, whose side are unbeaten in 12 games since he announced he would depart at the season's end. "We are only halfway there though, and it will be very difficult in Barcelona." The Catalans are appearing in the last eight of the Champions League for the first time since 2020, when they lost 8-2 to Bayern Munich in Lisbon, and since Lionel Messi left the club. It is their first away win in the knockout phase of the competition since 2019. "The players believe in themselves," said Xavi as he looked ahead to next Tuesday's return at Montjuic. "They have this opportunity, and if they play in the same way they will get chances. Nothing is done but we can be proud. This match shows that Barca are very much alive." It was a disappointing night for PSG, with Kylian Mbappe for once failing to deliver on a big occasion. He scored a hat-trick on the French club's last visit to Barcelona in the competition in 2021, though, and their coach Luis Enrique is optimistic that they can still progress.

Nuggets Get Past Wolves, Sit Alone Atop West

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokic scored 24 of his game-high 41 points in the second half as the host Denver Nuggets took sole possession of first place in the Western Conference with a 116-107 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves. Jokic added 11 rebounds, seven assists and three steals for the Nuggets, who can secure the West's No. 1 seed for the second straight season by winning road games against the San Antonio Spurs on Friday and the Memphis Grizzlies on Sunday. Denver's Jamal Murray put up 20 points and Michael Porter Jr. had 18. The win was the 423rd for Nuggets coach Michael Malone, tying him with George Karl for second in franchise history. Anthony Edwards had 25 points, Mike Conley scored 19, Rudy Gobert had 13 points and 15 rebounds and Naz Reid also contributed 13 for Minnesota. The Timberwolves fell into a tie for second place in the West with the Thunder, who beat the Spurs earlier on Wednesday. Minnesota and Oklahoma City are one game behind Denver. Meanwhile Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving combined for 54 points as Dallas Mavericks won for the 16th time in its last 18 games, defeating host Miami Heat 111-92. The loss was costly for Miami (44-36), which no longer has a shot at clinching a top-six seed in the Eastern Conference. The Heat, who played without Terry Rozier (neck) and Duncan Robinson (facet), were led by Tyler Herro with 21 points, seven boards and six assists. Doncic, who overcame three first-quarter fouls, had 29 points, nine rebounds and nine assists. Irving finished with 25 points on 10-for-15 shooting from the field, going 5-for-8 from deep. Dallas center Daniel Gafford went 6-for-6 from the floor, finishing with 12 points, five rebounds, three assists and three blocks. Devin Booker scored 16 of his 37 points in the first quarter, Bradley

Beal added 26 points and visiting Phoenix Suns ended a two-game skid by defeating short-handed Los Angeles Clippers 124-108. Kevin Durant scored 24 points and added nine rebounds as the Suns avenged a home loss to the Clippers on Tuesday when they trailed by as many as 31 points in the first quarter. Phoenix moved to within a half-game of the New Orleans Pelicans for sixth in the Western Conference. Bones Hyland scored a career-high 37 points and added nine assists, and Brandon Boston Jr. had 23 points for the Clippers. Los Angeles was without Kawhi Leonard (knee) for the sixth consecutive game, and Paul George (knee), James Harden (foot) and Russell Westbrook (hand) were given the day off. Bobby Portis finished with 30 points, nine boards and five steals and Damian Lillard added 29 points to lead Milwaukee Bucks past visiting Orlando Magic 117-99. The Magic, tied for fifth place, fell three games behind the second-place Bucks in the congested Eastern Conference standings. Milwaukee, which played without Giannis Antetokounmpo (calf injury) and Khristian Middleton (injury management), also got 13 points, eight rebounds and six assists from Patrick Beverley. Lillard added nine assists. Cole Anthony led Orlando with 23 points, while Paolo Banchero contributed 20 points, six rebounds and six assists. Brandon Miller scored 27 points and Charlotte Hornets rallied from 18 points down in the second half to defeat host Atlanta Hawks 115-114, spoiling the return of Trae Young. The Hornets scored the game's final four points in the last 30 seconds, with Miller sinking two free throws and then Miles Bridges scoring in the lane with 3.8 seconds left. Charlotte's Tre Mann stole the ball from Trent Forrest to seal the stunning outcome.

