

The Lawmakers of the Iranian Parliament, aka Majlis, on Wednesday Approved the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) Bill Between Iran and Indonesia Which Follow the 7th National Development Plan

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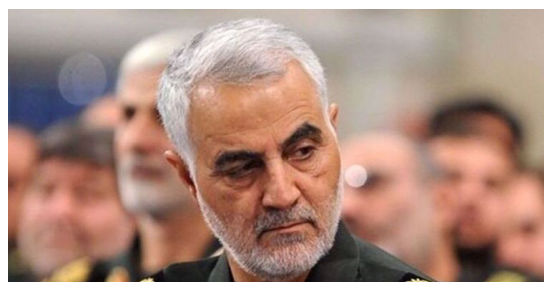
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U.S. Assassination of Soleimani Should Be Focus of Global Attention



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top human rights official says the U.S. assassination of Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad in 2020 should become the focus of attention as the international community probes decades-long terrorist crimes by the United States across the world. Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, made the remarks at a meeting held on Tuesday to review US human rights violations and crimes against the world countries. "We must identify, highlight and expose US crimes against humanity against the Iranian nation and other nations in different periods of time. These crimes should be exposed at the domestic and international levels," Gharibabadi said. Pointing to terrorism and the importance of dealing with the issue, the official said, "The US criminal operation to martyr Soleimani should be the focus of attention. The first court session on that issue will be held on June 19, and the accusations of 70 American defendants on complicity in the martyrdom of General Soleimani will be investigated." Lieutenant General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by then-president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020. Both commanders were highly revered across West Asia because of their key role in fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria. Elsewhere in his remarks, Gharibabadi touched on Israel's months-long brutalities in the besieged Gaza Strip, saying the Israeli crimes are committed with the full support of the United States and Washington is complicit in all kinds of crimes by the Zionist regime in the territory.

Any Agreement Stopping Short of Gaza Ceasefire "Meaningless"



GAZA (Dispatches) - A high-ranking member of the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement says it would be "meaningless" to conclude any agreement with the occupying Israeli regime unless Tel Aviv commits itself to a complete ceasefire in the besieged Gaza Strip. Sami Abu Zuhri, a member of the Hamas movement's political bureau, further noted on Tuesday that Israeli captives will not see the light of day until the usurping entity complies with the conditions of the Gaza-based resistance groups. He stressed that Israeli authorities must adhere to the conditions of the Palestinian resistance front, the foremost of which is an end to the ongoing aggression against Gazans. Abu Zuhri pointed out that it is "the occupying regime" that "obstructs and impedes reaching an agreement." The remarks came on the same day that Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani stated that indirect negotiations aimed at securing a ceasefire in Gaza have reached a stalemate following the Israeli military's aggression in the southern border city of Rafah. "We had seen some momentum building in recent weeks, but unfortunately, things did not move in the right direction, and the events in Rafah have pushed us backward," he said at an economic forum in Doha on Tuesday. Sheikh Mohammed, whose Persian Gulf country has played a key role in mediating between Israel and Hamas during the seven-month conflict, reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to mediation. "We make it very clear for everyone: our role is strictly limited to mediation, and we will continue in this capacity," he stated.



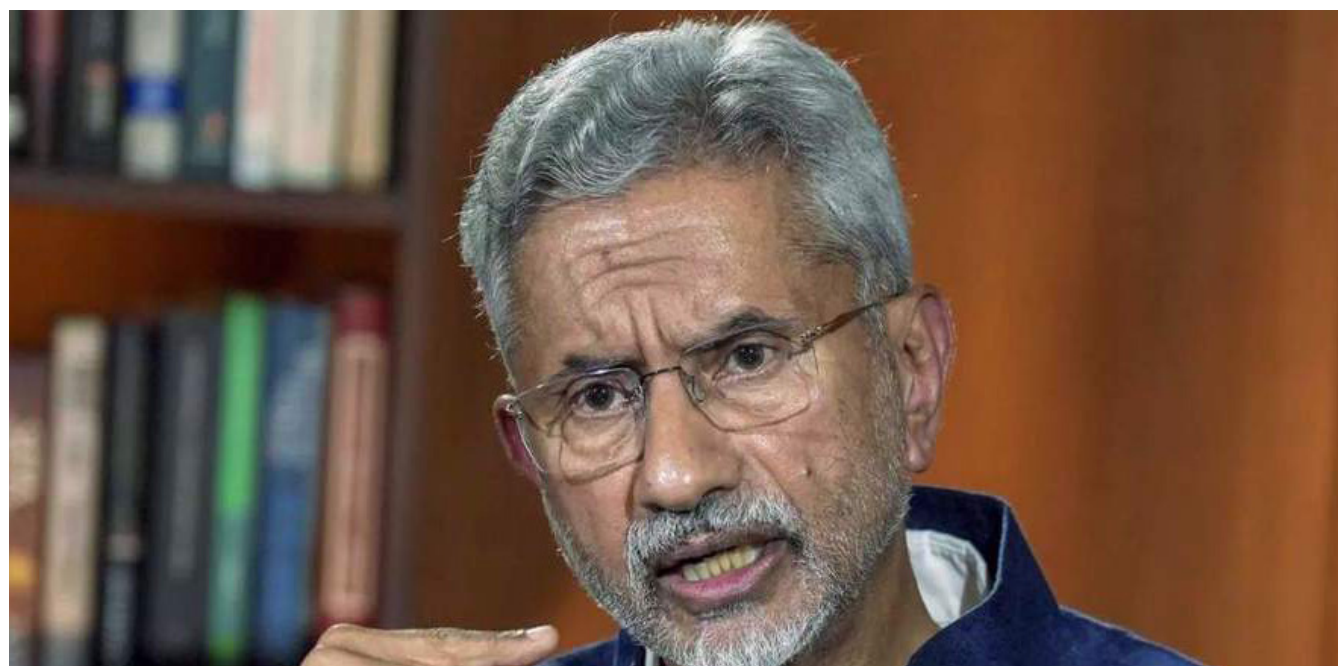
President Urges Free Nations to Be United in Quest for Just World Order

TEHRAN - The Western support for Israeli crimes in Gaza and international organizations' failure to stop such a genocide attest to the current unjust world order, the Iranian president said, hailing the global Pro-Palestine rallies as a quest for the formation of a just world order. Addressing the 5th International Congress of Imam Reza (AS) in Mashhad on Tuesday, President Ebrahim Raisi said the younger generation's growing enthusiasm for religion indicates the righteousness of the Islamic establishment's justice-advocating stances against the arrogance system. Denouncing the support provided by the U.S. and the Western governments for the Zionist regime in its onslaught against Gaza and deploring the failure of the international organizations and the self-proclaimed advocates of human rights in ending the Israeli genocidal atrocities, Raisi said, "Today, it has become clear to everybody that the current international system is unjust." "Who would have thought that universities in the West and East of the world would stand up to demand rights like this?" he asked. The lone purpose of all nations has become the defense of the oppressed people of Palestine and to protest against the oppressors. "Today, the world of humanity has realized that the Zionist regime is a cancerous tumor and this tumor must be destroyed so that not only the Middle East region but the world can achieve peace and security," Raisi said. Pointing to the Pro-Palestine demonstrations in the universities across the world, the president said the fact that all freedom-seeking nations in the world are now united in their quest for the liberation of Palestine clearly demonstrates that the free humans are calling for the formation of a just world order. He

also noted that the blood of 15,000 innocent Palestinian children shed by the Israeli regime in the onslaught on Gaza has the power to terminate the criminal Zionist regime. The President also stated that there are few people who are against the implementation of justice, but the important issue is the indicator of the implementation of justice in societies, and said, "Law can also be the indicator of the implementation of justice in the society, but what is the complete indicator of the implementation of justice is the behavior of imams, including Imam Reza (AS)." Raisi also thanked the organizers of this congress, and congratulated the 10-day Dignity Celebration and clarified, "According to the Almighty God, man has inherent dignity, but what is considered in this congress is an acquired dignity that is achieved in the light of the teachings of the imams, including Imam Reza (AS)." Pointing out that Imam Reza (AS) emphasized more than other imams on the issue of guardianship and imamate, the President added, "Monotheistic governance, which has the element of guardianship and imamate, is different from other types of governance, and therefore, it is necessary for us to try to understand the differences of governance considered by Imam Reza (AS) and the rule of Harun and Ma'mun." Stating that the relationship between the ruler and the people is different from the relationship of non-religious and non-monotheistic rulers with the people, Raisi listed love and affection between the Imam and the Ummah as one of the characteristics of monotheistic governance, which makes it different from mandated and dictator-based governance.

India Downplays U.S. Sanctions Threat Over Chabahar Deal

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - India's Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar has downplayed US threat of sanctions after New Delhi signed a landmark contract with Tehran to operate the Chabahar Port in Iran, saying the project will "benefit the entire region." Hours after India and Iran inked a 10-year deal to develop and operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar, the U.S. on Monday warned any entity considering business deals with Iran of potential sanctions. "Any entity, anyone considering business deals with Iran, they need to be aware of the potential risk they are opening themselves up to, potential risk of sanctions," the U.S. State Department Principal deputy spokesperson, Vedant Patel, said at a press briefing. In reaction to the US threat, Jaishankar said on Tuesday that people should not take a "narrow view" of the initiative, noting that the US has been appreciative of the larger relevance of the port and is well aware of the significance of the deal. "I did see some of the remarks that were made, but I think it's a question of communicating, convincing, and getting people to understand that this is actually for everyone's benefit. I don't think people should take a narrow view of it," Jaishankar said while speaking at a book launch in Kolkata, India. "They (U.S.) have not done so in the past. So, if you look at the U.S.'s own attitude towards the port in Chabahar, the U.S. has been appreciative of the fact that Chabahar has a larger relevance...we will work at it," he added. He emphasized India's longstanding involvement in the project, but said a long-term agreement could not previously be concluded due to a number of issues. He said that successful resolution of issues led to the signing of a beneficial long-term pact for the region. "We have had a long association with the Chabahar Port, but we could never sign a long-term agreement. The reason was...there were various problems...the joint-venture partner changes, the condition changed," Jaishankar, 69, was quoted as saying. "Finally, we were able to sort this out and we were able to get the long-term agreement done. The long-term agreement is necessary, because without it you cannot really improve the port operation. And the port operation we believe will benefit the entire region." Back in 2016, India agreed to finance the development of the Iranian port but the process was stalled two years later due to the US sanctions reimposed after Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. The agreement for the Long-Term Bilateral Contract regarding the operation of Chabahar Port, Iran's sole ocean port, was officially executed on Monday between Indian Ports Global Limited (IPGL) from India and the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) of Iran.



Iran Strongly Condemns Australian Sanctions



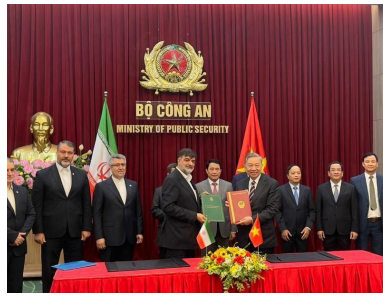
TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has strongly condemned Australia's sanctions against several Iranian senior officials, entities and companies allegedly over the country's peaceful missile and drone programs. Australia's sanctions against Iran came on Tuesday a month after Tehran launched missile and drone attacks on the Israeli regime to punish it for an airstrike that killed Iranian generals in a diplomatic mission in Syria. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani slammed the silence of Australia and its allies in the face of Israel's violations of international law and its recent attack on the Iranian embassy premises in Syria. Kanaani said this silence proves the double-standard approach adopted by Australia and its allies to developments in West Asia. He said that Australia and its partners remained silent "regarding the aggressive action and violation of international laws and human rights by the Zionist regime in attacking the diplomatic headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran." The spokesman said such an approach only encourages Israelis to further violate the rules of international law and commit more war crimes. "The double-standard approach of Australia and its partners in the selective selection of international norms, not only does not help to reduce instability in the region, but by keeping silent against the Zionist regime's attack on diplomatic places, its provision of weapons in the brutal killing of the defenseless people of Gaza, the Israeli regime is violating international rules encourage more war crimes and lead the region to instability," Kanaani said. "The main cause of tension and insecurity in the region is the occupation (Palestinian lands) and the criminal approach of the Zionist regime in killing the Palestinian people and the relentless support of the evil coalition, including Australia, to this regime," he said.

EU Broadens Sanctions to Cover Iran's Missile Program



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union (EU) has expanded its sanctions regime to target Iran's missile capabilities a month after the country launched missile and drone attacks on the Israeli regime to punish it for an airstrike that killed Iranian generals in a diplomatic mission in Syria. The European Council, a body which defines the EU's overall political direction and priorities, said in a Tuesday statement on its website that the sanctions regime on Iran had been expanded beyond current restrictions on the country's drone production capabilities to also cover its missile program. "The EU will now be able to target persons and entities supplying, selling or otherwise being involved in transferring Iran's missiles..." said the Council in its statement, adding that those targeted will be subject to an asset freeze and travel ban to the EU. The statement alleged that the sanctions had been imposed on Iran in response to the country's support for Russia's war on Ukraine and its supply of missiles and drones to non-state groups in the West Asia region. It said that the sanctions also came after Iran launched drone and missiles attacks against Israel. Iran has repeatedly denied accusations it has supplied weapons to Russia for direct use in the war in Ukraine. It has also rejected allegation of supplying weapons to anti-Israeli and anti-US groups in the region. Tehran has said that its mid-April military operation against Israel was a legitimate response to the Israeli regime's attack on Iran's consulate in Syria's Damascus on April 1. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said last month that it was a pity that the EU was planning to impose sanctions on Iran only because the country had used its legitimate right to defend itself against "brazen Israeli aggression".

IRAN NEWS



Iran, Vietnam Sign Police Cooperation Agreement

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's police chief Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan and Vietnamese Minister of Public Security General Tô Lâm signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on police cooperation. General Tô Lâm stressed the need for further development of bilateral and multilateral relations, especially in the field of comprehensive police cooperation. He said the friendly and respectful relations between the two countries are a foundation to expand and strengthen bilateral cooperation. He lauded Iran's progress in the fields of defense, military, science, and industry, as well as resistance, stability, and self-reliance despite the cruel sanctions. Strengthening law enforcement cooperation, such as the exchange of information and experiences in the field of fighting organized crime, terrorism, cybercrime, drug production and trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, arms and ammunition smuggling, forgery of documents, and illegal immigration are among the articles of the MoU. During this trip, General Radan is to visit the National Training Center on Terrorism Prevention, the National Center for Population Database, and the Department of Cyber Security and Hi-tech Crime Prevention.

President Approves Referral to Arbitration Against Indian Company



TEHRAN (Shana) - President Ibrahim Raisi promulgated the law pertaining to refer the dispute between the Iranian Gas Engineering and Development Company (IGEDC) with the State Trading Corporation of India LTD to arbitration. In his decree, the president ordered the related governmental bodies including Ministry of Petroleum, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Legal Office to pursue implementation of the law. Iranian Parliament and Guardian Council have already approved the law respectively in 9 and 12 May in accordance with the articles 123 and 139 of the constitution. Article 139 restricts and binds referral of claims about public and government property to arbitration to its approval by the cabinet and parliament. Now, after the publishing of the law by Iranian president, Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company (IGEDC) is allowed to pursue its claims against the Indian company. IGEDC and the State Trading Corporation of India LTD signed a 3-year contract in 2013. The Iranian side believes it has fulfilled its obligations under the contract while the Indian company has fulfilled less than one-fifth of its obligations.

Released Iranian Diplomat Recounts Abuses in Belgian, German Jails



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Asadollah Asadi, an Iranian diplomat who was jailed in Germany and Belgium on false charges, has spoken out against numerous human rights violations he endured in the two European countries despite having diplomatic immunity. Addressing a human rights meeting organized by Iran's High Council for Human Rights on Tuesday, Asadi said that during his 5-year imprisonment in Germany and Belgium, he was not allowed a single visit from his family members. He was only able to have limited telephone contact with his family for one year, he recalled. Asadi, who was arrested in Germany in 2018 on his way back to Austria, recounted that during his 101-day detention in Germany, he was subjected to "extensive torture and abuse." He was the third counselor at Iran's Embassy in Vienna at the time. The former diplomat said he was held in poor conditions

along with two dozen "special individuals", despite a psychiatrist's recommendation to transfer him to normal accommodations. Asadi added that German authorities imposed the strictest legal regime for his detention. Kazem Gharib-Abadi, secretary of the High Council for Human Rights, condemned the actions of the German government, stating that the arrest of the Iranian diplomat was a clear violation of international law and the Vienna Convention, carried out without any justification or evidence. He said the German and Belgian authorities subjected Asadi to various forms of psychological and mental torture during his imprisonment. Asadi was falsely accused of plotting an attack against the anti-Iran Mujahedin-e Khalq (MKO) terrorist organization and sentenced to 20 years in prison by a Belgian court. He returned home last May after five years.

Talks Underway between Tehran, Kabul for Ditching Dollar in Bilateral Trade



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Negotiations are ongoing between Iran and Afghanistan for sidelining U.S. dollar in bilateral transactions. The deputy governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said that talks are ongoing between the two countries for the implementation of "offshore rial" in Afghanistan. Mohsen Karimi pointed out that "offshore rial" is used with the aim of supporting the economic activists and exporters of the private sector of the country. The project of ditching the US dollar and using rial in foreign trade exchanges has always been followed up by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to neutralize sanctions, he underlined. Earlier, CBI Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin had announced that using the "offshore rial" in trade with Russia, Afghanistan and Iraq is on the agenda, adding that the idea of ditching the US dollar has produced positive results.



FM Hosts Nat'l Security and Foreign Policy Commission

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held the last joint meeting with the chairman and members of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the 11th Parliament, which was attended by a group of deputies and directors of the Foreign Ministry in order to exchange views on the country's diplomatic endeavors. Amir-Abdollahian presented a report on Iran's diplomacy and foreign relations and thanked parliament, especially the chairman and members of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission for their support, cooperation and constructive interaction in advancing the government's foreign policy goals. While responding to the queries of participants, the top diplomat emphasized the importance of continuing and strengthening mutual understanding and synergistic cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and parliament in the future. Vahid Jalalzadeh, head of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Iranian Parliament, in his address to the meeting, appreciated the foreign ministry's successful diplomacy in the regional and international arenas. In the meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari, and Hassan Kazemi Qomi, Iranian President's Special Representative for Afghanistan Affairs, also talked about the latest developments in their domains.

IBD Approves Iran's Proposal at Riyadh Summit

TEHRAN (IP) - During the Riyadh Summit, the Minister of Economy announced that Iran's proposal for a new financing window with a preferential exchange rate was approved by 57 member countries. Ehsan Khandouzi, the Minister of Economy and Finance, stated in a press conference on Tuesday that Iran's proposal will contribute to the growth of low-interest Muslim countries. The Minister of Economy revealed that negotiations were held with the Islamic Development Bank during the Riyadh meeting for financing construction projects worth 7 million euros. The Islamic Development Bank agreed to fund these projects and also committed to three new hospital and knowledge-based initiatives. Furthermore, he mentioned that Saudi authorities expressed willingness to resume cooperation

during their visit to Saudi Arabia. A Saudi business delegation visited the Tehran Expo and accepted Iranian proposals in a meeting with Iranian officials. Two representatives from Saudi Arabia were designated to follow up on these agreements. Addressing concerns of foreign investors regarding exchange rates, the Minister noted that 151 million euros of capital had been imported, but only half had been declared. He assured that with cooperation from the Central Bank, foreign investment processes will become more attractive this year. Additionally, he announced plans to establish investment management companies under the infrastructure financing law. This move aims to manage investments effectively, especially in border provinces.



Iran's Heavy Crude Oil Output Rises to 3.212m bpd in April



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The chief executive of the Railways of the Islamic Republic of Iran (RAI) said a \$500 million fund has been allocated for purchasing the equipment, repairing and modernizing the railway fleet of the country using oil bartering. Miad Salehi made the remarks in a meeting with the producers and repairmen of the railway fleet of the country, adding that another \$500 million will also be earmarked for buying locomotives. The CEO of RAI further pointed out that 50 freight locomotives of the Railway Company will be delegated to the private sector in the next month, the website of Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD) reported. With the coordination made in this regard, the contract for delegating 50 freight locomotives and another contract of investment for repairing 15 other locomotives (ROT) will be unveiled in a ceremony as well, the deputy roads minister added.

Chief of State Oil Company Dismissed in Brazil

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - The CEO of Brazil's state oil company Petrobras has been sacked, the government announced Tuesday. The move follows a recent spat between Petrobras and shareholders over dividend payments, which heightened concerns about the government's influence in the publicly traded company's decision-making. Jean Paul Prates, a former state senator and ally Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, "has been dismissed," a presidential spokesman said Tuesday evening. A lawyer and economist, Prates was appointed last January by the Petrobras board of directors soon after leftist Lula was sworn in for a third term. He previously held office from 2003-2011. Prates previously served as a senator in the state of Rio Grande do Norte and was a member of Lula's Workers' Party. A presidential spokesperson later told AFP that Lula intends to nominate former top regulator Magda Chambriard to be the next CEO, pending approval by the company's board. Chambriard led Brazil's oil and natural gas agency (ANP) from 2008-2016 and is the only woman to have held the post.



Georgian Parliament Passes Foreign Agent Bill, Prompting New Protests



TBILISI (Dispatches) - Georgia's parliament on Tuesday passed the third and final reading of a "foreign agents" bill, prompting a warning from the United States that if the legislation failed to meet European Union standards, Washington could review relations. Thousands of protesters, who along with Western nations denounce the bill as authoritarian and Russian-inspired, massed in the centre of Tbilisi, shutting down a major intersection controlling traffic between different neighbourhoods. After passage on third reading, the bill now goes to President Salome Zourabichvili, who has said she will veto it, but her decision can be overridden by another vote in parliament, controlled by the ruling party and its allies. The law would require organisations receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as agents of foreign influence, imposing onerous disclosure requirements and punitive fines for violations. Opponents see the bill as a test of whether the country stays on a path towards integration with Europe or pivots back towards Russia. In Washington, the White House said the United States was "deeply troubled" by the "Kremlin-style" agents legislation. "If this legislation passes, this will compel us to fundamentally reassess our relationship with Georgia," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien, visiting Tbilisi, said Washington could impose financial and travel restrictions unless the bill underwent change or if security forces forcibly broke up protests as has occurred in recent weeks.

New Caledonia Riots Rage on After Paris Approves Voting Change



SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Gunshots could be heard and schools remained shut in New Caledonia's capital Noumea on Wednesday morning after a night of rioting despite a curfew, as France's National Assembly approved changes to voting rules in the Pacific island. Lawmakers in Paris voted 351 to 153 in favour of the bill to allow French residents who have lived in New Caledonia for 10 years to vote in provincial elections - a move some local leaders fear will dilute the indigenous Kanak vote. The French government says the change is needed so elections are democratic in the country's territory, although President Emmanuel Macron has offered to hold dialogue between New Caledonia's pro- and anti-independence camps before a special congress of the two houses of parliament rubber-stamps the bill. The major pro-independence political group, Front de Liberation Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), said in a statement on Wednesday it would accept Macron's offer of dialogue and was willing to work toward an agreement "that would allow New Caledonia to follow its path toward emancipation." On Wednesday morning, Lilou Garrido Navarro Kherachi, 19, drove around protestor blockades in Noumea and saw burning cars and buildings, including a ruined veterinary clinic where the neighbors had evacuated the animals before the fire spread. Police were outnumbered by protestors, she told Reuters. "The real problem is the youngsters who trash, burn and loot. We didn't see any police deployed on site," she said.



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin, in an interview published early on Wednesday, said he backed China's plan for a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine crisis, saying Beijing had a full understanding of what lay behind the crisis. Putin, speaking to China's Xinhua news agency ahead of his visit to Beijing this week, said Russia remained open to dialogue and talks to solve the more than two-year-old conflict. China's plan and further "principles" made public by President Xi Jinping last month took account of factors behind the conflict, Putin said. "We are positive in our assessment of China's approach to solving the Ukrainian crisis," Putin said, according to a Russian-language transcript on the Kremlin website. "In Beijing, they truly understand its root causes and its global geopolitical meaning." And the additional principles, set down by Xi in talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, were "realistic and constructive steps" that "develop the idea of the necessity to overcome the cold war mentality." Beijing put forward a 12-point paper more than a year ago that set out general principles for ending the war, but did not get into specifics. It received a lukewarm reception at the time in both Russia and Ukraine, while the U.S. said China was presenting itself as a peacemaker but reflecting Russia's "false narrative" and failing to condemn its invasion. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov last month called the proposal a "reasonable plan that

the great Chinese civilization proposed for discussion." Xi's additional principles call for a "cooling down" of the situation, conditions for restoring peace and creating stability and minimising the impacts on the world economy. Russia views the conflict as a struggle pitting it against the "collective West" which took no account of Moscow's security concerns by promoting the eastward expansion of NATO and military activity close to its borders. Russia calls its actions in Ukraine a "special operation" to disarm Ukraine and protect it from fascists. Ukraine and the West say the fascist allegation is baseless and that the war is an unprovoked act of aggression. Russia and China proclaimed a "no limits" relationship just days before Moscow launched its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, but Beijing has so far avoided providing actual weapons and ammunition for Russia's war effort. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's peace plan calls for a withdrawal of Russian troops, the restoration of its 1991 post-Soviet borders and bringing Russia to account for its actions. A "peace summit" is scheduled for Switzerland in June. But Russia is not invited, dismisses the initiative as meaningless and says talks must take account of "new realities". China has attended some preparatory talks for the summit and Ukraine has deployed great efforts to persuade it to attend.

U.S. Arms to Make Real Difference to Ukraine's Defense



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken sought Tuesday to rally the spirits of glum Ukrainians facing a fierce new Russian offensive, assuring them that they are not alone and that billions of dollars in American military aid on its way to the country would make a "real difference" on the battlefield. On an unannounced visit to Kyiv, Blinken told Ukrainian leaders that despite a months-long delay in U.S. assistance that left them vulnerable to renewed Russian military strikes more weaponry is coming and some has already arrived. He made the case even as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed to him personally for more air defense systems to protect civilians under intense Russian fire in the northeast. Blinken also lambasted Russian President Vladimir Putin for underestimating Ukraine's determination to fight back. "We meet at a critical moment," he told students at the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. "The coming weeks and months will demand a great deal of Ukrainians, who have already sacrificed so much. I've come to Ukraine with a message: You are not alone." "We sometimes hear that time is on Putin's side," Blinken said. "That Russia's bigger population, Putin's

willingness to throw more Russians into the meat grinder of his making, and sink more of Russia's resources into trying to subjugate Ukraine means that Russia can't lose." "In fact, Russia's been losing the battle to control Ukraine's destiny for 20 years. And Putin has it wrong - time is on Ukraine's side," he said. "As the war goes on, Russia is going back in time. Ukraine is moving forward." And yet, in increasingly intense attacks along the northeastern border in recent days, Moscow's troops have captured around 100 to 125 square kilometers (40 to 50 square miles) in the northeast Kharkiv region that includes at least seven villages, according to open-source monitoring analysts. Though most of those villages were already depopulated, thousands of civilians in the area have fled the fighting. The Kremlin's forces have also been making a concerted push in the east, seeking to drive deeper into the partly occupied Donetsk region. The main focus of Russian attacks Tuesday was Pokrovsk, just inside the Ukrainian border in Donetsk, where the Kremlin's forces launched 24 assaults, the Ukrainian general staff said in a report. Analysts have called this moment one of the most dangerous for Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.



Singapore Inaugurates New PM

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore inaugurated Lawrence Wong on Wednesday as its new prime minister and fourth leader since independence six decades ago, completing a carefully calibrated power transfer designed to guarantee continuity in the wealthy city-state. Wong, 51, comes from among a crop of so-called "4G" leaders, a new generation of politicians hand-picked by the long-ruling People's Action Party (PAP) to take over the reins of the key Asian trade and financial centre. Wong will retain his current position as finance minister and takes charge of a country led for two decades by Lee Hsien Loong, the 72-year-old son of Lee Kuan Yew, the founder of modern Singapore who stayed in politics until his death in 2015. The succession has been long coming, with Lee's plans of stepping down before he turned 70 upended by the pandemic, and by a transition fumble when his anointed successor unexpectedly ruled himself out of the running in 2021. When the date for the handover was announced last month, Wong said he accepted the responsibility "with humility and a deep sense of duty" towards Singapore and its 5.9 million people. "Every ounce of my energy shall be devoted to the service of our country and our people," Wong pledged in a video on his social media accounts. Wong rose to prominence in 2020 as co-chair of the pandemic taskforce and was named Lee's successor in April 2022 after a series of consultations between the political leadership and Wong's peers. He was promoted to deputy prime minister and led a high-profile public consultation exercise to chart a "social compact" between the government and the people on dealing with issues like sustainability, inequality and employment.

Israeli Tanks Push Deeper Into Rafah

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israeli tanks pushed deeper into Rafah on Tuesday, reaching some residential areas of the southern Gaza border city where more than a million people had sought shelter, and its forces pounded the enclave's north in some of the fiercest attacks in months. Israel's international allies and aid groups have repeatedly warned against a ground incursion into Rafah, where many Palestinians fled and Israel says four Hamas battalions are holed up. Israel says it must root out the remaining fighters. The White House said U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan will visit Israel and Saudi Arabia this weekend. The Biden administration declined to comment on a report by Axios that Israel agreed not to expand its Rafah operation significantly before Sullivan's visit. A U.S. official who declined to be identified told Reuters that Israel promised not to make a major move in Rafah without advising Washington. Israeli spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said in a briefing that Israeli forces had killed about 100 militant fighters, located 10 tunnel routes and found many weapons in Rafah since the start of the operation a week ago. Fighting has intensified elsewhere across the Gaza Strip in recent days, including in the north, with the Israeli military returning to areas where it had claimed to have already dismantled Hamas. The clashes on Tuesday were the fiercest in months, residents and militant sources said. "We are operating with determination in all three parts of the Gaza Strip. Forces from the air, land and sea are simultaneously striking terrorist targets," Hagari said, referring to the enclave's

north, centre and south. The Palestinian death toll in the war has now surpassed 35,000, according to Gaza health officials, whose figures do not differentiate between civilians and fighters. They said that 82 Palestinians had been killed in the past 24 hours, the highest death toll in a single day in many weeks. Fierce gun battles raged late on Tuesday in northern Gaza's Jabalia, a sprawling refugee camp built for displaced Palestinians 75 years ago. "Many people are being trapped in their houses," Nasser, 57, a father of six, said by phone. In Gaza City, also in the enclave's north, an Israeli air strike on a house in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood killed four people and wounded several others late on Tuesday, medics said. In the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City, Israeli bulldozers demolished houses to make a new road for tanks. The Israeli military said it had eliminated about 150 fighters and destroyed 80 structures used by Hamas there.



Haaland Double Puts Man City on Brink of Premier League History



LONDON (Dispatches) - Erling Haaland scored twice to settle Manchester City's nerves as the Premier League champions beat Tottenham 2-0 to take a giant step towards a historic fourth straight English title. The Norwegian forward tapped home a pinpoint Kevin De Bruyne cross early in the second half to score City's first-ever league goal at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. And he netted a late penalty to seal the three points for the visitors, minutes after substitute goalkeeper Stefan Ortega saved brilliantly from Son Heung-min. The win takes Pep Guardiola's team two points clear of Arsenal at the top of the table after 37 games. Victory at the Etihad against West Ham on Sunday will make them champions for a fourth consecutive season, regardless of the Gunners' result against Everton. No team in English top-flight history has ever won four titles in a row. Defeat for Spurs also guarantees that Aston Villa will finish in the fourth Champions League spot, joining City, Arsenal and Liverpool in Europe's top-tier competition next season. "We gave the chance in our hands for the last game," Guardiola told the BBC. "The tennis players say 'The serve to win Wimbledon, the last game, is the

most difficult one'." It happened in our period against Aston Villa (in 2022). And many, many years ago it happened with Sergio Aguero (scoring) in 93 minutes 20 seconds against QPR. So there will be the typical game." Guardiola called for help from City's fans to get them over the line. "We know what we're playing for," he said. "The tension is there, the rival is so good. It's why it is difficult, we know that. "Everyone come to the stadium and make noise. These games are more difficult but you have to do it. We'll have one day off, two days to prepare, and then we will do our best." The build-up to the game in north London was dominated by a fierce debate over whether home fans wanted their own team to lose in order to leave City in the driving seat, with Arsenal their nearest challengers. The Spurs supporters made their feelings towards their bitter local rivals clear in the opening minutes, with chants of "Stand up if you hate Arsenal" ringing around the stadium. Tottenham had the first sight of goal, with City's Ederson tipping over a fierce Rodrigo Bentancur effort before Spurs goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario kept out Phil Foden's close-range shot.

Bellingham, Vinicius Shine as Champions Madrid Smash Alaves



MADRID (Dispatches) - Jude Bellingham and Vinicius Junior inspired runaway Spanish champions Real Madrid to a 5-0 rout of Alaves. Carlo Ancelotti's side continued warming up for the Champions League final with a comprehensive demolition of their Basque visitors at the Santiago Bernabeu. Bellingham scored the opener and played a part in Madrid's next three goals, two scored by Vinicius, finding his best form at the business end of the season. Turkish teenager Arda Guler added a late fifth to put the cherry on Madrid's cake and moving them 17 points clear of second-place Barcelona. "We've had just one defeat in the league and I think that a big part of the success is because of (the defence)," Ancelotti told reporters after his side's 30th consecutive league game unbeaten. Madrid celebrated their title with an open-top bus parade on Sunday but with the Wembley final a little over a fortnight away, nobody is letting their concentration slip. Least of all Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, who made a fine double save from Samu Omorodion in the opening minutes. After missing most of the season with a severe knee injury, Courtois is hoping for a Champions League final start and boasts three clean sheets in three matches since his return. "I knew I'd come back strongly -- I'm the same Courtois, or even better," said the goalkeeper.

Brunson Scores 44, Knicks Pound Pacers in Game 5

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jalen Brunson scored 44 points for the host New York Knicks, who routed the Indiana Pacers 121-91 in Game 5 of an Eastern Conference semifinal series. The Knicks, who lost Games 3 and 4 in Indianapolis, now hold a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven series. New York will attempt to clinch a berth in the Eastern Conference finals with a road win in Game 6 on Friday. Brunson, who scored at least 40 points for the fifth time in 11 playoff games this spring, added seven assists and four rebounds in 43 minutes. Josh Hart logged 18 points and 11 rebounds for the Knicks, and Isaiah Hartenstein pulled down 17 rebounds. Hartenstein's 12 offensive boards tied a franchise playoff record set by Charles Oakley against the Chicago Bulls on May 15, 1994. Alec Burks had 18 points off the bench while Miles McBride scored 17 points for the Knicks. New York utilized a seven-man rotation with Julius Randle (shoulder) out for the season, Mitchell Robinson (ankle) out until at least mid-June and OG Anunoby (hamstring) sidelined for a third straight game. "To me, that's been a trademark of the team," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said of New York's high level of energy. "We've been short-handed all year and this is our way. We have to play hard as heck on every possession and we've got to keep doing it. So, we have to do that for 48 minutes." And we know if we defend and we rebound, take care of the ball, we're going to have a good chance to win." Pascal Siakam amassed 22 points and eight rebounds for the Pacers, while Myles Turner had 16 points. Tyrese Haliburton, who averaged 23.8 points and 16.5 shot attempts in the first four games of the series, was limited to just 13 points on 5-of-9 shooting. Andrew Nembhard added 11 points.



Woods Says Body "OK" Ahead of His Third PGA at Valhalla



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tiger Woods has returned to compete at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Ky., for a third time, with this week's PGA Championship destined to land somewhere in the middle of where his first two ended.

In 2000, Woods authored one of his more memorable major titles when he outlasted Bob May in a final-round duel that included a three-hole playoff. In a scene that has come to define Woods' unwavering determination, the 15-time major champion marched behind his long putt on the first playoff hole at Valhalla, with a pointed index finger that demanded the ball go into the hole. It obliged. When Woods tapped in his short winning putt to seal the second consecutive of an eventual four PGA Championship titles, he offered a trademark spinning fist pump. "It was a fun week and unbelievable moment, really," Woods said Tuesday. Woods touched on the passing of the torch that occurred in that 2000 event as he played his first two rounds with Nicklaus, who was playing in his final PGA Championship. Nicklaus failed to make the cut. There also was Woods' quest for his third consecutive major title that year after winning the U.S. Open and Open Championship. Woods not only became the first to win three majors in a calendar year since Ben Hogan in 1953, he would also be three-quarters through a run of four consecutive titles. He won the Masters in 2001 to make it four majors in four tries in an accomplishment that would be dubbed the "Tiger Slam." "Well, I just remember the pressure I felt," Woods said of his quest to match Hogan. "...The summer was a whirlwind. I was playing well."

Paul Reaches Italian Open Quarters

ROME (Dispatches) - Tommy Paul beat defending champion Daniil Medvedev 6-1 6-4 at the Italian Open to reach the quarter-finals in Rome for the first time. Paul barely broke sweat as he dashed Medvedev's hopes, wrapping up a one-sided contest in 73 minutes, hitting 18 winners and winning 16 points at the net. "He beat the brakes off me last year and got me at Indian Wells. So this one was good," said Paul. Paul will next face seventh seed Hubert Hurkacz, who overcame Argentina's Sebastian Baez 5-7 7-6(4) 6-4 in two hours and 39 minutes. Meanwhile two-time champion Iga Swiatek eased into the Italian Open semi-finals with a 6-1 6-3 win over 18th seed Madison Keys on Tuesday, and will face American third seed Coco Gauff for a spot in the final. The quarter-final in Rome was a repeat of Swiatek's recent semi-final clash with America's Keys in Madrid, which ended with the same scoreline. World number one Swiatek broke serve in the opening game, and while Keys won her next service game to love to make it 2-1, the Polish top-seed won the next four games to take the first set in 26 minutes. Swiatek needed just one break in the second set, which gave her a 3-1 lead, and when the Pole saved four break points in the next game to hold serve, Keys' chance of a comeback ended. "Honestly I felt really good today, even if I knew that one or two points could change everything," Swiatek said. "I'm glad that I served well because I think when we were kind of even in the games sometimes, I

could win two points just by serving. "It's something that doesn't happen often in my game, so today was a good day in terms of that." Swiatek is aiming to win her

fourth title this year having already won the Qatar Open, Indian Wells and the Madrid Open.

