

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Says Cordial Relations Between the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia Benefit Not Only Both Countries But Also the Entire West Asia Region

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Leader Hails Lebanese Nation for Resistance



TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has sent a message to the Lebanese resistance, and people who are reeling from the Israeli carnage, pledging Iran's support.

Ayatollah Khamenei said, "We are not separated from you. We are with you. We are one entity together. We share your pains, sufferings and tribulations, We share and feel your pains. Your pain is our pain, your suffering is our suffering."

The message was conveyed by Iranian religious eulogist Meysam Motiee, who has traveled to Lebanon as part of a national campaign seeking to provide aid to the oppressed people of the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

Accompanying a group of activists, Motiee has traveled to Lebanon to visit its resilient people and deliver Iran's humanitarian assistance.

His trip is part of the "Iran-e Hamdel" campaign (literally meaning sympathetic Iran) that is trying to hand over aid consignments, collected through public donations across Iran, to those affected by Israeli attacks in Gaza and Lebanon.

Since early October 2023, Israel has been waging brutal two-front aggression that has killed at least 43,922 people in the besieged Gaza Strip and 3,516 others in Lebanon so far.

Israel's deadly assaults have displaced almost the entire population of Gaza and more than a fifth of Lebanon's residents.

In support of the oppressed Palestinians and Lebanese, resistance groups in the region have launched retaliatory attacks on Israeli targets and vowed to keep fighting until the regime stops its killing machine.

Fresh EU, UK Sanctions on Iran's Shipping Lines Target Ordinary People



TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development Ali Akbar Safaei has decried a fresh round of sanctions imposed by the European Union and Britain on the Islamic Republic's shipping lines on baseless allegations.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said on Monday that it had imposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL), its director Mohammad Reza Khiabani, and several other entities and individuals.

It added that vessels, ports, and docks owned, operated, or controlled by those individuals and entities will be targeted by the sanctions, thereby prohibiting any transaction with them.

The EU claimed the individuals and entities have been involved in transporting Iranian-made Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), missiles, and related technologies and components to Russia to use in the war in Ukraine.

Acting in parallel, Britain also announced fresh sanctions against Iran Monday, freezing the assets of IRISL as well as national airline Iran Air over the same allegation.

Safaei, who also serves as CEO of Ports and Maritime Organization, told IRNA on Monday that IRISL is a "completely commercial and trading" body that transports goods not only from Iran but also from other countries.

It is among the largest shipping companies in West Asia which conducts extensive commercial activities, he said.

He added that IRISL's works in the Caspian Sea entirely focus on the import of basic commodities to the country. "Therefore, the European Union's allegations are completely illusory."

The Iranian official criticized the 27-nation bloc for following the suit of the US in imposing sanctions against Tehran on groundless claims.

Safaei noted that sanctions will have adverse consequences on the Iranian people's living.



Preparedness Prevents War, Says Iranian Foreign Minister

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi stressed the importance of being prepared for conflict as a means to prevent war. Speaking to senior commanders and staff at the IRGC headquarters, he warned that showing even a hint of fear in the face of threats could invite aggression.

In his remarks during the meeting with IRGC officials on Tuesday, Araqchi addressed recent developments, including Israel's actions against Iran, which he labeled as a "new act of aggression." He emphasized the necessity of maintaining readiness to counter any hostility effectively.

According to him, the recent Israeli operation represents a new phase of aggression, distinct from previous incidents, which Iran has treated as defensive responses. He noted that Iran has formally communicated to the international community that it reserves the right to respond at an appropriate time and manner.

"Our decisions are neither emotional nor impulsive," he stated. "They are made with careful consideration of all circumstances, including potential traps and schemes laid by adversaries. Over the past year, our responses have been measured and strategically aligned to prevent the broader escalation of war—a scenario Israel seems to be pursuing to draw the U.S. into the conflict."

Araqchi highlighted the interplay between military preparedness and diplomatic efforts in managing threats. "We have succeeded in merging diplomacy with strategic military readiness, ensuring a balanced and calculated approach to prevent conflict," he said.

The Foreign Minister underscored the importance of sending clear signals to adversaries. "It is crucial to manage the enemy's perception and avoid creating the impression that Iran would retaliate against an attack," he said. "Failure to address such perceptions could embolden the enemy to launch further aggressions."

He reiterated that Iran will exercise its right to respond with wisdom and precision at the right time, guided by the nation's leadership.

Reflecting on the broader strategy, Araqchi emphasized that readiness for war is the cornerstone of peace. "If you display fear or hesitation in a situation where war is a threat, you are essentially inviting conflict upon yourself," he warned. "To prevent war, one must visibly project strength and

preparedness." He explained that any display of weakness or lack of readiness could encourage adversaries to exploit vulnerabilities. "Those who threaten us are watching closely for any signs of weakness," he said. "Standing firm and prepared is key to deterring aggression."

Araqchi elaborated on the complementary role of diplomacy alongside military preparedness. "While our armed forces provide military deterrence, the Foreign Ministry's role has been to establish political deterrence," he said. "This involves rallying regional and international support against aggression, creating a defensive shield through collective opposition to hostile actions."

He pointed to the success of diplomatic initiatives in building coalitions that amplify voices against war and aggression. These efforts, he said, have been instrumental in reducing the likelihood of conflict.

Recalling previous operations, Araqchi praised the contributions of former Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian, who played a pivotal role during earlier conflicts. "During Operation Wa'd al-Sadiq (True Promise) I, he effectively utilized diplomacy to send messages and coordinate with other nations, thereby enhancing Iran's defensive posture," Araqchi said. "These lessons have guided our approach in subsequent operations, including Wa'd al-Sadiq II, where the stakes were higher, and the challenges more complex."

Araqchi emphasized that diplomacy and power must operate in tandem. "Diplomacy derives its strength from power, and without power, diplomacy is ineffective," he stated. "Conversely, power requires diplomacy to chart its course. Together, they form an inseparable foundation for advancing national interests and preventing conflict."

He concluded by underscoring the necessity of integrating military strength with active diplomatic engagement. "The words of a diplomat carry weight only when backed by power," he said. "Likewise, power needs diplomacy to articulate and achieve its objectives. This synergy ensures that Iran remains resilient and prepared in the face of any threat."

His remarks reflect Iran's strategic outlook on the interplay between preparedness, deterrence, and diplomacy, highlighting the nation's efforts to maintain a delicate balance between strength and negotiation to avoid war while safeguarding its sovereignty.

Israel's Gaza Genocide, Regional Aggression Underscore Urgent Need for WMD-Free Zone

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations says the Israeli regime's acts of aggression in the besieged Gaza Strip and elsewhere have underscored the necessity of establishing the West Asia region free from all weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

Amir Saied Irvani made the remarks during a speech delivered at the fifth session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction held at the world body on Monday.

"The current global landscape, particularly the genocidal war of the Israeli regime in Gaza over the past year and its blatant aggression against other regional countries, underscores the urgent need to establish a Middle East free from all WMDs. The rationale for creating a WMD-free zone in the region has never been more relevant and pressing," he said.

Iran's permanent representative to the UN expressed regret that, for decades, the Israeli regime has unlawfully opposed repeated international calls to establish such a region—a proposal first made by Iran in 1974.

He voiced concern that the Israeli regime, which is backed by the US government, "keeps accumulating all kinds of WMDs without being party to any legally binding international disarmament instrument and without being subject to any safeguards or verification mechanisms."

"The Israeli regime seeks to conceal the true reason behind its opposition to the establishment



of a Middle East free of WMDs, which is to safeguard its own WMD program by remaining free of any legally binding commitments," Irvani stressed.

The Iranian envoy also raised the alarm about the Israeli regime's actions, including acts of terrorism and sabotage targeting civilian nuclear programs and scientists in the region, its prime minister's threatening Iran with nuclear weapons during the 78th UN General Assembly session on September 22, 2023, and an Israeli minister's proposal to use nuclear

weapons in the Gaza Strip, and demanded immediate intervention by international bodies such as the UN Security Council and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"We categorically condemn these illegal and irresponsible actions, emphasizing the danger posed by WMDs in the hands of such an illegitimate regime. These actions underscore the urgent need for a zone free of WMDs in the region, as a critical step to address the Israeli regime's WMD capabilities and rid the region of these menacing weapons," he further noted.

Israel has carried out acts of sabotage against Iran's peaceful nuclear program over the past years in addition to assassinating several nuclear scientists of the country.

The regime, which pursues secret nuclear activities, is estimated to possess 200 to 400 atomic warheads in its arsenal, making it the sole possessor of non-conventional arms in West Asia. It has refused to either allow inspections of its nuclear facilities by the IAEA or sign the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Iran Responds Firmly to Western Allegations at IMO Meeting



TEHRAN - Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) chief, Ali Akbar Safaei, strongly rebuffed what he described as baseless accusations by Western representatives during the 133rd session of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Council held in London on Monday.

Speaking at the IMO headquarters, Safaei condemned the actions of certain delegations, particularly the United States, accusing them of using the organization's platform to disseminate misinformation and advance political agendas.

Addressing the session, Safaei reaffirmed Iran's commitment to maritime safety and freedom of navigation. He emphasized the importance of ensuring security in critical waterways, including the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Safaei also criticized the U.S. and its allies for their military interventions in Yemen. He argued that the claims used to justify such actions, particularly those invoking self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter, were baseless and violated Yemen's territorial sovereignty.

"Iran categorically rejects any unfounded allegations made by some Western governments, which appear to be excuses to legitimize illegal military aggression," Safaei declared.

Safaei labeled the U.S. and U.K. military interventions in Yemen as blatant violations of international law and a serious threat to regional peace and stability. He underscored that Iran has consistently adhered to UN Security Council Resolutions 2140 and 2216, rejecting any involvement in arms transfers to Yemen.

Iran, he said, continues to advocate for a diplomatic resolution to the Yemeni crisis and supports efforts to enhance maritime security.

Safaei linked the current tensions in the Red Sea to what he described as "genocide and atrocities" committed by Israel in Palestine and Lebanon, allegedly with the backing of the U.S. and its allies. He called for accountability, holding the Western powers responsible for supporting Israel.

The IMO Council meeting, attended by an Iranian delegation led by Safaei, will include discussions with senior IMO officials and maritime leaders from other nations. The session is expected to address key global maritime issues and further Iran's diplomatic efforts in the sector.

Venezuela Says Collaboration With Iran Facilitates Signing of 300 Agreements



TEHRAN - Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ivan Gil emphasized the "historic" cooperation between Venezuela and Iran during the 10th Joint Commission meeting held in Caracas. He confirmed that this partnership has led to the finalization of nearly 300 agreements.

Representing President Nicolás Maduro, Minister Gil inaugurated the event alongside Iran's Ambassador Hojjatollah Soltani. In a message shared via his official Telegram channel, Gil highlighted the importance of the meeting in strengthening the long-standing friendship and collaboration between the two nations. The event aims to foster solidarity against coercive Western actions and promote a new diplomatic paradigm based on mutual respect and cooperation.

Speaking in a video from the commission, Minister Gil described the 45-year-old Iranian Islamic Revolution and the 25-year-old Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution as "twin revolutions" that have built a robust framework of cooperation. He revealed that the two nations have signed 298 agreements to date, with approximately 80 of them finalized in the past two years. He credited high-level visits, including President Nicolás Maduro's 2022 trip to Iran and President Ebrahim Raisi's 2023 visit to Caracas, for advancing bilateral ties.

"The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is proud to have Iran as a partner, friend, and ally in navigating the complexities of today's world," Gil remarked. He reaffirmed Venezuela's unwavering support for Iran's dignity, sovereignty, and principles.

Venezuelan Transport Minister Ramón Velásquez also stressed the shared commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation. He announced plans to reactivate commercial flights between Caracas and Tehran and restart the operations of an Iranian car assembly plant in Venezuela.

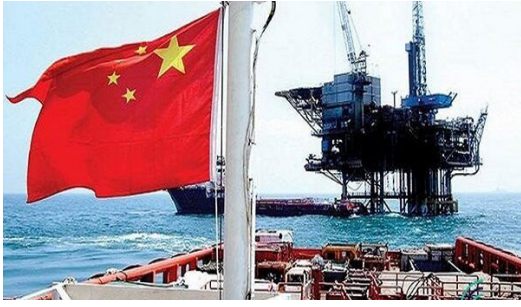
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Approval of Free Trade Agreement with Eurasia Linked to Parliament's Decision

TEHRAN - Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, emphasized during a meeting for organizing the 3rd International Trade Exhibition with Eurasia that a free trade agreement with Eurasia was signed last year. Following the positive experience of the preferential trade agreement with this region, it led to the signing of the free trade agreement. Dehghan Dehnavi stressed the importance of Parliament approving the agreement promptly. He noted that the agreement has already been signed by four Eurasian countries, and its implementation depends on ratification by Iran's Parliament. He highlighted efforts made in recent years to develop infrastructure facilitating trade with Eurasia, using exhibitions as a vital tool. These exhibitions allow Iranian and Eurasian companies to showcase their capabilities, paving the way for expanded trade and deeper bilateral relations.

Iran's Oil Exports to China Continue: Angola Unlikely to Replace Iran



TEHRAN - Mohsen Ghamsari, a former director of international affairs at the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), commented on recent reports about a Chinese refinery planning to replace Iranian oil imports with oil from Africa. He stated that oil from African countries, including Angola, cannot effectively replace Iranian oil in Chinese refineries.

He explained that Angola's oil is light, while Iranian oil is classified as medium. Even Iran's light crude is considered medium-grade on a global scale. Therefore, it is unlikely that Angola's oil can easily replace Iranian oil unless it is mixed with heavier materials to create a new crude blend.

Regarding the potential impact of Donald Trump's re-election on China's oil procurement decisions, Ghamsari noted that if China intended to replace Iranian oil, it would have done so months ago—well before the U.S. election results were known. He dismissed the idea that such a decision would be linked to Trump's re-election, emphasizing that there is no connection.

Ghamsari stressed that Iran's oil exports to China are expected to continue. Currently, China is Iran's primary market, and unless Iran's next administration successfully expands its diplomatic efforts to establish new markets, China will likely remain its main customer.

Commenting on Trump's potential influence on Iran's oil exports, Ghamsari remarked that Trump is not a politician but a businessman, suggesting that it might be possible to negotiate with him, potentially easing the path for Iranian oil exports.

He concluded that as long as China remains the sole buyer of Iranian oil, the volume of exports will remain steady, with only minor fluctuations. The current level of exports is expected to be maintained.

Tariff Removal on Over 80% of Goods Traded Between Iran and Russia



TEHRAN - The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Russia announced that more than 80% of goods exchanged between Iran and Russia are now exempt from tariffs, highlighting the benefits of Iran's free trade with Eurasian countries.

Kazem Jalali, speaking at a coordination meeting for the third International Eurasian Trade Expo, emphasized the significance of expanding Iran's trade ties globally. He pointed out the pivotal role of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), stating that Iran has worked to establish strong relations with the bloc.

Jalali explained that a preferential trade agreement with the EAEU was approved and implemented five years ago. Following this, negotiations for a free trade agreement were initiated, culminating in its signing last year. The agreement, signed in the presence of Iran's then-Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade and the prime ministers of the five EAEU member states, awaits legislative ratification.

Highlighting the advantages of this agreement, Jalali noted that over 80% of the goods traded between Iran and Russia now benefit from tariff exemptions. He added that another Eurasian summit is scheduled for December 2024, where senior officials from the Islamic Republic of Iran will participate, aiming to further strengthen relations.

The ambassador also underlined the importance of trade exhibitions in showcasing national capacities. He noted that two editions of the Eurasian Economic Union expo have been held so far, with the third scheduled for this year. Jalali expressed hope that the upcoming events will see robust participation from foreign companies, enhancing economic collaboration.

Meanwhile in the meeting, Iran's Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade, and the head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), announced their full support for the upcoming Third Eurasia International Trade Exhibition.

The meeting was attended by key figures, including Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, Head of the TPO; Hamid Padesh, Deputy for Economic and Infrastructure Coordination; Jalali, Iran's Ambassador to Russia; and Mohammad Sadegh Ghanadzadeh, Deputy for International Business Development at the TPO. Commercial attachés from Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries also participated.

Dehnavi emphasized the significance of trade exhibitions in fostering

international commerce. He highlighted Iran's success since signing a preferential trade agreement with the EAEU four years ago, which boosted trade with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. This success has paved the way for a free trade agreement, currently under parliamentary review in Iran. The agreement has already been ratified by four EAEU member states and is set for implementation once approved in Iran.

"We need to expedite the process in Iran to unlock the positive outcomes of this agreement," said Dehnavi.

He noted the importance of comprehensive trade facilitation, citing infrastructure improvements in transportation, logistics, customs communication, and standards. He added that numerous projects are underway to ease financial transactions and regulatory standards for smoother trade.

He stressed the role of trade exhibitions as a powerful tool for showcasing capabilities and building relationships. "These events provide an opportunity for Iranian and EAEU companies to demonstrate their potential, ultimately promoting trade as a foundation for cultural and political ties."

Dehnavi reiterated Iran's commitment to expanding trade with friendly nations in the EAEU. Reflecting on the success of last year's exhibition, he expressed hope for an even grander event this year. "We have invited EAEU member countries to actively participate in this exhibition as a sign of our willingness to deepen trade ties. Our vision sees trade as a two-way path involving both exports and imports," he explained.

He emphasized Iran's readiness to utilize the production capabilities of EAEU nations while promoting the entry of high-quality Iranian goods into their markets. "While we've made progress, we are not yet at the desired level of trade with Eurasia," Dehnavi admitted. "That's why the TPO is fully backing this exhibition and has invited other executive bodies to collaborate."

Dehnavi concluded by urging organizers to incorporate a broader range of products and encourage greater participation from EAEU companies. "With stronger collaboration, we can take solid steps toward achieving our trade development goals," he said.

The Third Eurasia International Trade Exhibition is expected to be a significant platform for enhancing economic ties between Iran and the EAEU, reinforcing their commitment to regional collaboration and mutual growth.

Peugeot Pursues Joint Factory with Iran Amid Energy Crisis



TEHRAN - The Chairman of the Board of the Iranian Road Safety Supporters Association has stated that major automobile manufacturers are reluctant to cooperate with Iranian automakers due to macroeconomic challenges. Highlighting past initiatives, he noted that during the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) period, Peugeot had planned to establish a joint factory in Iran. However, the withdrawal from the agreement derailed these plans. Currently, despite announcements of 30,000 imported cars, the nation's annual demand exceeds 2 million vehicles.

According to a report from ILNA, Mehdi Karbasian, Chairman of the Board of the Road Safety Supporters Association, spoke during the Global Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. He revealed alarming statistics: road accidents in Iran claim approximately 20,000 lives annually, leaving around one million people mourning their loved ones. This figure does not account for the significant number of individuals who suffer life-altering disabilities due to road accidents.

Karbasian emphasized that 16 national entities are engaged in addressing traffic accidents. Each year, around 20,000 deaths and 300,000 injuries occur due to road incidents, with many injured individuals facing lifelong challenges.

He underscored the economic crises that exacerbate the nation's road safety issues. He criticized the lack of attention to fundamental problems, noting that some officials suggest wearing warm clothing at home as a solution to energy shortages, reflecting the depth of the crisis. He warned that the energy crisis is unlikely to be resolved soon.

Regarding infrastructure, Karbasian stated that Iran's roads and highways require significant investment for maintenance and safety improvements. The steel sector alone faces a \$10 billion budget deficit for essential road repairs connecting mining routes to export and import hubs. However, less than 50% of the required road maintenance budget is allocated, compounding the problem.

He identified three major contributors to road accidents: human error, infrastructure, and vehicles. While measures like hazard warning signs and accident-prone spot repairs offer partial solutions, the transportation sector, which constitutes 8% of the GDP, has turned into a crisis.

He defended automakers, noting their dependence on the broader economic system. The lack of partnerships with international brands, such as Peugeot, has worsened the situation. The JCPOA provided a window for cooperation, but its collapse eliminated those opportunities.

Highlighting the human factor, Karbasian said that 22% of accidents involve motorcyclists, while 19% are pedestrian-related. Notably, 60% of accidents occur within 30 kilometers of urban areas. Additionally, statistics reveal that 23 trillion rials from the Road Accident Compensation Fund have been allocated to victims lacking third-party insurance.

Formation of Negotiation and Trade Agreements Committee for Iran and Eurasian Countries



TEHRAN - The secretary of the executive committee for the Eurasia Trade Exhibition announced the formation of a committee to review Iran's trade negotiations with Eurasian countries at this year's event. The initiative aims to expand trade agreements.

Alireza Jafari, during a coordination meeting held on Monday, stated that the third international Eurasia Trade Exhibition will take place from February 22 to 25 at Tehran's permanent exhibition center. The event will host representatives and pavilions from member countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), including Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, to advance trade agreements.

Jafari highlighted that this year's exhibition will focus on contract-based interactions, moving beyond the traditional exhibition format. "We will form a dedicated committee to oversee trade negotiations and agreements under the supervision of the Trade Promotion Organization," he said.

Afghanistan Committed to Completing the Khaf-Herat Railway



TEHRAN - An Afghan delegation member, during a meeting with the acting head of Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company, highlighted the completion of the Khaf-Herat railway as a key priority for Afghanistan. The official stated that Afghanistan is determined to fulfill its commitments to operationalize this railway line and benefit from its advantages, emphasizing that removing obstacles to this project remains a top priority.

The Afghan representative also discussed plans for expanding the country's railway network, aiming to connect it to Iran's borders and link other Afghan cities. One notable project is the extension of the railway from Herat to Mazar-i-Sharif. Spanning approximately 800 kilometers, this project will provide railway access to about 5 million Afghans, facilitate domestic cargo and passenger transport, and link Iran with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and eventually China. The development is expected to boost economic, social, and cultural ties across the region while increasing transit revenues for both Afghanistan and Iran.

The deputy for railways, ports, and airports development at the Iranian company underscored the significance of the Khaf-Herat railway for both nations. He noted that it is the first rail link between Iran and Afghanistan, currently operational from Khaf to the Rozanak station. Enhanced utilization of this line is anticipated to boost cargo and passenger transit between the two countries.

Iran's strategy in constructing this railway is part of its East-West Rail Corridor, explained the Iranian official. He highlighted that completing Afghanistan's rail network is crucial to unlocking the full potential of this international corridor.

Iran, with extensive experience in constructing over 15,000 kilometers of railways and an additional 2,000 kilometers in recent years, is ready to provide technical and engineering services to Afghanistan. Such collaboration could strengthen transportation infrastructure links between the two nations.

He also pointed to the Chabahar-Zahedan railway as another vital line for Afghanistan. This project, upon completion, will connect Afghanistan to India and South Asia through Iran. Afghan traders stand to benefit significantly from the railway and Chabahar Port's capacity.

Path for Exporting Isfahan's Handicrafts to Regional Countries Opens



TEHRAN - The president of Isfahan Chamber of Commerce highlighted the province's exceptional opportunities in the handicraft sector, emphasizing efforts to introduce Isfahan's artistic creations to Arab countries. Amir Keshani stated that the chamber is ready to collaborate with the Arab Handicrafts Union as a strategic partner, through joint offices or development initiatives, to promote Isfahan's handicrafts and carpets. These efforts aim to familiarize Arab audiences with Isfahan's artistry and establish a market for these products in the region.

Keshani, speaking at the signing of a cooperation agreement with the Arab Handicrafts Union, announced the chamber's willingness to host a showroom in Isfahan to display Arab handicrafts. He stressed that, similar to the global trade of Iran's steel and oil despite sanctions, Iranian handicrafts can also reach international markets, reflecting the resilience of creative endeavors.

Mohammad Abdulbaset Al-Qadah, founder and president of the Arab Handicrafts Union, praised Iran's commitment to the handicraft sector. He reaffirmed the union's readiness to cooperate and highlighted its base in Damascus, representing 19 Arab countries. The union focuses on supporting small workshops and marketing their creations. Al-Qadah revealed plans to launch a dedicated online platform next month to connect producers and consumers globally.

The Arab Handicrafts Union president also noted that, per the

union's charter, strategic partnerships are limited to non-Arab countries. He expressed interest in exporting Iranian handicrafts through the union's 19 regional offices.

Majdaddin Taj, head of Isfahan's Handicrafts Union, underlined the importance of leveraging shared cultural and religious ties between Iran and Arab nations to boost trade. Taj pointed out that past collaborations with Syria in handicraft trade were successful and expressed hope to restore and expand these relationships. He proposed establishing reciprocal trade centers in Isfahan and Arab countries for showcasing Isfahan's handicrafts.

Mojgan Izadi, head of the Tourism, Handicrafts, and Carpet Commission at the Isfahan Chamber of Commerce, identified export as a missing link in the handicraft production chain. She highlighted the potential of the Arab Handicrafts Union's regional offices to enhance the global reach of Isfahan's handicrafts. A recent visit by a union delegation, including Al-Qadah, further solidified their belief in the uniqueness of Isfahan's craftsmanship.

Mohammad Namaki-Zadeh, president of Isfahan's Guild Chamber, cited over 280,000 active workshops in the province, with more than 3,500 in handicrafts. Namaki-Zadeh noted that over 200 of UNESCO's 600 registered handicraft disciplines belong to Isfahan, confirming its status as a global hub for traditional art.

Bangladesh's Yunus Hopes U.S. Ties Will Strengthen

DHAKA (Reuters) - Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus hopes ties with the U.S., the biggest buyer of Bangladeshi clothes, will strengthen despite strong criticism from President-elect Donald Trump on violence against minorities in the Muslim-majority nation.

"Foreign policies don't usually change because of a change in the president," Yunus told the Hindu newspaper, referring to Trump's victory in this month's U.S. presidential election.

"It's a very good relationship that we have built over years with the U.S. Our hope is that it will be strengthened."

Trump in a X post at the end of October said: "I strongly condemn the barbaric violence against Hindus, Christians, and other minorities who are getting attacked and looted by mobs in Bangladesh, which remains in a total state of chaos".



Germany, Finland Warn of Hybrid Warfare After Sea Cable Cut



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany and Finland launched a probe Monday after an undersea cable linking the countries was severed, warning of the threat of "hybrid warfare" amid heightened tensions with Russia.

The countries' foreign ministers said in a joint statement they were "deeply concerned" by the cutting of the communications link through the Baltic Sea, where tensions have increased since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

"The fact that such an incident immediately raises suspicions of intentional damage speaks volumes about the volatility of our times," they said.

"Our European security is not only under threat from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, but also from hybrid warfare by malicious actors."

"Safeguarding our shared critical infrastructure is vital to our security," they added. Finnish network operator Cinia said earlier that the cable between Finland and Germany, both members of the NATO military alliance, had been cut for unknown reasons.

The fault was detected in the undersea cable C-Lion1, Cinia said in a statement, adding that all services provided by the cable were down.

A Cinia spokesman quoted by Finnish media added that "all the fibre connections in it are cut".

"At the moment there isn't a possibility to assess the reason for the cable break but these kinds of breaks don't happen in these waters without an outside impact," the spokesperson said.

But internet traffic had not suffered any disruptions, said Samuli Bergstrom, head of the Cybersecurity Centre at the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Traficom).

"Fortunately, there are several data cable routes between Finland and abroad, so a single cable failure will not affect internet traffic," Bergstrom was quoted as saying by the broadcaster Yle.

The 1,172-kilometre (730-mile) fibre-optic cable has carried communications between Helsinki and Germany's Rostock since 2016.

Trump Confirms Plan to Use Military for Mass Deportation



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - President-elect Donald Trump confirmed Monday that he plans to declare a national emergency on border security and use the US military to carry out a mass deportation of undocumented migrants.

Immigration was a top issue in the election campaign, and Trump has promised to deport millions and stabilize the border with Mexico after record numbers of migrants crossed illegally during President Joe Biden's administration.

On his social media platform Truth Social, Trump amplified a recent post by a conservative activist that said the president-elect was "prepared to declare a national emergency and will use military assets to reverse the Biden invasion through a mass deportation program."

Alongside the repost, Trump commented, "True!" Trump sealed a remarkable comeback to the presidency in his November 5 defeat of Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris.

He has been announcing a cabinet featuring immigration hardliners, naming former Immigration and Customs Enforcement acting chief Tom Homan as his "border czar."

Homan appeared at the Republican National Convention in July, telling supporters: "I got a message to the millions of illegal immigrants that Joe Biden's released in our country: You better start packing now."

Authorities estimate that some 11 million people are living in the United States illegally. Trump's deportation plan is expected directly to impact around 20 million families.

Israeli Strike in Beirut; Hezbollah kills five as Lebanon, Hezbollah accept US ceasefire proposal



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - An Israeli airstrike killed five people in central Beirut on Monday, Lebanon's health ministry said, the second day in a row Israel has hit a target within the capital as it presses its campaign against Iran-backed armed group Hezbollah.

Smoke was seen rising from the strike in the densely populated Zuqaq al-Blat neighbourhood, near the central Beirut district where the Lebanese government is headquartered. Two people were missing after the strike and another 31 were wounded, the ministry said.

Israel has intensified its bombardment in and around the Lebanese capital over the last week, and Hezbollah has kept up missile fire into Israel, even as U.S.-led diplomacy to halt the fighting has progressed.

Lebanon and Hezbollah have agreed to a U.S. ceasefire proposal and made some comments on the content, a top Lebanese official told Reuters on Monday, describing the effort as the most serious yet to end the fighting.

A diplomat familiar with the talks cautioned that details still needed to be ironed out and these could still hold up a final agreement.

U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein was expected in Beirut soon, a U.S. source told Reuters.

Israel has dealt big blows to Hezbollah since late September, killing its leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, pounding wide areas of Lebanon with airstrikes, and sending troops into southern Lebanon.

Rocket sirens sounded across Tel Aviv and much of central Israel on Monday evening.

Falling shrapnel from an intercepted missile hit a main street in a Tel Aviv suburb, according to the Israeli military, which said it was still investigating. The blast wounded six people, including a 54-year-old woman who was in serious condition, according to Israel's ambulance service.

Hezbollah said in a statement it launched a salvo of drone attacks at "sensitive military sites" in Tel Aviv.

Earlier an Israeli woman was killed when a rocket struck a building in Shfaram, in the north, Israel's ambulance service said. The Israeli military said about five projectiles were fired from Lebanon.

Since Israel went on the offensive in September, the bulk of its airstrikes in the Beirut area have targeted the Hezbollah's strongholds in the southern suburbs.

But on Sunday, Israel hit targets in the Beirut city limits for the first time in more than five weeks, killing 10 people in two

separate strikes, including Hezbollah's top media official.

Israel launched its offensive after almost a year of cross-border hostilities with Hezbollah. Its declared goal is to dismantle Hezbollah's capabilities and secure the return of tens of thousands of Israelis who evacuated the north.

Hezbollah has fired rockets at Israel in solidarity with its ally Hamas since the Gaza war began more than a year ago. Israel's campaign has uprooted more than 1 million people in Lebanon in the last eight weeks.

World powers say a ceasefire must be based on U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 which ended a 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah. Its terms require Hezbollah to move weapons and fighters north of the Litani River, about 30 km (20 miles) north of the Israeli border.

Hochstein, who has conducted several rounds of fruitless ceasefire talks over the last year, expressed hope last week that one could be reached.

Ali Hassan Khalil, an aide to Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, said Lebanon had on Monday delivered its written response to the U.S. ambassador in Lebanon.

Hezbollah, a heavily armed movement backed by Iran, has endorsed its long-time ally Berri to negotiate about a ceasefire.

"All the comments that we presented affirm the precise adherence to (U.N.) Resolution 1701 with all its provisions," said Khalil.

The success of the initiative now depended on Israel, Khalil said. If Israel did not want a solution, "it could make 100 problems," he added.

There was no immediate comment from Israel on Lebanon's latest assessment of the diplomacy.

Berri said earlier on Monday that he saw a positive atmosphere in the diplomacy but also cautioned against counting chickens before they were hatched, Labour Minister Mustafa Bayram said, speaking after a meeting with him.

Israel's campaign has killed 3,481 people in Lebanon since hostilities began, most since late September, Lebanese authorities say. The figures do not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Hezbollah strikes have killed 43 civilians in northern Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, while 73 soldiers have been killed in strikes in northern Israel and the Golan Heights and in combat in southern Lebanon, according to Israeli figures.

Russian Delegations Visit Pyongyang as Ukraine War Deepens Ties

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met with Russia's natural resources minister in Pyongyang, state media said Tuesday, as visiting delegations from Moscow highlighted deepening ties amid the Ukraine war.

Kim met Monday with Russian Minister of Natural Resources and Ecology Alexander Kozlov, who is leading a delegation focused on "cooperation in trade, economy, science and technology," the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

A delegation from a Russian military academy also arrived in the North Korean capital, KCNA said, without providing details about the visit.

The United States and South Korea have accused the nuclear-armed North of sending more than 10,000 soldiers to help Russia fight Ukraine, with experts saying Kim was eager to gain advanced technology, and battle experience for his troops, in return.

Putin and Kim signed a strategic partnership treaty in June, during the Kremlin chief's visit to North Korea.

It obligates both states to provide military assistance "without delay" in the case of an attack on the other and to cooperate internationally to oppose Western sanctions.

Putin hailed the deal in June as a "breakthrough document".

Last week, Pyongyang said it had ratified a



landmark defence pact with Russia, after Russian lawmakers voted unanimously in favour of the deal, which Putin later signed.

Noting the new treaty, Kim said his meeting with Kozlov was aimed at "further promoting" trade as well as "scientific and technological exchange," according to KCNA.

The North Korean leader added the two countries' relations "have reached a new strategic level".

In exchange for North Korea's sending troops, the West fears Russia is offering technological support that could advance Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program.

The reclusive state recently fired a salvo of ballistic missiles and tested a new solid-fuel ICBM, while Washington has said North Korean troops have begun combat operations alongside Russian forces.

Experts say Pyongyang could be using Ukraine as a means of realigning its foreign policy.

By sending soldiers, North Korea is positioning itself within the Russian war economy as a supplier of weapons, military support and labor — potentially even bypassing its traditional ally, neighbor and main trading partner, China, according to analysts.

Russia can also provide North Korea access to its vast natural resources, such as oil and gas, they say.

North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui recently visited Moscow and said her country would "stand firmly by our Russian comrades until victory day".

She called Moscow's offensive against Ukraine a "sacred struggle" and said Pyongyang believed in Putin's "wise leadership".

China's Xi Announces Steps to Support "Global South" at G20 Summit

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Chinese President Xi Jinping announced a raft of measures designed to support the "Global South" at a gathering of leaders of the Group of 20 (G20) major economies in Rio de Janeiro, China's state television CCTV reported.

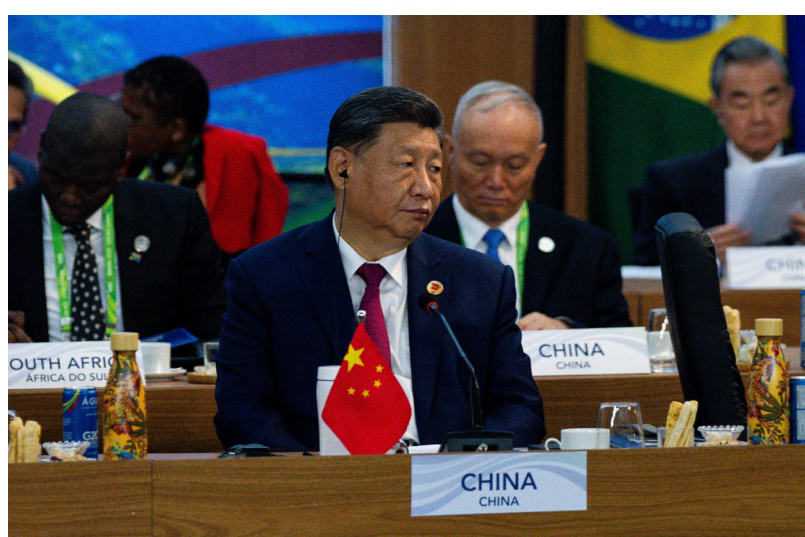
In his first remarks at the G20 Summit, Xi said China would support global development with eight actions, including building a "high quality" Belt and Road Initiative, his signature foreign policy plan that directs large Chinese investments to infrastructure projects in the developing world.

He also announced that China, along with Brazil, South Africa and the African Union, were launching an "Open Science International Cooperation Initiative" designed to funnel scientific and technological innovations to the Global South.

"China supports the G20 in carrying out practical cooperation for the benefit of the Global South," Xi said, according to state news agency Xinhua, adding that China's imports from developing countries are expected to top \$8 trillion between now and 2030. "China has always been a member of the 'Global South', a reliable and long-term partner of developing countries, and an activist and doer in support of global development," Xi added.

"China does not seek to be a single player, but rather hopes that 100 flowers will blossom and that it will work hand in hand with the vast number of developing countries to achieve modernization."

Xi's focus on the Global South comes as Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva



and his peers from developing economies push for a more central role in multilateral talks. The two leaders will meet in Brasilia on Wednesday, as Xi wraps up his stay in Brazil with a state visit.

Brazil has taken strides to elevate voices of the Global South by insisting that the African Union should be a formal member of the G20, citing the example of the European Union. The AU is participating fully in this year's G20 on behalf of African nations.

While the rise of the Global South in the G20 has caused some discomfort among richer countries, it presents an opportunity for China, given its close economic and political ties with most of the developing world, particularly in Africa, where it is a major lender.

The G20 was launched after the 2007-08 financial crisis to include important emerging economies in talks that had been confined to the Group of Seven industrialized nations, and has become a key venue for economic and financial cooperation.

It represents around 85% of global GDP, over 75% of global trade and about two-thirds of the world population.

The concept of the Global South emerged to designate developing, emerging or lower-income countries, mostly in the southern hemisphere, and replace the term "Third World" after the 1945-90 Cold War.



Croatia Into Nations League Quarters With Portugal Draw

ZAGREB (Dispatches) - Josko Gvardiol scored his first international goal in two years to rescue a point for Croatia in their 1-1 Nations League A Group 1 draw with Portugal in Split on Monday as both teams advance to March's quarter-finals.

Portugal were already assured of top spot in the pool ahead of kickoff and left Cristiano Ronaldo out of their match-day squad. Croatia finish in second place with eight points from their six games.

The visitors led thanks to a superb finish from Joao Felix, who expertly controlled Vitinha's perfect pass into his path and lashed the ball low past Dominik Livakovic in the home goal.

Croatia came close to the equaliser when Gvardiol cushioned a header towards Andrej Kramaric and the latter's shot crashed into the post and away to safety.

Kristijan Jakic's cross to the back post was perfect for Gvardiol to beat Portugal goalkeeper Jose Sa from close range and level the score, his third international goal and first since the 2022 World Cup.

Livakovic produced a brilliant point-blank save to deny Nuno Mendes a winner, while at the other end Sa made a fingertip stop as Ante Budimir seemed sure to score from six yards and the latter also hit the post late on.

Meanwhile Denmark secured a Nations League quarter-final spot on Monday thanks to a 0-0 draw away to Serbia, who missed out on the knockout rounds and had defender Strahinja Pavlovic sent off late in a game they dominated.

Denmark finished second in Group A4 on eight points, eight adrift of Spain and two ahead of Serbia, with Switzerland already relegated and finishing bottom on two points.

Despite a good start by Denmark, who needed at least a point to secure second spot, Serbia quickly took charge and bombarded the visiting defence in the first half but goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel and his rearguard stood firm.

The home side continued to attack after the break as they fired in a succession of crosses but they tired as the game wore on, allowing the Danes to try to hit them on the counter.

Dusan Vlahovic missed a great chance to put Serbia ahead in the 80th minute, blazing his shot high when he really should have scored, much to the disappointment of the packed crowd.

As the tension reached boiling point, Pavlovic was booked in the 90th minute and sent off when he

picked up a second yellow card five minutes into stoppage time as Serbia failed to get the goal they needed to go through at Denmark's expense.

Meanwhile a late penalty from Bryan Zaragoza secured Spain a 3-2 win over Switzerland in their final Nations League Group A4 game on Monday, with the Spaniards guaranteed top spot before kick off and the Swiss already confirmed as relegated.

Holders Spain finished with 16 points and are through to the quarter-finals while bottom side Switzerland end on two. Denmark also made the quarter-finals with a 0-0 draw in Serbia to secure second place.

In a game with little to play for, manager Luis de la Fuente fielded a completely different starting 11 to the one which beat Denmark 2-1 on Friday, and the European champions showed their strength in depth as a relatively inexperienced side got the job done.

Spain opened the scoring in the 32nd minute when Yerey Pino fired home after Pedri had his penalty saved, before the Swiss levelled through Joel Monteiro in the 63rd, but the hosts were back in front five minutes later when Bryan Gil netted.

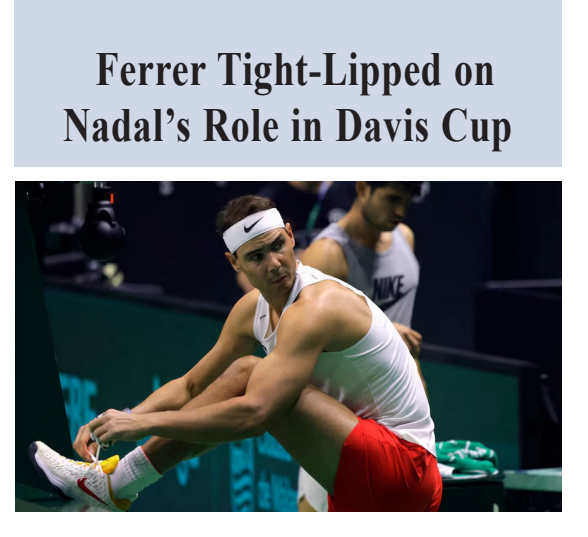
Switzerland thought they had snatched a draw when Andi Zeqiri netted a penalty five minutes from time but another spot kick in added time earned the Spanish side the win.

Spain's attacking play lacked its usual intensity and in the early stages, Nico Williams rounded two Swiss players to reach the edge of the area but with no movement from his teammates opted for a shot which sailed over the bar.

Alvaro Morata was taken down by Ricardo Rodriguez for the first penalty. Pedri's spot kick was parried away by Swiss keeper Yvon Mvogo and Williams rebounded effort was blocked but Pino pounced on the edge of the six-yard box to score.

The game livened up after the break and substitute Joel Monteiro charged through the home defence before slotting the ball to the net.

The Swiss joy was short-lived as Gil, only on the pitch a few minutes, battled for possession in the area before firing past Mvogo. However, when Spain conceded a late penalty, it looked like the visitors would end a disappointing campaign in style.



Ferrer Tight-Lipped on Nadal's Role in Davis Cup

MALAGA (Dispatches) - Spain's Davis Cup captain David Ferrer will not reveal whether Rafael Nadal will feature in the quarter-final against Netherlands until the 11th hour, with fans eager to get a final glimpse of the Mallorcan in action before he bows out from the sport.

Ferrer has until one hour before the first singles match starts at 5pm local time to announce his line-up, which will be spearheaded by world number three Carlos Alcaraz in the singles.

The 38-year-old Nadal, who last month announced he was putting an end to his glittering tennis career after the Davis Cup final, said earlier he was not dwelling on his impending retirement and only focused on helping Spain claim the trophy this week should he be called into action in the southern Spanish city of Malaga.

"I see (Nadal) doing well, after a period of inactivity he is improving day by day, without a doubt, which is the most important thing," Ferrer told a press conference before Spain's final practice session.

"As for him playing singles, I don't know, I don't know yet... We'll announce the team tomorrow and we'll see. I may have decided already, but I won't say until the last moment."

Nadal, the winner of 22 Grand Slam titles, exchanged shots with Alcaraz for eight intense games during a practice session that lasted about an hour. They both looked sharp and aggressive on the indoor hard court, with coaches Carlos Moya and Juan Carlos Ferrero on hand to offer them pointers.

The 21-year-old Alcaraz, who already owns four Grand Slam titles and reached the doubles quarter-finals at the Paris Olympics with Nadal, praised his team mate several times following blistering exchanges.

"For me, it was a dream to play with Rafa, and the doubles was very special. To represent Spain in the Davis Cup, to be with him, to share many moments with him in his last time on court, it's going to be very special for me and for everybody," Alcaraz told a press conference.

Magic Eclipse Suns, Run Win Streak to Six Games

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Franz Wagner matched a season high with 32 points as the visiting Orlando Magic won their sixth straight game, beating the Phoenix Suns 109-99 on Monday.

Anthony Black posted season bests of 20 points and nine assists, and Goga Bitadze had a season-high 17 points to go with 10 rebounds for Orlando, which led by as many as 19 points and held its opponent under 100 points for the sixth straight game.

Phoenix trailed 94-78 before battling back to cut the deficit to 98-91 on Devin Booker's 3-pointer with 3:36 remaining. Orlando answered with a 7-2 run to seal the victory.

Jalen Suggs chipped in 12 points for the Magic, who improved to 2-6 on the road, compared to 7-0 at home.

The Suns played their sixth straight game without Kevin Durant and the fourth consecutive minus Bradley Beal. Both All-Stars are out with left calf strains.

Tyus Jones led Phoenix with 18 points and eight assists. Booker and Grayson Allen had 17 points apiece, Oso Ighodaro scored a career-high 12 in his first-career start, and Josh Okogie had 11.

Orlando scored the game's first seven points and led 26-22 at the end of the first quarter.

After missing 10 of their first 11 attempts from 3-point range to start the game, the Magic made three straight triples to move ahead 45-34 with 6:03 left in the second quarter.

Wagner's 3-pointer capped a 10-2 run and put the Magic ahead



64-48 at halftime. Wagner and Bitadze had 15 points apiece in the opening half.

Orlando extended its lead to 67-48 on Suggs' trey early in the third quarter, and Black hit a 3-pointer with three seconds left to give the Magic an 84-68 lead at the end of the period.

Wagner has scored at least 20 points in eight straight games for Orlando, which shot 51.3 percent from the field and 11 of 29 (37.9 percent) from beyond the arc.

Mason Plumlee had 11 rebounds for the Suns, who shot 29.3 percent (12 of 41) from 3-point range.

Magic center Wendell Carter Jr. missed his eighth straight game with left foot plantar fasciitis.

Meanwhile RJ Barrett scored a season-best 39 points, Jakob Poeltl added 30 points and 15 rebounds and the Toronto Raptors defeated the visiting Indiana Pacers 130-119 on Monday.

Barrett, who pulled down nine rebounds, scored 15 points in the fourth quarter.

Grady Dick added 15 points for the Raptors, who ended a seven-game losing streak. Davion Mitchell and Ochai Agbaji chipped in with 11 points apiece.

Former Raptor Pascal Siakam had 25 points and 10 rebounds for the Pacers, who opened a three-game road trip. Benedict Mathurin added 28 points and Obi Toppin scored 19 points. Tyrese Haliburton had 16 points and five steals while T.J. McConnell put up 10 points.

Indiana's Jarace Walker (six points) and rookie Enrique Freeman (three points) both started an NBA game for the first

time. The Pacers have lost three of four.

Toronto led 34-27 after the first quarter. Siakam grabbed a defensive rebound and produced a running layup at the other end to give the Pacers their first lead at 41-40 with 7:33 remaining in the second quarter.

Toronto answered with nine straight points. The gap reached 18 points with 1:26 left in the period on Barrett's layup. Indiana finished the first half on an 8-2 surge to cut the deficit to 69-57.

Italy Dig Deep to Beat Swiatek's Poland 2-1

MALAGA (Dispatches) - Italian Olympic gold medalists Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini beat Katarzyna Kawa and Iga Swiatek to secure a hard-fought, thrilling 2-1 victory over Poland on Monday and send Italy into the Billie Jean King Cup final for the second consecutive year.

Lucia Bronzetti put the Italians ahead with a 6-4 7-6(3) singles win over Magda Linette but an imperious Swiatek almost worked her magic to lead Poland to what would be a historic win by beating Paolini 3-6 6-4 6-4 in singles and coming inches close to a comeback victory in a breath-taking doubles that went into the early hours of Tuesday.

Paolini, who has never beaten world number two Swiatek in their three previous attempts, including a 6-2 6-1 defeat to the Polish juggernaut in the French Open final in June, started well and won the first set.

But in two evenly matched and very similar sets between the two-highest ranked players in the tournament, Swiatek was clutch



when it mattered the most and broke Paolini's serve in the 10th game to seal her victory in a thrilling 2 hours and 36 minutes, forcing the doubles clash in southern Spanish city of Malaga.

It was a rare doubles performance for the five-time Grand Slam singles champion Swiatek, who played her first Billie Jean King Cup doubles match since 2019 on Saturday, when she and Kawa beat Czech Republic in the quarter-finals to advance to the final four for the first time.

And on Monday, the Polish pair putted on a great fight against the Paris 2024 Olympic champions Errani and Paolini.

The Italians saved three set points in the first set, and rallied from a 5-1 deficit in set two, to finally close a 7-5, 7-5 win and advance to the final for a seventh time and second year in a row, having lost to Canada in 2023.

"It was tough, the intensity was insane, I was so tired but I had to give it all to my team and my country," Paolini said.

Matt Eberflus, Bears Cry Foul to NFL on Game-Deciding FG Block



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Pictures and video point to a clear penalty on the Packers' game-deciding blocked field goal on Sunday. Chicago Bears head coach Matt Eberflus said the day after Green Bay escaped with a 20-19 win.

Eberflus said the Bears are sending a report and video of Chicago's field-goal try as time expired to the NFL to repeat the complaint he shared with officials in real time on Karl Brooks' block of Cairo Santos try for a game-winning 46-yarder.

"(The Packers) were on our longsnapper," Eberflus said Monday, a violation of the NFL rule that defenses must leave the snapper "uncovered" on placement kicks.

The result of the play was Green Bay holding on for a 20-19 victory extending the Packers' streak of wins over the Bears to 11 under head coach Matt LaFleur. Eberflus is 0-5 against the Packers and the Bears are 4-6 after starting the season 4-2.

Brooks said he only got his middle finger on the ball and was concerned upon contact that he didn't slow the ball down enough. The play was the focus of special teams coach Rich Bisaccia in last week's practices according to LaFleur. LaFleur said Bisaccia told the team he "wouldn't understand" if they didn't come out of the Week 11 game at Soldier Field with a blocked kick because of Santos' penchant for lower, line-drive angles on longer kicks.

"We were going to block it," Green Bay defensive lineman Kenny Clark said of what the Packers discussed on the final play. "We talked about TJ (Slaton) or KB (Brooks) blocking the kick all week. They've got holes in their field goal protection and a couple of them they got close. So we've been talking about that all week. It was a problem, so, coach Rich has been telling them all week and we ended up getting one."

Eberflus repeated Monday that he didn't regret not running another play to shorten the length of the field goal try on second down. Santos has never missed a field goal from 40 yards or closer, making all 71 of his tries from that distance with the Bears.

"We didn't want to risk a fumble or a holding penalty. We felt good about where we were at on the field to kick the field goal," Eberflus said Monday.