

IRAN NEWS

Students and Staff of Tehran University Have Held a Rally in Support of Growing Protests on U.S. Campuses Where Students Have Erected Encampments to Demand Action to End Israel's War on Gaza

2 DOMESTIC

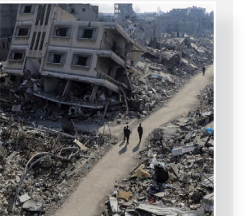


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Iran Cannot Be Sanctioned; Plots to Isolate Tehran Failed



TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says Iran cannot be sanctioned and Western plots to isolate the country have failed thanks to the nation's steady resolve. Raisi made the remarks at the opening of the 6th export potential exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Expo 2024) in the capital Tehran on Saturday. "This exhibit shows that Iran is unsanctionable and sanctions against the country have never yielded any results thanks to the strong will of the people and will not be successful after this either," the Iranian president said. "Also, the evil plots to isolate the Islamic Republic of Iran have never come to fruition and will never come to fruition. Underlining that sanctions are regarded not just as a method of oppression against one nation but all nations, Raisi said, "If a nation is deprived of achieving its goals and amenities by creating constraints, this is not an injustice to one region but to all nations and regions." The president termed sanctions as a kind of non-military war and said the Iranian nation managed to overcome the bans by relying on its capabilities as acknowledged by the US administration and the White House, which admitted to the failure of the anti-Iran pressure campaign. Elsewhere in his speech, Raisi pointed to the Islamic Republic's localization of technology over the past years and said the West's attempts to deter Iran's progress by assassinating its scientists are in vain. "The West is trying to prevent us and the region from achieving new technologies, and if we gain that technology, they make sure that the fulcrum will be at their disposal so that they can continue to dominate," the Iranian chief executive said. "By the grace of God and thanks to our young scientists, many sciences in our country have become localized and it is not possible for them to take indigenous knowledge out of our country even by assassinating scientists," he added. Touching on the country's level of output and export, Raisi said, "The power of production and export is not less than military power. What can make a country strong in addition to the military power is the power of production and economy and the ability to export."

IRGC Prevented ISIL Penetration to Europe, U.S.



TEHRAN (MNA) - If it were not for the sacrifices of IRGC and its martyred anti-terrorist advisors in the region, ISIL terrorism would have penetrated the back door of the European Parliament, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman said. Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani says the country is a key partner in efforts to fight terrorism and to ensure peace and stability in the world.

Kanaani made the remarks in a statement issued on Saturday in response to new sanctions imposed on Iranian individuals and entities by the United States, Britain, Canada as well as to an anti-Iran communique issued by the European Union. The sanctions and the communique came nearly two weeks after Iran carried out a series of drone and missile attacks on Israel in response to the regime's April 1 attack on the Iranian consulate in Syria's Damascus. Kanaani said in his statement that resorting to sanctions to undermine Iran's defense capabilities would never dent the country's resolve to boost its national power, adding that the sanctions would even backfire by giving Iran an opportunity to reach self-sufficiency in production and procurement of its own defense equipment. He also slammed the EU for keeping silent on the Israeli regime's attack on the Iranian diplomatic mission in Syria which prompted Iran's military response. The spokesman rejected the EU's claims about the supply of Iranian weapons for use in the Ukraine war, adding that lack of resolve in the US and EU is the main cause for protracted wars in Ukraine and in Gaza. Kanaani condemned calls within the EU parliament for blacklisting Iran's elite military force the IRGC, saying that sacrifices carried out by members of the force have been a key element in preventing terrorism from reaching the Western world.

Yemeni Armed Forces Strike British Oil Tanker, Shoot Down U.S. MQ-9 Drone



SANAA (Dispatches) - The spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces says it has carried out new operations against American and British targets in retaliation for their aggression on the country. Brigadier General Yahya Saree said that Yemen's naval forces struck a British oil tanker in the Red Sea with missiles. Saree also said the military also shot down an American MQ-9 drone in Sa'ada province. He added that the new operations were also a show of solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, amid the Israeli genocide there. "The Yemeni Armed Forces salute all the people of Yemen for their faithful response to the call of the fighter leader Sayyed Abdulmalik Badr El-Din Al-Houthi, may Allah protect him, in their unprecedented large-scale interaction in support of our oppressed brothers in the Gaza Strip, affirming support for the Armed Forces in their military operations against the 'Israeli' enemy and against the American-British aggression supporting it in the Red and Arabian Seas and the Indian Ocean," Saree said. He stressed that the Yemeni armed forces will continue operations in the Red and Arabian Seas as well as the Indian Ocean until the Western-backed Israeli genocide comes to a halt. Since

the start of the brutal campaign in Gaza, the regime has killed more than 34,300 Palestinians and injured over 77,000 others. It has cut off fuel, electricity, food and water to the more than two million Palestinians living there. The Yemeni Armed Forces have been targeting Israeli vessels or those "associated" with the occupying regime in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea since October 7, 2023. The regime ignited its bloody war machine in the besieged Palestinian territory on that October day in response to Operation Al-Aqsa Storm conducted by the resistance movement Hamas. The maritime attacks have forced some of the world's biggest shipping and oil companies to suspend transit through one of the world's most important maritime trade routes. Tankers are instead adding thousands of miles to international shipping routes by sailing around the continent of Africa rather than going through the Suez Canal. The pro-Palestine maritime campaign has also prompted airstrikes by the US and its allies on Yemen - in violation of the Yemeni sovereignty and international law. In consequence, Yemen's armed forces have declared US and British vessels as legitimate targets.

Israel Root Cause of All Tensions in Region



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has underlined the need for cessation of the Israeli regime's genocidal war on Gaza and respect for the rights of the oppressed Palestinians there, calling the occupying regime the root cause of all conflicts in the region. Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks during a telephone conversation with his Portuguese counterpart Paulo Rangel on Friday night. The top Iranian diplomat reiterated the need for an end to Israeli military offensives against the Gaza Strip and observation of the inalienable rights of Palestinians, emphasizing that the Israeli regime is the root cause of all problems and the precarious situation in West Asia. Amir-Abdollahian also said the crew of a seized Portuguese-flagged ship linked to Israel have been granted consular access and are expected to be freed. "The humanitarian issue of the release of the ship's crew is of serious concern to us," he stated. The MSC Aries, operated by Zodiac Maritime, is owned by Israeli real estate, energy, technology and shipping magnate Eyal Ofer. Zodiac Maritime is part of the Israeli billionaire's Zodiac Group. The Portuguese-flagged ship was impounded by the Sepah Navy Special Force (SNSF) in a helicopter operation and rappelling of forces on the ship's deck on April 13. For his part, Rangel demanded an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and stated that the Portuguese government supports the formation of an independent sovereign Palestinian state and calls upon all regional countries to help ease tensions in the region. The two sides also pointed to the history of good and long-standing relations between Tehran and Lisbon and exchanged views on the further development of such ties. At least 34,305 people have been killed by the Israeli military across Gaza since October 7 last year, when the regime launched the war on the besieged territory in response to Palestinian resistance movements' Operation Al-Aqsa Storm. Women and children comprise more than 70 percent of the victims of the war, which has also wounded as many as 77,293 others.

Iranian Attack Shows Israeli Dependence on Allies



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Ivo Daalder told Politico that Netanyahu changed his mind about hitting Iran when US President Joe Biden called and told him the US would not engage in any counter-strike on Tehran. The Iranian strike on the Israeli occupation has revealed that "Israel" relies on military backing from the United States and other allies more than it would like to admit, according to former US Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder. Iran fired hundreds of drones and missiles at "Israel" on April 13 in retaliation for a fatal raid on the Iranian embassy in Syria on April 1. The US claimed to have downed around one-third of done targets, while the United Kingdom, France, and Jordan downed a few more. "Israel's" military and political leaders began discussing a potential new strike as soon as Iran initiated its retaliatory strike, even before the extent of the damage caused by the drones was known. Despite initially claiming no damage was recorded, a senior American official told ABC News that at least nine Iranian missiles penetrated Israeli air defenses and hit two Israeli air bases. Daalder told Politico on Friday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu initially wanted to retaliate with a large-scale strike, but he settled for a "signaling strike" almost a week later. "The reality is that what happened demonstrated just how much the effectiveness of Israel's anti-missile defenses depends on the U.S. and the cooperation of other countries," Daalder wrote. Daalder divulged that Netanyahu changed his mind about hitting Iran when US President Joe Biden called and told him the US would not engage in any counter-strike on Tehran amid concerns of escalation in the region. "What strike?" with a snort when the FM was asked about his stance on the reportedly Israeli drone attack that targeted the Iranian city of Isfahan and whether Iran would retaliate.

Tehran, Moscow Need to Boost Defense Cooperation to Improve Regional Peace

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani has stated Iran and Russia should promote defense and military cooperation to improve regional security and stability. Ashtiani made the remarks in a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu on the sidelines of the 21st meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Defense Ministers in Astana, Kazakhstan, on Friday. He said Tehran and Moscow should oppose unilateralism in global issues. He thanked Russia for condemning Israel's illegal and unlawful airstrikes against Iran's diplomatic premises in the Syrian capital of Damascus on April 1 and expressing support for Tehran's legitimate response. "Terrorist attacks in Russia and Iran are the outcome of support of Western countries, especially the United States, for terrorist groups," Ashtiani emphasized. On April 1, the Israeli regime carried out terrorist airstrikes on the consular section of Iran's embassy in the Syrian capital, which killed two generals of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi and General Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, as well as five of their accompanying officers. In retaliation, the IRGC targeted the occupied territories on April 13 with a barrage of drones and missiles. The retaliatory strikes, dubbed Operation True Promise, inflicted damage on Israeli military bases across the occupied Palestinian territories. Elsewhere in the conversation, the Iranian defense chief warned that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and some Western countries are taking steps in line with the policy of expansion to the East. He urged the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states to use the body's capacities to thwart common threats. For his part, the Russian defense minister slammed Israel's attacks on Iran's diplomatic premises in Damascus and said Tehran's response was in accordance with the legitimate right of self-defense. Ashtiani and Shoigu also hailed the successful experience of Iran and Russia in the fight against terrorism in the region and called for the expansion of cooperation to counter terrorist threats, separatism and extremism. The Iranian and Russian defense chiefs emphasized that the developments in the South Caucasus are important to the two countries' interests, noting that the presence of extra-regional powers in this region is detrimental to common interests. They said that the 3+3 format, which is being implemented in the presence of all the countries of the Caucasus region, is an appropriate framework for solving problems, according to a statement by Iran's Defense Ministry. The 3+3 format includes three southern Caucasus countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) and three neighboring countries (Russia, Turkey and Iran). Iran was one of the countries that proposed the formation of a 3+3 group in line with its foreign policy of resolving problems, differences and challenges faced by countries in the region.



IRAN NEWS



\$1.8b Technical Engineering Services Exported in 2 years

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The chairman of the Board of Directors of the Iran Water Industry Federation said the country exported \$1.8 billion worth of technical and engineering services over the past two years. Stressing the importance of exporting technical and engineering services, Reza Haj Karim said giant steps have been taken in the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi in the field as compared to the previous years. Domestic knowledge-based companies have a high potential to export technical and engineering services and can do even better with due support from the government, he underscored, IRNA reported. Haj Karim further noted that Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and East Asian countries are among those whose economic growth is higher than the world average so this Asian market can be a lucrative market for Iranian domestic companies. As a leading country in the water and electricity industry, Iran stands in the first rank in the region in the export of technical and engineering services in this industry, and this shows the high technical and engineering knowledge and ability of Iranian specialists and companies.

Iran Expects over \$1b Contract to Be Inked at Iran Expo 2024



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Over \$1 billion worth of trade contracts are expected to be signed between Iran and other countries at the 6th edition of the Export Potentials Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran, known as Iran EXPO 2024, the head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) said. Speaking at a news conference of Iran EXPO 2024, Mehdi Zeyghami noted that the 2nd Iran-Africa International Economic Cooperation Summit will be held on April 26 and the exhibition will be held at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on April 27 with the participation of high-ranking officials of Iran and officials from various other countries. The expo will run through May 1, 2024, he noted. The representatives of 80 countries will take part at the 6th Export Potentials Exhibition of Iran, he added. In addition, more than 2,000 foreign traders and businesspersons are predicted to visit the exhibition, the TPOI chief added. He went on to say that Saudi Arabia will partake in the exhibition with a high-ranking economic delegation. More than \$1 billion worth of contracts was concluded between Iranian and foreign traders in the previous edition of the exhibition which led to the export of products from the country, he said. In this year's exhibition, it is predicted that over \$1 billion worth of products will be exported from the country overseas due to the participation of the high number of traders in this prestigious export event, the deputy industry minister added.



Tehran, Colombo Ink 5 Cooperation Documents

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Senior officials of Iran and Sri Lanka have signed five cooperation documents in the various fields in the presence of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Sri Lankan counterpart Ranil Wickremesinghe. President Raisi arrived in Sri Lanka on Wednesday on the second leg of his regional tour, which took him to Pakistan earlier, IRNA reported. In continuation of the visit by President Raisi and the high-ranking political and economic delegation accompanying him to Sri Lanka, five cooperation documents were signed between the two countries in the fields of culture, cinema, tourism, and science and technology. Earlier on Wednesday, President Raisi said the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to assist Sri Lanka on the path of progress. Raisi made the remarks at the inauguration ceremony of the Uma Oya Multipurpose Project, one of the largest irrigation projects in Sri Lanka, on Wednesday. "What is more important than the inauguration of the project is the realization of the concerted efforts of the two countries that are seeking to enhance the well-being of their

nations further," he said. The project manifested the solidarity between the two Asian countries, he further noted. Raisi voiced Iran's readiness to share with Sri Lanka the knowledge of its scientists from 45 years of experience. Terming Sri Lanka as an independent country, he said the expansion of bilateral ties could bring about a bright future for both sides. The Islamic Republic, with its technical and engineering capabilities, is carrying out large electricity and water projects in over 20 countries, he noted. The Uma Oya Multipurpose Project, implemented through the collaboration of Iranian experts, aims to alleviate water scarcity in the southeastern region of Sri Lanka by redirecting an annual average of 145 million cubic meters of excess water from the Uma Oya basin to the Kirindi Oya basin. The project is located in southeastern Sri Lanka, 200 kilometers east of the capital Colombo, in a relatively deprived and arid region. It includes the construction of two dams, a water transmission tunnel, and two 60-MW underground hydroelectric power plants.

Iran, Pakistan Eye Boosting Trade Exchanges Fivefold



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - High-ranking officials from Iran and Pakistan stressed increasing bilateral trade fivefold. The trade exchanges between Iran and Pakistan exceeded \$2 billion in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended March 19, 2024), showing a 38-percent growth compared to a year before. Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazpash, who is the head of the Iran-Pakistan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, in a joint meeting with Pakistani officials emphasized boosting annual trade between the two countries to \$10 billion. According to the existing statistics, the trade exchanges between Iran and Pakistan increased from \$1 billion in 2002 to more than \$2 billion in the last Iranian calendar year, registering a 38 and a 23 percent in terms of value and volume respectively, IRNA reported. Promoting the level of trade between the two countries, especially in the field of transportation, and also the development of infrastructures were put on the agenda as one of the fundamental principles of trade and economic activity during the bilateral meetings between Iran's roads minister and his Pakistani counterpart which promises a considerable growth in bilateral trade activities. Heading a high-ranking political and economic delegation, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi paid an official visit to Pakistan on Monday morning.

Iran, Turkmenistan to Develop Cooperation in Energy Sector



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran and Turkmenistan will expand their cooperation in the fields of electricity and energy. A high-ranking delegation from Turkmenistan has arrived in Tehran to pursue the development of cooperation in the electricity and energy industries, the director general of the foreign trade office of Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company (TAVANIR) said. Mehrdad Eqlimi added that an expert-level meeting was held at the venue of the company with the aim of expanding relations between the two countries in the relevant fields. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged their views regarding the expansion of the common capacities and the process of facilitation of financing the joint venture project for the construction operation of 3rd electricity transmission line between the two states, he said. Once the said electricity transmission line is launched, the electricity connection capacity between the two neighbors will increase threefold, Eqlimi emphasized, ISNA reported. An expert-level meeting was also held between the two sides for developing and strengthening cooperation with the neighboring states in the field of exporting electricity equipment and technical and engineering services, he continued.



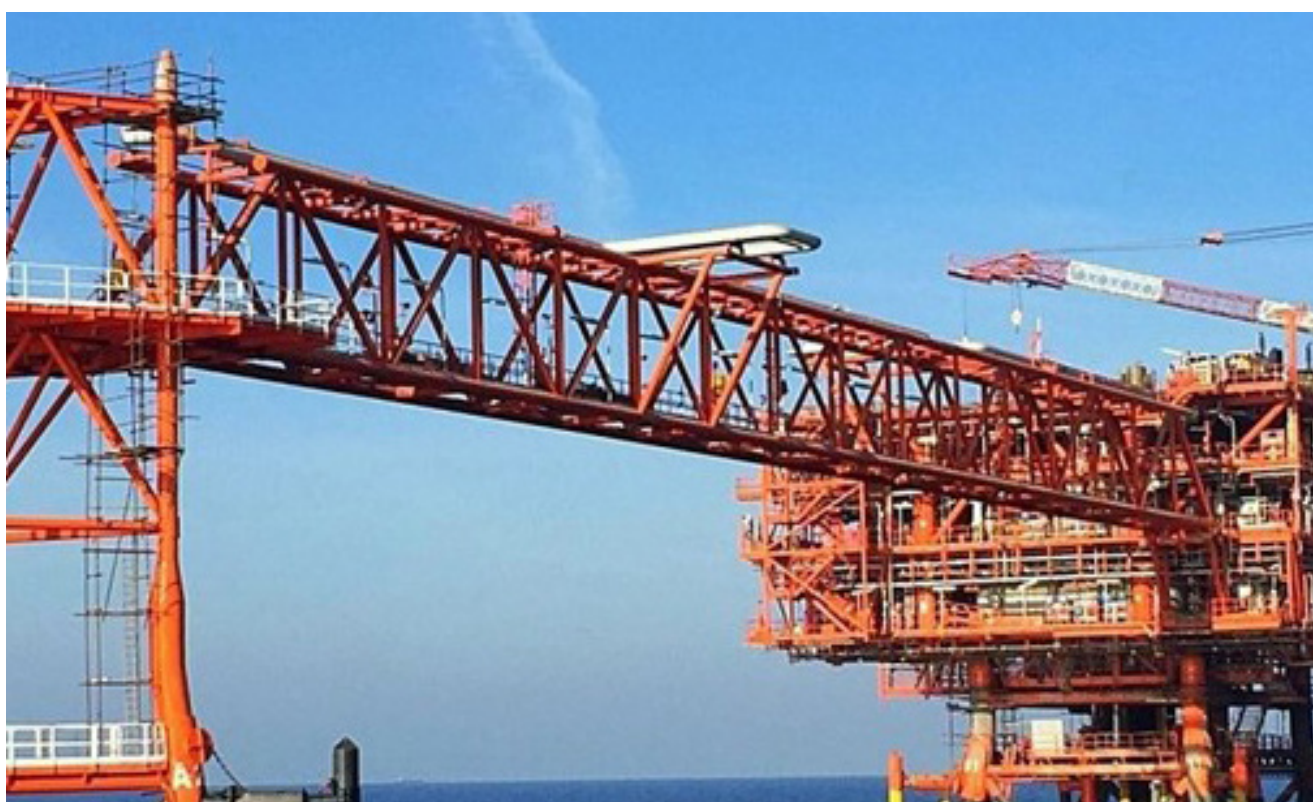
Tehran, Islamabad Private Sectors Call for Finalizing FTA

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The private sectors of Iran and Pakistan have stressed the need for finalizing a free trade agreement between the two neighboring countries. Hamed Asgari, the director of international affairs of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA), and Atif Ikram Sheikh, the president of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), discussed a wide range of bilateral issues in a meeting in Pakistan. Speaking during the meeting, the Iranian side urged the need for further joint investments by both the state and private sectors of Iran and Pakistan. The creation of a joint free zone with the incentives and support of both governments will be an additional incentive for further cooperation, Asgari said. He also highlighted the urgency of making improvements in the transportation and customs sectors, calling for removing tariff obstacles and problems hindering the money transfer. Asgari further underscored the significance of cutting tariffs on bilateral trade and called for a free trade agreement between the two neighbors to be finalized at the earliest.

Iran Refutes Kuwait, Jordan's Statement on Arash Gas Field

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesman rejected a joint statement about the Arash gas field issued by Kuwait and Jordan during the Kuwaiti emir's recent trip to Amman, reasserting Iran's right to exploit the field that is shared with its southwestern neighbors. Reacting to Kuwait's claim to Arash field, Nasser Kanaani said on Wednesday that making a unilateral claim in such statements does not create any right for the claimant. Pointing to the previous talks between Iran and Kuwait, he advised the Kuwaiti officials to avoid the wrong path of media hype on the matter and instead return to technical and legal negotiations, which would be the best and most appropriate way to deal with the issue. The spokesman noted that based on its historical rights and previous bilateral talks, Iran is ready to continue negotiations to come up with a framework that entails respect for mutual interests. Underscoring the principle of good faith in regional interactions, Kanaani

stressed the need for the third parties to avoid interference in the issue. Undoubtedly, relevant governments can reach a necessary agreement in light of friendly cooperation and in line with mutual interests while keeping away from media controversies, he added. The dispute over the Arash gas field dates back to the 1960s when Iran and Kuwait were awarded overlapping offshore concessions for the field following its discovery. The dispute has undergone several rounds of assertions and rebuttals by the involved parties, becoming a friction point among the three neighboring states of the Persian Gulf. Iran says dialogue is the fundamental means to resolve the dispute. The Arash gas field is estimated to contain reserves of 20 trillion cubic feet of gas, potentially yielding a daily output of one billion cubic feet. Some studies show approximately 40% of the field lies within Iranian maritime boundaries, Press TV reported.



Junta-led Burkina Faso Suspends BBC, Voice of America for Two Weeks

OUAGADOUGOU (Dispatches) - Burkina Faso has blocked local internet access to the BBC and Voice of America after they aired a rights report accusing the army of attacks on civilians in its battle against jihadists. The British and U.S. broadcasters are the latest international media organizations to be targeted since Captain Ibrahim Traore seized power in the West African country in a September 2022 coup. Burkina's communications authority, the CSC, announced late on Thursday that it had "directed" internet service providers to suspend access to the BBC, VOA and Human Rights Watch from Burkina territory for two weeks. It said the decision had been taken because BBC and the VOA had aired and also published reports on their digital platforms "accusing the Burkina army of abuses against the civilian population". The CSC said the report contained "hasty and biased declarations without tangible proof against the Burkina army". HRW said Thursday that soldiers in Burkina Faso's jihadist-hit north had killed at least 223 villagers, including 36 children, in two revenge attacks on February 25. Burkina authorities, contacted by AFP, have not commented on the accusations.



North Korea Accuses U.S. of Politicizing Human Rights Issues



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday called for additional air defense systems to be sent to Kyiv to help protect against Russian strikes, adding that a pause in U.S. funding had helped Moscow seize the initiative. Zelenskyy's comments come just days after Congress emerged from a half-year of deadlock to approve a \$61 billion aid package for Ukraine. On Friday, the Pentagon announced that it will buy \$6 billion worth of new weapons for Ukraine including interceptors for the Patriot air defense system, the single largest assistance package President Joe Biden's administration has provided. "This year, Russian jets (have) already used more than 9,000 guided aerial bombs against Ukraine and we need the ability to shoot down the air combat aircraft so that they do not approach our positions and borders," Zelenskyy said at the start of a virtual meeting led by the United States on helping arm Ukraine. The first such meeting, known as the Ukraine Contact Group, was held two years ago on Friday. "While we were waiting for a decision on the American support, the Russian army managed to seize the initiative on the battlefield," Zelenskyy said. "We can still now, not only stabilize the front, but also move forward achieving our Ukrainian goals in the war," he added. After the meeting, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he would ask allies to accept more risk.



Hamas Receives Israel's Response to Its Ceasefire Proposal

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Hamas said it had received on Saturday Israel's official response to its latest ceasefire proposal and will study it before submitting its reply, the group's deputy Gaza chief said in a statement. "Hamas has received today the official response of the Zionist occupation to the proposal presented to the Egyptian and the Qatari mediators on April 13," Khalil Al-Hayya, who is currently based in Qatar, said in a statement published by the group. After more than six months of war with Israel in Gaza, the negotiations remain deadlocked, with Hamas sticking to its demands that any agreement must end the war. An Egyptian delegation visited Israel for discussion with Israeli officials on Friday, looking for a way to restart talks to end the conflict and return remaining hostages taken when Hamas fighters stormed into Israeli towns on Oct. 7, an official briefed on the meetings said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Israel had no new proposals to make, although it was willing to consider a limited truce in which 33 hostages would be released by Hamas, instead of the 40 previously under discussion. On Thursday, the United States and 17 other countries appealed to Hamas to release all of its hostages as a pathway to end

the crisis. Hamas has vowed not to relent to international pressure but in a statement it issued on Friday it said it was "open to any ideas or proposals that take into account the needs and rights of our people". However, it stuck to its key demands that Israel has rejected, and criticized the joint statement issued by the U.S and others for not calling for a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said on Friday he saw fresh momentum in talks to end the war and return the remaining hostages. Citing two Israeli officials, Axios reported that Israel told the Egyptian mediators on Friday that it was ready to give hostage negotiations "one last chance" to reach a deal with Hamas before moving forward with an invasion of Rafah, the last refuge for around a million Palestinians who fled Israeli forces further north in Gaza earlier in the war. Meanwhile, in Rafah, Palestinian health officials said an Israeli air strike on a house killed at least five people and wounded others. Hamas fighters stormed into Israeli towns on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and capturing 253 hostages. Israel has sworn to annihilate Hamas in an onslaught that has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians.

UN Ends, Suspends Probes Into 5 UNRWA Staffers Accused by Israel



UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - A UN probe into Israeli allegations that 19 members of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees participated in the October 7 Hamas attacks has closed one case due to the absence of any evidence from Israel and suspended four others, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Friday. UNRWA was swept into controversy in January when Israel accused 12 of its 30,000 employees of being involved in the shocking cross-border attack, which led to the deaths of around 1,160 people - mostly civilians - according to an AFP count based on official Israeli figures. The UN immediately fired the implicated staff members and launched an internal investigation to assess the agency's neutrality, led by former French foreign minister Catherine Colonna in recent weeks. The UN received information on seven additional UNRWA staffers allegedly involved in the attack, leading to new investigations. Dujarric said that of the initial group of 12 UNRWA members, one case was closed "as no evidence was provided by Israel to support the allegations against the staff member." "We are exploring corrective administrative action to be taken in that person's case," he said. In addition, investigations into three other staffers were suspended, "as the information provided by Israel is not sufficient." Regarding the seven fresh cases, one of them was also suspended pending additional evidence from Israel. The other accused staffers remain under investigation, Dujarric said. An interim report published in March found that "UNRWA has in place a significant number of mechanisms and procedures to ensure compliance with the Humanitarian Principle of neutrality." But investigators "also identified critical areas that still need to be addressed," it said. Some 15 countries including the United States, Britain, Germany and Japan suspended funding to UNRWA following the Israeli allegations. Canada and Sweden, which were among those states, have since resumed sending aid to the agency.

Erdogan's White House Talks With Biden Postponed



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - A rare meeting between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his U.S. counterpart Joe Biden at the White House has been postponed, a Turkish official said Friday, amid tensions over the Gaza war. The talks, previously scheduled for May 9, would be the first White House meeting between the two leaders, who last met on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Lithuania in July. "The visit planned for May 9 was postponed because of a change in Erdogan's programme," the official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. "A new date will be decided" after an exchange between the two presidents, the official added. Erdogan's planned visit was never officially announced by the Turkish presidency but a Turkish official told AFP in March that it would take place on May 9. The NATO allies are seeking to rebuild ties strained over a number of disputes including Turkey's delayed approval of Sweden's accession to the NATO alliance. "The postponement is a pretty big deal, since Erdogan has been trying - for three years now - to get invited to the White House to meet US President Biden," said Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Program at The Washington Institute. Erdogan's harsh criticism of Israel's devastating response to the October 7 attack by Hamas is also a thorn in bilateral ties. He has often compared Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler and accused the United States of sponsoring the "genocide" of Palestinians. In an address in Istanbul on

Friday, Erdogan called Netanyahu "the butcher of Gaza." "Netanyahu, like villains before him, has etched his name in history with shame as the butcher of Gaza," he said while also criticizing Washington for its "unconditional military and diplomatic support" to Israel. Erdogan lashed out at the U.S. Senate for passing an aid package that earmarks \$13 billion for Israel. Erdogan's AKP government announced export restrictions on Israel early this month, after the party suffered a historic defeat in the March 31 local elections, losing control of many cities. "Not to upset Biden ahead of the visit, Erdogan had been holding off regarding harsher steps targeting Israel. Now, all bets are off," Cagaptay said. Erdogan met in Istanbul this month with Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, who has been a frequent visitor to Hamas - designated a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and Israel - is a rival of the Fatah faction that rules the semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank. Erdogan on Friday reiterated his position, saying: "We cannot be among those who label Hamas as a terror organisation just because Israel and its Western supporters want it that way." He said Ankara considers Hamas "brothers who defend their homeland against occupiers". Erdogan met with Biden's predecessor Donald Trump in the Oval Office at the White House in 2019.



North Korea Accuses U.S. of Politicizing Human Rights Issues

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea accused the United States on Saturday of politicizing human rights in the East Asian country, denouncing what it called political provocation and conspiracy. Pyongyang will make stern and decisive choices to protect its sovereignty and safety in response to Washington using human rights as a tool for invasion and hostile, anti-North Korea behavior, state media KCNA quoted a foreign ministry spokesperson as saying. The spokesperson cited a special envoy on human rights in the administration of President Joe Biden. The envoy on North Korean human rights issues, Julie Turner, visited Seoul and Tokyo in February to discuss North Korea. An annual report this week by the State Department described "significant human rights issues" in North Korea. It cited credible reports of "arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government authorities." North Korea also criticized the U.S. for urging it to stop launching missiles and other rockets for what Washington calls violations of U.N. resolutions. KCNA said, mentioning a South Korean satellite launch in April. "We will carry out our critical mission as planned to enhance our space reconnaissance capabilities to ensure the security of our country," KCNA said in a statement citing a spokesperson for North Korea's National Aerospace Development Administration.

Columbia Leadership Rebuked by Faculty Panel for Police Crackdown on Protesters

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Columbia University's embattled president came under renewed pressure on Friday as a campus oversight panel sharply criticized her administration for clamping down on a pro-Palestinian protest at the Ivy League school. President Nemat Minouche Shafik has faced an outcry from many students, faculty and outside observers for summoning New York police to dismantle a tent encampment set up on campus by protesters against Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza. After a two-hour meeting on Friday, the Columbia University Senate approved a resolution that Shafik's administration had undermined academic freedom and disregarded the privacy and due process rights of students and faculty members by calling in the police and shutting down the protest. "The decision... has raised serious concerns about the administration's respect for shared governance and transparency in the university decision-making process," it said. The senate, composed mostly of faculty members and other staff plus a few students, did not name Shafik in its resolution and avoided the harsher language of a censure. The resolution established a task force it said would monitor the

"corrective actions" the senate asked the administration to take on dealing with protests. There was no immediate response to the resolution from Shafik, who is a member of the senate but did not attend Friday's meeting. Columbia spokesperson Ben Chang said the administration shared the same goal as the senate - to restore calm to the campus - and was committed to "an ongoing dialogue." Police arrested more than 100 people on Columbia's campus last week and removed the tents from the main lawn of the school's Manhattan campus, but the protesters quickly returned and set up tents again, narrowing Columbia's options on dismantling the encampment. Since then, hundreds of protesters have been arrested at schools from California to Boston as students set up camps similar to the one at Columbia, demanding that their schools divest from companies involved with Israel's military. On Friday at least 40 protesters were arrested in Denver at the Auraria Campus, an institution shared by the University of Colorado Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver and the Community College of Denver, according to a press release from the school.





Guler Stretches Madrid's Vast Liga Lead at Real Sociedad

MADRID (Dispatches) - Turkish teenager Arda Guler's strike helped Real Madrid close in on the Spanish title with a 1-0 win at Real Sociedad on Friday, moving 14 points clear at the top of La Liga. After last weekend's Clasico win over second place Barcelona it appears a formality for Madrid to take the title back from their arch-rivals, and Guler helped them move one step closer. The playmaker, 19, has endured an injury-hit season but on his first league start snatched a heavily rotated Madrid side a tight victory at the Reale Arena. Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti rested virtually his entire first choice team with Tuesday's Champions League semi-final visit to face Bayern Munich in mind. Top scorer Jude Bellingham was on the bench after recovering from a stomach problem to earn a late addition to the squad list, alongside Vinicius Junior, Toni Kroos and various other stars. As a result Madrid conjured little in attack beyond Guler's goal, with the hosts, sixth, on top in driving San Sebastian rain. "Arda scored a goal, Arda will be an important player for us in the future, there's no doubt he'll be here next year," Ancelotti told reporters, also praising his team's commitment despite the rotations. "It was quite clear that everyone thought we were coming here for a stroll, the only ones who didn't think so were the players," he continued. "I am proud of the players because they had the desire and will to keep winning... I have to thank them because from that point of view, they were spectacular." Madrid goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, on

loan from Chelsea, pushed away a Takefusa Kubo effort as La Real continued to probe. Ancelotti also gave defender Eder Militao his first start after his long-term knee injury. The Brazilian looked uncertain but Real Sociedad could not capitalise, with Benat Turrientes firing narrowly over. Despite previously failing to generate openings of their own, Madrid took the lead in the 29th minute. Aurelien Tchouameni swept the ball out to Dani Carvajal on the right, who stroked a low ball across the area. It was a perfectly placed pass by the Spain international -- playing seemingly only as he is suspended for the visit to Munich -- and Guler arrived in the right place at the right time to finish. Kubo thought he had pulled Real Sociedad level against his former side before the break when he beat Militao and slotted home, but Ander Barrenetxea was penalised for a foul on Tchouameni in the build-up. "Barrene went to steal the ball and the only thing I can say is that the player who loses it was sleeping," Kubo told Movistar. Arrizabalaga pushed a Turrientes effort wide in the second half and Ancelotti called on the cavalry for the final 25 minutes, sending Vinicius Junior and Fede Valverde into the fray. Another substitute, Antonio Rudiger, made a vital block on an attempted Oyarzabal dink to deflect the forward's effort behind for a corner. Alex Remiro made a fine save to deny Eduardo Camavinga late on as the reinforced visitors took control in five minutes of added time to see out the win.

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Alcara, Sabalenka Through in Madrid Open

MADRID (Dispatches) - Defending Madrid Open champions Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka both triumphed in their opening clashes in the Spanish capital on Friday to reach the third round. Alcaraz returned after a month out to begin his double defence with a convincing 6-2, 6-1 win over Alexander Shevchenko, while Sabalenka survived a tense three-set tussle against the in-form Magda Linette. Men's world number three Alcaraz shone on home clay after a forearm problem led to his withdrawals from the Monte Carlo Masters and Barcelona Open. "It's been quite a tough month for me, with the uncertainty over when I'd be back," said Alcaraz. "The priority today was to see how I felt, in a difficult match. The feelings were very good, and I think I played at a very good level despite coming without rhythm... I am very happy and it's a pleasure to play here in Madrid again." Wearing a protective sleeve on his right arm, two-time Grand Slam winner Alcaraz quickly dispelled any doubts after his time out by flying out of the blocks in the first set with a break. The 20-year-old Spaniard was as exciting as ever, frequently on the attack, and secured a second break in the fifth game for a 4-1 lead. Indian Wells winner Alcaraz hit the net with a drop shot to let the Kazakhstani back in but broke again himself for a 5-2 advantage which he served out. Alcaraz pulled off two second set breaks for a 3-0 lead but again allowed his 23-year-old opponent to cut the deficit before striking back with a third break, which he

consolidated for 5-1. The 2022 and 2023 Madrid winner and second seed wrapped up his victory in little over an hour with another break when Shevchenko sent a forehand long. Alcaraz will face Thiago Seyboth Wild in the third round after the Brazilian surprised Lorenzo Musetti 6-4, 6-4. Andrey Rublev ended a four-match losing streak with a straightforward 6-1, 6-4 win over Facundo Bagnis. "It feels really great after a while to start with a win and I'm happy with my performance," said Rublev, who lost his temper and obliterated his racquet after a first round exit in Barcelona. German fourth seed Alexander Zverev, the champion in 2018 and 2021, comfortably made the third round with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Borna Coric. In the women's draw Sabalenka edged Linette 6-4, 3-6, 6-3. Aryna Sabalenka serves the ball to Poland's Magda Linette during her narrow victory as she started her title defence in Madrid. Aryna Sabalenka serves the ball to Poland's Magda Linette during her narrow victory as she started her title defence in Madrid. © Thomas COEX / AFP. The Australian Open winner has struggled since her triumph in Melbourne and her Polish opponent fought well in the two-hour nine minute contest. Big-hitter Sabalenka, ranked second in the world, edged the first set but struggled in the second as Linette broke to love and then consolidated for a 4-1 lead. The 32-year-old then carved out three break points in the sixth game but although she could not take them, eventually steered the match to a deciding third set.



Greece Hands Olympic Flame to 2024 Paris Games Hosts



ATHENS (Dispatches) - Greece on Friday handed over the Olympic flame of the 2024 Games to Paris organizers in a ceremony at the Athens marble stadium where the competition was revived nearly 130 years ago. Hellenic Olympic Committee chairman Spyros Capralos handed the torch to Paris Olympics chief organiser Tony Estanguet at the Panathenaic Stadium, where the first modern Olympics were held in 1896. Estanguet in a speech said the goal for Paris was to organise "spectacular but also more responsible Games, which will contribute towards a more inclusive society." Organizers want to ensure "that the biggest event in the world plays an accelerating role in addressing the crucial questions of our time," said Estanguet, a member of France's Athens 2004 Olympics team who won gold in the slalom canoe event. A duo of French champions, Beijing 2022 ice dance gold medalist Gabriella Papadakis and former swimmer Beatrice Hess, one of the most successful Paralympians in history, carried the flame during the final relay leg into the Panathenaic Stadium. Nana Mouskouri, the 89-year-old Greek singer with a worldwide following, performed the anthems of France and Greece at the ceremony. After spending the night at the French embassy in Athens, the flame on Saturday will begin its journey to France on board the 19th-century three-masted barque Belem. On Sunday, the ship will pass from the Corinth Canal -- a feat of 19th century engineering constructed with the contribution of French banks and engineers. The Belem is set to reach Marseille -- a city founded by ancient Greek colonists around 600 BCE -- on May 8.

Leicester Promoted to Premier League as Leeds Crash



LONDON (Dispatches) - Leicester City were promoted to the Premier League on Friday after rivals Leeds United crashed to a shock 4-0 defeat at Queens Park Rangers. The result leaves Leicester top of the Championship with 94 points with two games to play while Leeds stay second on 90 but with just one match left. Third-place Ipswich Town can pip Leeds to the second automatic promotion place as they currently have 89 points with three matches still to play. "It's not in our hands anymore (automatic promotion), we need to be honest," Leeds boss Daniel Farke told the BBC. "The race is not over, if Ipswich win the next two games then I will say congratulations but if they don't win them then we will have a lot to play for (against Southampton on the final day of the season)." "As long as we have a chance, I'm far away from giving up." Enzo Maresca's Foxes achieved promotion at the first time of asking having been relegated from the Premier League last season. Their final two games begin with a trip to Preston on Monday, before they round off the season with a home finale against Blackburn on May 4. Leeds will find themselves outside the top two if Ipswich beat Hull on Saturday or Coventry in their game in hand on Tuesday. Should Ipswich win both, they will be promoted while Leeds will have to enter the play-offs. "Congratulations to QPR and congratulations to Leicester," added Farke. "In the first 20 minutes we didn't do the basics and QPR used this in an effective way to be 2-0 up."