

Iran and Republic of Azerbaijan Are Expected to Inaugurate a Major Water Project of constructing Qezelsi Dam Within the Coming Days, According to a Local Official at Bordering Province of East Azarbaijan

IRAN NEWS

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami Met With the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi on the Sidelines of the 1st Int'l Conference on Nuclear Science and Technology in Isfahan

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U.S. Unstable Behavior Should Not Affect Iran-IAEA Cooperation

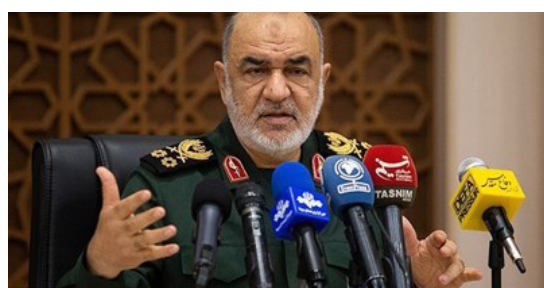
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Israel Bombards Rafah Ahead of Talks Aimed at Sealing Truce

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Iran Widening Battlefield to Break Up Enemy



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Islamic territories must close ranks as a united front against the common arrogant adversaries, the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said, describing the expansion of the battlefield as a strategy for disintegration of the enemy. Iran has blocked the path of the enemy in the eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea, Major General Hossein Salami said in a ceremony in Tehran on Tuesday, held in commemoration of the 40th day after the loss of a number of Iranian military advisers martyred in an Israeli airstrike on the consular section of the Iranian embassy in Damascus. "We are broadening the battlefield so that the enemy becomes disintegrated," the IRGC commander added. He emphasized that the Islamic territories must join hands in the fight against the arrogant powers, because Muslims face a common enemy, have a common fate, and share aspirations. The Islamic lands should not be surrounded by the arrogant powers, he added, saying, "We must safeguard our assets and identities." The general noted that the IRGC Quds Force is tasked with preventing the enemies from making inroads into the Muslim world. "By doing so, we are protecting our own country's national security and also the security and dignity of other Muslims." He warned that the presence of the arrogant powers, above all the US, in the Islamic world brings about nothing but havoc, poverty and massacre. Muslims will not tolerate "oppression" by the enemies, he said, adding, "Ongoing Gaza genocide exposes true face of Western civilization." Major General Salami noted that US portrays itself as supporter of human rights but in fact seeking dominance. IRGC chief commander also added that Israel's political lifetime nearing an end. In remarks in 2018, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei described Iran's presence in the region as a key component of the Islamic Republic's power and security, saying that's why the enemies are opposed to such presence. The U.S. is opposing Iran's nuclear power, uranium enrichment capabilities, and its presence in the region, the Leader noted, describing it as a sign of America's deep hostility towards the Islamic Republic's elements of power.

FAO, Iran Ink Deal to Enhance Saffron Authenticity



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and Iran's Ministry of Agriculture Jihad (MAJ) have signed a deal aimed at ensuring food authenticity and managing food supply chains. Titled "Control of Food Authenticity and Management of Food Supply Chain for Successful Achievement of SDGs," the project is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), Sustainable Development Goals and FAO Country Programme Framework (CPF). The initiative is part of FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) and is set to span two years, concluding in December 2025. Under the auspices of the Deputy for Horticulture of the MAJ, the project targets the enhancement of a transparent and reliable saffron supply chain, ensuring food and nutrition security and safety for consumers. The initiative seeks to address the challenges posed by the globalization of food supply and the complexities of modern trade, particularly in the saffron industry, where Iran holds a dominant position, producing approximately 90% of the world's output. The project's impact will be profound, warranting consumers' access to safe and authentic saffron products through enhanced enforcement mechanisms for food quality testing and traceability. This project represents a significant step towards enhancing transparency and traceability in the saffron industry, ultimately contributing to food security and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. It also exemplifies FAO's commitment to fostering sustainable agriculture and food systems, aligning with the global agenda for achieving the SDGs. By collaborating with national counterparts and leveraging expertise, FAO aims to empower countries like Iran in enhancing the resilience and sustainability of their agricultural sectors.



IAEA Chief Says Offered Iran Proposal for Continued Cooperation

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi said Tuesday that it had offered to Iran a proposal for continuation of cooperation. Speaking in a joint press conference in the Iranian city of Isfahan along with Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), the UN nuclear watchdog chief said that Iran and the IAEA need to take practical steps to continue the cooperation, adding that he had offered Tehran a proposal for continuation of cooperation. Referring to the Joint Statement signed between the IAEA and the AEOI on March 4, 2023, Grossi said that the Agency does not seek a new document and it is going to work on the March statement. He added that the Joint Statement has the potential to resolve the remaining issues. He added that Iran and the Agency have agreed on taking concrete and operational steps to implement the Joint Statement. Later in his remarks, the IAEA chief ruled out that the Agency was influenced by the Israeli regime and Western countries' pressures in dealing with the Iranian nuclear program. Grossi further asserted that the IAEA will work towards cooperation to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or any other document that Iran is willing to. Meanwhile earlier on Monday, Eslami said that the country is prepared to confront arrogant countries' dominance in the field of nuclear energy. Mohammad Eslami,

head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), made the remarks on the sidelines of an exhibition displaying the country's nuclear achievements on Monday. "We are prepared to fight arrogant countries' dominance [and] transfer our technologies to other countries," he said. Doing so, Eslami added, would help "break down [existing] barriers and [contribute to] emergence of a new scientific order." "The comments came amid some Western countries and their allies' allegations against the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear energy program as they claim it has deviated toward "military purposes." The Islamic Republic has rejected the allegations, underlining that its nuclear doctrine disallows weaponization of its nuclear activities in line with religious and moral concerns. Non-diversion of the program has been verified by countless reports produced by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), with which the country enjoys favorable levels of cooperation. Adding to his remarks, Eslami praised an international nuclear conference that went underway alongside the exhibition. He said international conference was well received despite "pressure [being applied] by the imperialist establishment [that is] geared towards preventing the realization of the peaceful goal of Iran's nuclear energy program." Some large numbers of seasoned personalities took part in the conference, despite obstacles and obstructionist efforts, and presented high-quality scientific articles, Eslami stated.

Ball in Israel's Court Over Gaza Ceasefire



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has said Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh briefed him on the Palestinian resistance movement's response to a proposed ceasefire for the Gaza Strip. In a post on his X account on Monday, Amir-Abdollahian said Haniyeh appreciated strong positions of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, President Ebrahim Raisi and the Iranian nation in support of Palestine and the Gaza Strip. The Iranian minister added that Haniyeh also briefed him on the latest developments on the ground in the war-torn Gaza in the phone conversation on Sunday. He emphasized that Haniyeh said that he had conveyed Hamas' response to a joint Egyptian-Qatari proposed plan on ending the Israeli regime's attacks, exchanging captives and lifting the blockade. "The ball is now in the opposite side's court. Hamas is honest in its intentions," Amir-Abdollahian quoted Haniyeh as saying. A short statement from Hamas on Monday said that the movement has agreed to a ceasefire proposal in Gaza, where it has fought a seven-month Israeli aggression that has left tens of thousands dead. According to the statement, Haniyeh had informed Qatari and Egyptian mediators that it accepted their proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza. In a statement on Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry said during the Sunday night talks Haniyeh had briefed Amir-Abdollahian on the political plan aimed at stopping Israel's war in Gaza. It added that Haniyeh has reiterated that the Hamas stance is to insist on restoring the Palestinian people's right to achieve any political agreement. The top Iranian diplomat, for his part, hailed the brave resistance of the Palestinian people and resistance groups in the face of the Israeli regime during its war and genocide against Gaza over the past seven months. Amir-Abdollahian also voiced Iran's support for the proposed plan for the realization of the Palestinian people's rights, including the immediate and permanent cessation of the Israeli regime's crimes, the lifting of the cruel blockade on Gaza, the exchange of captives, the complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying Israeli forces from the Strip and the reconstruction of the war-stricken areas.

Iranian Court Urges France to Repatriate MKO Terrorists



TEHRAN (IRNA) - An Iranian court has called on France to repatriate the members of the terrorist group Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO). During the second hearing of the new round of legal proceedings against the MKO members in Tehran, Judge Dehghani emphasized on Tuesday that hosting MKO members constitutes a crime according to international conventions combating terrorism. He urged certain countries, including France, to cooperate with international organizations in prosecuting the defendants. Judge Dehghani also advised countries to reconsider hosting individuals who have committed criminal acts against humanity. He advised the people of Albania that hosts members of the terrorist group to demand the extradition of the terrorists from their respective country. Some 104 members of the terrorist group as well as a legal entity (the MKO) are being sued in the trial for committing inhumane crimes. The MKO has carried out numerous terrorist attacks in Iran against ordinary people and officials since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people over the past four decades. Iranian Judiciary spokesperson Masoud Setayeshi has stated that the MKO has been responsible for over 100 acts of terrorism and betrayal against the Iranian nation.

Iran Raps U.S.' Arms Race in Outer Space

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Reminding the international community of its responsibility for peaceful use of outer space and the prevention of an arms race, an Iranian UN representative lashed out at the US government for refusing to prevent an arms race in the outer space. The representative of Iran, Hassan Rahimi Majd, delivered a speech to the UN General Assembly regarding the exploration and use of outer space, held in New York on May 6. Reaffirming Iran's commitment to the principles outlined in the UN Charter and the international legal framework governing the activities of States in the exploration and use of outer space, he said, "Our position on outer space has been consistent and clear. We believe that outer space is the common heritage of all mankind and must be used, explored, and utilized for exclusively peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development, and without discrimination of any kind." "For more than four decades, the Conference on Disarmament (CD), in accordance with paragraph 80 of the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly (SSOD-I), has been mandated to launch 'appropriate international negotiations' in order to prevent an arms race in outer space based on the spirit of the Outer Space Treaty. In this regard, all states with major space capabilities have a special responsibility to contribute positively and actively to the objective of the exclusively peaceful uses of outer space and the prevention of an arms race in outer space," the envoy added. Voicing Iran's concern about the increasing threat of "weaponization of outer space", Rahimi Majd said Iran reiterates the urgency of preventing an arms race in outer space and has consistently supported the start of negotiations on a comprehensive and legally binding instrument on PAROS at the CD. "Matters on space activities, including safety, security, and stability, should be thoroughly discussed and analyzed within the scope of international specialized bodies under the United Nations. This notably includes the Conference on Disarmament and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS)," he added. The Iranian envoy also strongly condemned the instrumental and political exploitation of United Nations institutions and bodies, notably the Security Council, adding, "The long-awaited mandate of CD should not be converted to a political agenda of the UN Security Council. Such a move would downgrade the noble agenda of CD on PAROS as well as the objectives of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS)." "Iran emphasizes the imperative of restoring the principle of multilateralism and striving for consensus on diverse issues through relevant specialized institutions, with the active participation of all member countries being paramount," he stated. "The amendment to the draft resolution outlined in document S/2024/302, proposed by China and the Russian Federation, aligned precisely with the longstanding mandate of preventing an arms race of all types of weapons in outer space through early elaboration of a verifiable legally binding multilateral agreement. It aimed to address significant gaps and shortcomings within the draft resolution. Unfortunately, the United States did not accept this amendment, once again standing against the international community's aspirations to prevent an arms race in outer space," the Iranian diplomat said. "If the United States genuinely values addressing the critical issue of the weaponization of outer space, it should refrain from single-handedly impeding progress within the UN disarmament machinery on this front. The United States views outer space as a potential battleground, as evidenced by the establishment of the Space Force and Space Command, and the integration of commercial space enterprises into their space combat systems," he noted. "The adoption of a biased and self-serving approach by certain Western nations, particularly the United States, towards international treaties and conventions, such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, undermines the credibility of disarmament and non-proliferation efforts," Rahimi Majd added.



IRAN NEWS



Iran Exporting Technical, Engineering Services in Water, Soil Sectors to 19 States

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An official at Iran’s Ministry of Agriculture said the country is exporting technical, engineering and electromechanical services to 19 countries. Iran is exporting technical, engineering and electromechanical services to 19 countries, including Iraq, Armenia and Uzbekistan, Safdar Niyazi Shahraki said. The deputy minister of agriculture for water and soil affairs also said that 50% of the projects of the ministry are related to water and soil. Niyazi Shahraki pointed to the smarting of the irrigation system and noted that intelligent irrigation systems should replace the current systems and the country should employ irrigation systems according to the world’s most modern technologies, IRNA reported. Back in January, a spokesperson for Iran’s water industry said that the country has gained many achievements in the field of constructing equipment and machinery needed in the water and wastewater sector.

Iran Ready to Cooperate With Saudi Arabia in Nuclear Field



TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran is ready to cooperate with the countries of the region, especially Saudi Arabia in the field of nuclear technology, the chairman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said. Mohammad Eslami, the chairman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) met and held talks with the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Iran, Abdullah bin Saud Al-Anazi on the sidelines of the 1st International Conference on Nuclear Science and Technology and the 30th National Nuclear Conference in Isfahan on Monday. What is important for Iran and Saudi Arabia is efforts to develop interactions in line with the national interests of the two countries, Eslami said. Obtaining new technologies such as nuclear technology has had very positive results for Iran, Eslami said in this meeting, adding that of course, this issue has caused the displeasure of countries opposing the Islamic Republic of Iran and global arrogance. Referring to the approach of Saudi Arabia in the field of developing new technologies, he said, “Saudi Arabia has taken a new approach and is looking for the development of nuclear technology, and we are ready to cooperate with the countries of the region, especially Saudi Arabia.” The ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Iran, for his part, emphasized the progress and development of interactions between the two countries. The Saudi envoy considered Iran as a neighboring country, a friend and a brother, expressing hope to see more progress in the field of bilateral cooperation and in the field of peaceful nuclear activities.

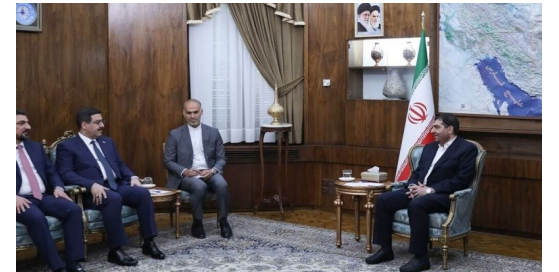


U.S. Unstable Behavior Should Not Affect Iran-IAEA Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP)– Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a meeting with the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, referring to the U.S. record of bad faith in past agreements regarding Iran’s peaceful nuclear program said that cooperation between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency should not be affected by Washington’s unstable and contradictory approach and behavior. Amir-Abdollahian in the meeting said that the IAEA chief’s visit to Iran comes at a crucial time, given the complicated and sensitive situation in the region. The Iranian foreign minister emphasized the importance of the IAEA’s position and role and praised Grossi’s “impartial and professional” leadership. Amir-Abdollahian also discussed the recent actions taken by the Iranian armed forces against the “aggressor Zionist regime,” stating that the inaction of the United Nations Security Council left Iran with no choice but to exercise its legitimate defense based on international law. The top Iranian diplomat described threats by the Israeli authorities to use nuclear weapons as a clear threat to regional and international peace and security and stressed the important role of the IAEA in responding to such dangerous statements. Regarding the cooperation between Iran and the

IAEA, Amir-Abdollahian highlighted the history of non-compliance on the part of the United States regarding previous agreements on Iran’s peaceful nuclear program, and emphasized that the cooperation between Iran and the IAEA should not be influenced by the “unstable and contradictory policy and behavior of Washington.” Grossi, in his turn, expressed his pleasure with the trip to Tehran and praised Iran’s role in restoring stability and security to the region. He underscored that bolstering cooperation between Iran and the IAEA will lead to the failure of those seeking to escalate the conflict, tension, and confrontation in the region. Grossi also met with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister and chief negotiator in talks on lifting sanctions, Ali Bagheri. During the meeting, the two sides discussed various aspects of cooperation between Iran and the IAEA, with Bagheri stressing the importance of the agency’s impartiality and professionalism. Bagheri also reiterated that Iran’s peaceful nuclear activities are always within the framework of its international obligations, including the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Grossi described his trip to Tehran as a sign of the agency’s will to maintain a constructive atmosphere in its relations with Iran. 219

Iran, Iraq Urged to Use National Currencies in Economic Transactions



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran’s first vice president said that Tehran and Baghdad should use their national currencies in economic and trade exchanges. In a meeting with Iraqi Trade Minister Ather Daoud Salman Al-Gharini, Mohammad Mokhber referred to the friendly, historical and cultural relations between the two countries and said the two sides should use their national currencies, instead of the currency of a third country, in bilateral trade and economic transactions. Iran attaches great importance to its relations with Iraq, he said, expressing hope that the two countries would witness evermore progress in all areas. Mokhber emphasized the need for expanding economic relations and promoting the level of trade cooperation between Iran and Iraq. He went on to say that the private sectors of the two countries can play a leading role in enhancing trade and economic relations. It is necessary that joint economic cooperation commission of the two countries should first identify the obstacles in the way of the development of bilateral relations and then embark on removing the trade barriers. The Iraqi minister of trade, for his part, said that Baghdad is determined to strengthen its relations with Tehran in all areas, especially in the fields of trade and economy.

Iran Ready to Supply Gas to Pakistan in Sustainable Manner



ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Iran’s Consul General in Karachi Hassan Nourian has said that Iran is well aware of Pakistan’s need for energy and is ready to supply the gas in a sustainable and sufficient manner to the neighboring country. Addressing the Meet the Press program at Karachi Press Club, Nourian expressed his gratitude to the organizers of the event, where both brotherly countries can exchange their viewpoints on bilateral relations. He pointed to the official visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to the three major Pakistani cities of Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi, he said it is not out of place to mention that the two nations of Iran and Pakistan have always stood with each other in sweet and bitter times and both have behaved like one soul in two bodies. “Iran correctly understands Pakistan’s need for energy and is ready to supply the gas in a sustainable and sufficient manner to its neighboring country,” Nourian said. “Lack of energy in Pakistan, as a developing country, has become a major obstacle for the economic development of this country, and we understand that the Pakistani industrialists and businessmen and even ordinary people consider energy supply as an indisputable issue.” The envoy noted that Iran has recently increased the electricity export required in Baluchistan and Gwadar region up to 200 megawatts and will not spare any help for the economic development of Pakistan. “We believe that new horizons have been opened for bilateral relations, and hopefully, with the implementation of these agreements, we will witness speedy economic growth and overcome the economic challenges of the two countries,” he said. According to Nourian, both countries have vowed to boost bilateral trade to \$10 billion annually and agreed to boost trade and energy cooperation, including on the gas pipeline deal that has faced delays due to technical and political reasons.

Tehran Oil Show 2024 Kicks Off Today

TEHRAN (Shana) - Despite all the propaganda against Iran oil industry’s international successes and its energy diplomacy approach, the growing number of foreign oil companies’ presence at the 28th Oil Show is a clear sign of rising trust in Iran’s oil industry. Director of the 28th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, known as Iran’s Oil Show 2024, Gholamreza Jamali, made the remarks during a press conference in Tehran adding the exhibition opens its doors to the public on May 8. Jamali said that 1750 oil industry related companies, including 250 foreign companies, have participated at this year’s exhibition from 12 countries including Russia, China, Germany, France, Japan, Belarus, India, Canada, Italy, Turkey, Austria and Argentina adding that Iran’s oil show is not only one of the largest oil exhibitions at home but also in the West Asia region. The great achievements of Iran’s oil industry over the last two years, is due to the support of the Minister of Petroleum, Jamali said at the

press conference. He added: A number of companies failed to take part in this year’s oil exhibition mainly due to lack of appropriate infrastructures expressing hope improvements in the facilities to provide proper conditions for participation of all companies in the next rounds of oil exhibitions. Elsewhere in his remarks he said: a number of world high-ranking officials have been invited to participate at the opening ceremony of the exhibition. According to him, while during last year’s oil exhibition, just 2 thousand square meters had been allocated to accommodate foreign companies, this space has been expanded this year so that the foreign companies’ exclusive space reaches 5 thousand square meters. As far as it concerns allocating spaces, the organizers have decided to pay attention to the arrangement based on upstream, midstream and downstream activities and the halls and booths locations are somehow related to the subject of value chain in the oil industry.



PHOTO: Mojtaba Mohammadgholi

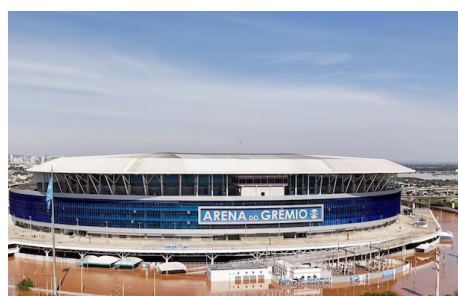
Afghanistan-Turkey Cargo Train Transited Through Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - The Islamic Republic of Iran Railways resolved the problem of the Afghanistan-Turkey train which was due to the mismanagement of customs formalities incumbent on the Afghanistan Railway Development Consortium and thus transported Afghanistan’s export cargo to Turkey. Following the disruption of the Afghanistan-Turkey cargo train through Iran’s territory due to the mismanagement of the Afghanistan Railway Development Consortium regarding the completion of the customs formalities, Afghanistan’s export cargo to Turkey was transported on May 2 to the Razi Border by the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways and Iran’s border guards. Also, the Railways of the Islamic Republic of Iran announced its readiness to transport the second train of commercial cargo after the completion of customs and border procedures and obtaining necessary permits from the relevant authorities by the cargo owners and the forwarder company. Following previous reports, unfortunately, the Afghanistan Rail Development Consortium, without passing the legal procedures, including obtaining permits from the border guard and customs, as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, had sent several wagons with commercial cargo to the border of Shamtigh and then left these 10 wagons in Shamtigh Border and tried to use media pressure and resorting to some false claims to pass this cargo through the railway of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite the immaturity and dishonesty of the Afghanistan Consortium, the Railway of the Islamic Republic of Iran, considering the national interests and with good faith, started transporting the first part of the commercial cargo on Thursday, and this cargo was delivered passed through Tehran on Saturday to the Razi Border in the northwest of Iran.



Lula Seeks State of Emergency After 85 Dead in Flood

CANOAS (Dispatches) - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva asked Congress to recognize a state of public calamity for the heavy rains that have killed at least 85 people in the country's southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul. More than 130 people are still missing after flooding that has affected more than two-thirds of the nearly 500 cities in the state, leaving about 150,000 people displaced, the state civil defense authority said. Floods have destroyed roads and bridges in several cities triggering landslides and leaving a path of destruction. Lula's measure asks Congress to declare a public calamity in the state, which would authorize extra government spending with no need to comply with a spending cap stipulated by fiscal rules approved last year. Expenses and tax waivers related to the state's recovery will also not be counted in the government's fiscal result under the measure. "We don't have an estimate yet of what will be necessary," said Planning Minister Simone Tebet.



Putin Orders Tactical Nuclear Weapon Drills to Deter the West



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia said it would practise the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons as part of a military exercise after what the Moscow said were threats from France, Britain and the United States. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Russia has repeatedly warned of rising nuclear risks - warnings which the United States says it has to take seriously though U.S. officials say they have seen no change in Russia's nuclear posture. Russia says the United States and its European allies are pushing the world to the brink of confrontation between nuclear powers by supporting Ukraine with tens of billions of dollars of weapons, some of which are being used against Russian territory. Russia's defense ministry said it would hold military drills including practice for the preparation and deployment for use of non-strategic nuclear weapons. It said the exercises were ordered by President Vladimir Putin. "During the exercise, a set of measures will be carried out to practice the issues of preparation and use of non-strategic nuclear weapons," the ministry said. Missile forces in the Southern Military District, aviation and the navy will take part, the defense ministry said. The exercise is aimed at ensuring Russia's territorial integrity and sovereignty "in response to provocative statements and threats by certain Western officials against the Russian Federation", it said. Russia and the United States are by far the world's biggest nuclear powers, holding more than 10,600 of the world's 12,100 nuclear warheads. China has the third-largest nuclear arsenal, followed by France and Britain. Russia has about 1,558 non-strategic nuclear warheads, according to the Federation of American Scientists, though there is uncertainty about exact figures for such weapons due to a lack of transparency.

Israel Bombards Rafah Ahead of Talks Aimed at Sealing Truce



RAFAH (Dispatches) - Israel carried out strikes on the Gaza city of Rafah overnight as it sought to put "pressure" on Hamas ahead of talks in Egypt on Tuesday aimed at sealing a truce proposal endorsed by the militants. After having vowed for weeks to push into the southern border town, Israel called on Monday for Palestinians in eastern Rafah to leave for an "expanded humanitarian area" ahead of a ground incursion. An AFP correspondent in the city reported heavy bombardment throughout the night, while the Kuwaiti hospital there said Tuesday in an updated toll that 11 people had been killed and dozens of others injured in Israeli strikes. After talks earlier in the day failed to produce an agreement, Hamas said Monday evening that it had informed mediators Egypt and Qatar of its "approval of their proposal regarding a ceasefire" in the seven-month-old war, prompting cheering crowds to take to the streets of Rafah. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the proposal "is far from Israel's essential demands", but the government would send negotiators for talks "to exhaust the potential for arriving at an agreement". In the meantime, it added, "Israel is continuing the operation in Rafah to exert military pressure on Hamas in order to advance the release of our hostages and the other objectives of the war". Close Israeli ally the United States said it was "reviewing" the Hamas response. Hamas member Khalil al-Hayya told the Qatar-based Al Jazeera news channel that the proposal agreed to by Hamas involved a three-phase truce. He said it includes a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the return of Palestinians displaced by the war and a hostage-prisoner

exchange, with the goal of a "permanent ceasefire". Qatar said that it was sending a delegation to Cairo on Tuesday to resume negotiations in the "hope that the talks will culminate in reaching an agreement for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza strip". A senior Hamas official, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said Israel must now decide whether it accepts or "obstructs" a truce. Renewing the call for people to leave Rafah late Monday, Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari said "aircraft targeted more than 50 terror targets in the Rafah area" throughout the day. Hamas ally Islamic Jihad said Monday night that it had fired rockets from Gaza towards southern Israel in response. International alarm has been steadily building about the consequences of an Israeli ground invasion of Rafah, situated on the border with Egypt. Egypt, the main conduit for aid trucks into Gaza, has been a key mediator in truce efforts and has resolutely opposed any mass displacement of refugees from the strip into its territory. An Israeli incursion into the city would be "intolerable", UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Monday, calling on Israel and Hamas "to go an extra mile" to reach a ceasefire deal. "This is an opportunity that cannot be missed, and a ground invasion in Rafah would be intolerable because of its devastating humanitarian consequences, and because of its destabilising impact in the region," Guterres said. Egypt's foreign ministry warned of "grave humanitarian risks" for the more than one million Gazans sheltering there and urged Israel to "exercise the utmost restraint".

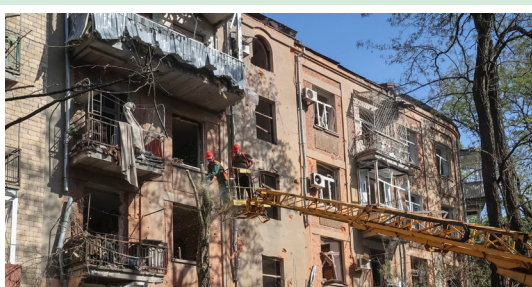
Macron, von der Leyen Press China's Xi on Trade in Paris Talks



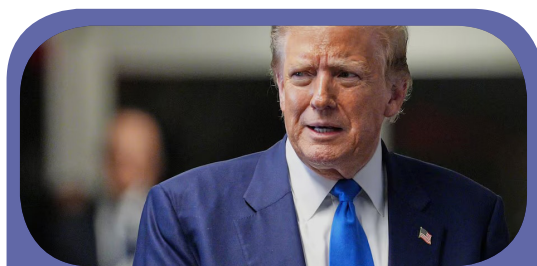
PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron and EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen urged Chinese President Xi Jinping to ensure more balanced trade with Europe, but the Chinese leader showed little sign of being ready to offer major concessions. In meetings in Paris, Macron also pressed the Chinese leader to use his influence on Russia to end the war in Ukraine. Xi arrived in Europe for the first time in five years, at a time of growing business tensions that include the European Union investigating Chinese industries such as electric vehicle exports, while Beijing probes mostly French-made brandy imports. The European Union "cannot absorb massive over-production of Chinese industrial goods flooding its market," von der Leyen said after the three held talks under the gilded ceilings of the Elysee Palace. "Europe will not waver from making tough decisions needed to protect its market," she said, in reference to the trade probes and the sanctions that could follow. The relationship between Europe and China is hurt by unequal market access and by Chinese state subsidies, she said. Speaking later alongside Xi after the two met several times during the day, reviewed troops together and repeatedly shook hands for the cameras, Macron told reporters: "The EU today has the world's most open market ... but we want to be able to protect it." The EU's more assertive stance on trade with China dovetails with Washington's approach. U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has warned Beijing that Washington

will not accept new industries being "decimated" by Chinese imports. During their talks, held behind closed doors, Xi agreed that economic and trade frictions should be addressed through dialogue, Chinese state media said. But he also told Macron and von der Leyen that the problem of China's over-capacity "does not exist either from the perspective of comparative advantage or in light of global demand", Chinese media said. He later said China and France would work on rebalancing trade from the top, but gave few details. Macron's official gifts for Xi included cognac by LVMH-owned Hennessy and Remy Cointreau, which are among the French companies affected by China's retaliatory anti-dumping brandy investigation. Macron thanked Xi for what he described as his "open attitude" in the cognac probe. While the French president gave little details and Xi did not mention it, a French diplomatic source said this meant no taxes or custom duties until the probe was over, but did not preclude measures once it is wrapped up. "I thank the President for his open attitude regarding provisional measures on cognac and for his wish not to implement them," Macron said. French diplomatic sources said Xi seemed receptive to concerns about trade imbalances, adding that the objective of the visit was to get messages across. Whether any action would follow remained to be seen, the sources said.

China Says Ukraine Peace Talks Should Include Russia



BEIJING (Dispatches) - Beijing supports a peace conference on the Ukraine war that would see equal participation of all parties, Chinese Ambassador to Russia Zhang Hanhui said in an interview with Russia's RIA state news agency in remarks published on Tuesday. "China supports a timely convening of an international peace conference, approved by the Russian and Ukrainian sides, with equal participation of all parties and fair discussion of all options for peace," RIA cited the ambassador as saying. Switzerland will host talks during a two-day high-level conference on June 15-16 aimed at achieving peace in Ukraine, to which Moscow has not been invited. On Monday, Chinese President Xi Jinping, on a visit to France, appeared to be lukewarm on the Swiss conference. Moscow has said it sees no point in Ukraine peace talks in Switzerland, while Kyiv has said it sees no place at the summit, held near the Swiss city of Lucerne, for Russia. Beijing put forward a 12-point paper more than a year ago that set out general principles for ending the war but did not get into specifics. That plan received a tepid reception at the time in both Russia and Ukraine, while the United States said China was presenting itself as a peacemaker but reflecting Russia's "false narrative" and failing to condemn its invasion. The Chinese ambassador to Russia told RIA that Beijing is ready to continue playing a role and bringing "China's wisdom" to help solve the crisis. "In order to prevent the conflict from escalating and getting out of control, all parties must make common efforts to restore peace as quickly as possible," Russia cited the diplomat as saying. Since Russia's President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Moscow's smaller neighbour in February 2022, tens of thousands have been killed and millions driven from their homes. Now in its third year, the war has no end in sight.



Judge Warns Trump of Potential Jail Time for Violating Gag Order

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The judge in Donald Trump's criminal trial fined him \$1,000 and held him in contempt of court for a 10th time on Monday for violating a gag order and warned that further violations could land the former president in jail. Justice Juan Merchan said the nine \$1,000 fines he had imposed previously did not seem to be deterring the wealthy business mogul from violating the order, which bars him from speaking publicly about the jurors and witnesses in the first criminal trial of a former U.S. president. "I do not want to impose a jail sanction and have done everything I can to avoid doing so. But I will if necessary," Merchan said at the start of the trial's 12th day before the jury entered. Imprisonment would be an unprecedented step in the historic trial, which stems from a hush money payment made to porn star Stormy Daniels in the final weeks of the 2016 election. After Merchan's ruling, jurors heard testimony from former Trump employees that could bolster prosecutors' case that Trump falsified business records to cover up the hush money payment. Trump has pleaded not guilty and denies wrongdoing. As he imposed the fine, Merchan said he considered jail time "truly the last resort" as it would disrupt the trial, pose extraordinary security challenges and complicate the 2024 presidential election, in which the Republican Trump seeks to win the White House back from Democratic President Joe Biden. But the judge said Trump's "continued, willful" violations of the gag order amounted to a "direct attack on the rule of law."

Modi Casts His Vote as Giant Election Reaches Half-Way Mark

AHMEDABAD (Dispatches) - Prime Minister Narendra Modi voted early as India held the third phase of a massive general election on Tuesday, and called for a strong turnout although he warned of the scorching summer heat. The world's most populous nation began voting on April 19 in a seven-phase election in which nearly one billion people are eligible to vote, with ballots set to be counted on June 4. Modi is seeking a rare, third straight term in a vote which pits his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) against an alliance of more than two dozen opposition parties. Surveys suggest he will win a comfortable majority. "I urge all citizens to vote in large numbers and celebrate the festival of democracy... To all those working in the heat, I urge you to take care of your health and drink adequate water," he said shortly after voting in his home state of Gujarat. Modi cast his ballot in the Gandhinagar constituency where his number two, Home Minister Amit Shah, is the BJP candidate. Clad in saffron and white, Modi was surrounded by hundreds of supporters and party members, signing autographs and talking to children on the way to the polling booth. He was received by Shah as people beat drums and rang bells. Modi's campaign began by showcasing his economic record, welfare measures, national pride and personal popularity. But it changed tack after the first phase of voting on April 19 and focused more on firing

up BJP's Hindu base by attacking rivals as pro-Muslim, even as surveys say jobs and inflation are the main concerns of voters. In an interview with broadcaster Times Now aired on Monday, Modi said he does not oppose Islam or Muslims and wants the community to think about their future growth as they vote. Tuesday's polling covers 93 seats in 11 states and territories, with Gujarat and Maharashtra in the west and Karnataka in the south accounting for 50 seats. That would complete voting for 283 of parliament's 543 elected seats. In the 2019 elections, the BJP won more than 70 of 93 seats up for grabs on Tuesday, but faces tougher contests this time as the main opposition Congress party has gained strength in Karnataka and a regional partner has split in Maharashtra. Voter turnout of 66.14% and 66.71% respectively in the first two phases has been marginally lower than corresponding phases five years back, with analysts blaming the summer heat and the lack of a single strong issue to motivate voters.





Crystal Palace Thrash Man Utd 4-0

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United are at risk of failing to qualify for Europe next season after a dismal 4-0 thrashing at Crystal Palace left the Red Devils eighth in the Premier League. Michael Olise scored twice, either side of goals from the in-form Jean-Philippe Mateta and Tyrick Mitchell, as the Eagles' resurgence since the appointment of Oliver Glasner as manager continues. The time for a change of boss at Old Trafford could be coming soon as Erik ten Hag fails to arrest a slide in his second season in charge. "I will keep fighting and I prepared the team in the best way I could do. It was not good enough, by far not good enough, so I have to take the responsibility for that," said Ten Hag. United have only been absent from European competition once since the 1989-90 season. That came after finishing seventh in David Moyes' sole campaign 10 years ago and the Scot was sacked with four games of the season to go. United have never come lower than seventh in the Premier League era but are staring that possibility in the face with title-chasing Arsenal to come at Old Trafford on Sunday. Ten Hag has routinely cited injury problems as mitigation for his side's struggles. The Dutchman was forced to cobble together a makeshift backline as Casemiro deputised out of position at centre-back, alongside 36-year-old Jonny Evans. Captain Bruno Fernandes was also absent as his proud record of never missing a club game in his career due to injury came to an end. "All season, we have huge (injury) problems," added Ten Hag. "This is the fourth defeat in 2024, so that's not a lot and every time we had huge problems. Many times, we sort it out, today, we didn't." But there was

little excuse for the lack of fight or quality on show from a United side, whose sole Premier League win in their last seven games came against relegated Sheffield United. Palace are unbeaten in their last five as former Eintracht Frankfurt boss Glasner's project takes shape. "First half we didn't play as well as we could but we were very efficient," said Glasner. "At half-time we made adaptations and second half was much better. Much better control of the game, created more chances and scored nice goals." The south London club will have to ward off interest in Olise and Eberechi Eze if they are to kick on to even better things under the Austrian next season. Olise has attracted interest from United, Manchester City and Chelsea and showed why as he eased through the middle of the visitors' defence before firing low past Andre Onana. United failed to muster even a single shot on target in the first half but were unfortunate not to level against the run of play. Casemiro's looping header dropped into the net after Rasmus Hojlund clashed with Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson and was harshly penalised for a push. But a two-goal half-time lead was the least Palace's superiority deserved. Mateta has been a man transformed under Glasner and hammered home his ninth goal in 11 games after skipping past the leaden-footed Evans with ease. There was no response from United after the break on a night which could be the final straw for the club's new leadership group when deciding Ten Hag's future. Mitchell netted a rare goal from close range as United were cut open from a set-piece. Onana was then caught out by the power of Olise's strike that flew past the Cameroonian.

MLS Must Attract Best Players to Grow



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - FIFA president Gianni Infantino said Monday Major League Soccer needs to sign more top players in order to boost the profile of the sport in the United States. Infantino, speaking at a conference in Los Angeles, said he told MLS officials recently that bringing in the world's best players would take football to the next level. "I told them you have to be a bit more bold, a bit more in the game," Infantino said at the Milken Institute Global Conference. "Bring in the best players." Infantino said Inter Miami's signing of Lionel Messi, and the club's acquisition of other big-name players such as Luis Suarez and Sergio Busquets, had proven the demand for top talent amongst US fans. The FIFA chief alluded to the record 65,612 crowd who flocked to the New England Revolution's recent home game against Miami at Gillette Stadium, home of the NFL's New England Patriots. "The 'Messi effect' if we want to call it that way, you see Messi and Inter Miami filling stadiums, and not MLS stadiums but NFL stadiums," Infantino said. MLS salary and roster restrictions mean that teams are unable to spend freely when it comes to signing top players. However the league has faced growing calls -- not least from broadcast partner Apple TV -- to relax those rules in order to enable clubs to target more top talent. Infantino said bringing in top talent would ultimately reap dividends at grass roots level in North America, encouraging young players to believe they could forge a career in soccer. "We want to see the best so we need to bring them the best players, but also the best game, and the best spectacle," Infantino said.

Brunson Rallies Knicks to Game 1 Win Over Pacers

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jalen Brunson continued his postseason magic with 43 points for his fourth straight 40-point effort as the New York Knicks recorded a 121-117 victory over the visiting Indiana Pacers in Game 1 of an Eastern Conference second-round series on Monday night. Donte DiVincenzo scored 21 of his 25 points in the second half and Josh Hart added 24 points, 13 rebounds and eight assists for New York, which erased a nine-point, fourth-quarter deficit. Isaiah Hartenstein had 13 points and OG Anunoby added 13 points and nine rebounds for the Knicks. Myles Turner scored 23 points, Pascal Siakam added 19 and T.J. McConnell had 18 points for the Pacers. Aaron Nesmith and Obi Toppin chipped in 12 points apiece and Andrew Nembhard scored 11 points. Game 2 is Wednesday night in New York. Brunson became the fourth player in NBA playoff history to score 40 or more points in four consecutive games. Jerry West reached that mark a record six straight times in 1965. Bernard King (1984) and Michael Jordan (1993) did it in four straight contests. "I'm not going, 'I have to score 40,'" Brunson said. "That's not my mindset at all. I want to be aggressive and make plays for myself and for others." Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said of Brunson, "The thing I love about



him is he's all about the team. All he cares about is winning. And he cares about his teammates." In the end, what do we need? Do we need a big bucket? Whatever it is that we need, he'll provide. The same could be said for all the guys." DiVincenzo drained a 3-pointer to give the Knicks a 118-115 lead with 40.4 seconds remaining. Indiana pulled within one on Siakam's driving layup with 26.6 seconds to go. The Pacers later had a chance to take the lead, but Turner was called for a moving screen on DiVincenzo with 12.7 seconds left. "This is from my experience in this league: I think it's best when the players decide the outcome of the game," Turner said. "I think it's unfortunate that it happened and was called a moving screen. But it's a playoff game. I feel DiVincenzo did a good job of selling it. For the most part, you can't leave the game to be decided by the refs." Indiana made another mistake when Nembhard fouled Brunson before the ball was inbounded. Brunson made the ensuing free throw, and New York kept possession. Brunson was fouled with 10.7 seconds to play and made two free throws to give New York a 121-117 advantage, and the Knicks closed it out.

Wembanyama Named 2024 NBA Rookie of the Year



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - San Antonio Spurs star Victor Wembanyama won the 2024 NBA Rookie of the Year award, the league announced on Monday, marking the first time a Frenchman has captured the honor. The 20-year-old center, a 7-foot-4 (2.24m) prodigy who was the top pick in last year's NBA Draft, averaged 21.4 points, 10.6 rebounds, 3.9 assists, a league-high 3.6 blocked shots and 1.2 steals a game in his impressive debut campaign. Wembanyama was a unanimous selection, taking all 99 first-place votes, the first unanimous top rookie pick since Karl-Anthony Towns in 2016. "My goals were always to have my team as best as I could and to get better as the year went on," Wembanyama told US NBA telecaster TNT. "I knew that in order to do this I had to be individually good on the court and dominant so it was a huge thing for me, a big thing to get." It has always been really important and I'm glad it's finally official." Chet Holmgren, a center for Western Conference champion Oklahoma City, was second and Charlotte's Brandon Miller third in the voting. While the Spurs struggled to a 22-60 record, second-worst in the Western Conference, "Wemby" became an NBA sensation with amazing feats, living up to his advance billing as a once-in-a-generation talent. With 38 points, 10 rebounds and two blocks in a November victory over Phoenix, a then-19 Wembanyama joined LeBron James and Kevin Durant as the only NBA teens with 35 points, 10 boards and two blocks in a game. After achieving his first NBA triple double in a January triumph over Detroit, Wembanyama posted his second triple double with 27 points, 14 rebounds and 10 blocked shots in a February win over Toronto -- the first with 20 points and 10 blocks in less than 30 minutes played and the first NBA player with blocks in a triple double since 2021.

Nadal to Make Rome Return Against Qualifier

ROME (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal was drawn on Monday with a qualifier in the first round of the Italian Open as the 22-time Grand Slam winner continues his comeback from injury on clay in Rome. Should Nadal get through to the second round in the Italian capital, where he has won the title a record 10 times, he could face world number nine Hubert Hurkacz. Also on Nadal's side of the draw are last year's winner, world number four Daniil Medvedev, and the beaten finalist Holger Rune. The 37-year-old last won in Rome in 2021 and dropped out last year with injury ahead of the tournament. Since making his comeback in April after three months on the sidelines, Nadal, who sits at 305 in the men's ATP tour rankings after hardly playing in 2023, has been knocked out in the second round in Barcelona and reached the last 16 in Madrid. This season is expected to be Nadal's last, even though he has not decided exactly when he will be hanging up his racquet. Numerous physical issues have hampered him over the past two years and he has said that he will only compete at Roland Garros later this month if he feels competitive. Nadal's old rival Novak Djokovic will face either a qualifier or Russian Roman Safiullin in the second round as he guns for a seventh title in Rome with key rivals sidelined. Both home hope Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz, ranked two and three in the world respectively, have been forced to withdraw from the tournament with injury.

