

Kamal Kharrazi, an Adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Told Al Jazeera on Thursday That Iran Could Be Pushed Into Changing Its Nuclear Doctrine If Its Existence Is Threatened

IRAN NEWS

Iran Has Hit Out at the U.S. Over Reports That American Lawmakers Are Preparing Legislation to Sanction International Criminal Court Officials If They Issue Arrest Warrants Against Israeli Officials

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Iranians in Some Cities Cast Votes in Run-Off Majlis Election



TEHRAN - Polls opened Friday morning for Iran's run-off parliamentary election to determine the fate of 45 remaining seats in the 290-member legislature. The voting was held at 22 constituencies in 15 provinces at 8 a.m. local time (0430 GMT) on Friday. A total of 90 candidates competed for the remaining seats. In eight constituencies, including Tehran, this round of election is being held in an all-electronic format. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei cast his ballot at a polling station in the capital Tehran in the first minutes of voting. Ayatollah Khamenei said that every person, who wants Iran's progress, has a national duty to take part in the election. "The importance of the second round [of the election] is not less than the first one, and God willing, our beloved people will all participate [in the election], vote and complete the parliament," the Leader added. "The more votes, the stronger the parliament is, and the stronger the parliament, the more opportunities to work in the country." Mohsen Eslami, spokesman of Iran's Election Headquarters, said on Thursday that the polling stations will remain open for 10 hours. He noted that the time may be extended upon the decision of the Interior Ministry. The first round of the parliamentary election, which was held along with the Assembly of Experts vote on March 1, saw a turnout of 41 percent. Back then, 245 candidates managed to pass the 20-percent threshold to win the ticket to the parliament. On Friday Interior Minister said that in this round of the parliamentary elections at eight constituencies more than 60% of the ballot boxes have been completely electronic, which he hopes will be a good step towards innovative activities in the electoral constituencies. Having cast his vote in the ballot, Ahmad Vahidi said: "The second round of Parliamentary elections has started so that the remaining 45 members of the parliament will be elected." He added: "This round of the elections is very important, and God willing, with the presence of our dear people at the polls, we will see important political and social movement in the areas where they should vote." Vahidi further explained: "The difference between this round compared to the previous period is the electronic of a larger number of constituencies."

Iran-U.S. Trade Volume Doubles in Q1 2024



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The official data of the United States show that the country's trade with the Islamic Republic of Iran has doubled and grew more than 100 percent in the first quarter of this year. The U.S. Bureau of Statistics announced in its latest report that the trade exchange with Iran reached \$27.7 million in the first three months of 2024, an increase by 103% compared to the same period last year. Based on the same data, the exchange of bilateral trade between the two countries was at \$13.6 million in the months of January to March in 2023. The two-fold growth in Iran-U.S. trade in the first quarter of 2024 followed a steady rise in trade exchanged between the two sides in the previous year that saw 8% growth and reached \$61.2 million. According to this report, the trade surplus is still in favor of the United States as its export to Iran increased by 77% in the first three months of 2024 to \$23.8 million compared to \$13.4 million in the same period of the last year. The country's imports from Iran in the first quarter of this year also increased 20 times compared to the same period last year and reached \$3.9 million from \$0.2 million in the first quarter of 2023. The amount of trade between Iran and the US is not significant compared to the total trade of the two countries with the rest of the world. Iran ranks 152 among the export destinations of the United States.



Iran Missile, Military Might Non-Negotiable

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

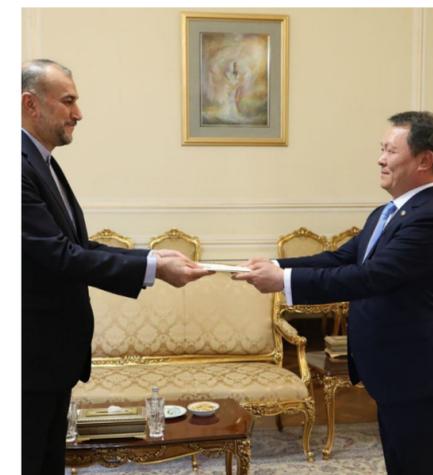
sidelines of an exhibition displaying the country's nuclear achievements on Monday. "We are prepared to fight arrogant countries' dominance [and] transfer our technologies to other countries," he said. Doing so, Eslami added, would help "break down [existing] barriers and [contribute to] emergence of 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.

Europe Urged to Raise Voice in Support of Palestine



TEHRAN - Describing the Gaza crisis as a test for the legitimacy of the values the Europeans have been always advocating for, the foreign minister of Iran called on Europe to raise its voice for justice on the issue of Palestine. In a post on his X account on Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian congratulated the European people on the "Europe Day 2024" which commemorates the vision of a united, peaceful, and thriving Europe. "On this special day all who worked for peace and prosperity for Europe should be mindful on the peace and security all over the world," he stated. "What is happening in Gaza weigh heavy on the conscience of humanity and is a crucial test for the legitimacy of values namely human rights and dignity that Europeans claiming working for. The Europe must raise its voice for justice on the issue of Palestine," Amir-Abdollahian stated. "Iran stands ready to continue to work and engage with Europe based on respect, constructive dialogue, cooperation for mutual interests and peace and security in the world," the foreign minister added. The Europe Day was celebrated on May 9 while around 80,000 Palestinians fled Rafah in the Gaza Strip and thousands more are still attempting to leave as the Israeli regime's ground invasion ramps up.

FM Welcomes, Bid Farewell to Several Envoys



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The new ambassadors of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Finland, and the Republic of Serbia submitted a copy of their credentials to Iranian Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Wednesday. Ontalap Onalbayev, newly-appointed envoy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Islamic Republic presented a copy of the letter of credence addressed by his head of state to the host country at the beginning of his mission in Tehran to the top Iranian diplomat. New ambassador of the Republic of Finland, Jani Johannes Raappana was second envoy who met with Amir-Abdollahian on Wednesday and submitted a copy of credentials at the beginning of his diplomatic work in Iran. On Wednesday evening, Damir Kovačević, new ambassador of the Republic of Serbia to Tehran also met with the Iranian Foreign Minister to hand over a letter of credence at the beginning of his diplomatic mission in the Islamic Republic. Separately, Amir-Abdollahian met with Mohammed bin Hamad Al Hajri, ambassador of the Qatari government in Tehran to say goodbye to him at the end of his diplomatic mission in the country. The Iranian foreign minister on Wednesday also bid farewell to Joshua Gatimo Aguta, Ambassador of Kenya and Angel Losada Fernandez, Ambassador of Spain who concluded their diplomatic missions in the Islamic Republic.

Yemen to Target Israel-Linked Ships

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen's Ansarullah leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi says the country's forces will target ships of any company related to supplying or transporting goods to Israel regardless of their destination. This is a fourth stage of escalation in retaliation for "the Israeli aggression on Rafah" in the southern Gaza Strip, but Yemen is also considering a further "fifth and sixth stage", he said in a televised speech on Thursday. "Any ships of any company involved in supply or transporting goods to the enemy and to any destination will be targeted. Any ship transporting goods to enemy ports will be a target for us wherever our hands reach," he said. "When we make a decision at a certain stage, it means that we have the capabilities to implement it," he added. Ansarullah has been targeting Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in solidarity with the Palestinians. It says the operations will continue unless Israel stops its war and its siege on the Gaza Strip. "We are also thinking about the fifth stage now, and we have very important, sensitive, and impactful options against the enemies," Houthi said. "There are no red lines for us that can hinder us from carrying out our operations." Houthi said Ansarullah forces continue to target American, Israeli, and British ships linked to the Israeli enemy. He said the forces carried out 25 operations in the month of Shawwal which began on April 10, during which 71 ballistic missiles and drones were launched. Since the beginning of Yemen's operations, 112 vessels have been targeted, he said, adding 10 ballistic missiles and drones were launched only over the past week. Houthi described Israel as "an enemy of the Islamic Ummah", which poses a danger and a threat to global security and peace. "The enemy only understands the language of force, and the Ummah needs to focus on the strength of deterrence," he said. Houthi also called on Arab states to help stop a widening Israeli invasion of Rafah, suggesting that they allow Ansarullah use their stocks of weapons and ammunition against Israel. "If any Arab country desires, we are ready to activate the capabilities stored in its warehouses instead of letting them rust or be misused against the enemy." The enemy's escalation regarding the Rafah crossing, east of Rafah, and the expected threat to the rest of Rafah must be met with greater action at all levels," he said. Israel's attack in the southern Gaza city of Rafah has expanded from airstrikes to ground attacks, CNN reported on Thursday, citing new satellite images. The images, which bear a striking resemblance to the early stages of Israel's ground invasion of Gaza last year, show troops are active outside the immediate border crossing area between Egypt and Gaza, which Israel occupied on Monday evening, the broadcaster said. Houthi said the occupation of the Rafah crossing does not target only the Palestinian people but is also a show of force against the Egyptian people and army. "Whenever the enemy escalates, we should escalate even more at all levels and activities," he said, adding the Islamic Ummah needs to achieve a deterrent capability against their enemies to fend off danger. "Events and evidence unequivocally indicate the importance of reviving conscious spiritual Jihad within the Islamic Ummah," he said. "Stagnation and passivity will not suffice against the enemy's motives of hatred, greed, and dangerous beliefs." Houthi said with what's happening in Gaza, "it's astonishing that some regimes negotiate security agreements with America for protection", apparently referring to reports that the US and Saudi Arabia were finalizing a "mega-deal". According to US media reports, the agreement would "tie together the futures of Saudi Arabia, Israel and Gaza". The Ansarullah leader said the US clearly encouraged the Israeli occupation of the Rafah crossing, prepared the conditions for it, and is a partner in all crimes of the occupying regime.



IRAN NEWS



Deputy FM Stresses Tehran-Dushanbe Cooperation in Fight Against Terrorism

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Baqeri described cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan in the fight against terrorism as necessary. Baqeri and Tajikistan's Deputy Foreign Minister Farrukh Sharifzadeh jointly chaired the second round of political consultations between the two countries, held in Tehran on Wednesday. The two sides discussed a range of subjects at the meeting, including bolstering of economic ties, elevation of cultural and scientific relations, enhancing regional and international cooperation and boosting parliamentary interactions. Baqeri hailed the agreements reached between the two sides in the first round of the meeting, held in Tajikistan, and expressed Tehran's readiness to develop ties with Dushanbe. He referred to regional and extra-regional security threats and highlighted the support from the United States, the Zionist regime and some European countries for extremist and terrorist groups in the region. He said regional countries' convergence is necessary for confronting the ominous phenomenon of terrorism, stressing the need for cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan in this regard.

Iran to Keep Up Efforts for an End to Israeli War on Gaza



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian vowed the country's continued efforts aimed at bringing an end to the Israeli regime's crimes in the war on Gaza. Speaking in a telephone conversation with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Amir-Abdollahian said the Islamic Republic would keep striving for the establishment of sustainable stability and security in the region and the termination of the Israeli crimes in the Gaza Strip. He warned that if the United States fails to exert pressure on the Israeli prime minister to accept a truce deal and continues to appease the regime as it commits new crimes in Rafah, southern Gaza, the consequences would be hard on the supporters of the war. He said the Zionist regime, in continuation of its "policy of terror and genocide" is now trying to cause another humanitarian catastrophe and thwart international initiatives for terminating the war by shutting down the Rafah Border Crossing. It is now upon Washington to choose between exerting pressure on Israel to stop the war or seeing the region enter a new and different level of crisis and tension, he stated. The Iranian top diplomat reiterated Iran's support for the Hamas resistance movement's response to a ceasefire proposal and briefed Guterres on his recent consultations with his counterparts from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt as well as Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh. He further hailed the UN chief's efforts to end the Israeli war and genocide in Gaza and called for a greater role of the UN on the issue of Palestine.



Iran Registers 30% Rise in Annual LPG Exports

TEHRAN (Shana) - Iran's export of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) increased by about 30 percent during last Iranian year of 1402 (ended March 19), compared to the corresponding figure of its preceding year of 1401, announced the caretaker of the International Affairs Department of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC). Speaking on the sidelines of the 28th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show 2024) in Tehran on Thursday, Amir-Houshang Karami said his department can help to increase forex revenues through the export of natural gas and its products, which is often done through private sector. The department can provide better conditions for the development of investment, employment and promotion of gross domestic product (GDP), the official added. The export of natural gas to Iraq increased by 15 percent in the Iranian year of 1402, while the related contract was extended for the next five years, Karami stated noting that "It is obvious that in addition to the commercial benefits, it plays an important role in the stability of the country's energy diplomacy and the strengthening of relations with neighboring and regional countries." The presence of the NIGC in the Iran Oil Show 2024, which symbolizes Iran as the second-largest holder of gas reserves in the world, the third producer of natural gas and the most important energy supplier of the country, paves the ground well for international interactions in the field of exporting gas products and condensates as well as techno-engineering services. In addition to 1,500 Iranian firms, a sum of 250 companies from 12 countries have taken part in Iran Oil Show 2024, whose motto is "Petroleum industry, production leap and technological optimization".



African States Welcome Collaboration With Iran on Oil, Gas

TEHRAN (Shana) - The ambassadors of Uganda, Kenya, Senegal and Burkina Faso in Tehran discussed the updates about their countries in the energy field, expressing their readiness to collaborate with Iran in the "Perspective of Oil and Gas Industry in Africa" meeting. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the 28th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show 2024) in Tehran on Thursday. Speaking at the meeting, Kenyan Envoy in Tehran Mohammed Joshua Gatimo Aguta said the only gas reservoir in Kenya which has a 3,000-ton capacity is made by an Iranian company. "We need a reservoir of 60,000 tons." "Kenya has favorable opportunities for investment. We have allocated an area of 60,000 hectares for establishing a free trade zone as we hope to be completed by 2050," the ambassador noted. This Kenyan diplomat expressed his hope that in the near future, the African country will not only use gas for domestic and industrial purposes, but also use it to extract other resources. Kenya can establish favorable cooperation with Iran under the framework. Salion Niang Deing, the Senegalese ambassador in Tehran said in the meeting his country is interested in technical and engineering services from Iran as Iranian engineers enjoy good experiences in downstream and upstream industries. "In addition to being ready to cooperate with state-run sectors, Senegal invites Iran's private sector for cooperation in the field of oil and gas," the envoy added. Speaking at the meeting, Muhammad

Tezikuba Kisambira, Ugandan ambassador in Tehran, stated that more than 6.5 billion barrels of oil are the country's crude reserves, of which 1.4 billion barrels can be extracted now. We are now developing a production line for oil export, and we are also building a refinery. Our priority is to work more in the field of refining, but due to the financial limits we have, we have to work with other countries and companies in these fields," the envoy added. Cooperation in crude oil export is Kampala's priority, the diplomat stated adding that "Considering that Uganda has a developing economy, it is normal that the country's need for energy is noteworthy." Pointing to Iran's capacity in the field of oil and gas, he said that his country is keen on cooperating with Iranian companies both in the public and private sectors. Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs and Trade Ahmad Asadzadeh said in the meeting that Tehran proposes multimodal and mutual ways to cooperate with Africa. Collaboration with Africa is very important for the Ministry of Petroleum; hence a special headquarters was formed for this field of cooperation, the official noted. He expressed Iran's readiness to sign agreements with the African Energy Commission (AFREC) to form a close, coherent and powerful relationship. In addition to 1,500 Iranian firms, a sum of 250 companies from 12 countries have taken part in Iran Oil Show 2024, whose motto is "Petroleum industry, production leap and technological optimization".

Iran, Poland Private Sectors Discuss Bilateral Cooperation

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Presidents of the chambers of commerce of Iran and Poland, in an online meeting last week, explored ways for increasing the level of cooperation between the private sectors of the two sides. Speaking during the meeting, President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Samad Hassanzadeh urged the need for holding specialized exhibitions in both countries to help mobilize the trade potentials for more enhanced interactions. Noting that Iran and Poland enjoy high potentials for cooperation, he stressed that the level of exchanges between the two countries is far below these potentials. Referring to US sanctions on Tehran, Hassanzadeh said that the chambers of commerce of Iran and Poland can focus on economic activities to give a boost to bilateral trade cooperation in spite of the sanctions. He also touched upon Iran's plans to defuse the effects of sanctions, noting that major trade delegations from different world countries attended Iran Expo 2024 in the Iranian capital last week where they got further familiar with Iran's exports capabilities. In the meantime, President of the Polish Chamber of Commerce, Marek Kłoczko, said that the trade potentials of Iran and Poland are much bigger than the existing levels. He also stressed the need for provincial cooperation between the two countries while acknowledging the restrictions for financial transactions due to US sanctions on Tehran. Kłoczko invited the Iranian economic actors to travel to Poland so as to discuss the grounds for economic cooperation.



Iran, Iraq Extend Gas Contract for Another 5 Years



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The CEO of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said the gas contract between Iran and Iraq, which would finish at the end of June 20, 2024, was extended for another five years. Majid Chegeni made the comment on the second day of the 28th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show), which is underway at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds. Iran agreed to export its gas to neighboring Iraq for another five years, he stated, Mehr reported. Currently, the two countries have good relations in the field of energy, and the officials of both sides are willing to strengthen these relationships, he emphasized. Turning to the compilation of the 7th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan, the deputy oil minister said Iran needs \$42 billion in investment to develop infrastructural projects of the company, \$20 billion of which is provided through domestic and foreign sources. The Iran Oil Show provides great opportunities for businesses, manufacturers, suppliers, commercial media, and other activists in related sectors to showcase their latest products, services, achievements, technologies, and business ideas.

Tehran to Host Iran-Turkey Joint Economic Cooperation Commission



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's minister of roads and urban development said the meeting of the Iran-Turkey Joint Economic Cooperation Commission will be held in Tehran within the next weeks. Mehrdad Bazrpash, who heads the Iran-Turkey Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, in a meeting with the chairman of the Iran-Turkey Parliamentary Friendship Group said Turkey is an important country in the region and has established good relations with the Islamic Republic in all areas. Given the policy taken by the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi regarding the development of relations with the neighbors, Iran is determined to facilitate the trade exchanges between traders of the two countries, he said. Bazrpash noted that Iran and Turkey have forged extensive trade relations through the four border terminals of Sero, Razi, Bazargan and Kouzehrash. Considering the situation of the two countries in accessing European markets and high seas, the officials in Tehran and Ankara have targeted an annual \$30 billion trade, Iran's roads minister added. He went on to say that Turkey is a very safe route for Iran to access the European markets, adding that the completion of the construction operation of the International East-West International Corridor and South-Northwest Corridor can create unique opportunities for the growth of transit, the IRIB reported. The chairman of the Iran-Turkey Parliamentary Friendship Group, for his part, highlighted Turkey's resolve to reach an annual \$30 billion trade with Iran and increase the number of tourists between the two countries from three million to five million people per year. Kayhan Turkmenoglu expressed hope that bilateral trade and economic relations would develop more than ever.

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 Proposes Mishustin Remain Russia's PM



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed the reappointment on Friday of Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, a technocrat who has helped him through the war in Ukraine and the economic challenges wrought by Western sanctions over Moscow's invasion. The Duma's approval of the low-key Mishustin is nearly certain, as there is virtually no opposition in parliament, which has supported Putin in all his decisions, including the February 2022 invasion of Russia's smaller neighbor. As dictated by law, the government resigned just before Putin, Russia's paramount leader for nearly a quarter of a century, was sworn in for another six-year term on Tuesday after winning in a landslide re-election in March. There is no indication that Putin plans a big reshuffle of the government, which includes veteran Sergei Shoigu, in charge of Russia's defence since 2012, and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in charge of Russia's diplomacy for two decades. Keeping his government intact would send a message of stability and of Putin's satisfaction with his team's progress at home and abroad, analysts say. "President Vladimir Putin submitted to the State Duma a proposal on the candidacy of Mikhail Vladimirovich Mishustin for the post of Chairman of the Government," the speaker of the Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, said on the Telegram messaging app. "Today, deputies will make a responsible decision on behalf of their constituents on this issue," Volodin said. Mishustin, a career bureaucrat, was said to have no political ambitions before Putin tapped him as prime minister in 2020. With no background in the security services, he is not part of the so-called siloviki (strongmen) faction of intelligence veterans close to Putin.

Israel Strikes Eastern Rafah as Ceasefire Talks End



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israeli forces bombarded areas of Rafah on Thursday, Palestinian residents said, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed U.S. President Joe Biden's threat to withhold weapons from Israel if it assaults the southern Gaza city. A senior Israeli official said late on Thursday that the latest round of indirect negotiations in Cairo to halt hostilities in Gaza had ended and Israel would proceed with its operation in Rafah and other parts of the Gaza Strip as planned. Israel has submitted to mediators its reservations about a Hamas proposal for a hostage release deal, the official said. "If we must, we shall fight with our fingernails," Netanyahu said in a video statement. "But we have much more than our fingernails." In Gaza, Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad said their fighters fired anti-tank rockets and mortars at Israeli tanks massed on the eastern outskirts of the city. Residents and medics in Rafah, the biggest urban area in Gaza not yet overrun by Israeli ground forces, said an Israeli attack near a mosque killed at least three people and wounded others in the eastern Brazil neighbourhood. Video footage from the scene showed the minaret lying in the rubble and two bodies wrapped in blankets. An Israeli air strike on two houses in the Sabra neighbourhood of Rafah killed at least 12 people including women and children. Among the dead was a senior commander of the militant Al-Mujahdeen Brigades, and his family, and the family of another group leader, medics, relatives and the group said. Israel says Hamas militants are hiding in Rafah, where the population has been swelled by hundreds of thousands of Gazans seeking refuge from the bombardments that have reduced most of the coastal enclave to ruins. In the United States, the White House repeated its hope that Israel would not launch a full operation in Rafah, saying it did not believe that would advance

Israel's aim of defeating Hamas. "Smashing into Rafah, in [President Biden's] view, will not advance that objective," spokesperson John Kirby said. Kirby said Hamas had been pressured significantly by Israel and there were better options to hunt down what remains of the group's leadership than an operation with significant risk to civilians. Israel's assault on Gaza has killed nearly 35,000 Palestinians and wounded nearly 80,000, most of them civilians, the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said. Biden on Wednesday issued his starkest warning yet against a full ground invasion in Rafah, telling CNN that: "I made it clear that if they go into Rafah... I'm not supplying the weapons." Israel's ambassador to the United States said the decision to withhold weapons from Israel over Rafah sends the "wrong message" to Hamas and the country's foes. "It puts us in a corner because we have to deal with Rafah one way or the other," Ambassador Michael Herzog told a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace webinar. The Israeli military has the munitions it requires for operations in Rafah and other planned operations, chief armed forces spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said. Israeli armed forces have already killed 50 Palestinian gunmen in east Rafah and uncovered several tunnels, Hagari said. Hamas had no immediate comment. In Cairo, delegations from Hamas, Israel, the U.S., Egypt and Qatar had been meeting since Tuesday. The talks in Egypt's capital made some headway but no deal was reached, according to two Egyptian security sources. Izzat El-Risheq, a member of Hamas' political office in Qatar, said the Hamas delegation had left Cairo, having reaffirmed its approval of the mediators' ceasefire proposal. The plan entails the release of Israeli hostages held captive in Gaza and a number of Palestinians jailed by Israel.

Philippines Calls for Expelling Chinese Diplomats



MANILA (Dispatches) - The Philippines' national security adviser called on Friday for Chinese diplomats to be expelled over an alleged leak of a phone conversation with a Filipino admiral in a significant escalation of a bitter row over the South China Sea. China's embassy in Manila had orchestrated "repeated acts of engaging and dissemination of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation", with the objective of sowing discord, division and disunity, Eduardo Ano said in a statement. Those actions "should not be allowed to pass unscathed without serious penalty", he said. China's embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the call to expel diplomats. The office of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and the foreign ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The two countries have been embroiled in a series of heated standoffs this past year in disputed areas of the South China Sea as the Philippines, emboldened by support from the United States and other allies, steps up activities in waters occupied by China's vast coast guard. China has accused the Philippines of trespassing and of treachery, while Manila has scolded Beijing for what it says is a policy of aggression and dangerous manoeuvring inside its exclusive economic zone. The expelling of diplomats could intensify a row that has so far seen heated exchanges, diplomatic protests and the ramming and water-cannoning of Philippine ships at two disputed shoals, the closest of which is more than 850 km (530 miles) away from mainland China.

Ukraine Needs More Arms to Stop Russian Advances



KYIV (Dispatches) - President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Ukraine could stop Russian forces advancing in the east if allied countries increased the supply of arms. The Ukrainian leader made the comments at a joint news conference in Kyiv with the European Parliament's visiting President Roberta Metsola, more than two years after Russia launched its full-scale invasion. Russia has been making small but steady territorial gains in the east of the country since the start of the year, with Ukraine's forces depleted and weapons and ammunition running perilously low. "We are putting maximum pressure on our partners to increase weapon deliveries," Zelenskyy said at an open air briefing in the centre of the capital. "If the delivery of weapons is increased, we will be able to stop (Russian forces) in the east, where they have the initiative." As he spoke, air raid sirens started to blare, a reminder of the threat of Russian missile and drone attacks which have intensified across the country, causing power outages for hundreds of thousands of civilians. "This is their true attitude to peace," Zelenskyy said in reference to Russia, as officials began moving towards a shelter. Metsola was in Kyiv on Europe Day, which celebrates peace and unity across the continent. Item 1 of 5 Ukraine's President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy meets with European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, Ukraine May 9, 2024. REUTERS/Viacheslav Ratynskiy "How are you feeling Roberta?" he asked, turning to Metsola who was standing a few metres away. "I am alright but, as you say, it's Europe Day. Look at this, now I get an idea of what you live through every day," she replied. Ukrainian troops withdrew from three eastern villages in late April, and Ukraine's top commander has said the situation at the front had worsened. The U.S. decision to approve a huge military aid bill last month was welcomed by Kyiv, but many units have yet to receive new arms and warn that time is running out. Zelenskyy acknowledged Ukraine's need for more troops, saying that the lack of forces was creating a "difficult situation" near Avdiivka, a town Russia has captured, and Pokrovsk, which is still in Ukrainian hands. Additional brigades need to be equipped as they arrive to hold back Russian forces, Zelenskyy said, making aid that is "weeks and months away" more pressing. "Deliveries are taking place but not in the amounts that were ... voted for," he said. Zelenskyy added that increased domestic production of drones and artillery shells had helped Ukraine in its battle against Russia's continued onslaughts.



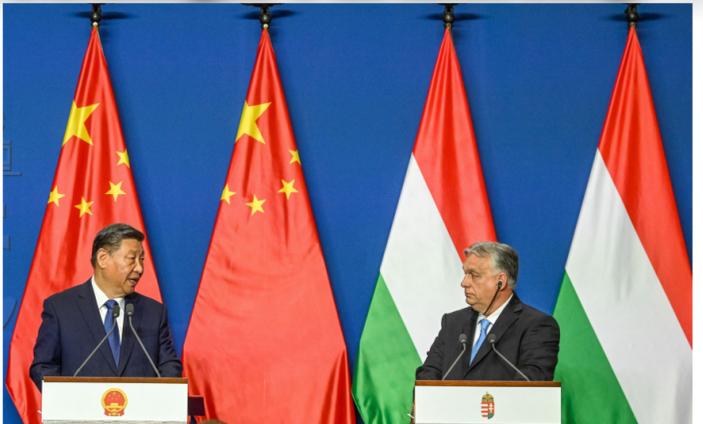
Chad Declares Interim President Deby Winner of Disputed Vote

N'DJAMENA (Dispatches) - Chad's state election body said interim President Mahamat Idriss Deby had won the May 6 presidential election outright with over 61% of the vote, citing provisional results, even as his main challenger declared himself the winner. Chad's junta has become the first of the coup-hit countries in West and Central Africa to stage a return to constitutional rule via the ballot box, but some opposition parties have cried foul over vote-rigging concerns. With tensions running high, large numbers of security forces deployed at major intersections in the capital N'Djamena ahead of the results announcement. National Election Management Agency chief Ahmed Barticheh said Deby had secured 61.3% of the vote - comfortably over the 50% needed to avoid a run-off. He said Deby's prime minister and top opposition candidate Succes Masra, 40, had won 18.53%. Just before the ceremony, Masra claimed victory in a live broadcast on Facebook and called on security forces and his supporters to oppose what he called an attempt to steal the vote. "A small number of individuals believe they can make people believe that the election was won by the same system that has been ruling Chad for decades," he said. "To all Chadians who voted for change, who voted for me, I say: mobilise. Do it calmly, with a spirit of peace," he said. What happens next is unclear.

China-Hungary Relations an All-Weather Strategic Partnership

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - China and Hungary will embark on a "golden voyage" in bilateral relations, Chinese President Xi Jinping said after meeting Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on the third and final stop of his first European tour in five years. Hungary under right-leaning Orban has become an important trade and investment partner for China, in contrast with some other EU nations that are considering becoming less dependent on the world's second-largest economy. Xi arrived in Budapest late on Wednesday after visiting France and Serbia. In Paris, President Emmanuel Macron and EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen pressed him to ensure more balanced trade with Europe and use his influence on Russia to end the war in Ukraine. After their meeting, both Xi and Orban said that their two countries elevated ties to an "all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership." "We are willing to take this as a new starting point to push bilateral relations and pragmatic cooperation into a golden channel and move towards a higher level," Xi said. This, among others, means that the two countries expand their cooperation to the nuclear industry, Orban said. The two countries will also move forward in the construction of key projects including the reconstruction of the Budapest-Belgrade railway project, the Chinese president said. The \$2.1 billion project,

most of which is financed by a loan from China, is part of the Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious plan launched by Xi a decade ago in the hope of building global infrastructure and energy networks connecting Asia with Africa and Europe. Hungary and China signed 18 agreements after the meeting of their leaders, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said in a video on his Facebook page. The two countries will start preparing the construction of a railway line around Budapest that will help transport goods produced by Chinese factories in Eastern Hungary to markets in Western Europe, Szijjarto said. Hungary and China will also start preparing a high-speed railway connecting the centre of Budapest and its airport, the ministers said. The relationship between China and Hungary, which mark their 75th year of diplomatic relations, goes beyond trade and investment as China offered cooperation on public security and law enforcement issues to Hungary in February. Orban started bringing his country closer to Beijing after he came to power in 2010. Warm political relations turned into investments about a decade later when battery and electric vehicle makers started to bring production to Hungary.

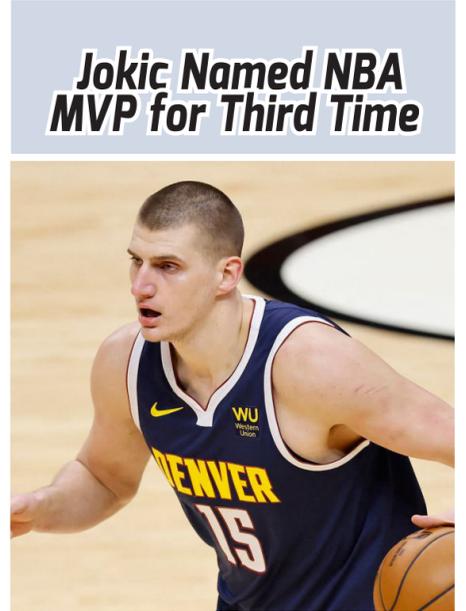




Real Madrid Stun Bayern to Reach Champions League Final

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid showed they remain Europe's comeback kings as Joselu's late double rescued them from the brink of elimination to reach the Champions League final with a dramatic 2-1 second-leg win over Bayern Munich at Santiago Bernabeu today. A 4-3 aggregate victory sealed Real's progress to a remarkable sixth Champions League final in 10 years and they will bid for a record-extending 15th title against Borussia Dortmund at Wembley on June 1. In a repeat of their spectacular semi-final comeback win over Manchester City two years ago, they saw their opponents take the lead after Bayern substitute Alphonso Davies fired home a stunning strike from a counter attack in the 68th minute. But Joselu climbed off the bench to equalise following a calamitous error from Manuel Neuer in the 88th minute and, two minutes later, he shinned a second into the Bayern goal from a cross by Antonio Ruediger. The effort was first ruled out for an apparent offside, but the goal was given following a VAR check. "We've seen it a lot of times this season when it looked as though we're dead and buried ... it doesn't matter who scores the goals but someone always manages it... that mentality of never say die," Jude Bellingham, who will play against his former club in the final, told TNT Sports. Real dominated proceedings, but misfired with several chances as a gritty Bayern put their domestic woes aside to almost eliminate the Spaniards in their own back yard. Davies, who came off the bench early in the first half in place of injured Serge Gnabry, opened the scoring in spectacular fashion, cutting back on his right foot and curling an unstoppable bullet of a shot into the far

corner on a counter-attack. But Real, who were the better side throughout the game, piled on the pressure with Vinicius Jr tormenting the visitors down the left channel. The Brazilian glided past Matthijs De Ligt and Joshua Kimmich effortlessly and created a number of chances for himself and his team mates, who were denied several times by an inspired Neuer. The Bayern keeper looked on course to be man of the match as he weathered a storm, but with minutes remaining he fumbled a Vinicius strike from the edge of the box to gift Joselu the equaliser. The goal recharged a raucous Santiago Bernabeu under their spectacular new roof and two minutes later Real worked their European magic again, snatching a deserved winner that fired the Spanish giants into another final. Bayern made a late push for an equaliser which they thought they had found when defender De Ligt rifled the ball home deep in added time. But play had already been stopped after the linesman flagged for a debatable offside in the build-up, leading Bayern's players and bench to complain vociferously to the referee and his assistants. "We all know the rules and it's clear that, if it's not an obvious offside, you have to let it play. It was a disgraceful call," De Ligt said. With Bayer Leverkusen ending Bayern's 11-year Bundesliga reign by securing the league title last month, the six-times European Cup winners had only one trophy left to fight for this season. "We are almost through, it's almost there and there was a very unusual mistake from our best player for the equaliser then we conceded the second one in stoppage time," Bayern boss Thomas Tuchel said.



Jokic Named NBA MVP for Third Time

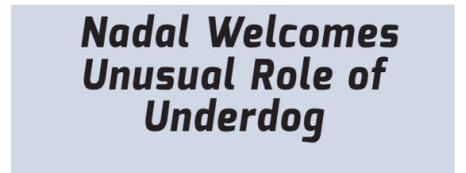
NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic won the NBA's Most Valuable Player award for the third time in four seasons, the league announced on Wednesday. Jokic beat Oklahoma City Thunder's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Luka Doncic of the Dallas Mavericks for the honor, receiving 79 first-place votes from a panel of broadcasters and journalists. The Serbian big man is the ninth player to claim the honor three or more times, previously winning in 2021 and 2022, after averaging 26.4 points, 12.4 rebounds and 9.0 assists across 79 games during the regular season. He was only the second player ever to have at least 2,000 points, 900 rebounds and 700 assists in a season, after Oscar Robertson (1961-62). It marks the sixth year in a row that an international player has claimed the title in the North American league, after Cameroonian center Joel Embiid won last year and Greek forward Giannis Antetokounmpo won in 2020 and 2019.

Brunson Shakes Off Injury, Sends Knicks Past Pacers

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jalen Brunson returned from a first-half injury to spark a second-half comeback for the host New York Knicks, who beat the Indiana Pacers 130-121 in Game 2 of an Eastern Conference semifinal series. The second-seeded Knicks lead the sixth-seeded Pacers 2-0 in the best-of-seven series. Game 3 is scheduled for Friday night in Indianapolis. Brunson missed the final 15:32 of the first half with a right foot injury. The Knicks led 24-17 when Brunson exited, but they entered the second half down 73-63. Brunson drew a standing ovation from the sellout crowd at Madison Square Garden after leading the Knicks out for warmups prior to the third quarter. He played all 24 second-half minutes and had 24 of his team-high 29 points - along with four assists, two steals and one rebound - over the final two quarters as New York outscored the Pacers 67-48. "Lot of toughness," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said of Brunson. "That's sort of, I think, the makeup - we know that's his makeup, but that's also the makeup of our team. The mental-toughness piece is so important - the ability to get through things, to be at your best when your best is needed even when you may not be feeling your best. And that's who he is. Great leader." New York's OG Anunoby scored 28 points before leaving with 3:27 left in the third quarter due to a left hamstring injury. The Knicks are already playing without Mitchell Robinson, who will miss at least six weeks



after aggravating a left ankle injury in Game 1, and Julius Randle, who is out for the season with a right shoulder injury sustained in January. Donte DiVincenzo also had 28 points while Josh Hart (19 points, 15 rebounds) and Isaiah Hartenstein (14 points, 12 rebounds) posted double-doubles for the Knicks, who played the final 8:01 without making a substitution. Tyrese Haliburton had 34 points and nine assists for the Pacers, while Obi Toppin scored 20 points off the bench. Andrew Nembhard had 15 points, Pascal Siakam added 14 points and nine rebounds and T.J. McConnell had a double-double (10 points, 12 assists) off the bench. "We need to get home. We need to play better," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. Nembhard opened the third quarter with a layup for the Pacers before New York went on a 36-16 run to end the period with a 99-91 lead. Indiana scored the first six points of the fourth to begin a 10-3 run that ended with McConnell hitting a layup with 8:03 left to cut the Pacers' deficit to 102-101. Hart hit a 3-pointer and Indiana got within two points four more times, the last coming at 112-110 on a floater by Haliburton with 4:35 remaining. But DiVincenzo drained an open corner 3-pointer on the Knicks' next trip, and Siakam missed a 3-point try and two free throws on the Pacers' following possession.



Nadal Welcomes Unusual Role of Underdog



ROME (Dispatches) - Spanish tennis legend Rafael Nadal said he was "excited to be playing in Rome" despite entering the Italian Open unseeded and ranked 305. "All the matches are tough for me today, difficult and more unpredictable than what they used to be for me, especially on clay," the 37-year-old, 10-time Italian Open winner said. "I accept that role. I accept that challenge. I'm excited about the way that I can be able to play if I keep working the proper way and my body allows me." The 22-time Grand Slam singles champion has recently returned to the circuit after a long absence due to injury. He will open his campaign against Belgian qualifier Zizou Bergs with the Spanish icon taking nothing for granted but confident of his current match preparation. "I'm excited to be playing in Rome. It's a tournament that brings back a lot of unforgettable memories," said Nadal, who turns 38 on June 3. "But it's day by day. This will be my third week almost in a row on the tour, third tournament almost in a row. That hasn't happened for a super long time - that's good news. I need to keep going. I need to keep exploring how I will be able to manage to play every day. But I'm happy the way that I feel today." Nadal is not the only top player with injury issues. Young stars Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz are missing Rome. "When you push your body to the limit, you get injured," said Nadal.

Djokovic Ready to Peak at French Open

ROME (Dispatches) - World number one Novak Djokovic said he believes he will be in top form for the French Open and hopes to prove that at the Italian Open which started on Wednesday. The Serbian told a press conference in Rome on Wednesday that his focus is on Paris, Wimbledon and the Olympic Games and he had strategic reasons for skipping the recent Madrid event. "It was not part of the schedule. The plan was to come here. That's basically it," said Djokovic at a press conference at the Italian Open. Djokovic, who turns 37 on May 22, just before the French Open gets underway on May 26, said he hoped to perform better than he did in his last tournament, the Monte Carlo Masters, where he lost to Casper Ruud in the semi-finals. "I'm on a good route to peak at Roland Garros in Paris," he said. "Hopefully, here in Rome I can play better than I did in Monte-Carlo." "The wish, obviously, is always to go far, but let's see." As top seed Djokovic, who has won the Italian Open six times, has a bye in the first round. He said the expansion of the event to nearly two weeks influenced scheduling choices. "It's a different concept now, the first time that Rome and Madrid are almost two-week events, like Indian Wells, Miami. It gives you more time to recover between matches if you keep going in the tournament, which I think is useful for me." As Djokovic continues to overhaul his team, he has rehired former physio Miljan Amanovic for "certain weeks" this season. Amanovic worked for Djokovic from 2007 to 2017 and

again from 2018 to 2022. Djokovic has sacked several staff in recent months, including coach Goran Ivanisevic and the publicity team. "I'm a proponent of having a quality team and entourage around you, having people who are experts in their field, who have experience, who have knowledge, who also understand psychology as well," he

said. "They know how to emotionally approach you when you need help or when you need space." "You spend a lot of time on the tour together." "You see them much more than you see your family, especially when you're younger, when you're travelling literally every single week of the year."

