

Head of the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran (CAO) Mohammad Mohammadi-Bakhsh and Qatar's Acting President of the General Civil Aviation Authority Mohamed Faleh Al Hajri Reviewed Further Cooperation and Enhancement of Relations in a Meeting in Doha

# IRAN NEWS

Iran Will Respond Directly to Any Threat Originating From the Zionist Regime, Army Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Kiumars Heydari Says, in the Islamic Republic's Latest Warning to Israel

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2

DOMESTIC

## Tehran, Astana Can't Be Held Hostage by Global Geopolitics

> SEE PAGE 2

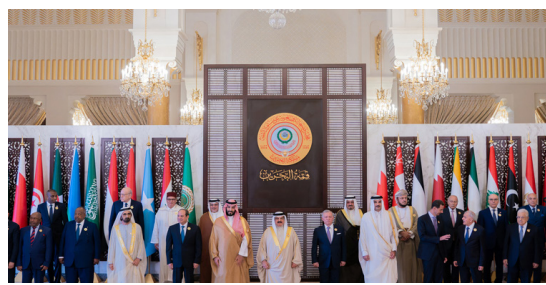
3

INTERNATIONAL

## Putin and Xi Pledge a New Era and Condemn U.S.

> SEE PAGE 3

### Iran Rejects Unacceptable Arab League Statement on Persian Gulf Islands



TEHRAN - Tehran has dismissed "baseless" and "unacceptable" the Arab League statement on Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs in the Persian Gulf, reiterating its sovereignty over the three Iranian islands. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani made the remarks on Thursday after the 33rd Arab League summit repeated the United Arab Emirates' claim to the trio of the Iranian islands in its final statement following a meeting in the Bahraini capital Manama. "It has been stated and emphasized time and again that the three Iranian islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs are an integral and eternal part of the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said. The Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs have historically been part of Iran, proof of which can be found and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world. However, the United Arab Emirates has repeatedly laid claim to the islands. The islands fell under British control in 1921 but on November 30, 1971, a day after British forces left the region and just two days before the UAE was to become an official federation, Iran's sovereignty over the islands was restored. Additionally in its statement, the 22-member Arab League called for an immediate end to the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces from the Palestinian territory, the lifting of an Israeli siege, and the opening of all crossings for the entry humanitarian aid. Kanaani welcomed the points raised in the statement in defense of the oppressed people of Palestine and the condemnation of the Israeli war crimes in Gaza. He also emphasized the need for further unity among Muslim countries to stop Israeli atrocities. Since early October, Israel has killed at least 35,272 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 79,205 others.

### Iran Arms for Yemen "Lies" by U.S. Aim to Justify Aggression



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations has unequivocally dismissed US allegations about the Islamic Republic's interference in Yemen, saying Washington aims to achieve its short-sighted political interests in the region through spreading lies and misinformation. Amir Saeed Irvani made the statement in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and rotating President of the UN Security Council Pedro Comissario Afonso in response to the recent U.S. accusations against Iran at a Security Council meeting on the situation of Yemen. During the public UNSC meeting on May 13, U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Robert Wood claimed that the Islamic Republic was sending "advanced weapons, including ballistic and cruise missiles" for Yemen's military and Ansarullah resistance movement. "It is regrettable that, once again, the U.S. representative used the Security Council's platform to advance its short-sighted political interests and to justify and legitimize the US's ongoing illegal actions and military aggression against Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity by spreading lies and misinformation about the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the situation in Yemen," Irvani wrote in his letter. "The Islamic Republic of Iran unequivocally rejects these unfounded allegations." Irvani also rejected the identical allegations made against Tehran by the representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom and France in another meeting on Yemen in April.



## European Trio Warned After Deploying Warplanes to Defend Israel Against Iran Operation

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian commander sounds a note of warning addressed to the UK, Germany, and France after the trio deployed their warplanes to defend the Israeli regime against a retaliatory operation staged by Iran last month. Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), made the remarks. On Wednesday, "All criminals should know [this] that their measures and crimes have been chalked up to their accounts," Qa'ani said. "France, Germany, and the UK should not think that they deployed the planes that night and that the issue was over. Yes, that night was over, but they will be held accountable in due course," he added. The commander was addressing a ceremony held to mark 40 days since the martyrdom of the IRGC's General Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi. Haji Rahim, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, an IRGC Quds Force commander, and five of their accompanying officers were all martyred on April 1 in an Israeli terrorist attack against Iran's diplomatic premises in the Syrian capital Damascus. In retaliation, the IRGC targeted the occupied territories late on April 13 with a barrage of drones and missiles. The retaliatory strikes, dubbed Operation True Promise, inflicted heavy damage on Israeli military bases across those territories. According to Qa'ani, the United States and the entire Western military alliance of NATO contributed all of their military capabilities towards defending the occupying regime against the Iranian operation. "[Up to] seven to eight naval groups were deployed to the Black Sea to prevent the [Iranian] operation," he

said, adding that more than 200 aircraft were also scrambled across the region's skies during the night of the operation. The commander described the aerial expanse, where the operation was conducted, as "the most condensed spot in the world as far as [the issue of] air defense is concerned," billing the operation as "unprecedented and historically unachievable." Qa'ani reminded that the Islamic Republic had previously informed various concerned parties about the pending operation. "True Promise was an overt operation... The time of the operation was [already] clear as daylight to the Zionist regime and the United States," he said, noting that the Islamic Republic "displayed its strength, steadfastness, and power to the whole world" during the operation. "The [Operation] True Promise's victory is not [simply] limited to the number of missiles and drones that reached the occupied territories," the commander stated. "There are so many secrets within this operation that would take one a long time to analyze," he added. Qa'ani hailed the role that was played by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in the operation. "Who in the world dares to take such a decision?" he asked, reminding that even the United States -- Israel's biggest ally -- had announced following the Israeli terrorist attack that it would not enter the fray. The commander, meanwhile, advised regional and extra-regional countries to learn from the US's inability to protect the Israeli regime during the Iranian operation, calling on them not to take much comfort in relying on Washington.

## President Urges Experts to Provide Solutions Than Creating Dead End

TEHRAN - Emphasizing that none of us have an excuse before God and the people for failing to remove the obstacles, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says, "It is true that the constitution subordinates any kind of development to the protection of the environment, but the expert's view should not create a dead end, but the expert should solve the problem and find a way to boost production and create employment". Following the plans of the second visit of the Popular Administration to Mazandaran province, President Raisi attended the meeting of the administrative council of the province, and emphasized the importance of vision, approach and action in order to bring about transformation, stating, "We believe that there is no problem in the country that cannot be solved; Our belief and logic is the belief and logic of 'we can'. The President added, "We believe that with our logic of 'we can', great things can happen to us, as we observed today in the celebration of the revival of stagnant production units, that some famous and big units of the province, which were caught in a deplorable situation in the past, today prospered and have good plans for the development of production and employment". Raisi described the revival of 395 production units as a proof and a manifestation that great things can be done with the existing capacities in the province and the country, he said, "Today, during the visit to the village of Khormakela, I witnessed beautiful effects of attracting people's participation in the economy". The President stated that the people, the Leader and the family of the martyrs have a right to expect from us managers under this roof and that great things can happen in your hands, and said, "One of your most important missions is to give a platform to the people and use the popular labour force in all fields". Raisi pointed out, "None of us has any justification before God and people for failing to remove the obstacles. For example, it is true that the constitution subordinates any kind of development to the protection of the environment, but the expert's view should not be to create a dead end, rather, the expert should open a way and untie knots with the view of solving the problem and for the prosperity of production and creation of employment". He considered jihadi action as the expectation of the people, martyrs, and Leader from all managers and added, "Today, the will and wishes of 10,400 martyrs of the province, and their message to us is to open the knots in people's lives, and basically, teal honouring of martyrs is to act on their wishes and solve problems in people's lives". Raisi continued by emphasizing the importance of paying attention to the production of priority products in the agricultural sector for the people, and said that achieving a resilient economy and economic independence can be realised with comprehensive planning and action. The President also pointed out the importance of rice production as one of the country's strategic products in Mazandaran province and said, "There should be a chain of planting, harvesting and distribution of rice in such a way that the rights of farmers and consumers are not violated". Raisi further referred to the problem of waste in the northern cities of the country as one of the main sufferings and concerns of the people of these regions and urged the governor general of Mazandaran to set a time for the contractor of the Sari waste incinerator project to complete and operate it as one of the main priorities".



### Iran Ready to Share Nuclear Expertise With All Countries: AEOL chief



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOL) has expressed the country's preparedness to share its achievements in the nuclear sector with other states, particularly with neighboring countries. Behrouz Kamalvandi made the remarks on Wednesday during a meeting with participants at the third Iranian-Arab Dialogue Conference, which was held in Tehran on May 12-14. "Iran has 50 years of history and experience in the nuclear field and has been able to train many scientists and specialists," he said. "Iran stands ready for comprehensive cooperation in order to transfer its nuclear expertise and technology to all countries, especially neighboring ones. We extend the hand of friendship to all states." The AEOL spokesman also highlighted Iran's achievements in the area of uranium enrichment and the production of radiopharmaceuticals despite Western sanctions. He further pointed to Israel's assassination of Iranian scientists and its acts of industrial and cyber-sabotage aimed at slowing the Islamic Republic's nuclear progress, saying, "We did not obtain the nuclear industry easily in our country and we paid a heavy price for it." Meanwhile, Kamalvandi expressed regret that political issues have prevailed over negotiations between Tehran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), stressing that the talks should be technical and within the framework of Safeguards Agreement. Iran, he added, has currently one nuclear power plant and is constructing two more as part of plans to generate 20,000 megawatts (MW) of nuclear electricity by the next 20 years.

### Iran, IAEA to Cooperate on Unresolved Issues



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top nuclear official says the Islamic Republic will continue to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to resolve disputed issues surrounding its nuclear program. Mohammad Eslami, who serves as head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOL), said on Wednesday that Iran had sorted out almost half of the issues raised by the IAEA about its nuclear sites. "...two sites remain, which are in the process of being resolved and the deputies from the two sides are negotiating and interacting on them based on the plan we have agreed upon," Eslami told reporters on the sidelines of a Cabinet meeting in Tehran. He said ongoing work between Iran and the IAEA is completely separate from stalled negotiations that are aimed at reviving a 2015 international agreement on Iran's nuclear program, known as the JCPOA. His remarks came days after IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi visited Iran to attend a major nuclear science conference and to hold talks with senior officials of the country. Grossi and Iranian officials have described bilateral meetings in Tehran as positive. In an interview with the Financial Times published on Tuesday, Grossi said that he had seen a desire in the Iranian authorities for engaging in serious negotiations with the IAEA. That comes against the backdrop of some media reports and statements by Western government officials suggesting Iran is not willing to cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog because it has not benefitted from the JCPOA. Eslami said in his remarks that a "Joint Statement" he made with Grossi in March 2023 to outline the road ahead for cooperation between Iran and the IAEA is still valid.



# IRAN NEWS



## Iran Self-Sufficient in Drone, Missile Production

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A senior Iranian defense official says the Islamic Republic has designed and produced highly advanced drones and missiles without reliance on any country and despite draconian sanctions imposed by the West. Brigadier General Afshin Khajefard, head of Iran's Aviation Industries Organization (IAIO) of the Defense Ministry, said on Wednesday, "We are affected by sanctions, and the enemy is trying to ensure that the Islamic civilization is not prominent." "The field of science and technology is one of the areas that the enemy does not want to be developed in our country," he added. Despite the outside pressure, Iran has made significant progress in the defense industry, particularly in the production of various types of drones and missiles. The Iranian-made drones can fly for 6 to 7 hours depending on different situations to reach their targets, Khajefard said. Regarding Iran's Operation True Promise of April 13, an unprecedented missile and drone attack against the Israeli regime, the official said both the operation and the air defense that was deployed to deter a possible counterstrike were an exemplary military action in the air domain.

## New Chinese Ambassador Presents Copy of Credentials to Iran FM



TEHRAN (IRNA) - China's New Ambassador to Tehran Cong Peiwu has presented a copy of his credentials to Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian at the start of his diplomatic mission in the Islamic Republic. Cong Peiwu met with the top Iranian diplomat on Wednesday four days after he arrived in Tehran. Amir-Abdollahian appreciated efforts by Cong Peiwu's predecessor to progress Tehran-Beijing relations, expressing hope that the new ambassador will take the same path to help strengthen ties between the two countries. Cong Peiwu said that Iran and China enjoy deep and long-running relations, adding that the Chinese government gives special importance to promoting all-out cooperation with Iran.



## Tehran, Astana Can't Be Held Hostage by Global Geopolitics

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Ali Akbar Jokar says Tehran and Astana have a lot in common and cannot be held hostage by various geopolitical events in the world. Jokar made the remarks in an exclusive interview with "Eurasia: Politics and Culture", an Astana-based information and analytical portal about Eurasia and the world. While expressing his views on the economic cooperation between the two countries, the Iranian envoy said that "the relations between Tehran and Astana are exemplary all over the world" not only because of geographical connection but also because of very deep and centuries-old cultural and historical ties. "Although some manifestations of big powers affect our trade, commerce and economic interactions" he said, adding that there exist no insoluble problems between Iran and Kazakhstan as "the two countries have the will at the highest political level to develop successful relations". "There is the Caspian Sea between our countries, which connects us, and Kazakhstan has the

opportunity to access the Indian Ocean and international waters through Iran", Jokar clarified. The Iranian ambassador continued by saying that "Astana has a high potential to enter the 80-million market of Iran and the market of Persian Gulf countries as well as to Africa via sea". According to him, agricultural products, food industries and petrochemicals have the highest volume in bilateral trade, but said that "the current volume is not proportional to the capacities of the two countries". Jokar also mentioned about the potential of the tourism industry in Iran and Kazakhstan. "Undoubtedly, today tourism plays an essential role in the development of relations in cultural, social and scientific fields around the world. Therefore, the more tourism relations are strengthened, the more cultural and social relations will improve and the level of tensions will decrease". "In addition, Iran has a very high educational and scientific potential", the Iranian envoy said during the interview.

## Culture Minister Offers Hosting 2nd SCO Film Festival in Tehran



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili has proposed that the second Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) International Film Festival be held in Tehran. Addressing the 21st meeting of the ministers of culture of the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on Wednesday, Esmaili said that the West attempts to deviate people from civilized culture and progress. "We should try to accurately introduce the manifestations of high culture with the originality of the countries of the Middle East and the SCO members which has a long history," he added. Common culture, traditions, and customs as unbreakable threads are the cause of unity between nations and can be the cause of closeness, he noted. Iran, as a civilized country, is ready for cultural and artistic cooperation in the form of SCO, he stressed. He also suggested the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Film Union.

## RAI Earmarks \$500m for Renovating, Repairing Railway Fleet



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The chief executive of the Railways of the Islamic Republic of Iran (RAI) said a \$500 million fund has been allocated for purchasing the equipment, repairing and modernizing the railway fleet of the country using oil bartering.

Miad Salehi made the remarks in a meeting with the producers and repairmen of the railway fleet of the country, adding that another \$500 million will also be earmarked for buying locomotives.

The CEO of RAI further pointed out that 50 freight locomotives of the Railway Company will be delegated to the private sector in the next month, the website of Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD) reported.

With the coordination made in this regard, the contract for delegating 50 freight locomotives and another contract of investment for repairing 15 other locomotives (ROT) will be unveiled in a ceremony as well, the deputy roads minister added.

## Iran's Trade With Neighbors Exceeds \$90 b

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The volume of trade between the Islamic Republic of Iran and its neighbors has reached over \$90 billion, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says. Ebrahim Raisi's government attaches importance to the establishment of relations with neighbors, Amir-Abdollahian said on Thursday on the sidelines of the 35th Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF). Iran enjoys strong relations with all its northern, western, eastern and southern neighbors, he noted. Neighborhood policy has helped Iran to take important steps in the development of economy, science, technology, as well as scientific, cultural and tourism and academic cooperation, he added. Given the

high capacity in Iran in the field of industry and mining, the country has strong cooperation with neighboring countries, the Iranian foreign minister stated. Civilization and Persian language issues are important in interaction with Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan, he said, adding that Iran has taken very effective measures in this regard and the recent visit of Raisi to Pakistan has been made within this framework. Tehran International Book Fair is taking place from May 8 to 18 under the motto 'Let's Read, Create'. In total, about 60 foreign publishers are taking part in the book fair, presenting around 50,000 books compared to 45,000 books last year.



## Vietnam Keen on Expansion of Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh has welcomed the further expansion of relations between Iran and Vietnam.

Iran's police chief Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan held talks with Pham Minh Chinh.

During the meeting, the Vietnamese premier welcomed the further expansion of ties, especially in the areas of economic, trade, education, and delegation exchanges in the field of law enforcement between Iran and Vietnam.

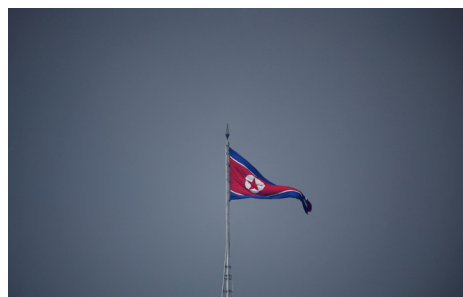
He highlighted the progress of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the fields of science and technology, defense, and military, and voiced his country's readiness in exchanging know-how and transferring technology between the two countries.

The official lauded the two countries' cooperation in multilateral levels and common stances in international organizations.



### North Korea Fires Ballistic Missile

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired a ballistic missile towards the sea off its east coast, South Korea's military said on Friday. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff did not immediately provide details of the projectile or its trajectory. North Korea has launched a range of ballistic and cruise missiles as well as tactical rockets in recent months, describing them as part of a program to upgrade its defensive capabilities. Earlier on Friday, the powerful sister of North Korea leader Kim Jong Un said its tactical rockets were intended solely as a deterrent against South Korean military aggression, while denying that Pyongyang was exporting the weapons. The missile launch comes at the same time as a visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to the Chinese northeastern city of Harbin.



# IRAN NEWS

### Slovakia PM Fico's Fate Remains in Balance After Surgery



BRATISLAVA (Dispatches) - Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico remains in a serious condition and it is too soon to say whether he will recover, a deputy prime minister said, a day after an assassination attempt that has sent shock waves across Europe. The shooting was the first major assassination attempt on a European political leader for more than 20 years and has drawn international condemnation. Political analysts and lawmakers say it has exposed an increasingly febrile and polarised political climate both in Slovakia and across Europe. "Unfortunately, I cannot say yet that we are winning (the battle to save Fico) or that the prognosis is positive because the extent of the injuries caused by four gunshot wounds is so extensive that the body's response will still be very difficult," Deputy Prime Minister Robert Kalinak said. Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estok, speaking at the same news conference, said the shooter—who police have charged with attempted murder—had acted alone and had previously taken part in anti-government protests. "This is a lone wolf who had radicalised himself in the latest period after the presidential election (in April)," Sutaj Estok said. The suspect listed government policies on Ukraine and its plans to reform the country's public broadcaster and dismantle the special prosecutor's office as reasons for the attack, the interior minister added.



### Putin and Xi Pledge a New Era and Condemn U.S.

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin on Thursday pledged a "new era" of partnership between the two most powerful rivals of the United States, which they cast as an aggressive Cold War hegemon sowing chaos across the world. Xi greeted Putin on a red carpet outside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, where they were hailed by marching People's Liberation Army soldiers, a 21-gun salute on Tiananmen Square and children waving the flags of China and Russia. China and Russia declared a "no limits" partnership in February 2022 when Putin visited Beijing just days before he sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine, triggering the deadliest land war in Europe since World War Two. Xi, 70, and Putin, 71, signed a joint statement on Thursday about the "new era" that proclaimed opposition to the U.S. on a host of security issues and a shared view on everything from Taiwan and Ukraine to North Korea and cooperation on new peaceful nuclear technologies and finance. "The China-Russia relationship today is hard-earned, and the two sides need to cherish and nurture it," Xi told Putin. "China is willing to ... jointly achieve the development and rejuvenation of our respective countries, and work together to uphold fairness and justice in the world." Russia, waging war against NATO-supplied Ukrainian forces, and China, under pressure from a concerted U.S. effort to counter its growing military and economic strength, increasingly have found common geopolitical cause. Xi has told Putin the two have the chance to drive changes the world has not seen in a century, which many analysts see as an attempt to challenge a U.S.-led global order. Their governments, pushing back against perceived humiliations of the 1991 Soviet collapse and centuries of European colonial dominance of China, have sought to portray the West as decadent and in decline, with China challenging U.S. supremacy in everything from quantum computing and synthetic biology to espionage and hard military power. But China and Russia face their own challenges, including a slowing Chinese economy and an

emboldened and expanding NATO following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Washington casts China as its biggest competitor and Russia as its biggest nation-state threat. The U.S. views both as authoritarian rulers who have quashed free speech and exerted tight control at home over the media and the courts. Biden has referred to Xi as a "dictator" and has said Putin is a "killer" and even a "crazy SOB". Beijing and Moscow have scolded Biden for the comments. Putin's visit comes weeks after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken flew to China to raise concerns about China's support for Russia's military. That trip appears to have done little to dent Xi's deepening relationship with Putin. By picking China for his first foreign trip since being sworn in this month for another six-year term, Putin is sending a message to the world about his priorities and the strength of his personal ties with Xi. The joint statement was described as deepening the strategic relationship, and mentioned plans to step up military ties and how defence sector cooperation between the two nations improved regional and global security. It singled out the United States for criticism. "The United States still thinks in terms of the Cold War and is guided by the logic of bloc confrontation, putting the security of 'narrow groups' above regional security and stability, which creates a security threat for all countries in the region," the statement said. "The U.S. must abandon this behaviour." It also condemned initiatives to seize assets and property of foreign states, a clear reference to Western moves to redirect profits from frozen Russian assets or the assets themselves, to help Ukraine. State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel told a daily news briefing that China "cannot have its cake and eat it too" in backing Moscow. "You can't want to have good, further, stronger, deepened relationships with Europe and other countries while simultaneously continuing to fuel the biggest threat to European security in a long time," Patel said, calling Beijing's help in reconstituting Russia's defence industrial base "deeply problematic".

### Russia Intercepts More Than 100 Ukrainian Drones Overnight



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia intercepted more than 100 Ukrainian drones overnight in the south of the country and over annexed Crimea and the Black Sea, Moscow's defense ministry said on Friday. Fifty-one drones were destroyed over Crimea, 44 over the Krasnodar region, six over the Belgorod region, six over the Black Sea and one over the Kursk region, the defence ministry said in a statement. The offensive was one of the largest overnight drone attacks by Ukraine and comes as Russian forces advance along the front line, making their biggest territorial gains in 18 months. Russia's latest offensive has further stretched Ukraine's outgunned and outmanned forces. Moscow seized 278 square kilometres (107 square miles) of Ukrainian territory between May 9 and 15, according to AFP calculations based on data from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) - the largest territorial gain in a single operation since mid-December 2022. Meanwhile Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited the northeastern city of Kharkiv on Thursday to boost morale and reinforce troops in the region where Russian forces are trying to press their new offensive beyond border areas. Moscow has made inroads of at least several kilometres into the north of Kharkiv region since Friday, forcing Kyiv's outmanned troops to try to hold the line on a new front as Russia mounts more pressure on the front in the east. "The direction remains extremely difficult - we are strengthening our units," Zelensky said after holding a meeting in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, with his top commander and senior military leaders.



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israel's tanks pushed into the heart of Jabalia in northern Gaza on Thursday, facing anti-tank rockets and mortar bombs from militants concentrated there, while in the south, its forces pounded Rafah without advancing, Palestinian residents and militants said. The slow progress of Israel's offensive, more than seven months after it was prompted by Hamas' deadly cross-border raid, highlighted the difficulty of achieving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's aim of eradicating the militant group. Armed wings of Hamas and its ally Islamic Jihad have been able to fight up and down the Gaza Strip, using heavily fortified tunnels to stage attacks in both the north - the focus of Israel's initial invasion - and new battlegrounds like Rafah. "We are wearing Hamas down," Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said, announcing that more troops would be deployed in Rafah, where he said several tunnels had been destroyed. Senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri responded that the group would defend its people "by all means". Israel says four Hamas battalions are

now in Rafah along with hostages abducted during the Oct. 7 assault, but it faces international pressure not to invade the city, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinian civilians are sheltering. South Africa asked the top U.N. court to order a halt to Israel's Rafah offensive, saying it was "part of the endgame in which Gaza is utterly destroyed". Israel has denied South African allegations of genocide in Gaza and said it had complied with an earlier court order to step up aid. The Gaza death toll has risen to 35,272, health officials in the Hamas-run coastal enclave said, and malnutrition is widespread with international aid efforts blocked by the violence and Israel's de-facto shutdowns of its Kerem Shalom crossing and the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. The United States anchored a temporary floating pier to a beach in Gaza on Thursday to boost aid deliveries, but it was still unclear how it would be distributed given the challenges that have beset the United Nations and relief groups for months.



### S. Africa Urges World Court for End to Israel Attack in Gaza

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - South Africa urged the U.N.'s top court on Thursday to order a halt to Israel's offensive on Rafah, saying attacks on the southern Gaza city "must be stopped" to ensure the survival of the Palestinian people. South Africa's ambassador to the Netherlands, Vusumuzi Madonsela, asked judges to order Israel to "immediately, totally and unconditionally, withdraw the Israeli army from the entirety of the Gaza Strip." The two days of hearings at the International Court of Justice, also known as the World Court, are part of a case brought by South Africa accusing Israel of genocide. Israel, which has denounced South Africa's claim that it is violating the 1949 Genocide Convention as baseless, will respond in court on Friday. Last week South Africa asked for additional emergency measures to protect Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians have been sheltering. South Africa also asked the court to order Israel to allow unimpeded access to Gaza for U.N. officials, organisations providing humanitarian aid, journalists and investigators. Israel's military campaign has killed tens of thousands of children and women, destroyed civilian infrastructure and starved the population, South Africa's legal team told the court.

## French Security Forces Impose Calmer Situation in New Caledonia

PARIS (Dispatches) - Hundreds of military and armed police reinforcements deployed Friday to the riot-scarred streets of France's Pacific territory of New Caledonia, seeking to quell clashes that have left five people dead and hundreds injured. Anger over France's plan to impose new voting rules spiralled into the deadliest violence in four decades in the archipelago of 270,000 people, which lies between Australia and Fiji - 17,000 kilometres (10,600 miles) from Paris. In Paris, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said about 1,000 extra security forces were being sent to New Caledonia - adding to the 1,700 already present - while authorities would push for "the harshest penalties for rioters and looters". Extra forces began landing Thursday at the French army-controlled La Tontouta International Airport and could be seen moving through the capital Noumea in red berets, toting rifles, gas masks and riot shields. Using state of emergency powers, security forces had imposed "a calmer and more peaceful situation" around Noumea for the first time since the unrest started on Monday, according to the high commission representing the French state. But there were "fires at a school and two companies", it said in a statement Friday. On Friday morning, AFP journalists saw flames and smoke pouring from a shopping centre, smouldering buildings, dozens of burned-out cars and residents dragging the remnants of vehicles off the roads. Hundreds of people

lined up outside shops for desperately needed food and supplies. The security reinforcements will impose order "where control is no longer assured", High Commissioner of the Republic in New Caledonia Louis Le Franc told journalists in Noumea. Read more Colonial past haunts latest New Caledonia crisis Security forces have placed 10 independence activists accused of organising violence under house arrest, according to authorities.







## Ronaldo Tops Forbes' List of Highest-Paid Athletes Again

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo topped Forbes' list of highest-paid athletes for the fourth time in his career while Spanish golfer Jon Rahm moved up to second following his sensational switch to Saudi-backed LIV Golf. Ronaldo became the world's highest-paid athlete after his move to Saudi Arabian side Al-Nassr and Forbes said the 39-year-old's estimated total earnings were in the region of \$260 million, an all-time high for a soccer player. His on-field earnings amounted to \$200 million while his off-field earnings were \$60 million thanks to sponsorship deals where brands make use of his 629 million Instagram followers. Twice major winner Rahm joined LIV Golf in December in a big-money move that sent shockwaves through the sport after media reports said the current world number five would be paid at least \$300 million. Apart from that guarantee, Rahm has earned \$218 million and joins Ronaldo as the only two athletes to earn over \$200 million. Third on the list is record eight-times Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi, who made a lucrative switch to Major League Soccer side Inter Miami, helping the Argentine World Cup winner earn \$135 million. The 36-year-old has earned \$65 million in on-field earnings but \$70 million off it thanks to deals with major

sponsors such as Adidas and Apple. Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James is fourth at \$128.2 million and although the 39-year-old, the first NBA player to score 40,000 career points, is nearing the end of his career, the American is set to have one last crack at the Olympics. Fellow NBA star Giannis Antetokounmpo (\$111 million) of the Milwaukee Bucks rounds out the top five while France soccer captain Kylian Mbappe has dropped down to sixth (\$110 million). Mbappe announced he would be leaving Paris St Germain after seven years in the French capital where he became the club's all-time leading scorer and the 25-year-old is expected to join Spanish giants Real Madrid in the close season. Former PSG star Neymar, who also moved to the Saudi Pro League to join Al-Hilal, is seventh (\$108 million) despite sitting out the majority of the season with a torn ACL. French striker Karim Benzema, who also moved to Saudi Arabia, is eighth (\$106 million) on the list followed by Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (\$102 million). Lamar Jackson is the only NFL player on the list in 10th place (\$100.5 million) thanks to the signing bonus that was negotiated into his new Baltimore Ravens contract last year.

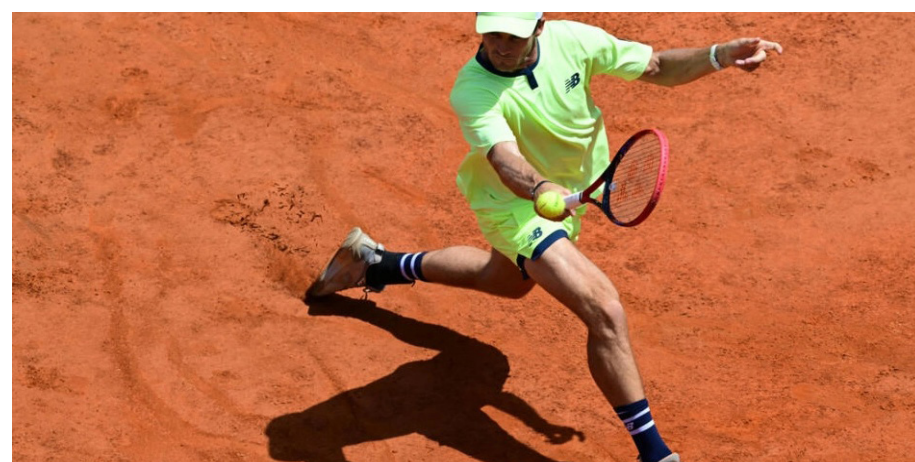
## Curry Wins 2023-24 Magic Johnson Award



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Golden State Warriors star Stephen Curry is the winner of the 2023-24 Magic Johnson Award, the Professional Basketball Writers Association announced. The award is voted on by more than 200 writers and editors who belong to the PBWA and honors the NBA player who excels both on the court and in displaying "cooperation and grace in dealing with the media and fans," according to the organization. It's the second Johnson award for Curry, who also won in 2016. Damian Lillard (2017, 2020) and Shane Battier (2007, 2013) are the other two-time winners. There were five finalists for the award: Curry, Bam Adebayo (Miami Heat), DeMar DeRozan (Chicago Bulls), Rudy Gobert (Minnesota Timberwolves) and Tyrese Haliburton (Indiana Pacers). Curry, 36, has won about every award in his 15 seasons since the Warriors selected him No. 7 overall in the 2009 NBA Draft. Among the honors, he's a two-time league MVP, four-time NBA champion, 10-time All-Star, four-time All-NBA first-team selection and a member of the league's 75th Anniversary Team. For the 2022-23 season, Curry won the J. Walter Kennedy Citizenship Award and was named the Social Justice Champion, winning the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Trophy. In the 2023-24 season, Curry averaged 26.4 points, 4.5 rebounds and 5.1 assists and was named Clutch Player of the Year.

## Paul Overcomes Hurkacz to Reach Italian Open Semis

ROME (Dispatches) - American 14th seed Tommy Paul came through a marathon match to beat Polish seventh seed Hubert Hurkacz 7-5 3-6 6-3 and reach the Italian Open semi-finals. Paul, who defeated defending champion Daniil Medvedev in the previous round, had yet to drop a set before the quarter-final, but Hurkacz managed to force the match into the decider before the American came out on top. It was a match which went back and forth with 13 breaks of serve overall. The pair exchanged breaks early in the opening set, with Paul breaking twice to lead 3-2. With Paul serving for the set, Hurkacz broke again to make it 5-5. Paul broke back immediately and held serve to take the first set. The American made a strong start to the second, breaking in the first game, but Hurkacz came back, breaking twice to force a third set. This time it was the Pole who took an early 2-0 lead, but they again exchanged breaks of serve to make it 3-3 before Paul made the decisive break to go 5-3 up, and then saved six break points to wrap up victory. Paul awaits the winner of last quarter-final between Greece's sixth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas and Chilean 21st seed Nicolas Jarry. Another Chilean, Alejandro Tabilo is already into the other semi-final and will take on German third seed Alexander Zverev. Earlier Alexander Zverev suffered a nasty fall before rallying to beat Taylor Fritz 6-4 6-3 in the quarter-finals of the Italian Open. The third-seeded German fell on his stomach and suffered cuts to his wrist and finger after hitting a backhand return in the third game. He was treated on court before play resumed after a short delay and he returned to attack Fritz's serve, converting three of his five break-point chances and hitting 20 winners en route to a 90-minute victory.



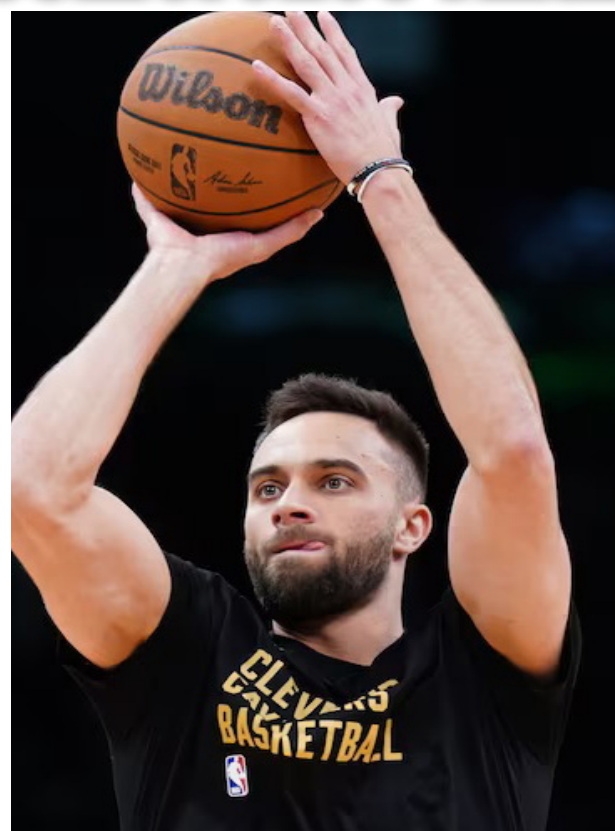
## FIFA Propose Mandatory Racism Sanctions, Including Match Forfeits



ZURICH (Dispatches) - FIFA will present a proposal to its Congress to implement mandatory sanctions, including match forfeits, for incidents of racist abuse across all its 211 member associations, the secretary general of world soccer's governing body said on Thursday. Mattias Grafstrom, who was formally appointed as the FIFA Secretary General this week, wrote a letter to all member associations outlining the proposal which includes rules and sanctions, action on the field and potential criminal charges. "We... will make racism a specific offence with mandatory inclusion in the individual Disciplinary Codes of all 211 FIFA Member Associations, differentiating racism from other incidents, giving acts of racism their own specific and severe sanctions, including match forfeits," Grafstrom said, with the proposal to be presented at the FIFA Congress in Bangkok on Friday. "We will pause, suspend and abandon games in cases of racism, introducing a global standard gesture for players to communicate racist incidents and referees to signal the implementation of the three-step procedure." The gesture involves players raising their hands and crossing their wrists so the referee is made aware of a racist incident. The three-step procedure adopted by FIFA involves the referee requesting a public announcement to call for such behavior to cease, suspending the match until it stops and, in some scenarios, abandoning the match altogether. "We... will push for the recognition of racism as a criminal offence in every country in the world, and where already an offence, will push for prosecution with the severity it deserves," FIFA added.

## Celtics Puts Cavs to Bed, Advance to Eastern Conference Finals

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Boston Celtics are in a familiar place. The Celtics advanced to the Eastern Conference finals for the third straight year -- and the sixth time in the past eight seasons -- by dispatching the visiting Cleveland Cavaliers 113-98 in Game 5 of the Eastern Conference semifinals. Top-seeded Boston won the best-of-seven series 4-1 and will face either the Indiana Pacers or the New York Knicks for the Eastern Conference title. Second-seeded New York leads sixth-seeded Indiana 3-2 in a series that will continue with Game 6 on Friday night in Indianapolis. "It's a blessing, honestly, to be a part of winning," Boston's Jaylen Brown said. "It's been a great journey so far, but we're not done yet. We just have to keep going." Al Horford had 22 points and 15 rebounds during the Wednesday victory. "(Horford) made shots, and he's a winner," Cleveland coach J.B. Bickerstaff said. "I can't say enough about the way he played tonight. Just watching him chase down loose balls and make extra-effort plays. He understood the moment and has the ability on both ends of the floor to impact winning at a high level with little things -- knowing who he is. Understanding his role." Jayson Tatum added 25 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists for Boston. The Celtics led by three points early in the



fourth quarter but extended the gap to 101-87 on a Tatum 3-pointer with 6:45 to play. The Cavaliers didn't threaten after that. The Celtics have a 7-0 record in the playoffs this season when their opponent fails to score 100 points. "I thought tonight the Cavs brought the best out of us, especially in the second half," Boston coach Joe Mazzulla said. "We showed what we can be when we really put our minds to it and when we play at a different level. I thought Al was inspirational. And I thought they tested our trust. They tested our trust in each other, they tested our physicality, they tested our toughness and I thought the guys responded." It was a skeleton crew that took the court for Cleveland, which played without guard Donovan Mitchell (calf strain), center Jarrett Allen (bruised rib) and guard Caris LeVert (knee bone bruise). The calf injury also caused Mitchell to miss Cleveland's 109-102 loss in Game 4 on Monday night. Allen didn't play in the series, and LeVert was coming off a 19-point performance in Game 4. Evan Mobley had a game-high 33 points and seven rebounds for the fourth-seeded Cavaliers. He made 15 of his 24 field-goal attempts. Cleveland received a season-high 25 points from Marcus Morris Sr., who made 5 of 6 3-point attempts.