

After the Opening of the Book of Condolence to Honor Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and His Entourage, Who Were Martyred in a Copter Crash Last Sunday, 65 Ambassadors and Political Envoys From 20 World Countries Signed the Book in Italy

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Inability to Service Its American-Made Helicopters Due to U.S. Sanctions Surely Played a Role in the Fatal Crash That Killed the Country's Leader, President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus Has Said

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Envoy Denies Use of Iranian Drones at Serbia Border



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations dismissed the allegation made by the president of Kosovo that the Republic of Serbia has used Iranian drones at the Serbia border. In a letter to President of the UN Security Council Pedro Comissario Afonso and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on May 24, Saeed Iravani categorically rejected the accusation leveled by President of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani against Iran. "I am writing to you regarding the UN Security Council meeting held on 22 April 2024 regarding the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/PV.9612). During the meeting, Ms. Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu, who was invited under Rule 39 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure, alleged that the Republic of Serbia used Iranian drones at the Serbia border," Iravani said. "The Islamic Republic of Iran categorically rejects this unfounded claim, which was also denied by the President of Serbia during the meeting. Iran has not exported any drones to the Republic of Serbia, although there are no restrictive measures on such exports. Moreover, Iran evaluates each country's official request for UAVs or other kinds of weapons to ensure compliance with its stringent domestic and national arms export regulations, including requiring end-user certificates to prevent misuse or diversion of these weapons. Consequently, all Iranian arms exports are conducted legally and strictly in line with its international obligations and commitments," the envoy stressed.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Massive Turnout in the Funeral Processions of Martyr Raisi a Proof to Nation's Loyalty to Revolution

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has said that the mass participation in funeral processions of Martyr president Ebrahim Raisi and his entourage showed to the world that the Iranian people are loyal to those who adhere to the slogans of the Islamic Revolution. The Supreme Leader made the comment on Saturday during a meeting with family members of the late foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and other companions of Raisi, who were martyred in a helicopter crash a week ago. Ayatollah Khamenei already met with family members of President Raisi at their home in Tehran on Wednesday night. During the Saturday meeting, also held in Tehran, the Supreme Leader hailed the big participation of people in the funeral processions for all the martyrs, which were held in different Iranian cities including the capital city, Tabriz, Qom, and Mashhad. He referred to a propaganda campaign by enemies claiming that the Iranian people have become separated from the Islamic Republic, saying that the huge public participation in the recent mourning ceremonies proved to the world that the Iranians have been and are loyal to President Raisi and all those who adhere to the Revolution's slogans. Mr. Raisi was known in the

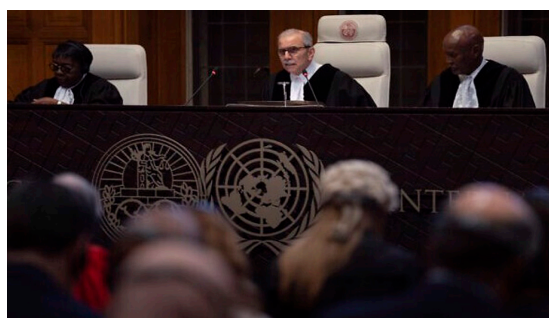
world as the president of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei said, adding that the huge public support and admiration for him means that people support the slogans of the Revolution as well. The Supreme Leader described President Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian as tireless, saying that they made a lot of efforts and rendered many services both inside and outside of the country. Ayatollah Khamenei also praised other martyrs of the helicopter crash, including the Friday prayers imam of the city of Tabriz Mohammad Ali Al-e-Hashem for their big efforts aimed at serving the Iranian people. Earlier Ayatollah Khamenei had said the massive turnout of Iranians for the funeral processions of late President Ebrahim Raisi demonstrated the strength of the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Khamenei made the comments during a visit to the family of the deceased president who lost his life along with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and six of their companions in a helicopter crash in the northwestern Iranian province of East Azarbaijan on Sunday. The Leader said that the Iranian people's mass participation in funeral processions for the late president sent a message to the world in support of the Islamic Republic.

Iraqi President Arrives in Tehran



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid has arrived in the Iranian capital Tehran to pay tribute to late President Ebrahim Raisi and his companions, who lost their lives in a helicopter crash last week. The airplane of Rashid and his accompanying delegation landed at Tehran's International Mehrabad Airport on Saturday morning. Rashid's visit to Tehran with the aim of conveying his country's condolences over the Iranian president's passing came a few days after Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani visited Tehran to meet with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and attend the funeral procession of Raisi and his companions. Offering Iraq's condolences to the Iranian leadership, government and nation over the tragic incident, Sudani said, "What we saw in Mr. Raisi, the martyred president of Iran, was nothing but honesty, sincerity, purity, work and ... serving the people." In the meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei thanked Sudani for his visit and his expression of sympathy, saying, "We have lost an outstanding figure. President Raisi was a great brother and an efficient, competent, sincere and serious official." Over the past days, dozens of world leaders, presidents, ambassadors and international personalities as well as high-profile figures of the Axis of Resistance have participated in various ceremonies across Iran to commemorate the tragic loss of President Raisi. Meanwhile the Islamic Resistance in Iraq reportedly says it has carried out a fresh strike on Israeli positions in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of anti-terror fighters, in a statement published on its Telegram channel, claimed responsibility for the attack on the "vital" site in the Port of Eilat on Friday evening.

Hamas Welcomes ICJ Order for Israel to Halt Rafah Offensive



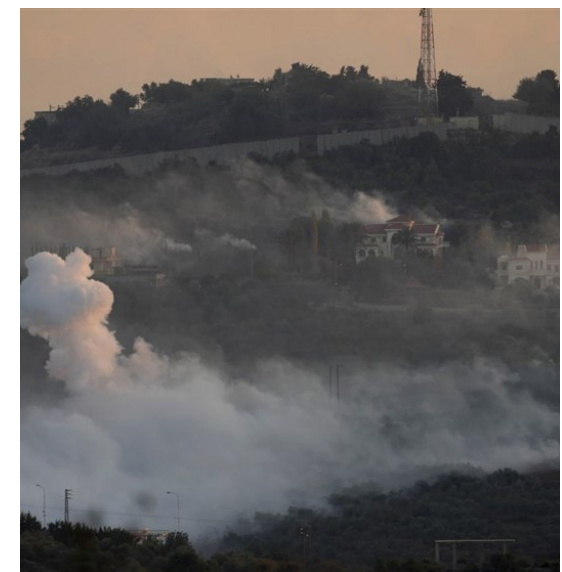
GAZA (Dispatches) - Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has praised the United Nations top court's ruling that ordered Israel to "immediately" halt its offensive in Gaza's southern city of Rafah. In a statement on Friday, Hamas said it "welcomes the decision of the International Court of Justice." The group, however, criticized the decision to exclude the rest of war-torn Gaza from the order. "We had expected the International Court of Justice to issue a decision to put an end to the aggression and genocide against our people throughout the whole Gaza Strip, not just in Rafah." "What is happening in Jabalia and other governorates of the Strip is no less criminal and dangerous than what is happening in Rafah," Hamas added. The group called on the "international community and the United Nations to put pressure on the [Israeli] occupation to comply immediately with this decision." Hamas said the international community and all relevant UN institutions, particularly the Security Council are required "not to allow this fascist entity to continue its disregard for all international laws and conventions and to escape accountability and punishment", adding that they had a "historical responsibility to see that the principle of international justice is respected, and to commit to supporting our people's right to freedom and self-determination and the establishment of the Palestinian State with al-Quds as its capital." Earlier on Friday, the International Court of Justice said Israel must "immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

President Raisi Had Great Faith in Palestinian Cause, Resistance

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The secretary-general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has said that Iran's late President Ebrahim Raisi was a political figure with "great faith" in the Palestinian cause and the region's resistance front. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah made the remarks during a speech that he delivered in the Lebanese capital Beirut as a means of paying tribute to the president and his companions, who were martyred in a helicopter crash in northwestern Iran on Sunday. Nasrallah also called Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who was also martyred in the incident, "a believer in the resistance and its movements." The Hezbollah leader described the tragic incident as "very painful and very sad in Iran and abroad." He noted that the martyrs' funeral was attended by millions across the Islamic Republic. "The funeral processions is the third largest in the history of mankind after Imam Khomeini and Martyr Qassem Soleimani," Nasrallah said, referring respectively to the late founder of the Islamic Republic and the former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). The massive turnout, he observed, was a testament to the Iranian people's "loyalty, allegiance, and firm commitment to the path of Imam Khomeini and to the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran." The tragedy has, however, neither "weakened" the country nor "shaken" it, the Hezbollah chief said, saying the country remains a key supporter of the Palestinian cause of liberation from Israeli occupation and aggression. "This support is [even] increasing and is clearly visible," he stated. Elsewhere in his remarks, Nasrallah

pointed to the October-present war that the Israeli regime has been waging against the Gaza Strip following Al-Aqsa Storm, a retaliatory operation by Gaza's resistance movements. "The enemy acknowledges the severe suffering it faces and acknowledges its impotence and failure," he said. The Hezbollah chief was apparently referring to Tel Aviv's failure so far to realize the objectives that it has been seeking to achieve through the military onslaught, including destroying Gaza's resistance groups and enabling the release of those who were taken captive during Al-Aqsa Storm. "Today, as we are in the eighth month of the war on Gaza, the Israelis themselves, in power and the opposition, all agree that what the entity has experienced this year is unprecedented," Nasrallah said. He noted the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Khan's recent application for arrest warrants against Israeli war criminals, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, over their atrocities in Gaza. "Who would have believed that the time would come when the International Criminal Court would request the issuance of arrest warrants against Zionist officials, and this is one of the results of the Al-Aqsa Storm," the Hezbollah leader said. He also asserted that if the Israeli regime kept up the war "it will go to the abyss," warning that the regional resistance groups had "surprises" in store for the regime. "You must expect surprises from our resistance," Nasrallah said, addressing Netanyahu. The Hezbollah leader, meanwhile, hailed the European trio of Spain, Ireland, and Norway's recent recognition of the Palestinian state.

Hezbollah Launches Fresh Attacks on Israeli Military Positions



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement conducted at least 11 new operations against Israeli military targets. In separate statements, Hezbollah said it targeted Israeli military and espionage equipment in northern parts of the occupied territories. Hezbollah reported striking several Israeli forces and military vehicles with missiles and drones. The group said it launched a drone attack on the rocket and artillery battalion headquarters in the "Yoav" barracks, accurately hitting the positions and residences of enemy officers and soldiers. Hezbollah also stated it conducted an aerial attack using explosive drones, targeting the newly established headquarters of the 91st Division in "Eilat," precisely hitting locations where enemy officers and soldiers were stationed. The movement said these operations were in retaliation for Israeli attacks on civilians and residential buildings in Lebanon and in solidarity with Palestinians. Hezbollah and the Israeli military have been exchanging fire along Lebanon's southern border since early October when Israel began its assault on Gaza. Israel initiated its offensive against the Gaza Strip on October 7, following a surprise attack by Palestinian resistance movements. Since the start of the Israeli war, at least 35,800 Palestinians have been killed, most of them women and children, and another 80,200 have been injured. More than 1.7 million people have been displaced within Gaza during the ongoing genocidal war.



IRAN NEWS



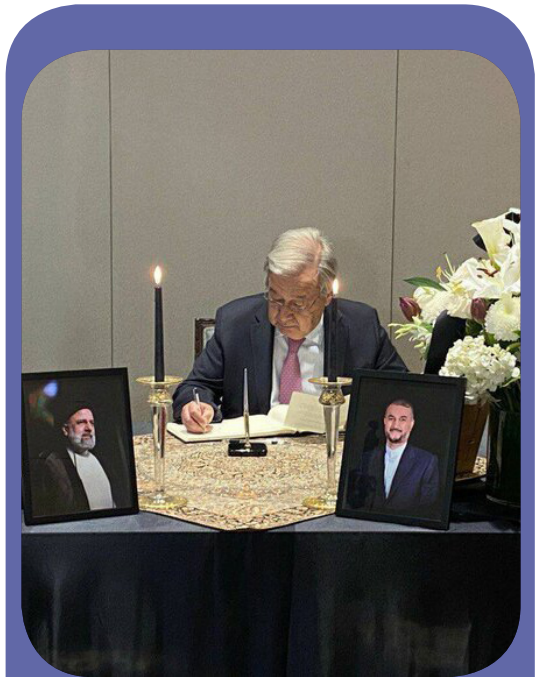
Visa Waiver Between Iran, Thailand to Be Pursued

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The commercial envoy and second deputy of Thailand's Embassy in Iran, Trirong Wan-Ar-ree, said his country is pursuing a visa waiver agreement between Tehran and Bangkok. Speaking in a meeting with economic activists in Shiraz, Iran's southern province of Fars, he noted that the Thai Embassy in Iran is after developing and expanding trade and economic relations with the Islamic Republic and with its different provinces. He emphasized that tourism is one of the sectors in which the Thai government has established good relations with Iranian provinces. The commercial attaché of the Thai Embassy pointed to his country's need for Iranian high-quality products including steel, technical and engineering services, dairy industries and aquaculture products and said Iran has other economic advantages as well and so the embassy is after establishing economic ties with the different Iranian provinces, IRNA reported.

Mokhber Calls for Developing Iran-Saudi Arabia Economic Ties



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhber underlined the need to develop economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia. Despite the opposition of some powers, today our relations have reached a good level and the region is in dire need of expanding these connections, and the two countries should be able to do this by increasing economic interactions and removing obstacles, especially for the private sectors of the two countries, and meeting mutual needs. To support, improve and stabilize political relations more than ever. In a phone call that took place this afternoon (Friday), Mohammad Bin Salman expressed his condolences on the martyrdom of Ayatollah Raisi and stated: The incident that happened was very painful for us. "The loss of Mr. Raisi hurt all of us, and the loss of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, who was very friendly with our Minister of Foreign Affairs, was also fatal."



UN Chief Pays Tribute to Late Iranian President, FM

TEHRAN (MNA) - The UN Secretary-General visited the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York to pay tribute to the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. António Guterres and Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Amina J. Mohammed visited the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York on Saturday. During the visit, Guterres wrote and signed a message in his own handwriting in a memorial book that had been opened to honor the Iranian martyrs. President Raisi was returning from a ceremony to inaugurate a dam on Iran's border with Azerbaijan on Sunday when his helicopter crashed in Varzaqan, northwestern Iran, on Sunday. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and a number of senior provincial officials were also on board the helicopter that crashed, killing all onboard.



Iran Foreign Trade on Upward Trajectory During President Raisi Term

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian customs administration says that the country's foreign trade recorded a considerable jump during the late President Ebrahim Raisi's administration and reached more than \$301 billion. The Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said in a report that about 347 million tons of goods, valued at over \$137.8 billion, were exported from the country between August 2021 and April 22, 2024, showing a 17.19 and 1.5 increase hike in terms of value and weight respectively compared to the same period in the previous administration. The report added that \$48 billion of products were exported from the country in 2021, showing a 40

percent hike compared to a year earlier. More than \$53 billion of products were imported into the country in 2021, showing a 36 percent hike compared to a year before, it noted. IRICA put the export of non-oil goods in 2022 at \$53 billion, showing about 10 percent increase compared to a year earlier. The country imported \$59 billion of products in 2022, registering a 13 percent hike compared to a year before. Iran exported about \$87 billion worth of products including oil, electricity, technical and engineering services last year (ended March 19, 2024), showing a 58% hike compared to a year earlier, the report said.

Iran-Russia Ties Will Continue to Grow Despite Raisi Martyrdom

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali has said that the two countries will continue to develop their ties even after the martyrdom of Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. The progress of Moscow-Tehran ties, which President Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian initiated, will continue as before, the Jalali said on Friday night. He was speaking at a ceremony held at Moscow's Islamic Center, attended by Muslims from Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan as well as university students from other countries like Japan. Also in his remarks, Jalali expressed gratitude towards top Russian officials for their sympathy and assistance since the moment the helicopter carrying Raisi and his

companions went missing in northwest Iran on May 19. The ambassador said that even though the news came out on a holiday, Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with his security and military officials on how to assist Iran at that difficult time. Jalali added that he had been invited to attend the meeting as well, and kept connection with Russian officials afterwards. Russian officials continued to sympathize with the Iranian nation after the martyrdom of Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian was announced, he added. The ambassador, meanwhile, hailed the late president and foreign minister for their efforts to serve Iran's national interests. He said that Raisi was also a caring person for the people of Gaza and made a lot of efforts to alleviate their suffering.



Iran Receives Over 300m Cubic Meters of Water Share From Afghanistan's Taliban



TEHRAN (IFP) - After months of bickering with the Taliban administration in Afghanistan, Iran has received over 300 million cubic meters of its share of water from the Hirmand River, the Iranian special envoy to the eastern neighboring country says.

Hassan Kazemi Qomi said on Friday that after extensive talks, the Taliban took a three-pronged initiative, one of which wasted the water by leading it to Gozarah depression, but the other two took off the ground and supplied Iran with water. He clarified that as a result of repairing the valves of the Kamal Khan Dam and dredging the water transfer route to Sistan and Baluchestan, over 300 million cubic meters of Iran's share of water was supplied. The Taliban had been refusing to allow Iran's share of water from Hirmand, known as Helmand in Afghanistan, to stream into Iran, blaming drought and technical issues for the low supply of water. Tehran says Afghanistan must adhere to the terms of the internationally-binding 1973 Hirmand river water treaty under which Iran should receive 820 million cubic meters of water annually.

Monthly Trade on IME Exceeds 15m Tons

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) during last month of Iranian calendar Ordibehesht ended on May witnessed trade of 15,982,553 tons of commodities and 134 vehicles with a total trading value of more than \$3.6b on its physical market, logging growths of 30.8% in volume and 26.1% in value of trades compared with the month before that. According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor, trade of 13,794,428 tons of commodities and 134 vehicles valued at more than \$2.6b. On this floor the IME sold 6,482,476 tons of cement, 4,181,500 tons of iron ore, 1,781,411 tons of steel, 1,154,650 tons of sponge iron, 83,925 tons of zinc, 53,510 tons of aluminum, 43,420 tons of copper, 500 tons of metallurgical coke, 36 tons of precious metals concentrate and 1 tons of molybdenum concentrate. Based on this report, the IME saw trade of 1.5 tons of saffron on its agricultural trading floor. Moreover, the exchange saw trade of 2,037,649 tons of commodities worth more than 1 billion USD on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor. Items traded on this floor included 646,515 tons of bitumen, 541,550 tons of vacuum bottom, 414,994 tons of polymeric products, 188,500 tons of lube cut, 170,127 tons of chemicals, 50,245 tons of sulfur, 22,768 tons of oil, 2,050 tons of feedstocks and 400 tons of waterproofing materials.

Last was the IME's side market on which the exchange traded 72,474 tons of goods.

Four Britons Repatriated From Syria Camp

QAMISHLI (Dispatches) - Kurdish authorities in northeast Syria said Friday that they had handed over a woman and three children to British representatives for repatriation, with a source saying they had been held in a camp for jihadists' relatives. Five years after the Islamic State group was driven out of its last bastion in Syria, tens of thousands of the jihadists' family members, including from Western countries, remain in detention camps in the Kurdish-controlled northeast. The Kurdish administration said it had "handed over a woman and three children to the United Kingdom", following a meeting with a British delegation led by Syria envoy Ann Snow. A source within the administration told AFP the four had been interned in the Roj camp where jihadists' relatives are held. Britain's foreign ministry said UK officials had "facilitated the repatriation of a number of British nationals from Syria to the United Kingdom".



Georgia's Ruling Party Accuses U.S. of Blackmail Over Visa Restrictions



TBLISI (Dispatches) - Georgia's ruling party accused the United States of pursuing a policy of "threats and blackmail" after Washington announced new visa restrictions over a draft law on "foreign agents". The bill, which would require organisations receiving over 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents", has sparked a political crisis in the South Caucasus country and threatens its historically strong ties with Washington, a major aid donor. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday Washington was launching a review of cooperation with Georgia and imposing visa restrictions on individuals "responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Georgia", as well as their family members. Blinken said the draft law, which has triggered large street protests in Georgia for over a month, would "stifle the exercise of freedoms of association and expression" and impede independent media organizations' work. The ruling Georgian Dream party said on Facebook that the visa restrictions were "nothing but a gross attempt to restrict Georgia's independence and sovereignty." "No blackmail whatsoever can force us to go against our country," it said. The head of the governing bloc's parliamentary faction called said the U.S. move was "comical" and that it threatened to restrict Georgia's independence. "The country's independence is not for sale for any visas", Mamuka Mdinaradze wrote on Facebook. Germany and France this week expressed deep concern over the path taken by Georgia, and the European Union has urged Tbilisi to withdraw the bill, saying the measure would set back the nation's ambitions to join the bloc.

Ukrainian Forces Control Area of Russia Push Into Kharkiv Region



KYIV (Dispatches) - President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Ukrainian forces had secured "combat control" of areas where Russian troops staged an incursion this month in northern parts of Kharkiv region. "Our soldiers have now managed to take combat control of the border area where the Russian occupiers entered," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address. Zelenskyy's comments, after holding a meeting of military and regional officials in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, appeared to be at variance with comments by Russian officials. Viktor Vodolatskiy, a member of Russia's State Duma lower house of parliament, was quoted by Tass news agency as saying Russian forces controlled more than half the territory of the town of Vovchansk, 5 km (three miles) inside the border. Vodolatskiy was quoted as saying that once Vovchansk was secured, Russian forces would target three cities in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region — Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Pokrovsk. Reuters was unable to verify independently battlefield accounts from either side. Russian forces pushed into border regions of Ukraine's Kharkiv region this month and Russia's Defence Ministry said they had secured control of about 12 settlements. Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian officials had been reporting success in "stabilising" the area.

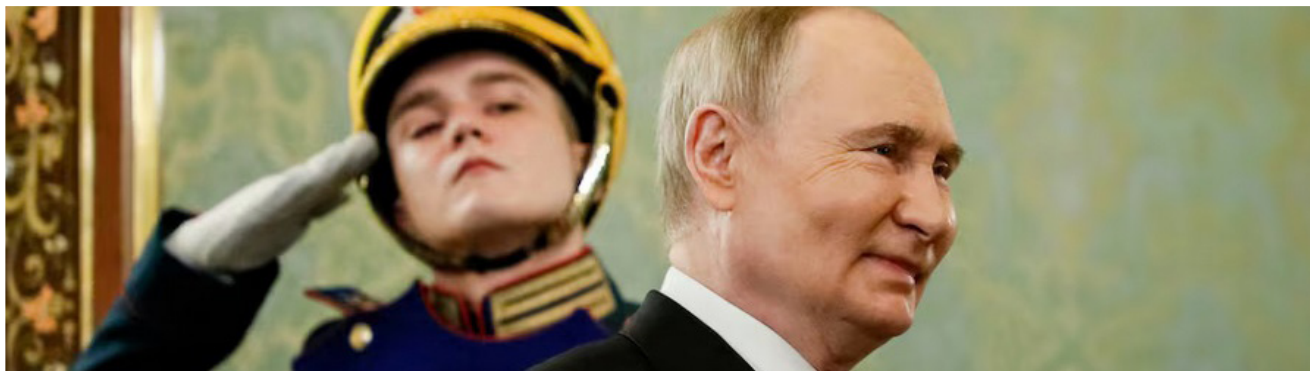


Top UN Court Orders Israel to Halt Rafah Offensive

RAFAH (Dispatches) - The top UN court ordered Israel to halt military operations in Rafah, a landmark ruling likely to increase international pressure for a ceasefire more than seven months into the war sparked by Hamas's October 7 attack. The International Court of Justice also demanded the immediate release of all hostages still held by Palestinian militants, hours after the Israeli military announced troops had recovered the bodies of three more of the captives from northern Gaza. The Hague-based court, whose orders are legally binding but lack direct enforcement mechanisms, also ordered Israel to keep open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, which it closed earlier this month at the start of its assault on the city. The orders come ahead of separate meetings on the Gaza conflict in Paris between the CIA chief and Israeli representatives on one side and French President Emmanuel Macron and the foreign ministers of four key Arab states on the other. In its keenly awaited ruling, the ICJ said Israel must "immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah governorate which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part". Israel must "maintain open the Rafah crossing for unhindered provision at scale of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance", the UN court added. "The court finds it deeply troubling that many of these hostages remain in captivity and reiterates its call for their immediate and unconditional release," it said. Israel gave no indication it was preparing to change course in Rafah, insisting that the court had got it wrong. "Israel has not and will not carry out military operations in the Rafah area that create living conditions that could cause the destruction of the Palestinian civilian population, in whole or in part,"

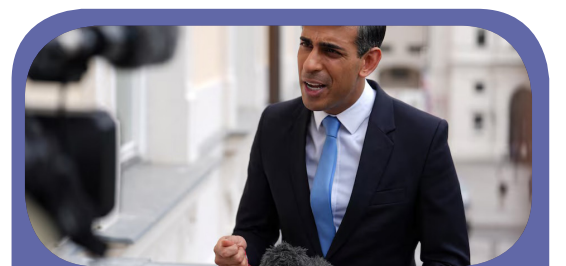
National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi said in a joint statement with the foreign ministry spokesperson. "Israel will continue to enable the Rafah crossing to remain open for the entry of humanitarian assistance from the Egyptian side of the border, and will prevent terror groups from controlling the passage," the statement added. There was no immediate comment from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was huddling with ministers. Centrist war cabinet member Benny Gantz said Israel remained committed to fighting on "to return its hostages and ensure the security of its citizens at all times and everywhere, also in Rafah". UN chief Antonio Guterres stressed that "decisions of the court are binding and trusts that the parties will duly comply with the order from the court," his spokesperson said. The Palestinian ambassador to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour, called on Israel to abide by the court's ruling immediately. Hamas gave the ruling a qualified welcome, regretting only that it applied solely to Rafah and not the whole Gaza Strip. The Gaza war broke out after Hamas's October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures. Activists also took 252 hostages, 121 of whom remain in Gaza, including 37 the army says are dead. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 35,800 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry. The Israeli military said the three hostages whose bodies were recovered in north Gaza yesterday — Israeli hostage Chanan Yablonka, Brazilian-Israeli Michel Nisenbaum and French-Mexican Orion Hernandez Radoux — were "murdered" during the October 7 attack and their bodies taken to Gaza.

Putin Wants Ukraine Ceasefire on Current Frontlines



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin is ready to halt the war in Ukraine with a negotiated ceasefire that recognizes the current battlefield lines, four Russian sources told Reuters, saying he is prepared to fight on if Kyiv and the West do not respond. Three of the sources, familiar with discussions in Putin's entourage, said the veteran Russian leader had expressed frustration to a small group of advisers about what he views as Western-backed attempts to stymie negotiations and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's decision to rule out talks. "Putin can fight for as long as it takes, but Putin is also ready for a ceasefire — to freeze the war," said another of the four, a senior Russian source who has worked with Putin and has knowledge of top level conversations in the Kremlin. He, like the others cited in this story, spoke on condition of anonymity given the matter's sensitivity. For this account, Reuters spoke to a total of five people who work with or have worked with Putin at a senior level in the political and business worlds. The fifth source did not comment on freezing the war at the current frontlines. Asked about the Reuters report at a news conference in Belarus on

Friday, Putin said peace talks should restart. "Let them resume," he said, adding that negotiations should be based on "the realities on the ground" and on a plan agreed during a previous attempt to reach a deal in the first weeks of the war. "Not on the basis of what one side wants," he said. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on X that the Russian leader was trying to derail a Ukrainian-initiated peace summit in Switzerland next month by using his entourage to send out "phony signals" about his alleged readiness to halt the war. "Putin currently has no desire to end his aggression against Ukraine. Only the principled and united voice of the global majority can force him to choose peace over war," said Kuleba. Mykhailo Podolyak, a Ukrainian presidential adviser, said Putin wanted Western democracies to accept defeat. The appointment last week of economist Andrei Belousov as Russia's defence minister was seen by some Western military and political analysts as placing the Russian economy on a permanent war footing in order to win a protracted conflict. It followed sustained battlefield pressure and territorial advances by Russia in recent weeks.



More UK Conservative Lawmakers Set to Quit

LONDON (dispatches) - British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is facing a mass departure of lawmakers with the number of resignations surpassing the level the Conservative Party suffered before a landslide defeat in the 1997 election. Sunak, in power since 2022, this week called a national election for July 4, but his party is far behind in the opinion polls after a period of high inflation, low economic growth and a steady stream of political scandals. The number of Conservative members of parliament (MPs) who will not be standing at the next election reached 78 on Friday, more than the 72 in the run up to the 1997 election. Late on Friday, Michael Gove, a veteran Conservative who has held several government roles and was a leading voice in the push for Britain to leave the European Union, said he was also standing down. "There comes a moment when you know that it is time to leave. That a new generation should lead," he said in a letter. Andrea Leadsom, who also held ministerial roles and ran for the Conservative leadership in 2016 but lost to Theresa May, said she would also stand down at the election. Conservative members of parliament said so many colleagues were leaving because it was unlikely the party would win the election and many had grown tired of the infighting and polarisation in parliament. All the opinion polls predict Sunak will lose the election with his Conservatives trailing the opposition Labour Party by about 20 percentage points. Only 12 Conservative members of parliament said they would stand down in the run up to 2017 election, while 32 lawmakers stood down before the 2019 election, according to the House of Commons Library.

China Ends War Games

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - China ended two days of war games around Taiwan, in which it simulated attacks with bombers and practiced boarding ships, and Taiwan's defence ministry detailed the surge of Chinese warplanes and warships involved. Chinese state television's military channel said late yesterday the drills had concluded. A commentary in the official People's Liberation Army Daily said they had lasted for two days from Thursday to Friday, as previously announced. China's defence ministry did not answer calls seeking comment. China, which claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, launched the "Joint Sword — 2024A" exercises three days after Lai Ching-te became Taiwan's president, a man Beijing says is a "separatist". Beijing said the exercises were "punishment" for Lai's Monday inauguration speech, in which he said the two sides of the Taiwan Strait were "not subordinate to each other", which China viewed as a declaration the two are separate countries. Lai has repeatedly offered talks with China



but been rebuffed. He says only Taiwan's people can decide their future, and rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims. Taiwan's government has condemned the drills and said it will not be cowed by Chinese pressure. On Friday, 46 Chinese military planes crossed the Taiwan Strait's median line, which previously served as an unofficial barrier between the two sides, Taiwan's defence ministry said today. It said it had detected a total of 62 Chinese aircraft and 27 navy ships. The aircraft, including advanced Su-30 fighters and nuclear-capable H-6 bombers, flew in the strait as well as down into the Bashi Channel, which separates Taiwan from the Philippines, the ministry said. On Friday, it published footage taken by Taiwanese air force planes of a Chinese J-16 fighter and an H-6 but did not say exactly where it was taken. China has over the past four years regularly staged military activities around Taiwan, including large-scale war games in 2022 and in 2023. The People's Liberation Army Daily commentary, published as "the voice of the military", said Lai was determined to act as a "pawn" for external forces to curb China's development. "If Taiwan independence separatist forces insist on going their own way or even take risks, the PLA will obey orders and take decisive action to resolutely smash all separatist plots," it said.



Zverev Expects Peak Nadal in French Open Duel as Djokovic Slumps

PARIS (Dispatches) - Alexander Zverev expects to face "peak Rafael Nadal" in their mouth-watering French Open duel as he prepares to deliver a heart-breaking, final blow to the 14-time champion's storied Roland Garros career. Zverev, the world number four from Germany, has been handed the first round draw that nobody wanted as 22-time Grand Slam title winner Nadal prepares to play the tournament for the final time. "In my mind, I'm going to play peak Rafa Nadal. That's what I expect him to be. I expect him to be at his absolute best," Zverev told reporters ahead of Monday's clash. "I expect him to play the best tennis he's played in a long time on this court." Nadal holds a 7-3 winning record over the in-form German, winning five of their six meetings on clay. One of those came in Paris two years ago when Zverev was forced to retire from their semi-final after suffering an horrific ankle injury which kept him sidelined until January last year. Zverev is still refining his form after that injury and won his first Masters 1000 since 2021 last week at the Rome Open. "He's going to finish his career probably before mine," said the 27-year-old Zverev of his Spanish rival who turns 38 on June 3. "I really wanted to play him one more time because I didn't want my last

memory to be me rolling off in a wheelchair off Court Philippe Chatrier. I really wanted to play him here." He added: "I didn't want to play him in the first round. I wanted to play him in the semi-finals, final, a later stage of the tournament. But at the end of the day, he's not seeded, it is how it is, and I think we're both prepared for a tough battle." While Paris geared up for an emotional rollercoaster on Monday, 500km away in Geneva, world number one Novak Djokovic was enduring another setback. Djokovic admitted he was "worried" about his French Open title defence after falling to 44th-ranked Czech Tomas Machac in the Geneva semi-finals, 6-4, 0-6, 6-1. "Of course I'm worried. I haven't been playing good at all this year," said 37-year-old Djokovic ahead of Roland Garros where the 24-time Grand Slam champion has won three times. "I've had some good matches here and there but it is what it is. You have to accept it. I don't consider myself a favourite there. I'm going to take it match by match and see how far I can go." The Serb will head to Paris where he faces Frenchman Pierre-Hugues Herbert in the first round on Tuesday having won no titles this year, his first such dry spell since 2018.

Brown Scores 40 as Celtics Take 2-0 Series Lead vs. Pacers



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jaylen Brown scored a game-high 40 points to lead the Boston Celtics to a 126-110 victory over the visiting Indiana Pacers in Game 2 of the Eastern Conference finals. Brown was 14 of 27 from the floor and made 8 of 11 free throws. He added five rebounds. Boston had a 13-point lead after three quarters and the Pacers were never closer than 11 points in the fourth. The victory gave Boston a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series, which will shift to Indianapolis for Game 3 today. The Celtics won Game 1 133-128 in overtime. "I think we adjusted a little bit better in Game 2," Brown said. "I still think we can play a little better, so we're looking forward to doing that in Game 3." The Pacers are unsure whether point guard Tyrese Haliburton will be available for that game. He left with left hamstring soreness in the third quarter Thursday. He collected 10 points and eight assists in 28 minutes. He missed 10 games in January with a left hamstring strain. "Losing Ty for the game obviously is a big blow," Indiana coach Rick Carlisle said. "We'll know more (Friday) and even more Saturday. ... I know you want details. I don't have much." Pascal Siakam made 13 of 17 field-goal attempts and led the Pacers with 28 points. Andrew Nembhard added 16 points for Indiana.

Costa Rica Goalkeeper Navas Announces Int'l Retirement

LONDON (Dispatches) - Costa Rica goalkeeper Keylor Navas announced his retirement from international football on Thursday at the age of 37, putting an end to rumours that he would play in the next Copa America. Navas, who made his international debut in 2008, has made 114 appearances and played in three World Cups, the most notable being Brazil 2014, where he helped his side reach the quarter-finals. Having made his last appearance for his country in a friendly against Argentina in March, Navas' announcement means he will not be taking part in the Copa America, which will be held in the United States from 20 June to 14 July. "This chapter of my life is coming to an end, I leave with my heart full of gratitude and my eyes looking forward, always carrying the name of our beloved Costa Rica," the goalkeeper said in a video posted on social media. "It's a bittersweet feeling, difficult to accept, this stage has come to an end. It's not goodbye, it's see you later because I know our paths will continue to cross. Thank you Costa Rica, see you later, pura vida," he added. Navas, who has played for Paris St Germain since 2019 and spent last year on loan at Premier League side Nottingham Forest, is out of contract in June. The goalkeeper has won three Ligue 1 titles with PSG's, including their record-extending 12th crown last month. He previously played for LaLiga side Real Madrid, with whom he won three Champions League titles.



Real Madrid Are the World's Best Team



MADRID (Dispatches) - Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone, on the eve of his side's final LaLiga match against Real Sociedad, said they fell short of their objectives this season and that title winners Real Madrid were the best team in the world. Atletico, who will finish fourth in the standings behind Real, runners-up Barcelona and surprise package Girona, secured their place in the Champions League, although the coach believes they could have done better. "We have the responsibility to get into the Champions League every year. You can be left out, but you can also be champion, yet with Real Madrid, who are the best team in the world and will continue to be because they have rejuvenated the squad, it is not easy," Simeone told a press conference on Thursday. "We have to keep working at 120% because 100% is not enough and 80% is even less to be able to get closer to them, keeping in mind that those below us are also improving." The coach said the team lacked the right response when it mattered most, such as when they were knocked out of the Champions League after a 5-4 aggregate defeat by German side Borussia Dortmund in the quarter-finals. "We were close to the Copa del Rey final and were expecting to reach the semi-finals of the Champions League. We created the illusion of being in a possible final and we weren't able to do it, so now we have to think about what comes next to improve things," the Argentine said. Simeone, 54, added that while there have been shortcomings this season, he remains excited about the future and reflected on his long 12-year tenure at the club, having amassed 402 victories in 680 matches in charge. "I have had players who have allowed me to compete as we have done since I arrived, and a coaching staff where everyone who has walked this path has given the maximum and the illusion that there is always room for improvement and growth," he said.

Man Utd to Sack Ten Hag Even If They Win FA Cup

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United will sack embattled manager Erik ten Hag after the FA Cup final against Manchester City regardless of the result at Wembley, it was reported on Friday. Britain's The Guardian newspaper said the Premier League club had decided to take the ruthless step after a dismal season. If Ten Hag's two-year reign does end following the City clash, his exit would provoke memories of fellow Dutchman Louis van Gaal's Old Trafford departure. Van Gaal was fired just two days after United's FA Cup final victory against Crystal Palace in 2016. United finished an embarrassing eighth in the Premier League this season -- their lowest final position since 1990 -- and crashed out of the Champions League in the group stage. Ten Hag has been the subject of intense speculation over his future, months after British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe took a minority stake in the club and assumed control of football operations. United insist no decision has been made on the Dutchman's future and say a full review will take place after Saturday's

showpiece against the Premier League champions, who are chasing their second straight league and FA Cup double. The club have been linked with a list of names including Thomas Tuchel, Mauricio Pochettino, England's Gareth Southgate and Ipswich boss Kieran McKenna, who has previously coached at Old Trafford. Speaking before the latest report emerged, United goalkeeper Andre Onana said the final was "extra motivation" after an injury-hit season in which many of their star players flopped. "We lost twice against City already (in the Premier

League)," he said. "We know how good they are. Best team at the moment -- all of our respect -- but we go there to win. A final." Onana, who also played under Ten Hag at Ajax, stood up for his manager, describing him as a "good guy, a good coach". "Tactically he's very good and he showed it last season," said the Cameroon international. "I was not here last season and they got top four. This season a lot of things happened. I'm not here to back him. He is big enough to back himself. But he is a really good guy, he is a positive coach and tactically he's good." "If he had all his squad it would probably be different. This season is difficult for him, for us, for the club, for the fans." The match offers United a shot at silverware against their bitter rivals and a route to Europa League qualification. "It would make things look better," said Onana, who has had an inconsistent first season at Old Trafford. "It's important to end well and winning this game would mean we're in the Europa League."

