

Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei, and acting president Mohammad Mokhber Held a Meeting on Saturday to Coordinate Plans for the Upcoming Presidential Election, Slated for June 28

# IRAN NEWS

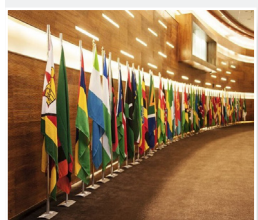
Abbas Johari, Secretary of the Election Headquarters of Tehran Province, Said That the Final List of Candidates Who Will Participate in the Snap Presidential Elections in Iran Will Be Announced on June 11

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## 2 DOMESTIC



### Africa Day Reminder of Solidarity

> SEE PAGE 2

## 3 INTERNATIONAL

### G7 Ministers Cie Progress But No Done Deal on Russian Assets for Ukraine



> SEE PAGE 3

### Bahrain Soon to Restore Relations With Iran Relations With Iran



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The first deputy speaker of Bahrain's Council of Representatives says the Persian Gulf kingdom intends to take measures soon to revive diplomatic relations with neighboring Iran after more than eight years. "Resumption of political and commercial relations between the two countries is of great importance, because Iran is a neighboring country and Bahrain supports stable ties with all regional states," Abdulnabi Salman stated on Saturday. He added that the desire to resume relations between Manama and Tehran has been met with a positive response from the Bahraini government and the Council of Representatives, and the legislature has even put out a positive statement in this regard. "Compared to other countries along the [Persian] Gulf, we are the closest country to Iran. Iranian expatriates live in Bahrain, and we are also witnessing the presence of Bahraini citizens in Iran. Trade exchanges between the two countries date back many decades," Salman pointed out. The senior Bahraini legislator underlined that Manama hopes to resume stable and strong political relations with Tehran, stressing, "This will happen in the very near future and will be based on respect for good neighborliness." He went on to note that Russia, interested in the stability of the West Asia region, has been mediating between Bahrain and Iran in order to revive diplomatic ties. "The two countries may have political differences; but such differences will not last forever. Currently, they should take advantage of playing a central role in promotion of regional stability," Salman stated.

## IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

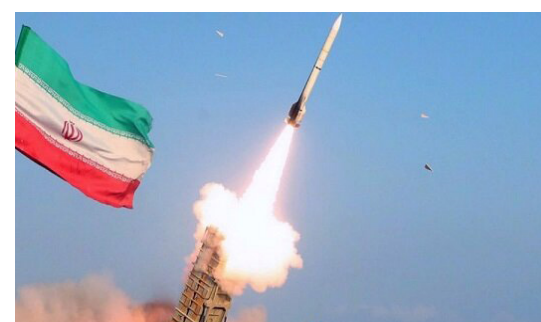


### No Change in Iran's Pro-Resistance Strategy After Raisi Martyrdom

TEHRAN - Interim President Mohammad Mokhber says there will be no shift in Iran's strategy in support of resistance groups, especially the Palestinian ones, after the martyrdom of President Ebrahim Raisi. Mokhber made the remarks on Saturday during a telephone conversation with Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad resistance movement Ziad al-Nakhalah. He said that President Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who lost their lives in a helicopter crash last week, were seriously concerned about support for the resistance and the Palestinians' inalienable rights. "The basic strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in backing the Resistance Front, especially the Palestinian resistance groups, will not alter by the change of people," Mokhber asserted. He also described resistance as the most effective way to counter Israeli crimes and aggression. Raisi, Amir-Abdollahian and six others died on May 19, when their helicopter crashed in foggy weather in the mountains near the northwestern border with Azerbaijan. The charred wreckage of the aircraft was found the following day. The pair had defended the Palestinians' rights in regional and international meetings and appreciated their resilience against the Israeli occupation.

Nakhalah offered condolences to the Iranian government and people, saying the country will overcome the tragedy thanks to its qualified officials and revolutionary nation. "Martyr Raisi and Martyr Amir-Abdollahian were always on the frontline in defending the interests of the Iranian nation and supporting the resistance," he added. Earlier Mokhber said the Islamic Republic would resolutely continue the policy of late president Raisi to promote ties with Iraq. Mokhber made the remarks in a Saturday meeting with Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid and his accompanying delegation, who are in Tehran to pay homage to Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his companions, who lost their lives in a helicopter crash last week. Mokhber said the late president's huge and bitter loss reinforced national unity inside the country and created convergence and synergy between the resistance front and Muslim countries. He added that one of the late president's most significant successes was to improve Iran's relations with Muslim and neighboring countries. The interim president emphasized that the Iraqi government and nation have a leading position in Iran's foreign policy.

### Iran's Drone, Missile Strikes Against Israel Devastating



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden has, for the first time, admitted that Iran's massive drone and missile strikes against Israel, could have devastated the regime if the American military did not come to rescue Tel Aviv. According to ABC News website, Biden made the revelation during his speech at the United States Military Academy's graduation ceremony in West Point, New York. While pointing to the ongoing conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, Biden claimed: "There has been no period in the history of the United States as in the current time, we want to ask our military forces to perform different missions simultaneously in different parts of the world, including defending (the) Israeli (regime)." Without referring to the Israel bloodshed of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the US president praised the role of the American army in defending the Zionist regime, "Iran's massive drone and missile attack on Israel was devastating. And I appreciate the US military for responding quickly and helping Tel Aviv to defend itself against the attack." On 12th of April, Iran launched a punitive operation dubbed "True Promise" against Israel, firing hundreds of missiles and drones toward Zionist positions in the occupied territories in retaliations for the Zionist regime's airstrikes on the consular section of the Iranian Embassy in Damascus. Iran then said it had well informed the United States about Tehran's decision to punish the Israeli regime and after the operation was accomplished with strikes on Israeli targets. Iran's representative to the United Nations had also made it clear that Iran's military action was based on Article 51 of the UN Charter regarding legitimate defense in response to the aggression of the Zionist regime on Iran's diplomatic places.

### U.S. Pier in Gaza Failed to Have Any Meaningful Impact



GENEVA (Dispatches) - A former top UN official has dismissed the United States-built pier purportedly installed to transfer aid to Gaza, stating that the structure has failed to have any meaningful impact on the Palestinian population in the war-torn coastal territory. "The U.S. taxpayer-funded pier in Gaza, designed as a fig leaf to cover US complicity in genocide & in the destruction of UNRWA, has failed to have any meaningful impact & has now been largely washed away by the sea," Craig Mokhiber, former Director of the New York Office of the UN's High Commissioner of Human Rights, wrote in a post published on the social media platform X on Saturday. He noted that the inefficiency of the U.S. pier comes as the Tel Aviv regime is enforcing a tight blockade on all border crossings into Gaza. The construction of the \$320-million floating pier was completed in mid-May to allegedly provide aid to the Gaza Strip. The pier has been criticized as a complicated and costly alternative that tries to deflect attention from demanding a much simpler solution. Part of the U.S.-built Gaza pier collapsed and swept into sea on Saturday as waves carried it toward the shores of the city of Ashdod, situated about 40 kilometers (24.8 miles) south of Tel Aviv, in the 1948 Israeli-occupied territories. U.S. President Joe Biden asserted in his State of the Union in March that the pier would "receive large shipments carrying food, water, medicine and temporary shelter." This is while Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson of UN chief Antonio Guterres, said on Friday that the World Food Programme (WFP) has "taken possession of 97 trucks since the floating dock came into operation." Israel unleashed the Gaza onslaught on October 7 after Hamas-led Palestinian resistance groups carried out Operation al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people.

### With Iran Port Deal, India to Expand Central Asia Trade, Counter China

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's signing of a 10-year contract this month to develop and operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar -- which is seen as a gateway to landlocked Afghanistan and energy-rich Central Asia -- could emerge as a counter to a Chinese-controlled project in Pakistan provided that the U.S. does not act on its warning of potential sanctions. Under the long-term deal between India Ports Global Ltd. (IPGL) and the Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran, inked on May 13, New Delhi is set to invest about \$120 million in equipping the port and has also offered Tehran a credit window of \$250 million with the aim of improving project-related infrastructure, taking the total contract value to \$370 million. The landmark deal replaces a 2016 pact that was being renewed on an annual basis. The port, on Iran's southeastern coast along the Gulf of Oman, developed to help it gain access to war-torn Afghanistan. It also needed a route for its companies to enter Central Asia, bypassing rival neighbor Pakistan. "The port operation, we believe, will benefit the entire region," Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said at an event in Kolkata on May 14. At a separate event in New Delhi on Monday, Jaishankar also spoke of the role of the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who died in a helicopter crash, in the Chabahar project, saying it was "because of their interest and their initiative we were actually able to finalize a long-term agreement." Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, left, meets with the late Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Tehran on Jan. 15. © Reuters/Sanjay Kumar Pandey, a professor at the Centre for

Russian and Central Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, told Nikkei Asia that "although the Iranian president was instrumental in getting this agreement, [his death] is not a major hurdle that this pact faces."

Besides giving India access to Central Asia, the port could also help it counter Gwadar Port in Pakistan, near the Iranian border, which is operated by the China Overseas Ports Holding Co. under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). One of the sales pitches of Gwadar Port was to provide easy and quick access to Central Asia, but the Indian-controlled port in Chabahar -- located just 170 kilometers west of Gwadar -- can now deprive it of this advantage. Tania Baloch, a political analyst based in Canada, said that the increase in the Indian footprint just across the border from Pakistan is significant following skirmishes between Pakistan and Iran in January. "India has got a very good opportunity to take advantage of Pakistan-Iran border tensions and strategically compete with Chinese-controlled Gwadar Port, which has failed to kick off." Gwadar Port has limited commercial activity, and hardly any ships dock there for unloading cargo. Pakistan has not been able to properly develop the port as planned. In 2015, a 300-megawatt coal power plant was approved for the port. Work has not yet started on that, resulting in a severe shortage of power needed for economic development in the city. "[The] Chinese are frustrated with how things are not going as planned for Gwadar Port," a Pakistani government official dealing with CPEC told Nikkei Asia on condition of anonymity. "They are not happy with the current state of the Gwadar project, but they can't just pack and leave."



### European Cities Stage Pro-Palestine Rallies Under Strict Conditions



LONDON (Dispatches) - Major European cities have under strict conditions staged protests in solidarity with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, calling for an immediate ceasefire in the eighth month of Israel's genocidal war against the besieged territory. Thousands of Germans took to the streets across the capital Berlin on Saturday, with demonstrators carrying Palestinian flags and placards that read, "Free Palestine," and "Stop Genocide," among others. "We are here today at these demonstrations, as at all demonstrations since the terrible genocide of Israel against the Palestinians, to support this protest," said Angela Niklaus, European candidate for the Socialist Equality Party. "We are here because of the Palestine Protest because we think it's important to support those people," another protester said. "Palestine will never die." The mass rally in the German capital was heavily policed, with about 200 officers present. Before the demonstration began, law enforcement officials instructed participants on which slogans were permissible. The central German city of Frankfurt was also the scene of protests as demonstrators gathered on Saturday ahead of the European elections to demand reforms in EU policies. People also gathered outside Montmartre Sacré-Coeur, a Roman Catholic church, in Paris on Saturday to protest against the Israeli war on Gaza. Waving Palestinian flags, the demonstrators held banners and placards that read, "Stop Gaza Genocide," and "Palestinians martyred, Israel expels." Symbolizing the Palestinian children affected by the months-long Israeli onslaught, some participants held effigies of dead children wrapped in sheets and covered in fake blood with the aim of drawing attention to the civilian casualties in Gaza.



**Russia Seeks to Set Up Direct Flight From North Caucasus to Iran**

MOSCOW (IRNA) - A Russian official has announced that Moscow, at the federal level, is seeking to set up a direct flight from the North Caucasus to Iran. Pavel Kalmychek, Director of the Department for the Development of Bilateral Cooperation at the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, made the remarks in a specialized meeting on Iran-Russia relations. The Russian official pointed to the implementation of the bilateral agreement to abolish the visa requirement for group tours to Iran as of August 1, 2023, noting that the issue of setting up a direct flight from the North Caucasus to Iran is being studied at the federal level in Russia, and that the Russian authorities will also examine similar flights from other Russian territories. The Russian director further described Iran as a very important partner and a friend of Russia, saying that Moscow is trying to benefit from Iran's experiences in dodging sanctions, and that it is seeking to expand collaborations in all sectors of economy, logistics, and transportation with the Islamic Republic.

**Iran Annual Inflation at Lowest Rate in Three Years**



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The latest official figures show that Iran's annual inflation rate has reached 37%, which is the lowest rate in the past three years. According to the figures released by the Statistical Center of Iran on May 23, the annual inflation rate stood at 37% in the April 11-May 11 period, the lowest since 2021. The figure also shows a 12.1-point decrease year on year. Also during the April 11-May 11 period, the point-to-point food inflation reached its lowest level in nearly four years, standing at 22.7%. With economy being a main concern of people in Iran, the administration of the late president Ebrahim Raisi has prioritized policies aimed at improving the economy and increase the purchasing power of people since it took office in August 2021. In December 2023, the World Bank said in a report that Iran's economy had continued to grow for the fourth consecutive year, highlighting the success of the Iranian administration in curbing inflation and stabilizing the currency market.



**Iran's Support for Palestine Unshakable**

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Acting President of Iran Mohammad Mokhber gave an assurance that Tehran's backing for Palestinian resistance groups would by no means falter after the loss of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. In a telephone conversation with Secretary General of the Islamic Jihad movement Ziad al-Nakhala on Saturday, Mokhber highlighted the late Iranian president and foreign minister's concerns about the Palestinian people's rights and resistance. "The Islamic Republic of Iran's fundamental strategy of supporting the resistance current, particularly the Palestinian resistance groups, would not change with a change of individuals," the acting president said. Mokhber described resistance as the most effective strategy for countering the Zionist regime's crimes and acts of aggression. The acting president also hailed Iran's retaliatory 'True Promise' operation against the Israeli military targets as an outcome of the resistance current that humiliated the US and the Zionist regime. In a meeting with head of the political bureau of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas in Tehran on May 22, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei hailed the remarkable resistance displayed by the people of Gaza, which he said has surprised the world.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



**Africa Day Reminder of Solidarity**

TEHRAN - Caretaker Foreign Minister of Iran Ali Baqeri congratulated African people on the occasion of Africa Day, which he hailed as a reminder of solidarity and brotherhood. "My congratulations on Africa Day, a reminder of solidarity, brotherhood and the establishment of the African Union (AU), a lasting legacy for future generations, to our friends across Africa," Baqeri said in a post on his X account on May 25. "I hope the union, considering its innumerable opportunities and capacities, will witness increasing growth, progress and prosperity and African nations will benefit from more achievements," he added. Africa Day is the annual commemoration of the foundation of the Organization of African Unity on May 25, 1963. It is celebrated in various countries on the African continent, as well as around the world. Expansion of relations with African nations in all political, economic, and cultural fields is top on the agenda of Iran's foreign policy. In comments in January 2022, late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi denounced the objectives and interests that the Westerners pursue in Africa, expressing the Islamic Republic's support for African nations' independence, development

and welfare. Meanwhile Iran and Sudan have agreed to accelerate the opening of embassies in their capitals, the Sudanese Foreign Ministry has announced. The agreement was reached during a meeting between Sudan's Foreign Minister Hossein Ayvaz and Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Bagheri Kani on Saturday, Al Arabiya cited a statement by the Sudanese Foreign Ministry. Ayvaz and Bagheri Kani discussed ways to expand Tehran-Khartoum relations and agreed to speed up the process to open embassies of their respected countries. The top Sudanese diplomat traveled to Iran to attend the funeral processions of the late president Ebrahim Raisi and his entourage including foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian. The two countries announced the resumption of their diplomatic relations in early October 2023, after a seven-year hiatus. Khartoum cut the ties after Saudi Arabia severed its relations with the Islamic Republic over protests in Iran against the execution of cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. Tehran and Riyadh restored their diplomatic relations a year ago, with both sides expressing time and again satisfaction with the growing mutual cooperation.

**ICCIMA Focused on Expansion of Key Regional Corridors**

TEHRAN - Houman Azimi, the director of international transportation and TIR carnet department of Iran Chamber of Commerce (ICCIMA), has stressed that enhancement of key regional corridors is a top agenda of this department. Azimi made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran with a high-ranking delegation from the International Road Transport Union (IRU) headed by IRU Director of TIR and Transit Tatiana Rey-Bellet. He said that the Iran Chamber of Commerce seeks further cooperation with the IRU as well as the private and state beneficiaries as it eyes to expand provincial offices. Rey-Bellet, for her part, highlighted the role of Iran Chamber of Commerce

as Iran's TIR issuing and guaranteeing association, noting that the chamber has to make plans for risk management of international transportation companies and make capacities so as to regain its place as the world's biggest issuer of TIR carnets. She stressed the need for strengthening the regional corridor in the Central Asia and ECO regions, particularly the southern part of the East-West corridor, urging the Iran Chamber of Commerce to give a boost to cooperation with Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iraq. During their three-day stay in Iran, the IRU delegation also had a meeting with senior officials from Iran's Road maintenance and Transportation Organization.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



**Iran Opens Major Railway Link Between Yazd, Fars Provinces**



YAZD (IRNA) - Iran has inaugurated a main railway link between the central province of Yazd and the southern province of Fars. The railway is one of the most important railway projects in Iran in the north-south railway corridor. The route includes 270 km of mainline with 11 stations. The speed of passenger trains on the railway will be 160 km per hour while the speed of a freight train will be 120 km per hour. Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash attended the inauguration ceremony on Sunday. During the event, the official said that rail and road transit grew by 57% in the first two months of the Iranian calendar year (March 20-May 20) compared to the same period last year.

**Weekly Trade on IME Hits 3m Tons**

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 3,003,079 tons of commodities and 59 vehicles with a total trading value of more than \$555m on its physical market. According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor, trade of 2,720,337 tons of commodities and 59 vehicles valued at more than \$390m. On this floor the IME sold 1,344,527 tons of cement, 955,000 tons of iron ore, 269,365 tons of steel, 139,500 tons of sponge iron, 7,140 tons of copper, 6,465 tons of aluminum, 840 tons of zinc and 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate. Based on this report, the exchange saw trade of 276,614 tons of commodities worth nearly \$163m on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor. Items traded on this floor included 84,765 tons of polymeric products, 83,100 tons of vacuum bottom, 67,167 tons of bitumen, 20,000 tons of lube cut, 17,402 tons of chemicals, 3,680 tons of oil, 380 tons of waterproofing materials, 320 tons of feedstocks and 100 tons of sulfur. Last was the IME's side market on which the exchange traded 6,128 tons of goods.

### Macron Would Debate With Far-Right's Le Pen

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron said on Saturday that he was willing to debate with far-right leader Marine Le Pen ahead of the June 9 European Parliament election, saying part of France's destiny was at stake in that ballot. Le Pen's eurosceptic National Rally (RN) party leads opinion polls by a huge margin, with as much as 33% of the vote, or about twice as much as what is forecast for Macron's centrist, pro-EU party. "My dear compatriots, wake up, look closely at who they are!," Macron told Le Parisien newspaper in an interview, speaking of the RN. "I'm willing to debate with Mrs Le Pen," Macron said. "The ball is in her camp." Le Pen immediately said on social media platform X that she was willing to debate, but only on the condition that Macron agreed to resign or call snap parliamentary elections if his party loses on June 9 - which he would have no reason to agree to. Macron beat Le Pen in two presidential election runoffs, in 2017 and 2022, but her popularity has kept growing since. Macron cannot run for a third mandate and the EU election is seen partly as a barometer of the parties' popularity



### "Anora" Wins Palme d'Or in Cannes



CANNES (Dispatches) - U.S. indie director Sean Baker won a richly deserved Palme d'Or at the 77th Cannes Film Festival for "Anora", a darkly comic and deeply moving Brooklyn odyssey about a dancer who marries the son of a wealthy Russian oligarch, starring Mikey Madison. Baker accepted the prize with Madison watching in the audience at the Cannes closing ceremony on Saturday. The win for "Anora" marks a new career high for the indie director, who built up a cult following with "Tangerine" (2015), "The Florida Project" (2017) and "Red Rocket" (2021). "Anora" centres on Ani, a Brooklyn stripper turned call girl who strikes gold with a wealthy client, the son of a Russian oligarch, only for the fairy tale to turn sour. It was an instant favourite among film critics, drawing rave reviews in Cannes. "This, literally, has been my singular goal as a filmmaker for the past 30 years, so I'm not really sure what I'm going to do with the rest of my life," Baker joked, before adding that his ambition would remain to "fight to keep cinema alive". The 53-year-old director said the world needed reminding that "watching a film at home while scrolling through your phone, answering emails and half paying attention is just not the way, although some tech companies would like us to think so." He added: "So, I say the future of cinema is where it started: in a movie theater." Moments earlier, George Lucas received an honorary Palme d'Or from his old friend and sometimes collaborator Francis Ford Coppola, reuniting two of the most pivotal figures of the last half-century of American moviemaking.

### Burkina Faso's Military Regime to Remain in Power for Five More Years



PARIS (AFP) - Burkina Faso's military regime, in power since a 2022 coup, will extend its rule for five years under an accord adopted during national consultations on Saturday, the talks' chairman said. "The duration of the transition is fixed at 60 months from July 2, 2024," Colonel Moussa Diallo, chairman of the organising committee of the national dialogue process, said after the talks. He added that coup leader and acting president Ibrahim Traore can run in any elections at the end of the transition period. What was supposed to be a two-day national dialogue began earlier Saturday, ostensibly to chart a way back to civilian rule for the West African nation beset by jihadist violence. The army has governed Burkina Faso since 2022, carrying out two coups that it justified in large part due to the country's persisting insecurity. Jihadist rebels affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group have waged a grinding insurgency since 2015 that has killed thousands and displaced millions. An initial national dialogue adopted a charter that installed Traore as president, and put in place a government and a legislative assembly. Under the new charter agreed Saturday, quotas will no longer be used to assign members of traditional parties seats in the assembly. Instead, "patriotism" will be deemed the only criteria to select deputies. The initial charter set the duration of the transition to civilian rule at 21 months with the deadline due to expire on July 1, but Traore had repeatedly warned that holding elections will be difficult given the perilous security situation.



### G7 Ministers Cite Progress But No Done Deal on Russian Assets for Ukraine

STRESA 9 (Dispatches) - G7 finance ministers cited "progress" in finding ways to use profits from frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine as they wrapped up a meeting Saturday, envisioning a concrete proposal to present to a leaders' summit next month. A search for creative yet legally sound solutions was top of the agenda at the two-day Group of Seven meeting in Stresa, northern Italy, as Kyiv continues its urgent appeals for more funds from Western allies in its third year of war with Russia. "We are making progress in our discussions on potential avenues to bring forward the extraordinary profits stemming from immobilized Russian sovereign assets to the benefit of Ukraine, consistent with international law and our respective legal systems," the ministers said in a final statement. They hope to present a proposal "defined in all its dimensions" to G7 leaders ahead of a summit in Puglia, southern Italy, on June 13-15, Italian Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti said during a press conference Saturday following the summit. "Progress has been made," Giorgetti said, cautioning however that an agreed proposal "is clearly not yet finalised because it has significant technical and legal issues". "We do not deny the difficulties but there is a firm determination to arrive at a solution," he added. G7 finance ministers reiterated in their final statement that Russian assets frozen by the Group of Seven nations "will remain immobilised until Russia pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine". But they went further, saying they were "committed to further financial and economic sanctions," including in the energy sector. The G7 is "ready to impose sanctions on individuals and entities that help Russia acquire advanced materials, technology, and equipment for its military industrial base," added the statement. Meanwhile, the governor of the Bank of Italy, Fabio Panetta, said Italian banks should

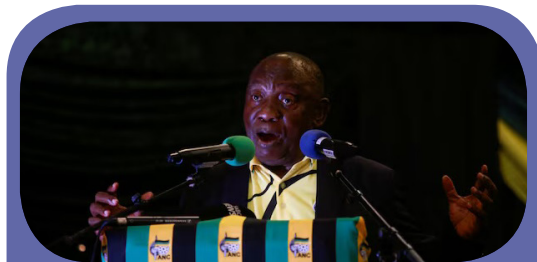
quit Russia even though doing so would be complicated and costly. "Knowing that you are forced to find a buyer can be difficult, however in the end you have to get out of there because there is a reputational problem as well," he told reporters. The summit wrapped up a day after the United States announced a new \$275-million package of aid for Kyiv, part of a \$61-billion military aid deal passed by Congress last month after months of delays. Kicking off the talks in Stresa, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had urged her counterparts to embrace "ambitious options" in considering how to use the frozen Russian assets. A debated US proposal would tap the interest generated by the 300 billion euros (\$325 billion) of Russian central bank assets frozen by the G7 and EU, creating a \$50-billion loan facility backed by future interest on the assets. Giorgetti -- whose country Italy holds this year's G7 presidency -- called the US proposal a "flexible and pragmatic" plan that addressed the legal and regulatory concerns shared within the EU. Last week, the European Union agreed to a more modest plan, using interest from Russian assets frozen by the bloc potentially amounting to up to three billion euros a year. Finance ministers attending the talks had warned that the Stresa summit was not likely to result in a concrete deal. On Friday, France's Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire downplayed what was reached as a "political agreement in principle, not a turnkey solution". Ukrainian Finance Minister Sergii Marchenko, who also attended the Stresa talks, said it was a "good signal that we are moving in the right direction". "I hope that during the G7 leadership summit in June there will be some decision," he told reporters. The G7 ministers also called out China's trade policies and industrial overcapacity, warning that the bloc could take measures to counter them.

### Gaza Ceasefire Talks Could Soon Resume But Israel-Hamas War Rages on



CAIRO (Reuters) - Prospects for a resumption of mediated Gaza ceasefire talks grew though Israel carried out new attacks in which Palestinian medics said more than 40 people were killed. An official with knowledge of the matter said a decision had been taken to resume the talks next week after the chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency met the head of the CIA and the prime minister of Qatar. The source, who declined to be identified by name or nationality, said it had been decided that "in the coming week negotiations will open based on new proposals led by the mediators, Egypt and Qatar and with active U.S. involvement." A Hamas official later denied Israeli media reports that the talks would resume in Cairo on Tuesday, telling Reuters: "There is no date". After more than seven months of war in Gaza, the mediators have struggled to secure a breakthrough, with Israel seeking the release of hostages held by Hamas and Hamas seeking an end to the war and a release of Palestinian prisoners in Israel. Israel pressed on with its offensive in Gaza to eliminate the Palestinian Islamist militant group Hamas after the top United Nations court ordered Israel on Friday to stop attacking the southern city of Gaza. Israel says it wants to root out Hamas fighters holed up in Rafah and rescue hostages it says are being held in the area, but its assault has worsened the plight of civilians and caused an international outcry. In northern Gaza, where the Israeli military says it is trying to

prevent Hamas from reestablishing its hold, Palestinian medical workers reported new Israeli airstrikes that they said killed at least 17 people. Abu Mohammad said he had been taking shelter with his family at a school in Gaza City's Saftawi suburb with other families, when an Israeli missile struck a yard and outside a classroom where women were preparing bread. "We were sitting peacefully, then there was boom, a missile from a controlled drone, or a regular drone, but it did massive damage," he told Reuters. He said several people were killed, adding: "Even schools are not safe anymore." The Israeli military said it was looking into the report. Palestinians medics said 45 Palestinians had been killed in the past day across Gaza. They do not distinguish between civilian and militant casualties. Nearly 36,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's offensive, Gaza's health ministry says. Israel began the operation in response to Hamas-led militants attacking southern Israeli communities on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people and seizing more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Hamas and the smaller armed group Islamic Jihad said their fighters had fired anti-tank rockets and mortar bombs at Israeli soldiers in the north. The Israeli military said its troops in the northern district of Jabalia killed dozens of militants in close combat and airstrikes. Residents and civil emergency services there said Israeli tanks moving deep in Jabalia destroyed dozens of houses, shops, and roads.



### South Africa's Ramaphosa Promises to Do Better as Election Looms

SOWETO (Dispatches) - South African President Cyril Ramaphosa vowed to do more on issues including jobs and state welfare as he campaigned ahead of elections next week that polls suggest could loosen the African National Congress' 30-year grip on power. Political parties are holding rallies in the final weekend before the national and provincial elections on May 29, which Ramaphosa called one of the most important in the country's history. If poll predictions prove accurate, the ANC, which has faced corruption scandals, a sky-high unemployment rate and economic stagnation, could win less than 50% of the vote. Such an outcome would mean it would have to seek one or more coalition partners for the first time since coming to power under the leadership of liberation hero Nelson Mandela at the end of apartheid. "We gather here carrying with us the hopes and aspirations of millions of our people ... to declare that together, we will do more and we will do better," Ramaphosa told supporters dressed in the ANC's colours of yellow, green and black who gathered at a soccer stadium in the country's most populous township, Soweto. In comments broadcast on national television, he said the ANC would focus on getting more South Africans into work, tackle the high cost of living, maintain existing social grants and progressively implement a basic income support grant for the unemployed. Meshack Jantjie, 31, who is unemployed, said he planned to vote for the ANC because he had faith in Ramaphosa's plans to create jobs - something he said was urgent.

### Deadly Russian Strike on Kharkiv DIY Store, Hundreds Feared Inside

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia on Saturday bombed a hardware superstore in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, killing two and injuring 33, in an attack condemned as "vile" by President Volodymyr Zelensky. Kharkiv regional governor Oleg Syneghubov said at least two people were killed and 33 injured when "two Russian guided bombs hit a construction hypermarket". "Two people were killed. They were men who worked in the hypermarket," Syneghubov said in a video posted on Telegram. "The number of wounded has gone up to 33 people," he added in a later post. Thick black smoke billowed from the gutted building of the Epitsentr DIY superstore as firefighters sprayed water on a blaze sparked by the strikes, an AFP video journalist saw. The Epitsentr chain of hypermarkets sells household and DIY goods. "As of now, we know that more than 200 people could have been inside the hypermarket," Zelensky said on Telegram, condemning the daylight attack on an "obviously civilian" target. Ukraine's rescue service posted images of firefighters spraying water inside the blazing building with the roof torn open and debris strewn around. They said the fire was raging over an area of 10,000 square metres but that the firefighters managed to localise it. The city of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest, regularly comes under attack from Russian missiles, with strikes on the city killing at least seven people on Thursday. The



latest attack came after Russia launched a ground offensive in the Kharkiv region on May 10. Ukraine said Friday that it had managed to halt Moscow's progress and was counterattacking. "Russia struck another brutal blow at our Kharkiv -- at a construction hypermarket -- on Saturday, right in the middle of the day," Zelensky said. "Only madmen like Putin are capable of killing and terrorising people in such a vile way," he added, referring to the Russian president who ordered his troops into Ukraine in February 2022. "There were a lot of workers and shoppers inside," Zelensky said. Kharkiv mayor Igor Terekhov said that according to the store's owner, 15 store employees had not been in contact and approximately 200 people were in the building at the time of the strikes. He described the attack as "pure terrorism". In the Kharkiv region, Russian troops mounted attacks Saturday in border areas. Russia shelled the village of Kupiansk-Vuzlovyi, a railway hub in the Kharkiv region near the border, wounding five, the regional prosecutor's office said in a statement. It said two vehicles came under fire: a car with two passengers and an ambulance with a driver, a paramedic and a 64-year-old patient. Russia also carried out air strikes on the Kupiansk district, damaging a factory and residential buildings, the prosecutor's office said. In the eastern Donetsk region, shelling on Saturday killed a 40-year-old woman and wounded four, said the head of the regional administration, Vadym Filashkin.



## Man Utd Stun Man City to Win FA Cup

LONDON (Dispatches) - Erik ten Hag made a convincing case to be spared the sack as Manchester United upset Manchester City to win the FA Cup with a shock 2-1 victory in Saturday's final. Ten Hag was reportedly set to be dismissed regardless of the result at Wembley after a troubled campaign that even the United manager described as "terrible" this week. But United's hierarchy might be having second thoughts after Ten Hag's tactical masterclass ruined City's history bid. City were hot favorites to win a second successive Premier League and FA Cup double. Yet Ten Hag found a way to neutralise Pep Guardiola's side as first half goals from Alejandro Garnacho and Kobbie Mainoo put United on course to win the FA Cup for the first time in eight years. Jeremy Doku squeezed an 87th minute strike past Andre Onana's weak attempted save but it was too late to rescue City. Ten Hag celebrated by kissing the Cup as he held it aloft in the Royal box. Asked if he was worried about his future, he said: "I don't know. The only thing I'm doing is preparing my team. This is a project for me. When I came in I can say it was a mess. Now we are better. We are not where we want to be." Guardiola added:

"Congratulations to United. It was a tight game. It can happen. At the end they scored two goals and we couldn't score more." Having ended a turbulent season on a high note, if Ten Hag's two-year reign does end, 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. Ten Hag will hope a more apt comparison is Alex Ferguson's 1990 FA Cup final win against Palace, which kick-started his remarkable run after calls for his sacking earlier that season. Ferguson was in attendance as a match labelled Ten Hag's funeral turned into a triumph for the much-maligned Dutchman. United shareholder Jim Ratcliffe, who has control of football operations at Old Trafford, was also watching from the stands alongside co-owners Joel and Avic Glazer. Linked with Thomas Tuchel, Mauricio Pochettino and Gareth Southgate, among others, there is still plenty for Ratcliffe to ponder after United finished eighth in the Premier League this season -- their lowest final position since 1990 -- and crashed out of the Champions League in the group stage.

## Nadal Won't 100% Close Door on Magical French Open



PARIS (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal said Saturday that he is likely appearing at the French Open for the final time but cautioned it was "not 100%" certain, describing the tournament where he has been champion 14 times as a "magical place". "It's a big, big chance that this is going to be my last Roland Garros, but if I have to tell you it's 100% my last Roland Garros, sorry, but I will not, because I cannot predict what's going on. I hope you understand," said the Spaniard. Nadal, who will celebrate his 38th birthday on June 3, faces world number four Alexander Zverev in the first round in Paris on Monday. The Spanish legend has racked up 112 wins in 115 matches at the tournament since his title-winning 2005 debut when he was just 19. He has 22 Grand Slam titles -- second only to Novak Djokovic's 24 on the all-time men's list -- but his career has been plagued by injuries. Nadal has played just four tournaments since January last year after suffering a hip injury and then a muscle tear. As a result, his ranking has slumped to 276 in the world and he comes into the French Open unseeded. "I have been going through a long process of recovery with a very difficult injury, almost two years of suffering, but I feel better now," he added. "I have fewer limitations than three, four weeks ago, without a doubt."

## Ruud Wins Third Geneva Title to Head to Paris on a High

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Casper Ruud downed Novak Djokovic's conqueror Tomas Machac on Saturday to win a third Geneva title and head into the French Open with a trophy in his racquet bag. Norwegian Ruud, the world number seven, beat 44th-ranked Czech Machac 7-5, 6-3 in an hour and 47 minutes. Second seed Ruud is at home on the Parc des Eaux-Vives clay, having won the Geneva title in 2021 and 2022. Ruud was the runner-up in the last two French Opens, and a third Geneva title gives the 25-year-old a timely boost as he makes the journey to Paris. Nobody has won more matches on the ATP tour this year than Ruud. "I'm happy after winning another title. It's been quite a difficult week. There are never any easy matches. I was on the brink of losing a couple of times during the tournament," Ruud told reporters afterwards. "So the margins were on my side and hopefully they can continue to be for the next two weeks. The courts, the conditions suit my game quite well and I'm always motivated when



I come here, and looking forward for this tournament." And of course, with Paris in the back of my mind, I try to take this tournament very seriously. "Aesthetically it's a beautiful city: the lake, the mountains. Somehow it reminds me a bit of Norway," he said of Geneva. The 28-man Geneva tournament serves as a warm-up before the French Open, the second of the year's four Grand Slams. It was Ruud's second match of the day, having beaten Italy's in-form Flavio Cobolli 1-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) in a roller coaster semi-final. The contest between Ruud and Cobolli, on a career-high ranking of 56, was meant to take place on Friday evening but was called off due to persistent rain. World number one Djokovic took a late wildcard to play in Geneva in a bid to reverse an alarming dip in form ahead of Roland-Garros, where he has won three times. But the 24-time Grand Slam champion was left feeling "worried" about his French Open title defence after falling 6-4, 0-6, 6-1 to Machac in the Geneva semi-finals on Friday.

## Leclerc Eyes Maiden Monaco Win as Verstappen Struggles



MONACO (Dispatches) - Charles Leclerc stayed calm and focused after ending Max Verstappen's record run of pole positions by topping a tense and dramatic qualifying session at the Monaco Grand Prix. After securing Ferrari's 250th pole position as a Formula One constructor and his third at his home-town circuit, the 26-year-old Monegasque driver said he was painfully aware that he had yet to score a Monte Carlo podium -- and was intent on winning Sunday's 78-lap race. "I know very well that more often than not qualifying is not everything, as much as it helps for Sunday's race, and we need to put everything together," he said. "In past years, we didn't manage to do so. But we are a stronger team now and in a stronger position so I am sure we can achieve great things tomorrow and a win is the target. I need a good launch off the grid and once we do that -- and hopefully Carlos (Sainz) can have a great start and follow me into Turn One and be 1-2 -- we can manage it as a team." That would be a perfect scenario. Whatever happens, we just need to bring that victory home. "Leclerc, who has failed to convert any of his last 12 pole positions into a win, clocked a best lap of one minute and 10.270 seconds to outpace nearest rival Oscar Piastri of McLaren by 0.154 seconds. It ended Verstappen's run of seven poles this year and a record-equalling eight in succession, shared with three-time world champion Ayrton Senna. Leclerc's winning margin over Australian Piastri was bigger than the gap separating the McLaren driver from Verstappen in sixth. "Credit to Charles he's been incredibly quick all weekend and at certain points, I don't think anyone thought we were going to get close to him," said Piastri. "It's nice to be starting on the front-row, it feels like it has been a good weekend in terms of building momentum - and what better colours to do it than this?" he added, referring to the special green and yellow livery to commemorate Senna sported by the team this weekend.

## Doncic Hits Game-Winning 3 to Put Mavs Up 2-0 on Wolves

DALLAS (Dispatches) - The Dallas Mavericks needed a big shot as they trailed in the final seconds. Luka Doncic was on the floor. Therefore, nobody on the Mavericks had a question about which player would get the opportunity to shoot or find the open man. "The play was to get Luka the ball, and let Luka do what Luka does in those moments," Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said. "He has trust with his teammates. If they were to come and hit him, he knew who he was going to find to knock down a shot. "We talked about taking a two -- we were only down two -- but when he got to dancing with (Rudy) Gobert, you could see that the step-back was coming. And the rest was history." Doncic knocked down the go-ahead 3-pointer with 3.8 seconds left and the Dallas Mavericks held on for a 109-108 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves in Game 2 of the Western Conference finals in Minneapolis. Doncic registered a triple-double with 32 points, 10 rebounds and 13 assists. Kyrie Irving finished with 20 points and Daniel Gafford scored 16 on 8-for-10 shooting. The Mavericks seized a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series as they head to Dallas for the next two games. Game 3 of the series is scheduled for today. Naz Reid led the Timberwolves with 23 points off the bench. He shot 8-for-13 from

the field and 7-for-9 from beyond the arc to give Minnesota an opportunity to win, but he missed his final attempt from 3-point range as the buzzer sounded. Anthony Edwards scored 21 points, grabbed five rebounds and dished seven assists for Minnesota. Mike Conley contributed 18 points. The Timberwolves led 108-103 with 1:29 to go before Dallas made its final run. Irving drained a 3-pointer at the 1:05 mark. Jaden McDaniels and Edwards committed turnovers



on Minnesota's next two possessions before Doncic's winning shot. Edwards pointed the finger at himself after shooting 5 of 17 from the field. "They're just showing me crowds, man, sitting in the gaps," Edwards said of the Dallas defense. "But I'm turning down a lot of shots, like my mid-rangers and stuff, I'm turning a lot of those down. But we're getting open looks, so I'm not tripping." Gafford provided energy for the Mavericks throughout the game. In one sequence, he blocked a 3-pointer and sprinted the length of the court to finish with a layup to give the Mavericks a 96-94 edge with 5:55 remaining. The Mavericks trailed 86-79 entering the fourth quarter. The Timberwolves enjoyed a 68-52 lead after Conley made a pair of free throws with 9:07 to go in the third quarter. Dallas responded with a 13-3 run to cut its deficit to 71-65 with 5:40 remaining in the third. Doncic capped the run with a floating jump shot from 10 feet. Minnesota led 60-48 at the half. Edwards scored 10 points in the first quarter to lift the Timberwolves to a 32-26 edge. He made a 2-point basket, a 3-pointer and 5 of 6 free-throw attempts. Minnesota maintained the pressure in the second quarter. Conley put the Timberwolves on top by 14 points with a floating jump shot with 1:32 left in the half, but Josh Green responded with a basket with 1:10 to go before the break