

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Export of Fresh Fruits to India Doubled in the First Three Months of 2024 Compared to the Same Period Last Year, According to the Indian Ministry of Trade and Commerce

Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi Met in the Western Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod and Discussed the Continuation of Bilateral Cooperation

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DOMESTIC

Polish Envoy Hails Long-Standing and Extensive Friendly Relations Between Iran and Poland

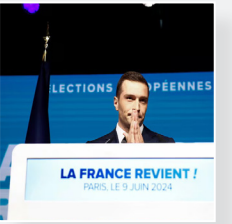
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INTERNATIONAL

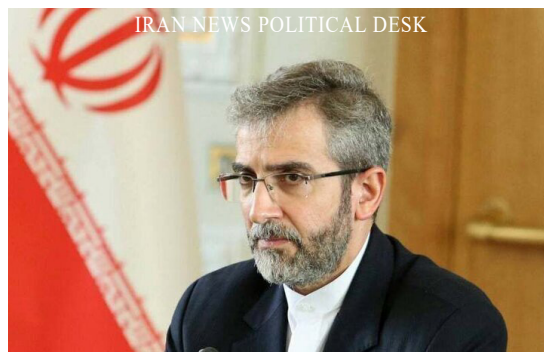
Far-Right Advances in EU Election, France Calls Snap National Vote

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Iran's BRICS Membership Legacy of Raisi, Amir-Abdollahian

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



TEHRAN - Iran's membership in BRICS is a lasting legacy of the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and the country's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani said. Bagheri Kani made the remarks while speaking to reporters as he arrived in the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod early on Monday. BRICS is the largest international economic group that with the presence of important countries is playing its role outside the framework of unilateralism of the West, he said. "The presence of the Islamic Republic in this group shows the position and importance of our country in the multilateral system." "We will actively participate in today's BRICS meetings and we will also consult with different countries regarding bilateral, regional and global issues in bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the meeting," he added. Elsewhere in his remarks, the top Iranian diplomat stressed that Iran's membership in BRICS is a lasting legacy of martyred President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. The BRICS group of emerging economies has welcomed 2024 by officially adding five developing nations. Specifically, the bloc introduced Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia to kick off the new year. Last year, the BRICS economic alliance has flourished. In what was undoubtedly a year of growth, the bloc fast-tracked a host of initiatives. Those range from its de-dollarization plans to its first-ever expansion bid. The latter of which is finally set to be made official. Indeed, the BRICS alliance has welcomed 2024 by officially adding five expansion nations to its ranks. Specifically, it introduced Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia to be the first countries to constitute expansion since South Africa was added more than a decade ago. The expansion is set to have massive geopolitical ramifications, as they could be hugely important to its multipolar goals. Bagheri Kani arrived in the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod to attend the foreign ministerial meeting of the member states of the BRICS group of countries. Bagheri Kani was welcomed by Iran's ambassador to Moscow and the Russian Foreign Ministry's officials.

1st Phase of Iran's Chabahar Space Center under Construction With 60% Physical Progress



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The head of the Iran Space Agency (ISA) said the first phase of the Chabahar National Space Center is under construction with about 60% physical progress. Speaking on the sidelines of a ceremony to honor the efforts of late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in boosting Iran's space industry, Hassan Salarieh said the first launch from this center is planned for later in the current Iranian calendar year (to end March 20, 2025). He noted that the space industry of the country witnessed 12 satellite launches over the past three years which is unprecedented in the history of the country. The administration of President Raisi took giant strides in developing the domestic space industry, he emphasized. The deputy minister of communications and information technology (ICT) added that the designing and construction of various satellites were completed in the administration, the most important of which was the Nahid satellite. The construction of the second prototype of the Pars-1 satellite will finish in the near future, Salarieh added, according to IRIB. The Chabahar Space Center is designated as a non-military launch center, intended for live payload launches as well as the deployment of Earth observation and communication satellites into geosynchronous orbit. These operations necessitate specific conditions, ideally being close to the equatorial region, to minimize launch costs and orbital adjustments. The Chabahar Space Center is poised to unlock new possibilities in the realm of space exploration, enhancing both Iranian capabilities and international collaboration. Meanwhile Iran unveiled flight models of the homegrown Kowsar and Hodhod satellites. The models were put on show on Sunday at a ceremony, where the active figures of the private sector had gathered to honor the endeavors of late President Ebrahim Raisi in the space field.



TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry Spokesman said today the world acknowledges that the Zionist regime is the most important threat to peace and stability in the region and the world. Speaking at his weekly presser on Monday morning, the Spokesman of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nasser Kanaani reacted to news circulated by regional media about the Zionist regime preparing for a major operation against Lebanon. "Iran's decisive policy in the region is to support peace, stability, and security in the region. It is a universal recognition that the Zionist regime is the most important threat to peace and stability in the region and this regime was and is the main cause of war in the region," Kanaani explained. Iranian diplomat stressed: "Now after eight months of this regime's war against the Gaza Strip, the world is convinced that this regime is trying to fuel war and insecurity and expand the scope of the war in the region. The threats of this regime against Lebanon should be taken seriously by the international community and the United Nations." "Any provocative actions of this regime against Lebanon and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country should be strongly condemned, Kanaani urged regional countries: "For securing stability, security and control the scope of war, the establishment of an immediate ceasefire in the region is necessary," Kanaani said. He reminded the responsibility of the US, UK, and European countries to stop supporting the Israeli regime and prevent this regime from waging war in the region. Kanaani then went on to state: "We must emphasize that the maintenance of stability, security, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon must be emphasized and paid attention to by all parties." "The government, the nation and the Lebanese army have the right to respond to the aggressive and provocative actions of this regime, and resistance against this regime is a guarantee of stability and security and the establishment of peace in Lebanon and a strong shield against the aggression of this regime," He added. Kanaani continued: The Zionists should know that the resistance did not remain silent in the face of the aggression and murder of the Zionists in Gaza, they will not remain silent in the face of any adventurous action against Lebanon and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country. He also said Iran regards

any claim about its sovereignty over the three islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb and the Lesser Tunb in the Persian Gulf as "interference" in its internal affairs. Kanaani dismissed the "unconstructive and fruitless" statement issued by the ministerial council of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in its 160th session in Doha, Qatar. He said the trio islands in the Persian Gulf are an "inseparable and permanent" part of the Islamic Republic's territory. In its statement, the ministerial council claimed that the three islands belong to the United Arab Emirates and accused Tehran of continuing to occupy them. It called on Iran to respond to the UAE's efforts to resolve the issue through direct negotiations or resorting to the International Court of Justice. The three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs have historically been part of Iran, proof of which can be found and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world. However, the United Arab Emirates has repeatedly laid claim to the islands. The islands fell under British control in 1921 but on November 30, 1971, a day after British forces left the region and just two days before the UAE was to become an official federation, Iran's sovereignty over the islands was restored. The Iranian spokesperson also dismissed the PGCC claims asserting shared rights of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the entirety of the Arash natural gas field in the Persian Gulf: "Issuing repetitive statements and leveling unilateral claims [about the Arash gas field] lack legal value and do not prove any right in favor of the Kuwaiti side," Kan'ani said. He emphasized that the only logical and fruitful solution is to return to the technical and legal negotiating table and bilateral talks in order to reach a lasting agreement based on good neighborliness and respect for common interests. He reaffirmed Iran's right to the resources of the gas field as per the negotiations held between the two countries and advised the Kuwaiti officials against resorting to fruitless political and media approaches. Based on its strategic approach and principled policies, Iran always believes in interaction and cooperation with its neighbors to solve the problems in the region and welcomes constructive initiatives to promote bilateral and multilateral relations, the spokesman stated.

Iran's Air Defense Force Made Leaping Progress in Recent Years

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Iranian Army's Air Defense Force has hailed the achievements of his forces in recent years, saying they have made "leaping progress" by exercising self-reliance. Brigadier General Alireza Sabahifard said the Army's Air Defense Force is in possession of a variety of systems that enable it to react to any possible threats in a timely manner. The force, he continued, has also made great strides in specialized areas, especially in the field of developing different types of drones and radars. "As a manifestation of the power of the Islamic Iran, the Air Defense Force has been able to achieve significant progress through self-belief and self-confidence," Sabahifard said on Sunday. "The progress and development of this

specialized force in the past years has been very accelerated and leaping." Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient. Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will be never subject to negotiations. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeatedly called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran's defense capabilities.



Iran's GDP Doubled during President Raisi's Administration



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The figures of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) indicate that Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) more than doubled during late President Ebrahim Raisi's administration. The statistics released by the international monetary body show that Iran's GDP based on the current prices more than doubled between 2020 and 2023. Iran's GDP based on the last year of activity of the previous administration in 2020 had reached \$195 billion, the rate of which exceeded \$403 billion in 2023, registering a 106 percent growth. In this respect, Iran's rank has significantly improved among the world's economies. Iran stood in the 51st rank in the world in 2020 in terms of the gross domestic product based on the current prices but it climbed 13 places to rank 38th in the world in 2023. In other words, the GDP of 37 countries was higher than Iran in 2023 while in 2020, over 50 countries had a higher GDP than Iran, according to the IMF. Iran's rank considerably improved during President Raisi's administration in terms of the gross domestic product based on the purchasing power index (PMI).

Gantz, Eisenkot Resignations Expose Collapse of Israel's Political System



GAZA (Dispatches) - Palestinian resistance movement Hamas says the resignations of Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz and war cabinet observer Gadi Eisenkot lay bare the collapse of the regime's political system. Sami Abu Zuhri, a spokesman for the Gaza-based resistance movement, said Gantz and Eisenkot made the decision to leave the incumbent Israeli administration before its eventual breakdown. "There is no end in sight to the resignation of the Zionist regime's political and military figures. This points to the downfall of the regime's political system," the senior Hamas official said. He underscored that it makes no difference whether Gantz or Netanyahu is in office as they are both bloody brutes, and that the Zionist society seeks bloodshed and atrocities in general. Gantz and Eisenkot stepped out of Israel's war cabinet on Sunday. They joined Netanyahu's administration after Israel launched its onslaught against the Gaza Strip in early October last year, leading to the formation of the emergency coalition, which then established the war cabinet. Addressing a press conference in Tel Aviv, Gantz called on Netanyahu to hold early elections "as soon as possible." "Months after the October tragedy, the situation in Israel and in the room of the decision-makers has changed. Netanyahu and his partners have turned unity into a moving call without real-world action. Fateful strategic decisions are met with hesitancy and procrastination due to political considerations," Gantz said.

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Sponge Iron Sets Highest Production Growth in Q1

TEHRAN - Statistics on the production of various steel chain products in the first month of the current year show that production has increased by 1.1 to 10.4 percent compared to the same month last year, with the highest growth belonging to sponge iron. According to ISNA, based on statistics from the Iranian Steel Producers Association, in the first month of this year, sponge iron had the highest production growth compared to the same period last year. During this period, 3,807,000 tons of sponge iron were produced, which shows a 10.4 percent increase compared to the 3,447,000 tons produced in the same period of 2022. Following this, over six million tons (6,095,000 tons) of iron ore pellets were produced in the first month of this year, which is about 231,000 tons more than the production in April of last year, equivalent to 5,764,000 tons, marking a 5.7 percent growth. During the mentioned period of this year, 6,066,000 tons of iron ore concentrate were produced, which is 4 percent more than the 5,831,000 tons produced in April of last year. In the first month of the year, 999,000 tons of long steel sections and 1,866,000 tons of steel products were produced, each 2 percent more than the production in the same period last year.

Iran, Italy Discuss Reconstruction of Syria



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian and Italian representatives talked about the latest developments in Syria, plans to assist in the reconstruction of the Arab country, and helping displaced Syrians to return home. Senior adviser to the Iranian foreign minister for special political affairs Ali Asghar Khaji and Italian special envoy for Syria, Stefano Ravagnan, in a meeting discussed the latest developments in Syria. Expressing concern about the Syrian people's economic problems and a decline in international humanitarian aid for the Arab country, the Iranian and Italian diplomats stressed the need for the initial stage of reconstruction of Syria to pave the way for the return of the Syrian displaced citizens and refugees. Khaji and Ravagnan also highlighted the importance of continuing political processes in Syria and holding the Constitutional Committee meetings. In an address to the UN Security Council last week, Iran's UN ambassador denounced the Western sanctions for exacerbating the plight of the most vulnerable segments of the Syrian society, prolonging the crisis, and worsening the suffering endured by the Syrian population.

Polish Envoy Hails Long-Standing and Extensive Friendly Relations Between Iran and Poland

TEHRAN – Ambassador of Republic of Poland in a conference marking 550 Years of Diplomatic Relations Between Iran and Poland hailed the long-standing and extensive friendly relations between the two conference.

The faculty of Law and Political Sciences of University of Tehran on Sunday held a commemoration conference on the occasion of 550 years of political relations between Iran and Poland and many political experts and professors were among the speakers in the event.

Addressing the event, Ambassador of Poland H.E. Maciej Falkowski hailed this historic relations and called for continuation of this relation.

In his speech Falkowski said he was very pleased to inaugurate this conference on the occasion of the 550th anniversary of relations between Poland and Iran, adding that for any ambassador, experiencing such a moment is like "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and being present at the University of Tehran—one of the most renowned academic institutions in Iran and the entire region—is an honor for him.

He further said: Perhaps the primary domain of diplomacy is not the study and review of enduring history. What we are doing today is focused on the present and the future. Of course, this does not mean that history is useless in improving foreign policy. History affects our understanding of the world. History provides us with a perspective. History explains why countries behaved and acted in certain ways in the past and how social, political, ideological, and cultural variables influenced those choices. Moreover, history highlights the importance of perceptions and—most importantly—misconceptions throughout this process. Finally, the study of history is probably the best cure for any form of determinism. While history illuminates the past, it does not provide a clear path for the future. Paying attention to historical arguments can be a great source of insight, but building the future ahead of us is entirely in our hands. We must remember this."

Falkowski then added: With that said, let's take a look at the past five and a half centuries. What do we learn from this long and eventful period? I will focus on three observations, which are entirely subjective."

He went on to say: First, Poland and Iran had the strongest political relations during their political heydays. These relations date back to the 15th and 16th centuries and also a brief period in the 20th century. Both countries had strong international positions at that time, which were, of course, challenged by their neighbors. Both countries were guarantors of political orders in their respective regions."



He noted: Secondly, whenever the two countries achieved a powerful position in a stable region, their trade and cultural relations flourished. Cultural fascination sparked academic interests, leading to the establishment of schools and research centers. From the 16th century, Polish diplomatic envoys acted as intermediaries, conveying the consultations and opinions of the kings of Poland and Iran. Letters were exchanged between the kings, leading to political and philosophical dialogues. Merchants established routes through which Iranian carpets, textiles, and weapons reached the homes of contemporary European aristocracy."

He then highlighted some major events in the history of relations between the two countries and said: "Thirdly, Poland and Iran have had long-standing and extensive friendly relations. This legacy remains and makes us equal partners. From Poland's perspective, two historical events are noteworthy in this regard."

Falkowski then pointed to some major historical events in recent centuries in both countries and reiterated that has been one of the two countries that has never recognized the occupation of Poland and this will never be forgotten.

He went on to say: "History proves that Polish-Iranian relations have been a source of strength and a competitive advantage for both countries. History teaches us that countries with similar potential, as long as they share similar values and pursue common goals and objectives, can create effective and mutually beneficial partnerships. History can be a testament to the extraordinary solidarity of human beings. And we must be wisely guided by this shared history. As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, the future is entirely in our hands. History teaches us much about the nature of people and societies. History unequivocally testifies that following sincere and logical intentions leads to impeccable strategies. As long as we walk on the right path, victory is ours."

The conference was held in collaboration between Embassy of Poland, Negarestan Andisheh Institute, Iranian Studies Center of University of Tehran, National Library and Archives of Iran, Faculty of Law and Political Science of University of Tehran and Iranian Society of History.

In the event the background and the history of Iranian and Polish Diplomatic Relationship was reviewed and by the way the historical and cultural relations of Poland and Persia will be of the other topics which is on the agenda of the conference.

Rise in Smuggling of Audio and Visual Goods



TEHRAN - Mohammad Reza Shahidi, Secretary of the Association of Audio and Visual Equipment Manufacturers, stated that the association is a non-governmental organization representing this sector and its officials. He mentioned that manufacturers are currently facing two major challenges. The first issue is the provision of foreign currency and raw materials, which, despite being pursued by the Ministry of Industry, has not yet been resolved by the Central Bank, which has failed to supply the necessary foreign currency. The second issue is government-mandated pricing. The Secretary of the Association of Audio and Visual Equipment Manufacturers said: "Despite two and a half months into the year and rising transportation costs, prices of goods, and inflation, our request for product price increases has not been approved. This has resulted in a situation where we cannot replace the products we sell at the same rate." Shahidi continued: "The third, and very distressing, challenge is the smuggling of goods. Unfortunately, the government does not address this issue, despite the fact that we, as producers, pay 30 percent of our income in taxes, duties, etc., to the government. However, individuals who bring in smuggled goods do not pay duties, taxes, or rent and easily bring in and sell their goods." He emphasized: "Instead of providing facilities to producers, they are effectively being given to smugglers, and no action is being taken against smuggling. The import of smuggled goods has become openly allowed, and no official addresses this issue." The Secretary of the Association of Audio and Visual Equipment Manufacturers noted that smuggled goods usually enter the country from the southern and western borders, saying: "Unfortunately, officials do not resist this issue."



Chabahar to Become a Hub for Mineral Exports

TEHRAN - According to the Chairman of the Mining and Mineral Industries Commission of the Chamber of Commerce, Iran can only become a transit route for goods from its northern neighbors if it strengthens its transportation infrastructure, particularly in rail transport.

Bahram Shakouri, Chairman of the Mining and Mineral Industries Commission of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, stated in an interview with ILNA that Russia is interested in using Iran's rail route to export coal to India. He mentioned that Iran's transportation infrastructure has not improved in line with the growth in the domestic mining industries. Currently, steel and copper industries are facing challenges due to weak transportation infrastructure, and there is a concern that in the coming years there will be no adequate machinery to transport goods produced in industrial units. He emphasized that the weakness in the country's transportation infrastructure is more pronounced in rail transport compared to road transport. He added that for such a plan to be operational, the completion of the North-South and East-West corridors is necessary. Therefore, it can be concluded that while there is potential for implementing such a plan in Iran, the required infrastructure is currently lacking. Shakouri pointed out that Iran's access to warm waters and its geopolitical position in the region creates such potential. He also noted that India could use Iran as a transit route in its trade dealings with Europe, shortening its trade route with Europe. Additionally, using this route is cheaper than transporting goods by sea, which presents a good opportunity for Iran to capture more than one-third of the transportation costs in the Russia-India route and earn substantial revenue from it. He highlighted that this advantage is not limited to the transportation of mineral goods. Currently, 40 million tons of grain are produced in CIS countries north of Iran, with 20 million tons consumed in southern neighbors. Iran could generate income from the transit of goods between these two regions if it has the necessary infrastructure. Shakouri mentioned that if the Zahedan-Chabahar railway is completed, Chabahar could become a hub for mineral exports from Iran and Afghanistan. Had this happened, Pakistan's Gwadar Port would not hold its current position.

Russia Planning to Export Coal to India through Iran's Railway Network

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Russia has announced plans to export coal to India through Iran's railway network system. The announcement was made at a meeting of BRICS transport ministers on Saturday on the sidelines of the 27th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF). Russia said it will make use of the International North-South Corridor to export coals to India. Russia's Presidential Aide Igor Levitin said the first coal-carrying wagons will be sent to India after passing through Iran and the port city of Bandar Abbas. Speaking in his visit with Ambassador of Iran to Russia Kazem Jalali, Levitin said, "The first wagons carrying coal will be transited to India after passing through the territory of Iran and Bandar Abbas." Also, in this meeting, the two sides discussed the latest status of cooperation in this sector, especially the construction project of the Rasht-Astara Railway. In a separate meeting with Oleg Belozorov, the

president of Russian Railways, Iran's ambassador discussed the expansion of bilateral cooperation, particularly the implementation of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). In this meeting, Belozorov emphasized the promotion of bilateral relations and called for the development of railway cooperation between Iran and Russia to increase freight transport between the two countries. Referring to the signing of the agreement for the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway, Jalali also considered the implementation of this project important and in line with the interests of Iran, Russia, and the countries of the region, according to the website of the Iranian Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD). Back in February 2024, Iran Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash hosted Igor Levitin in Tehran to discuss the promotion of transit along the INSTC and acceleration of the Rasht-Astara Railway



1.4m Foreign Tourists Visit Iran in 3 Months



TEHRAN - The World Tourism Organization has reported a continued upward trend in foreign tourist arrivals to Iran in 2024. While Iran experienced a significant 43% growth in attracting foreign tourists in 2023, statistics from this UN-affiliated organization indicate a 60% increase in foreign tourist arrivals in the first quarter of 2024, corresponding to winter 1402 in the Iranian calendar. In the first quarter of the current year, 1,398,000 foreign tourists visited Iran. In the same period last year, the number of foreign tourists entering Iran was 872,000. According to the report, 495,000 tourists arrived in January, 506,000 in February, and 397,000 in March of this year. In the 12 months of the previous year, 5.9 million foreign tourists visited Iran. This figure was 4.1 million for 2022 and only 880,000 for 2021. The actions and policies of the Thirteenth Government, including facilitating visa issuance and waiving visas for citizens of 33 countries, have revitalized and boosted the country's tourism industry following the global decline of the COVID-19 pandemic.

South Korea, U.S. to Hold New Round of Nuclear Planning Talks in Seoul

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea and the United States were set to hold talks in Seoul to better coordinate an allied nuclear response during a war with North Korea, amid anxiety over Pyongyang's growing arsenal, Seoul officials said. The third meeting of the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) is designed to follow up on last year's summit, during which the United States promised to give South Korea more insight into its nuclear planning for a conflict with the North. The talks came as North Korea races ahead to advance its nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, which triggered questions in South Korea about its reliance on "extended deterrence" - in essence the American nuclear umbrella. Some politicians, including some senior members of President Yoon Suk Yeol's party, called for Seoul to develop its own nuclear weapons, a step Washington opposes. In late May, North Korea's attempt to launch a military reconnaissance satellite failed after a newly developed rocket engine exploded in flight. Seoul and Washington condemned the launch as a violation of U.N. Security Council sanctions banning Pyongyang's use of ballistic technology.



IRAN NEWS

Armenian Archbishop Calls Four Days of Protests to Seek Ouster of PM



YEREVAN (Dispatches) - A large crowd protested in Armenia's capital Yerevan on Sunday against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, led by a Christian cleric who announced the start of four days of rallies to seek to drive him from office. Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan is seeking to tap into popular anger over military defeats and territorial concessions to Azerbaijan, but Pashinyan has so far withstood the pressure. "For four days, we will stay in the streets and squares, and with our determination and will, we will achieve victory," said Galstanyan, who called on parliamentary factions to hold a special session on Tuesday to remove the government from power. A live video stream on YouTube showed thousands of people rallying in the centre of Yerevan and then marching peacefully through the streets with music blaring. There were no reports of arrests or clashes. After weeks of protests against Pashinyan appeared to be losing momentum, Galstanyan is attempting to bring matters to a head with demands for a change of power within days. He is calling for the appointment of a transitional government to "implement reconciliation", manage foreign relations and prepare for snap elections. But Richard Giragosian, director of the Regional Studies Center in Yerevan, said the move smacked of desperation in the face of waning protest numbers. The archbishop's campaign was hampered by a lack of political experience and the absence of a clear strategy or alternative vision, he said. The demonstrations, as yet, "do not pose any real challenge to the government. The only danger of escalation is from a possible over-reaction by the security forces," Giragosian told Reuters. Pashinyan is a former journalist who came to power after a wave of street protests in 2018. He came under heavy domestic pressure in 2020 after major losses to Azerbaijan in the second war the two countries had fought in three decades. Last year Azerbaijan followed up with a lightning offensive to take back its Karabakh region, prompting an exodus of 100,000 ethnic Armenians who had enjoyed de facto independence there for three decades. Pashinyan has criticised Russia for not intervening with its peacekeeping force in the region to stop Azerbaijani forces from retaking Karabakh.



Far-Right Advances in EU Election, France Calls Snap National Vote

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Gains by the far-right in voting for the European Parliament on Sunday prompted a bruised French President Emmanuel Macron to call a snap national election and added uncertainty to Europe's future political direction. While the centre, liberal and Socialist parties were set to retain a majority in the 720-seat parliament, the vote dealt a domestic blow to the leaders of both France and Germany, raising questions about how the European Union's major powers can drive policy in the bloc. Making a risky gamble to try to reestablish his authority, Macron called a parliamentary election, with the first round on June 30. Like Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also endured a painful night where his Social Democrats scored their worst result ever, suffering at the hands of the mainstream conservatives and hard right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Meanwhile, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni saw her position strengthened by her arch-conservative Brothers of Italy group winning the most votes, exit polls showed. A rightwards shift inside the European Parliament may make it tougher to pass new legislation that might be needed to respond to security challenges, the impact of climate change or industrial competition from China and the United States. However, exactly how much clout the euro-sceptic nationalist parties will wield will depend on their ability to overcome their differences and work together. They are currently split between two different families, and some parties and lawmakers for now lie outside these groupings. The center-right European People's Party (EPP) will be the biggest political family in the new legislature, gaining five seats to field 189 deputies, a centralized exit poll showed. In Poland, Prime Minister Donald Tusk's centrist Civic Coalition, a member of the EPP, was set to win the European vote. In Spain as well, the centre-right People's Party, also part of the EPP, came out on top, outperforming Socialist Prime Minister Pedro

Sanchez. Such results were good news for EPP member Ursula von der Leyen who seeks a second five-year term at the helm of the powerful EU executive arm. And she was quick to present herself as a shield against extremes. "No majority can be formed without the EPP and together ... We will build a bastion against the extremes from the left and from the right," she told supporters at the EPP's election night event in Brussels. She added, later in the evening: "But it is also true that extremes on the left and the right have gained support and this is why the result comes with great responsibility for the parties in the centre." Von der Leyen may still need support from some right-wing nationalists, such as Meloni's Brothers of Italy to secure a parliamentary majority, giving Meloni and her European Conservative and Reformists (ECR) allies more leverage - which could upset other potential allies. The centre-left Socialists and Democrats are poised to be the second biggest political family, even as they lost four lawmakers to end up with 135, the exit poll showed. Political observers attribute the shift to the right to the rise in the cost of living, concerns about migration and the cost of the green transition as well as the war in Ukraine -- worries that nationalist and populist parties have seized on. "I think a lot of people felt that Europe is doing things not with people, but just doing it on top of people," Greens' lead candidate Bas Eickhout told Reuters in an interview, asked why the far right was doing so well. "And I think here we need to come up with a credible answer, otherwise, we're only getting further to the far right," he said, after the Greens and liberals lost ground in the election. Eurosceptic nationalist groups ECR and Identity and Democracy (ID) and hard-right lawmakers not yet affiliated to an EU political family from Germany's AfD secured together 146 seats, a gain of 19, the centralised exit poll showed.



Trump Tells Sweltering Rally in Nevada He Won't Tax Tips

LAS VEGAS (Dispatches) - Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump told a rally in Las Vegas on Sunday that he would seek to end taxation of income from tips, a direct appeal to service workers in the swing state of Nevada, which polls suggest is leaning his way ahead of the Nov. 5 election. Trump also once again valorized his supporters convicted for their roles in the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol, calling them "warriors" and suggesting a possible counter-investigation into the event if he were re-elected. The pledge on tips, revealed at a sweltering outdoor rally in Las Vegas where temperatures reached 100 degrees, adds one more detail to a Trump tax plan that has included vague pledges of tax relief to middle-income workers and small businesses. "So this is the first time I've said this, and for those hotel workers and people that get tips you're going to be very happy because when I get to office, we are going to not charge taxes on tips people (are) making," Trump told a crowd of several thousand people. Trump said he would "do that right away, first thing in office," and noted in prepared remarks that he would seek legislation in Congress to make the change. "You do a great job of service, you take care of people and I think it's going to be something that really is deserved."

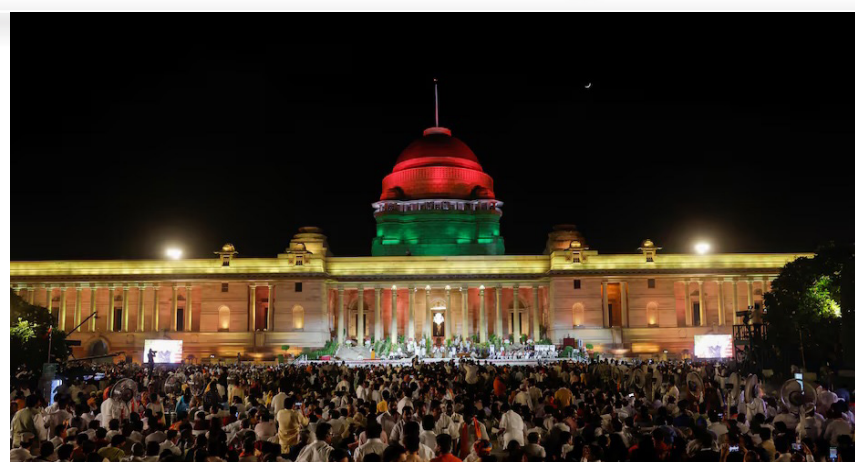
Russia Appears to Make Headway in Key Ukrainian Town of Chasiv Yar

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian forces appear to be making headway towards their longstanding goal of capturing the strategic Ukrainian town of Chasiv Yar, according to reports on Sunday from both sides of the more than two-year-old conflict. Chasiv Yar stands on high ground about 20 km (12 miles) to the west of Bakhmut, a town Russian forces seized a year ago after months of battles that flattened nearly all its buildings. It is seen by both sides as a potential staging point for Russia to advance on the key cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. Ukrainian media outlet Ukrainska Pravda quoted a military source and a blogger as saying that Russian forces had begun occupying a district of the town alongside a canal. "Over the past week, there have been more than 1,500 instances of shelling of the outskirts of Chasiv Yar from the north to the south," it quoted its source as saying. The source said Russian troops were using guided aerial bombs to clear areas along a major road "and with the support of multiple long-range missiles and... drones they have begun to move forward and build up their forces". Russia's 98th Paratrooper Division, posting on the Telegram messaging app, said Ukrainian forces were "doing everything possible to ensure our units do not move across the canal and take up positions in the 'New' district on the other side". Russian assault units were continuing to clear the canal district, it said. Video posted by both sides showed soldiers making their way through virtually destroyed areas of an urban centre and checking buildings. Russian forces have been making gradual progress in areas of the eastern front since the town of Avdiivka fell to Russian troops in February. They have also launched a cross-border incursion into parts of northeastern Kharkiv region, though Ukraine says that advance has been stopped. Ukraine has long anticipated a Russian advance and its top commander, Oleksandr Syrskiy, last month said Moscow's forces had hoped to capture Chasiv Yar in time for May 9 ceremonies marking the anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War Two. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in his nightly video address on Sunday, made no mention of Chasiv Yar, but said the area around the town of Pokrovsk, to the southwest, remained the most difficult sector to defend. "This is the toughest area along the entire front line, the one where pressure from the occupiers is the greatest," he said. "Every day this is the site of the highest number of engagements. Only yesterday, there were more than 40 assaults and as of this hour today, there have been more than 20."



Modi Sworn in as PM for Third Term, Faces Coalition Challenges

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Narendra Modi was sworn in as India's prime minister on Sunday for a third term, after a shock election setback that will test his ability to ensure policy certainty in a coalition government in the world's most populous nation. President Droupadi Murmu administered the oath of office to Modi at a ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the president's palace in New Delhi, attended by thousands of dignitaries, including the leaders of seven regional countries, Bollywood stars and industrialists. "Honoured to serve Bharat," Modi posted on X, minutes before he was sworn in, referring to India's name in Indian languages. Supporters cheered, clapped and chanted "Modi, Modi" as the 73-year-old leader, dressed in a white kurta tunic and blue half jacket, was called to take his oath. Modi was followed by senior ministers in the previous government: Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari, Nirmala Sitharaman, Subrahmanyan Jaishankar, and Piyush Goyal, among others. Their portfolios were expected to be announced after the swearing-in. Midway through the inauguration, news came that at least nine people were killed and 33 injured when a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims plunged into a gorge after a suspected militant attack in the federal territory of Jammu and Kashmir, drawing criticism of the security situation from the



opposition Congress party. Modi, who started as a publicist of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ideological parent of his Bharatiya Janata Party, is only the second person after independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru to serve a third straight term as prime minister. Modi secured the third term in after multi-stage election that concluded on June 1 with the support of 14 regional parties in his BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. In the previous two terms his party had won an outright majority. The outcome is seen as a big setback to the popular leader as surveys and exit polls had predicted BJP would secure even more seats than in 2019. Modi delivered world beating growth and lifted India's global standing, but appeared to have missed a step at home as a lack of enough jobs, high prices, low incomes and religious faultlines pushed voters to rein him in. When Modi was the chief minister of the western state of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014 the BJP enjoyed strong majorities, allowing him to govern decisively. Modi's new term as prime minister, therefore, is likely to be fraught with challenges in building consensus on contentious political and policy issues in the face of different interests of regional parties and a stronger opposition, analysts say.

Celtics Take 2-0 NBA Finals Lead Over Mavs



BOSTON (Dispatches) - Although he considers himself part of the supporting cast, Boston Celtics guard Jrue Holiday looked like a star on Sunday night. Holiday racked up team highs in points with 26 and rebounds with 11, leading Boston to a 105-98 victory over the Dallas Mavericks in Game 2 of the NBA Finals. The Celtics now lead the best-of-seven series 2-0, with Game 3 set for Wednesday in Dallas. "I'm a utility guy. I'll do whatever. I'm here to win," said Holiday, who went 11-for-14 from the field. "I feel like they brought me here to win, and I'll do my best to do that. But at the end of the day, this is (Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown's) team." "And I know it's probably just as much my team as theirs, but ... the pressure that they have on themselves to execute and to be great is a little bit different than my pressure." Brown and Tatum were still very much in the picture on Sunday. Brown went for 21 points while Tatum collected 18 to go along with nine boards and 12 assists. However, both knew the series very well may have been tied 1-1 had it not been for Holiday. "Tonight, they wanted to emphasize loading up, making us make the right reads over and over again, and Jrue had a lot of opportunities tonight and he took advantage," Brown said. "He's just a hell of a player, hell of a person, great teammate." "I credit the victory to him tonight. He played well." Derrick White also had 18 points for Boston, while Kristaps Porzingis chipped in 12 off the bench. White's biggest play of the night came on the defensive end, as he blocked P.J. Washington with 50.5 seconds left in the game. Had

Washington scored, the Mavericks would have pulled within 103-100. "That was sick," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said of White sending back Washington's dunk attempt. Luka Doncic supplied 32 points, 11 boards, 11 assists and four steals for Dallas, which still managed to outshoot Boston 47.5 percent to 45.2 percent overall. Washington chipped in 17 points, Kyrie Irving had 16 and Daniel Gafford went for 13. Irving finds himself in familiar territory. Back in 2016, Irving and the Cleveland Cavaliers were down 2-0 after losing road games to the Golden State Warriors in the Finals, but they rallied to win in seven games. The Mavericks tried to mount a late rally after 3-pointers from Holiday and White on back-to-back possessions put Boston ahead 103-89 with 3:34 left in the game. Derrick Jones Jr. scored four straight points as part of a 9-0 spurt that ended with a three-point play from Doncic, but White's block and Brown's layup with 29.8 seconds to go dashed any hope Dallas had left. Dereck Lively II threw home a dunk to get the Mavericks within 63-61 with 7:30 left in the third quarter, but the Celtics then started to pull away. Boston scored 17 of the next 23 points, with Brown's trey making it 80-67 with 2:04 remaining in the period. Dallas cut its deficit to six before quarter's end, but Payton Pritchard nailed a 34-foot 3-pointer at the buzzer to send Boston into the fourth with an 83-74 cushion. Doncic took over in the first quarter, scoring 13 points to lift Dallas to a 28-25 lead. The Celtics stayed close by going 10-for-10 from the free-throw line through the first 12 minutes.

India Beat Pakistan in Low-Scoring Thriller



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jasprit Bumrah was the hero as India beat Pakistan by six runs in a low-scoring T20 World Cup thriller in New York on Sunday. India were bowled out by Pakistan for 119 in 19 overs but while Mohammad Rizwan made 31 for Pakistan, in a well-paced innings, Bumrah delivered crucial wickets and his 3-14 in four overs proved decisive as Pakistan fell just short ending on 113-7. Despite a tricky surface that made batting difficult, a crowd of 34,028, a record attendance for an international cricket match in the USA, were given a tight contest that ebbed and flowed. Pakistan needed exactly a run a ball and they approached their innings accordingly -- they engineered themselves into a position where they needed 40 to win off the last six overs but then were unable to deliver in the face of Bumrah's brilliance. "Bumrah is going from strength to strength. I'm not going to talk too much about him, we want him to be in that kind of mindset till the end of this World Cup, he's a genius with the ball," said India captain Rohit Sharma, who praised his team's fans, who had travelled from far and wide to back them. "The crowd was superb, they never disappoint, wherever we play in the world, they come out in huge numbers and support us. They'll be going home with a big smile on their face as well. Just the start of the tournament, we have a long way to go," he said. Bumrah had picked up the vital wicket of Pakistan captain Babar Azam (13) early and then the breakthrough dismissal of Mohammad Rizwan (31) in the 15th over when Pakistan were 80-4. Then, handed the ball for the penultimate over, with Pakistan needing 21 to win, Bumrah conceded just three runs and removed Iftikhar Ahmed with his final delivery.

Alcaraz Says Paris Triumph Proudest Moment

PARIS (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz said his maiden French Open triumph on Sunday was the proudest moment of his glittering career, after the Spaniard became the youngest man to win Grand Slams on all three of the sport's surfaces following his Wimbledon and U.S. Open titles. The 21-year-old beat German Alexander Zverev 6-3 2-6 5-7 6-1 6-2 at Roland Garros to join an elite club that includes greats Mats Wilander, Jimmy Connors, Andre Agassi, Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic. But having arrived in Paris with barely any matches under his belt due to a right forearm injury, Alcaraz said his latest achievement was all the more special. "Obviously winning the U.S. Open (in 2022) when I reached for the first time the number one, something that I dreamt about since I started playing tennis, getting my first Grand Slam. So it was pretty special," Alcaraz said. "The way I won Wimbledon (in 2023), beating Djokovic in five sets has been a great achievement for me. Right now, lifting the Roland Garros trophy, knowing everything I've been through the last month with the injuries and all, I don't know. "Probably this is the moment I'm



really proud about, because of everything I've done the last month just to be ready for this tournament with my team, a lot of talks with them. If I have to practise, if I can't practise or discuss with them. "It has been really difficult for me, honestly." Alcaraz had withdrawn from Monte Carlo and the Barcelona Open due to the injury and although he attempted to retain his title in Madrid, going out in the quarter-finals, he also skipped the Italian Open. "I consider myself a player who doesn't need too many matches just to get to 100%. I had a really good week here in Paris, practising with good players," Alcaraz said. "I felt really well playing sets, moving, hitting my shots before the tournament began. Obviously, every match that I have played, I was getting better and better." Alcaraz said he would mark his latest triumph by getting a tattoo of the Eiffel Tower with Sunday's date, having gotten inked after his previous major successes. "I have to find the time. But I'll do it for sure. It's going to be on the left ankle," Alcaraz said. "Wimbledon was the right one. Here it's going to be the left one, I think with the Eiffel Tower, with the date."

Italy Beat Bosnia in Final Euros Warm-Up



EMPOLI (Dispatches) - Italy beat Bosnia and Herzegovina 1-0 on Sunday to win their final warm-up match before defending the European Championship title in Germany. Davide Frattesi's classy volley seven minutes before half-time was enough for Italy to claim victory in soaking conditions in Empoli. Inter Milan midfielder Frattesi could have scored at least once before netting from Federico Chiesa's clipped cross as Luciano Spalletti's experimental line-up showed encouraging flashes of attacking flair and quickfire passing. The Azzurri performed much better than in Tuesday's drab goalless draw with Turkey, with Gianluca Scamacca also being twice denied by Bosnia goalkeeper Kenan Pirc. "I could have scored more so there's still much to improve on," he said to broadcaster RAI. "We had good chances but we have to take advantage as in the Euros groups we're going to have fewer of them." Italy open the defence of their crown on June 15 against Albania in Group B, where they have also been drawn with Spain and Croatia. Bosnia failed to qualify for Euro 2024 and were missing captain Edin Dzeko but had the first chance, Haris Hajradinovic being denied by a superb Gianluigi Donnarumma save after he intercepted Riccardo Calafiori's sloppy pass. Frattesi then had three good chances to open the scoring before finally guiding in his fifth international goal. Striker Scamacca, who was key to Atalanta making history by winning the Europa League, had his head in his hands in the 64th minute when his powerful volley was brilliantly tipped away by Pirc. The 25-year-old was involved in much of Italy's best play and should have done better nine minutes later when Andrea Cambiaso supplied him with a perfect low cross which he could only direct straight at Pirc from near the penalty spot. And the hosts' profligacy in front of goal was almost punished in stoppage time when a dozing Federico Dimarco rolled Anel Ahmedhodzic clean through on goal. But Donnarumma brilliantly closed Ahmedhodzic down to ensure Italy would travel to Germany after a deserved win. Meanwhile Angel Di Maria scored the only goal as Argentina warmed up for the defence of their Copa America crown with a 1-0 friendly victory over Ecuador in Chicago on Sunday. Di Maria, named as captain for the game with Lionel Messi on the bench, bagged his 31st international goal in the 40th minute of an entertaining clash at Soldier Field.

Verstappen Wins Crazy Rain-Hit Canadian Grand Prix

MONTREAL (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen eased the pressure on Sunday when he completed a hat-trick of victories at the Canadian Grand Prix to consolidate his early-season lead in the drivers' championship. After being beaten in two of the previous three races, the series leader and three-time champion bounced back to his competitive best, with the aid of excellent calls from his team in a tactical race, to win by 3.879 seconds ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris. Mercedes' George Russell, who started from pole position, finished third ahead of a fast, but frustrated team-mate in seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton. Verstappen scored his third consecutive triumph at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve and the 60th win of his career, having started second on the grid and, at times, riding his luck in a dramatic contest featuring two Safety Car interventions. "That was a pretty crazy race and a lot of things were happening," said Verstappen. "We had to keep on top of our calls and as a team we did really well today. We remained calm and we pitted at the right time." "With both Ferraris failing to finish -- just two weeks after Charles Leclerc claimed an emotional win in his home Monaco Grand Prix -- Verstappen's success lifted him 56 points clear of the Monegasque driver in the title race. "The safety cars worked out nicely for us this time," he added, referring to the Miami Grand Prix where he lost his advantage, allowing Norris to claim his maiden win. "But even after that we were managing the gaps quite well. "I loved it. It was a lot of fun. These kind of races



you need to have once in a while. The most important thing is that we won. The suspension problem is not particularly an issue. "We know what it is, so we just need to work on it. We still have room to improve." Hamilton, who was self-critical after the race, was passed by Russell in the closing laps, but finished ahead of fifth-placed Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren and two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin. Local hero Lance Stroll was seventh in the second Aston Martin ahead of RB's Daniel Ricciardo and the two Alpines of Pierre Gasly and Esteban Ocon. "A lot of fun," said Norris, who, with Piastri, brought McLaren their first points in Canada since 2014 on the 56th anniversary of the team's first win, with Bruce McLaren, at the 1968 Belgian Grand Prix. "It was wild. It was chaotic. It was eventful. To be honest, I felt like I drove a good race, the whole time, from start to finish. These conditions are so stressful inside the car, but very enjoyable at the same time." Russell said: "That was an ugly race on my behalf and I am sorry for that. It feels like a big missed opportunity to be honest. We had a fast car this weekend." "On a day of showers and sunshine, five cars -- Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull, both Ferraris and both Williams -- failed to finish in front of a big enthusiastic crowd who revelled in the changing conditions and race positions. Verstappen's win carried him to 194 points in the drivers' championship ahead of Leclerc on 138 and Norris on 131. In the constructors' race Red Bull, in a troubled season by their standards, moved to 301 points ahead of Ferrari on 252.