

The Ministry of Tourism of Tunisia Has Declared the Cancellation of the 15-Day Visa Requirements for Iranian and Iraqi Tourists With Ordinary Passports as It Came Into Effect as of Saturday, June 15

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York Has Dismissed Western Allegations That the Islamic Republic Has Aided the Yemeni Armed Forces in Their Anti-Israel Operations in the High Seas

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Two Satellites Poised to Be Launched Within the Next Month



TEHRAN - Hassan Salarieh, the head of the Iranian Space Agency, told Mehr News Agency about the first satellite launch in 2024. He said, "Over the past three years, 12 launches have been conducted in the space industry, with 10 domestic and 2 international launches. By the end of the thirteenth administration, we will have multiple launches, and within the next month, we have plans for two launches."

He added, "We are likely to have an orbital launch of the Saman orbital transfer block and a research satellite, which, God willing, will take place within the next month."

Regarding the use of these two launches, Salarieh said, "Given the country's growing capability in satellite carriers, one of the essential tools needed for space missions, whether for placing communication satellites in orbit or deep space exploration missions such as lunar landers and Mars rovers, is having high-reliability orbital transfer blocks."

He concluded, "The Saman orbital transfer block system is an interface system for placing satellites in higher orbits. It aims to reduce costs and avoid the need for building giant carriers and consuming a large amount of fuel."

According to Mehr, Hassan Salarieh previously mentioned that the design and construction phases of various satellites are either completed or nearing completion, including the flight model of Nahid 2 satellite, the flight model of the Saman orbital transfer block, and the flight model of Zafar 2 satellite. These satellites and the orbital transfer block are ready for launch after completing their environmental tests.

He also stated that the flight models of Nahid 2, Saman orbital transfer block, and Zafar 2 are planned for launch in 2024. He emphasized that 2024 will be as busy with launches as 2023.

Isa Zarepour, the Minister of Communications and Information Technology, also announced that in the field of satellite movement in various layers, an orbital transfer block has been built, and its initial test will be conducted soon.

U.S. Navy Says Faces Most Intense Combat Since World War II Against Yemenis



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S.-led campaign to protect Israeli interests in the Red Sea has escalated into the "most intense" running sea battle the Navy has faced since World War II, according to an AP report quoting American military commanders and experts.

The report says the U.S. Navy has been exhausted after confronting non-stop naval operations by Yemen's Armed Forces for over seven months, with commanders warning that the situation there is perilously dangerous for them.

"I don't think people really understand just kind of how deadly serious it is what we're doing and how under threat the ships continue to be," Cmdr. Eric Blomberg told the AP aboard the USS Laboon warship in the Red Sea.

"We only have to get it wrong once," he said. "The Houthis (Yemen's Ansarullah movement) just have to get one through."

Bryan Clark, a former Navy submariner and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, told the AP, "this is the most sustained combat that the U.S. Navy has seen since World War II."

"We're sort of on the verge of the Houthis being able to mount the kinds of attacks that the U.S. can't stop every time, and then we will start to see substantial damage. ... If you let it fester, the Houthis are going to get to be a much more capable, competent, experienced force," he said.

"It is every single day, every single watch, and some of our ships have been out here for seven-plus months doing that," said Capt. David Wroe, commodore overseeing the guided missile destroyers.

Yemen initiated its naval operations in the Red Sea in October to help bring the U.S.-Israeli genocide in Gaza to a halt.

Nearly every day, the Yemenis have launched missiles, drones or some other type of attack in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait that connects the waterways and separates Africa from the Arabian Peninsula.



Ayatollah Khamenei Urges Constant Renunciation of U.S., Israel

TEHRAN - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei emphasized that the renunciation of the Zionist regime and the US by Muslims must continue beyond the time and place of Hajj, prevail in all Islamic countries worldwide, and be extended to the general populace.

"This renunciation of the Zionist regime and its supporters, in particular the government of the United States of America, must be demonstrated in the words and actions of nations and governments, and it must impede the actions of the murderers," the Leader said in a message to the 2024 Hajj pilgrims.

The following is some parts of Ayatollah Khamenei's message: "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, and peace and blessings be upon the best of creation, our Master Muhammad al-Mustafa, and upon his Pure Progeny, upon his chosen Companions and upon those who follow them in righteousness until the Day of Judgment."

He went on "The appealing Abrahamic call, which by God's command summons all human beings in all eras to the Kaaba during the time of Hajj, has once again this year, attracted the hearts of a number of Muslims from around the world to this center of tawhid and unity."

Ayatollah Khamenei in his message further said: "When one contemplates this magnificent gathering and the complex Hajj rituals, they are a source of reassurance and increase the confidence for the Muslims, while being intimidating and a cause of trepidation for enemies and for ill-wishers. It should not come as a surprise if the enemies and ill-wishers of the Islamic Ummah attempt to ruin and sow doubts about both of these aspects of the Hajj -

whether it is by accentuating denominational and political differences, or by trying to diminish the importance of its sacred and spiritual aspects."

He noted: "This year, the issue of bara'at (renunciation of the polytheists) is more significant than ever before. The tragedies in Gaza, which are unparalleled in our contemporary history, along with the audacity of the ruthless Zionist regime, which is the embodiment of cruelty and villainy, and of course the declining state of Zionism, leave no room for any consideration or tolerance by any individual, party, government or Muslim denomination. This year's renunciation of the polytheists must continue beyond the time and place of Hajj to all Muslim countries and cities worldwide. It must continue beyond just the Hajj pilgrims and be extended to the general populace."

Ayatollah Khamenei then said: "This renunciation of the Zionist regime and its supporters, in particular the government of the United States of America, must be demonstrated in the words and actions of nations and governments, and it must impede the actions of the murderers. The ironclad resistance of Palestine and the patient, oppressed people of Gaza - whose remarkable patience and resistance have earned them admiration and respect globally - must be fully supported in every way."

He concluded: "I implore God for their complete and swift victory. And for you dear pilgrims, I pray that your Hajj will be accepted. May the prayers of the Remnant of God on earth (Imam Mahdi (may our souls be sacrificed for him)) be with you."

Daily Production of 220,000 Barrels in Iran's Oil Fields With Russian Investment

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Owji, in an interview at the end of his trip to Moscow, and after discussions with Alexander Novak, Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, Igor Levitin, Assistant to the President of Russia for International Cooperation, and Sergey Tsivilov, Minister of Energy of Russia, elaborated on the results of his visit.

He said: In this trip and in a meeting with the current and future heads of the Russian side of the Joint Commission and the Assistant to the President of Russia, all items on the agenda of the bilateral relations were reviewed once again.

The Minister stated: The progress in the fields of industry, oil and gas, power plants, Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant Unit 2, banking, the North-South Corridor, and the Rasht-Astara railway line were examined.

Owji added: In this meeting, the challenges in joint projects were discussed, and new agreements and decisions, especially in the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries, were made.

He continued: Currently, seven oil fields in Iran are being developed with the investment of various Russian companies, and 220,000 barrels of Iran's daily oil production come from these fields where Russians have invested.

The Oil Minister stated: The investment of Russian companies in new oil fields in Iran was also discussed in this meeting.

Owji mentioned talks about the

export of oil products and petrochemical products and technology transfer as another focus of his discussions with Russian officials. He said: Iranian specialists are currently meeting the needs of Russian companies in the upstream and downstream sectors of the oil industry, and in return, some of the needs of Iran's oil and gas industry are being met by Russian companies. All these matters were discussed in the meetings with Russian statesmen, and good decisions were made.

He reminded: Due to the unfortunate incident that happened in the country which led to the martyrdom of the President, Foreign Minister, and other dear ones, we witnessed the expression of sympathy and the follow-up of the issues by Mr. Putin and his support in this process; therefore, it was necessary to express gratitude in person.

Owji also pointed out that the term of Alexander Novak, the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, as the head of the Russian side of the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation with Iran, will end next week. He announced: In this meeting, the Russian Energy Minister, who will take over the responsibility of the Russian side of this commission, was also present.

Owji continued: In this meeting, all the areas that we had pursued in the framework of the Joint Commission with Mr. Novak over the past three years were reviewed. In this regard, I also appreciate the efforts of Mr. Jalali, the Iranian Ambassador to Moscow.



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

Iran Well Knows How to Defeat U.S. Plot to Isolate Yemen's Resistance



TEHRA (PressTV) - Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations in New York says Tehran is well aware of ways to thwart US plots to isolate and defeat Yemen's resistance movement.

The mission made the announcement on Friday in reaction to claims that Iran is providing financial and intelligence support to Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement to target ships in the Red Sea. Iran is also accused of arming Yemen despite UN sanctions blocking weapons transfers.

It said the US thinks that it can isolate and defeat the Yemeni resistance movement through its military power and political dominance over the United Nations Security Council. The US believes that Iran will either be afraid and cuts off its relationship with Ansarullah or will violate the Security Council's resolutions, it added. However, the mission emphasized, Iran "knows how to defeat the US strategy in such a way that Yemen's Ansarullah [movement] is strengthened while the Islamic Republic is not recognized as a violator of UN Security Council resolutions." The US and its allies have been bombing Yemen in recent months in violation of the country's sovereignty and international law. Yemeni naval units target a British destroyer, the HMS Diamond, and two commercial vessels, underscoring their support for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amidst relentless Israeli strikes. The illegal air raids came in response to Yemen's maritime campaign in solidarity with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In the pro-Palestine campaign, Yemeni forces have targeted ships going to and from ports in the occupied territories, or whose owners are linked to Israel, in the southern Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Gulf of Aden, and even in the Arabian Sea. They have also attacked American and British vessels in the same waters.

Iran Eyes Closer Ties with KRG: Caretaker FM



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The caretaker foreign minister of Iran called for the expansion of economic relations between Tehran and Erbil, describing economic interaction and collective efforts as prerequisites for regional security and stability.

In comments at a joint press conference with Prime Minister of Iraqi Kurdistan Region Masrour Barzani, held in Erbil on Friday, Ali Baqeri said Iran and its "friends in Iraq and the KRG" believe that regional stability and security hinges on bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Pointing to the "bright prospect" for economic cooperation between Iran and the Kurdistan Region, Baqeri described economic interaction as prerequisite for regional stability.

He said the talks with the KRG prime minister have revolved around the removal of obstacles to cooperation between Tehran and Erbil.

Highlighting the brotherly and deep-rooted relations between the two neighbors, the caretaker foreign minister said such inseparable bonds have contributed to stability and calm in the region.

He also warned against the hostile attempts at disrupting regional peace and stability, noting that the vigilance of the Iranian and Iraqi officials will foil the enemies' plots. For his part, Barzani said discussions have been held on the region's security problems and the ways to strengthen its political stability. He also hailed the "very good meeting" on the promotion of economic relations between the Kurdistan Region and Iran. In a meeting with President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Nechervan Barzani in Tehran on May 6, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei highlighted the strong bonds between Iran and the Kurdish communities.

IRAN NEWS



Yadavaran Boosting Oil Production Plan Launched

TEHRAN (Shana) - The Yadavaran shared oil field's development plan was launched on Wednesday with the aim of boosting oil production by 42 thousand barrels per day.

Implementation of the plan started in the presence of the National Iranian Oil Company's (NIOC) managing director, Mohsen Khojastemehr, and a number of other Petroleum Ministry managers via videoconference.

The plan consists of drilling 24 oil wells including 12 developmental wells in each of Fahlan and Sarvak layers with a 350 million dollars investment with the aim of maintaining and increasing oil production by 42 thousand barrels per day.

Earlier last May, when Iran Oil Show 2024 was underway in Tehran, the Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC), on behalf of NIOC, signed separate contracts with the National Drilling Oil Company (NIDC), the Qeshm Oil and Energy Industry Development Company (OEID) and Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarter (KAA) for drilling 24 oil wells in Yadavaran oil field.

48% Increase in Iran-Russia Trade Exchanges in 2024



TEHRAN - The trade exchange between Iran and Russia has witnessed 48% growth in 2024, it was reported. Alexander Novak, who has chaired the Russian side of the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission with Iran for the past three years, announced this news during a meeting with Javad Owji, the Oil Minister and the head of the Iranian side of the commission in Moscow.

He stated: Based on the results of the first quarter of 2024, Russia's exports to Iran increased by 77%, and its imports from Iran increased by 13%.

The Russian Deputy Prime Minister also mentioned the launch of direct flights on the Grozny-Tehran route on June 10, 2024, operated by the Iranian company Mahan Air.

Novak continued: I am confident that this will serve as an incentive to increase the mutual flow of tourists between Iran and the North Caucasus regions.

During this meeting, Novak introduced Sergei Tsivilev, the Russian Minister of Energy, as the new head of the Russian section in the Permanent Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation between Russia and Iran.

The Russian Deputy Prime Minister also expressed his readiness to continue his personal involvement and provide assistance in all matters related to the development of Russia-Iran relations.



41% Growth in Iran-Qatar Trade

TEHRAN - The Commercial Attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Qatar Abbas Abdolkhani reported a growth in trade exchanges between Iran and Qatar in the first two months of the current year. He stated that, based on the statistics from the Customs Administration of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the trade exchanges between Iran and Qatar during the first two months of 1403 (Iranian calendar year) experienced a 41% increase compared to the same period last year. He noted that agricultural products, foodstuffs, seafood, nuts, carpets, building materials, and minerals are among the most important Iranian export items to Qatar. Emphasizing the development and expansion of economic and trade relations between the two countries, Abdolkhani added that the stable and tension-free political relations between Iran and Qatar have provided a suitable environment for the development of economic and trade cooperation. This can be seen as an opportunity to synergize and deepen trade relations. Given that the political leaders of both countries emphasize strengthening trade relations, this support can create avenues for economic cooperation between the private sectors of Iran and Qatar, allowing companies and investors from both countries to engage in joint trade activities with greater confidence. He highlighted the advantage of geographical proximity between the two countries, stating that this closeness can reduce transportation costs and shorten delivery times. As a result, the exchange of goods between the two countries becomes faster and more economical. Abdolkhani, enumerating Iran's high capacities and potentials in the field of food and agricultural products, explained that the Qatari market needs these products and Iran can act as a reliable and stable supplier. Due to their high quality and the short distance, Iranian agricultural products can easily capture a significant share of the Qatari market, thereby reducing the country's reliance on imports from other countries. He expressed that the development of economic and trade relations between Iran and Qatar seems to contribute to the diversification of both countries' economies. With Iran's diverse natural resources and agricultural products, and Qatar's dynamic consumer market, they can complement each other in developing and expanding economic and trade relations. Therefore, efforts to deepen and expand these relations should be considered a strategic priority for both countries.



TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Owji who is visiting Moscow has said that the two countries will continue expanding bilateral relations.

According to a report released by IRNA, the Minister as the head of the Iran-Russia Economic Cooperation Joint Commission met today in Moscow with Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Alexandre Novak who leaves the joint commission as the head of the Russian side.

In the meeting which held at Russian Prime Minister Office in Moscow in the presence of Igor Levitin Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation and Sergei Tsivilev Minister of Energy of the Russian Federation; Iranian Oil Minister praised the Novak's efforts during his 3 years of presence at the joint commission, expressing Iranian side readiness for continuation of bilateral cooperation with the Sergei Tsivilev who took over the post as head of Russian side of the joint commission.

During the meeting, in which Iranian ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali attended as well, Owji said that during the 13th administration under the leadership of Martyr Raisi, he provided the basis for expanding bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries

adding "that process will be consolidated by relying on those basics including implementation of the signed bilateral contracts."

Owji also expressed his appreciations for the deep sympathy expressed by Russian President Veladimir Putin and other Russian officials on death of Iranian president Ibrahim Raisi, announcing that Raisi made relentless efforts to expand relations with the neighboring countries as well as other independent countries like Russia which resulted in developing and consolidating bilateral relations.

In his turn, Alexander Novak announced that Moscow was determined to continue cooperation with Iran, stressing on sooner implementation of the already signed contracts.

Restating his condolences for Raisi death, he said: Russia is determined to continue the path Iranian and Russian presidents laid for reinforcing bilateral relations.

The two sides held talks about a variety of subjects concerning bilateral relations including speeding up completion of North-South Corridor which includes Rasht-Astara Railroad. The railroad construction Mou, was signed in April 2023.

Official Highlights Strengthening Tourism, Cultural Interactions Between Turkey and Urmia

TEHRAN - The Director-General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of West Azerbaijan Morteza Safari stated in a meeting with the trade and tourism delegation from Yuksekova, Turkey, on Thursday that significant steps have been taken in the 13th government to develop tourism with a focus on strengthening ties with neighboring countries, including the visa waiver for 35 foreign countries. Safari Mraded that during the visit of the West Azerbaijan governor and his accompanying delegation to Van, Turkey, good agreements were made to develop tourism between the two countries. Increasing these interactions will also pave the way for tourism development. He mentioned that increasing meetings between the officials of the two countries will help solve some existing issues hindering tourism development. In previous meetings, Turkish tour operators visiting Urmia pointed out the lengthy bureaucratic procedures at the province's customs, which, with the governor's follow-up, have been partly resolved. He expressed hope that other issues would also be addressed to increase the number of Turkish tourists and their stay duration in West Azerbaijan. Safari highlighted the historical, tourism, and cultural capacities of West Azerbaijan, noting that the province, with 1809 national registered sites and five UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the Qara Kelisa in Chaldoran, the Zorzor Church in Maku, Takht-e Soleyman in Takab, the Badrak religious ceremony, and the Shah Abbasi Caravanserai in Khoy, is among Iran's rich provinces.

He also noted the province's natural attractions, such as pristine nature, waterfalls, hot springs, forests, and more, which have high potential for attracting nature tourists. Referring to the province's investment potentials, he stated that several

tourism and accommodation projects, including 11 hotels, are under construction in the province, adding over a thousand beds to West Azerbaijan's accommodation capacity upon completion.

Safari pointed out that the Serow border of Urmia is the closest route to Yuksekova, and strengthening these connections will lead to increased annual travel between the two regions, boosting tourism in Yuksekova and Urmia. He emphasized that besides enhancing land travel infrastructure between Urmia and Yuksekova, an air route between the two cities could be established since both have international airports, which is a good capacity for tourism development. Salih Ozdemir, President of the Yuksekova Chamber of Commerce and Industry, thanked the people of West Azerbaijan for their hospitality during this meeting. He noted that Yuksekova has good tourism and historical capacities, and significant steps have been taken in recent years to strengthen its tourism infrastructure. He highlighted the unique capacity of Yuksekova Airport, stating that establishing an air route between Urmia and Yuksekova would increase passenger numbers and save time, requiring proper planning. Ozdemir mentioned that, unlike Tabriz, the number of flights from Urmia Airport to Turkey is very low, which does not meet the tourism needs of the city. Increasing these flights would make Urmia a preferred destination for Turkish tour operators and turn it into an important corridor between Turkey and Iran.

The President of the Yuksekova Chamber of Commerce and Industry expressed dissatisfaction with the lengthy bureaucratic procedures at the Serow border and called for resolving this issue, as it causes frustration and deters tourists.

Iran Ranks in Flower and Plant Exports



TEHRAN - The Head of the Flower and Plant Producers Union of Tehran Province stated that from the beginning of 2024 until now, the demand for flowers has decreased by 70% compared to the same period last year.

Gholamhossein Sultan Mohammadi, the Head of the Flower and Plant Producers Union of Tehran Province, provided a detailed overview of the latest status of flower production and exports in Iran in an interview with ILNA. He mentioned that due to the reduced purchasing power of the people, flowers have been removed from the household shopping basket and are now only bought for special occasions and ceremonies. As a result, from the beginning of 2024 until now, the demand for flowers has decreased by 70% compared to the same period last year.

He added that only 65 days of the year have good demand for flowers, with peak demand on 15 of those days, which include occasions like Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Valentine's Day. Consequently, on the remaining 300 days, the demand for flowers and plants is weak, and during days like Muharram, Safar, Ramadan, and similar occasions, there is no demand at all. Since flowers are perishable, producers are forced to sell their products at a discount, causing them financial loss.

Sultan Mohammadi continued that the per capita consumption of flowers and plants in Iran is low on a global scale. In European countries, the annual per capita purchase of flowers is 150 to 200 stems per person, while in Iran, this figure is 15 to 20 stems. Consequently, the total annual purchase in the country averages around 1.2 billion stems, whereas about 5 billion stems are produced annually in Iran, leading to an imbalance in the flower market.

Sultan Mohammadi emphasized that due to decreased demand and excess supply of flowers and plants in Iran, producers intend to sell their flowers in export markets. Currently, the value of Iran's flower and plant exports does not exceed \$200 million annually, with most of this figure coming from exports to Iraq.

He pointed out that while Iran ranks 17th globally in flower and plant production, its export rank is 117th. The main reason for the failure of Iranian producers in exports is that they do not identify the target market before production and do not align their production with the demands of the target market. Iranian flower and plant producers tend to produce first and then look for customers, without considering that customer preferences for flowers and plants vary across different countries.

Commercial Advisors Urged to Strive for Marketing and Strengthening the Country's Trade



TEHRAN - The President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture emphasized the need to utilize the capacities of commercial advisors to enhance trade relations with other countries. He stated that commercial advisors can play a crucial role in identifying target markets and introducing them to the country's economic activists.

Samad Hasanzadeh, accompanied by Hossein Pirmoozen, Vice President of the Iran Chamber, and Mohammad Khazaei, Secretary-General of the Iranian ICC Committee, traveled to France to attend the annual meeting of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). During this trip, they also attended a meeting at the Iranian Embassy in Paris, where they discussed leveraging diplomatic capacities to develop and strengthen foreign trade.

In this meeting, Hasanzadeh pointed to the commercial capacities of Iran and France, saying that the two countries have significant potential and capabilities that can be used to enhance trade interactions and investments.

Hasanzadeh also assessed the outcomes of the ICC annual meeting as noteworthy.

The main issue discussed during this meeting was banking transactions, which are the primary obstacle to joint trade cooperation between Iran and other countries, including France. According to representatives from Export, National, Sepah, and Tejarat banks present at the meeting, despite the banking infrastructure being ready, sanctions prevent their utilization.

Hossein Pirmoozen emphasized the importance and role of financial exchanges in strengthening trade relations. He stated that the oppressive sanctions are a significant barrier to financial transfers, but the private sector has always tried to design and implement mutually acceptable financial routes for exchanges with other countries.

Huge Fire at Iraq Oil Refinery Injures 14

ARBIL (Dispatches) - A massive fire at an oil refinery in Iraqi Kurdistan raged for about 20 hours and injured at least 14 firefighters who on Thursday finally brought the blaze under control. The fire broke out in a major crude oil tank on Wednesday night before spreading to a second refinery on a road southwest of Arbil, capital of the autonomous northern region of Kurdistan, the civil defense agency said.

Thick plumes of black smoke and balls of orange flame rose into the sky above the facility, an AFP photographer reported.

The civil defense agency said the fire, the cause of which remains unclear, "started in one refinery before spreading to another".

A spokesman for the agency, Shakhwan Saeed, told a news conference yesterday evening: "The fire has been 100 per cent contained, and there is no longer any danger for the surrounding refineries." He said 150 rescuers had been mobilized and 14 had been injured, with two in "critical condition".



S. Korea, U.S. Sound Alarm Over North Korea-Russia Ties



SEOUL (Dispatches) - A possible impending visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to North Korea could deepen military ties between the two countries in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, officials of South Korea and the United States warned on Friday.

South Korea's vice foreign minister, Kim Hong-kyun, in an emergency phone call with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, said Putin's visit should not result in more military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow in violation of the resolutions, according to Seoul's foreign ministry.

Echoing Kim's concerns, Campbell pledged continued cooperation to tackle potential regional instability and challenges caused by the trip.

"While closely monitoring related developments, the two sides agreed to resolutely respond through airtight cooperation to North Korea's provocations against South Korea and actions that escalate tensions in the region," the ministry said in a statement.

On Wednesday, a senior official at Seoul's presidential office said Putin was expected to visit North Korea "in the coming days". Russia's Vedomosti newspaper on Monday reported Putin would visit North Korea and Vietnam in the coming weeks.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Thursday declined to give a date or agenda for a possible visit but said Russia's right to develop closer ties with North Korea should not be in doubt or a source of fear for anyone.

Russia has used North Korean-made missiles and artillery shells to attack targets in Ukraine, officials in Washington, Seoul, and Kyiv, as well as United Nations sanctions monitors and independent experts have said.

North Korea and Russia have denied arms deals but vowed to deepen cooperation across the board, including in military relations.

Speaking at the Stimson Center think tank in Washington on Wednesday, Campbell said the United States has a very good understanding of what North Korea has provided Russia, which he said has had "a substantial impact on the battlefield".



Israel Hits Gaza as Tensions Surge on Lebanon Border

GAZA (Dispatches) - Israeli forces struck Gaza and battled Hamas as truce efforts failed to make progress and tensions surged on Israel's northern border with Lebanon.

Witnesses reported strikes on the southern city of Rafah and central areas of the Gaza Strip.

At Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central city of Deir al-Balah, men gathered over the body of an 11-year-old boy who died during a bombardment of nearby Bureij refugee camp.

In a black singlet, the child lay on a floor smeared with fresh blood, a white bandage covering the top half of his face, AFP images showed.

The Israeli military said troops continued operations in central Gaza, where warplanes struck a militant cell in the Zeitun area.

Witnesses in Rafah, on Gaza's southern border with Egypt, reported helicopter fire, while Hamas's armed wing said its militants fired mortar rounds at Israeli troops near the Tal al-Sultan neighbourhood.

The war began after Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack on southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,194 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

The militants also seized 251 hostages. Of these, 116 remain in Gaza, although the army says 41 are dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 37,266 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to the Hamas-ruled territory's health ministry.

The toll includes at least 34 deaths over the past 24 hours, the ministry said.

Fears of a broader Middle East conflict have surged again, with Lebanon-based Hezbollah fighters, who are backed by Iran and allied with Hamas, launching waves of rockets, missiles and drones against Israeli military targets.

Hezbollah said intense strikes since Wednesday were retaliation for Israel's killing of one of its commanders.

Sirens sounded in northern Israel, where police said munitions had hit in the Kiryat Shmona area, with no reports of casualties.

The military said "approximately 35 projectiles were identified crossing from Lebanon". "A number" of them were intercepted while some caused fires.

Israeli forces responded with shelling, the military said, also announcing air strikes on "Hezbollah terror infrastructure" across the border.


Two women were killed in a strike on Jannata in southern Lebanon, village official Hassan Shur said, the latest deaths in near-daily exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and the Israeli military since the start of the Gaza war.

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday that his country and the United States would work separately with Israeli and Lebanese authorities to ease tensions.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant rejected the initiative, decrying "hostile policies against Israel" by France, which last month had barred Israeli firms from an arms trade show.

A spokesperson for the Israeli prime minister's office and senior foreign ministry officials however said Gallant's remarks do not reflect the government's position.

During a Middle East trip this week to push a Gaza ceasefire plan, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said "the best way" to help resolve the Hezbollah-Israeli violence was "a resolution of the conflict in Gaza and getting a ceasefire".



Reform UK Overtakes PM Sunak's Conservatives in Opinion Poll

LONDON (Dispatches) - Nigel Farage's Reform UK Party overtook Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservatives in an opinion poll for the first time on Thursday ahead of Britain's election on July 4.

The poll by YouGov for the Times newspaper put Reform UK on 19%, up from 17% previously, and the Conservative Party unchanged on 18%. The opposition Labour Party topped the poll with 37%.

The survey of 2,211 people was carried out June 12-13, after Sunak pledged to cut 17 billion pounds (\$21.7 billion) of taxes for working people in his party's election manifesto.

Reform's poll rating has risen since Farage, best known for his successful campaign for Britain to leave the European Union, said he was returning to frontline politics, taking over leadership of the party and standing for election to parliament.

"This is the inflection point. The only wasted vote now is a Conservative vote, we are the challengers to Labour and we are on our way," Farage said in a video posted on X.

A small right-wing party, founded in 2018 as the Brexit Party, Reform backs populist causes such as tougher immigration laws.

Asked if the trend would stick, a Conservative lawmaker who declined to be named said: "Yes. I think people are fed up with the Tories (Conservatives), but not with Conservatism."

G7 Draft Confronts China's Unfair Business Practices

BORGO EGNAZIA (Dispatches) - The Group of Seven (G7) nations vowed to tackle what they called unfair business practices by China that were undermining their workers and industries, according to a draft statement on the final day of their annual summit.

The G7 also warned of action against Chinese financial institutions that helped Russia obtain weaponry for its war against Ukraine.

Pope Francis joined the leaders of Italy, the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany and Japan in southern Italy today, a historic appearance at a G7 to take part in a discussion on artificial intelligence.

The pope had meetings with French President Emmanuel Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and was due later to have talks with other leaders, including US President Joe Biden.

The draft summit statement, reviewed by Reuters, stressed the G7 was not trying to harm China or thwart its economic development but would "continue to take actions to protect our businesses from unfair practices, to level the playing field and remedy ongoing harm".

Washington expected to see unprecedented unity across the G7 in confronting China's non-market policies and practices, a senior US official at the G7 said.

The US this week imposed fresh sanctions on China-based firms supplying semiconductors to Russia amid worries over Beijing's increasingly aggressive stance against Taiwan and run-ins with the Philippines over rival maritime claims.

"China is not supplying weapons, but the ability to produce those weapons and the technology available to do it, so it is, in fact, helping Russia," Biden told reporters at the summit yesterday after

signing a bilateral security pact with Zelenskyy.

During the first day of their meeting in southern Italy, the G7 nations agreed on a deal to provide US\$50 billion (RM235 billion) of loans for Ukraine backed by interest from frozen Russian assets — hailing the accord as a powerful signal of Western resolve.

Biden held talks today with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the summit host, where they agreed to pursue all options to impose further costs on Russia.

In the draft, G7 leaders also promised sanctions against entities that helped Russia circumvent sanctions on its oil by transporting it fraudulently.

The draft reiterated commitments made at the G7 meeting in Japan last year on sexual and reproductive rights but did not directly mention the word abortion.

The issue has caused a dispute between France and Italy after Rome — which holds the G7 rotating presidency — demanded the removal of a reference to "safe and legal abortion" from the final statement.

The pope will be joined by 10 other heads of state and government, including the prime minister of India and the king of Jordan, as the G7 throws open its doors to outsiders in an effort to show it is not an aloof, exclusive club.

Leaders will also discuss immigration, a crucial issue for Meloni who is pushing Europe to help her curb illegal flows from Africa and who has launched a flagship plan to boost development in the continent to tackle the root cause of the departures.

Many of the leaders, including Biden, will leave Italy late today, and Meloni said they had already agreed on the summit's conclusions, to be approved at the end of the day.



France Facing Very Serious Moment as Far-Right and Far-Left Lead Polls

BORGO EGNAZIA (Dispatches) - France is facing a "very serious" moment as parliamentary elections loom, said President Emmanuel Macron yesterday, with financial markets rattled by the country's far-right and far-left political blocs currently leading polls.

Political uncertainty has already triggered a brutal sell-off of French bonds and stocks after Macron unexpectedly called the election, following a trouncing of his ruling centrist party by Marine Le Pen's eurosceptic National Rally (RN) in last Sunday's European Parliament elections.

"We are at a very serious moment in the history of our country. There are major issues at stake, with wars, and unprecedented economic challenges," said Macron, speaking at the end of a G7 summit in Italy.

Macron's comments echoed an earlier warning yesterday by French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire, who said that France — which is the euro zone's second-biggest economy — faced the risk of a financial crisis if either the far right or left won the coming parliamentary



election because of their heavy spending plans.

Calling the two blocs "extremist", Macron said neither were serious politically or realistic economically.

A first series of opinion polls have projected that the RN, which has promised to cut electricity prices and VAT on gas and increase public spending, could win the election and be in a position to run the government.

A poll conducted for Le Point magazine, published yesterday evening, forecast National Rally as in the lead in the first round of the parliamentary election, narrowly ahead of a coalition of left-wing parties called the "Popular Front".

The poll said RN would get 29.5 per cent of votes, compared to 28.5 per cent for Popular Front and 18 per cent for Macron's camp.

At least two polls have put the left not far behind the RN, and ahead of Macron's centrist camp.



Germany Hammer 10-Man Scotland to Launch Euro 2024

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Germany thrashed 10-man Scotland 5-1 as the Euro 2024 hosts kicked off the tournament in style in Munich on Friday, the start of a journey they hope culminates in a record fourth continental title.

Florian Wirtz struck the opening goal 10 minutes in and Jamal Musiala soon doubled Germany's lead with an emphatic finish.

"We couldn't have had a better start. We've seen the atmosphere in the country, and we need that," Musiala said of Germany's lightning start.

A long-awaited night for Scotland went from bad to worse before half-time when Ryan Porteous was sent off for a two-footed challenge on Ilkay Gundogan, with Kai Havertz tucking away the resulting penalty.

Niclas Füllkrug powered in a fourth midway through the second half after coming on as a substitute and not even a late own goal from Antonio Ruediger could spoil an otherwise perfect start to the campaign for Germany.

There was even time for Emre Can to add a fifth goal with the final kick of the game. Scotland could surely not have envisioned such a disastrous beginning, but they must regroup quickly with games to come in Group A against Switzerland and Hungary.

"Today was hugely disappointing but you're playing against the host nation and it's the first game... things don't get much tougher than that," said Scotland captain Andy Robertson.

After three successive failures at major tournaments, including back-to-back group stage exits at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, this was a statement of intent from an experienced Germany side.

It is Germany's first men's major tournament as hosts since the 2006 World Cup, and they are looking to recreate the magic that helped rekindle the passion for the national team then.

Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann had spoken of his players' hunger to atone for the shortcomings of recent times, with the outlook improving and optimism gradually increasing since his appointment in September.

His counterpart Steve Clarke on the other hand urged Scotland to "fear no one" going into the country's second straight Euros after more than two decades in the international wilderness.

Almost right away Germany took the game to a Scotland side who arrived in Munich with only one win from their past nine matches -- an unimpressive 2-0 victory over lowly Gibraltar last week.

Scotland goalkeeper Angus Gunn alertly blocked from an offside Wirtz, but Germany soon grasped the match by the scruff of the neck.

Toni Kroos, coaxed out of his Germany retirement earlier this year, pinged a ball out to Joshua Kimmich, who teed up Wirtz to sweep in from the edge of the area as Gunn could only help the shot in via the post.

Kroos will hang up his boots for good after the tournament, but with him and Gundogan running the Germany midfield they bring a level of knowledge and maturity few can match.

Gundogan threaded a pass through the Scotland defence to Havertz, who worked it back towards Musiala, the Bayern Munich attacker creating himself space to crash a strike into the roof of the net.

Messi, Martinez Give Argentina 4-1 Win Over Guatemala



Buenos Aires (Dispatches) - Doubles from Lionel Messi and Lautaro Martinez earned Argentina a 4-1 victory against Guatemala in their final Copa America warm-up on Friday.

Guatemala grabbed an early lead with their first-ever strike against the World Cup winners courtesy of Lisandro Martinez's own goal following a set-piece situation just four minutes into the game.

Lionel Messi equalised eight minutes later as keeper Nicholas Hagen cleared the ball straight into the path of the Argentine captain, who scored into an empty net.

Lautaro Martinez, this season's Serie A top scorer, put Argentina ahead with a penalty kick in the 39th minute before netting his second from a Messi pass after the break.

"We are aiming for the title, we are fighting for everything," Martinez told TyC Sports.

"We said it when the Copa America ended in 2021 and when the World Cup ended, we will try to prepare ourselves to start the Copa America in the best possible way and hopefully it will be all joy."

The 36-year-old Messi got his double in the 77th minute after a superb pass from substitute Angel Di Maria to seal the win for the Copa America reigning champions.

The Copa America runs from June 20 to July 14 in the United States. Lionel Scaloni's side kick off their Group A campaign against Canada on Thursday before facing Chile on June 25 and Peru four days later.

"We're going to keep trying to do our best, we still want to keep winning titles," Messi said. "It will be harder and harder, the games are getting tougher, winning (the Copa) again is hard, but we will try again."

Draper Hits 31 Aces to Advance in Stuttgart

STUTTGART (Dispatches) - No. 6 seed Jack Draper of Great Britain racked up 31 aces and rallied to beat No. 4 seed Frances Tiafoe 5-7, 6-4, 7-6 (1) to reach the semifinals of the Boss Open in Stuttgart, Germany.

Draper committed only three double faults while hitting his dominant serves past Tiafoe, who was the defending champion. The aces helped Draper win 53 of 62 first-service points (85.5 percent), including 18 of 19 in the second set alone.

Draper moves on to face another American, Brandon Nakashima, who advanced via walkover after seventh seed Jan-Lennard Struff of Germany withdrew.

The other semifinal will pit Italians Lorenzo Musetti, the fifth seed, and Matteo Berrettini against one another. Berrettini defeated Australian James Duckworth 6-4, 7-5. Musetti led 4-6, 6-1, 1-0 when third seed Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan retired.

No. 7 seed Sebastian Korda swept past No. 2 seed Tommy Paul 6-4, 6-2, in an all-American quarterfinal in 's-Hertogenbosch,



Netherlands. Korda won an overwhelming 27 of 32 first-service points (84.4 percent) and broke Paul's serve four times in eight chances in the 67-minute romp. His next opponent will be defending champion and sixth seed Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands, who was a 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (4) winner over Australia's Aleksandar Vukic. The only other match of the day saw No. 1 seed Alex de Minaur of Australia beat Canadian Milos Raonic 7-5, 6-2. He awaits the winner of the quarterfinal to be concluded Saturday between No. 3 Ugo Humbert of France and Dutch qualifier Gijs Brouwer. Meanwhile Canada's Bianca Andreescu outlasted Japan's Naomi Osaka 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (3) in a battle of former Grand Slam winners in the quarterfinals of the Libema Open in 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands. Osaka scored three straight points to move ahead 3-2 in the third-set tiebreaker before Andreescu finished her off with five consecutive points of her own. Now ranked just No. 228 in the world, Andreescu reached her first semifinal of 2024 and is vying for her first singles title since winning the 2019 U.S. Open.

Hummels Leaves Dortmund After 13 Years



MUNICH (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund announced on Friday defender Mats Hummels will leave after 13 years at the club.

Hummels departure comes a day after coach Edin Terzic surprisingly announced he would leave the club, just two weeks after taking them to the Champions League final.

During two stints at Dortmund, Hummels won two league titles and two German Cups, along with reaching the Champions League final in 2013 and 2024.

"Dear fans, my time in black and yellow is now coming to an end after a total of over 13 years. It was a huge honour and joy for me to have played for BVB for so long," Hummels said in a statement.

"I will be cheering from afar and hopefully in the stadium from time to time. I will miss you."

Hummels, 35, wound back the clock this campaign in Dortmund's run to the Champions League final and was named in the UEFA team of the season.

The centre-back was publicly critical of Terzic's tactics in the lead up to the Wembley final, in particular the coach's focus on defensive rather than attacking football.

Hummels said Dortmund had been "submissive" and felt he had his "honour insulted to stand on the pitch in the (Dortmund) kit."

The 2014 World Cup winner has previously said he will keep playing, preferring a move to another club in Germany or elsewhere in Europe to stay close to his son, who lives in Munich.

German media reported Hummels had attracted interest from Serie A side AC Milan.

Dortmund sporting director Sebastian Kehl, who played alongside Hummels at the club, said "without a doubt we are losing an outstanding personality in Mats Hummels," calling the defender "one of the last of his kind in football."

USA Into T20 World Cup Super Eights, Pakistan Out

LAUDERHILL (Dispatches) - The USA advanced to the Super Eights stage of the T20 World Cup on Friday when their match against Ireland was abandoned, an outcome which meant former champions Pakistan were eliminated.

Ground staff spent hours working to dry the wet outfield at Lauderhill but shortly after the umpires had inspected conditions a huge downpour ended any hope with the field quickly under water once again.

The USA reach the last eight in their debut appearance in the T20 World Cup largely thanks to their shock win over 2009 champions Pakistan.

A USA defeat to Ireland would have handed Pakistan the chance to leapfrog into the top two when they face Ireland at the same venue on Sunday.

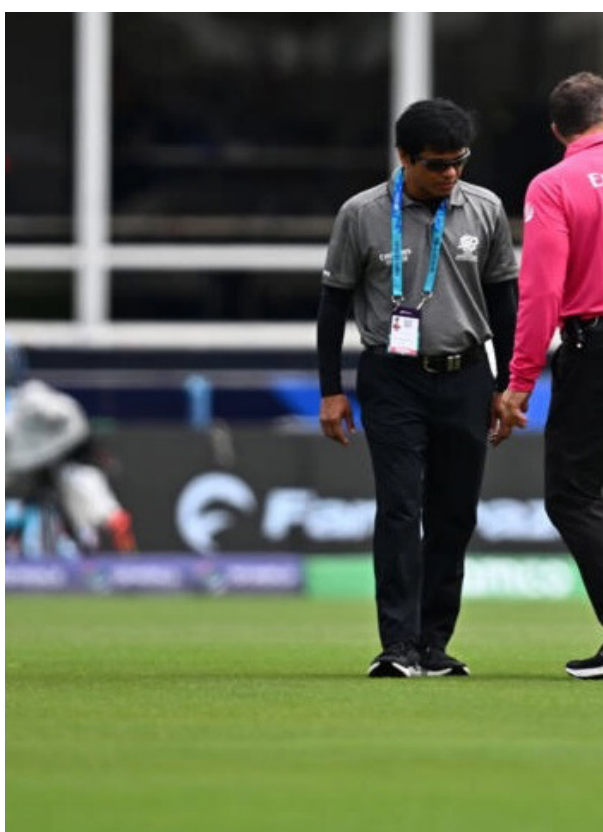
Instead, the early exit is a bitter disappointment for Pakistan, who were beaten finalists in the tournament two years ago.

This is the earliest Pakistan have exited T20 World Cup, having played just three games with a defeat to India and their sole victory coming against Canada.

Pakistan were knocked out in the group stage in 2014 and 2016, but on every other occasion made it to the last four of the tournament.

Fans who had waited patiently inside the Central Broward Stadium were instructed to stay in the facility and in shelter due to thunder and lightning which accompanied the torrential rain.

The two teams will receive a point each meaning the USA



will progress to the Super Eights along with Group A winners India who are due to play Canada on Saturday in what is now a dead rubber

South Florida has suffered heavy rain and flooding and the game on Tuesday at Lauderhill between Sri Lanka and Nepal was also abandoned.

There were heavy showers earlier on Friday morning which added to the workload which all proved to be in vain.

But while it was not the way they wanted to qualify, the USA team celebrated in their locker-room what is a historic achievement for the associate nation.

"As a cricketer, you don't want to leave home and not play cricket, you want to play but at the end of the day there was nothing that we could control," said USA vice-captain Aaron Jones, who was again stand-in skipper in the absence of the injured Monank Patel.

"Definitely we celebrated. Everybody is happy right now, obviously qualifying for the Super Eights is a big deal," added Jones, who has been the stand-out batter for the USA team.

Jones was vocal before the tournament in insisting the USA were not just happy to be involved but believed they could win games and he said that attitude would continue against the tougher opponents that await.

"I think that on any given day, once we play proper cricket that we can beat any team in the world," said the New York born born Jones, who grew up in Barbados and will return to the Caribbean for the next round of games.