

The Iran Food and Drug Administration (IFDA) Says the Country Exports Raw Materials and Pharmaceutical Products to Approximately 50 Countries Around the World

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Top Human Rights Official Has Strongly Condemned a Decision by a French Court to Deport Iranian National Bashir Biazar as Illegal and a Violation of His Human Rights

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DOMESTIC



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INTERNATIONAL

## NATO Chief Seeks Costs on China Over Russia Support



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## Youth Can Change Course of History



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei highlighted the remarkable potential of young Iranian elites and their capacity to bring about transformative change throughout history.

In a meeting with a number of young medalists in national and international student and university Olympiads, held in Tehran, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the elite youth as a significant source of "profound and genuine hope".

"I have great faith in the youth and their motivation. I consider you as a great asset, worth far more than your medals which are a source of pride," the Leader said.

Emphasizing the remarkable potential of young elites, the Leader highlighted their capacity to bring about transformative change, not only within the country but also throughout history, and to establish an entirely favorable environment. "Throughout history, it has been the human factor, not in the sense of politicians and rulers, but rather in the form of intellectual-moral, and spiritual elements, that has propelled Iran to its exemplary glory and grandeur," he added.

Referring to the approximately 200-year period of British and then American political domination over Iran, the Leader said, "During that period, our culture and scientific progress were decimated, and politically, Iran was kept in a backward state. However, the Revolution, relying on its predominantly young human force, brought that to an end and created leaps forward in various fields."

While noting that there was a productive scientific movement in the 2000s, Ayatollah Khamenei remarked, "In the current circumstances, a scientific leap is necessary to propel us to the forefront of global science. This feat can be achieved through the efforts of young intellectuals and the preparation of the public environment."

He described the country's political independence as a tangible reality and stated, "The Islamic Republic has a well-defined opinion, logic, and has things that are being heard, about important world issues that even people who do not agree with them, count on."

The Leader underscored that this political independence should not be compromised and that any new government that comes to office has the responsibility of keeping it, Khamenei.ir reported.

## Americans' Weakness Proven in Remarks on Busted U.S.-Israeli Spy Network



SANAA (Dispatches) - A senior Yemeni official has censured recent Western remarks regarding the busting of a U.S.-Israeli espionage network in the country as "evidence of weakness and [moral] bankruptcy."

"The statement of America and several other countries regarding the espionage network is evidence of weakness and [moral] bankruptcy," Mohammad Ali Al-Houthi, member of the Supreme Political Council, told Yemeni Al-Masirah TV channel on Monday.

Last week, the Yemeni military announced it had busted an American-Israeli espionage network linked to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Israeli spy agency Mossad.

Al-Masirah reported the spy network had operated from the American embassy until it closed in 2015. After which "the elements of the espionage network continued to implement the same sabotage agenda under the cover of international organizations."

The senior Yemeni political figure asserted that neither the Americans, Israelis, nor any of the others that condemned the dismantling of the US-Israeli espionage network had the right to do so, noting that the spies operated under the guise of humanitarian workers.

"America uses humanitarian work as a cover for spying, and countries involved in the statement are unable to allow the activities carried out by the [espionage] network in their countries," he emphasized.

Houthi said the Yemenis had gathered "conclusive evidence that proves the crimes of the American espionage network and are ready to hand them over to a third party that refuses to violate the sovereignty of countries with such espionage acts."

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



## First Round of Presidential Candidates' Televised Debate Held

TEHRAN - In the first televised debate of the 14th presidential election campaign on Monday, six candidates discussed their views and opinions on economic issues.

The six candidates, on the eighth day of the election campaign, held their first debate and also shared their views on social media.

Four more debates are due to be held in the coming days, with the last one set to take place on June 25, three days before voters go to the polling stations across the country to cast their ballots.

As part of their campaigning process, the presidential candidates are also given equal platforms on other TV programs to elaborate on their plans to administer the country.

The candidates entered the IRIB building at 6 PM, were welcomed with a special ceremony, and paid tribute to the anonymous martyrs by offering flowers and reciting Fatiha. Here we have a glance at major issues raised by the candidates in the first debate:

Amir Hossein Qazizadeh Hashemi was the first to respond to the experts' questions. He said: "People are tired of promises. We need to specify the team and method for achieving our goals." He emphasized the need for serious investment and the complete implementation of the targeted subsidy plan to achieve economic growth.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf stressed the importance of the president's role in transforming the economy and supporting vulnerable families, particularly workers and employees with fixed incomes, who are affected by inflation.

Masoud Pezeshkian stated that achieving 8% economic growth requires \$200 billion annually, which is impossible without opening borders and cooperating with other countries. He highlighted the need for internal cohesion and the participation of all factions to implement the plans effectively.

Saeed Jalili argued that achieving economic growth requires more than just attracting

investment. He stressed the importance of involving all sectors of society and fostering national consensus.

Alireza Zakani pointed out that Iran's economic problem is that people earn in rials but spend in dollars due to flawed economic policies. He advocated for strengthening the national currency and reducing dependency on foreign currencies.

Hojatoleslam Mostafa Pourmohammadi emphasized that solving economic problems requires working with the international community and fostering national unity. He noted that economic issues are intertwined with cultural, social, legal, and political matters, both domestically and internationally.

Meanwhile the office of the Supreme Leader issued a statement regarding some unverified quotes attributed to the Leader of the Revolution and his office officials, declaring that unverified quotes or personal interpretations lack validity.

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The text of the statement from the office of the Supreme Leader is as follows:

"In recent days, it has been observed that some respected presidential candidates or members of their campaign teams, and individuals associated with them, have made statements and taken positions that include incomplete or incorrect quotes from the Leader of the Islamic Revolution or officials from his office. We declare that any quote not substantiated by existing and written documents from the statements and opinions of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, and reliance on personal interpretations and verbal receptions of his statements or those of his office officials, lacks validity and credibility. It is expected that everyone pays due attention to this matter and avoids repeating it."

## Iran, Russia Discuss Settlement of Caucasus Disputes



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iranian and Russian diplomats weighed plans for collective efforts to resolve problems in the Caucasus and ensure peace and calm in that region. In a meeting in Tehran, Caretaker Foreign Minister of Iran Ali Baqeri and Igor Khovayev, the special representative of the Russian foreign minister for the settlement of issues between Azerbaijan Republic and Armenia, talked about the latest developments in the Caucasus region. Highlighting the alignment of Iran and Russia's positions on important regional and international issues, Baqeri referred to the Caucasus region as an area of national interest and security for both countries, and emphasized the necessity for bilateral cooperation in this domain.

He also reiterated Iran's principled stance on the peaceful resolution of regional issues, noting that the importance and sensitivity of the current developments in the Caucasus region, especially the increasing foreign interventions, necessitate strategic coordination and continuous consultation between Iranian and Russian officials. The acting foreign minister of Iran also stressed the importance of maximizing the use of regional mechanisms such as the 3+3 structure to resolve regional issues, expand regional cooperation and convergence, and ensure the security, stability, and collective interests of the countries in the Caucasus region, the ministry's website reported.

For his part, Khovayev provided a report on his country's diplomatic efforts to establish peace and tranquility in the Caucasus region.

He emphasized Russia's view on the need for joint and strategic assessment by both countries regarding the developments in the Caucasus region, and the necessity for close and continuous interaction and coordination between officials to counter the interference of external actors in the region.

## Iran Exports \$400m of Household Appliance



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The production and quality of household appliances have increased due to the strategic policies and programs of the 13th government, in collaboration with manufacturers. Last year, household appliance production grew by 18.2%, with exports reaching \$400 million.

The 13th government has taken significant steps to develop the household appliance industry by formulating strategies, launching a comprehensive trade system, and removing fixed pricing.

According to Omid Fazelinia, Secretary General of the Iranian Household Appliance Manufacturers Association, in 2022, 16.5 million units of various household appliances were produced in the country, which increased to 19.5 million units in 2023, marking an 18.2% growth. He announced that the 13th government has planned to produce 22.5 million units of household appliances in 2024, aiming for a 15% growth if achieved. Fazelinia, referring to existing export statistics, said that exports reached \$400 million last year, indicating improved quality and production in components and various household appliances that are competitive in global markets. The Secretary General of the Iranian Household Appliance Manufacturers Association emphasized that these statistics show production growth compared to the previous year. He mentioned that Iranian household appliances are cheaper than foreign ones, stating that the price of Iranian goods is significantly lower than similar products in other countries. In the US, due to the open market, household appliance prices are much higher than similar products in Iran.

## Iran Steel Exports to Iraq May Decrease Due to Tariffs

TEHRAN - Jahanbakhsh Sanjabi Shirazi, the Secretary General of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, in an interview with ILNA talked about potential negative impacts on Iran-Iraq trade.

He explained: "Like any other independent government, Iraq monitors its economic environment and strives to maximize added value within its borders under the central government's control. One of the key indicators of economic development is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and a developing economy aims to increase its production year by year. As production approaches self-sufficiency, dependence on imports decreases."

He added: "However, Iraq is also pursuing a policy of joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), which influences its policies supporting domestic production by increasing import tariffs, making such tariff increases irrelevant in the future. Currently, to support domestic production, Iraq prohibits the import of goods it believes it has achieved self-sufficiency in, notably in perishable goods and agricultural products. This often results in seasonal bans affecting Iranian exporters. Besides agricultural products, Iraq is self-sufficient in beverages, sweets, biscuits, cakes, and detergents, indicating that packaged and processed food and drink products may also face import restrictions. Additionally, Iran has already lost its cement market in Iraq."

Sanjabi continued: "Iraq also imposes import tariffs on various other goods, the latest example being a 20% duty on rebar imports. Such policies, combined with currency and trade measures since the end of last year, suggest that Iran will face a significant decrease in steel product exports, including rebar, to Iraq in the short term. This will also impact other exports to Iraq in the

long term."

The Secretary General of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce noted: "Currently, 292 HS codes of goods are exported from Iran to Iraq, with metal products, especially rebar, accounting for a significant portion. Barriers to rebar imports will affect the overall volume of Iranian exports to Iraq."

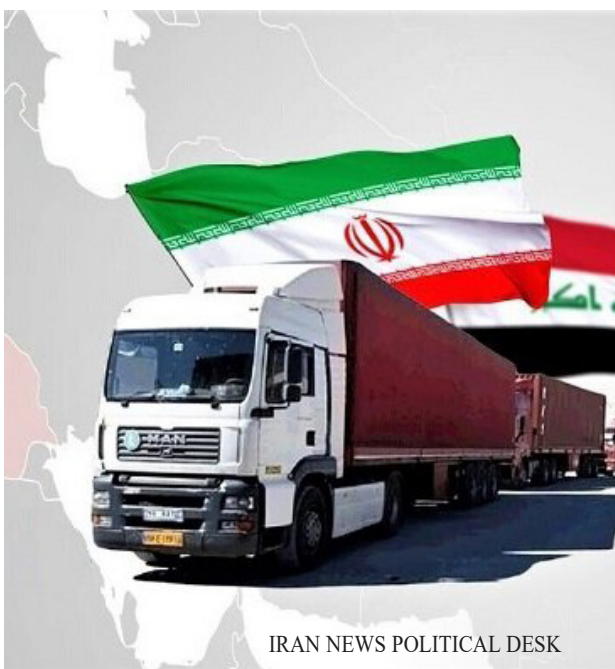
He stated: "Although Iran's exports to Iraq exceeded \$10 billion last year, the Secretary of the Iranian Steel Producers Association reported a 76% drop in steel product exports from small steel units last year. This decline could impact the Iran-Iraq trade balance by more than 7%."

Sanjabi emphasized: "If Iran cannot maintain this market by replacing goods or

creating more competitive advantages, a 10% reduction in exports to Iraq is anticipated."

The Secretary General discussed Iran's position in the Iraqi market: "Iraq is the second-largest destination for Iranian goods, but for Iraq, Iran holds a lesser position, being its fourth-largest trading partner after the UAE, China, and before India and Saudi Arabia. The share of Iranian trade in Iraq's economy is not comparable to that of the UAE and China."

He added: "Iraq imports 1,200 HS codes, while Iran, at best, reaches 300. This means Iran has not entered or lacks competitive advantage in 70% of Iraq's import goods. Despite this, Iraq or any third country cannot easily remove Iran from its export market due to Iran's competitive advantages, although not impossible. Given the competitive market and Iran's natural and competitive advantages, Iran can maintain its presence in Iraq."



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



# IRAN NEWS



## Leader Visits Ailing Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei visited Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, who has been hospitalized in Tehran.

The Leader visited Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi at a hospital in Tehran on Monday.

Ayatollah Khamenei was briefed on the process of treatment of the hospitalized cleric, and prayed for his recovery and health.

The Leader also lauded Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi for his valuable efforts to promote religious sciences, guide people, and broaden knowledge.

The unwell cleric also thanked the Leader for his affection.

Born in 1927 in Iran's southern city of Shiraz, Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi is a prominent Shiite Marja' (source to follow or religious reference) and a religious leader who has written numerous books and trained a lot of seminary students.

## Iran, China Enjoy a 2000-Year History of Joint Relations



TEHRAN - The President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Technology said: Given the 2000-year history of joint relations between Iran and China, we hope that the recent understandings reached between the two countries will be fruitful, allowing us to enhance our relations in various fields, including the environment.

Dr. Wan, in a meeting with Iranian Vice President Mr. Ali Salajegheh thanked for this meeting and said: The inauguration of the joint laboratory of the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources of the University of Tehran and the Gansu Academy of Sciences and Technology can be an important step in elevating the level of relations between the two countries in the fields of environment and natural resources.

He added: The inauguration of the joint laboratory of the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources of the University of Tehran and the Gansu Academy of Sciences and Technology can be an important step in elevating the level of relations between the two countries in the fields of environment and natural resources.

This Chinese official said: Our presence in the Iranian Department of Environment allowed us to become familiar with the positive thinking in your country in this field, and we hope such meetings will be beneficial and lead to practical results. As representatives of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Technology, we express our pleasure in planning to conduct joint scientific cooperation with Iran.



**300 Renewable Energy Power Plants With a Capacity of 8400 Megawatts Under Construction**

TEHRAN – Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian in the official inauguration ceremony of the second phase of solar panel production in Khomein County, Markazi Province, with a capacity of 1,800 megawatts per year, while commemorating the memory of the martyrs of service, especially Martyr Ayatollah Raisi, said: The first phase of the solar panel production line in Khomein County was inaugurated in 2022 with the presence of the honorable martyr Ayatollah Raisi, and now we are beginning the operation of the second phase of this factory in his memory.

The Minister of Energy, appreciating the efforts of those involved in the project, especially private sector investors and Mana Energy Pak Company, continued: In the solar panel production factory in Khomein County, we see young people and graduates from various fields, especially electrical and chemical engineering, who are working towards the development of our beloved country. We hope that, thanks to their efforts, a bright future in the field of renewable energy lies ahead for the country.

He emphasized the crucial role of electrical energy as a significant factor in economic growth and public welfare, adding: One of the most important programs and agendas of the thirteenth government at the start of its activities was the effort to resolve the electricity imbalance in the country, which necessitated special support for projects such as the production of solar panels.

Referring to the inauguration of the second phase of solar panel production in Khomein County and the increase in this factory's capacity to produce 2,300 megawatts of panels per year, he said: The operation of this factory will be very effective in achieving the major goal set in the path of developing renewable energies.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

## Over 50,000 Russian Tourists Predicted to Visit Iran

TEHRAN - The head of the Office of Foreign Tourism Marketing and Development at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts predicted that the number of tourists traveling from Russia to Iran will exceed 50,000 in 2024.

Moslem Shojaei, speaking at the international tourism conference "Russia and the World" during the side events of the International Russia Exhibition at the VDNKh exhibition center in Moscow, said: Last year, 50,000 tourists traveled from Russia to Iran, and we expect this number to reach its highest level this year. He stated that last year, over 60,000 tourists traveled from Iran to Russia. He believes that the international tourism capacity of both countries is much greater than these figures and that they can send more tourists to each other's countries.

The head of the Office of Foreign Tourism Marketing and Development at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts mentioned the implementation of the agreement on visa-free group travel for Iranian and Russian citizens. Under this framework, tourists in groups of five to 50 people can stay for 15 days in each country. He continued, Russia and Iran have rich culture, history, and natural attractions, creating favorable conditions for tourist exchange. Shojaei added that joint steps must be taken to exchange experiences between our countries,

which will aid tourism flows.

The agreement on visa-free group travel between Iran and Russia was signed in 2017 but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, with the efforts of Iranian and Russian parties, the implementation of this agreement began in August 2023. The first group of Iranian tourists under this framework visited the North Caucasus in Russia. Under this agreement, organized groups of five to 50 tourists can visit both countries without a visa.

Previously, Nikita Kondratyev, Director of Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects at the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, stated: According to our estimates, the mutual tourist flow with Iran through the visa-free group mechanism will reach around 40,000 trips in 2024.

Natalia Molotchkovaya, Head of Foreign Relations at the Moscow Tourism and Hospitality Development Project Office, said: In 2023, 2.3 million foreign tourists visited Moscow, with the number of tourists from Iran surpassing not only the figures of 2022 but also those before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. She continued, under the visa-free group travel agreement, we hope that the number of Iranian tourists in Russia will increase significantly in the near future.

## Call for Using Border Capabilities of Iran and Turkey for Regional Development

TEHRAN - The commercial conference of the Chambers of Commerce of Urmia and Yuksekova, Turkey, was aimed at leveraging the advantages of neighboring regions and understanding the commercial and economic capacities of both sides for the economic development of the adjacent border areas, was held at the Urmia Chamber with the presence of members from both chambers.

Qasem Karimi, the head of the Urmia Chamber, emphasized the need to utilize all the border capacities of Iran and Turkey for the economic development of the border regions, stating: "The border is a capacity for development; however, the regions of Urmia and Yuksekova have not adequately utilized this capacity for the economic and social development necessary for the welfare of border residents."

Karimi added: "Turkey is one of the most important economic partners of the Islamic Republic of Iran; however, the agreement between the leaders of the two countries to achieve the goal of 30 billion dollars in trade has not yet been implemented, which requires efforts from both the public and private sectors of both sides."

He further mentioned: "During the last visit of the late Raisi to Ankara and his meeting with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of Turkey, both sides emphasized developing economic relations and utilizing the border capacities of the two countries. One of the resolutions of the visit was the reopening of the Kouzeh Rosh - Gulinjik border terminal, which has not yet been implemented."

The head of the Urmia Chamber added: "In the recent meeting of the border governors of Iran and Turkey, there was a focus on increasing truck traffic capacity at the Sarv - Esendere border, but progress has been slow, and the problems of this border terminal need to be resolved. However, we managed to turn the Razi Khoy border terminal into one of the commercial terminals for exporting seasonal agricultural products to Turkey with the support of government officials from both sides."

Karimi stated: "This was the first

economic conference between the economic activists of West Azerbaijan and Yuksekova, and regular meetings and joint commissions of the economic activists from both sides need to be held to plan for increasing regional trade volume, removing obstacles, and facilitating trade."

He added: "West Azerbaijan has high potential in four sectors: agriculture, industry, mining, and commerce, which can meet a large part of the needs of the eastern regions of Turkey."

Following this, Saleh Ozdemir, the head of the Yuksekova Chamber of Commerce and Industry, expressed gratitude for the warm hospitality of the Urmia Chamber's president and members to the Turkish economic delegation. He stated: "The distance of less than 50 kilometers between the two regions and the shared border is a significant capacity for the economic development of both countries, especially Yuksekova and Urmia."

The head of the Yuksekova Chamber of Commerce and Industry, highlighting the capacities of this city, added: "This region has advantages in livestock and border trade, and through mutual cooperation, we can enhance reciprocal trade by developing and strengthening border markets."

He also mentioned: "The Yuksekova customs revenue last year was 27 million dollars, with 90 percent based on exports, especially mineral materials."

Saleh Ozdemir suggested: "One way to increase cooperation between the two countries is the creation of joint industrial parks, which can significantly impact economic development."

In the continuation of the session, members of the Urmia and Yuksekova chambers discussed the problems and solutions for increasing commercial interactions.

At the end of the session, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Urmia and Yuksekova chambers to increase mutual interactions, facilitate border trade, and resolve issues related to joint border terminals with clear commitments from both sides.



## Iran, Iraq Emphasize Bolstering Relations in All Fields



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhber and Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid in a telephone conversation stressed the need to strengthen cooperation and interaction in all areas.

The Iraqi president congratulated the Iranian nation, government and Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the occasion of Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice).

Rashid also once again expressed his condolences over the martyrdom of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his companions in a tragic helicopter crash last month.

Rashid said the Iraqi government is making efforts to enhance cooperation with Iran in all areas, and considered deeper economic relations as a necessity to fulfill the interests of both nations.

Iran's acting president, for his part, expressed his gratitude for the solidarity shown by the Iraqi government and people over the martyrdom of President Raisi and his entourage.

Mokhber also said strengthening trade and economic cooperation between the two countries will lead to further promotion of bilateral relations in the political field.

He also praised Iraq's effective and "dignified" stance on regional and international issues, in particular about the Israeli aggression against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

## ICCIMA Seeks Greater Cooperation With Paris Chamber in Non-Sanctioned Areas



TEHRAN - The President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture stated that there is potential for increased cooperation between the Iran and Paris chambers, particularly in the academic and scientific fields.

In a meeting with the Vice President of the Paris Chamber of Commerce, Samad Hassanzadeh continued, "The Iran Chamber is ready to provide scholarships for Iranian students interested in studying at universities and educational institutions affiliated with the Paris Chamber of Commerce."

He pointed out that 27% of Iran's national production and economic activities fall under the purview of the Iran Chamber, adding, "We seek greater bilateral cooperation in non-sanctioned areas."

Hassanzadeh concluded by inviting the Vice Presidents of the Paris Chamber of Commerce to visit Iran to closely acquaint themselves with the country's economic and commercial potential, an invitation that was warmly received.

During the meeting, the Vice President of the Paris Chamber of Commerce also highlighted their activities, saying, "Providing consultancy to companies, aiding their economic growth, supporting companies in international domains, particularly in digitalization processes, organizing international exhibitions and events, and overseeing their implementation are among the main activities of the Paris Chamber of Commerce."



## Train Crash in Eastern India Kills 15, Injures Dozens

KOLKATA (Reuters) - A freight train smashed into the rear of a stationary passenger train in India's West Bengal state on Monday, killing at least 15 people and injuring dozens, police said, in an accident that railway authorities blamed on driver error.

Media showed images of the pile-up, with containers from the goods train strewn nearby, and one carriage left nearly vertical after the accident, which comes just over a year after a signalling error caused one of India's worst rail crashes.

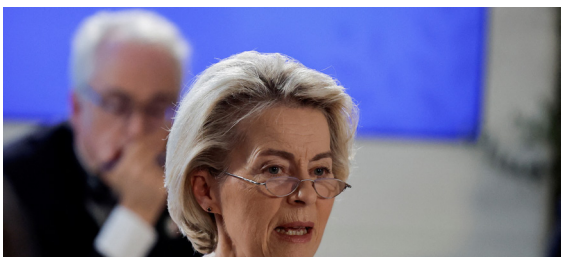
Fifteen bodies were pulled from the mangled carriages, Abhishek Roy, a senior police official in the eastern state's district of Darjeeling, the site of the accident, told Reuters.

Fifty-four people were injured and rescue teams from the police and national disaster response force were working to clear debris from the derailed carriages, Roy added.

The goods train hit the Kanchanjunga Express travelling to Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, from the northeastern state of Tripura, driving three carriages of the passenger train off the rails. It was not immediately clear how many passengers were on board at the time.



## EU Summit Ends Without Agreement on Top Jobs



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union leaders ended a discussion on who should take the bloc's top jobs for the next five years without agreement on Monday, aiming instead for a decision at a summit next week.

The leaders' meeting was the first since the European Parliament election, which saw gains for the centre-right and right-wing nationalists, but humiliating defeats for French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Over dinner in Brussels, the EU's 27 national leaders discussed who should run the powerful European Commission executive body, who should chair their European Council meetings and who should take the post of foreign policy chief.

They had been widely expected to nominate Ursula von der Leyen of Germany for a second term as European Commission chief, Portuguese ex-premier Antonio Costa as Council president and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas as top diplomat.

But the current European Council president, Charles Michel, said they needed more time.

"It was a good conversation, (it) goes in the right direction, I think. But there is no agreement tonight," he told reporters after the dinner.

Michel said pan-European political parties had made proposals about the posts and more work would be needed to reach an agreement. He did not elaborate on the proposals.

Von der Leyen remains in pole position to stay on as European Commission president, buoyed by gains in the June 6-9 elections for her centre-right European People's Party.

Thirteen of the 27 EU leaders are from parties belonging to the EPP. With French and German support too, she would have the qualified majority she requires to be nominated.

France had previously weighed alternatives to von der Leyen, but with a snap parliamentary election called by Macron from June 30, the government now prefers EU stability. Germany has made clear it backs von der Leyen for another term.



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - NATO's chief called yesterday for China to face consequences if it keeps up support to Russia as he trumpeted a sharp increase in allies' defense spending since the invasion of Ukraine.

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that Kyiv needed predictable and steady military funding as he hailed the uptick in NATO member defense budgets — addressing a key factor behind Donald Trump's skepticism about helping Ukraine.

NATO next month celebrates its 75th anniversary with a summit in Washington that aims to send a decisive long-term message of support for Ukraine ahead of President Joe Biden's reelection fight against Republican candidate Trump in November.

"The more credible our long-term support, the quicker Moscow will realize it cannot wait us out," Stoltenberg said on a visit to the US capital to lay the groundwork.

"It may seem like a paradox, but the path to peace is more weapons for Ukraine," he said.

Stoltenberg accused China of worsening the conflict through what US officials say is a major export push to rebuild Russia's defense industry.

President Xi Jinping "has tried to create the impression that he is taking a back seat in this conflict, to avoid sanctions and keep trade flowing," Stoltenberg said.

"But the reality is that China is fuelling the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II, and at the same time, it wants to maintain good relations with the West," he said.

"Beijing cannot have it both ways. At some point — and unless China changes course — allies need to impose a cost. There should be consequences," Stoltenberg added.

In addition to the 32 members of the Nato alliance, the summit will also bring in four key partners from the Asia-Pacific: Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

China argues that it is not sending lethal assistance to either side — unlike the United States and other Western nations.

Beijing steered clear of a weekend summit in Switzerland promoted by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that reaffirmed Kyiv's demands for Russia to leave Ukrainian territory for any peace.

Stoltenberg said that Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit this week to North Korea, which has supplied shells to Moscow despite being under UN sanctions, further showed how Moscow was "dependent" on

authoritarian leaders.

Trump — who in the past has voiced admiration for Putin — has boasted that he can quickly end the war, likely by pressing Ukraine to accept demands.

Trump has long raged over what he sees as unfairness in NATO, founded to counter the Soviet Union.

On the campaign trail, he has suggested he would encourage Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" if NATO members do not "pay your bills."

In the Oval Office, Stoltenberg told Biden that 23 of the 32 allies now met a pledge to spend at least two percent of GDP on defense, as the Ukraine invasion brings new security fears to Europe.

A 2014 NATO summit set the funding goal that was then met by only three countries — the United States, Britain and Greece. Stoltenberg last reported that 20 countries were achieving the target.

"NATO allies are this year increasing defense spending by 18 per cent. That's the biggest increase in decades," Stoltenberg said.

In a sharply different message than Trump, Biden hailed NATO, saying that since it has successfully "deterred further Russian aggression in Europe" through its promise to "defend every inch of NATO territory."

In an unstated bid to "Trump-proof" future efforts, Stoltenberg wants the Washington summit to commit the alliance to provide at least €40 billion a year in military aid to Ukraine and to put NATO in charge of coordination.

Speaking to reporters after his Wilson Center speech, Stoltenberg did not criticize Trump but pointed to the damage done on the battlefield by the delay in Congress approving a \$60 billion package for Ukraine.

"Regardless of who's going to be the next president of the United States," Stoltenberg said, "I believe that we should minimize the risk."

Stoltenberg, who led NATO throughout Trump's 2017-2021 presidency, said that successive US administrations had "an absolutely valid point to say that European allies are spending too little."

"The good news is that's changing," Stoltenberg said.

"We're not saying that we are satisfied, but we are in a totally different place now than we were back in 2014," he said.

## Netanyahu Disbands War Cabinet as Pressure Grows

TEL AVIV (Dispatches) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dissolved the six-member war Cabinet, an Israeli official said yesterday, in a widely expected move following the departure from government of centrist former general Benny Gantz.

Netanyahu is now expected to hold consultations about the Gaza war with a small group of ministers, including Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer who had been in the war cabinet.

The move was announced as US special envoy Amos Hochstein visited Jerusalem, seeking to calm the situation on the disputed border with Lebanon, where Israel said tensions with the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia were bringing the region close to a wider conflict.

The Israeli military said yesterday it had killed a senior operative in one of Hezbollah's rocket and missile sections in the area of Selaa in southern Lebanon.

The military also said its operations were continuing in the southern parts of the Gaza Strip, where its forces have been battling Hamas fighters in the Tel Sultan area of western Rafah, as well as in central areas of the enclave.

Hochstein's visit follows weeks of increasing exchanges of fire across the line between Israel and Lebanon, where Israeli forces have for months been engaged in a simmering conflict with Hezbollah that has continued alongside the war in Gaza.

Tens of thousands of people have been evacuated from their homes on both sides of the so-called Blue Line that divides the two countries, leaving eerily deserted areas of abandoned villages and farms hit by near-daily bombardment. "The current state of affairs is not a sustainable reality," government spokesperson David Mencer told a briefing.

Netanyahu had faced demands from the nationalist-religious partners in his coalition, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister

Itamar Ben-Gvir, to be included in the war cabinet. Such a move would have intensified strains with international partners including the United States.

The forum was formed after Gantz joined Netanyahu in a national unity government at the start of the Gaza war in October. It also included Gantz's political partner Gadi Eisenkot and Aryeh Deri, head of the religious party Shas, as observers.

Gantz and Eisenkot both left the government last week, over what they said was Netanyahu's failure to form a strategy for the Gaza war.

An agreement to halt the fighting in Gaza still appears distant, more than eight months since the October 7 attack on Israel led by Hamas fighters that triggered Israel's military offensive in the Palestinian enclave.

Although opinion polls suggest most Israelis support the government's aim of destroying Hamas, there have been widespread protests attacking the government for not doing more to bring home around 120 hostages still being held in Gaza and against Netanyahu's handling of the war.

Protesters calling for new elections clashed with police in Jerusalem yesterday. By sundown, a crowd of thousands had gathered outside the Knesset, Israel's parliament, before marching to Netanyahu's private home.

Some protesters tried to break through barriers set up by the police, who pushed them back. At one point a bonfire was lit in the street, and police used a water cannon to disperse the demonstration.

The northern border was relatively quiet on Monday, the second day of the Muslim Eid celebration, compared with previous days, when rocket fire set off widespread brush fires in heatwave conditions.

A survey for the Jewish People Policy Institute, a Jerusalem-based think tank, found 36 per cent of respondents favouring an immediate strike against Hezbollah, up from 26 per cent a month earlier.

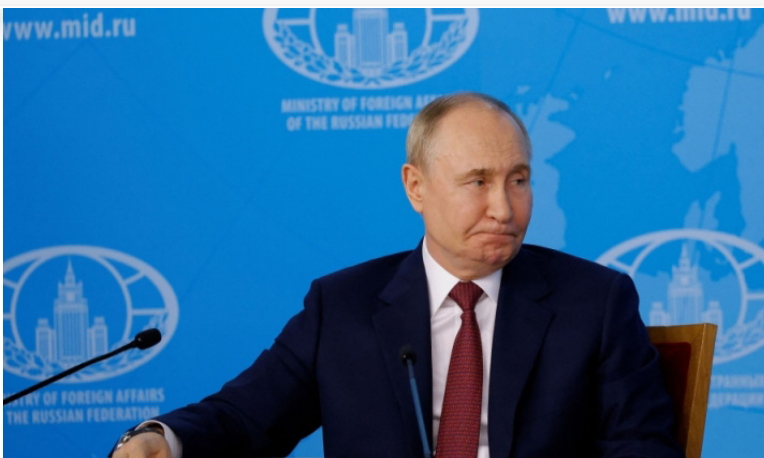


## Putin Vows Trade, Security Agreements With North Korea Ahead of Visit

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Vladimir Putin promised to build trade and security systems with North Korea that are not controlled by the West and pledged his unwavering support in a letter published by North Korean state media today ahead of his planned visit to the country.

In a letter published in North Korea's Rodong Sinmun, a ruling Workers' Party mouthpiece, the Russian president said the two countries have developed good relations and partnerships over the past 70 years based on equality, mutual respect and trust.

"We will develop alternative mechanisms of trade and mutual settlements that are not controlled by the West, and jointly resist illegitimate unilateral restrictions," Putin wrote. "And at the same time — we will build an architecture of equal and indivisible security in Eurasia." He thanked North Korea for supporting what Russia calls its special military operation in Ukraine, and vowed support for Pyongyang's efforts to defend its interests despite what he called "US pressure, blackmail and military threats."



The article was published a day after the two countries announced that Putin will visit North Korea for the first time in 24 years for two days starting today.

Putin's foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov said Russia and North Korea may sign a partnership agreement during the visit that would include security issues. He said the deal would not be directed against any other country, but would "outline prospects for further cooperation, and will be signed taking into account what has happened between our countries in recent years - in the field of international politics, in the field of economics ... including, of course, taking into account security issues." Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Putin's point man for energy, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, will be part of the delegation.

Ahead of the visit North Korea appears to have been making preparations for a possible military parade in downtown Pyongyang, commercial satellite imagery showed.





BERLIN (Dispatches) - Maximilian Woeber's own goal was enough to give France a winning start to their Euro 2024 campaign on Monday as they edged Austria 1-0 in their opening game but Kylian Mbappe came off late on with a broken nose.

Woeber diverted Mbappe's cutback into his own net seven minutes before half-time in Dusseldorf to allow the French, one of the leading contenders to win the tournament, to come through a stiff test.

Austria have been much-improved under Ralf Rangnick and they often made life uncomfortable for the 2022 World Cup runners-up, who saw Mbappe leave the field near the end after being hurt in a collision.

He had earlier failed to convert a glorious chance that would have allowed France to win by a wider margin, and sources close to the player confirmed he had broken his nose in the accidental clash with Kevin Danso.

"We had the chance to put the game to bed and it is true that we could have been more precise in attack, but it's very good to start with a victory," said France coach Didier Deschamps.

"It is a good habit to have and we need to try to keep it."

France will be relieved to have emerged victorious after a build-up overshadowed by talk of politics rather than football.

Mbappe and other French players had spent much of their time before the media in recent days answering questions about upcoming elections in the country which could see the far-right National Rally become the biggest party.

Any slip-up here would have led to suggestions their minds had not been fully focused on the competition.

Instead, the result leaves France level on three points in Group D with the Netherlands, who defeated Poland 2-1 in Hamburg on Sunday.

France and the Netherlands meet next in Leipzig on Friday, while Austria face Poland earlier the same day in Berlin.

"We are obviously disappointed with the result. No France player scored against us in 100 minutes, just a very unfortunate own goal," said Rangnick.

"I think Didier Deschamps was really happy when the final whistle came which shows how well my team played."

Austria had enjoyed some impressive results coming into the tournament on a seven-game unbeaten run and their team is on familiar ground during these Euros -- Rangnick is from Germany and eight of their starting line-up played in the German Bundesliga last season.

The French, however, are arguably the most talented team at the tournament, led by their captain Mbappe.

## Thompson Knocks Rune Out of Queen's Club Tennis

LONDON (Dispatches) - Australia's Jordan Thompson caused an early upset at the Queen's Club tournament in London with a first-round win over seventh-seed Holger Rune on Monday.

Thompson came from a set down to beat Rune, a semi-finalist at the grass-court warm-up event for Wimbledon last year, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 in a match lasting more than two hours.

Rune was unhappy with the condition of the court after slipping several times on the damp grass.

"Terrible court, what is this?," he said to umpire James Keothavong. "I can't stand on the court. It's too wet. Call the supervisor. I fell three times. It's too wet. You think I'm falling on purpose?"

Meanwhile world number 10 Grigor Dimitrov, the 2014 Queen's champion, made short work of a 6-1, 6-2 win over France's Adrian Mannarino.

"I was very happy with the way I started the match," said Dimitrov. "I think I set the bar high and wanted to be steady the whole time.

"Serve and return I just tried to focus on, they are the fundamentals of this surface," added the Bulgarian, 33.



Former Wimbledon runner-up Milos Raonic survived two match points in a marathon third-set tie-break before beating Britain's Jack Draper 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 7-6 (11/9).

Injuries have seen Raonic slip from number three in the world rankings to 186. But the 33-year-old Canadian retains one of the most powerful serves in the game, and several of his 140 mph (225 kph) thunderbolts proved too much for Norrie. Raonic struck 45 aces in total.

Reigning Queen's and Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz, fresh from winning the French Open, begins his defence of this ATP title against Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo on Tuesday, as British tennis great Andy Murray faces Alexei Popyrin.

Meanwhile reigning champion Jelena Ostapenko lost in the first round of the Birmingham WTA tour event on Monday as she went down in straight sets to Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto.

The Latvian, ranked 13th, won her second career title on grass last June but she fell 6-3 6-3 at Edgbaston Priory to Cocciaretto, who still needed seven match points to defeat the 2017 French Open champion.

## FIA Ditches Verstappen Rule and Opens Door for Antonelli



ROME (Dispatches) - Italian Andrea Kimi Antonelli could make an appearance in Formula One before he turns 18 after the governing FIA modified licence age limits that have been in place since Max Verstappen debuted at 17 in 2015.

Antonelli is tipped to replace Ferrari-bound seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton at Mercedes at the end of the season but has also been linked to Logan Sargeant's seat at Williams.

The Mercedes-backed Italian is currently competing in Formula Two and turns 18 on Aug. 25, ruling him out of the next six race weekends.

There has been speculation that Mercedes-powered Williams, or Mercedes, want to run Antonelli in their car in Friday practice before then at European circuits he is familiar with.

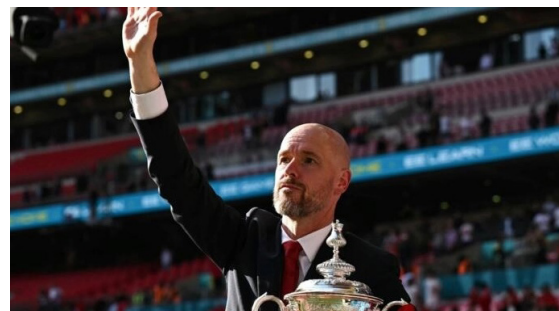
The FIA's International Sporting Code previously stated that drivers must be at least 18 and hold a valid driving licence, a rule introduced after now-triple champion Verstappen's precocious arrival.

The minimum age for a driving licence in Italy is 18 but that clause was quietly deleted this week in the FIA regulations.

A new clause now says that "at the sole discretion of the FIA, a driver judged to have recently and consistently demonstrated outstanding ability and maturity in single-seater formula car competition may be granted a Super Licence at the age of 17 years old."

Antonelli already has sufficient points from junior series to qualify and has been testing privately with Mercedes in older F1 cars, most recently in Barcelona this month.

## Pakistan's World Cup Failure Down to Poor Batting



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan captain Babar Azam said the team's batting let them down at the Twenty20 World Cup and apologised to fans for failing to reach the Super Eight stage.

Pakistan fell to the tournament's biggest upset when the United States, a tier-two member of the game, beat the 2009 champions via Super Over. Defeat by arch-rivals India then left Babar's side with a mountain to climb to advance.

India and the U.S. bagged the two Super Eight slots from Group A while Pakistan finished third after Sunday's laboured three-wicket victory against Ireland.

"Thank you so much for supporting us, and sorry for that performance..." Babar said after the match in Florida.

"I know the fans and the team are saddened by this. It is not any one player's fault. We all made a mistake."

Babar had stepped down as captain of all three formats after Pakistan failed to make the knockout stage of the 50-overs World Cup in India last year, but was reinstated as white-ball skipper ahead of the 20-overs showpiece in the U.S. and West Indies.

Amid sub-par performances at the tournament, talk of rifts within the camp surfaced, while Pakistan Cricket Board's chief promised "major surgery" on the team after their exit was confirmed last week.

Pakistan's batting was a huge disappointment as they failed to make the most of the powerplay overs and could not get partnerships established.

"The pitches here helped the fast bowlers a little but I think overall our batting did not click," said Babar.

"We lost two crucial matches even when we were in charge." All-rounder Imad Wasim has said the team needed a complete reset of their approach to white-ball cricket and Babar agreed.

"Every player has to think, because cricket has become very fast. With modern cricket, you must have game awareness," he said.

"You know that the strike rate here is (low)... I think it's about game awareness and common sense."

## Slovakia's Shock Win Over Belgium Gives Hope to Euro Minnows

FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Slovakia manager Francesco Calzona claimed his side's stunning 1-0 win against Belgium on Monday showed smaller nations are capable of competing with the Euro 2024 superpowers.

Calzona's team caused the first major upset of the tournament as Ivan Schranz's seventh-minute strike rocked the Belgians in Frankfurt.

Although third-placed Belgium are placed 45 spots above Slovakia in FIFA's rankings, the underdogs showed they were not overawed as they delivered an aggressive display that knocked Kevin De Bruyne and company out of their stride.

While Slovakia's Group E upset is unlikely to be the start of a march to the final in Berlin, Calzona believes it should serve as a rallying cry to the unfancied teams competing in Germany.

"The smaller nations, the lesser teams if you will, have made progress and we can cause problems for the big nations," he said.

"We have quality in the team. We've produced a number of excellent displays during the qualification stage. Of course it has an extra taste to it to beat Belgium. They are a top class side.

"It is true the small teams have improved. But there is still a big gap and we have to work hard. It is not easy."

Slovakia will face Ukraine, beaten 3-0 by Romania on Monday, in their second group game on Friday, knowing a win would book



their place in the last 16.

But Calzona, who served as Napoli's interim coach for part of last season, cautioned his players against getting carried away by their success, which was aided by the controversial decision to disallow Romelu Lukaku's late equaliser for handball against Lois Openda.

"It will be very tough to qualify. Unexpectedly the two teams who were favourites to go through have lost their first games," Calzona said.

"They will want to get revenge but we don't want to throw away this opportunity we have."

It was a significant moment for Slovakia as they seek to emulate their run to the last 16 at Euro 2016.

They failed to get out of the group stage at the 2020 European Championship and Calzona said: "My team did what they had to do. We had to dig in during the second half but we showed no fear.

"I'm delighted. It's a hugely significant win for me on a personal level. The lads are doing a great job and they deserved a success like this.

"Slovakia is a small country but so many people came to support us. To see men, women and children with a smile on their face was a touching moment."