

The Iranian Naval Forces Have Acquired Military Drones With State-of-the-Art Technologies, Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani Said

IRAN NEWS

Head of Iran's Supreme Court in Russia Expressed His Hope That the BRICS Group Would Respond Appropriately to the Attacks by the Zionist Regime on the People of Gaza

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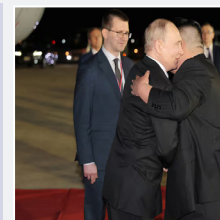


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IRGC Chief Hails Martyr Amir-Abdollahian as Diplomat of Resistance



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has praised late Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian for his fruitful activities in support of the resistance front, saying that he was well familiar with the diplomacy of resistance and skillfully directing it.

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks on Tuesday as he visited Amir-Abdollahian's family in Tehran to honor the late foreign minister, who passed away in a helicopter crash along with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on May 19.

The commander lauded the late minister as a senior diplomat with a distinctive personality, and great acumen, political knowledge and diplomatic skills.

Describing diplomacy as a combination of talent, skill, knowledge and charisma, Salami said Amir-Abdollahian enjoyed all the core and essential requirements in the field of diplomacy.

He also said diplomats generally have to speak according to international rules and protocols, but Amir-Abdollahian acted beyond the standards and applied the rules of the Islamic Revolution to the world of politics.

"He would use the language of authority while negotiating with world powers, but he would draw on the language of support while engaging in talks with the oppressed," the IRGC chief pointed out.

Salami went on to hail Amir-Abdollahian's remarkable skills at bringing together ethics, expertise and authority in the field of politics, saying, "Among his admirable traits were his thorough familiarity with conventional diplomacy, alongside his direction of the diplomacy of resistance."

The IRGC chief commander further noted that the late Iranian foreign minister had no fear of visiting conflict-stricken countries like Lebanon and Syria, and had close and intimate relations with forces of the Axis of Resistance as well as Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, the late commander of IRGC's Quds Force.

Internet Speed in the Country Has Increased



TEHRAN - The head of the Regulatory and Radio Communications Organization, referring to global statistics, announced a minimum 20% increase in both fixed and mobile internet speeds from mid-December last year to mid-June this year. He said that with the ongoing construction of 5G sites and the fiber optic expansion project, we will see a significant transformation in internet speed this year. "Amir Lajvardi" stated that the Regulatory and Radio Communications Organization, as the regulator of this sector, meticulously monitors and assesses network quality and makes this information publicly available on the NetSenj Plus website. He noted that according to recorded statistics, the average internet speed for the operator MCI (Mobile Communications of Iran) increased from 11.42 Mbps in mid-December last year to 13.84 Mbps in mid-June this year, and for Irancell, it increased from 10.95 Mbps to 12.64 Mbps. The Deputy Minister of Communications and Information Technology added that by June 5, MCI's internet speed had grown by 21.3% and Irancell's by 15.4%. Referring to global internet speed measurement dashboards, he said: According to statistics from Ookla, one of the international references on the Speedtest website, the median internet speed for both fixed and mobile sections has increased by about 20% from January last year to now. Lajvardi highlighted that according to Ookla's statistics, the median mobile internet speed in the first half of this month (June) was reported at 37.36 Mbps, while in the second half of December last year, it was 31.29 Mbps, indicating a 19.4% increase in mobile internet speed during this period. Regarding fixed internet speed, the head of the Regulatory and Radio Communications Organization stated that Ookla's statistics show the median fixed internet speed in the country in the first half of this month was 15.28 Mbps, up from 12.62 Mbps in the second half of December last year, reflecting a 21% increase in fixed internet speed during this period.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Iran Attracting \$12b in Foreign Investment Under the Current Gov't

TEHRAN - The Organization for Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran announced that the number of approved and valid foreign investment projects from the start of the current administration until the current month of June is 713 projects, valued at \$11.926 billion.

According to IRNA, the Organization for Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran stated in a notification: During the first debate of the fourteenth presidential election candidates, which focused on economic issues on Monday night, June 28, the topic of foreign investment was highlighted as one of the key points.

Given the mission and responsibility of this organization in the field of foreign investment, the final and comprehensive statistics of the current government's performance, achieved

without any positive changes in sanction conditions or recommendations from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), are re-announced as follows:

According to this report, from the beginning of the current administration until June 2024, a total of 713 foreign investment projects valued at \$11.926 billion have been approved by the Foreign Investment Board. Of this valid approved foreign investment, 91 projects valued at \$2.148 billion involve investments from individuals and legal entities from China.

Foreign investment projects that did not bring capital into the country after obtaining permits within the specified period have been removed from the statistics, and therefore the above statistics only include valid approved foreign investments up to this date.

Iran Urges Holistic Approach to Deal With Illegal Arms Trade

TEHRAN - Iran's Envoy and Permanent Representative to the UN has urged the world body to take a comprehensive approach to deal with the supply and demand chain of illegal trade in small arms and light weapons.

Amir Saeed Irvani issued the statement on Tuesday local time, at the fourth conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons.

The Iranian diplomat emphasized that Tehran is ready to give its support for achieving a consensus on the document and the full implementation of the UN Action Plan on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons at the national, regional and international levels.

Addressing the event, Irvani said: I would like to reaffirm my country's commitment to fully implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA) at the national, regional, and international levels."

He added: As a victim of foreign-backed terrorists and constantly faced with the threat of organized crime and drug trafficking linked to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the Islamic Republic of Iran attaches great importance to the Programme of Action."

Irvani further said: Currently, Iran has established appropriate laws and necessary mechanisms to provide policy guidelines and facilitate coordination among relevant national bodies. We have made significant progress in combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, as well as the associated issues, particularly drug trafficking. Our dedication to implementing the Programme of Action is evident in the sacrifice of nearly 5,000 law enforcement personnel who have lost their lives in this fight."

He then reiterated: "The Islamic Republic of Iran has also established bilateral and trilateral agreements with several countries in the region to effectively prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, along with the associated problems. Notably, we consistently focus on addressing the root causes of this illicit trade and its related issues at the regional level. This is achieved, in particular, through investments in development programs and reconstruction plans in our neighboring countries."

Irvani added: Unfortunately, unlawful restrictions imposed on Iran, contrary to the commitments made in the UN Programme of Action, have limited our access to the technical and technological assistance necessary for combating the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons in the region.



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia Agree on Cargo Transit via North-South Corridor



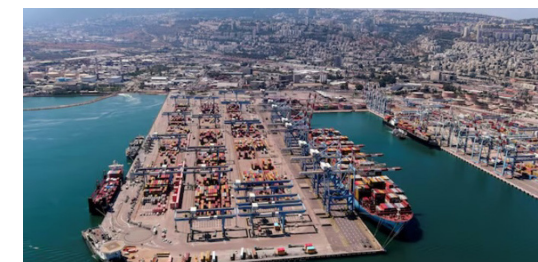
TEHRAN - Representatives from the transport sectors of Azerbaijan, Iran, and Russia reportedly met for the first time at the Muharramkandi-Yarag Kazmalyar, Khanoba-Tagirkent Kazmalyar, and Astara-Astara borders to discuss various aspects of border transit, trade, and customs cooperation, as well as border crossing methods. The discussions particularly focused on deepening transit cooperation and developing the corridors.

Seyyed Hossein Hosseini Mirzaei, the Deputy for Border Affairs at the Transit and International Transportation Office of the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, who led the Iranian delegation, stated that during this meeting and subsequent sessions, senior representatives engaged in pragmatic and constructive discussions aimed at strengthening border crossing measures and countering illegal border crossing arrangements.

He added that the representatives emphasized the need for joint efforts to enhance road trade, optimize the use of the western branch of the North-South International Transport Corridor, and prevent unconventional actions at the borders.

Hosseini noted that the meeting also focused on exploring commercial cooperation opportunities and how to utilize regional capacities within the framework of reviving the North-South Corridor. The representatives discussed ways to simplify customs procedures and reduce trade barriers to deepen the integration of road transport and facilitate transit with the goal of achieving the annual target of 15 million tons through the North-South Corridor. They exchanged views on the current state of border crossings. According to the report, the three parties also shared initiatives regarding the coordination of cross-border projects to diversify transport between the three countries and discussed joint proposals to upgrade border facilities, eliminate obstacles in corridor operations, develop transport routes to facilitate various cargo groupings, revive passenger transport capacities, and address scheduling considerations. In summarizing the meeting, the Deputy for Border Affairs at the Transit Office stated that the trilateral field visit demonstrated the commitment of Azerbaijan, Iran, and Russia to strengthening relations and increasing regional cooperation for the shared benefits of all parties within the framework of the North-South International Transport Corridor.

Hezbollah Publishes Drone Surveillance Footage of Key Israeli Sites in Haifa



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement has published video footage gathered from its surveillance aircraft of strategic locations in the northern part of the 1948 occupied territories, including sea and air ports in the city of Haifa.

The group flagged up distribution of the nine-minute 31 second-long footage, including on its Telegram channel, advising viewers on several channels to "watch and analyze important scenes", including the cryptic message that it shows the "hoopoe had brought back."

The decision to broadcast the footage, which included images of residential and military sites in and around Haifa, including port facilities, was apparently aimed at Israeli audience.

The footage underlines the mounting difficulties that the Israeli military has encountered in dealing with the drone capabilities of Hezbollah.

There has been no reaction from Israeli political or military authorities on Hezbollah's drone footage of Haifa yet. Nonetheless, it will surely be seen as a humiliating failure for Israel's aerial missile systems.

The development came on the same day that Hezbollah announced in a statement that it had carried out a large-scale airstrike against a military site in the Israeli-occupied lands.

IRAN NEWS



Iranian Digital Currency to Be Launched

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) says it is planning to introduce a digital currency (CBDC) to facilitate purchases for the clients of the banking network in the country.

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According to the CBI, a pilot version of its digital currency is ready to be rolled out on the island of Kish, southern Iran, after several years of work and studies on the program.

The CBI hopes the pilot platform could enable the bank to finally launch a digital form of Iran's national currency the rial. Iran's Mellat and Tejarat banks will contribute to the pilot project in Kish, which is to be launched in July.

2.4% Decrease in Unemployment Among Educated Individuals



TEHRAN - Seyed Solat Mortazavi, the Minister of Labor, in a joint press conference with the government spokesperson and the Minister of Health held at the Presidential Institution, discussed the actions taken by the Thirteenth Government in the welfare sector. He stated: "Significant achievements have been made by the Thirteenth Government, and these accomplishments will be highlighted." He added: "There were substantial debts to pharmacies and medical centers. With the President's emphasis, 200 trillion rials of social security debt were paid in bonds, and 200 trillion rials were converted to liquidity. For the first time in several decades, we can pay off the entire social security debt to medical centers and pharmacies." The Minister added: "More than 2.5 million job opportunities have been created nationwide by executive agencies in the Thirteenth Government. Despite the increase in the active population, the unemployment rate has decreased by 1.2%. For the first time in several decades, the unemployment rate has reached the 8% range and will fall below it."

Mortazavi said: "There has been a 2.4% decrease in the unemployment rate among higher education graduates since the beginning of the Thirteenth Government. The allocation and distribution of 2.8 trillion rials in employment facilities across various sectors, including industry, production, and services, to sustain rural employment and home-based jobs, a fourfold increase in interest-free loan payments, and the issuance of 115,000 home-based job loans are other actions taken by the Thirteenth Government. Immediate issuance of permits for over 95% of home-based job fields happened for the first time in the Thirteenth Government."



Iran's Monthly PMI Raises Concern About Industry Sector

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's new PMI data for the fiscal month of Ordibehesht (April 20 – May 20, 2024), released by the country's Chamber of Commerce, has raised concern about the industry sector.

The PMI data suggests that failing to allocate the currency needed for the purchase of raw materials as well as the new regulations for placing import orders can limit access to raw materials over the next months, affecting the industry sector and the improvement of economic conditions.

Iran's overall PMI was reported at 55.9 in the month under review which shows a significant month-on-month rise in the economic activities, while after seasonal adjustments, the PMI reading for this month was estimated at 50.7 which indicates a slight improvement in the Iranian economy.

The Statistics and Economic Analysis Center of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, the sponsor and coordinator of the survey, announces the whole economy PMI data in a report every month.

The headline PMI is a number from 0 to 100, such that over 50 shows an expansion of the economy when compared with the previous month. A PMI reading under 50 indicates contraction and a reading of 50 implies no change.

PMI is an index of the prevailing direction of economic trends, aiming to provide information about business conditions to company directors, analysts and purchasing managers.

The "business activity" sub-index was reported at 57.7 which shrank to 50.4 after seasonal adjustment. Although the New Year holidays of the previous month has come to an end, this index remained almost the same of the preceding month.

The "new orders" sub-index (46.8) also shows a relative decrease in demand compared to figures of the preceding month.

Average Annual Economic Growth Is 5.5% in

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Deputy Minister of Economic Policy of the Ministry of Economy, referring to the fact that the economic growth achieved in the Thirteenth Government has exceeded the predictions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), said: "In the last three years of the previous government, economic growth, including oil, was -2%, while in the first three years of the Thirteenth Government, it is 5.5% positive."

Seyed Ali Rouhani compared the economic indicators of the first three years of the Thirteenth Government with the last three years of the previous government and stated: "The main successes of the Thirteenth Government have been in the real economy sector, mainly in economic growth, poverty rate reduction, unemployment rate, and other statistics that can be mentioned."

He added: "In the last three years of the previous government, economic growth, including oil, was -2%, whereas in the first three years of the current government, the average economic growth was 5.5%."

The Deputy Minister of Economy continued: "The economic growth excluding oil in the last three years of the previous government was 1.1%, while the average economic growth in the first three years of the recent government was 4.7%. Also, the average unemployment rate in the last three years of the previous government was 10.8%, which has decreased to 8.8% in the first three years of the Thirteenth Government."

Rouhani stated: "Regarding the investment growth rate, which is a very important indicator and shows the potential for economic growth in the coming years, we had an unfavorable situation in this area during the 2010s; the average investment growth in the last three years of the previous government was -13.7%, meaning that the value of our investments was decreasing each year. However, we have moved away from this negative situation in the

Thirteenth Government and have achieved an average investment growth of 3.8%."

He emphasized: "Of course, these figures that have been achieved are certainly much less than the capacities that the Iranian economy has, and a series of actions that will be carried out in the next government, with the groundwork laid by the Thirteenth Government, will lead to increased growth rates."

Rouhani recalled: "Another indicator we can use to evaluate the economic performance of the Thirteenth Government is the comparison of economic performance with the forecasts of international organizations," referring to the reports of the IMF, and continued: "According to the IMF's economic outlook reports, the economic growth for 2021 was forecasted to be 2.5% and 3.2%, but the achieved growth in that year was 4.7%. For 2022, the economic growth was predicted to be 2% and 3%, but the reports of this fund indicate a growth of 3.8% in that year."

The Deputy Minister of Economy continued: "Also for 2023, the IMF's forecasts for economic growth were 2% and 3%, but according to the report published in April 2024, Iran witnessed an economic growth of 4.7% in 2023. Therefore, overall, it is observed that the economic growth achieved in the past three years has been more than the amount predicted by this organization."

He reminded: "According to the data published in the periodic reports of the IMF, the current account balance for 2021 was forecasted to be -3.4% and 1.3%, but the achieved number was 0.7%. For 2022, the current account balance was predicted to be 1% and 3.5%, but the reports of this fund indicate a growth of 4.2% in the current account balance in that year."

Rouhani emphasized: "For 2023, the IMF's forecasts were 1.5% and 3.4%, but according to the report published in April 2024, Iran witnessed a current account balance of 4.4% in 2023."

Rasht-Caspian Railway to Be Inaugurated This Week

Rasht-Caspian Railway to Be Inaugurated This Week

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Rasht-Caspian Railway Project in Iran's northern province of Gilan will be inaugurated on Thursday, June 20.

It will be launched in a ceremony to be attended by Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhber, Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash, Aide to the President of the Russian Federation Igor Levitin, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan Shahin Mustafayev, Governor of Astrakhan Oblast Igor Babushkin and the ambassadors of the neighboring countries.

The project will bring considerable benefits to Iran and regional transport networks. Upon operation of this rail project, which is part

of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the Persian Gulf will be connected to the Caspian Sea via rail, the website of Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD) reported.

The 37-kilometer Rasht-Caspian Railway completes the Qazvin-Rasht rail route and connects the city of Rasht to the Caspian Sea.

Located in the northern part of Iran, the primary purpose of the Rasht-Caspian Railway is to enhance connectivity to facilitate transportation and trade links between Iran and the Caspian Sea region northward and to the railway network southward. It provides a more efficient and cost-effective mode of transportation for freight and passengers.



Iran's Domestic Wheat Purchase at Over \$1.3b Since April



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has purchased some 4.4 million tons of wheat at the worth of over \$1.3 billion from domestic producers since April in carrying out a national plan which guarantees the purchase of domestic production of the crop.

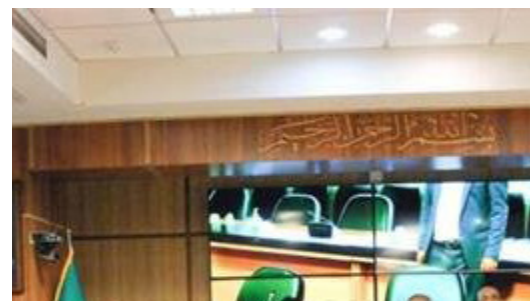
Alireza Mohajer, a senior official with the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad (MAJ) said on Sunday that the figure is 200,000 tons more than that of last year's corresponding period.

He added that the government has paid over \$500 million to the farmers and the rest sum will be gradually paid to them.

The official noted that the wheat harvest is underway in 25 provinces and will continue until late September.

The southwestern province of Khuzestan has been the number one province in the supply of wheat with a 1.6 million tons of supply, followed by the provinces of Golestan, Fars and Ilam which ranked second to fourth respectively, the official said, adding that with the beginning of harvest in the temperate provinces, the rankings will change, except for Khuzestan province which is expected to keep it first place.

Tehran, Seoul Exchange Experiences in Urban Regeneration



TEHRAN (MNA) – Within the cooperation framework of the UN-Habitat, Tehran and Seoul shared experiences regarding their approaches to urban regeneration with the centrality of community and neighborhood.

Within the cooperation framework of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) for knowledge-sharing and exchange of experiences, Tehran and Seoul discussed their own experiences in urban regeneration with the centrality of community-based planning at Iran's Urban Regeneration Corporation on June 10, 2024. The session was dedicated to the experiences of South Korea in urban regeneration by the Counsellor of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Tehran, Dr. Ki Bum Park, through his book titled "Answer is in the Neighborhood". Iran Deputy Minister and Managing Director of Urban Regeneration Corporation, Mohammad Aeeni, members of the board of directors of the Corporation, the acting head of the UN-Habitat office in Tehran, the secretary of the National Habitat Committee (NHC), and other experts, urban facilitators, and actors attended the meeting. Presenting his book at the beginning of this meeting, Dr. Park explained the urban regeneration approach in Seoul for the development of middle housing as well as architectural solutions to provide greater accessibility in the neighborhoods. This is considered a paradigm shift in Seoul's policies from the high-rise building to middle housing in an attempt to rediscover the value of the neighborhood and bring diversity in the community. Explaining Iran's approach to urban regeneration, Aeeni stated that Iran is following a similar path as it advances community-based planning and reviving the identity of the neighborhoods in the process of renovation of dilapidated (old) urban areas through the participation of people and the least intervention of government.

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.



Swedish MPs Adopt U.S. Defense Deal Amid Nuclear Fears



STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Swedish lawmakers adopted a controversial defense deal with the United States, which critics fear could lead to the deployment of nuclear weapons and permanent US bases in the country.

The Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) is a major step for a nation that in March ended two centuries of military non-alliance to join NATO.

Signed by Stockholm and Washington in December, the deal gives the US access to 17 military bases and training areas in Sweden, and allows the storage of weapons, military equipment and ammunition.

The agreement was approved by a broad majority in parliament following an almost five-hour debate, with 266 MPs voting in favor and 37 against, while 46 were absent.

The main opponents, the Left and Green parties, had argued that the agreement ought to state outright that the Scandinavian country would not allow nuclear weapons on its territory.

"We want to see legislation that bans nuclear weapons from being brought onto Swedish soil," Green Party MP Emma Berginger told parliament during Tuesday's debate.

"Unfortunately, the government has chosen to sign an agreement that doesn't close the door to nuclear weapons, and therefore the Green Party is going to vote no to this agreement," she told said during the debate.

Greens leader Daniel Hellden had argued Monday that the agreement made Sweden "a target for nuclear weapons" since "we're going to have 17 bases where the Americans can store (military) materiel".

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's center-right minority government, propped up by the far-right Sweden Democrats, has said the deal respects Swedish sovereignty.



Taiwan Will Not Bow to China's Pressure

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te said Wednesday that China was attempting to force Taiwan into submission but the self-ruled island would not bow to pressure.

China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has said it will never renounce the use of force to bring it under Beijing's control.

In recent years, Beijing has upped military and political pressure on the Taipei government, with the latest show of force coming three days after Lai's inauguration, when China conducted war games around the island. Speaking at a press conference Wednesday to mark his first month in office, Lai said: "The annexation of Taiwan is a national policy of the People's Republic of China." "In addition to military force, they have increasingly employed non-traditional methods of coercion to try to force Taiwan into submission," he said. "However, Taiwan will not bow to the pressure. The people of Taiwan will resolutely defend national sovereignty and uphold the democratic and free constitutional way of life." China had said the war games — launched days after Lai's May 20 inauguration — were "punishment" for Lai's inaugural speech, which Beijing dubbed a "confession of Taiwan independence".



Putin, Kim Embrace in North Korea, Vow New Multipolar World

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un embraced Russian Vladimir Putin on his arrival at Pyongyang's airport on Wednesday, and the two leaders shared their "pent-up inmost thoughts" and agreed to develop their nations' relations, North Korean state media said.

Putin, who arrived before dawn, is on his first trip to the North Korean capital in 24 years, a visit likely to reshape decades of Russia-North Korea relations at a time when both countries face international isolation.

The countries' partnership is an "engine for accelerating the building of a new multi-polar world" and Putin's visit demonstrates the invincibility and durability of their friendship and unity, North Korea's state news agency KCNA said.

Russia has used its warming ties with North Korea to needle Washington, while heavily sanctioned North Korea has won political backing and promises of economic support and trade from Moscow.

The United States and its allies say they fear Russia could provide aid for North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, which are banned by U.N. Security Council resolutions, and have accused Pyongyang of providing ballistic missiles and artillery shells that Russia has used in its war in Ukraine.

Moscow and Pyongyang have denied weapons transfers.

Kim greeted Putin, shaking hands, embracing and talking beside the Russian leader's plane. The pair then rode in Putin's Russian-made Aurus limousine to the Kumsusan State Guest House.

Likely given the hour, the welcome was a relatively subdued affair, with Kim greeting the Russian leader on the red carpet without the grand ceremony the North put on for Chinese President Xi Jinping on his 2019 visit.

"Passing through charmingly lit streets of Pyongyang at night, the top leaders exchanged their pent-up inmost thoughts and opened their minds to more surely develop the DPRK-Russia relations," KCNA reported, using the initials of North Korea's official name.

State media photos showed streets of Pyongyang lined with portraits of Putin and the facade of the

unfinished and vacant 101-story pyramid-shaped Ryugyong Hotel brightly lit with a giant message "Welcome Putin."

Wednesday's agenda includes one-on-one discussions between the two leaders, as well as a gala concert, state reception, honour guards, document signings and a statement to the media, Russia's Interfax news agency quoted Putin's foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov as saying.

In a signal that Russia, a veto-wielding member of the U.N. Security Council, is reassessing its approach to North Korea, Putin praised Pyongyang ahead of his arrival for resisting what he said was U.S. economic pressure, blackmail and threats.

In an article on the front page of North Korea's main ruling party newspaper, he promised to "develop alternative trade and mutual settlement mechanisms not controlled by the West" and "build an equal and indivisible security architecture in Eurasia."

Putin's article implies that there is an opportunity for North Korea's economic growth within an anti-West economic bloc led by Russia, which is a message that is likely appealing to Kim Jong Un, wrote Rachel Minyoung Lee, an analyst with the 38 North programme in Washington.

"If Pyongyang views Russia as a viable longer-term partner for improving its economy - as irrational as this may seem to some - there is even less of an incentive for it to try to improve relations with the United States," she said in a report.

Putin also issued a presidential order on the eve of the visit saying Moscow was looking to sign a "comprehensive strategic partnership treaty" with North Korea. Ushakov said it would include security issues.

Ushakov said the deal would not be directed against any other country, but would "outline prospects for further cooperation".

Israel, Lebanon Escalate Rhetoric as U.S. Tries to Prevent War

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz warned that a decision on an all-out war with Hezbollah was coming soon, even as the United States tries to avert any escalation.

U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein was sent to Lebanon to try and cool tensions following an increase in cross-border fire along Lebanon's southern frontier that has escalated to Hezbollah hinting it could attack Haifa, Israel's third-largest city.

Hezbollah has been trading fire with Israel for the last eight months in parallel with the Gaza war. Last week, the group fired the largest volleys of rockets and drones of the hostilities so far at Israeli military sites, after an Israeli strike killed the most senior commander yet.

Katz said in an X post that in the wake of threats by Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the group's head, to damage Haifa's ports that are operated by Chinese and Indian companies, "we are getting very close to the moment of deciding on changing the rules of the game against Hezbollah and Lebanon". "In an all-out war, Hezbollah will be destroyed and Lebanon will be severely beaten," he added.

Israel's military later said "operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon were approved and validated, and decisions were taken on the continuation of increasing the readiness of troops in the field". Israel, Katz said, would pay a heavy price but the country was united and it must restore security to the residents of the north. Hezbollah says it will not halt its attacks unless there is a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. A Pentagon spokesperson said the United States did not want to see a wider regional war in the Middle East. Hochstein, special envoy to U.S. President Joe Biden, said he had been dispatched to Lebanon immediately following a brief trip to Israel because the situation was "serious". "We have seen an escalation over the last few weeks. And what President Biden wants to do is avoid a further escalation to a greater war," Hochstein said on Tuesday.

He had met the head of Lebanon's army earlier on Tuesday and spoke to reporters following a meeting with parliament speaker Nabih Berri, who heads the armed Amal movement, which is allied

to Hezbollah and has also fired rockets on Israel. The U.S. and France are engaged in diplomatic efforts to secure a negotiated end to the hostilities along Lebanon's border.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah published a 9-minute 31 second video of what it said was footage gathered from its surveillance aircraft of locations in Israel, including the city of Haifa's sea and air ports. Haifa is 27 km (17 miles) from the Lebanese border.

Haifa mayor Yona Yahav said Hezbollah's video was "psychological terror on residents of Haifa and the north". "Whether diplomatically or militarily one way or another, we will ensure the safe and secure return of Israelis to their homes in northern Israel. That is not up for negotiation. Oct. 7 cannot happen again anywhere in Israel or on any of Israel's borders," Israeli government spokesman David Mencer said.

He added that Israel was "impeding Hezbollah's military buildup and their stockpiling of weapons for terror against Israelis". Hezbollah began trading fire with Israel on Oct. 8, a day after its Palestinian ally Hamas attacked southern Israel, sparking the Gaza war. Tens of thousands of people have fled both sides of the border.

Hochstein urged Hamas to accept a U.S.-backed proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza, which he said "also provides an opportunity to end the conflict across the Blue Line", a reference to a demarcation line between Lebanon and Israel where parts of the international border are disputed.

Hochstein met caretaker Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who told him that "Lebanon does not seek escalation", according to comments issued by Mikati's office.

The increase in attacks last week was followed by a brief respite during the Eid al-Adha Muslim holiday, which concludes on Tuesday. Hezbollah announced a drone attack against an Israeli tank on Tuesday afternoon - its first announced attack since Saturday. An Israeli spokesperson said Israel on Tuesday targeted a Hezbollah air unit.

The group used more of its extensive arsenal against Israel last week, prompting United Nations officials in Lebanon to warn over the weekend that the "danger of miscalculation leading to a sudden and wider conflict is very real".



Dutch PM Rutte to Succeed Stoltenberg as NATO Chief

AMSTERDAM (Dispatches) - Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, a staunch ally of Kyiv and a critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, will succeed Jens Stoltenberg as NATO chief, Dutch national broadcaster NOS reported on Tuesday, after Hungary and Slovakia backed him.

Speaking at a news conference alongside U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington, Stoltenberg neither confirmed nor denied the media report. "With the announcement of (Hungarian) Prime Minister (Viktor) Orban, I think it's obvious that we are very close to a conclusion ... to select the next secretary-general, and I think that's good news," he told reporters, while praising Rutte.

"I think Mark is a very strong candidate. He has a lot of experience as prime minister. He's a close friend and colleague, and I therefore strongly believe that very soon, the alliance will have decided on my successor," he said. "And that will be good for all of us, for NATO and also for me." NATO's next secretary-general will face the challenge of sustaining allies' support for Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion,



while guarding against any escalation that could draw the military alliance directly into a war with Moscow. In the two years since Russia launched its full-scale invasion, Rutte has been one of the driving forces behind Europe's military support to Ukraine, stressing time and again what he said was the absolute need for a Russian battlefield defeat to secure peace in Europe. Under his recent leadership, the Netherlands has ramped up defence spending above the 2% threshold of GDP required of NATO members, providing F-16 fighter jets, artillery, drones and ammunition to Kyiv as well as investing heavily in its own military. Rutte's support for Ukraine is underscored by his criticism of Russia and its President Vladimir Putin, as the Netherlands holds Russia accountable for the downing of passenger flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine in July 2014 - which killed all 298 passengers and crew, 196 of them from the Netherlands. Hours before the NOS report, Hungary and Slovakia had given their support to the candidacy of Rutte, clearing a crucial hurdle on his way to NATO's top job.



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal beat the Czech Republic 2-1 to claim a Euro 2024 debut victory but they needed to come from behind with a 92nd-minute winner from youngster Francisco Conceicao.

Earlier in the section's other clash, Turkey bested Georgia 3-1 in a pulsating match in Dortmund.

Roberto Martinez's Portugal qualified at a canter with a 100 percent record, but only just scraped victory in Leipzig in their first match, under driving rain.

Ronaldo played at a record-extending sixth European Championship and 41-year-old defender Pepe became the tournament's oldest ever player for the Selecao.

The Czechs went ahead against the run of play through Lukas Provod's fine strike from the edge of the box after the hour mark, but Robin Hranac's own goal soon pulled Portugal level before Conceicao's winner.

"We want to do more, but there was also a lot of emotion, a lot of desire and sometimes we failed to pull off the strategic plan," said Portugal midfielder Vitorinha, awarded player of the match.

"We wanted to come out strong, show our strength and unfortunately we conceded the goal first, on the Czech Republic's first opportunity.

"We showed all our coolness and resilience."

Portugal supporters chanted Ronaldo's name and imitated his "Suuuui" celebration shout as they marched to the game waving flags and in high spirits despite a brief but intense thunderstorm.

Around 8,000 fans attended Portugal's open training session on Saturday, many of whom were just hoping for a glimpse of the 39-year-old former Real Madrid striker.

Thousands of fans sported replica Ronaldo shirts at the match but were unable to watch the all-time record Euros goalscorer find the net on a frustrating night against a solid Czech side.

Ronaldo was thrice denied by goalkeeper Jindrich Stanek on a record Euros appearance and headed against the post, but was offside.

Diogo Jota put the rebound into the net but the goal was disallowed after VAR highlighted Al Nassr striker Ronaldo's infringement.

It did not matter for Portugal in the end as 21-year-old Porto winger Conceicao, son of former Portugal international Sergio Conceicao, struck from close range.

"Francisco is the ultimate example of earning it, he deserves to be here and showed he is ready to help the group," Martinez told reporters.

The former Wigan and Everton coach defended his team's performance.

Alcaraz Hoping to Learn From Nadal at Paris Games



LONDON (Dispatches) - World number two Carlos Alcaraz said he is looking forward to learning from 22-times Grand Slam champion Rafa Nadal when they pair up in the doubles at the Paris Olympics.

Three-times Grand Slam champion Alcaraz, 21, will return to Roland Garros for the singles and doubles at the Games after being crowned French Open champion there earlier this month.

Nadal won Olympic singles gold in 2008 and a doubles gold in 2016. The 38-year-old will be playing at the Games for a third time.

"I didn't expect to play doubles at the Olympic Games with Rafa," Alcaraz told reporters on Monday. "It is a unique moment for me but of course I am very happy about it. Let's see how it's going to be but it's going to be a great time.

"Honestly, I feel he is going to teach me how to deal with everything. I am the young guy who needs to grow up as a player, to grow up as a person as well.

"Of course it's going to be my first Olympic Games. Everything is new for me, so I hope to learn a lot from him."

Nadal is skipping Wimbledon in July in order to prepare for the Olympics while Alcaraz returns to action at the Queen's Club Championships in London later on Tuesday before starting his title defence at Wimbledon next month.

The Olympic tennis tournament runs from July 27 to Aug. 4.

Murray Wins at Queen's in 1,000th Professional Match



LONDON (Dispatches) - Former world number one Andy Murray celebrated his 1,000th tour-level singles match by beating Alexei Popyrin 6-3 3-6 6-3 to reach the second round at the Queen's Club Championships.

The 37-year-old, the only Briton to win a title at Wimbledon in the Open era, had considered retiring in early 2019 due to his struggles with a hip injury but resumed playing after undergoing surgeries.

Playing in front of home fans and with his mother Judy watching, the Briton suffered a blip in the second set when Popyrin served well to force a decider before Murray romped to his 739th win with a volley at the net on match point.

It was also Murray's first win on the Tour since the Miami Open in March as he seeks a sixth title at Queen's despite being a wildcard entry this year.

"I didn't realise, my mum told me it's my 1,000th match on tour. A lot of matches and a lot of wear and tear on the body. It's not easy, but I'm pushing through it," Murray said.

"I haven't gotten too many wins this year. It's been a difficult season, but I did well to come through in the end.

"Any win you can get is important, that's why we're playing. To try and win matches. With Wimbledon a few weeks away, I want to try and build up confidence and get some matches in my legs."

Murray, a two-time champion at Wimbledon, has not moved past the third round at the All England Club in the last three years. At Queen's he will next face Australia's Jordan Thompson.

Reigning Wimbledon champion and Queen's top seed Carlos Alcaraz breezed into the next round with a 6-1 7-5 victory over Francisco Cerundolo, but second seed Alex de Minaur was upset 1-6 6-4 6-2 by Italy's Lorenzo Musetti. Meanwhile Novak Djokovic will compete at this year's Olympic Games in Paris, the Olympic Committee of Serbia has announced. The 24-times Grand Slam winner will be attending his fifth Olympics since his first in 2008 when he won a bronze medal. The 37-year-old had knee surgery last month after he was forced to pull out of the French Open with an injury sustained in a fourth-round win that cast doubt over his chances of playing at Wimbledon and at the Paris Games.

Jayson Tatum, Celtics Put Away Mavs for Record 18th Title

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - One of the first people to congratulate Boston Celtics star Jayson Tatum on winning the NBA championship was his 6-year-old son.

"He told me that I was the best in the world," Tatum said. "I said, 'You're damn right I am.'"

Tatum certainly looked like it on Monday night, recording 31 points and 11 assists as Boston locked up its league-record 18th title with a 106-88 blowout of the Dallas Mavericks in Game 5 of the NBA Finals.

Tatum also had eight rebounds while Jaylen Brown added 21 points, eight boards and six assists for Boston, which celebrated the 16th anniversary of its 17th title by completing a 16-3 playoff run.

The Celtics knocked off the Los Angeles Lakers in the 2008 Finals, and those two franchises shared the NBA record with 17 championships apiece entering



Monday.

Brown was selected the Finals MVP, an award named after Celtics legend Bill Russell, after averaging 20.8 points, 5.4 rebounds and five assists. Brown admired Russell, making the honor all the more special.

"I can't even put it into words," Brown said. "Just Bill Russell and what he's meant for me through my Boston journey, and his spirit. You know, everything that he stood for, just for this to be the Bill Russell MVP Award. ... I don't even know what to say. It's unreal."

Jrue Holiday had 15 points and 11 rebounds and Derrick White chipped in 14 points as Boston bounced back from a 122-84 loss to wrap up the best-of-seven series.

"We did it together," Holiday said. "I hope that when people watch us play, they see the joy that we play with, that we love playing together, and we got it done together. I feel like that's the most important thing."

Sinner Rallies in Halle

HALLE (Dispatches) - World No. 1 Jannik Sinner of Italy needed three sets to overcome Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands 6-7 (8), 6-3, 6-2 in the first round of the Terra Wortmann Open on Tuesday in Halle, Germany.

Sinner hit 15 aces to Griekspoor's 11 and saved all four break points he faced while going 3-for-4 on opportunities to break his opponent's serve.

No. 2 seed Alexander Zverev of Germany also had to rally to beat countryman Oscar Otte 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4. No. 4 seed Andrey Rublev of Russia wasn't as fortunate, falling to Marcos Giron 6-4, 7-6 (5).

No. 6 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece survived a pair of tiebreakers, saving a set point in the first set, to defeat German wild card Henri Squire 7-6 (7), 7-6 (2). No. 7 seed Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan, Christopher Eubanks, Arthur Fils of France and Australian qualifier James Duckworth also won in straight sets.

No. 1 seed Carlos Alcaraz of Spain advanced while three seeded players were shown the door in opening-round action in London.

Alcaraz won 13 of 15 net points while defeating Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina 6-1, 7-5. Italy's Lorenzo Musetti stunned Australian No. 2 seed Alex de Minaur 1-6, 6-4, 6-2, finishing with a 7-0 edge in aces and saving 8 of 12 break points along the way.

French qualifier Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard ousted No. 6 Ben Shelton 6-3, 7-6 (3), and Italy's Matteo Arnaldi defeated No. 8 Ugo Humbert of France 3-6, 6-1, 7-6 (6), saving a match point down 6-5 in the third-set tiebreaker before completing the



upset.

In the draw as a wild card, Andy Murray of Great Britain fought past Australian qualifier Alexei Popyrin 6-3, 3-6, 6-3. Other winners Tuesday included No. 4 seed Taylor Fritz, No. 5 seed Tommy Paul, Sebastian Korda, Brandon Nakashima, Brits Jack Draper and Billy Harris and Chile's Alejandro Tabilo.

Meanwhile, seeded Qinwen Zheng of China fired 23 aces to take down Japan's Naomi Osaka 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 in the first round at the ecotrans Ladies Open in Berlin.

The 23 aces are the most in any match on the WTA tour since Canada's Rebecca Marino had 24 against France's Caroline Garcia in 2022 in Guadalajara, Mexico. Zheng also saved three of four break points and took advantage of 30 unforced errors by the four-time Grand Slam champion.

Before rain halted play, Victoria Azarenka of Belarus ousted No. 7 seed Maria Sakkari of Greece 6-4, 6-2. Also moving on to the second round were Russia's Veronika Kudermetova and Ekaterina Alexandrova, Czech Linda Noskova and Croatia's Donna Vekic.

Caroline Wozniacki's first match on grass since 2019 ended with a 6-4, 6-1 loss to No. 5 seed Elise Mertens of Belgium in Birmingham, England.