

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami Says Iran Has Been Able to Successfully Withstand the Pressure Campaigns of the “Satanic Powers” Over the Past Four Decades

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Said the Transit of Goods From the Country Increased 55% in the First Quarter of the Current Iranian Calendar Year Compared to the Same Period Last Year

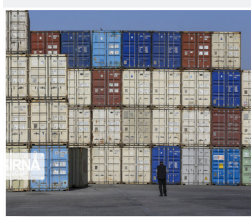
VOL. XXIX, No. 8014 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SATURDAY JUNE 22, 2024 TIR 2, 1403

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DOMESTIC



Growth in Iran-US Trade Amid Thwarting Sanctions

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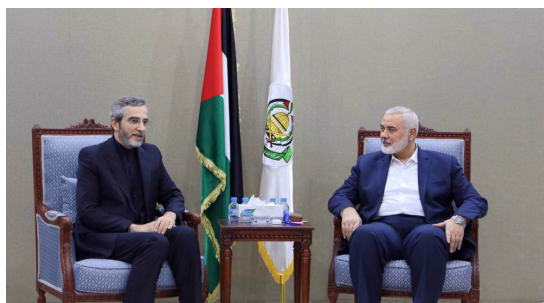
INTERNATIONAL

Israel-Hezbollah Hostilities Fan Fears of Widening Gaza War



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Resistance Must Make Israel Pay Heavier Price for Aggression



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Interim Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani says Palestinian resistance groups must make use of their entire capacities to force Israel to pay a heavier price for its aggression in the Gaza Strip.

Bagheri Kani made the remarks in a meeting with senior leader of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas Ismail Haniyeh in the Qatari capital Doha on Thursday.

He said resistance should not be limited to armed resistance inside Palestine against the occupying forces.

In parallel with armed resistance, he added, resistance needs to be exercised in the legal and political domains as well as in public diplomacy outside the occupied Palestine to support the Palestinian people's rights.

The top Iranian diplomat hailed Palestinians' brave resistance and outlined the Islamic Republic's latest political efforts to support resistance.

Haniyeh, for his part, thanked the support provided to his nation by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei as well as the Iranian nation and government.

He said the Palestinian people continue their strong resistance against Israel despite the continuation of the regime's brutal crimes and genocide in the Gaza Strip over the past nine months.

He added that a number of developments in the region and across the world indicate the "strategic maturity" of regional nations and the impossibility of returning to the era before Operation al-Aqsa Storm launched by Gaza-based resistance groups last October.

The Hamas leader noted that among those developments are Israel's internal political situation, its position at regional and international levels, the rise of the voice of people in the West and the US against the crimes of the occupiers as well as the field developments in Lebanon and Yemen.

Nearly nine months into extensive military aggression and genocide against the people of Palestine in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli forces has failed to achieve any objective, Haniyeh emphasized.

BRICS Prosecutors Call for Joint Fight Against Money Laundering, Terrorism



MOSCOW (IRNA) - Attorney Generals of BRICS member states during their sixth meeting in Russia have emphasized the need to jointly fight against money laundering and terrorism.

The meeting was held with the participation of representatives of the Prosecutor General's Offices of Iran, Russia, China, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Brazil, India and Ethiopia in St. Petersburg on Wednesday.

In this meeting, the Iranian representative, while honoring martyred President Ebrahim Raisi said that Iran's membership in BRICS was the result of a period of dynamic diplomacy, which emphasized the policy of regional cooperation and multilateralism in the changing world order.

Iran's Prosecutor General Mohammad Movahhedi-Azad underlined that within the framework of the same policy, the aggression of the Zionist regime against the oppressed people in Gaza "is considered a threat to world peace and security".

Referring to the BRICS meeting regarding the role of modern technologies in the prevention and control of crimes, especially in the digital space, he said that on the one hand, modern technologies have contributed to the well-being of human societies, and on the other, they have provided opportunities for abuse by criminals. "Terrorism and recruitment of terrorists, hidden financial exchanges and money laundering and cyber-attacks are among the common challenges that require solutions and collective technical and legal assistance from governments to create a secure structure to protect the rights of their citizens", he added. In the final statement, chief justices of BRICS member states pointed to the essential role of digital solutions in supporting the rule of law and fighting crime, the sharing of best practices in the development and introduction of digital solutions, the need for advanced training of members, the fight against the use of information and communication technology for terrorism purposes, and combating corruption and crimes in accordance with domestic laws.



Rasht-Caspian Railway Line Inaugurated

TEHRAN - The Rasht-Caspian railway line was inaugurated on Thursday morning in a ceremony attended by Mohammad Mokhber, Acting President, his accompanying delegation, and Igor Levitin, Putin's Special Assistant. The Rasht-Caspian railway, stretching 37 kilometers and built with an investment exceeding 35 trillion rials, is valued at over 60 trillion rials today. This railway project is the final segment of the Sea-to-Sea Rail Corridor, connecting the southern ports of the country to the northern ports in Gilan province, enabling the exchange of combined cargo through Iran for the region. The project, which is the last piece of the North-South Corridor puzzle, was inaugurated despite the notable absence of Ayatollah Seyed Ebrahim Raisi, a significant figure in this national event. The inauguration of the Rasht-Caspian railway project, long-awaited by the people of Gilan, can tie the livelihood and economy of the province and even the country to an international standard "rail economy." Given its national and international strategic importance, the Rasht-Caspian railway project can transform trade in the country and the Middle East region. Data shows that the construction of the Rasht-Caspian railway project started in 2006 but only progressed by 3% over a 13-year period until 2019. Most of the work commenced in 2019. The project languished with only 3% progress for 13 years, and the "Prudence and Hope" government did not revive hopes for its completion. However, with the advent of the Thirteenth Popular Government, the execution of the Rasht-Caspian railway project, alongside other unfinished projects inherited from previous governments, gained momentum, culminating in its inauguration with the presence of high-ranking Iranian and Russian officials. The Rasht-Caspian railway inauguration paves the way for developing relations between Eurasian members and the southern Gulf countries, marking a significant milestone in achieving the general policies of the resilient economy in free zones. With the sound of the Rasht-Caspian train whistle in Gilan, we witness the connection of Iran's northern and southern seas. This can remedy Gilan's struggling economy through commercial relations, cargo transit, and the export of fisheries and agricultural products. This project benefits not only Gilan but also rescues Iran from economic constraints, sanctions, and the psychological pressures of economic and livelihood challenges. Moreover, this project heals the significant economic wounds of Caspian, Eurasian neighbors, and distant European friends. The Acting President referred to the sea-to-sea connection via the Rasht-Caspian railway, stating that the completion of the North-South Corridor and the Rasht-Caspian rail link is a legacy of the Martyr of the Republic. Mohammad Mokhber, on Thursday at the inauguration ceremony of the Rasht-Caspian railway project in the Anzali Free Zone, emphasized that the personality of Martyr Ayatollah Raisi should be examined and explained. The Acting President, expressing that we lost a prominent revolutionary figure, said Martyr Ayatollah Raisi had a revolutionary, spiritual, and Vilayi character. Mokhber added that Martyr Raisi was devoted

to the leadership and never faltered in following the Supreme Leader's directives, moving in line with the Leader's views. He highlighted Martyr Raisi's efforts and services in various sectors, stating that with wise management in the Thirteenth Government, he rescued the country from economic deadlock. The Minister of Roads and Urban Development announced a 70% growth in road transit in the first three months of the year, claiming a revolution in transit, especially in the maritime and road sectors. Mehرداد Bazpash, at the Rasht-Caspian railway project inauguration ceremony in the Anzali Free Zone on Thursday noon, noted that Ayatollah Martyr Raisi persistently pursued the completion and implementation of the Rasht-Caspian railway project. The Minister of Roads and Urban Development emphasized that Martyr Raisi's efforts will be remembered for years, and the Thirteenth Government's services in various sectors are memorable. Bazpash stated that effective diplomacy is not just about claims and boasts, noting a 55% growth in national transit, which is rapidly increasing. The 37-kilometer Rasht-Caspian railway (Rasht to Pibazar: 25.3 kilometers, 9.7 kilometers to the Caspian Port, and 2 kilometers within the Anzali Free Zone), which was initially scheduled to be inaugurated during the President's second provincial trip, and had its acceleration and completion constantly emphasized, was officially put into operation today in memory of the esteemed martyred president and by the Acting President, entering into service for the nation. The Deputy Minister and CEO of the National Company for Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure stated that this railway line is the last segment of the North-South maritime corridor and the missing link of this corridor that has now been completed. Khairallah Khademi added that the 37-kilometer railway line and 40 kilometers of track were completed in May, with a maximum freight capacity of seven million tons and a passenger capacity of 600,000 people. Due to the lower passenger demand, the line can handle up to ten million tons of freight. He mentioned that one branch of this railway extends to the Anzali Port and another to the Astara Port, connecting to the national rail network. This line serves as a comprehensive rail-sea corridor from Russia and Finland in northern Europe, spanning 13,000 kilometers through the Islamic Republic of Iran to reach the Port of Mumbai. Khademi said that the Rasht-Caspian railway is part of an international transportation project, and with its inauguration, goods from East Asia and India will be transferred to the Caspian Sea and then to the Russian port of Astrakhan. He noted that this route reduces the travel time from 45 days to 25 days compared to the current route through the Suez Canal and cuts costs by up to 30%.

The total length of this railway line, which is the endpoint of the South-North corridor, connects the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea. It has a passenger capacity of 300,000 and, in its first year, can transport three million tons of goods, which can increase to seven million tons in subsequent years.

Canada's Blacklisting of IRGC Mindless Gift to Israel, Terrorists



TEHRAN - Iran's interim Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani has denounced the Canadian government's decision to blacklist the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), describing it as a senseless gift to the bloodthirsty Israeli regime, terrorists and enemies of peace and stability in West Asia.

"Canada's unlawful act of declaring an integral part of the official military force of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has played an irreplaceable role in defending the national security and territorial integrity of dear Iran, and protecting the security and stability of the region and confronting the terrorism by Daesh, was malicious and violates the principles and rules of international law," Bagheri Kani wrote in a post published on the social media platform X on Thursday. The Iranian official added that it was "a mindless gift to the bloodthirsty regime, terrorists and other enemies of peace and stability in the region." Bagheri Kani said the Canadian government will be held accountable for the consequences of the provocative and irresponsible decision. "May all enemies be afraid of you! May the hearts of the wicked ones be cut in half!" the interim Iranian foreign minister stated. In a hostile move against Iran, Canada's Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc Ottawa on Wednesday listed the IRGC as a "terrorist entity" under the Criminal Code and called on Canadians in Iran to leave. Last month, the Canadian House of Commons adopted a non-binding resolution calling on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government to blacklist the IRGC and expel an estimated 700 Iranians. Canada broke off diplomatic ties with Iran and closed its Tehran embassy in a surprise move in 2012, citing various reasons, including Iran's support for Syria, its nuclear work, and alleged threats

to the Israeli regime. In the same year, however, Ottawa took off the anti-Iran terrorist Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) from its list of terrorist organizations. In 2022, Iran's Foreign Ministry imposed sanctions on eight Canadian officials and one institution over their support for anti-Iran terrorists and acts of terror among other things.

Meanwhile Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the Italian ambassador to Tehran in protest at the Canadian government's decision to blacklist the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and designate it as a so-called "terrorist" entity. Paola Amadei, whose country represents the Canadian interests in the Islamic Republic, was called in on Thursday by the Director-General for Americas at the Foreign Ministry. The 59-year-old Italian diplomat received Tehran's strong protest over Ottawa's unlawful action that contracts the rules of international law and was warned about the repercussions of such a move. The Iranian diplomat also underscored the Islamic Republic's right to take necessary measures and reciprocal actions. The Italian ambassador indicated that she would bring the matter to Canadian officials as quickly as possible. Meanwhile Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani on Thursday denounced the "political, unconventional and unwise" move by the Canadian government against the IRGC. He said Iran reserves the right to reciprocate with a "proper" response Canada's unlawful act to designate the country's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "terrorist organization." "The reprehensible move of the Canadian government against the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps will have no impact on [the force] generating legitimate and deterrent power," he said.

Iran Rejects U.S. Claims Regarding Yemen



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations has dismissed a recent U.S. accusation regarding Yemen, stressing that the Islamic Republic has invariably been espousing a peaceful solution to the long-standing crisis in Yemen through diplomatic channels.

Amir Sa'ed Iravani made the statement in separate letters to the UN secretary general and the president of the Security Council on Wednesday as he outlined Iran's stance on the ongoing situation in war-torn Yemen and responded to US allegations about the Islamic Republic's aid to the Yemeni armed forces in their anti-Israel maritime operations.

Robert Wood, the US representative at the UN, claimed during the open session of the Security Council on June 13 that Iran "continues to directly support" the Yemeni forces in the Red Sea region and accused Tehran of "brazen violations of the arms embargo" on the Arab country.

It is regrettable that "the US representative, as is the US' typical behavior, abused the Security Council platform to accuse other sovereign states. The Islamic Republic of Iran unequivocally rejects these unfounded allegations," Iravani wrote in his letters. "On numerous occasions, Iran has made it clear that it is committed to the Security Council's relevant resolutions on the situation in Yemen and has not been engaged in activities in contravention of these resolutions. Instead, Iran consistently advocates for the peaceful resolution of the Yemen crisis through diplomatic channels and underscores its dedication to maritime security and freedom of navigation," he added.

The Iranian envoy censured Washington and its coalition partners for perpetrating acts of aggression against Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"The United States and its coalition partners have committed and continue to commit acts of aggression against Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity, blatantly violating international law, the UN Charter, and pertinent Security Council resolutions," Iravani said.

"These egregious violations jeopardize regional peace and stability and obstruct efforts toward achieving a peaceful resolution in Yemen, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian crisis gripping the nation."

Iran Calls for Electricity Swap Among Regional Countries



TEHRAN (IRNA) - On the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting in Kazakhstan, Iranian Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian voiced the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to export technical and engineering services, as well as supply equipment in the energy sector.

The Iranian energy minister pointed out that connecting the electricity grid of Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan and then Iran will enable the exchange of electricity for the countries of the region, especially during the peak consumption period of summer and winter.

On Thursday, on the sidelines of the fourth meeting of the energy ministers of the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in a meeting with Mahmoud Jurabek, the Minister of Energy of Uzbekistan, Mehrabian expressed his readiness to expand cooperation between the two countries, while thanking the president of that country for his efforts in bilateral cooperation in the field of energy.

He voiced the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop cooperation, especially in the field of exporting technical and engineering services, as well as supplying energy field equipment to Uzbekistan.

Stating that Uzbekistan has a growing economy, the Mehrabian mentioned energy as the most important issue of development in this country.

IRAN NEWS



55% Growth in Country's Transit in Q1

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Mehرداد Bazrpash, the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, in response to a question during a press briefing on the sidelines of the Cabinet meeting Wednesday, stated that success is shown by indicators and figures. He said: "Transit in the first quarter of this year has grown by 55% compared to the first quarter of last year."

He added: "This statistic becomes significant when we know that transit in the year 1402 (March 2023 - March 2024) also grew by 58% compared to the year 1401 (March 2022 - March 2023)."

The Minister of Roads and Urban Development continued: "The available statistics indicate that the growth in transit is continuing, and we hope to set an unprecedented record in the country's transit."

Bazrpash also stated: "The growth rate of road transit in these 3 months has been 69%, which is an unprecedented figure in road transit."

Iran-China Trade Reaches \$6b in 5 Months



TEHRAN - China's customs announced that the country's trade with Iran in the first five months of the current year has reached approximately \$6 billion.

According to IRNA, the latest statistics released by China's customs show that trade exchanges between China and Iran in the first five months of 2024 have reached \$5.9 billion.

Iran-China trade in the first five months of 2024 has decreased by 9% compared to the same period last year. In the months from January to May of the previous year, the value of Iran-China trade was announced at \$6.5 billion.

China's imports from Iran in the first five months of 2024 have decreased by 5% compared to the same period last year, reaching \$1.8 billion. During the same period last year, China imported \$1.9 billion worth of goods from Iran.

China's exports to Iran from January to May this year amounted to \$4.1 billion, which is a 10% decrease compared to the same period last year. In the months from January to May of the previous year, China exported \$4.6 billion worth of goods to Iran.

According to this report, in May of this year, China imported \$245 million worth of goods from Iran and exported \$594 million worth of goods to Iran.

Growth in Iran-US Trade Amid Thwarting Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - Despite ongoing sanctions from the US and its allies against Iran, the US Census Bureau has reported a 51% increase in US exports to Iran, indicating growth in trade between the two countries this year, IRNA reported.

According to an IRNA, Iran's 13th administration began its term amid less than ideal trade conditions. The government had announced its intention to engage with all countries, including neighbors.

When this goal was announced, some critics believed it was unachievable due to the sanctions that hinder Iran's ability to increase trade, and they doubted the US would permit such an increase. Additionally, key factors like money transfers for trade were blocked. However, multiple visits by the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran to neighboring countries and major trading partners have led to improvements in this sector.

One of the Central Bank's strategies was to facilitate money transfers using national or non-dollar currencies, which was welcomed by some countries.

Now, statistics show that the US has increased its trade with Iran during the 13th administration's tenure. This growth comes even though, as critics note, 1,000 additional sanctions have been imposed over the past three years.

Experts believe that the trade growth with countries like the US, which have sanctioned Iran, is due to the neutralization of these sanctions. Over the past three years, Iran has joined major global economic organizations, such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. BRICS, for instance, is seeking an independent currency for trade, which has caused concern for the US.

Recently, statistics from the US Census Bureau revealed that US exports to Iran grew by 51% in the first four months of 2024. Although the total figure is not ideal, the growth is significant.

The US Census Bureau reported that Iran-US trade exchanges in the first four months of this year reached \$30.6 million, a 72% increase compared to the same period last year. From January to April 2023, goods worth \$17.8 million were exchanged between the two countries.

According to this report, in the first four months of 2024, the value of US exports to Iran grew by 51%, reaching \$26.5 million. Additionally, \$17.5 million worth of goods were exported from the US to Iran. US imports from Iran in the first four months of 2024 saw a 13-fold increase, rising from \$0.3 million in January-April 2023 to \$4.1 million in the same period this year.

Internet Capacity Doubled During 13th Gov't

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Minister of Communications and Information Technology stated that under the thirteenth government, the country's international internet capacity has doubled. We now have more than twice the country's internet needs, ensuring that in the event of outages, we won't experience disruptions.

Isa Zarepour added on the sidelines of a government meeting that the telecommunications infrastructure, supported and maintained by the Telecommunications Infrastructure Company (TIC), has seen significant development. Besides the network's transmission capacity, the country's IP network capacity has also doubled.

He noted that the total capacity of the country's transmission network, which had been around 31 to 32 terabits per second since the network's inception three decades ago until before the thirteenth government, has been increased by the same amount in less than the past three years. All of this capacity addition has been achieved using 100% domestic and Iranian-made equipment.

The Minister of Communications and Information Technology emphasized that the IP network has seen similar growth. At the beginning of the thirteenth government, the capacity was 28 terabits per second; this year, it has reached 56 terabits per second.

Zarepour stated that the international internet capacity has doubled and that we now have more than twice the country's internet needs. In the past, if a submarine cable was cut, the internet would face disruptions. However, we have had several such cuts, including both sea and land-based, without any disruptions. This is because we have diversified the internet entry routes into the country and have more than enough capacity to handle any outages

without issues. He mentioned that as a result of these efforts, since the beginning of this government, not only do our own dashboards show improvement, but international dashboards also indicate that our fixed and mobile internet speeds have consistently increased. The latest report, published yesterday from global dashboards for this month, shows that our fixed and mobile internet speeds have increased, corroborating our dashboards.

The Minister of Communications stated that the median mobile internet speed at the beginning of the government was approximately 21.5 Mbps, which has now increased to over 37 Mbps. In the fixed communications sector, the speed was 9.2 Mbps at the start of the government and has now exceeded 15 Mbps, showing an approximate 60% increase in both fixed and mobile communications.

Zarepour emphasized that a promise was made to the public that last year's tariff increase would be used to develop the network, and by June, the speed would increase by 30%. Both our dashboards and global reports show that internet speed has increased by more than 20% compared to last January.

He added that the statistics announced from global dashboards yesterday pertain to the first ten days of June, not including June 15 to 20. We aim to increase this figure to 25%, and we are monitoring operators to ensure they adhere to development promises. Any operator not meeting their commitments will be penalized on behalf of the public. The Minister of Communications stated that the commitments regarding the number of 5G and 4G sites and internet speed are being achieved rapidly. We will stand with the public until these promises are fully realized.

Iran Economic Growth Rate Higher Than That of Regional States



TEHRAN - The Governor of the Central Bank said: According to statistics announced by the World Bank, Iran's economic growth rate is higher than that of many countries, including all neighboring and regional countries.

Mohammad Reza Farzin, speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting, stated: This is a good growth rate considering the country's growth rate in recent years.

He continued: Considering the growth rates of other countries, our country's growth rate in the year 1402 [2023/2024] has been good.

The Governor of the Central Bank noted: The full report on the growth rate is available on the Central Bank's information base. Farzin said: Considering the average growth rate of the country in recent years and especially other countries in 2023, based on a recent report announced by the World Bank, the highest growth rate belongs to Iran at 5 percent. He continued: All neighboring and regional countries had lower growth rates than Iran, and given the trend of recent years, a growth rate of 5 percent is an accelerated and acceptable growth rate, which we hope will continue this year as well. He also referred to the investment growth rate in the country and said: The investment growth rate is still very good. Last year, the investment growth rate was 6.7 percent, which has increased this year to 7.2 percent. Farzin stated: A very noteworthy point is the excellent investment growth rate in the fourth quarter, which was 14.2 percent.

He said: We will implement the digital rial in the country, which is electronic cash and will be available to applicants to meet the small-scale needs of society. This plan has long-term benefits.

Iran Importing Fresh Meat From 10 Countries



TEHRAN - Alireza Peyman Pak, Deputy Minister of Agriculture Jihad for Trade and Market Regulation, explained the ministry's plan for importing red meat and live livestock this year. He said: "The import of red meat this year is based on the country's needs. The country needs one million tons of red meat annually, and the estimates from the Ministry's Trade and Livestock Affairs Departments suggest a shortage of 100,000 to 150,000 tons of red meat this year. Last year's red meat production was satisfactory, and most of this shortage pertains to processed meat products, with part of it due to a lack of lamb meat in the country." He added: "At the beginning of the year, it was planned that up to 70% of the 100,000 to 150,000-ton shortage would be covered by importing frozen lamb and beef. This quota has been approved for this year's imports by the ministry, and the necessary foreign exchange will be provided from the secondary market. It is worth mentioning that last year and this year, the import of meat did not receive the 28,500 toman exchange rate." Peyman Pak stated: "Additionally, it has been planned to import about 45,000 tons of fresh meat this year, and imports will continue until the price of this commodity stabilizes. The Livestock Affairs Department has set a balanced price for lamb carcass meat at between 480,000 to 520,000 toman, and until the consumer price reaches these figures, the import of fresh lamb meat will continue." Regarding the beef market, he said: "The beef market has currently stabilized; production is sufficient, and the prices of live cattle and beef have been declining." The Deputy Minister of Agriculture Jihad clarified the sources of various red meat imports, noting: "Currently, fresh lamb meat is imported to Iran from 10 countries including Australia, Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Romania, Kenya, and South Africa. Among these, Kenya and South Africa have the highest health protocols, and their meat is of good quality, with most imports coming from these two countries. However, imports are not limited to these sources. Frozen beef comes from Brazil and Pakistan, and frozen lamb meat from Australia and Mongolia."

He added: "There are also plans to import live livestock for both slaughter and fattening from Pakistan, with imports from Australia and South Africa also being considered."

Ministry of Heritage Strives to Market Handicrafts in Target Countries



TEHRAN - Ezzatollah Zarghami, Minister of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, during his visit to the Iranian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce representative office in Shanghai, discussed the registration of intellectual property rights for over 290 items of handicrafts and carpets in the name of Iran in China. He stated that the Cultural Heritage Organization and related institutions would provide the necessary support to achieve this goal.

He mentioned that, based on a recent government decree, the export of handicrafts is exempt from the requirement to repatriate foreign currency. He continued, saying that aiding in market creation and marketing of handicrafts in target countries is one of the missions of the Handicrafts Organization, and significant efforts have been made to implement these initiatives.

Zarghami emphasized the importance of developing cooperation in tourism and paying more attention to commercial and medical tourism. He said that financial tools and credit cards for travelers and tourists from both countries and the mutual recognition of driving licenses could help increase interactions.

Babak Besharati, Director of the Iranian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce representative office, highlighted the importance of explaining cultural and civilizational values between the two countries. He said that this would facilitate a deeper understanding between Iranian and Chinese traders and create more confidence for starting and continuing long-term mutual commercial and industrial cooperation.

He added that focusing on commercial tourism exchange and consulting with economic activists in the handicrafts sector and addressing their concerns in various ways are among the chamber's responsibilities.



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.



French Rally Against Far-Right Ends in Clashes



PARIS (Dispatches) - Riot police clashed with demonstrators in the French city of Rennes on Thursday in the latest rally against the rise of the far-right ahead of a national election this month.

The rally was ended after dozens of young demonstrators threw bottles and other projectiles at police, who responded with tear gas.

The regional prefecture said seven arrests were made among about 80 people who took positions in front of the march through the city centre. The rally was called by unions opposed to the far-right National Rally party, which is tipped to make major gains in the legislative election. The first round of voting is on June 30. "We express our absolute opposition to reactionary, racist and anti-Semitic ideas and to those who carry them. There is historically a blood division between them and us," Fabrice Le Restif, regional head of the FO union, one of the organisers of the rally, told AFP.

Political tensions have been heightened by the gang rape of a 12-year-old Jewish girl in a Paris suburb, for which two 13-year-old boys have been charged. The National Rally has been among political parties to condemn the assault. Several hundred people protested against anti-Semitism and "rape culture" in Paris in the latest reaction. Dominique Sopo, president of anti-racist group SOS Racisme, said it was "an anti-Semitic crime that chills our blood".

Hundreds had already protested in Paris and Lyon amid widespread outrage over the assault. The girl told police three boys aged between 12 and 13 approached her in a park near her home in the Paris suburb of Courbevoie on Saturday, police sources said.

She was dragged into a shed where the suspects beat her and "forced" her to have sex "while uttering death threats and anti-Semitic remarks", one police source told AFP.

France has the largest Jewish community of any country outside Israel and the United States.

Israel-Hezbollah Hostilities Fan Fears of Widening Gaza War



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Israel and Hezbollah traded fresh cross-border fire, as fears of a regional conflict grew after Israel revealed it had approved plans for a Lebanon offensive and the militants vowed to blanket their foe in rockets.

Hezbollah said it fired dozens of rockets into northern Israel Thursday in retaliation for a deadly air strike in south Lebanon that Israel said killed one of the group's operatives. Hezbollah also claimed several other attacks on Israeli troops and positions over the course of the day.

The Israeli military said its jets had struck two weapons storage facilities and several other sites belonging to the group, and that it had fired artillery "to remove threats in multiple areas in southern Lebanon".

Just before midnight, the army said it had "successfully intercepted a suspicious aerial target that crossed from Lebanon". And early Friday, Lebanese media reported fresh Israeli strikes in the country's south.

Experts are divided on the prospect of a wider war, almost nine months into Israel's campaign to eradicate Hezbollah's ally Hamas, the Palestinian militant group in the Gaza Strip.

Hezbollah and Israeli forces have exchanged near-daily fire since Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel triggered the Gaza war, and the bellicose talk has escalated along with the strikes.

Israel's main military backer the United States has sought to discourage any expansion of hostilities along the border. In a meeting with visiting Israeli officials in Washington, Secretary of State Antony Blinken underscored "the importance of avoiding further escalation in Lebanon and reaching a diplomatic resolution that allows Israeli and Lebanese families to return to their homes", according to a statement.

In a televised address on Wednesday, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah had warned "no place" in Israel would "be spared our rockets" if a wider war began.

He also threatened nearby Cyprus if it opened its airports or bases to Israel "to target Lebanon".

European Union member Cyprus houses two British bases, including an airbase, but they are in sovereign British territory and not controlled by the Cypriot government.

On Thursday, Cyprus government spokesman Konstantinos Letymbiotis dismissed as "totally groundless" any suggestion of possible involvement in a conflict related to Lebanon.

Warplanes from the British airbase in Cyprus have, along with US forces, attacked Yemen's Huthi rebels who have for months been targeting Red Sea shipping.

On Thursday the US military said it had destroyed several Huthi drones, a day after its forces struck two rebel sites in Yemen.

The October Hamas attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,194 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

The militants also seized hostages, 116 of whom remain in Gaza although the army says 41 are dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed at least 37,431 people, also mostly civilians, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. The latest toll on Thursday included at least 35 deaths over the previous day, the ministry said. The Huthis and Hezbollah both say they are acting in response to Israel's actions in Gaza. On Tuesday, Israel's military announced that "operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon were approved and validated". The same day, Hezbollah published a video showing drone footage it purportedly recorded over northern Israel, including parts of Haifa's city and port. US envoy Amos Hochstein on a trip to the region called for "urgent" de-escalation, while the UN special coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert said there was "no inevitability to conflict" as she visited UN peacekeepers in the country's south. The cross-border violence has killed at least 479 people in Lebanon, most of them fighters but also 93 civilians, according to an AFP tally.

U.S., China Hold First Informal Nuclear Talks in 5 Years

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - The United States and China resumed semi-official nuclear arms talks in March for the first time in five years, with Beijing's representatives telling U.S. counterparts that they would not resort to atomic threats over Taiwan, according to two American delegates who attended.

The Chinese representatives offered reassurances after their U.S. interlocutors raised concerns that China might use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons if it faced defeat in a conflict over Taiwan. Beijing views the democratically governed island as its territory, a claim rejected by the government in Taipei.

"They told the U.S. side that they were absolutely convinced that they are able to prevail in a conventional fight over Taiwan without using nuclear weapons," said scholar David Santoro, the U.S. organizer of the Track Two talks, the details of which are being reported by Reuters for the first time.

Participants in Track Two talks are generally former officials and academics who can speak with authority on their government's position, even if they are not directly involved with setting it. Government-to-government negotiations are known as Track One.

Washington was represented by about half a dozen delegates, including former officials and scholars at the two-day discussions, which took place in a Shanghai hotel conference room.

Beijing sent a delegation of scholars and analysts, which included several former People's Liberation Army officers.

A State Department spokesperson said in response to Reuters' questions that Track Two talks could be "beneficial". The department did not participate in the March meeting though it was aware of it, the spokesperson said.



Such discussions cannot replace formal negotiations "that require participants to speak authoritatively on issues that are often highly compartmentalized within (Chinese) government circles," the spokesperson said.

Members of the Chinese delegation and Beijing's defence ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

The informal discussions between the nuclear-armed powers took place with the U.S. and China at odds over major economic and geopolitical issues, with leaders in Washington and Beijing accusing each other of dealing in bad faith.

The two countries briefly resumed Track One talks over nuclear arms in November but those negotiations have since stalled, with a top U.S. official publicly expressing frustration at China's responsiveness.

The Pentagon, which estimates that Beijing's nuclear arsenal increased by more than 20% between 2021 and 2023, said in October that China "would also consider nuclear use to restore deterrence if a conventional military defeat in Taiwan" threatened CCP rule.

Visiting Vietnam, Putin Seeks New Security Architecture for Asia

HANOI (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said he wanted to build a "reliable security architecture" in the Asia-Pacific region during a state visit to Vietnam on Thursday, part of a trip to Asia seen as show of defiance to the West.

A day after signing a mutual defence agreement with North Korea, Putin received a 21-gun salute at a military ceremony in Vietnam, was embraced by two of its Communist leaders and lavishly praised by one of them.

Putin had contributed to "peace, stability and development" in the world, Vietnam's president said.

Putin's visit has drawn criticism from the United States and its allies, who treat the Russian leader as a pariah and have protested that he should not be given a stage on which to defend Russia's war in Ukraine.

Russia and Vietnam signed agreements on issues including energy, underlining Moscow's pivot to Asia after the West imposed sanctions on Moscow over the conflict in Ukraine.



"We are firmly committed to deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership with Vietnam, which remains among the priorities of Russia's foreign policy," Putin was quoted as saying by Russian media.

He was quoted by Russia's TASS news agency as saying the two countries shared an interest in "developing a reliable security architecture" in the region based on not using force and peacefully settling disputes with no room for "closed military-political blocs".

At a news conference to wrap up his trip, Putin accused the NATO military alliance of creating a security threat for Russia in Asia, TASS reported.

The 11 pacts signed in Hanoi were not on the same level as the landmark mutual defence agreement in North Korea.

But Putin's warm welcome was a public relations achievement for the Russian leader, who has an outstanding International Criminal Court arrest warrant against him over alleged war crimes in Ukraine, charges he denies.



Spain Beat Italy; England thwarted by Denmark in Euro 2024

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Spain secured a spot in the knockout stages of Euro 2024 with a 1-0 victory over Italy in their heavyweight clash on Thursday, after England struggled to show their credentials in a 1-1 draw with Denmark.

Three-time winners Spain got the better of reigning champions Italy at the Arena AufSchalke in Gelsenkirchen as Riccardo Calafiori bundled the ball into his own net 10 minutes after half-time to decide the encounter.

A second win in as many matches for Spain is enough for them to secure top spot in Group B with a game to spare, meaning they already know they will play their last-16 tie in Cologne on June 30 against one of the best third-place finishers.

Italy, meanwhile, are not through yet but a point against Croatia in Leipzig on Monday will clinch second place in the group for Luciano Spalletti's team.

The sides were meeting at a fifth consecutive European Championship and Spain should have won by a far greater margin as they sought revenge for a defeat on penalties in the semi-finals at Wembley three years ago.

Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma made several key saves while Lamine Yamal came close from distance in the second half for La Roja and the outstanding Nico Williams smashed

a shot off the bar.

"I am delighted and proud not just with the result against a great side but with the way in which we got it," said Spain coach Luis de la Fuente.

"It's very simple, they were faster than us, compact and were right on top of us," Spalletti admitted. "We simply weren't as bright as them."

Earlier, England could have secured a last-16 spot as well as they took on Denmark in Frankfurt in Group C but produced an underwhelming performance that leaves more questions over their chances of becoming European champions for the first time.

In a rematch of the Euro 2020 semi-final won by England, it was Gareth Southgate's men who got off to a perfect start when Harry Kane slotted home after Kyle Walker caught Danish defender Victor Kristiansen napping.

Denmark, though, were worthy of at least a point and got it thanks to a spectacular strike by Morten Hjulmand before half-time.

Phil Foden hit the post for England and Denmark's Andreas Christensen came close to a late winner in the second half.

Jude Bellingham failed to inspire England in a disappointing 1-1 draw against Denmark

Australia Beat Bangladesh in Rain-Hit T20 World Cup Match



NORTH SOUND (Dispatches) - Pat Cummins claimed a hat-trick and David Warner thrashed a quick-fire 53 not out as Australia beat Bangladesh by 28 runs in a weather-disrupted T20 World Cup Super Eight clash in Antigua.

Australia, who are bidding to complete a historic treble of World Test Championship, ODI World Cup and T20 World Cup titles, were awarded the victory under the Duckworth-Lewis formula after motoring to 100-2 off 11.2 overs when rain stopped play.

Earlier, Australia had held Bangladesh to 140-8 off their 20 overs at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound.

Australia captain Mitchell Marsh saluted his bowlers for laying the foundations for the win.

"Really exciting bowling performance, the boys played well tonight," Marsh said. "It is a very good playing XI. We've got 15 guys that can take us deep in the World Cup, but there's a long way to go."

Fast bowler Cummins was elated to bag his first international hat-trick.

"Pretty awesome to tick that off," Cummins said. "The boys are welcoming me into the club -- it's a good club to be part of." Warner led a brisk march towards the victory target despite multiple interruptions to the Australian innings due to rain. A final rain delay took play past midnight with Warner not out on 53 and Glenn Maxwell unbeaten on 14, Australia 100-2 and needing 41 off 52 balls to win.

Draper Jolts Alcaraz in London

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jack Draper of Great Britain stunned defending champion Carlos Alcaraz 7-6 (3), 6-3, in the second round of the cinch Championships in London.

Draper recorded eight aces and won 82.1 percent of his first-serve points to dispatch the top-seeded Spaniard in 1 hour and 39 minutes.

Draper advances to face fifth-seeded Tommy Paul, who posted a 6-3, 6-4 win over Alejandro Tabilo of Chile.Also on Thursday, Great Britain's Billy Harris collected a 6-4, 7-5 win over French qualifier Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, and Italy's Lorenzo Musetti needed three sets to oust American Brandon Nakashima 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in 2 hours and 27 minutes.Top-seeded Jannik Sinner of Italy notched a 6-4, 6-7 (4), 6-3 win over Fabian Marozsan of Hungary in the second round in Halle, Germany.Sinner fired 12 aces and overcame two double faults to dismiss Marozsan in 2 hours and 15 minutes.Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff held serve throughout the match in upsetting



sixth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece, 6-4, 6-4. Struff converted two of three break-point opportunities.Fifth-seeded Hubert Hurkacz of Poland posted a 7-6 (3), 6-4 victory over Australian qualifier James Duckworth, while American Marcos Giron rallied for a 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 win over Matteo Berrettini of Italy.

Meanwhile Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas suffered an upset loss to Jan-Lennard Struff in the round of 16 at the Halle Open.The 34-year-old German downed sixth seed and world number 11 Tsitsipas 6-4 6-4, setting up a quarter-final against world number one Jannik Sinner."It's very special. The crowd was supporting me like hell and it was just an amazing feeling, amazing atmosphere," said Struff, who did not face a break point throughout the match.Italian Sinner advanced to the quarter-finals by defeating Hungarian Fabian Marozsan 6-4 6-7(4) 6-3.

"It's the first time I've faced him. He's already beaten incredible players, so I knew I had to play really, really good," Sinner said.

Fellow Italian Matteo Berrettini, who usually excels on grass, lost 3-6 6-4 6-3 to American Marcos Giron.

Argentina Begin Copa Title Defense With 2-0 Win Over Canada

ATLANTA (Dispatches) - World champions Argentina opened their bid for back-to-back Copa America titles with a 2-0 win over Canada in front of a crowd of 70,564 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

Julian Alvarez put Argentina ahead in the 49th minute but a combination of inspired goalkeeping from Canada's Max Crepeau and Lionel Messi's surprising lack of precision in front of goal ensured that the underdogs were in the game until Lautaro Martinez settled the contest in the 88th minute.

Backed by a huge support decked out in light blue and white striped shirts, Argentina fully deserved their victory but Canada, ranked 48th in the world, can take plenty of credit for the way they fought with the 15-time Copa America winners.

Alvarez, preferred to Lautaro as Messi's strike partner in attack, had the first opportunity when he charged down an attempted clearance from Ismael Kone and broke away.

But the Manchester City striker took a heavy touch as he bore down on Canada keeper Max Crepeau, who was able to smother the ball.

Messi, who became the most capped player in Copa America history, making his 35th appearance in what is his seventh tournament, then went close to an opener himself but his angled shot from the left flashed just wide of the far post.

While the Argentines were exploiting gaps in the Canadian defence, Jesse Marsch's team were nonetheless competing in midfield and creating some half-chances for themselves.

Alphonso Davies and Liam Millar both had shots blocked inside the box and Tajon Buchanan screwed an effort from a



tight angle wide in the 30th minute.

The first true save of the game came in the 40th minute, though, when Alexis Mac Allister's stooping header from an Angel Di Maria cross was well dealt with by Crepeau.

But Argentina needed their goalkeeper, Emiliano Martinez, to be at his very best to ensure they went in on level terms at the interval.

Cyle Larin's cross from the right wing was met with a powerful header from close-range from Stephen Eustaquio but Martinez's sharp reaction save kept the game goalless.

But it took less than four minutes of the second half for Argentina to break the deadlock -- Messi threaded a pass through to Mac Allister, who was brought down by Crepeau, but before the referee could blow his whistle Alvarez had slotted home the loose ball.

Within moments, there was another chance for Alvarez, but this time denied by the diving Crepeau and Canada could live to fight on.They did so with more urgency and a little more risk after Marsch introduced winger Jacob Shaffelburg and switched to an attacking 4-3-3 formation. Suddenly the Argentine defence was under pressure and didn't look at all comfortable as Canada got men forward and exploited the wide areas.But they were almost caught out with a classic counter-attack as Martinez launched a quick long ball towards Messi, who broke way goalwards but with the crowd expecting to see the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner on target he made a hash of the chance.

Scheffler Fixes Swing, Fires 65 at Travelers



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Scottie Scheffler fired a 5-under 65 in the opening round of the Travelers Championship and was not far off the lead when he signed his scorecard on Thursday at TPC River Highlands.

For his 28th birthday, Scheffler hopes to build on matching his best first-round score this season by celebrating the 36-hole lead. But he'll be pursuing another birthday boy Friday, 21-year-old Tom Kim, who wrapped up a 62 in the first round to assume the top spot on the leaderboard.

Scheffler, shooting for his sixth win this season, credited minor swing maintenance for getting him back on track after falling out of contention at the U.S. Open last week.

"I feel like I hit it nice," Scheffler said Thursday after four birdies, an eagle and a bogey on the opening 18. "Found some stuff in my swing at the beginning of the week, and definitely feel like I'm swinging a lot better than I did last week."

Nobody is swinging it better than Scheffler on the PGA Tour in 2024. The new dad and 11-time tour winner said he found a grip adjustment this week that helped him get back in the groove and post his first round in the 60s since the Memorial Tournament. The Thursday 65 ends a run of six rounds in the 70s in a row.

"It's kind of hard to explain, to be honest with you," Scheffler said. "But just really getting better feel coming at the top of my swing, making sure my grip's kind of in the right position."

Scheffler finished tied for fourth here in 2023 -- in the midst of a run of seven consecutive top-5 finishes -- with 63s in the first and third rounds and a cumulative score of 19 under.

His opening-round 65 on Thursday matches his best score in the first round this year (March 28, Houston Open).

He was in a tie at 2 under when he came to the par-5 13th, where he ripped a 3-wood from a fairway lie to within 8 feet and rolled in the eagle putt. He then followed that with his fourth birdie of the day on the par-4 14th.

"I hit two really great shots in there to give myself a look, and then I got a nice read off (playing partner Max Homa's) putt and was able to knock that in," Scheffler said.