

Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani Says That Expansion of Relations Between Iran and Azerbaijan Is a Necessity to Progress Policy of Neighborliness Launched by the Late President Ebrahim Raisi

# IRAN NEWS

On the Occasion of World Drug Day, Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani Has Described Iran as a "Flagbearer" in the Fight Against Drugs Worldwide, Emphasizing Its Determination to Combat Drug Trafficking

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DOMESTIC



## 7 Sabotages on Int'l Fiber Optic Thwarted

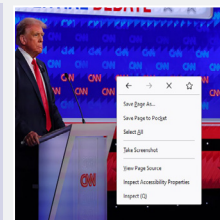
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INTERNATIONAL

## Biden Stumbles, Trump Lies in First Presidential Debate

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## Iran Ranks 2nd in Global Oil Production Growth



TEHRAN - According to statistics published by an international institute, Iran achieved a 19% increase in oil and condensate production last year, making it the second highest in the world in this regard. Data published in the World Energy Statistical Review by the British Institute IE indicates that Iran secured the second spot globally for the highest increase in oil production last year. Iran's crude oil and condensate production in 2023 experienced a 19% growth compared to the previous year, reaching 3.94 million barrels per day. The previous year, Iran produced 3.331 million barrels per day. This 19% growth in Iran's crude oil and condensate production in 2023, achieved despite ongoing illegal US sanctions, is over 13 times the global average growth rate for oil production that year. Worldwide crude oil and condensate production in 2023 grew by 1.4% compared to the previous year, reaching 82.636 million barrels per day. Consequently, Iran set a record for the highest growth in oil production among major oil producers last year. In fact, most oil producers not only did not see production growth but experienced a decline. For example, Saudi Arabia's crude oil and condensate production decreased by 8.6% in 2023. Iraq's production fell by 3.9%, Kuwait by 4.3%, Oman by 1.5%, the UAE by 3.4%, Algeria by 3.4%, and Russia by 1.1%.

Among the notable countries with production increases were Canada with 1.4%, the USA with 8.5%, Argentina with 13.8%, and China with 2.1%.

Guyana saw a 40.8% increase in its oil production in 2023, ranking first globally in this regard, although its total production was only 391,000 barrels per day.

According to this report, Iran was the seventh largest producer of crude oil and condensates globally last year, accounting for 4.8% of the world's total production. The USA was the largest producer with a 15.6% share, followed by Russia with 12.8%, Saudi Arabia with 11.6%, Canada with 6%, Iraq with 5.2%, and China with 5.1%, ranking second to sixth respectively before Iran.

## Russia Says Work Underway on Big Treaty With Iran



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia says it is working on a significant cooperation agreement with Iran, a sign of growing friendship between the two nations.

"Now we are working on a treaty – probably you have heard about it, and I ask you once again not to use the formula 'the same as the one with North Korea' – now the work is underway on the big treaty with Iran," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told a presser in Moscow. Her comment referred to a comprehensive bilateral cooperation agreement that has been negotiated between the two sides for years. In January, Russia's Foreign Ministry said a new inter-state treaty reflecting the "unprecedented upswing" in Russia-Iran ties was being finalized.

Over the past couple of years, the two countries have strengthened their bonds of friendship.

Earlier this month, Iran's acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani said Tehran and Moscow had serious intentions of expanding cooperation in several domains.

Bagheri Kani, in an interview on the sidelines of the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting in the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod, said Iran and Russia were two neighboring countries with historical relations.

"In the past years, the relations between the two countries have increased and also the two countries share similar challenges and threats, promoting several opportunities for cooperation."

For his part, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed Moscow's commitment to finalize the comprehensive long-term cooperation agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran. "Moscow is dedicated to concluding this memorandum with Tehran."

In a press conference following the BRICS meeting, Lavrov said the draft of the agreement had been agreed upon but still had to be signed by the presidents.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

## Iranians Go to Polls to Elect Next President

TEHRAN - Iranians headed to the polls on Friday in a snap election following the unexpected passing of former President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei cast his ballot at a polling station in Tehran just as the voting began. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on Iranian voters to turn out at polling stations to determine the country's future and make the "best and most useful choice".

"I pray for the best days and years and the highest blessings for our beloved nation," the Leader told reporters after voting.

"Election day is a day of joy and happiness for us Iranians, especially when the election is for selecting the president as the future of the country will be determined by this choice of the people." However, I think there is one important issue besides this, and that is the enthusiastic turnout of the people and the increase in the number of voters. This is a definite need for the Islamic Republic," he added. Ayatollah Khamenei said the Islamic Republic by its name indicates that the participation of the people is included in the essence of the system. "Therefore, the durability, consistency, dignity and reputation of the Islamic Republic in the world depend on the turnout of the people. That is why we recommend our dear people to take voting seriously and participate in this important political test." Ayatollah Khamenei addressed the undecided voters, saying there is no reason for hesitation. "When you say that some people are hesitant, I don't find any reason for doubt. This is an easy task that has important results. Why should one hesitate about something which has no trouble, no pressure and nothing to spare in time and money, but has many benefits?"

"Do not hesitate, especially considering the point I mentioned, that the durability of the

Islamic Republic is based on the turnout of the people, and in order to prove the health and sincerity of the Islamic Republic's system, the turnout of the people is necessary and obligatory," he added. Ayatollah Khamenei said, "I hope that God will choose the best option for this country and that the coming years, God willing, will be good and favorable years and people will be satisfied with their choice." "We recommend our dear people to take voting and participation in this important political test seriously and participate" in it, he said after voting. "In order to prove the health and sincerity of the Islamic Republic's system, the presence of the people is necessary and obligatory," he said. More than 61 million people are eligible to vote, the head of the election headquarters said. Voting was underway at 58,640 polling stations across the country, mostly in schools and mosques. Early projections of the results are expected by Saturday morning and official results by Sunday. If there is no clear majority after Friday's vote, the top two candidates face a second round of voting on July 5. The winner will serve for four years. While there was no clear frontrunner leading up to the vote, two candidates withdrew, leaving four others in the race.

Amirhossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi dropped his candidacy and urged other candidates to do the same "so that the front of the revolution will be strengthened". On Thursday, Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani also withdrew, as he did previously in the 2021 election in which Raisi was voted into office.

Former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf remain in the race, so do Massoud Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon by profession and a member of parliament from the northwestern city of Tabriz, and Mostafa Pourmohammadi, a former interior minister.

## Iran-Russia Strategic Ties Are Unchangeable



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhber expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the implementation of the agreements between Iran and Russia, and termed the strategic relations between Iran and Russia unchangeable. Mokhber made the remarks in a telephone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Mokhber considered the signing of a joint memorandum regarding the transfer of gas from Russia to Iran as a major step towards deepening the relations between the two countries and an effective measure in the direction of the economic development of the region. "The implementation of this plan will provide not only the economic interests of the two countries, but also the interests of the entire region," Iran's acting president said. Mokhber further expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the implementation of the agreements between the two countries, and called the strategic relations unchangeable and stressed the importance of Tehran-Moscow negotiations and common views on regional issues. He expressed hope that the efforts of the two countries to stabilize the region would achieve the desired results. Mokhber also condemned the recent terrorist incident in Dagestan and expressed his sympathy with the Russian government and people and the families of the victims of this crime. In this telephone conversation, Russian President Vladimir Putin also expressed his satisfaction with the signing of the strategic joint memorandum of gas transmission between the two countries. He regarded this agreement to be a great event in the direction of securing the interests of the two countries and strengthening bilateral cooperation for the benefit of the regional and international markets. The Russian president called the increase in the level of trade exchanges between the two countries satisfactory and the exchange of diplomatic delegations as the best option to lay the groundwork for the development of relations. Stating that the Islamic Republic of Iran has proven that bilateral cooperation with this country does not remain on paper and reaches the stage of implementation, Vladimir Putin expressed his appreciation for the efforts and seriousness of the late President Raisi's government to develop and implement the agreements between the two countries and for the Iranian nation in the electi

## Iran Strong Fortress of Resistance Against Oppressors, Colonialists



TEHRAN (PresSTV) - Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has described Iran as the "strong fortress of resistance" against oppressors, saying the Islamic establishment serves as a role model.

Nasrallah addressed via video link from Beirut a ceremony in Tehran Thursday to mark the 40th day since the passing of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash, hailing the country for taking the upheaval in its stride with fortitude and composure. "The Islamic Republic of Iran emerged proudly and admirably from this tragic incident and presented an advanced and lofty model that is strong in facing all challenges," he said.

Nasrallah said the incident, in which President Raisi lost his life along with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and six others in mountainous terrain in northwest Iran, was "very painful and historic" which left Iran faced with threats. "However, the rule is that we must turn threats into opportunities, as always emphasized by Eminent Leader of the Revolution" Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, he said. "We have faced similar big and dangerous incidents in recent years. As an example, we can point to the assassination of two dear commanders, Hajj Qassem Soleimani and Hajj Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, that was a huge damage and at the same time a threat," he added. "But this threat turned into an opportunity. These bloodsheds marked the breakout of the uprising and a new life for the resistance and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all the resistance movements in the region," Nasrallah said.

## Canada Will Bear Full Responsibility for Blacklisting IRGC

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations has said that Canada's move to designate the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "terrorist organization is unlawful, dangerous, and politically motivated."

In a letter addressed to the head of the UN Security Council and the secretary-general, Amir Saeed Iravani described the Canadian move as "a blatant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations."

"The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns in the strongest possible terms this illegal and provocative action by the Government of Canada and considers it a hostile act against the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as a grave threat to regional and international peace and security given the significant role of the IRGC in fighting against terrorism and extremism as well as in preserving peace and stability in our region," the ambassador wrote.

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.

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.

The move makes Canada the second country in North America after the United States to blacklist the IRGC.

It is self-evident that Canada—along with the US and those who have publicly supported this internationally wrongful act—will bear full responsibility for all consequences of such reckless behavior, Iravani emphasized. The ambassador said that a provocative act by Canada would



heighten tensions in the Persian Gulf region.

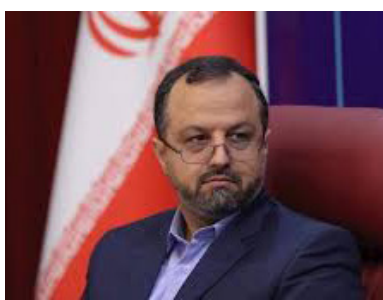
"Given the IRGC's role, tasks, and mandate, which include ensuring maritime safety and security in the Persian Gulf, Sea of Oman, and beyond, the Government of Canada is well aware that its irresponsible and provocative act will heighten tensions and increase the risk of accidents and incidents between IRGC forces and the Canadian armed forces," he said.

The official pointed out that this was not the first time Canada had systematically violated norms, rules, and principles of international law against Iran. "Canada has repeatedly breached fundamental principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations which my Country has already been prompted to institute legal proceedings against that Country before the International Court of Justice for grave violations," he said.

The ambassador also hailed slain Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani's major role in countering Daesh and other terrorist groups. "The role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, especially Major General Qassem Soleimani, the hero Commander of the Quds Force of the IRGC, who was assassinated by US forces at Baghdad International Airport on 3 January 2020 during an official visit to Iraq at the Iraqi government's invitation, in battles against the UN Security Council designated terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, Daesh, the al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups in the region, has been widely recognized and commended by affected people and governments in the region," he said. "The armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran are resolute in their commitment to fulfill its regional responsibilities and counter-terrorism efforts, as well as support regional nations and governments, upon request, in their efforts to eliminate foreign-backed terrorist groups."



# IRAN NEWS



## Current Foreign Investment 2 Times More Than JCPOA Years

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Finance said that foreign investment set a record in Raisi's administration and reached two times more than the days the whole country's economy was tied to the JCPOA.

Iran's international nuclear agreement or the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed between the country and P5+1 countries (Russia, China, UK, Germany, France, and the US) in 2015, to lift the West's sanctions on Iran, but the US scrapped it on May 18, 2018, re-imposing more sanctions on Iran.

In terms of foreign investment, the 16-year investment attraction record was broken with 5.5 billion dollars of real official investment last year, Iranian Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi told Iran Press in a news conference on Wednesday.

Khandouzi said that the actual number was more than the amount achieved in 2023, but in total, the performance of the late Raisi's administration of 12 billion dollars of foreign investment has been realized.

## Strategic Agreement Between Iran, Russia on Gas Transfer Signed

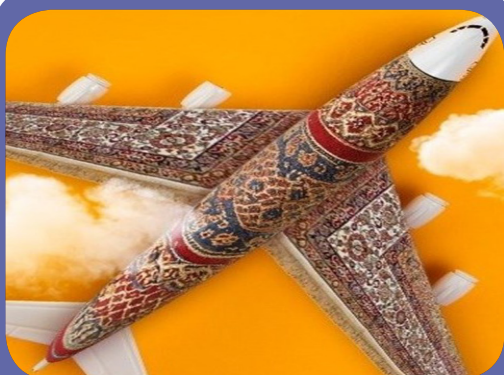


IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Owji in an interview referred to the memorandum of understanding on the transfer of Russian gas to Iran and said, "By the grace of God, today a significant and positive event took place for the country. May God bless Martyr Raisi. In numerous negotiations and meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, both in Tehran and Moscow, he pursued the issue of transferring Russian gas to Iran."

He added, "In the past three months, our colleagues in the National Iranian Gas Company conducted these negotiations with Russia's Gazprom. Fortunately, today, in the presence of the acting President and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Gazprom, Mr. Alexey Miller, the CEO of Gazprom, we witnessed the signing of the memorandum of understanding on the transfer of Russian gas to Iran by the National Iranian Gas Company and Gazprom." The Oil Minister emphasized that Iran and Russia possess more than 60% of the world's gas reserves, and today's achievement was a significant step. He noted, "Undoubtedly, this issue will bring about positive developments in the regional energy balance. Moreover, with its nationwide gas transmission infrastructure, Iran is fully prepared to receive this amount of gas." Owji stressed that the main framework for the gas transfer from Russia had been under review by experts for a long time and was also the wish of the martyred President. He mentioned that in a short time, this memorandum of understanding could be converted into a contract, marking a major event for both Iran and the Russian government.

This agreement is the next step following last year's agreement between the National Iranian Oil Company and Russia's Gazprom, indicating a move towards operationalizing the agreements. With this agreement, Iran's trade share will leap, altering international balances. In other words, the gas agreement between Iran and Russia will act as a revolution in the regional energy and industrial landscape. The agreement between the two major holders of the world's gas reserves, controlling about 60% of this clean fuel, is based on mutual interests and within international frameworks. It will soon enter the contract and implementation phase.



## \$50m of Hand-Woven Carpets Exported Last Year

TEHRAN - Abdollah Bahrami, the CEO of the Hand-woven Carpet Cooperatives Union, announced that the volume of Iran's carpet exports last year was approximately \$50 million.

The CEO highlighted the importance of holding the hand-woven carpet exhibition, noting that despite the hopes of weavers, producers, and exporters being pinned on this event, the exhibition's timing and duration have been changed unexpectedly this year.

He emphasized the significance of the exhibition and the presence of foreign delegations, as they play a crucial role in the introduction, display, sale, and marketing of hand-woven carpets. The hand-woven carpet exhibition has been held for 29 years as the largest exhibition in the world in terms of size and diversity. However, this year, the duration has been reduced from one week to three days, and the date has been moved to the 8th of Shahrivar (August 29th).

Regarding incentives for carpet exporters, the CEO stated that there are no incentives for them and that the foreign exchange commitment regulation has been detrimental. During the previous two administrations, a 5% export bonus was awarded for every carpet exported, but today, not only is there no export bonus, but it has also been stipulated that the foreign currency earned from exports must be returned to the Central Bank.

He added that the foreign exchange commitment regulation impacts prices by at least 30%. The difference between the NIMA exchange rate and the free market rate is over 30%. Therefore, it is not justifiable to return the export earnings to NIMA when no dollar has been spent or invested in importing raw materials for which the NIMA rate was allocated.



## 7 Sabotages on Int'l Fiber Optic Thwarted

TEHRAN - The Minister of Communications and Information Technology announced that over 400 monitoring teams have inspected 700,000 kilometers of both terrestrial and aerial fiber optic lines. We encountered seven cases of intentional sabotage, but the connection teams promptly restored communications.

Issa Zarepour, on Friday while casting his vote and visiting the Ministry of Interior's monitoring room, honored the memory of Martyr Raisi and said: "The fourteenth presidential election is currently taking place, and we hope that people will take part in shaping their destiny with their vote."

The Minister of Communications and Information Technology added: "Based on our experience from the parliamentary elections, in this election, the stamp from the ID card has been removed. This means that the communication infrastructure needs to be in place to ensure that an individual voting at one station has not voted at another."

He continued: "With the cooperation of the Ministry of Interior and related institutions, the communication status is very good and better than the previous parliamentary elections."

Zarepour stated: "58,600 polling stations are connected, meaning 99.9% of stations are online. It is anticipated that the remaining few stations are mobile and on the move."

The Minister, noting the monitoring of fiber optic lines in the country, said: "My colleagues controlled the fiber optics to prevent any disruption in the communication process."

Zarepour mentioned: "More than 400 monitoring teams inspected 700,000 kilometers of lines both on the ground and aerially. There

were seven cases of intentional sabotage, but the connection teams immediately restored communications."

He emphasized that in some cases of sabotage, the ground was dug up to two meters deep, yet the connection teams quickly re-established communications. He added that this record for online voting in the election and for the communications sector is a testament to a stable communication network in the country.

The Minister of Communications and Information Technology emphasized the importance of communication stability in the country, stating: "More than 99.5% of inquiries were conducted online, showing that the communication network is completely stable."

Zarepour said: "From months and weeks prior, and from the very early days, the election headquarters was formed to provide the best platform for the election."

He added: "We monitored and controlled over 700,000 kilometers of fiber optic lines to prevent any problems due to intentional sabotage. 400 fiber optic teams across the country are on alert, and 400 monitoring teams conduct ground and aerial drone inspections of the fiber lines."

The Minister of Communications announced: "As of 9:14 AM, out of 1,632,023 inquiries, 1,624,838 were conducted online."

He continued: "8,000 villages with more than 20 households and 3,000 villages with fewer than 20 households, totaling over 97,000 rural residents (98%), are connected to a stable network."

Zarepour concluded by urging people to participate fully in the elections.

## 1,000-Megawatt Power Plants Under Construction



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian, in the ceremony for the inauguration of 42 water and electricity projects in 4 provinces of the country with an investment of over 38 trillion toman, which was held on Thursday, and conducted online at the Ministry of Energy, commemorated the martyrs of service, especially the martyr of the nation Ayatollah Raisi, and said: The imbalance in electricity and water at the beginning of the government created a bitter memory in the public mind. This situation existed in different years but peaked in 2021.

In this regard, he continued: Apart from the imbalance in the electricity sector, annually between 4,000 to 5,000 megawatts of new demand is created, which necessitated special measures to solve this problem.

The Energy Minister, referring to the efforts made by the Ministry of Energy to address the imbalance through long-term, medium-term, and short-term plans, added: In the short-term plans, for the peak load of 2022, 100 strategic actions were planned; for the peak load of 2023, 140 strategic actions were planned; and for the current year's peak load, 180 strategic actions were considered.

Mehrabian stated that in the first phase, efforts were made to increase the country's electricity production capacity, continuing: In addition to increasing electricity production capacity, the repair and development of the country's power plants were seriously put on the agenda.

He added: Some of the country's power plants had been out of service for over 13 years and needed major overhauls, both in hydropower and thermal power plants. Therefore, relying on the knowledge and capabilities of domestic experts, the repair and

overhaul of these power plants were carried out.

Mehrabian, referring to the extreme heat in the past three weeks and the increased electricity consumption in the country, especially in Khuzestan province, said: In the past three weeks, for 10 days, the temperature in Khuzestan province reached above 50 degrees Celsius, which according to meteorological organizations was a rare phenomenon. This situation caused the country's power industry to operate at full capacity.

He further referred to the assessments of international energy institutions regarding Iran's electricity industry and stated: "According to international evaluations, Iran ranks seventh in terms of increasing electricity production capacity over the past three years. Countries like China, India, the USA, Russia, Brazil, and Indonesia rank higher than Iran, but their population, size, and economic volume are not comparable to Iran."

Mehrabian emphasized: "Iran holds the first rank in electricity production in the West Asia region and ranks third in Asia, above countries like Japan and South Korea."

In another part of his speech, he compared the increase in electricity production capacity under various governments since the imposed war. He stated: "During Mr. Hashemi's administration, 3.5 terawatt-hours of electricity were added annually to the country's production capacity. In the administrations of Mr. Khatami, Mr. Ahmadinejad, and Mr. Rouhani, 1.9 terawatt-hours, 10.8 terawatt-hours, and 8.7 terawatt-hours were added annually to the production capacity, respectively. However, under the administration of Martyr Raisi, despite the government's short tenure, 15.2 terawatt-hours were added to the country's electricity production capacity."

## Providing Facilities for Presence of Iranian Parts Manufacturers in Russia



TEHRAN - The project manager for Russia at the National Association of Automotive Parts Manufacturers announced the provision of special and diverse facilities for Iranian companies to participate in this year's international and specialized "Automobility" exhibition.

The project manager for Russia at the National Association of Automotive Parts Manufacturers, while detailing the supportive facilities for participating in this international event, emphasized: The "Automobility" exhibition in Moscow is listed among the significant events supported by the Innovation and Prosperity Fund. Additionally, the Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization of Iran has planned supports to empower small and medium-sized industries for presence in international markets, specifically for industries located in industrial parks and zones. Applicants seeking information and wanting to utilize these facilities can do so through the Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization in their respective provinces. Ebrahim Doostzadeh added that the Advanced Industries Support Fund of the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade also provides financial support for the participation of parts manufacturing companies in the "Automobility" exhibition in Moscow. Interested companies can visit the fund's website and submit their request letters in the relevant section (Services/Electronic Service Desk/Financial Support Requests). He further mentioned that knowledge-based companies can also apply for supportive facilities through the designated system for this purpose (the Ghazal system). Doostzadeh, referring to the short time remaining until this international exhibition and the necessity of planning for effective participation of companies, announced: The deadline for registration is set for next Thursday (July 4); therefore, parts manufacturers who wish to attend this event as part of their marketing strategies can do so through the National Association of Automotive Parts Manufacturers. The "Automobility Moscow 2024" exhibition will be held from August 19 to 22 this year in Moscow. The permit for the execution of the pavilion of the Islamic Republic of Iran at this trade event has been issued to the National Association of Automotive Parts Manufacturers.

## Amir-Abdollahian Opened New Era in Defense of Resistance



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Quds Force Brigadier General Esmail Qaani paid tribute to late Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, praising him for his support for resistance.

Speaking in a ceremony held in the capital Tehran on Thursday to commemorate the 40th day of the martyrdom of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian, Brigadier General Qaani praised the distinguished characteristics of the two martyrs in defense of resistance and the fight against US hegemony.

Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian lost their lives alongside a number of their companions in a tragic helicopter crash in northwestern Iran on May 19.

Describing the late Iranian foreign minister as "indefatigable and plucky," Qaani said Amir-Abdollahian opened a new era in defense of resistance and was the "sonorous voice" of the resistance front.

The IRGC commander said the words and actions of Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian proved that the Islamic Republic can "confront major powers," and "isolate" a heavyweight like the US.

Qaani stressed that the efforts of the two figures in the international arena were very effective and managed to safeguard Iran's authority against child-killing Israel and criminal America.

"These men fought with the US and proved that things can be done without relying on America," Qaani said.

"You should know that those who attribute the resolution of problems to relations with America are the ones who do not want to fight valiantly. If you talk from the position of authority and power, even the US will be forced to comply."

IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami hailed a day earlier the great achievements of the late Iranian chief executive, saying Raisi shattered the West's so-called policy of isolating and sanctioning Iran.

Salami also emphasized that the upcoming presidential elections should become a scene for the victory of the Iranian nation over its enemies.



## Ukraine Signs Security Pacts With EU, Lithuania and Estonia

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union and two of its member countries, Lithuania and Estonia, signed security agreements with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at a summit in Brussels. The agreement with the EU lays out the bloc's commitment to help Ukraine in nine areas of security and defense policy - including arms deliveries, military training, defense industry cooperation and demining, according to a draft seen by Reuters. The pact - along with the documents signed with Lithuania and Estonia - is intended to complement other similar agreements sealed between Ukraine and its allies as it continues its defence against Russia's invasion. Countries including the United States, Britain, France and Germany have sealed such pacts with Kyiv.

Officials say the agreements are not the same as the mutual defence pact between NATO nations, but are pledges to provide Ukraine with weapons and other aid to bolster its own security and deter any future invasion.



## Police Fire Tear Gas in Kenya Finance Bill Protests



NAIROBI (Dispatches) - A climbdown by Kenya's president over plans to raise taxes brought no end to nationwide protests on Thursday, with at least two people reported killed in clashes near the capital Nairobi and others shot by police elsewhere.

A day after President William Ruto abandoned a tax hike bill, demonstrators in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and other cities called for him to step down, although crowds were smaller than earlier in the week.

Police fired teargas at dozens of protesters in Nairobi and blocked off roads to the presidential palace. In the town of Homa Bay in western Kenya, police said officers had shot at protesters when they tried to torch police vehicles.

"I can confirm seven people have been admitted in hospital with gunshot wounds. Police opened fire when protesters attempted to burn police vehicles," said Hassan Barua, Migori police commander.

The Standard newspaper said two people had been killed as police clashed with anti-tax protesters looting two supermarkets in Ongata Rongai, a town on the outskirts of Nairobi. Police did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Ruto withdrew the legislation including new taxes and hikes on Wednesday, a day after parliament was briefly stormed and set ablaze while trying to vote through his plans and at least 23 people were killed in clashes.

Ruto is grappling with the most serious crisis of his two-year-old presidency as the youth-led protest movement has grown rapidly from online condemnations of the tax hikes into mass rallies demanding a political overhaul.

Dropping the bill hits his plan to reduce the budget deficit and borrowing, as demanded by lenders including the International Monetary Fund.



## Israel Storms Gaza City Neighborhood, Orders Palestinians to Go South

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israel stormed a neighborhood in Gaza City on Thursday, ordering Palestinians to move south as tanks rolled in and bombing the southern city of Rafah in what it says are the final stages of an operation against Hamas militants there. Residents of the Shejaia neighborhood in Gaza City said they were surprised by the sound of tanks approaching and firing in the early afternoon, with drones also attacking after overnight bombing of the city, which Israel had combed early in the war. "It sounded as if the war is restarting, a series of bombings that destroyed several houses in our area and shook the buildings," Mohammad Jamal, 25, a resident of Gaza City, told Reuters via a chat app. Later on Thursday, the Palestinian Civil Emergency Service said the Israeli military strikes had killed at least seven people in Shejaia so far. More casualties are feared to be under the rubble where rescue teams cannot reach, it said. Footage obtained by Reuters showed women, men and children carrying bags and food as they ran in the streets after the raid began. Some men carried injured children, some bleeding, in their arms as they fled. "This is the (Israeli) occupation targeting us, as you can see. You can see the children, the targeting of children here," said a man carrying a bleeding boy in his arms.



ATLANTA (Dispatches) - Democratic President Joe Biden delivered an uneven performance at Thursday's debate, while his Republican rival Donald Trump rattled off a series of attacks that included numerous falsehoods, as the two oldest presidential candidates ever clashed on stage ahead of November's US election.

The two men traded attacks on abortion, immigration, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza and their handling of the economy as they each sought to shake up what opinion polls show has been a virtually tied race for months.

A hoarse-sounding Biden stumbled over his words on several occasions during the debate's first half-hour, but he found his footing at the halfway mark when he attacked Trump for his conviction for covering up hush money payments to porn star Stormy Daniels, calling him a "felon."

In response, Trump brought up the recent conviction of Biden's son, Hunter, for lying about his drug use to buy a gun. Moments later, Biden noted that almost all of Trump's former cabinet members, including former Vice President Mike Pence, have not endorsed his campaign. "They know him well, they served with him," he said. "Why are they not endorsing him?" Two White House officials said Biden had a cold. But his up-and-down evening could deepen voter concerns that the 81-year-old is too old to serve another four-year term.

Trump, meanwhile, unleashed a barrage of criticisms, some of which were well-worn falsehoods he has repeated on the campaign trail, including claims that migrants have carried out a crime wave and that Democrats support infanticide. Biden and Trump, 78, were under pressure to display their command of issues and avoid verbal gaffes as they sought a breakout moment in a race that opinion polls show has been deadlocked for months. Biden, in particular, has been dogged by questions about his age and sharpness, while Trump's incendiary rhetoric and sprawling legal woes remain a vulnerability.

Asked about the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters, the former president refused to accept any responsibility and claimed that many of those arrested were innocent.

"This guy has no sense of American democracy," Biden scoffed in response.

Biden also blamed Trump for enabling the elimination of a nationwide right to abortion by appointing conservatives to the U.S. Supreme Court, an issue that has bedeviled Republicans since 2022.

Trump countered that Biden would not support any limits on abortions and said that returning the issue to

the states was the right course of action.

Trump said Biden had failed to secure the southern U.S. border, ushering in scores of criminals.

"I call it Biden migrant crime," he said.

Biden replied, "Once again, he's exaggerating, he's lying."

Studies show immigrants do not commit crimes at a higher rate than native-born Americans.

The televised clash on CNN was taking place far earlier than any modern presidential debate, more than four months before the Nov 5 Election Day.

The two candidates appeared with no live audience, and their microphones automatically cut off when it was not their turn to speak - both atypical rules imposed to avoid the chaos that derailed their first debate in 2020, when Trump interrupted Biden repeatedly. As the debate began, the two men - who have made little secret of their mutual dislike - did not shake hands or acknowledge one another.

But there were plenty more moments in which their bad blood was evident. Each called the other the worst president in history; Biden referred to Trump as a "loser" and a "whiner," while Trump called Biden a "disaster." At one point, the rivals bickered over their golf games, with Trump bragging about hitting the ball farther than Biden and Biden retorting that Trump would struggle to carry his own bag.

The first questions focused on the economy, as polls show Americans are dissatisfied with Biden's performance despite wage growth and low unemployment.

Biden acknowledged that inflation had driven prices substantially higher than at the start of his term but said he deserves credit for putting "things back together again" following the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump asserted that he had overseen "the greatest economy in the history of our country" before the pandemic struck and said he took action to prevent the economic freefall from deepening even further.

The debate took place at a time of profound polarisation and deep-seated anxiety among voters about the state of American politics. Two-thirds of voters said in a May Reuters/Ipsos poll that they were concerned violence could follow the election, nearly four years after a mob of Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol.

The second and final debate in this year's campaign is scheduled for September.

## EU Leaders Pick von der Leyen for Second Term as Commission Chief

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union leaders agreed to nominate Ursula von der Leyen of Germany for a second five-year term as president of the European Commission, the EU's powerful executive body.

At a summit in Brussels, the bloc's 27 national leaders also picked former Portuguese premier Antonio Costa as the future chair of their European Council meetings and selected Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas as the next EU foreign policy chief.

"Mission accomplished! The European Council has delivered," the body's current chair, Charles Michel, told reporters early on Friday morning.

The leadership package represents continuity at the top of the bloc of some 450 million people, with centrist pro-EU factions keeping hold of top posts despite a far-right surge in elections to the European Parliament earlier this month.

The trio won broad backing but right-wing Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni abstained from the vote on von der Leyen and voted against Costa and Kallas, according to diplomats.

Meloni said on X that she decided not to support the leadership slate "out of respect for the citizens and the indications that came from those citizens during the elections".

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, another right-winger, voted against von der Leyen and did not vote for Kallas, diplomats said.

Von der Leyen's nomination still needs approval from the European Parliament in a secret ballot - widely seen as a trickier proposition than her endorsement by EU leaders.

"It is a matter of convincing - if possible - a broad majority for a strong Europe," von der Leyen said. "This is what I'm

going to be working for."

The leadership package is balanced politically as well as geographically. Von der Leyen hails from the center-right, Costa from the center-left and Kallas from Europe's liberal group.



"This is an enormous responsibility in this time of geopolitical tensions. There's war in Europe, but there's also growing instability globally," Kallas told reporters.

Costa said he would be "fully committed to promoting unity among the 27 member states" in his new role.

The war in Ukraine laid bare the EU's lack of preparedness for a conflict as the bloc struggles to supply Kyiv with enough weapons against Russia, prompting calls for more EU coordination of defence systems and investment in defence industries.

Diplomats said von der Leyen told the summit that between 1999 and 2021, the EU increased defence spending by 20%, China by 600% and Russia by 300%, even before Moscow's massive rise in military spending after its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

According to diplomats, von der Leyen told leaders the EU needed to invest 500 billion euros (\$535.30 billion) in defence over the next 10 years. Financing options ranged from national contributions, dedicated revenue streams - called the EU's own resources - and joint borrowing, von der Leyen said.

Investment in defence is part of the EU's "strategic agenda" that the leaders aim to agree before dinner on Thursday - a document that tells EU institutions what European governments want them to focus on during their 2024-2029 term.

Apart from defence, the agenda calls for a more competitive EU to withstand economic pressure from China and the United States and for preparing the bloc for enlargement that would include Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkans.

## Bolivia President Denies Prior Intelligence of Coup Planning



LA PAZ (Dispatches) - Bolivian President Luis Arce denied any involvement or prior knowledge of a failed coup attempt led by the country's former top military commander who alleged the president had asked him to do something to boost his popularity.

"We were never informed about his intentions," Arce told reporters during a press conference at government headquarters. "We were surprised."

The mobilization of military units on Wednesday saw Juan Jose Zuniga gather troops in the main square of capital La Paz, ramming a palace door with an armored vehicle to allow soldiers to rush into the building.

Zuniga, who was soon arrested, told reporters that Arce had asked him to help boost popularity. Local news agency Fides reported Zuniga told police Arce had three days earlier authorized him to mobilize the armored vehicles "with the objective of controlling the situation of conflicts in the country."

Earlier on Thursday, Interior Minister Eduardo del Castillo said in an interview that Arce had received reports of "destabilization attempts," though the government did not know more at the time. Arce said Zuniga "acted on his own accord," and upon learning of what was happening, the leader called ex-President Evo Morales, his former ally turned political rival, to warn him. "It was clear that they were coming for me," Arce said, "and after they were going for Evo Morales." Zuniga was arrested along with former Navy commander Juan Arnez Salvador, Del Castillo said. He later said 17 people had been detained so far, but there were "many more who had participated." The failed coup happened over just a few hours and provoked swift condemnations from world leaders, raising fears that democracy in the Andean nation remains at risk. Arce, who quickly swore in new military chiefs, on Thursday evening sought to reassure the public, saying

everything "had returned to normal". Street stall seller Antonia, who witnessed Wednesday's events in the plaza near where she works, said the area had been calm on Thursday. "Things went along like any normal day. There were a few people who came to protest earlier," she told Reuters while packing up the games and puzzles she sells. Calls grew louder on Thursday for accountability for the attempted coup, in which around 200 military officers took part, according to Bolivia's ambassador. "I urge the authorities to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into allegations of violence and reports of injuries," said U.N. Human Rights Chief Volker Turk. "Those responsible must be held to account." Zuniga had recently said Morales should not be able to run again for president and threatened to block him if he attempted to do so. The commander had been told on Tuesday evening he would be stripped of his position as his conduct "was not in line with the Constitution," according to Del Castillo. The minister recalled that Zuniga reacted calmly to the news.

"But no one could have imagined that the next day, before the official handover in posts, there would be a failed coup in our country," he said.





## Fritz Takes Aim at Third Rothesay International

LONDON (Dispatches) - Top seed Taylor Fritz continued his pursuit of a third Rothesay International title, downing Chinese qualifier Juncheng Shang 7-6 (5), 7-6 (5) in the quarterfinals in Eastbourne, England.

Fritz, who captured the event in 2019 and 2022, won 50 of 54 first-serve points (92.6 percent), racked up 20 aces and saved all four break points he faced in capturing the match in one hour, 46 minutes. He will face Australian lucky loser Aleksandar Vukic, who ousted Japanese qualifier Yoshihito Nishioka 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (5) to advance to the semifinals. British wild card Billy Harris eliminated Italy's Flavio Cobolli 6-7 (3), 7-6 (4), 6-2. Harris will play Australian qualifier Max Purcell, a 6-3, 7-6 (4) winner over Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic. Top seed Ben Shelton had match point on serve in the third-set tiebreaker before British qualifier Paul Jubb rallied for the upset, 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (8), in the quarterfinals in Spain. Jubb, who won an NCAA singles championship in 2019 while at the University of South Carolina, converted his seventh match point against World No. 14 Shelton, a college singles champion in 2022 at Florida. Shelton had more aces (13-1) and winners (44-24) as well as unforced errors (32-14) on Thursday. Sixth-seeded Gael Monfils of France, in his first grass tournament since Wimbledon in 2021, advanced to the semifinals by defeating Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut 6-3, 4-6, 6-4. Monfils faces fourth-seeded Alejandro Tabilo of Chile, a 6-4, 6-4 winner over

Czech Jakub Mensik. Austrian Sebastian Ofner downed Alex Michelsen 3-6, 7-5, 6-3 and will meet Jubb in the semis. Meanwhile Canada's Leylah Fernandez reached her first grass-court semifinal with a 6-2, 6-1 win over England's Harriet Dart at the Rothesay International in Eastbourne, England. Fernandez, seeking her first title since Hong Kong in 2023, will face defending champion Madison Keys on Friday. The fourth-seeded Keys advanced by walkover after Czech Karolina Muchova withdrew with a right wrist injury. The other semifinal pits No. 3 seed Jasmine Paolini of Italy and No. 6 Daria Kasatkina of Russia, who both knocked out British hopefuls in the quarterfinals. Paolini eliminated Katie Boulter 6-1, 7-6 (0) and Kasatkina cruised to a 6-2, 6-2 victory over 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu. Third-seeded Emma Navarro moved into the semifinals in Germany after former World No. 1 Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark retired with a left knee injury. Navarro was up 4-6, 6-1, 1-0 when Wozniacki could not continue. Wozniacki slipped in the first set while chasing down a drop shot. Navarro will meet Russia's Diana Shnaider, a 6-3, 7-6 (3) winner over Spain's Paula Badosa. Croatia's Donna Vekic advanced to the final foursome in a walkover when defending champion Katerina Sinakova of the Czech Republic withdrew suddenly. Vekic will face Bulgaria's Viktoriya Tomova, who saved five match points against Anna Blinkova of Russia during a third-set tiebreaker before prevailing in dramatic fashion 2-6, 6-1, 7-6 (9).

## FIFA Launches "Football Manager" World Cup With \$100,000 in Prize Money



ZURICH (Dispatches) - FIFA will host its first ever FIFAe World Cup of Football Manager this year to crown the best virtual manager on the highly-popular video game, world soccer's governing body said on Thursday.

FIFA is partnering with Sports Interactive, the developers of the game that has sold millions of copies and has also been used by several football clubs to scout players and opponents thanks to its extensive database.

Players will compete for \$100,000 in prize money in the final event from Aug. 29 to Sept. 1.

"This competition requires participants to demonstrate a profound understanding of football strategy and tactics," said former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, who is the ambassador for the esports event.

"Success demands not only mastery of game mechanics but also in-depth football knowledge, making this format a fascinating blend."

FIFA said in the inaugural year of the event, selected member associations will be invited to be represented at the final event.

Member associations from all six confederations are expected to be invited while players can sign up on FIFA's website.

## Panama Stun USA With Copa America Upset

ATLANTA (Dispatches) - Panama left the USA's hopes of qualifying for the Copa America knockout rounds hanging by a thread on Thursday after scoring a shock 2-1 victory over the host nation.

A stormy Group C battle in Atlanta saw both sides finish with 10 men as Panama came from behind to snatch a victory which reignites their Copa campaign after an opening loss to Uruguay.

The game turned on a moment of madness in the 18th minute, when US winger Timothy Weah was sent off for striking Panama defender Roderick Miller in the face in an off-the-ball incident spotted by VAR.

Although Folarin Balogun fired the US into the lead with a screamer from the edge of the area after 22 minutes, Panama got back on level terms only minutes later after Cesar Blackman's strike.

As the game wore on, however, Panama's one-man advantage began to take its toll on the weary US side.

The US might have snatched the lead in the 81st minute after Weston



McKennie's fine run and cross found substitute Ricardo Pepi at the far post. Pepi's tame header fell into the arms of Panama goalkeeper Orlando Mosquera, however, to leave it at 1-1.

That miss proved costly, as with seven minutes remaining, Jose Fajardo swept in an emphatic finish from Abdiel Ayarza's low cross to put Panama 2-1 ahead.

A fractious finale saw Adalberto Carrasquilla sent off after a cynical hack on US captain Christian Pulisic in the dying minutes as Panama hung on for the win.

"That's soccer at the end of the day. We know what we signed up for and playing in a Copa America, we knew it was going to be a fight," US midfielder Tyler Adams said afterwards.

"Credit to Panama, they did their job and they got the result. Obviously, I think moving forward, we need to control our emotions in certain situations.

## Uruguay Put Five Past Bolivia to Edge Closer to Copa Quarters



EAST RUTHERFORD (Dispatches) - Uruguay thrashed tournament minnows Bolivia 5-0 in their Group C encounter in New Jersey to all but book their place in the Copa America quarter-finals.

Facundo Pellistri nodded home the opener in the eighth minute and Darwin Nunez doubled Uruguay's lead just after the 20-minute mark, powering a left-footed shot past Bolivia keeper Guillermo Vizarra to score in his seventh consecutive international match.

Maximiliano Araujo struck from close range to kill off the contest in the 77th minute before Federico Valverde made it 4-0 four minutes later.

Substitute Rodrigo Bentancur completed the rout by heading home the fifth in the 89th minute with his first touch.

Uruguay will progress as group winners if they avoid defeat by the United States in their final group game on Monday, while even defeat in that match would likely see them go through thanks to their superior goal difference.

Bolivia, who have lost both games so far, have only a slim mathematical chance of avoiding a group-stage exit for the fourth time in a row.

On a night when Nunez scored his 13th international goal, Uruguay's all-time leading scorer Luis Suarez was brought on as a late substitute and was immediately handed the captain's armband.

Nunez had already missed one quality chance before Pellistri found the net in the eighth minute from a well-worked set piece.

Nunez doubled Uruguay's advantage when he finished instinctively over the charging Vizarra's right shoulder and inside the near post.

Uruguay eased off at the start of the second half, much to manager Marcelo Bielsa's disgust, but it proved to be the calm before the storm.

Maximiliano Araujo added a third after getting on the end of Nicolas de la Cruz's through ball before Uruguay scored twice more in the closing stages.

## Curry, James Excited to Join Forces for Olympics

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - NBA superstars LeBron James and Stephen Curry are "excited" by the prospect of joining forces as the United States chases a fifth straight gold medal at next month's Olympics, USA coach Steve Kerr said Thursday.

Los Angeles Lakers superstar James and Golden State Warriors ace Curry will finally line up in a USA team for the first time in Paris after facing off against each other in 52 games during a 15-year rivalry in the NBA.

USA and Golden State coach Kerr said Thursday the two basketball icons were relishing the prospect of teaming up.

"LeBron and Steph are really excited to play together," Kerr said. "I've talked to both of them about this idea of being together after going against one another with such high stakes over the years.

"They obviously fit really well together. I think the idea of Steph playing off the ball and LeBron pushing it in transition, that's pretty intriguing."

Curry has a 29-23 winning record against James in the NBA, with a 17-11 record in playoff meetings.

Last season, the duo featured in one of the games of the year, combining for 82 points in a double-overtime thriller which saw the Lakers narrowly defeat Golden State 145-144.

"It's something I'll be able to talk about with my grandkids, about being able to compete with one of the greatest players to ever play the game," James said of



Curry after that instant classic.

Kerr said Curry and James will aim to gel over the course of a training camp which begins in Las Vegas next week before a warm-up game against Canada on July 10.

The USA squad also has pre-Olympic games in Abu Dhabi and London before their opening group game of the Olympics against Serbia on July 28 in Lille.

"They're really excited to compete together for the first time and to find over the course of the practices and the friendlies some of the nuances that they can really exploit and explore, to just to see where they can have an impact for each other," Kerr said.

James and Curry are part of one of the most powerful USA teams ever to take part in the Olympics, with a roster that also includes the likes of Kevin Durant, Anthony Davis, Anthony Edwards, Jayson Tatum and Joel Embiid.

"Our roster is obviously laden with stars and players who have accomplished so much," Kerr said. "And what I love about these guys is they want to accomplish more.

"They want to win an Olympic gold medal, and that's why they all signed up for this."