


Iran's Special Envoy to Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi Qomi Says the Complicated Situation in Afghanistan and the Region Requires Comprehensive Consultations With All Parties

IRAN NEWS

The Lebanese Resistance Movement Hezbollah Enjoys Very Dangerous Military Equipment and Technologies, Israeli Newspaper Yedioth Aharonot Said in a Report

2 DOMESTIC



Participation of 33% of Tehranis in Presidential Election

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

France Votes in Election That Could Put Far Right in Gov't



> SEE PAGE 3

Detection and Thwarting Enemy Plots to Disrupt Cyber Security of Elections



TEHRAN - The spokesperson for the National Virtual Space Center announced the detection and neutralization of enemy designs aimed at disrupting the cyber security of elections, stating: "The first round of elections was held with complete security thanks to the vigilance of our country's experts."

Hossein Delirian praised the public's turnout in the fourteenth presidential election and said: "From the outset of the election process, the National Center of Virtual Space, as the commander of the country's cyber security, devised necessary measures and implemented guidelines to ensure the cyber security of the elections."

He added that the first round of elections took place without any disruptions to cyber security, emphasizing: "Prior to the elections, extensive measures were taken to secure and enhance the security of election-related infrastructures, and enemy designs to disrupt the election process and its cyber security procedures were detected and thwarted."

The spokesperson for the National Virtual Space Center clarified: "Almost all inquiries into citizens' national identification numbers, who participated at the ballot boxes, were successfully conducted online."

Delirian underscored that all three aspects of network, system, and surveillance were fully secure during the presidential elections, stating: "In the recent elections for the Islamic Consultative Assembly, enemies attempted to disrupt the process, but their actions were neutralized promptly by the country's cyber security providers."

Referring to the final results of the elections and the second round scheduled for Friday, he highlighted: "Just as there were no successful attempts by enemies in the first round, we aim to conduct the voter inquiry and polling process in a fully secure cyber environment in the second round of elections."

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Suing Perpetrators of Chemical Attacks Against Iran Not Time-Bound

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Interim Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani has stressed that Iran will surely bring a lawsuit against those behind chemical attacks against the country, stressing that such a legal measure is not subject to the passage of time and averts tragedies like the one in the city of Sardasht.

He made the remarks in a message issued on Saturday to mark the 37th anniversary of a chemical attack on Sardasht by Western-backed former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

Bagheri Kani said that the widespread use of chemical weapons by the Saddam regime against Iran was made possible under the political, military and diplomatic support of the US and Britain, as well as financial, scientific and technical backing of some European governments and companies, especially Germany and the Netherlands.

These countries, he added, prevented Iran from upholding the rights of survivors of the chemical attacks in international tribunals.

"Filing lawsuits against the perpetrators and assistants of chemical attacks against the Islamic Republic of Iran will never be subject to the passage of time," the top diplomat asserted.

"In addition to prosecuting criminals in the court of human conscience and public opinion, national and international courts should also fulfill their responsibility and hold these criminals accountable... to prevent the recurrence of such tragedies in the future."

Bagheri Kani also noted that the victims of chemical weapons, which were supplied to Iraq by the West, are today the victims of inhumane sanctions imposed on Iran by the

very same states.

"The same countries, which fully supported Saddam to produce and use chemical weapons against Iranians, including the oppressed women and children of Sardasht, are today full-fledged supporters and direct partners in Israel's genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip," he said.

"The same countries, which block the access of our victims of chemical weapons to medicines through sanctions, are practically and openly supporting the Israeli regime that is obstructing the delivery of food and medicines to the people of Gaza and using starvation as a method of warfare."

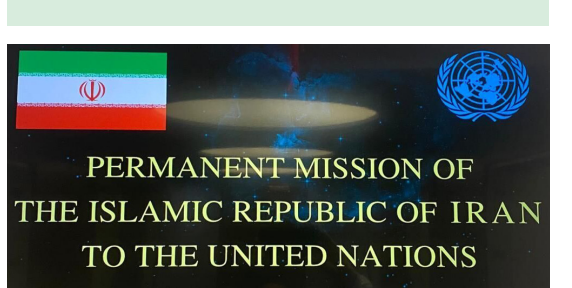
The interim foreign minister further emphasized that Iran has a firm will to seriously oppose chemical arms as the country is the biggest victim of the use of such weapons in modern history.

The Islamic Republic, he said, attaches great importance to the realization of the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention and continues its efforts towards a world free of chemical arms.

On June 28, 1987, the Saddam regime dropped mustard gas bombs on Sardasht, a small city in Iran's West Azarbaijan Province.

The attack killed at least 119 Iranian civilians and injured another 8,000, leaving some of them permanently disabled.

Iran Says All Options on Table Should Israel Attack Lebanon



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York has described as "psychological warfare" a possible Israeli full-scale military aggression against Lebanon, but at the same time warned the regime that "all options" are on the table should it attack the country.

"Albeit Iran deems as psychological warfare the Zionist regime's propaganda about intending to attack Lebanon, should it embark on full-scale military aggression, an obliterating war will ensue. All options, including the full involvement of all Resistance Fronts, are on the table", the mission said on its X account late on Friday.

Iran issued the warning as fears of a full-fledged war between Israel and Lebanon have grown in the past several weeks after the regime's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Tel Aviv was preparing for what he called a very tense operation.

Daily exchanges of fire have already been taking place between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah Resistance Movement on the country's southern border with the northern Israeli-occupied territories since the Gaza war broke out on October 7.

Hezbollah says it aims to support Palestinian resistance fighters battling the regime inside the Gaza Strip. Hezbollah has also warned Israel against a large-scale war on Lebanon, and pledged to defend the country.

Turkey Replacing Iran as Central Hub for Gas Trade



TEHRAN - An energy expert said: "We have missed the opportunity to become the energy hub of the region, and others have replaced Iran as the central hub for gas imports and exports. Even if we improve our relations with the world today and sanctions are lifted, our problem will not be solved. Because we need new infrastructure, new contracts, and new agreements, which are all time-consuming."

Mirqasem Momeni, an energy expert, commented on Iraq's plan to halt gas imports from Iran: "Currently, we have swaps or gas exports with several countries, but we face two issues with Iraq. Firstly, we have difficulties receiving payment for our gas exports to Iraq; Iraqi banks cannot transfer payments from the gas purchased from Iran due to recent US sanctions on several Iraqi banks, causing serious problems for Iraqis. Secondly, Iraq itself is an oil and gas producer, and European and American companies are heavily involved in rebuilding energy infrastructure that was damaged after the US invasion."

He added: "Today, Iraq exports more oil than Iran and, considering the development of gas fields, it may even start exporting gas in the coming years. Another issue in this area is Turkey's plan to transfer a gas pipeline from the north to Iraq, supplying part of the country's gas needs. In agreements with the Kurdistan region and the central government of Iraq, Turkey aims to export gas via the Azerbaijan-Russia-Kazakhstan route to enter Iraq and thus penetrate into the Persian Gulf, effectively bypassing Iran."

Momeni also attributed the issue of halting gas exports to Pakistan to political factors and said: "Iran has fulfilled all its commitments regarding the peace pipeline gas line to Pakistan, but Pakistan has not taken any action and delays its commitments. Iran has threatened to complain and claim penalties. However, due to neighborly relations, Iran does not seek to create a new legal issue with Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan seeks to meet its needs from other sources and considers the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline. Additionally, Afghanistan has large amounts of untapped gas, negotiating its extraction with China and Turkey, so Pakistan could potentially meet its needs from Afghanistan."

OIC Denounces Israel's Plan to Build New Settlement Outposts in West Bank

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The powerful grouping of 57 Islamic nations has condemned Israel's plan to build new settlement outposts in the West Bank despite the international outcry against the Tel Aviv regime's land grab policies in the occupied Palestinian territories.

In a statement on Saturday, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference) vehemently denounced the Israeli regime's decision to legitimize five new outposts, and subsequent construction of thousands of new illegal housing units in the area.

The intergovernmental Islamic organization also criticized the imposition of taxes on churches as well as their affiliated institutions and properties in the Israeli-occupied Old City of al-Quds. It slammed the Tel Aviv regime's deduction of the Palestinian tax revenues.

Such measures are in line with the Zionist entity's policy of ethnic cleansing, forced displacement and genocide against Palestinian people, the OIC said.

The organization stressed that all actions and decisions taken by Israel as the occupying power to perpetuate its colonial regime in the occupied Palestinian territory are null and void under international law and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, especially UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016).

The OIC finally warned about the danger of escalating settler terrorism in the West Bank, calling on the international community to assume its responsibilities in forcing Israel to stop the genocide in the Gaza Strip and the illegal measures it is enforcing throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement has denounced the Israeli security cabinet's decision to construct five new settlement outposts in the West Bank.

It stated that the measure represents a practical declaration from the



occupying regime to control the region.

Hamas said in a statement that such fascist measures require a unified stance on the part of all Palestinians to reject and confront the extremist Israeli administration's plans and policies.

The resistance group then called on the United Nations and the international community to take effective actions to stop these measures, which will eventually fail in the face of the steadfastness and resilience of Palestinians in the West Bank.

On Thursday evening, Israel's extremist finance minister Bezalel Smotrich announced that the Security Cabinet authorized one outpost for every country that unilaterally recognized Palestine as a state in the last month.

Last month, Spain, Ireland and Norway formally recognized the Palestinian state, joining over 140 UN member states that have recognized its statehood over the past four decades.

The five settlement outposts are Evyatar, Givat Assaf, Sde Efraim, Heletz, and Adorayim.

Tel Aviv has stepped up settlement expansion since December 2022, when Benjamin Netanyahu staged a comeback as prime minister at the head of a cabinet of hard-right and ultra-Orthodox parties.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

The international community views the settlements - hundreds of which have been built across the West Bank since Tel Aviv's occupation of the territory in 1967 - as illegal under international law and the Geneva Conventions due to their construction on the occupied territories.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent state with East al-Quds as its capital.

Pakistan Announces Enhanced Border Facilities to Bolster Ties With Iran



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's envoy to Iran, Ambassador Muhammad Mudassar Tipu, mentioned on Saturday enhanced trade and immigration facilities on the border crossing point between the two countries to facilitate increased movement of entrepreneurs and pilgrims, expressing optimism that their bilateral ties were on a positive trajectory.

Last month, the Pakistani diplomat announced that the two countries had decided to operate the Taftan-Gabd border between them 24/7 to improve the bilateral flow of goods and expand economic opportunities.

Pakistani people, including Zaireen or pilgrims and traders, frequently travel overland between the two countries, with religious devotees mostly visiting holy sites like Mashhad and Qom.

The movement of people and goods contributes to the cultural, economic and social ties between the neighboring states.

"Absolutely delighted to share that to facilitate Zaireen, business [community] & promote bilateral trade immigration facilities at Taftan-Gabd border terminals have been substantially beefed up," the Pakistani envoy announced in a social media post. "Now 4-6,000 passengers can cross both points everyday. [Pakistan-Iran] ties to see promising future."

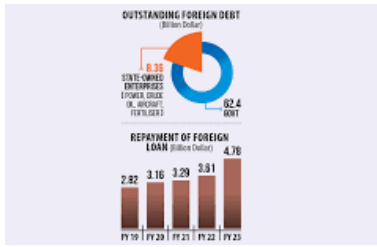
Pakistan and Iran have intensified efforts to expand bilateral trade through initiatives like establishing border markets and implementing barter trade mechanisms.

These developments aim to facilitate smoother economic activities and are part of broader attempts to increase bilateral trade to \$10 billion over the next five years.

Pakistan and Iran have also been working to develop closer political ties, the late Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi visiting Pakistan earlier this year in April.

Meanwhile on Saturday, Iran's Ambassador to Islamabad Reza Amiri Moghaddam condemned the recent US resolution on Pakistan's internal affairs.

IRAN NEWS



Rise in Foreign Exchange Revenues by \$4b This Spring

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Central Bank reported a \$4 billion increase in the country's foreign exchange revenues in the spring of 1403 compared to the same period last year. It announced that foreign exchange revenues in the first quarter of this year reached \$25.5 billion.

The Central Bank stated that foreign trade developments show that in the first quarter of this year, oil and non-oil exports reached \$25.5 billion, marking an 18.6% increase compared to \$21.5 billion in the same period last year.

The country's trade balance also saw a 51.3% increase in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period last year, rising from \$7.4 billion to \$11.2 billion. The Central Bank also provided \$17.417 billion for the import of essential goods, medicine, and commercial items from the beginning of the year until June 29, of which \$3.975 billion was allocated to essential goods and medicine.

Iran to Participate in Expo 2025 Japan



TEHRAN - The head of the Civil Aviation Organization (CAO), during the unveiling ceremony of the simulator, said: "The B737-800 simulator, operated by the Tehran Sky Knowledge Development Center, has entered service. The key to resilience and the development of the aviation industry lies in having efficient, specialized, and up-to-date human resources." He added: "Despite sanctions and the COVID-19 crisis, our efforts in the aviation industry focused on its resilience, with human resources being our top priority. Currently, upgrading human resources is also our top priority, alongside advancements in simulator construction and operation technology within the country."

He emphasized: "We have a young, efficient, and creative workforce, but we face shortages in human resource training." Captain Mohammadi highlighted: "Investing in training is an investment in capital, not expenditure. Timely investment in training will prevent the outflow of millions of dollars due to sending individuals abroad for simulator training." He also stated: "Training and simulation are crucial components in increasing safety in the aviation industry. Fortunately, today the country possesses both the technology and the knowledge to develop a variety of simulators for military and non-military purposes." He expressed hope: "By filling the training gaps and considering the increase in the country's air fleet by the end of this year, we hope not to face shortages in pilot-related infrastructure such as simulators." He further stated: "Due to the knowledge-based companies involved, decisions are based on knowledge, which drives progress. These entities are agile and have a good risk-taking capability." Captain Mohammadi added: "The B737-800 simulator is capable of operating in various weather conditions, day and night, and emergency situations, aligned with aircraft systems."

He also mentioned: "In training courses for B737 type ratings, MCC courses, PIRE SIM programs, pre-operational FFS simulator use, Operator Conversion programs, FDM programs, accident and incident investigations, and initial assessments for pilot recruitment in operating airline companies."



Participation of 33% of Tehranis in Presidential Election

TEHRAN - The head of the Tehran Province Election Headquarters stated: 10,199,742 individuals were eligible to participate in the fourteenth round of presidential elections, of which 3,366,264 tariffs were used in the capital during the elections held on Friday, indicating a 33% participation of the people of Tehran Province.

Seyyed Abbas Johari in an interview said: For the first time, we held these elections in a short time interval, with the entire population positively present at the ballot boxes in Tehran Province, experiencing a 1% increase in participation compared to the previous presidential elections, and most importantly, it was held in complete health and security."

The head of the Tehran Province Election Headquarters added: Holding elections in Tehran Province is very challenging and is equivalent to 18 provinces, so we appreciate all the factors involved in the election process.

He said: "In this province, we were able to hold all the election-related activities by the deadline set by the Minister of Interior, who was following up on the matters, and we had no problems with the ballot boxes."

Johari added: Naturally, I was looking at the statistics of past rounds. Tehran Province had the lowest participation in all rounds and was distant from the national average. However, in this round, participation in Tehran's presidential elections increased by one

percent compared to the previous presidential elections.

The Deputy for Political and Social Affairs of the Tehran Governorate continued: Although various points are raised in the area of participation, and there are various factors that need to be investigated and addressed, the removal of people's concerns and concerns should be investigated.

Johari also referred to statistics on people's presence with identification documents and said: 87% of voters cast their votes with their national card and 13% with their birth certificate in Tehran's ballot boxes.

He continued: In the presidential elections on Friday, voters aged 18 to 25 cast 361,593 first votes, 85,000 voters aged 75 to 85 also voted, and voters aged 85 to 95 cast 16,500 votes. Additionally, 558 people over 95 years old voted, with nearly 10% of those over 65 participating in the elections.

Johari emphasized: Out of the total votes cast in Tehran Province, 3,366,264 tariff votes were used, with 96% valid votes and less than 4% invalid votes.

He added: Out of the total votes of the people in Tehran Province, Masoud Pezeshkian received 1,492,164 votes and 40% of the votes, Saeed Jalili received 1,165,518 votes and 35%, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf received 673,000 votes and 20%, and Mostafa Pourmohammadi received 35,582 votes and 1% of the votes.

Iran's Commercial Networks in Agro Sector Being Expanded Through Cooperation With BRICS



TEHRAN - The Deputy Minister for Agricultural Affairs of the Ministry of Jihad Agriculture stated: The Islamic Republic of Iran, considering its exceptional geographical location and abundant transit advantages, is expanding regional and international commercial networks in the agricultural sector through cooperation with BRICS members.

Alireza Mohajer, who headed a delegation at the 14th BRICS Agriculture Ministers' Meeting in Russia, stated: In line with "mitigating the impacts of climate change and adapting to this phenomenon" and "preserving natural resources and biodiversity," the transition to an efficient, productive, stable, flexible, and sustainable agricultural production system is inevitable.

The Deputy Minister of Jihad Agriculture added: In this regard, developing collaborations, transferring knowledge, exchanging information and experiences in the revival and enrichment of forests, combating desertification, establishing and strengthening early warning systems, stabilizing shifting sands, managing crisis centers, and developing smart agriculture adapted to the climate by BRICS countries is an effective initiative in this field and a path towards enhancing food security.

Mohajer said: The development of sustainable rural tourism, agriculture, and food, and the necessity of identifying, registering, and preserving globally important agricultural heritage systems (GIAHS) as a vital combination of social, cultural, ecological, and

economic services, is of great importance in preserving and developing the livelihoods of grassroots agriculture, flexibility, and improving the livelihoods of small farmers.

He added: The Islamic Republic of Iran, considering its exceptional geographical location and abundant transit advantages, intersecting transit corridors north-south and east-west, and having commercial ports on the Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Oman Sea shores, has created conditions to expand regional and international commercial networks in the agricultural sector through cooperation with BRICS members and facilitate trade with the highest efficiency and lowest cost. Certainly, the Islamic Republic of Iran will be a reliable and effective partner in bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

He emphasized: The Islamic Republic of Iran will endeavor to remove existing obstacles to the development of agricultural cooperation with BRICS and expects reciprocity from member countries to open a new chapter in agricultural economic and trade relations.

According to this report, the development in recent years of agricultural relations between Iran and BRICS members demonstrates that this determination is practical and achievable by all members, and we must use joint capacities for multi-dimensional projects and initiatives and utilize the roles of other stakeholders at the regional and global levels to achieve BRICS agricultural goals.

Iran's Strength in Pharmaceutical Raw Material Production



TEHRAN - The head of the board of directors of the Syndicate of Pharmaceutical, Chemical, and Pharmaceutical Packaging Manufacturers of the country stated that Iran has become powerful in producing pharmaceutical raw materials. He said, "We have reached a strong production stage, and several domestic companies may produce each active ingredient in parallel."

According to IRNA from the public relations of the Syndicate of Pharmaceutical, Chemical, and Pharmaceutical Packaging Manufacturers, Faramarz Ekhteraee added: "Basic materials, especially in the fields of oil and petrochemicals, energy, and labor, are much cheaper for us; it is obvious that our finished product prices should also be cheaper."

He continued, "Today we are experiencing extraordinary conditions, and I truly feel that within two to three years, we will reach a significant level of export of pharmaceutical active ingredients." The head of the board of directors of the Syndicate of Pharmaceutical, Chemical, and Pharmaceutical Packaging Manufacturers, referring to the sixth International Exhibition of Pharmaceutical, Chemical, and Pharmaceutical Packaging Materials starting on Thursday, July 4, in Shahr-e Aftab, said, "This exhibition can be considered the most important international event in the pharmaceutical sector of the country, which will be held for four days with the participation of domestic and foreign companies."

Ekhteraee continued, "It is planned that at Pharmex exhibition, the capabilities of domestic companies active in the production and supply of pharmaceutical, chemical, and pharmaceutical packaging materials will be showcased to visitors."

He said, "During the five editions of this exhibition, it has been able to pave the way for transactions and exports of products of domestic companies, and various contracts have been concluded with companies and foreign countries."

Ekhteraee regarded the exhibition of pharmaceutical raw materials as a real advancement show and added, "I think everyone who attends Pharmex exhibition will be very hopeful about the future of the pharmaceutical industry."

According to this report, the sixth International Pharmex Exhibition will be held from July 14 to 17, 1403, at Shahr-e Aftab Exhibition.

Iran Among Leading Countries in Statistical Systems



TEHRAN - The head of the Organization for Budget and Planning emphasized the necessity of strengthening the authority of Iran's Statistical Center in preparing, producing, and publishing accurate and precise statistics. He stated, "The advancement of the statistical system is one of the indicators of the country's development, and Iran is among the pioneering countries in this regard."

In the sixty-second session of the High Council of Statistics, on Saturday, Davood Manzour highlighted the significant achievements in the country's statistical system, saying, "The Statistical Center of Iran has been able to produce and publish up-to-date and precise statistics in collaboration with agencies and according to a clear timetable, which serves as the main reference across all agencies." He emphasized the need to enhance the authority of Iran's Statistical Center in preparing, producing, and publishing up-to-date and precise statistics, adding, "The implementation of the population and housing census based on registration in 2026 is a very important issue that requires careful planning and preparation to ensure its successful execution." Referring to the effective measures and valuable achievements of Iran's Statistical Center during the late "Adel Azar" era and acknowledging the efforts of subsequent and current heads of this center, he called for the continuation of transformational programs in this institution, stating, "We hope that Iran's Statistical Center will be able to maintain its rightful place in the country's planning system with the cooperation of all agencies and under the support and backing of the Organization for Budget and Planning."

Manzour considered the advancement of the statistical system as one of the indicators of the country's development and stated, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is among the pioneering countries in this field, and we hope that the level and quality of the country's statistical organization will improve in international rankings."



Iran Has Capacity to Triple Trade Volume With Neighboring Countries

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Customs Administration Mohammad Rezvani Far stated: "Apart from elections, there is no alternative for better decision-making in key areas of the country." He added: "The positive aspect of this period is that economic and livelihood issues, employment creation, enhancing production capacity, country's exports, increasing people's income, and addressing social issues are prominently featured in all candidates' election slogans." The Head of Iran's Customs Administration stated: "The positive point is that all candidates participating in the final elections have presented urgent economic packages." He said: "Certainly, this vote can be a significant support in the international arena for our country." Rezvani Far reminded: "In line with the country's growth, it is necessary for the infrastructure of ports, terminals, and customs to also develop. One interesting point about our country is that transit has grown by 55% compared to last year. Each ton of transit brings \$70 to \$100 in profitability to the country. At least 35 to 40 million tons of goods transit through Iran annually, bringing a minimum income of \$4 to \$5 billion to the country. This field can only be realized through the development of domestic infrastructure."

He added: "Few countries in the world share land and sea borders with 15 countries. Our trade volume with neighboring countries has reached \$61 billion, and if the signed agreements at the highest levels are implemented, the trade volume and market in this area will more than triple." The Head of Iran's Customs Administration stated: "Development of economic diplomacy has been a slogan of all candidates, and we hope to see progress in this area."

Man Killed After Attacking Israeli Embassy in Serbia

BELGRADE (Reuters) - An attacker who fired a crossbow at a police officer guarding the Israeli embassy in Belgrade was shot dead on Saturday in what President Aleksandar Vucic called a terrorist attack against Serbia. No embassy staff were wounded in the attack, the Israeli foreign ministry said, and the policeman was in a stable condition in hospital following surgery to remove an arrow from his neck, Vucic said. Vucic named the attacker as Salahudin Zujovic, a man from central Serbia who had converted to Islam from Serbian Orthodox Christianity, and said he had worked with an accomplice who remained at large: "We are looking for another person." Vucic told reporters after visiting the wounded policeman. "We will secure all diplomatic missions and also guarantee safety and security." The pair were being tracked by Serbian security agencies prior to Saturday's attack but there was not enough evidence to detain them, Vucic added. Earlier in the day, interior minister Ivica Dacic said the policeman who was attacked had fired several shots at the assailant, killing him.



At Least 12 Killed in Russian Attacks Across Eastern Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian strikes on villages across Ukraine killed at least 12 people on Saturday, leading Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky to call for "accelerated" Western arms deliveries.

Russian attacks across eastern Ukraine killed at least 11 people Saturday, while rescuers in the city of Dnipro dug through rubble after a Russian strike ripped through a nine-story residential building, leaving one dead, officials said.

The attacks came as Russia continues to stretch out Ukrainian forces in several areas along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front. Moscow has stepped up airstrikes in a bid to drain Ukraine's resources, often targeting energy facilities and other vital infrastructure.

The shelling of the front-line village of Niu-York in the Donetsk region also wounded five people, Gov. Vadym Filashkin said. He said that Russian forces had shelled populated areas 13 times over the past 24 hours.

A further seven people were killed Saturday afternoon in Russian shelling on the town of Vilniansk, including two children, Gov. Ivan Fedorov said. Ten other people were wounded, while infrastructure was also damaged, he wrote on social media.

Meanwhile, in Dnipro, at least one person died and 12 were wounded, including a 7-month-old girl, after a Russian strike destroyed the top four floors of the apartment building on Friday evening, regional head Serhii Lysak said. Rescuers confirmed that several residents remained missing.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the Dnipro attack was a reminder to Ukraine's allies that the country needed more air defense systems. The Ukrainian air force said Saturday that it had downed 10 Russian drones overnight.



Colombian Rebel Group Agrees to Unilateral Ceasefire

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - A Colombian splinter group of former FARC guerrillas known as Segunda Marquetalia has agreed to a "unilateral ceasefire" and the release of captives following negotiations with the government, according to a joint statement Saturday. The talks, held in the Venezuelan capital Caracas, are the third launched under Colombia's leftist President Gustavo Petro, who has faced multiple obstacles in his efforts to end six decades of conflict between his country's security forces, guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries and drug gangs. Read more Colombia partly suspends truce with EMC armed rebel faction. The delegations to the talks agreed on "the unilateral ceasefire of the Second Marquetalia-EB (Ejército Bolivariano, or Bolivarian army)" as well as committing to "delivery of the people they are holding," according to a document signed by chief government negotiator Armando Novoa and rebel representative Walter Mendoza. The agreement's start date was not specified, but the text seen by AFP states "the full implementation of de-escalation will begin as soon as the presidential decree on offensive military operations comes into force." The statement asserts the unilateral ceasefire does not restrict the national security forces' "constitutional and legal powers. And it says the rebel group also agreed "not to remain armed or in uniform" in urban centers or "land and river routes."



involving navy destroyers, fighter jets and the nuclear-powered U.S. aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt, aimed at boosting defenses against missiles, submarines and air attacks. The exercise was devised at the three-way summit at Camp David last year to strengthen military cooperation amid tensions on the Korean peninsula stemming from North Korea's weapons testing.

North Korea Biames South Korea, U.S. and Japan Ties

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea criticized a joint military exercise by South Korea, Japan and the United States held this month, state media said on Sunday, saying such drills show the relationship among three countries has developed into "the Asian version of NATO".

On Thursday, the three countries began large-scale joint military drills called "Freedom Edge"

Pyeongyang will not ignore the strengthening of a military bloc led by the U.S. and its allies and will protect regional peace with an aggressive and overwhelming response, North Korea's foreign ministry said in a statement, according to KCNA news agency. The ministry also said Washington was continuing its effort to link up South Korea and Japan to NATO, adding South Korea's attempts to supply weapons to Ukraine is one example of that effort. South Korea said it would review the possibility of supplying arms directly to Ukraine, in protest against a recent mutual defense pact signed between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin. South Korea and the United States have accused the North of supplying weapons to Russia that are being used in the Ukraine war. Both Russia and North Korea deny any such transactions. On Saturday, North Korea's ruling party held a key meeting on the second day, presided by Kim, who addressed "deviations" hampering economic development and laid out the focus for the second half of the year, state media said. North Korea has long condemned joint drills between the United States and South Korea as a rehearsal for invasion and proof of hostile policies by Washington and Seoul. Last

year, the three countries staged joint naval missile defense and anti-submarine exercises to improve responses to North Korean threats. Meanwhile North Korean officials wore pins with a portrait of Kim Jong Un in public for the first time in pictures released by state media on Sunday, the latest step in the development of a cult of personality about the leader. The officials, speaking at a key meeting chaired by Kim of the reclusive state's ruling party, wore the typical party logo pin on the right lapel and, on the left chest, the pin with Kim's face against a flag-shaped red background. The 10th Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, which reviews the party's performance for the first half of the year, began on Friday, state news agency KCNA said. The Kim dynasty that has ruled North Korea since its founding after World War Two has sought to strengthen its grip on power by building cults of personality around itself. In an apparent push to solidify Kim Jong Un's status as a leader equal to his father and grandfather, North Korean media published photographs showing leader his portrait hanging prominently next to those of Kim Jong Il and national patriarch Kim Il Sung earlier this year.

France Votes in Election That Could Put Far Right in Gov't

PARIS (Dispatches) - French voters cast their ballots on Sunday in the first round of a snap parliamentary election that could usher in the country's first far-right government since World War Two, a potential sea change at the heart of the European Union.

President Emmanuel Macron stunned the country when he called the vote after his centrist alliance was crushed in European elections this month by Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN). Her eurosceptic, anti-immigrant party was a longtime pariah but is now closer to power than it has ever been.

Polls opened at 0600 GMT, closing at 1600 GMT in small towns and cities, and at 1800 GMT in the bigger cities.

However the electoral system can make it hard to estimate the precise distribution of seats in the 577-seat National Assembly, and the final outcome will not be known until the end of voting on July 7.

"We are going to win an absolute majority," said Le Pen in a newspaper interview on Wednesday, predicting that her protégé, 28-year-old Jordan Bardella would be prime minister. Her party has a high-spending economic programme and seeks to reduce immigration.

If the RN does win an absolute majority, French diplomacy could be headed for an unprecedented period of turbulence: with Macron - who has said he will continue his presidency until the end of his term in 2027 - and Bardella jostling for the right to speak for France.

France has had three periods of "cohabitation" - when the president and government are from opposite political camps - in its post-war history, but none with such radically divergent world views competing at the top of the state.

Bardella has already indicated he would challenge Macron on global issues. France could lurch from being a pillar of the EU to a thorn in its side, demanding a rebate of the French contribution to the EU budget, clashing with Brussels over European Commission jobs and reversing Macron's calls for greater EU unity and

assertiveness on defence.

A clear RN victory would also bring uncertainty as to where France stands on the Russia-Ukraine war. Le Pen has a history of pro-Russian sentiment and while the party now says it would help Ukraine defend itself against Russian invaders, it has also set out red lines, such as refusing to provide long-range missiles.

Opinion polls have suggested the RN has a comfortable lead of 33-36% of the popular vote, with a hastily assembled left-wing coalition, the New Popular Front, in second place on 28-31% and Macron's centrist alliance in third on 20-23%.

The New Popular Front includes a wide range of parties, from the moderate centre-left to the hard-left, eurosceptic, anti-NATO party France Unbowed, led by one of Macron's most vitriolic opponents, Jean-Luc Melenchon.

How the poll numbers will translate into seats in the National Assembly is hard to predict because of how the election works, said Vincent Martigny, professor of political science at the University of Nice and the Ecole Polytechnique.

Candidates can be elected in the first round if they win an absolute majority of votes in their constituency, but that is rare. Most constituencies will need a second round involving all candidates who received votes from at least 12.5% of registered voters in the first round. The top scorer wins.

"If you have a very high level of participation you might have a third or fourth party that is getting into the struggle. So then of course there's a risk of split voting and we know that the split vote favours the National Rally," said Martigny.

For decades, as the far right steadily gained popularity, voters and parties who did not support it would unite against it whenever it edged closer to national power, but that may not hold true this time.

No Progress in Gaza Ceasefire Talks With Israel

CAIRO (Dispatches) - A senior official of the militant Islamist group Hamas, Osama Hamdan, said there has been no progress in ceasefire talks with Israel over the Gaza war.

The Palestinian group is still ready to "deal positively" with any ceasefire proposal that ends the war, Hamdan told a news conference in Beirut.

Arab mediators' efforts, backed by the United States, have so far failed to conclude a ceasefire, with both sides blaming each other for the impasse. Hamas says any deal must end the war and bring full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, while Israel says it will accept only temporary pauses in fighting until Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007, is eradicated. Hamdan also blamed the United States for applying pressure on Hamas to accept Israel's conditions.

"Once again, Hamas is ready to deal positively with any proposal that secures a permanent ceasefire, a comprehensive withdrawal from Gaza Strip and a serious swap deal," said Hamdan, referring to a potential stage of hostages held in Gaza for Palestinians in Israeli prisons. When Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7 they killed around 1,200 people and seized more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. The Israeli offensive in retaliation has so far killed nearly 38,000 people, according to the Gaza health ministry, and has left the heavily built-up coastal enclave in ruins. The Gaza health ministry does not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants but officials say most of the dead are civilians. Israel has lost more than 300 soldiers in Gaza and says at least a third of the Palestinian dead are fighters. Palestinian health officials said Israeli military strikes across the enclave



had so far killed at least 35 people and wounded others on Saturday. The Israeli military on Saturday announced the death of two soldiers killed in combat in northern Gaza, as Israeli forces pressed on with an offensive in the Shejaia neighborhood in Gaza City. Residents said tanks advanced deeper into several districts including the area around the local market and there was heavy fire from the air and the ground.

The armed wing of Hamas and the allied Islamic Jihad reported fierce fighting, saying fighters fired anti-tank rockets and mortar bombs against the forces operating there. The Israeli military said dozens of Palestinian gunmen were killed over the past two days in close quarters combat and airstrikes in Shejaia, after forces encircled what it described as a civilian area converted by Hamas into a militant compound. "In the area, the troops located observation posts, weapons, enemy drones and a long-range rocket launcher near the schools," the military said in a statement. Hamas has denied assertions that it operates in civilian areas such as schools and hospitals. More than eight months into Israel's air and ground war in Gaza, militants continued to stage attacks on Israeli forces, operating in areas that the Israeli army said it had gained control over

months ago. Israeli leaders have said in the past week that the intense phase of the war is approaching its end, and that the next stage of the offensive will mainly be smaller-scale operations meant to stop Hamas from reassembling. Meanwhile Israeli forces operating in several districts in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, killed several Palestinians and forced families living in the far western edge of the city along the coastal areas to head northwards, according to Palestinian medical officials and residents. Israel has said its military operations in Rafah are aimed at eradicating the last armed battalions of Hamas.

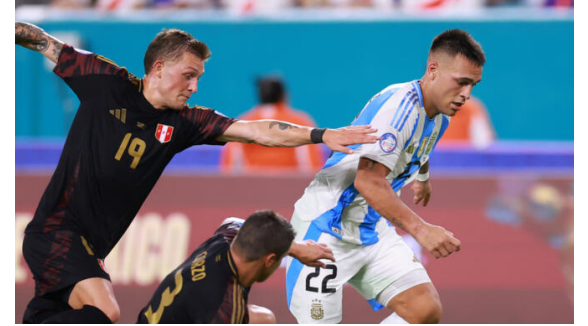


Germany Weather Storm at Euro 2024, Holders Italy Knocked Out

DORTMUND (Dispatches) - Hosts Germany beat Denmark 2-0 in a storm-interrupted encounter to reach the quarter-finals of Euro 2024 on Saturday, after reigning champions Italy were knocked out of the competition by Switzerland. Two second-half goals, one a Kai Havertz penalty and another a Jamal Musiala strike, allowed Germany to come out on top in Dortmund, where the last-16 tie was halted for 25 minutes late in the first half as a violent storm passed overhead. English referee Michael Oliver was forced to take the two teams off the pitch due to torrential rain, hailstones, high winds, thunder and lightning, while some fans in the crowd of 60,000 found themselves caught underneath torrents of water streaming from the stadium roof. Before that, Germany had an early Nico Schlotterbeck goal disallowed for a foul and were denied on several occasions by Danish goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel. When play resumed, Germany thought they had fallen behind early in the second half when Joachim Andersen scored, but his effort was ruled out for offside following a VAR review, and the unfortunate Danish defender was then penalised for a handball in his own box moments later. Havertz dispatched the spot-kick to put Germany ahead in the 53rd minute, and both he and Leroy Sane missed good opportunities before Musiala ran clear to make it 2-0 midway through the second half. "It was a bit of a bizarre

game," Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann told broadcaster Magenta. "The first 25 minutes were our best of the tournament. Then we scored what I think was a legitimate goal, and (the referee) ruled it out which was petty. "That kind of blocking happens at every corner. In England, where the referee is from, he would not blow the whistle for it. In the end, it was a game full of adversity. We fought well against the adversity." Germany could even have won by a wider margin but Florian Wirtz, who started the game as a substitute, had another effort disallowed late on. Nevertheless, a commanding victory takes the hosts through to a quarter-final next Friday in Stuttgart against either much-fancied Spain or surprise package Georgia. "It feels very good. We were dominant from the start. This team shows good character, we can always come back, always give it our all. We still have three finals left," said defender Antonio Ruediger. Denmark, meanwhile, go home without winning a game, having qualified from their group by drawing all three matches. Earlier, Italy's defence of their title ended in underwhelming fashion as they deservedly lost to Switzerland, going down 2-0 at the Olympiastadion in Berlin. Ruben Vargas teed up Remo Freuler for Switzerland's 37th-minute opener before curling home superbly himself right at the start of the second half to deservedly double their lead.

No Messi, No Problem as Argentina Down Peru



MIAMI (Dispatches) - Argentina shrugged off the injury absence of Lionel Messi to maintain their perfect start at the Copa America on Saturday with a 2-0 victory over Peru in Miami. Lautaro Martinez scored twice at the Hard Rock Stadium to seal a win that ensured Argentina advance to the quarter-finals as Group A winners. With Messi sidelined after complaining of a sore right hamstring, and coach Lionel Scaloni serving a one-game suspension, Argentina made nine changes to their starting XI at the Hard Rock Stadium.

But despite the makeshift-looking line-up, Argentina were always in control against a disappointing Peru side who managed just one shot on goal during a one-sided encounter. Martinez's first goal came just after half-time. A sublime through ball from Angel Di Maria released the Inter Milan forward, who calmly lifted a deft finish over advancing Peru goalkeeper Pedro Gallese. Argentina had a chance to double their lead in the 72nd minute after Jesus Castillo handled in the area to concede a penalty. But Leandro Paredes crashed his ensuing spot-kick against the woodwork to leave the score at 1-0. Martinez then grabbed a second in the 86th minute, latching on to a long pass forward before finishing past Gallese. Replays indicated Martinez appeared to shove defender Aldo Corzo in the build-up but referee Cesar Ramos waved Peru's protest and the goal stood. "It was tough in the first half because they were defending deep, but the first goal opened up the game," Martinez said afterwards. "There's a lot more to come from us."

India Win the T20 World Cup, Defeating S, Africa for Title

BRIDGETOWN (Dispatches) - India's men's cricket team won a nail-biter final game against South Africa in the Twenty20 World Cup match on Saturday, putting an end to the country's 13-year drought in the global cricket arena. Both India and South Africa were undefeated going into Saturday's match in Barbados. South Africa seemed like it had a chance of winning the game, but India thwarted the team's attempt to exceed India's 176 runs. This was India's second T20 World Cup win; the team won the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007. It was also India's first World Cup win in 13 years in any type of cricket, after a series of heartbreaking close final matches over the last 12 months. "Guys understand when the pressure is on what needs to be done," said Rohit Sharma, India's team captain. "Today was a perfect example, [we] stuck together with backs to the wall. We wanted this really bad ... very proud of the bunch of boys and the management." Cricket is the world's second-most popular sport but many Americans are unfamiliar. T20 is an abbreviated form of the game. In a T20 match, each team has 20 overs. In



each over, a bowler (similar to a pitcher) from the opposing team throws six balls for the batsman (similar to batter) to hit. Batsmen make "runs," each time they hit a ball, which are counted as points for the team. There are two batsmen playing in each over. "To get a run, the easiest or probably the hardest way to do it is to whack the ball as hard as you can so that it crosses the boundary line, which is the end of the field," NPR's Mumbai, India, producer Omkar Khandekar told Morning Edition. "If you can do that, then you start running between what they call the pitch. And the more you run, the more runs you get." Virat Kohli, one of the team's top batters, played a key role in India's eventual win over South Africa. The India team was in early trouble after deciding to bat first — they had only made 34 runs in the first five overs. This means that within the first quarter of India's time batting, the team had averaged approximately only one run per ball.

LeBron James Opts out of Contract, Eyes New Lakers Deal



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Four-times NBA champion LeBron James has opted out of the final year of his contract with the Los Angeles Lakers but is working on a new deal with the team, according to an ESPN report on Saturday.

While the decision means James will become a free agent on Sunday for the fourth time in his decorated career, his Lakers future is hardly in doubt given they selected his son in the second round of the NBA Draft on Thursday.

According to ESPN, James opted out of a contract worth \$51.4 million for next season to become a free agent eligible to sign a maximum three-year deal with the Lakers worth \$162 million.

But ESPN, which sourced James' agent Rich Paul, said the NBA's all-time leading scorer is willing to work with the Lakers on a deal below the maximum to better position the team to sign an impact player.

"He is prioritizing a roster improvement," Paul told ESPN. "He's been adamant about exuding all efforts to improve the roster."

James had until 5 p.m. ET (2100 GMT) on Saturday to decide whether to opt into his player option for the 2024-25 National Basketball Association season.

Reuters was unable to reach Paul for comment while the Lakers did not immediately respond when asked to confirm the ESPN report.

In six seasons with the Lakers the four-times league MVP has averaged 27 points per game, eight assists and 7.9 rebounds.

The Lakers finished seventh in the Western Conference this year with a 47-35 record and went on to lose to the defending champion Denver Nuggets in the first round of the NBA playoffs.

Kasatkina, Fritz Win Eastbourne Titles Ahead of Wimbledon

LONDON (Dispatches) - Daria Kasatkina and Taylor Fritz won the women's and men's singles titles respectively at the Eastbourne International as they both enjoyed morale-boosting grass-court triumphs just days out from the start of Wimbledon.

Kasatkina's 6-3, 6-4 victory over Leylah Fernandez gave the Russian her first grass-court title a year after she lost in the Eastbourne final to Madison Keys.

By contrast top-seed Fritz became the first three-time men's singles champion at Devonshire Park with a 6-4, 6-3 win over Australian qualifier Max Purcell.

Sixth seed Kasatkina, in defeating former US Open finalist Fernandez, won her seventh career title and first since 2022 following three previous defeats in finals this season.

"It's been a year, but it feels like it's been a few days since last year when I was standing here," said the 27-year-old. "It was a tough battle today. It's been a long road to the title but I am really proud."

Kasatkina now heads to Wimbledon, where she is seeded 14th, to play China's Zhang Shuai in the first round of the women's singles as the grass-court Grand Slam gets underway on Monday.

Fernandez's serve was broken in the first game and Kasatkina backed that up by holding her own serve.

A gruelling fifth game of 11 deuces, which lasted just over 20 minutes, including a stoppage while a spectator received medical treatment, saw



Fernandez force three break points.

Nevertheless, Kasatkina held and stayed ahead before clinching the set with a second break in the ninth game after the 21-year-old Canadian double-faulted.

Kasatkina, who knocked out Britain's Emma Raducanu in the quarter-finals, then surged into a 3-0 lead in the second set.

But Fernandez, defeated by Raducanu in the 2021 US Open final, fought back to 3-3 and then broke Kasatkina for the second time in the set as the Russian double-faulted.

Fernandez now led 4-3 only for Kasatkina to break back immediately.

With Fernandez's confidence dented, Kasatkina stayed ahead and won the match when her opponent overhit a forehand.

Fernandez, however, was happy with her week's work after reaching her first grass-court final.

Fritz's win over Purcell, appearing in his first ATP final, meant the 26-year-old American had not dropped a set all week.

"I'm pumped. I always feel like I play well here," said Fritz, who also won Eastbourne in 2019 and 2022. "I kind of just had that feeling coming into the week as well. I did a great job."

Fritz will now face another Australian when the 13th seed plays Christopher O'Connell in the first round of Wimbledon.