

IRAN NEWS

Major General Yahya Rahim-Safavi, an Advisor to the Supreme Leader, Said That Iraq Could Become the Most Influential Country in the Arab World, Adding That Iran and Iraq Have a Common Destiny

Acting President Mohammad Mokhber Has Said That Iranians Have Always Fulfilled Their Responsibilities in the Best and Most Appropriate Way With Regard to the System of the Islamic Republic

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Country's Foreign Exchange and Gold Reserves Increasing



TEHRAN - Mohammad Reza Farzin, the Governor of the Central Bank, announced: "One of our primary goals has been to increase the Central Bank's foreign exchange reserves, and I assure you that the free foreign exchange reserves and the Central Bank's gold reserves are on the rise."

He said: "With the establishment of the Exchange Center, we have provided essential goods' foreign currency at a rate of 28,500 based on the Parliament's resolution, and supplied the foreign currency for other goods at a variable and floating rate to maintain the balance of production enterprises."

Stating that, according to official statistics, the allocation and supply of foreign currency to the production sector have increased every year, he clarified: "Fortunately, with the start of the Exchange Center, we have gained more control over the foreign exchange market and have better allocated foreign currency and controlled its price."

Farzin emphasized: "When inflation is controlled and reduced, part of it is due to the success of the foreign exchange policy."

According to the Governor of the Central Bank, when growth is achieved and the growth of capital formation has increased, it means that the necessary foreign currency for capital formation has been well allocated.

Iran Says Hezbollah Fully Ready to Face Israel Threats



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's interim Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani has warned the Israeli regime of "detrimental consequences" if it attacks Lebanon, saying the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah is fully prepared to fight off Israel.

Bagheri Kani issued the warning in a phone conversation with Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan on Monday amid Israel's threats to launch attacks on the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah.

"They (the Israeli regime) should know that any new mistake they make in Lebanon will create new conditions at the regional level to the detriment of the Zionists, who will not be able to make up for their strategic defeat by [committing] murder and crime," the top Iranian diplomat said.

He added that Israel's war threats against Lebanon are in line with the continuation of the regime's crimes against the people of Palestine in the Gaza Strip and show its barbaric nature. Bagheri Kani hailed the unique power of the Lebanese resistance which is fully prepared to deal with the Israeli regime's threats, warning that any act of aggression will be costly for the occupiers. He noted that the Israeli regime is not able to restore the situation that existed before it launched the war in the Gaza Strip on October 7. Tensions remain high along Lebanon's southern border, where Hezbollah is engaged in intense clashes with Israeli forces. Hezbollah has been carrying out almost daily rocket attacks on Israeli positions in retaliation for the regime's aggression against Lebanon and in solidarity with Gaza. So far, the regime's genocidal war has killed at least 37,877 people, mostly women and children, in Gaza and injured 86,969 others.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Bagheri Kani commended the participation of the Turkish delegation in the 19th Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) ministerial meeting in Tehran late last month. The top Iranian diplomat stressed the importance of making use of the capacities of the D-8, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to promote the objectives of the independent countries in the region.

IRAN NEW POLITICAL DESK

Iran One of Most Active Countries in Creating a World Free of Chemical Weapons



TEHRAN - The acting Foreign Minister says the Islamic Republic of Iran has never pursued non-humanitarian weapons and has always been among the advocates for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. It is considered one of the most effective and active countries in creating a world free of chemical weapons. Ali Baqeri, the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, on Monday and at the ceremony commemorating the National Day of Fighting against Chemical Weapons and the anniversary of the chemical attack on the city of Sardasht, said: Countries that supported Saddam in producing and using chemical weapons against Iran are now supporters of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Zionist regime in Gaza. He said: Saddam's bombers attacked Sardasht years ago with chemical weapons, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of children and women and the injury of thousands. Surely, this crime was the most shocking crime of Saddam's regime in this regard. Until the end of the imposed war, the Ba'ath regime in Iraq used chemical weapons 500 times in five western border provinces of Iran. Baqeri added: According to UN documents and reports from Western intelligence agencies, Western countries played a major role in equipping and arming Saddam's regime, enabling it to repeatedly use chemical weapons against Iranians on a wide scale. He emphasized: Western countries not only supported Saddam militarily but also defended the dictator in the diplomatic arena, preventing the UN Security Council from issuing a single resolution against the Ba'ath regime throughout the eight-year imposed war. He continued: With Western intervention, the Security Council remained incapable of taking any deterrent action against Saddam's regime. The attack on Sardasht was not only the result of Saddam's dictatorship but also due to America's failure to allow any international organization to oppose Saddam and paralyze international mechanisms, preventing even a single resolution from being issued by the Security Council against Saddam. Baqeri said: Today, these same countries do not allow the necessary medicines for treating chemical patients to enter the country. He stated: The Islamic Republic of Iran has never pursued non-humanitarian weapons and has always been among the

advocates for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. It is considered one of the most effective and active countries in the world in creating a world free of chemical weapons. Meanwhile on the sidelines of the event, he said: "In today's world, the same Western countries that supported the Ba'athist regime in Iraq are now backing the Zionist regime to continue their crimes through international mechanisms, enabling them to perpetuate atrocities." He added: "Western countries defend dictators when it suits their interests, overthrow popular governments in other countries, start wars in independent nations, and unjustly impose sanctions on peoples." He said, "The issue of chemical weapons is one of the black pages of Western countries in dealing with the Iranian nation. If the casualties and injuries from the eight-year chemical defense of our holy defense were to happen in any other country in the world, hundreds of feature films and documentaries would have been made about it. But because one side consists of the world's bullies and the other side is a victimized country, such incidents do not occur." Baqeri added, "Today, the situation we witness in Gaza is similar. Today, chemical weapons and weapons of mass slaughter are condemned because they result in the genocide of humanity." He continued, "Today, just like 40 years ago, Western countries are the main accused and criminals in crimes against humanity and genocide, and the effort of all independent and freedom-loving countries must be to prevent Western powers from justifying their crimes using the mechanisms they possess." Baqeri added, "European and American countries not only provided equipment and supplies for chemical weapons, sometimes they themselves provided chemical weapons to Saddam during the war. They supported the Ba'ath regime against Iran's incursions and prevented any resolution against Saddam's regime in the field of diplomacy, as well." The Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs stated, "Today, Western countries do not even allow access to chemotherapy drugs through cruel sanctions, and these same Western countries today support the Ba'athist regime in Iraq against the Zionist regime and create space in international mechanisms for Zionists to continue their crimes."

Declining Israel Suffers All-Out Defeat From Resistance Front



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A top military advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the resistance front has succeeded in inflicting a heavy defeat on the Israeli regime, which is approaching its decline. "In a strategic assessment, they (the Israeli regime) sustained a defeat from the axis of resistance -- from Lebanon's Hezbollah, Yemen's Ansarullah, Syria's resistance, Iraq's resistance and Palestinian resistance groups," Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi said on Sunday. He added that Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has failed to achieve any of his stated goals in the Gaza Strip. Rahim Safavi, a former chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), emphasized that the West, led by the United States and NATO, is the main supporter of Israel and is in charge of the political, military, economic and even media command of the regime's months-long war against Gaza. They have killed and injured more than 120,000 oppressed people across the West Asia region, he noted. He said Netanyahu sought to occupy the Gaza Strip, eliminate the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas and free Israeli captives. However, the top commander added, "The resistance front changed the power equation both in the north and south of the occupied territories." Rahim Safavi reiterated that Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement managed to bring the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea under its full control. Ansarullah hit the military and commercial fleets of the US, Britain and supporters of the Zionist regime with its various missiles and drones, he explained. Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against Israel since the regime launched its savage campaign in Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian resistance movements carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity. The Yemeni Armed Forces say they won't stop the attacks until Israel stops its ground and aerial offensives. Rahim Safavi further described the establishment of the fake Israeli regime in the Palestinian territories as the "West's biggest strategic mistake" while the "Zionists have no place in the region."

At Least 18 Israeli Troopers Injured in Hezbollah Drone Strike



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The Israeli military says 18 soldiers were wounded in a drone attack by Hezbollah in the occupied Golan Heights.

The Israeli military says 18 soldiers were wounded, including one seriously, in a drone attack conducted by the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement in the occupied Golan Heights.

In a statement released Sunday on its X account, Israel's Army Radio said the casualties came after "the explosion of a Hezbollah drone launched from southern Lebanon."

Hezbollah also announced that it had targeted the headquarters of the 91st Brigade north of the occupied territories in response to Israeli strikes against the resistance group.

Earlier on Sunday, Hezbollah said three of its fighters were killed in an Israeli airstrike that hit a two-story building in the village of Houla.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military reported that its fighter jets had attacked Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon, including an observation post in the area of Markaba and a launch pad in the Aytash Shab village.

Israeli forces, it added, further fired artillery into several areas in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah and Israel have been exchanging deadly fire since early October, shortly after the regime launched a genocidal war against the Gaza Strip following a surprise operation by the Palestinian Hamas resistance group.

Hezbollah has vowed to keep up its retaliatory attacks as long as the Tel Aviv regime continues its Gaza onslaught, which has so far killed at least 37,877 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 86,969 others.

Hezbollah officials have repeatedly said they do not want a war with Israel but if it happens they are ready.

Iran Protests to UK After Hostile Elements Harass Iranian Voters



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran protested to Britain over attempts by anti-Islamic Revolution elements outside polling stations in the European country aimed at disrupting the Islamic Republic's 14th presidential election.

Iran's chargé d'affaires to London, Ali Matinfar, said on Sunday that the Iranian embassy had sent a message of protest to the UK Foreign Office after hostile elements harassed participants in the first round of the vote on Friday.

The message, he added, also stressed the need to protect the security of Iranians in the upcoming runoff election.

Matinfar further said that he will pursue the issue in his meetings with British Foreign Office officials this week.

On June 28, thousands of Iranians residing in the UK cast their ballots in 10 polling stations set up in the cities of London, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Glasgow and Cardiff for Iran's presidential election.

At the same time, several hostile elements demonstrated outside polling stations and cursed at voters. The UK police arrested six rioters.

However, the voting process continued without any pause and the voters expressed their strong opposition to moves by the rioters.

More than 24 million people cast their votes in Friday's election to replace Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who lost his life in a helicopter crash on May 19.

IRAN NEWS



Presidential Election Results Validated by Guardian Council

TEHRAN (IP) - Tahan Nazif announced that the Guardian Council, which is responsible for overseeing the electoral process, has confirmed the accuracy and legitimacy of the election results. He stated that the council had provided an opportunity for candidates or voters to file complaints, but no such complaints were submitted. The spokesman noted that preparations are now underway for the runoff election, which will take place on July 5. The two candidates who received the most votes in the first round, Masoud Pezeshkian and Saeed Jalili, will face off in the runoff. The validation of the election results by GCC is a crucial step in the democratic process, ensuring the integrity and transparency of the electoral outcome. The election was called following the martyrdom of former President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash. The runoff election between Pezeshkian and Jalili will provide Iranian voters with a choice between two distinct political visions for the country's future.

Turkey Imports Oil From Iran After 4 Years

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - Eurostat has reported that two official members of the European Union imported oil from Iran this year despite the sanctions, and announced that Turkey also imported oil from Iran for the first time in four years.

According to IRNA, data released by Eurostat, the European Statistics Center, shows that two official members of the European Union imported oil from Iran in 2024.

Despite the European Union's sanctions on Iranian oil, Bulgaria and Poland, two official members of this union, imported oil from Iran in the first quarter of 2024.

During this period, Bulgaria imported 314 tons of oil or oil products from Iran. This figure represents a 113% increase compared to the import of 147 tons in the first quarter of the previous year. Bulgaria had imported 147 tons of oil or oil products from Iran from January to March 2023.

Poland also imported a shipment of Iranian oil or oil products weighing 19 tons in March 2024 for the first time in two years.

Although the amount of oil imported by these two countries is not significant, it indicates the pressure of Iran's sanctions on the energy sector of EU members and these countries' willingness to ignore the sanctions against Iran.

Eurostat data also shows that Georgia, an observer member of the European Union, imported 544 tons of oil or oil products from Iran in the first quarter of this year. Georgia's oil imports from Iran in the first quarter of the previous year were reported to be 974 tons.

According to this data, Turkey also imported oil or oil products from Iran for the first time in four years. In March this year, Turkey imported 576 tons and in April 485 tons, totaling 1,060 tons of oil or oil products from Iran. The last time Turkey imported an oil shipment from Iran was in August 2020.

Tunisians Dream of Traveling to Isfahan and Shiraz

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



TEHRAN - Following the mutual visa waiver between Iran and Tunisia, the first joint meeting on tourism cooperation to address obstacles to tourism development between the two countries was held. The meeting included the Tunisian ambassador to Iran, representatives from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, and managers of Iranian travel agencies, hosted by the Iranian Association of Travel Agencies. Hormatollah Rafiei, head of the Iranian Association of Travel Agencies, stated that Tunisia was the first country to take steps towards a mutual visa waiver after Iran lifted visa requirements for 30 countries. Tunisia has long been a tourist destination and target market for Iran, with charter flights operating to Tunisia at various times. Although these activities were halted during the COVID-19 pandemic, both countries are now resuming and enhancing their tourism relations. Rafiei emphasized the strong relations between the Iranian and Tunisian governments and private sectors in advancing tourism goals. The Tunisian ambassador to Iran is very active in promoting tourism development between the two countries. The meeting was held to exchange views and hear opinions from both the public and private sectors to overcome obstacles and continue joint tourism cooperation. Tunisian Ambassador to Iran, Imad al-Rahmouni, noted that while tourism is not a political issue, politics plays a determining role. He mentioned past meetings between Tunisian officials and Iran's Foreign Minister, including a meeting between the Tunisian President and Iran's President in Algeria, and a visit to Iran to offer condolences after the death of Ayatollah Raisi.

The ambassador thanked Rafiei for organizing the joint meeting and shared that his initial meetings with Rafiei aimed to discuss developing tourism between the two countries. Rafiei's enthusiasm has made tourism a key focus of the Tunisian embassy in Iran.

Rahmouni believes that tourism opens broader horizons for international relations. Establishing direct flights can strengthen people-to-people connections and positively impact other bilateral collaborations. Despite challenges such as visa issues and the absence of direct flights between Tehran and Tunis, efforts continue to achieve tourism goals. After starting his mission in

Iran, Rahmouni participated in the Tehran International Tourism Exhibition last February, even though it wasn't initially planned by the Tunisian National Tourism Organization. Rahmouni highlighted the importance of a joint Tunisia-Iran commission on tourism cooperation, currently being planned in Iran. A similar commission was previously held in Tunisia. Tunisian tourism and handicrafts officials, travel agency representatives, hoteliers, and air transport representatives will visit Tehran for this meeting, coinciding with Tunisia's Cultural and Tourism Week in Tehran. This visit is seen as a crucial opportunity for collaboration between Tunisian and Iranian tourism professionals. With Iran's presidential elections ongoing, the joint commission's timing will be set after the new government forms. Rahmouni expressed gratitude for support from Dr. Naghizadeh in proposing these sessions to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. The ambassador welcomed Iran's decision to exempt Tunisian tourists from visa requirements earlier this year. In turn, Tunisia now allows Iranian tourists a 15-day visa-free stay with a return flight ticket, without the need for hotel reservations. Following the visa waiver, the Tunisian embassy received numerous collaboration requests from Tunisian and Iranian travel agencies. The embassy has provided a list of travel agencies, now available on the Tunisian National Tourism Office website and Iranian travel agency websites.

Efforts are underway to organize regular and charter flights between Tunis and Tehran. Despite challenges like ticket costs and travel time, Rahmouni is optimistic about progress with continued support. The Tunisian embassy is also exploring ways to promote Tunisian tourism in Iran. Meetings with travel agencies that previously organized charter flights to Tunisia and current tour operators have led to considerations for direct flights and tourism marketing strategies.

Rahmouni emphasized the significant role of the private sector in advancing tourism cooperation, noting that tangible results cannot be achieved without travel agencies and air transport companies.

Grounded Aircraft Require \$500m to Return to Service



TEHRAN - The Secretary of the Association of Iranian Airlines, referring to the \$500 million foreign currency requirement for grounded aircraft, said: By liberalizing air ticket prices, 113 grounded aircraft in the country will be operational again, and the supply of seats will increase by at least 100%.

Maqsood Asaadi Samani, at the end of the inauguration ceremony for the infrastructure projects of Iran Air in a gathering of reporters, said: "The mentioned 113 aircraft are grounded due to liquidity problems and working capital issues, and to enter operational cycles, they require \$500 million in foreign currency." He said: "If prices are liberalized, airlines will undoubtedly strive to increase the number of their aircraft." Asaadi Samani reminded that airlines need about \$1 billion in foreign currency annually for their operating expenses. Last year, they received close to \$430 million through the Foreign Exchange Center but had to procure the rest of their needs from the open market. He also said that foreign companies are not allowed to transport passengers within our country by law, especially since we are currently under sanctions, which would harm domestic companies. This industry official continued: "If foreign companies decide to leave our country tomorrow, the absence of domestic companies will have security and social consequences for the country. Therefore, fundamentally, it is not the right action, and Parliament will certainly oppose it." He emphasized that the Administrative Justice Court's ruling in this regard is in accordance with the law passed by Parliament, which indicates the liberalization of domestic flight ticket prices. Asaadi Samani added that in recent years, due to enforced pricing, a black market emerged, where some brokers and intermediaries entered this market, and the prices offered were not approved by the airlines. The Secretary of the Association of Iranian Airlines noted: "Undoubtedly, with the implementation of the court's ruling, we will gradually see a more orderly market and balance in it." He stated: "Enforced pricing has led to prices being less than the actual cost of each seat, causing market disruption."

Asaadi stressed that the experience of 2015 and price liberalization showed an increase in supply and a decrease in prices. It can even be hoped that companies, with the income generated, will be able to bring their grounded aircraft back into operation and enable more flights.

We Will Prevent Israel's Cyber Attacks



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Iran Air Mr. Shamseddin Farzadipour at the opening ceremony of the Flight Operations Control Center (OCC), the Cyber Security Operations Center (SOS), and the Aerospace Medicine Center said: The OCC is considered the brain cells of an airline. It is essentially the flight control and coordination center where all flight planning is conducted. He also mentioned the establishment of the SOS center, saying: This control center has been created to prevent cyber attacks, as one of the potential threats is cyber attacks. Additionally, the Aerospace Medicine Center, named Homa Sabz, was established to expand medical services in the aviation sector. This center is the first active health center in the Mehrabad Airport area, and one of its important actions is to assess the health status of the operational staff.

The CEO of Iran Air emphasized: Currently, patient transfers are carried out via charter, with the cost of chartering a plane for patient transfer on the Zahedan - Tehran route being around 500 million tomans. The establishment of this center will reduce this amount to one-tenth. At the same ceremony, Mohammad Mohammadi-Bakhsh, the head of the Civil Aviation Organization, stated that while we face potential cyber attacks from Israel and must maintain information security, the SOS center is being established to prevent these cyber attacks. The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development also announced the possibility of aircraft recycling in the country and said: Currently, in the industry, we are at the highest levels of the complete cycle, maintenance, and training, and the end of this path

is the recycling and recycling cycles of aircraft, for which the recent guidelines have been uploaded. He continued: The city of Hamedan has been selected as the pilot for aircraft recycling, and the aircraft will be recycled under environmental standards and ICAO annexes, which will also change the appearance of aircraft parking. In response to a question about the possibility of cutting off subsidized fuel for airlines and Iran Air with the liberalization of air ticket prices, Farzadipour emphasized: "Currently, we do not have any specific directive to cut off subsidized fuel, but this plan is on the government's table, and we are waiting for its approval." In response to another question about Saudi Arabia's reason for not approving the Meraj Airline for Hajj flights, he said: "Saudi Arabia has not clearly specified any particular reason to us and only stated that they do not allow Meraj, while other countries have no such restrictions for multiple airlines to conduct Hajj flights." He then responded to a question about fleet renewal and whether it is worthwhile for airlines to purchase new airplanes, he continued: "Airlines might go bankrupt if they bought new airplanes because the costs are very high. On average, buying a new airplane costs around \$50 million. An airline needs to sell a lot of tickets to recover this investment." When he was asked about whether airlines benefit from the sanctions and the inability to purchase new airplanes, he stated: "In fact, airlines benefit out of necessity. In the past 3 to 4 years, some airlines bought planes and paid for them, but the planes did not enter the country. Today, purchasing airplanes carries a very high risk."

Millions of Tons of Raw Milk Produced Annually in the Country



TEHRAN - The head of the Iran Dairy Farmers Association said: According to the latest statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, 11.7 million tons of raw milk are produced annually in the country, covering the domestic dairy industry needs, and we have no shortage in this area.

Seyed Ahmad Moqaddasi added that according to inflation rates and rising production costs, the price of raw milk is determined annually by the Pricing Council and the Agricultural Products Pricing and Policy Making Committee.

He stated: Based on last year's decision by the Pricing Council and the Agricultural Products Pricing and Policy Making Committee, the approved price of each kilogram of raw milk with specifications of 3.2% fat, 3% protein, and microbial load below 100,000 was set and announced at 15,000 tomans.

The head of the Iran Dairy Farmers Association noted: This year, too, based on the decision of this council, the price of each kilogram of raw milk has been determined but has not yet been announced.

Moqaddasi mentioned that 60% of the feed for dairy and meat cattle consists of alfalfa and silage corn, and said: Currently, the required livestock feed for this industry is available in the country, but producers are facing increased prices for alfalfa and silage corn.

He stated: This year, the price of each kilogram of alfalfa has reached around 16,000 tomans and silage corn around 4,000 tomans, which has caused concerns for producers.

50 Foreign Companies Participating in ELECOMP 27

TEHRAN - The head of the National Computer Organization (NCR) announced: The 27th ELECOMP Exhibition was held in 15 halls with an area of 50,000 square meters. In this exhibition, 50 foreign companies and 50 individuals as part of trade delegations participated.

Ali Hakim Javadi stated at the 27th International ELECOMP Exhibition in a press conference today (Sunday, June 30), that the ELECOMP exhibition is of special importance given the impact of the communications and information technology sector on all aspects of our lives.

He added: On Saturday, the Minister of Communications visited the insurance hall and was pleased to see that this industry is also developing using new technologies.

The head of NCR continued: In previous exhibitions, we had between 70 to 100 startup counters. Now, most of our startups have become large companies, and the conditions for startup activities have changed.

Hakim Javadi said: This year's ELECOMP exhibition was held in 15 halls with an area of 50,000 square meters. Side events at the LECOMP Exhibition, named Stars, Startup Counters, and Tino Stars, are active; additionally, two new sections have been added to ELECOMP, one of which is Insurtech, supported by the Central Bank.

He stated: This year, 50 foreign companies are directly present in hall 38 of the exhibition. Some foreign companies are represented through agents. Around 50 trade delegations also traveled to Iran with the support of the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology and held many meetings on various collaborations.

Greek Firefighters Battle Wildfires

ATHENS (Dispatches) - Greek firefighters were battling two wildfires near Athens amid strong winds, just hours after managing to contain blazes in a mountainous area also near the capital as well as on an island in the Aegean Sea. Dozens of firefighters in full gear, backed by 23 water-carrying aircraft, fought with hoses to tame a fire in a sparsely-populated area near the town of Keratea, some 35 kms (22 miles) south of Athens. Authorities had ordered evacuations before flames from burning pine and olive trees engulfed houses. Another fire in the community of Stamata north of Athens burned a lush pine forest, sending columns of smoke over parts of the city. It did not threaten houses so far. With hot, windy conditions across much of Greece, dozens of wildfires broke out over the weekend and people were advised to stay away from forested areas. Firefighters were still engaged on the island of Serifos where a fire had broken out amid low vegetation on Saturday and spread quickly, fanned by strong winds, damaging houses and prompting the evacuation of several hamlets. The wildfire, which at one point had raged across 15 kms (9.3 miles), damaged holiday homes and storehouses, the island's mayor, Kostas Revinthis, told Greek television.



Top Democrats Rule Out Replacing Biden Amid Calls for Him to Quit 2024 Race



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Top Democrats ruled out the possibility of replacing President Joe Biden as the Democratic nominee after a feeble debate performance and called on party members to focus instead on the consequences of a second Donald Trump presidency. After days of hand-wringing about Biden's poor night on stage debating Trump, Democratic leaders firmly rejected calls for their party to choose a younger presidential candidate for the Nov. 5 election. Biden, 81, meanwhile, was huddling with family members at the Camp David presidential retreat on Sunday. The New York Times cited people close to the situation as saying that Biden's family were urging him to stay in the race and keep fighting. The paper said some members of his clan privately expressed exasperation at how his staff prepared him for Thursday night's event. A drumbeat of calls for Biden to step aside has continued since Thursday and a post-debate CBS poll showed a 10-point jump in the number of Democrats who believe Biden should not be running for president, to 46% from 36% in February. "The unfortunate truth is that Biden should withdraw from the race, for the good of the nation he has served so admirably for half a century," the Atlanta Journal-Constitution said in an editorial on Sunday. "The shade of retirement is now necessary for President Biden." Democratic leaders rejected this. "Absolutely not," responded Georgia Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock, one of several Democrats seen as a possible replacement for Biden. "Bad debates happen," he told NBC's Meet the Press program. "The question is, 'Who has Donald Trump ever shown up for other than himself and people like himself?' I'm with Joe Biden, and it's our assignment to make sure that he gets over the finish line come November." House of Representatives Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries, who could become speaker next year if his party can take control of the House in November, acknowledged that Biden had suffered a setback, but this was "nothing more than a setup for a comeback."

Le Pen's Far-Right Party Wins First Round of French Elections



PARIS (Dispatches) - Marine Le Pen's anti-immigrant National Rally led a first round of voting on Sunday in exceptionally high-stakes elections that could put France's government in the hands of a far-right party for the first time since World War II. President Emmanuel Macron's ruling coalition was beaten into third place by a fledgling alliance of the left as the incumbent's gamble with a snap election backfired spectacularly. Three weeks after trouncing its rivals in low-turnout European polls, Le Pen's National Rally (RN) confirmed its status as France's leading political force in a first round of legislative elections marked by the highest turnout in three decades. Le Pen's camp secured a clear victory, albeit not a decisive one, meaning the vote's ultimate outcome remains uncertain ahead of a second round of voting on July 7. Macron, whose decision to call the snap election had stunned friends and foes alike, has urged voters to rally against the far right next Sunday. RN and its allies on the right took 33.2% of the first-round vote, ahead of the left-wing New Popular Front (NFP) on 28.1%, according to projections by pollsters Ipsos-Talan. Macron's Ensemble alliance trailed in third place with 21%, followed by the conservative Les Républicains and their partners on 10%. Based on those figures, the far-right camp would go on to win between 230 and 280 seats in the National Assembly, the pollsters added, leaving it short of the 289 seats required to win an absolute majority. Such predictions are extremely difficult, owing to the two rounds of voting and a record number of three-way runoff races. The final result will depend on days of frantic horse-trading as parties work to make alliances in some constituencies or pull out of others. Addressing jubilant supporters in her northern constituency, where she won an outright victory in the first round, Le Pen called on voters to push her party over the line and give it an "absolute majority" of seats in the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament, which wields greater powers than the Senate. In such a scenario, Macron would be expected to name the party's 28-year-old poster boy Jordan Bardella as prime minister in an awkward power-sharing system, known as "cohabitation", that would weaken him both at home and on the world stage. Victory for RN would lead to France's first far-right government since the Nazi-allied Vichy Regime - capping an extraordinary turnaround for an extremist party that was co-founded by Le Pen's

father Jean-Marie, a Vichy supporter and convicted anti-Semite. A more likely outcome would be a hung parliament in which no coalition is able to muster a majority, bringing gridlock to the European Union's second-largest economy and its leading military power. Sunday's vote follows a chaotic and volatile three-week campaign - the shortest in modern French history - that saw Macron warn voters of a threat of "civil war" should they choose either of his main rivals. Estimated at over 65%, turnout was the highest for a parliamentary vote since former president Jacques Chirac called France's last snap election in 1997 - and suffered an equally catastrophic backlash. Macron's startling move to dissolve the lower house of parliament came on the heels of European parliamentary polls that saw Le Pen's National Rally trounce the ruling party. The president took the momentous decision against the advice of senior allies, the heads of France's two chambers of parliament and his prime minister, who were informed of his decision at the 11th hour and were powerless to change his mind. The abrupt call presented local officials with a logistical nightmare, coming as school summer holidays begin and with the Paris Olympics just around the corner. Gérard Larcher, the conservative head of the Senate, accused Macron of "beating up" democracy. Even Le Pen marvelled at the gift from the Élysée Palace, stating, in the wake of the dissolution: "When your opponent is riding a wave of support, the last thing you do is encourage that wave." She likened the momentum from her party's victory in European elections to that enjoyed by a newly elected president, when voters typically hand the incoming head of state a parliamentary majority to govern. Macron had hoped to frame the elections as a final showdown between his "progressive" camp and rival "populist" forces. The strategy had worked before, with voters twice rallying behind him - many reluctantly - to defeat Le Pen in presidential runoffs, in 2017 and 2022. But instead of playing in his favour, the "clarification" he invoked as he dissolved the National Assembly has resulted in a revival of the left-right divide he thought he had banished years ago. The sudden prospect of a far-right government succeeded in reuniting France's bitterly fractured left - with a speed that caught the Élysée Palace off guard.



Hungary Takes EU Presidency Echoing Trump But Likely to Lack Bite

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Hungary's nationalist government launched its presidency of the European Union on Monday with a Trump-like call to "Make Europe Great Again" after EU lawmakers questioned whether it should be allowed to take on the role. Their concerns are based on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's many clashes with Brussels over democratic norms. Hungarian diplomats say the country will be an honest broker, while analysts say Budapest's actions at the forefront of EU policy-making are likely to be restricted given that Brussels is in a transition phase following elections in June. The presidency's role is to set the agenda, chair meetings of EU members in all fields except foreign or euro zone matters, seek consensus among EU member states and broker agreements on legislation with the European Parliament. It will take months for a new European Commission and the new members of parliament to be in their stride, analysts say. That means that, even though far-right gains politicians potentially sympathetic to Hungary's priorities made gains in the EU elections, the presidency's ability to drive policy through is limited. "There'll only be a small influence on the legislative agenda. That starts much later, possibly at the end of the year, possibly at the beginning of next year," said Pavel Havlicek, research fellow at the Association for International Affairs. Hungary has said its priorities include pushing western Balkan membership of the EU, illegal migration and economic competitiveness.

Israeli Tanks Advance Into Areas in North and

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israeli forces advanced further into the Shejaia neighbourhood of northern Gaza and also pushed deeper into western and central Rafah in the south, killing at least six Palestinians and destroying several homes, residents said.

Israeli tanks, which moved back into Shejaia four days ago, fired shells towards several houses, leaving families trapped inside and unable to leave, the residents said.

Speaking at a weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeated his stance that there is no substitute for victory in the war against the Islamist militant group Hamas.

"We are committed to fighting until we achieve all of our objectives: Eliminating Hamas, returning all of our hostages, ensuring that Gaza never again constitutes a threat to Israel and returning our residents securely to their homes in the south and the north," he said.

While the offensive focused on Gaza, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, one man was killed and five were wounded in an Israeli strike near the city of Tulkarm, according to the Palestinian health ministry. The dead man was a member of militant group Islamic Jihad, the group said. The Israeli military issued no comment.

Hours after Netanyahu's comments about Gaza, the armed wing of Hamas released a video purporting to show weapons-making, in a show of defiance.

The video, which was not immediately verified by Reuters, showed fighters preparing anti-tank rocket warheads. In the background a large TV screen showed recent news events to indicate the video was recent. "Our preparation is continuing," said writing at the end of the short film.

The Israeli military said forces operating in Shejaia had killed several Palestinian gunmen over the past day and found military infrastructure inside a United Nations school as well as dozens of weapons and



"valuable intelligence documents".

On Saturday the military announced the death of two Israeli soldiers in northern Gaza.

In another raid in Shejaia, the forces located a "terrorist war room" at a clinic, said the military, which again accused Hamas of "embedding itself in civilian structures for terror purposes".

Hamas denies using civilian sites such as schools and hospitals for military purposes.

The armed wing of Hamas and the allied Islamic Jihad reported fierce fighting in both Shejaia and Rafah, saying their fighters had fired anti-tank rockets and mortar bombs against Israeli forces operating there.

More than eight months into Israel's air and ground war in Gaza, militants continue to stage attacks on Israeli forces, operating in areas that the Israeli army said it had gained control over months ago.

Arab mediators' efforts, backed by the United States, have stalled. Hamas says any deal must end the war and bring a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Israel says it will accept only temporary pauses in the fighting until Hamas, which has governed Gaza since 2007, is eradicated.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people and seizing more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel's retaliatory offensive 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 ministry does not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants but officials say most of the dead are civilians. More than 300 Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza and Israel says at least a third of the Palestinian dead are fighters.

North Korea Test-Launches Two Ballistic Missiles



SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea's launch of two ballistic missiles on Monday escalated tensions with South Korea. Seoul responded by suspending a military treaty, resuming propaganda broadcasts, and conducting live-fire drills.

North Korea on Monday launched two ballistic missiles, South Korea's military confirmed -- the latest in a series of weapons tests by Pyongyang that have soured relations with Seoul. A short-range ballistic missile was launched in the early morning hours, the

South's military Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

About 10 minutes later, a second missile, this one as yet unidentified, was detected, it added.

"Our military has strengthened surveillance and vigilance in preparation for further launches," the JCS said, adding it had shared information about the incidents with the United States and Japan.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) did not offer immediate confirmation of the launches.

Last week, North Korea claimed to have successfully tested a multiple warhead missile, but the South said that launch ended in a mid-air explosion.

Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points in years, with the North ramping up weapons testing while bombarding the South with balloons full of trash.

Pyongyang says those missiles are in retaliation for balloons loaded with anti-regime propaganda leaflets sent northwards by activists in the South.

In response to the North's repeated launches, South Korea has fully suspended

a tension-reducing military treaty. It also resumed propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts and live-fire drills near the border.

South Korea also has grown anxious over the North's warming relations with its isolated neighbour Russia.

North Korea is accused of breaching arms control measures by supplying weapons to Russia to use in its war in Ukraine, and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a summit with leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang in June in a show of unity.

On Sunday, Pyongyang condemned joint military drills by South Korea, Japan and the United States, calling them an "Asian version of NATO" and warning of "fatal consequences".

The three-day "Freedom Edge" exercises included preparation in ballistic missile and air defences, anti-submarine warfare and defensive cyber training.

Pyongyang has always decried similar combined exercises as rehearsals for an invasion, but Seoul said Sunday the latest exercises were a continuation of defensive drills held regularly for years.



England Avoid Shock at Euro 2024 as Spain Ease Into Quarters

COLOGNE (Dispatches) - England escaped an embarrassing exit from Euro 2024 as they came from behind to beat Slovakia in extra time and reach the quarter-finals, while Spain defeated surprise packages Georgia 4-1 to set up a mouthwatering quarter-final showdown with hosts Germany. A Jude Bellingham overhead kick deep in injury time and a Harry Kane strike early in extra time allowed England to beat Slovakia 2-1 in their last-16 tie in Gelsenkirchen. It was very nearly another ignominious exit for England that would have rivalled their defeat by Iceland at the same stage of Euro 2016. They fell behind to Ivan Schranz's 25th-minute goal for Slovakia and were on their way out of the competition as a Phil Foden equaliser was disallowed for offside. But Bellingham's moment of inspiration five minutes into stoppage time at the end of the game saved Gareth Southgate's side, as the Real Madrid man acrobatically turned home Marc Guehi's flick-on from a throw-in. Slovakia's resistance was broken, and England got what proved to be the winner a minute into the extra period. Substitute Ivan Toney headed Eberechi Eze's mishit shot back across goal for Kane to power home his second goal of the tournament. That set up a quarter-final meeting with Switzerland on Saturday in Dusseldorf. "That's the desire and the attitude from the boys. It looked tough for a second there but you keep going," said Kane. "Jude does what Jude does and what an unbelievable goal." "We want to be better," admitted Southgate. "I'm not going to hide from that but the spirit and character was there for

everybody to see and we're still in there fighting." Slovakia coach Francesco Calzona said he was proud of his team despite the defeat. "My team showed a lot out there. They were great, gave away very little and came close to going through," said the Italian. "And in extra time we were in their half for long periods, I'm very proud." There was also a scare for Spain in the late game in Cologne, as they fell behind against Georgia when Robin Le Normand put through his own net in the 18th minute. It was the eighth own goal scored at this year's competition and the first time Spain had conceded at all after they registered three clean sheets during the group phase. However, Spain had beaten Willy Sagnol's Georgia side twice in qualifying, winning 7-1 away and 3-1 at home, and their class ultimately told on a rainy night. Rodri Hernandez stroked in the equaliser six minutes before half-time, and Fabian Ruiz headed in a Lamine Yamal cross to put Spain ahead on 51 minutes. Khvicha Kvaratskhelia had come close to scoring from inside his own half for Georgia just before that, but Ruiz's goal effectively ended their hopes of causing a monumental upset. Nico Williams ran from halfway to score a brilliant third goal for Spain on 75 minutes and substitute Dani Olmo wrapped up their victory seven minutes from time. Luis de la Fuente's team, who missed a host of chances to win by a greater margin, will now go to Stuttgart for a clash with the host nation on Friday. That game is also a repeat of the Euro 2008 final which Spain won 1-0 to begin their golden era.

Ecuador Reach Copa Quarters, Mexico Out After 0-0 Draw



GLENDALE (Dispatches) - Ecuador secured a place in the Copa America quarter-finals on Sunday after grinding out a 0-0 draw with Mexico, who bowed out of the tournament after finishing third in Group B. Ecuador, who are looking to reach their first semi-final since hosting the event in 1993, face defending champions Argentina in the quarters, while group winners Venezuela, who beat Jamaica 3-0, take on Canada. Ecuador finished level with Mexico on four points but progress to the last eight thanks to a superior goal difference. Mexico manager Jaime Lozano is likely to face increased scrutiny after they scored just one goal in their three group matches. Lozano, Mexico's third head coach in the last two years, also faced criticism after their 2-0 loss to the United States in the 2024 CONCACAF Nations League final, and defeats in two recent friendlies, including a 4-0 thrashing by Uruguay. In a physical first half, Mexico attacked with real intensity as they sought the win they needed but lacked quality on the ball and failed to record a shot on target. Lozano's side continued to push after the break and full-back Gerardo Arteaga created a good opportunity after a powerful run into the box, before being denied by a last-ditch tackle from Felix Torres. Winger Julian Quinones tested Ecuador goalkeeper Alexander Dominguez with a long-range effort in the 65th minute. Dominguez kept out Quinones' shot with a diving save, with Mexico's Santi Gimenez blasting the rebound off the post from a tight angle. As Mexico threw bodies forward in their search for a winner, Ecuador increasingly posed a threat on the counter-attack and in the 68th minute Enner Valencia forced a save from Julio Gonzalez with a dipping strike.

Russell Gifted Austrian Win After Verstappen, Norris Collide

VIENNA (Dispatches) - Mercedes' George Russell celebrated a surprise Austrian Grand Prix win on Sunday after Red Bull's triple world champion Max Verstappen and McLaren's Lando Norris collided late in the race while fighting for the lead. Oscar Piastri finished second for McLaren, 1.906 seconds behind, with Ferrari's Carlos Sainz taking third at Spielberg's scenic Red Bull Ring. The gifted victory was a first for once-dominant Mercedes since November 2022, when Russell also triumphed in Brazil 33 races ago, and only the second of the Briton's Formula One career. "It's not over until it's over," said a jubilant Russell after a race that saved its excitement for the last 20 laps, when the simmering battle between Verstappen and Norris suddenly boiled over. "The team have done an amazing job to put us in this fight. You've got to be there at the end to pick up the pieces and that's where we were," added Russell. "I knew it (the collision) was a possibility. You are always dreaming." Verstappen, who finished fifth, still extended his championship lead to 81 points over Norris. Russell had started third, with Verstappen on pole and Norris alongside the Red



Bull on the front row, but the win was handed to the Mercedes driver after 64 of the 71 laps. Verstappen was more than seven seconds clear of Norris when a slow 6.5 seconds final pitstop on lap 52 allowed Norris, who stopped at the same time in 2.9, to come right back at his rival. The ensuing duel, with Norris on new medium tyres to Verstappen's used ones, saw the Briton repeatedly challenging for the lead. Norris passed Verstappen on lap 59 but ran wide and collected a five second penalty for exceeding track limits after earlier warnings. After more thwarted attempts, with Norris complaining that Verstappen was moving illegally while braking and the Red Bull driver accusing the Briton of 'dive-bombing' him, the pair made contact at Turn Three. Both had punctures, Norris to the rear-left and Verstappen on his front-right. The McLaren limped back to the pits, tyre flailing, to retire while Verstappen held on to fifth despite a 10 second penalty for causing the collision.

Alcaraz, Sinner and Gauff Headline Opening Day Action



LONDON (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz will be the main attraction on the opening day of Wimbledon as the Spaniard begins his quest to retain the title while later in the day world number one Jannik Sinner will look to put down an early marker in his opening match.

Alcaraz, 21, beat Novak Djokovic to the title a year ago and has since taken his Grand Slam haul to three after winning the French Open earlier this month and despite being seeded three will be favourite to rack up number four. He will open Centre Court action against Estonian qualifier Mark Lajal in the first of what he hopes will be seven matches to become only the fourth player in the professional era to win four Slams at age 21 or under. World number 269 Lajal, who is one week younger than Alcaraz, is bidding to become the third man in history to defeat the defending champion in the first round at Wimbledon. "Obviously I want to put my name on that short list to win Roland Garros and Wimbledon in the same year," Alcaraz, who could join Rafa Nadal, Roger Federer and Djokovic by achieving that feat, told reporters. "I know that it's going to be a really difficult and big challenge for me, but I think I'm ready to do it." Italy's Sinner, who won this year's Australian Open and knocked Novak Djokovic off the top of the rankings, faces a vastly more experienced opponent in Germany's Yannick Hanfmann. There will be home interest on Centre Court's opening day schedule with Emma Raducanu returning after missing out last year because of injury. The 2021 U.S. Open champion, who required a wildcard as she works her way back up the rankings, faces a tough test against Russian 22nd seed Ekaterina Alexandrova. "For me, I feel like it's just a great opportunity to try to get a good scalp, try to enjoy playing how I have been in the last few weeks, and just get back into it," Raducanu said. Coco Gauff, enjoying a strong season, concludes Centre Court action on the opening day as the women's second seed takes on fellow American Caroline Dolehide while on Court One, Aryna Sabalenka, the third seed and many people's favourite for the title, opens against American Emina Bektas.

Bagnaia Wins Dutch GP Heating Up the Race With Rival Martin

ASSEN (Dispatches) - Twice MotoGP champion Francesco Bagnaia of Ducati completed the perfect weekend at the Dutch Motorcycle Grand Prix when the polesitter and sprint winner stormed to victory in Sunday's race, reducing the gap to championship leader Jorge Martin by 10 points.

Having dominated the practice and qualifying sessions at TT Assen, reigning MotoGP champion Bagnaia was comfortable from the get-go, leading from the first lap to the chequered flag, despite Martin's best efforts to make up for lost places after being handed a three-place grid penalty.

The Prima Pramac Racing rider, who was demoted for impeding Raul Fernandez in the second round of qualifying, finished second after starting fifth. Enea Bastianini came third to complete an all-Ducati podium.

Bagnaia, 27, is now the first rider to win three consecutive premier class races at Assen since Australian Mick Doohan. On Saturday, he also smashed the lap record in the qualifying session to clinch his first pole position of the season.

"I enjoyed very much. On the weekend,



everything was perfect. I want to thank the crowd, it is fantastic, we enjoyed a lot. We like to be very precise, very fast and in that it was fantastic," Bagnaia said.

Despite not being able to stretch his lead in the championship over Bagnaia, Martin was happy to take his first podium at Assen.

"It was a difficult weekend... From yesterday to today was another big step, we were much closer to Pecco (Bagnaia). I tried my absolute best to catch him. But I think a second position is good enough for a tough weekend," Martin said.

ix-times MotoGP champion Marc Marquez, third in the championship, finished fourth. Aprilia Racing's Maverick Vinales came sixth despite showing promising pace in Q2, where he was the third-quickest.

Fabio Di Giannantonio, Brad Binder, Alex Marquez, Fernandez and Franco Morbidelli were the other riders who made up the top 10 in the race.

Twenty-year-old rookie Pedro Acosta crashed in the closing moments of the race.