

Iranian Security Forces Have Disbanded a Terrorist Team in the Country's Southeastern Province of Sistan and Baluchestan on the Eve of the Runoff Presidential Election

Secretary General of Lebanon's Hezbollah Resistance Movement Sayed Hassan Nasrallah Congratulated Iran's President-Elect Masoud Pezeshkian on His Election Victory, Expressing Hope That the Islamic Republic's Support for the Resistance Front Continues Under His Presidency

2 DOMESTIC

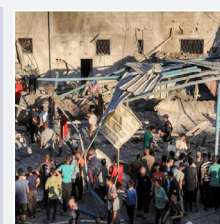


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Iran Denounces Arab League Claim on Persian Gulf Trio Islands



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has strongly rejected the recent "false and baseless" declaration issued by the Arab League regarding the Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb islands in the Persian Gulf as an obvious interference in the internal affairs of the country.

In a Saturday letter addressed to the UN Security Council, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Amir Saeid Iravani wrote that Tehran strongly condemns and categorically rejects the unjustified and baseless allegation against its sovereignty and territorial integrity in Paragraph 11 of the League of Arab States' declaration, which repeats the United Arab Emirates' claim to the trio of the Iranian islands.

Iravani noted that Tehran considers the declaration, which was conveyed by the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations Jamal al-Rowaihi to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and then rotating president of the Security Council Pedro Comissário Afonso back on May 20, as a flagrant and unjustified interference in its internal affairs.

"This action directly contradicts the spirit of good neighborliness and constitutes a blatant violation of the fundamental principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, particularly the well-established principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs," the senior Iranian diplomat stated.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms its sovereignty over the Iranian islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb in the Persian Gulf," he underscored.

Iravani also stressed that Iran rejects and condemns the use of a fabricated name for the Persian Gulf in Paragraphs 11 and 16 of the aforementioned declaration.

"Iran reiterates that 'The Persian Gulf' is the only legitimate and valid geographical designation for the body of water between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, a name that has been used since ancient times.

"All reputable cartographic organizations recognize and refer to this marine area as the 'Persian Gulf' that must be respected by all," he highlighted.

Foreign Assets of CBI Increase



TEHRAN - Based on preliminary statistics from this department, the growth of the monetary base has decreased by 15.3 percentage points, from 42.9% at the end of 2022 (1401) to 27.6% at the end of 2023 (1402). It should be noted that part of the monetary base growth in 2022 was due to an increase in the legal reserve ratio, which had no monetary effect. As expected, with the reduction of this variable's impact, the monetary base growth experienced a significant decline in 2023. Additionally, liquidity growth has also decreased from 31.1% at the end of 2022 to 24.3% at the end of 2023, indicating a 6.8 percentage point reduction in liquidity growth in 2023. Iran's Central Bank's Monetary Policy Deputy further reports on the changes in the components of the monetary base in 2023. Considering the directive from the Central Bank's General Assembly regarding the revaluation of foreign assets (based on their quality) and the foreign liabilities of the Central Bank in 2023, the balance sheet of the Central Bank's assets and liabilities was reviewed and adjusted by the end of the mentioned year. Furthermore, based on the IMF's guidelines for preparing monetary and financial statistics (MFSMCG, 2016), and considering the principles of economic territory and residency, as well as the distinction between resident and non-resident institutional units in preparing monetary and financial statistics to enhance accuracy and quality, the classification of the monetary base components was reviewed. In 2023, the net foreign assets of the Central Bank grew by 430.9%, contributing 174.3 percentage points to the 27.6% growth of the monetary base in 2023. This was mainly due to the revaluation issue. According to this report, the Central Bank's claims on banks contributed 44.5 percentage points to the monetary base growth in the reviewed year. The main factor for the increase in the Central Bank's claims on banks was the increase in banks' overdrafts from the Central Bank's resources. Regarding the changes in banks' debt to the Central Bank, which has significantly contributed to the monetary base growth over the past year, it is notable that in addition to the effect of the increased legal reserve ratio, a large portion of the banks' and credit institutions' overdrafts were influenced by factors such as balance sheet problems and weak corporate governance. These issues have not arisen in the short term but are primarily due to past bank behaviors and the accumulation of various imbalances in their balance sheets. In this regard, the Central Bank has implemented measures and policies aimed at correcting the imbalances of banks.



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

Leader Hails Raisi's Administration as an Administration of Work, Hope, and Movement

TEHRAN - In a meeting with members of the thirteenth administration, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei emphasized: "Raisi's administration was one of work, hope, and movement."

The Leader of the Revolution in a meeting with the members of the thirteenth administration emphasized: "Raisi's administration was one of work, hope, and movement in both domestic and foreign sectors. Although these titles might not have been used by him or members of the administration, it was practically seen and understood this way. He was truly hopeful and optimistic about the future, and he was right in this regard. He was determined to achieve his goals with your cooperation."

Ayatollah Khamenei further stated: "One of the most important characteristics of Mr. Raisi was his populism. This should be a model for all government officials. He respected and paid attention to the people, was present among them, and understood the realities by being among them. He listened to their words and based his planning on the needs of the people. This was his approach."

The Leader of the Revolution emphasized: "Imam Ali (AS) in his letter to Malik al-Ashtar emphasized attention to the masses and avoidance of favoritism and special privileges. Martyr Raisi followed this path."

Referring to the characteristics of Martyr Raisi, the Leader of the Revolution stated: "Martyr Raisi was completely clear in expressing revolutionary and religious positions and did not speak ambiguously."

The Leader of the Revolution emphasized: "Martyr Raisi was never discouraged by

verbal attacks. He suffered but never lost hope."

He noted one of the main characteristics of Martyr Raisi was tirelessness and working round-the-clock.

The Leader also reiterated the characteristics of Martyr Raisi can serve as a model for the country's management.

He added that Raisi in foreign policy was both open to interaction and committed to preserving the dignity of the country and the nation.

Meanwhile on Saturday, Ayatollah Khamenei received Iran's President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian after his victory in Friday's runoff presidential election.

Once again, Ayatollah Khamenei congratulated Pezeshkian on his success in obtaining the majority of the votes.

The Leader also hailed the increased participation of Iranians in the runoff vote.

Ayatollah Khamenei expressed hope that the president-elect will take steps toward Iran's progress and development by taking advantage of the nation's abilities.

The Leader also wished success for Pezeshkian and made necessary recommendations. Pezeshkian on Friday won Iran's runoff presidential vote.

The veteran parliamentarian received more than 16 million votes (about 53.6 percent) against former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili with more than 13 million (about 44.3 percent) out of over 30 million votes cast, with the voter turnout standing at about 50 percent.

Eliminating Dollar a Must for Using Iran and Russia Currencies in Trade

TEHRAN - Kambiz Mirkarimi, a board member of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce, touched upon the latest status of using national currencies in the trade between Iran and Russia and said that the necessary infrastructure for using the Iranian rial and Russian ruble in bilateral trade, eliminating the dollar, is ready, but there are still challenges to its implementation. One of these challenges is the exchange rate; in Iran, there are various rates for the ruble, which differ based on the type of demand.

He added that for importing some goods from Russia, dollars are still allocated, which makes purchasing goods with rubles impossible. Nonetheless, the most crucial issue is the unification of the ruble exchange rate. If this happens, all agreements can be operationalized.

Mirkarimi noted that the multiple exchange rates for the ruble in Iran significantly affect this issue. However, in some contracts, the ruble has already been accepted as the base currency, and it is recognized by traders in both countries for settlements.

He also pointed out another problem: the trade imbalance between Iran and Russia, with Iran's imports from Russia being three times its exports to that country. This imbalance means Iranian traders face a shortage of rubles in trade. To resolve this issue, the Central Bank of Russia needs to hold the Iranian rial in its currency reserves. However, the rial experiences significant fluctuations, and any central bank holding a currency must accept its risks and volatility.



Mirkarimi emphasized that if these obstacles are removed, the use of national currencies in the trade between the two countries can be realized.

Regarding the potential export of Iran's surplus chicken meat to Russia, he mentioned that while the restrictions on exporting chicken meat to Russia have been lifted, Russia is facing its own surplus and therefore is not a suitable market for Iran's surplus chicken. However, Eurasian Union countries, especially Kazakhstan, could be good alternatives.

Mirkarimi also discussed the continued growth trend in Iran-Russia trade, explaining that since 2019, both Iran's exports to Russia and imports from Russia have been on the rise. This growth resulted from the signing of a free trade agreement between the two countries, although the agreement has not been fully implemented yet. Currently, what is in place is preferential trade, where both sides offer customs concessions to each other.

He added that before the agreement was signed, the trade value between Iran and Russia was \$270 million. This figure grew by 61% in the first year after the agreement and has continued to increase, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching around \$1 billion.

Regarding the latest status of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union, which was recently signed, Mirkarimi said that the governments have agreed on which items will be on the zero-tariff list. In the next two months, the parliaments of both countries will ratify this law, aiming for free trade between Iran and the union countries to commence in the first half of this year.

President-Elect Vows to Fulfill Campaign Promises



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's president-elect Masoud Pezeshkian has delivered his first public address since victory in the country's run-off presidential race, pledging to deliver on his campaign promises.

He made the remarks, addressing his campaign members and the general public at the Mausoleum of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, in Tehran on Saturday.

"I have not made any false promises in this election. I have not said anything, which I would not be able to act on tomorrow and turns out to be a lie later," Pezeshkian said.

Pezeshkian declared the winner of the contest earlier in the day, taking over former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili.

"I am committed to God's order, and commit myself to lending an ear to you and your pains," the president-elect noted. He expressed gratitude towards the Iranian nation for its passionate participation in the electoral process, which saw more than 30 million voters flocking to the polling stations to cast their ballots.

Defining some of his plans, Pezeshkian said he would seek to advance dialog, convergence, and national consensus, and vowed to address the country's problems in all economic, social, cultural, and political areas.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has hailed the Iranian people for their "warm and passionate" turnout in the Friday presidential election, saying what they did in the face of boycott calls was a "brilliant and unforgettable job".

"The government's job is difficult amid these grave circumstances," he noted, saying the country faced the "great test" of passing successfully through "bottlenecks, challenges, and crises."

China's Oil Imports From Iran Reach the Highest

TEHRAN (Shana) - China's independent refiners have increased their crude imports from Iran by 4.3 percent in June to an eight-month high of around 6.1 million metric tons.

S&P Global Commodity Insights reported, adding Iranian crudes, which are much cheaper than Russian ESPO crudes, have gained more popularity among independent refineries in recent months.

SHANA republishes the report without commenting on the accuracy of the provided statistics. The full text of the S&P Global Commodity Insights report is as follows:

China's independent refiners, mainly in eastern Shandong province, increased their Iranian crude imports by 4.3% in June to an eight-month high of around 6.1 million mt to cut feedstock costs and combat weak refining margins, according to sources and S&P Global Commodity Insight data July 4.

The volume was the highest since October 2023, when it hit 6.22 million mt, the data showed.

Iranian crude accounted for about 65.7% of the total feedstock portfolio of small-sized independent refineries in Shandong in June, compared with 54.2% in May.

June's higher imports were mainly due to feedstock requirements of the independent refineries, which have been struggling with weak refining margins for most of 2024 so far, and are more selective with their feedstock, sources said.

Iranian crudes, which are much cheaper than Russian ESPO crudes, have gained more popularity among independent refineries in recent months.

"Other crudes are not [as cheap as] Iranian crudes," said a trader source.

Early deals for August-arrival ESPO sold to China were heard at discounts of around 60-80 cents/b to ICE Brent, according to trade sources.

More Iranian Heavy crude cargoes have been arriving in the Shandong market than Iranian Light crude, due mainly to the relatively lower prices, sources said.

IRAN NEWS

Saudi King, Crown Prince Congratulate President-Elect Pezeshkian

TEHRAN (IP) - King Salman bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, have congratulated Iranian president-elect Masoud Pezeshkian on his victory in the country's snap presidential election.

In their messages, the Saudi leaders expressed their wishes for Pezeshkian's good health and happiness, as well as for more progress for the "brotherly nation of Iran." They also emphasized their desire to develop and deepen relations between the two countries, and to continue coordination in order to promote regional and international security and peace.

Pezeshkian's victory in the runoff election came after a tight race that saw voters turn out in large numbers on Friday.

The veteran parliamentarian received over 16 million votes, defeating former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, who received more than 13 million votes out of the over 30 million cast.

13th Gov't Not Passive on FATF



TEHRAN - In response to a question about whether the martyr Raisi government was passive regarding the FATF issue over the past three years, and specifically what actions were taken regarding the FATF and in what state this matter will be handed over to the fourteenth government, Ehsan Khandouzi stated: In all areas, the governing approach of the government was that the country must actively engage. If we withdraw, no benefit will come to the Iranian nation on its own, and we must pursue it. Hence, we acted similarly in combating money laundering and organized crimes. He continued: We acted proactively both domestically and abroad. When we entered the Ministry of Economy, there were about 40 anti-money laundering centers across the country, but today more than 500 anti-money laundering and organized crime units are active nationwide. The Minister of Economy emphasized: Regarding foreign affairs, which was specifically your question, we must say that these follow-ups were conducted. Efforts were made after a period of interruption during which no precise report on developments and progress was sent and presented to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), it was assumed that the country had not worked in this area, but we performed a significant amount of judicial work. Khandouzi added: Foreigners questioned why no one in Iran is convicted of money laundering. In this regard, we sent a detailed report to the FATF showing that our judicial system is active and we provided the number of cases and convictions in detail. He said: Another good development was that despite some sanctions being in place for 8 years, we managed to be removed from the recommendations of clause 7 sanctions. During FATF correspondence, it was accepted to lift these sanctions from Iran. In response to another question about how much of the government's assets have been classified as surplus assets in the government's productivity project over the past three years, Khandouzi stated: The productivity initiative started in 2023, but the sale of assets, especially by banks, has had legal approval since 2015, and over the years, about 940 trillion rials of bank surplus assets have been sold, of which 580 trillion rials were sold during the thirteenth government.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Iran, Russia Sign First Bilateral Currency Agreement

TEHRAN - Mohammad Reza Farzin, Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, stated: "In a bilateral meeting of the Governors of the Central Banks of Iran and Russia on the sidelines of the Russia Financial Congress in St. Petersburg, held last Thursday, all the joint actions previously agreed upon were finalized, thus moving all prior agreements into the operational phase."

He added: "During this meeting, a new cooperation document regarding future joint actions was signed by the Governors of the Central Banks of both countries."

Farzin, highlighting the commercial and economic capacities of Iran and Russia, emphasized: "At the end of the bilateral meeting with the Governor of the Central Bank of Russia, a bilateral currency agreement aimed at providing (swapping) liquidity in national currencies for trade exchanges was signed. Soon, with the launch of the offshore rial trading infrastructure at Iran's Currency and Gold Exchange Center, the necessary instructions will be issued to the banking network and traders."

He reminded: "With the currency agreement, exchanges will be based on local currencies, the rial and the ruble, without the need to use other currencies. This marks the beginning of a leap in the country's trade exchanges and covers many of the risks associated with currency conversion, making it highly favorable for Iranian traders and Russian investors."

The Governor of the Central Bank further referred to the monetary and banking relations between Iran and Russia: "In the

bilateral meeting of the expert delegation from both sides, the requirements for connecting Russia's Mir card payment network to Iran's Shetab network were finalized, moving the project into the operational phase. The first phase of this project will be available to Iranian citizens by the end of next month (early August)."

Farzin added: "In this phase, Iran's Shetab network bank cards, under the smart bank card plan (Kahroba), will be usable at all ATMs in Russia, allowing Iranian citizens to withdraw rubles from Russian ATMs using their bank cards."

The Governor of the Central Bank also specified: "The second phase of this connection will allow Russian citizens to benefit from it in Iran, and in the third phase, Iran's Shetab cards will be processed at Russian retail points of sale."

Farzin also mentioned the allocation of Arbaeen currency to the pilgrims this year: "Last year, we endeavored to provide this currency 20 days before Arbaeen. Although some people felt it would have been better to have it earlier, this year we are prepared to start distributing Arbaeen currency in dinars at selected bank branches after the Tasua and Ashura ceremonies, in honor of the pilgrims."

The Governor of the Central Bank stated: "This year, each pilgrim will receive 200,000 dinars at the ETS rate, which is traded at Iran's Currency and Gold Exchange Center, without any commission, through selected bank branches in cities and villages to ensure Arbaeen pilgrims face no difficulties."

Sea Accounts for 88% of Cargo Export



TEHRAN - Seyed Ali Emami, Acting Deputy of Commercial Services at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, stated that the total commercial cargo transport in 2023 was approximately 175 million tons. He mentioned that based on available statistics, about 88% of commercial cargo is transported by sea, 10% by road, and 1.5% by rail. These statistics clearly demonstrate the significant role of maritime transport in Iran's foreign trade.

Emami emphasized that most petrochemical and oil-based products are transported by sea, underscoring the strategic importance of maritime trade for Iran due to the possibility of cargo movement through both the northern and southern seas. He highlighted that the majority of Iran's commercial cargo passes through the southern seas, namely the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. Based on the existing information, Emami mentioned that approximately 120 million tons of cargo pass through the southern ports and 8 million tons through the northern ports, with a significant portion of the northern ports' cargo headed to Russia. The Acting Deputy pointed out the main challenges facing maritime trade, noting that Iran's northern fleet is outdated and requires serious efforts to address this issue. He also noted that the shallow drafts of the northern trade partners' ports, such as Russia and Kazakhstan, limit the ships docking there to carrying a maximum of 3,000 tons of cargo to avoid running aground. As a result, ships in northern waters operate at half capacity. Emami stressed the high costs of cargo transport in the northern seas, adding that dredging needs to be pursued more vigorously. He suggested that forming a consortium among Caspian Sea countries is essential for revitalizing and dredging. He also noted that Russian ports like Makhachkala and Astrakhan are traditional and outdated, requiring infrastructure upgrades by Russia. He continued, mentioning that southern ports, except for Imam Khomeini Port, Chabahar, and Shahid Rajaei Port, are small, making cargo movement challenging. These ports also lack necessary infrastructure for fresh produce and need to be equipped with X-ray devices. The Acting Deputy criticized the lack of regular shipping lines in southern ports, stating that establishing regular shipping lines would assure cargo owners of the possibility of shipment transfer. Unfortunately, the equipment at Iranian ports is inadequate, and the costs of unloading, loading, and warehousing are high, all of which contribute to higher maritime transport costs from Iranian ports compared to neighboring countries, making it difficult for Iran to compete with them.

Iran Should Have a Fair Share of the New World

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



MOSCOW (IRNA) - The Iranian Ambassador to Russia, referring to international developments and the transition to a multipolar world, said: "The Islamic Republic of Iran should have a fair share in the equations of the new world."

Kazem Jalali made these remarks on Saturday at a dental implant symposium organized by an Iranian company and attended by about 250 Iranian dentists who traveled to Moscow for this event.

In this meeting, the Ambassador of Iran said: "In a sense, the mechanisms of international relations at the current juncture are fluid and taking shape. In such conditions, any country that strengthens its power components domestically and internationally can have a fair share in the international equations in the coming decade."

Recalling the historical experience after World War II, he said: "At that time, which laid the groundwork for the creation of some mechanisms of power administration and division in the world, Iran, considered the bridge of victory for the war victors, was at the peak of weakness, and the rulers of the time could not secure a share in the equations."

Jalali pointed out that today, contrary to the past, Iran is not alone in its policy of opposing unilateralism in the world. He mentioned the support of prominent BRICS countries such as Russia, China, and India for this discourse and said: "Iran has had a significant share in changing international equations and the transition of the world to multilateralism, and when the results are realized, Iran should take its rightful share."

In the opening part of his remarks, the Iranian Ambassador in

Moscow congratulated the people of Iran on the spirited holding of the second round of the 14th presidential election on Friday, July 5. He wished success for Masoud Pezeshkian, the elected candidate in this election.

The Iranian Ambassador to Russia expressed satisfaction with the gathering of a group of Iranian medical and dental specialists at this symposium in Moscow, saying: "Medicine has always been and continues to be one of the major reference groups in our country."

He posed the fundamental question of why Iran-Russia relations are extensively monitored and undermined by Western countries, what benefits Americans and Europeans gain, and what harm befalls the Iranian nation. In this context, the medical community, as an influential reference group, should have a realistic view of the relations between the Islamic Republic and Russia.

The Ambassador also provided an analysis of Russia's historical past and said: "Today's Russia is a new Russia. In this new Russia, our relations are based on neighborhood and common approaches, and we can have mutual economic benefits."

He reminded: "Geography compels neighboring countries to enhance their relations, and we should not be stuck in historical past; as we observed, despite the announcement of 27 million Soviet deaths by Nazi Germany, before the Ukraine war, we saw a serious transformation in Moscow-Berlin relations, culminating in Nord Stream 2 and the project of transporting Russian gas to Europe, which was one of the reasons for the new conflicts, to prevent Europe and Russia from reaching a strategic relationship."

Call for a FTA Between Iran and Turkey



TEHRAN - The Director of Asia and Oceania Ms. Niloufar Asadi at the International Affairs Department of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce believes that to expand Iran's exports to Turkey, a free trade agreement between the two countries should replace their previous agreements.

Achieving \$30 billion in trade between Iran and Turkey requires special attention from the private sectors of both countries.

The Director of Asia and Oceania at the International Affairs Department of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce stated that tariff barriers in Iran-Turkey trade cooperation are one of the main obstacles to the development of Iran's exports to Turkey.

Asadi, in a meeting with the Iranian Consul General in Istanbul, mentioned the exchange of certain agreed-upon items between the two countries within the framework of the D-8 (Developing Eight) group of Islamic countries. She continued, "Given the shortcomings of the previously signed preferential trade agreement and the need to revise and expand it, I suggest that a free trade agreement between the two countries replace the previous agreements."

She added that most of the discounted items offered by Turkey are not usable for Iran, and some items had previously existed with greater discounts in the bilateral preferential agreement. However, the Iranian Chamber has obtained the necessary authorization from the D-8 Secretariat to issue certificates of origin, which will be issued.

Asadi mentioned that the Iranian Chamber is actively addressing tariff barriers and issues related to the acceptance of certificates of origin by Turkish customs. Additionally, they are implementing certificates of origin related to agreements among Islamic countries, in collaboration with the customs authorities of both countries and the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey.

Iran, Indonesia Reach Agreement for Tourist Exchange

TEHRAN - According to the Public Relations of the Tourism Deputy of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, following the unilateral visa waiver by the Islamic Republic of Iran for 28 countries worldwide, the Tourism Deputy has undertaken additional activities, including organizing roadshows or events to introduce its tourism capacities in target countries.

To this end, Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, the country's Tourism Deputy, along with a delegation including Moslem Shojaei, Director General of Marketing and Advertising of the Ministry, and private sector activists in this field, traveled to Southeast Asia to hold roadshows in Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia to showcase the capabilities of Iran's tourism industry. In line with the roadshow held in Jakarta, Indonesia, the Tourism Deputy of Iran met with Ni Ayu Martini, Deputy Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy of Indonesia, aiming to develop tourism relations between the two countries. During this meeting, the tourism deputies finalized the terms of a tourism cooperation agreement between the two countries, facilitating the path for the agreement to be signed by the tourism ministers of both nations after reaching common ground on various topics.

Additionally, the meeting included plans to organize joint tours and events, and the topic of launching direct flights between Tehran and Jakarta was discussed separately to be followed up through the Iranian embassy in Indonesia.

In the mentioned meeting, the Indonesian Deputy Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy expressed a desire to expand cooperation in the fields of handicraft interactions and museum communications, which will be pursued with the relevant specialized departments in the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Tunisia Lawyer Handed One-Year Sentence

TUNIS (Dispatches) - A Tunisian lawyer and media figure was sentenced to one year in prison over comments critical of the country, her family said on Saturday. Sonia Dahmani was arrested on May 11 after masked police raided the Tunisian national bar association, where she had sought refuge, and detained her following comments she had made on TV. The comments in question were made during a programme on the Carthage Plus TV channel, while Dahmani was responding to another pundit's claim that sub-Saharan migrants were seeking to settle in Tunisia. "What extraordinary country are we talking about?" she had asked sarcastically. A judicial report later said Dahmani's comments were in response to a speech by President Kais Saied in which he said the country would not become a place for the resettlement of sub-Saharan migrants prevented from crossing to Europe. On Saturday, Dahmani's daughter Nour Beltaieb posted on Facebook that "a one-year prison sentence was issued against my mother... under Decree 54, because what she said represents a 'rumour' and false news".



New UK PM Declares Rwanda Deportation Plan "Dead and Buried"



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's new Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Saturday he would scrap a controversial plan to fly thousands of asylum seekers from Britain to Rwanda in his first major policy announcement since winning a landslide election victory.

The previous Conservative government first announced the plan in 2022 to send migrants who arrived in Britain without permission to the East African nation, saying it would put an end to asylum seekers arriving on small boats. But no one was sent to Rwanda under the plan because of years of legal challenges. At his first press conference since becoming prime minister, Starmer said that the Rwanda policy would be scrapped because only about 1% of asylum seekers would have been removed and it would have failed to act as a deterrent. "The Rwanda scheme was dead and buried before it started. It's never been a deterrent," Starmer said. "I'm not prepared to continue with gimmicks that don't act as a deterrent." Starmer won one of the largest parliamentary majorities in modern British history on Friday, making him the most powerful British leader since former Prime Minister Tony Blair, but he faces a number of challenges, including improving struggling public services and reviving a weak economy.

At the press conference in Downing Street, Starmer answered about a dozen questions and was repeatedly asked about how and when he would start delivering on his promises to fix the nation's problems, but he gave few specifics about what he planned.

Asked if he was willing to take tough decisions and raise taxes if necessary, Starmer said his government would identify problems and act in areas such as tackling an overstretched prisons system and reducing the long waiting times to use the state-run health service.

"We're going to have to take the tough decisions and take them early, and we will. We will do that with a raw honesty," he said. "But that is not a sort of prelude to saying there's some tax decision that we didn't speak about before."



Hamas Accepts U.S. Proposal on Talks Over Israeli Hostages

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Hamas has accepted a U.S. proposal to begin talks on releasing Israeli hostages, including soldiers and men, 16 days after the first phase of an agreement aimed at ending the Gaza war, a senior Hamas source told Reuters on Saturday.

The militant Islamist group has dropped a demand that Israel first commit to a permanent ceasefire before signing the agreement, and would allow negotiations to achieve that throughout the six-week first phase, the source told Reuters on condition of anonymity because the talks are private. A Palestinian official close to the internationally mediated peace efforts had said the proposal could lead to a framework agreement if embraced by Israel and would end the nine-month-old war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns will travel to Qatar next week for negotiations, a source familiar with the matter said. A CIA spokesperson declined to confirm Burns' trip in line with its policy of not disclosing the spy chief's travels. The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the discussions would focus on resolving a Hamas demand that the United States, Israel, Qatar and Egypt guarantee in writing a temporary ceasefire, aid deliveries and an Israeli troop withdrawal if indirect talks on implementing the second phase of the plan continued. A source in Israel's negotiating team, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on Friday there was now a real chance of achieving agreement. That was in sharp contrast to past instances, when Israel said conditions attached by Hamas were unacceptable. A spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. On Friday his office said talks would continue next week and emphasized that gaps between the sides still remained. A U.S. official declined to confirm the Hamas decision, adding, "There's real progress, but still a lot of work to do." The conflict has claimed the lives of more than 38,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, since Hamas

attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostages, according to official Israeli figures.

The Hamas source also said the new proposal ensures mediators would guarantee a temporary ceasefire, aid delivery and the withdrawal of Israeli troops as long as indirect talks continue. Efforts to secure a ceasefire and hostage release in Gaza have intensified with active shuttle diplomacy among Washington, Israel and Qatar, which is leading mediation efforts from Doha, where the exiled Hamas leadership is based. A regional source said Washington was trying hard to secure a deal before the U.S. presidential election in November. Netanyahu said on Friday that the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency had returned from an initial meeting with mediators in Qatar and negotiations would continue next week.

Some families of hostages on Saturday gave a statement to reporters ahead of a weekly hostage rally in Tel Aviv, in which they called on Netanyahu to go through with the deal. "For the first time in many months, we feel hope," said Einav Zangauker, the mother of Matan Zangauker, 24, who was abducted from his kibbutz home on Oct. 7. "This is an opportunity that cannot be missed," she said. Meanwhile, Israeli forces stepped up military strikes across the enclave, killing at least 29 Palestinians in the past 24 hours, and wounding 100 others, the territory's health officials said. Israeli forces, which have deepened their incursions into Rafah, near the border with Egypt, killed four Palestinian police and wounded eight others, in an air strike on their vehicle on Saturday, health officials said.

A statement issued by the Hamas-run interior ministry said the four included Fares Abdel-Al, the head of the police force in western Rafah neighbourhood of Tel Al-Sultan.

The Israeli military said forces continued "intelligence-base operations" in Rafah, destroyed several underground structures, seized weapons and equipment, and killed

Far Right Bids for Power as France Holds Parliamentary Election

PARIS (Dispatches) - France held a parliamentary run-off election on Sunday that will reconfigure the political landscape, with opinion polls forecasting the far-right National Rally (RN) will win the most votes but likely fall short of a majority.

Such an outcome could plunge the country into a chaotic hung parliament, severely denting the authority of President Emmanuel Macron. Equally, if the nationalist, eurosceptic RN did win a majority, the pro-business, pro-Europe president could find himself forced into a difficult "cohabitation".

Marine Le Pen's RN scored historic gains to win last Sunday's first-round vote, raising the spectre of France's first far-right government since World War Two.

But after centrist and leftist parties joined forces over the past week in a bid to forge an anti-RN barricade, Le Pen's hopes of the RN winning an absolute majority in the 577-seat National Assembly seem less certain.

Polls suggest the RN will become the dominant legislative force, but fail to reach the 289-seat majority that Le Pen and her 28-year-old protégé Jordan Bardella believe would allow them to claim the prime minister's job and drag France sharply rightward.

Polls opened at 8 a.m. (0600 GMT) and closed at 6 p.m. in towns and small cities and 8 p.m. (1800 GMT) in larger cities, with initial projections expected the moment voting ends, based on partial counts from a sample of polling stations.

Much will depend on whether voters follow the calls of leading anti-RN alliances to block the far right from power, or support far-right contenders.

Raphael Glucksmann, a member of the European Parliament who led France's leftist ticket in



last month's European vote, said he viewed Sunday's run-off as a simple referendum on whether "the Le Pen family takes over this country."

"France is on the cliff-edge and we don't know if we're going to jump," he told France Inter radio last week.

A longtime pariah for many due to its history of racism and antisemitism, the RN has increased its support on the back of voter anger at Macron, strained household budgets and immigration concerns.

"French people have a real desire for change," Le Pen told TF1 TV on Wednesday, adding that she was "very confident" of securing a parliamentary majority.

Even if the RN falls short, it looks set to more than double the 89 seats it won in the 2022 legislative vote, and become the dominant player in an unruly hung parliament that will make France hard to govern.

Such an outcome would risk policy paralysis until Macron's presidency ends in 2027, when Le Pen is expected to launch her fourth bid for France's top job.

Macron stunned the country and angered many of his political allies and supporters when he called the snap election after a humbling by the RN in last month's European parliamentary vote, hoping to wrong-foot his rivals in a legislative election.

Whatever the final result, his political agenda now appears dead, three years before the end of his presidency.

Barcelona Residents Protest Against Mass Tourism



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Thousands of protesters marched Saturday in Barcelona to denounce mass tourism and its effect on Spain's most visited city, the latest in a series of similar marches in the country.

Under the slogan "Enough! Let's put limits on tourism", some 2,800 people -- according to police -- marched along a waterfront district of Barcelona to demand a new economic model that would reduce the millions of tourists that visit every year.

"I have nothing against tourism, but here in Barcelona we are suffering from an excess of tourism that has made our city unlivable," said Jordi Guix, a 70-year-old sociologist.

With banners saying "Reduce tourism now!" the protesters chanted slogans such as "Tourists out of our neighbourhood", stopping in front of hotels to the surprise of visitors.

Barcelona's rising cost of housing, up 68 percent in the past decade according to local authorities, is one of the main issues for the movement, along with the effects of tourism on local commerce and working conditions in the city of 1.6 million inhabitants.

"Local shops are closing to make way for stores that do not serve the needs of neighborhoods. People cannot afford their rents," said Isa Miralles, a 35-year-old musician who lives in the Barceloneta district.

Brazil's Bolsonaro Hopes for Trump Return at Right-Wing Rally



BALNEARIO CAMBORIU (Dispatches) - Brazilian far-right former President Jair Bolsonaro at a rally of conservative supporters on Saturday said the right was gaining ground internationally, in Italy and France, and said he hoped that former U.S. President Donald Trump will be returned to the White House this year. "God willing, it will be Trump in November," he told a cheering crowd of 3,500 supporters at the CPAC Brasil 2024 event at the beach resort of Balneario Camboriu in Southern Brazil. The event was intended to drum up support for Bolsonaro's party's candidates in this year's municipal elections and project his influence ahead of the 2026 presidential race. The rally was billed as the first major opposition rally of the campaign for local mayoral elections in October. "We want Bolsonaro back," chanted some at the event who want to see him back in power, although Bolsonaro has been banned from seeking elected office until 2030 for attacks on democracy. Speakers attacked Brazil's current government of leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, calling it corrupt. They advocated Christian pro-life family values and a ban on abortion in speeches that were pro-gun and anti-drug. "It will be very important for us to once again bring together

Conservatives with a liberal view of the economy to discuss the future of the right-wing in Brazil," said former environment minister Ricardo Salles on CPAC Brasil, social media. Former Chilean right-wing presidential candidate Jose Antonio Kast addressed the rally, and Argentina's libertarian president, Javier Milei, was expected to address the closing session on Sunday afternoon. Bolsonaro lost his re-election bid to Lula in 2022 and has been banned from running for elected office until 2030 due to his attacks on Brazilian democracy and its electronic voting system. Despite being under investigation for his alleged role in encouraging supporters to storm government buildings a week after Lula took office in January last year, Bolsonaro maintains a large following that share his right-wing views, which he successfully broadcasts on social media. With funding from his right-wing Liberal Party, Bolsonaro draws crowds wherever he goes to back candidates for the upcoming local elections. Guilherme Casaroes, a political scientist at the FGV think tank in Sao Paulo, said the presence of Milei and Kast shows that Bolsonaro and his political associates want Brazil to become a hemispheric hub for far-right coordination.



Swiatek Crashes Out but Djokovic Still in Hunt for Title

LONDON (dispatches) - Top seed Iga Swiatek crashed out of Wimbledon in the biggest shock of this year's Championships so far but Novak Djokovic avoided joining her through the exit door despite another below-par performance on Saturday.

Poland's Swiatek, who clocked up her fifth Grand Slam title at last month's French Open, was beaten 3-6 6-1 6-2 by Yulia Putintseva in the third round as she again struggled on grass.

"I know what I need to change, and I'll do that," the world number one told reporters after her 21-match winning streak came to an end on Court One.

"My tank of really pushing myself to the limits became suddenly empty. I was kind of surprised."

Seven-time champion Djokovic moved into the fourth round but only after dropping the opening set to Alexei Popyrin.

The 37-year-old Serb, seeded two, stayed on course for a record 25th Grand Slam title with a 4-6 6-3 6-4 7-6(3) win to set up a clash with Danish dynamo Holger Rune.

"It was another tough match," Djokovic, who also dropped a set against British wildcard Jacob Fearnley in the second round, said on court. "It was a very challenging match mentally today."

"Each match it's getting better," added Djokovic, who is yet to win a title this year and

needed knee surgery last month.

Britain was left with only one singles player out of the 19 who started as Alexander Zverev beat Cameron Norrie and China's Wang Xinyu dumped out local favourite Harriet Dart.

Emma Raducanu will fly the flag alone for the hosts on Sunday and perhaps with that in mind she pulled out of her highly anticipated mixed doubles with Andy Murray.

Her decision, put down to protecting a sore wrist, effectively ended British great Murray's illustrious Wimbledon career in rather anti-climactic fashion.

Despite the impression that Swiatek and her topspin game is still unsuited to Wimbledon's lawns, she arrived as the favourite to finally make her mark at the All England Club.

And when she took the opening set against Kazakhstan's fiery 35th-ranked Putintseva it seemed everything was under control.

But after Putintseva broke serve in the fourth game of the second set Swiatek's game crumbled rapidly under the withering firepower of her opponent.

"At some point I was playing fearless. I was just, I have to believe 100%, I have nothing to lose, just go for it," Putintseva, who plays Jelena Ostapenko next, told reporters.

Rodriguez Inspires Colombia Into Semis



GLENDALE (Dispatches) - Confident Colombia marched into the semi-finals of the Copa America with an impressive 5-0 win over Panama on Saturday setting up a meeting with Brazil or Uruguay in the last four.

James Rodriguez delivered another top class performance for Colombia, creating two goals and scoring a penalty as Panama were put to the sword.

Colombia, now unbeaten in 27 games, will face the winner of Saturday's last quarter-final in the last four in Charlotte on Wednesday.

The other semi-final, on Tuesday in New Jersey, will see world champions Argentina take on surprise package Canada.

Colombia went ahead in the eighth minute when Jhon Cordoba showed great strength to hold off his marker and power home a header from a Rodriguez corner.

Seven minutes later Rodriguez converted from the penalty spot after Jhon Arias burst into the area and was brought down by diving Panama keeper Orlando Mosquera.

Panama, who had qualified from the group stage after beating the USA in group play, desperately needed a foothold in the game and went close when Roderick Miller headed against the post after a cross from Eric Davis.

But four minutes before the break, Colombia put the game beyond the reach of the Central Americans when Rodriguez showed great awareness to take a quick free-kick from in his own half, lifting the ball over the top to Luis Diaz.

The Liverpool winger raced goalward and with Mosquera caught in no-man's land pulled off a wonderful chip to make it 3-0.

Netherlands Mount Euros Comeback Against Turkey to Reach Semis

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The Netherlands struck two second-half goals in seven minutes to come from behind to beat Turkey 2-1 on Saturday and set up a Euro 2024 semi-final clash with England.

Samet Akaydin sent Turkey ahead in the first half but Stefan de Vrij headed the Netherlands level and Murt Muldur turned into his own net under pressure from Cody Gakpo after 76 minutes to hand the Dutch victory.

The build-up to the quarter-final clash in Berlin was overshadowed by a diplomatic row between Turkey and Germany after their last-16 hero Merih Demiral was banned for two matches for making a controversial salute.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended the match at the Olympiastadion as a result, along with tens of thousands of fans who greeted every sustained Dutch period of possession with a barrage of whistles.

Netherlands overcame the pressure from the stands and Turkey's energetic style, as well as a flurry of late chances, to reach the Euros semi-finals for the first time since 2004.



"Tonight we had to dig very deep and I am proud of these guys," Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk told NOS.

"We made a very good start in my eyes (but) we got sloppy and lost balls at dangerous moments... then we had to try and stay calm and take advantage of the chances that were going to come..."

"We want to fulfil our dream and we are one step closer."

Turkey coach Vincenzo Montella deployed five at the back, hoping his young side could catch Netherlands on the counter-attack.

It was the 1988 Euros champions who carved out the first chance, with Gakpo and Memphis Depay linking up well before the latter blazed over.

Koeman captained the Netherlands to glory 36 years ago but until their convincing 3-0 win over Romania in the last 16, the Dutch looked incapable of challenging for the trophy, sneaking through their group in third place.

They reverted to that weaker self in the first half after their early incursions, allowing Turkey to firmly establish themselves in the game.

Lakers Fall in Bronny James Summer NBA Prospects Debut



SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) - Bronny James, the 19-year-old son of NBA superstar LeBron James, scored four points on Saturday in his unofficial Los Angeles Lakers debut, a loss in the NBA California Classic.

Sacramento defeated the Lakers 108-94 at the Chase Center in San Francisco in the summer league contest, a showcase for prospects and newcomers to begin working into their team defensive systems and offensive schemes.

James, taken 55th in last month's NBA Draft, started at point guard and played 21 minutes and 43 seconds in the 40-minute contest, finishing with four points on 2-of-9 shooting, 0-of-3 from 3-point range and 0-for-2 from the free throw line.

The former University of Southern California guard also contributed two rebounds, two assists and a steal for the Lakers.

James, who signed a four-year deal with the Lakers, will play alongside his famed parent as part of the NBA's first father-son duo.

The elder James did not attend the game as he was in Las Vegas with the US Olympic team for their first practice session ahead of an exhibition game against Canada before they travel to Europe ahead of the Paris Olympics.

But he made time in Vegas to watch some video of his son's first basket, and later told reporters that Saturday's game was part of a learning process.

"I just hope for (him to get) his feet wet in the NBA -- the pace of the game, the speed of the game, the physicality of the game," LeBron James said.

"But what he does in the California Classic and Summer League, it doesn't matter if he plays well and it doesn't matter if he doesn't play well. I just want him to continue to grow. Practices, film sessions, his individual workouts."

Bronny James grabbed his first rebound just 80 seconds into the game then missed his first shot attempt six seconds later.

James was not called for a foul. He was whistled for one early in the second quarter defending a 3-point shot by Sacramento's Xavier Sneed but the Lakers challenged the call and it was overturned upon video review.

England Beat Switzerland on Penalties to Keep Euro 2024 Dream Alive

DUSSELDORF (Dispatches) - England's quest for a first major tournament win in 58 years remained alive after another late fightback before beating Switzerland 5-3 on penalties to book their place in the Euro 2024 semi-finals on Saturday.

After the 120 minutes finished level at 1-1, goalkeeper Jordan Pickford was the Three Lions' hero in the shoot-out as he saved Switzerland's first spot-kick from Manuel Akanji.

Cole Palmer, Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka, Ivan Toney and Trent Alexander-Arnold converted their penalties to send England into a semi-final meeting with Turkey or the Netherlands in Dortmund on Wednesday.

After needing Bellingham's 95th-minute equaliser before going on to beat Slovakia in extra time in the last 16, England were again staring at defeat with 10 minutes to go.

A dreary encounter for the first 75 minutes came to life after Breel Embolo put Switzerland in front.

Saka's fine strike from outside the box levelled with England's first shot on target five minutes later.

Manchester City defender Akanji was then the unfortunate penalty villain as Switzerland's horrible record in major tournament quarter-finals goes on.



They have now lost five without ever reaching a semi-final.

By contrast, England march on despite another in a string of underwhelming performances from Gareth Southgate's men.

"We know there are two more games, we can change our lives and make more history that's not been done before," said man-of-the-match Saka.

In his 100th match in charge of his country, Southgate again resisted calls for mass changes in personnel but did alter his system.

Ezri Konsa made his first ever competitive international start in place of the suspended Marc Guehi as England switched to a back three.

However, contrary to expectation, Saka remained on the right in what proved to be an inspired decision by Southgate.

The Arsenal winger was by far the biggest threat of a first half in which neither side managed a shot on target.

Saka was skipping beyond Michel Aebischer at will and created the best chance of the first period when Kobbie Mainoo saw an effort deflected behind just before the half-time whistle.

The game continued at the same laboured pace from both sides into the second half.

Southgate has been repeatedly criticized for being too slow to influence games with his substitutions