

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei Paid a Visit to the Grave of Late Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Who Passed Away Along With President Ebrahim Raisi in a Helicopter Crash on May 19

IRAN NEWS

Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ali Bagheri Kani Has Called for Pursuing Both Methods of Neutralizing and Lifting Sanctions at the Same Time

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Iran Warns Sworn Enemies



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Army has renewed its commitment to protect the Islamic Republic, warning sworn enemies that it will never allow them to misuse the country. The Army issued the warning in a statement on the occasion of the 36th anniversary of a counterattack - codenamed Operation Mersad (lit: Ambush) - against the anti-Iran terrorist cult Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) in the western Iranian province of Kermanshah. Within three days, Iran's military crippled the enemy forces which suffered over 4,800 casualties. In its statement, the Army said it would continue to increase the Islamic establishment's strength and dignity in the future by adhering to the wise guidelines of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. The name of the Mersad operation is tied to the Iranian Armed Forces' honor, glory and pride in the face of the cowardice of the MKO terrorists who sought to encroach on the country's territory, it added. The statement noted that the cowardly MKO terrorists carried out a desperate attack against Iran as they imagined that the country was suffering from weak military power after the end of eight years of Iraqi-imposed war. However, it emphasized, that the Iranian Armed Forces succeeded in giving a crushing and firm response to the terror group so that it would never think about conducting any attack on the country. On July 26, 1988, the MKO terror cult, a key ally of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime at the time, launched a blitz to overthrow the Islamic Republic of Iran. The terror cult, now based in Albania, had joined forces with Saddam's West-backed regime in its war against Iran in the early 1980s. In the waning days of the 8-year war, MKO carried out the offensive. In response, Iran's military carried out the Mersad operation, during which over 4,800 members of the terrorist group were killed or injured. The operation ended with the Iranian military forces' decisive victory. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said on Friday that those who betrayed the Islamic Republic with the support of the Iranian nation's enemies and attacked their homeland will face no destiny but displacement like what the MKO terrorists experienced in the Mersad operation. The MKO terrorists, exploited as a tool, have bloody hands and a disgraceful and criminal record, he emphasized. In the years after the 1979 victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, these terrorists killed more than 17,000 Iranian citizens and finally took refuge in the arms of the former Iraqi criminal dictator, the Iranian spokesperson wrote.

Iran Slams MKO Terrorists as Puppets of U.S., Israel



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry denounced the terrorist Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) as a political puppet of the U.S. and the Zionist regime, saying the notorious and hated anti-Iranian group is doomed to displacement and failure. "The hypocrites (MKO members) that are stranded in Europe, have been supported as a political puppet by the US, the Zionist regime and some European countries, claiming to be defenders of human rights," Nasser Kanaani said in a post on his X account on Friday, marking the 36th anniversary of a counterattack - codenamed Operation Mersad (Ambush) - against the MKO terrorists in the western Iranian province of Kermanshah. "They have served as a tool in their hands, and have blood on their hands with a dark record full of crimes," the spokesman said of the MKO terrorists. "The hypocrites have killed over 17 thousand people after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and finally took refuge in Iraq under Saddam's Ba'athist regime," he added, the Foreign Ministry's website reported. "The fate of those who, after betraying dear Iran with the support of the enemies of the Iranian nation, opened fire on their motherland and their countrymen and women with hatred, will not be anything but displacement or what they experienced during Operation Mersad," the spokesman added. On July 26, 1988, the MKO terror cult, a key ally of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime at the time, launched a blitz to overthrow the Islamic Republic of Iran. The terror cult, now based in Albania, had joined forces with Saddam's West-backed regime in its war against Iran in the early 1980s. In the waning days of the 8-year war, MKO carried out the offensive. In response, Iran's military carried out the Mersad Operation, during which over 4,800 members of the terrorist group were killed or injured. The operation ended with the Iranian military forces' decisive victory.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Pezeshkian Would Try to Fulfill His Promises

TEHRAN - In the "Sepas" conference, President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian stated, "I must honestly fulfill what I have said. Please do not praise me excessively, do not try to make me seem greater than I am. If we act with fairness and justice and give opportunities to the elite, the capable, the producers, and the factory owners, Iran can restore dignity to this land." Pezeshkian, the elected president, speaking at the Central Activists Conference on the morning of Friday, July 27, 2024, emphasized that now is the time to fulfill promises: "If we do not unite, do not have a clear plan and goal, do not use experts and elites, and do not act based on justice and fairness, all our slogans will be empty words." He continued, "It is no longer time for slogans; it is time to act. I have repeatedly said that Imam Ali told Malik Ashjar that he is being sent to govern a region where both good and bad rulers have ruled before, and people will look at you the way you looked at your predecessors. We must ensure that people speak of us in a way that aligns with our words." The elected president emphasized that the sincerity we speak of must be evident in our actions: "If we act otherwise, this trust and hope will turn into despair. To achieve this, everyone must help. We were not a single faction; we objected to having one faction, and we unanimously said that all of Iran, with its diverse ethnicities and cultures, is Iran." He stated that we must act with fairness and justice: "If we believe in giving rights to those who deserve them, we should not expect someone who has not earned a position to occupy it." The elected president added, "The Prophet Muhammad said, 'God bless those who have completed the lesser jihad, for now we face the greater jihad.' When asked what the greater jihad is, the Prophet replied, 'It is the struggle against one's ego and desires.' All conflicts arise when one considers oneself superior to others." He saw himself as a representative of the people and stated: "I must honestly fulfill what I have promised. Please do not praise me excessively. I am just like you. An opportunity has arisen, and you have trusted me, so I am standing here now. Do not try to make me seem greater than I am. We all must work together to ensure that our elites, both men and women, Shia and Sunni, Kurd, Baloch, Arab, and

Persian, receive their due rights." Pezeshkian mentioned that in the Quran, it is said to David to judge among people based on truth, not on factional or familial ties: "Do not follow your desires, for they will lead you astray. Let us work together to understand our current situation; if we raise expectations too high, we will become discontented when they are not met." The elected president stressed: "There are economic problems, sanctions, and differences that we must address together and solve based on our resources. Let us establish realistic expectations in society based on what we have." Pezeshkian emphasized that he will work tirelessly: "I will work day and night to serve the people and Iran. I will do nothing but act with justice and fairness, and we need reforms to implement this justice." He stated that we must correct our behavior: "We must change the allocation of resources and positions, and this requires reforms. Reforms are not about defending a particular person or faction but about establishing justice and fairness for all people so that everyone can benefit from these opportunities." The elected president concluded: "I believe that if we act with fairness and justice and give opportunities to the capable and the elite, we will succeed. Iran can restore dignity and honor to this land. We must strive to defend truth and justice both internally and externally. If we make mistakes, and we might, those close to us should point them out. We want to act based on truth." He continued: "If we act with fairness and justice and give opportunities to the elite, the capable, the producers, and the factory owners, Iran can restore dignity to this land. Imam Ali said, 'I am not above making mistakes, and my ego can lead me astray.' I am neither infallible nor above Ali. Criticize me and point out my flaws." Pezeshkian expressed gratitude to the Supreme Leader, saying: "If it were not for the presence of the Supreme Leader, these events would not have happened. It was the awareness and insight of the leadership that prevented continued interference." He emphasized: "We must not make people feel that we have lied to them. We will not lie; we will be honest and strive to serve Iran sincerely and follow this path based on knowledge and awareness."

Afghan Authorities Emphasize Full Provision of Iran's Water Rights



TEHRAN - Mohammad Javan-Bakht, Deputy Minister of Water and Wastewater and Hiranmand Water Commissioner, stated at this meeting that diverting more than 2 billion cubic meters of Hiranmand water to the "Gudzareh" salt marsh contradicts the declared approach of Afghan officials. He requested the Afghan commissioner to make the necessary technical corrections to the "Kamal-Khan" dam to fully secure Iran's water rights and respect the legal and customary rights of one million downstream residents in the Sistan region of Iran. At this meeting, the Iranian delegation seriously pursued and demanded the construction of joint measurement facilities from the Afghan side, urging the acceleration of the construction process. On the sidelines of this meeting, the Hiranmand Water Commissioner and his accompanying delegation met with Amir Khan Muttaqi, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, and Mullah Abdul Latif Mansoor, Acting Minister of Water and Energy of Afghanistan, at their respective ministries. In this meeting, Javan-Bakht emphasized the necessity of amending the "Kamal-Khan" dam to fully realize the water rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to prevent the drying of the Hamouns, which has exacerbated dust storms and caused severe hardship for the people in both countries. He also called for the Afghan side to expedite and be serious in determining water intake points and constructing joint measurement facilities to accurately implement the treaty. According to this report, during these meetings, the Deputy Minister of Water and Wastewater expressed concerns about the negative impacts of the construction of the "Bakhshabad" dam on the environmental conditions in the Sistan region and the intensification of dust storms, calling for serious attention to and consideration of the environmental water rights of the Hamoun Sabouri. In this meeting, Amir Khan Muttaqi, while confirming the Iranian side's concerns, emphasized the full provision of Iran's water rights according to the 1972 Hiranmand Treaty. He also expressed dissatisfaction with the further diversion of Hiranmand water to "Gudzareh," stating that this water could have been used to improve living conditions for people in the Nimruz region of Afghanistan and Sistan, Iran. Acting Minister of Water and Energy of Afghanistan: Diverting Hiranmand Water to "Gudzareh" is Against the Interests of Both Countries' People

Missiles Hit U.S.-Run Base in Eastern Syria



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - A military base in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr, where US occupation troops and their allied militants are stationed, has come under a missile attack. Loud explosions were heard early on Saturday as several projectiles slammed into an installation run by American occupation forces at the Conoco gas field, Lebanon's Al-Mayadeen television news channel reported. There were no immediate reports about the extent of damage at the military facility, and possible casualties. Sources said the blasts came at the same time that US military aircraft carried out a raid against the al-Joura district near the provincial capital city of Dayr al-Zawr. The Arabic service of Russia's Sputnik news agency said American military helicopters flew overhead after the missile strike, and launched a number of flares in the sky over the Conoco gas field. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of anti-terror fighters, has claimed responsibility for most of the retaliatory strikes on US military bases in Iraq and Syria. The United States, Israel's biggest ally, has provided the occupying regime with arms and ammunition since the Gaza war began.

Washington has also vetoed UN Security Council resolutions that called on the regime to cease its aggression. Meanwhile the Yemeni Armed Forces will deliver a crushing response to Israel over its air strikes on several sites in and around the Red Sea port city of Hudeidah, says a senior member of the Yemeni Supreme Political Council. "The response is coming as pledged by [the leader of the Ansarullah resistance movement] Abdul-Malik al-Houthi," Mohammed Ali al-Houthi wrote in a post published on the social media platform X on Friday. "We do not claim to be in possession of the ammunition that some Arab regimes have in their inventory. Nevertheless, this would not stop us from supporting our brethren in Gaza." Houthi stressed that the Yemeni armed forces' response to Israeli airstrikes on Hudeidah will be according to their military capabilities and resources. The high-ranking Yemeni official also took a swipe at some Arab regimes for their inaction in the face of Israeli crimes in the Gaza Strip, saying, "Where is your reaction whilst your national security is being jeopardized and your brethren are getting killed in Gaza?"

Iran Hails Palestinians' Unity Deal



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has welcomed a China-mediated agreement aimed at resolving a rift between Palestinian factions and forming a national unity government, calling it a "valuable step" towards national reconciliation and consensus. "The recent meeting of Palestinian groups in Beijing, focused on national reconciliation and unity, is a valuable step in the right direction," spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry Nasser Kanaani wrote in a post published on the social media platform X on Friday. The Islamic Republic of Iran, he maintained, will continue to "firmly" support the Palestinian cause and the consensus among Palestinian groups to confront the "apartheid Israeli regime." Tehran backs the collective Palestinian effort for restoration of the fundamental right of self-determination, full liberation of Palestinian lands, and establishment of an independent Palestinian state with holy al-Quds as its capital, he added. Palestinian groups on Tuesday reached a reconciliation agreement following three days of intensive talks in the Chinese capital Beijing to end their political division since 2007. Representatives of 14 Palestinian groups, including Fatah and Hamas movements, signed a new statement pledging to end the division and strengthen unity. Signatories of the agreement said they would form an interim national unity government to supervise the reconstruction of the war-torn Gaza Strip and hold new elections. The announcement of the Palestinian 'national unity' deal comes more than nine months after Israel launched the war on Gaza following Palestinian resistance groups' surprise retaliatory operation into the occupied territories. So far during the military onslaught, the regime has killed at least 39,175 Gazans, most of them women, children, and adolescents. Another 90,403 Palestinians have sustained injuries as well.

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3 Iranian Trade Centers to Be Launched in 3 Countries

TEHRAN (ILNA) - The Iranian Trade Organization has approved the establishment and operation of three international trade centers. The license for the establishment and operation of the Islamic Republic of Iran Trade Center in Belgrade, Serbia, became effective on July 7th of this year and is valid for one year.

The Trade Development Organization has also activated the license for the Iran Trade Center in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This license was issued on July 10th of this year and is valid until July 10th, 2026.

The license for the establishment and operation of the Iran Trade Center in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, is effective from July 7th of this year until September 8th of the following year.

Exporters Suffer Losses from Contracts in Rubles



TEHRAN - A member of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce board said: "Currently, exporters who have signed contracts in rubles have incurred losses because of this. They concluded the deals in rubles and presented the rial accounts of Bank Melli Iran for the transaction. However, they have suffered losses in the profit derived from converting rubles to rials and calculating it based on the dollar price in the free market. In protest against this issue, they have stopped exporting." Kamriz Mirkarimi, a member of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce board, told ILNA about the upcoming connection of Iranian and Russian ATMs: "There is no doubt about the possibility of establishing this connection, but there is still ambiguity in the conversion rate of rubles to rials. For currency conversion, there have always been conditions and required documents, and as long as these prerequisites exist, the use of these cards is not possible. Otherwise, Iranian and Russian banks have a correspondent relationship with each other, the Iranian banking network has accepted rubles, and it seems that the Central Bank of Russia has also agreed to include rials in its basket. Therefore, there are no infrastructural obstacles, but it is unclear at what rate the ruble will be converted to rial when the Russian Mir card is used in Iran." He added: "Therefore, in financial exchanges between Iran and Russia, whether for travel exchanges or commercial transactions, the issue of the currency conversion rate must be resolved without involving the dollar." Mirkarimi continued: "Another issue is the widening gap between the ruble and the dollar rates in Iran's free market; the value of rubles converted to rials has become less than the value of dollars in Iran's free market, and the increase in the dollar price in the free market has deepened this gap." He pointed out: "Previously, some Iranian exporters would give their currencies in rubles to Mirbusiness, but with the increasing gap between the ruble and the dollar, exporters are refraining from doing this, bypassing official markets and turning to unofficial markets." The member of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce board stated: "Currently, exporters who have signed contracts in rubles have incurred losses because of this. They concluded the deals in rubles and presented the rial accounts of Bank Melli Iran for the transaction. However, they have suffered losses in the profit derived from converting rubles to rials and calculating it based on the dollar price in the free market. In protest against this issue, they have stopped exporting."

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

Significant Decline in Rice Imports This Year



Masih Keshavarz, the Secretary of the Iranian Rice Producers and Suppliers Association, announced in an interview that rice imports have significantly decreased this year.

He stated that the country needs 1.2 million tons of imported rice annually. Of this, 600,000 tons should be imported before the fourth-month import ban, which spans from the beginning of August to the end of November. The remaining 600,000 tons are to be imported after the ban. However, only 250,000 tons have been imported in the first three months of this year, and optimistically, no more than an additional 100,000 tons will be imported before the ban. Therefore, the total rice imports before the ban will amount to approximately 350,000 tons.

Keshavarz added that the reduction in rice imports is due to issues with the registration of orders and the slow allocation of currency.

He continued, stating that the private sector in Iran imports rice only from India and Pakistan, and the currency allocated for rice imports is set at 28,500 toman. However, unlike the import of other goods, rice importers initially use their own credit at exchange offices or banks to import the rice, which is then distributed in the market. Subsequently, the Ministry of Agriculture orders the Central Bank to pay the importers in foreign currency. Therefore, the Rice Producers and Suppliers Association insists that the procedure used for tea imports cannot be applied to rice imports. Rice importers bring in the goods first and receive the currency later, a process that has been in place for several years.

The Secretary noted that besides domestic issues, the cost of

maritime shipping in the Persian Gulf region has increased due to specific conditions, leading shipping companies to charge higher fees for container transport. This has also raised land transport costs, further complicating rice imports to Iran.

He then addressed the consequences of reduced foreign rice supply in the Iranian market, stating that when the imported rice supply is less than market demand, Iranian rice prices rise as well.

Keshavarz explained that typically, the lower-income 50% of the population consumes imported rice. When the price of Iranian rice rises, more people switch from Iranian rice to imported rice, and those who already consume imported rice may have to eliminate rice from their diet altogether. Additionally, with the reduction in imported rice, the price of Iranian rice will increase significantly, leading to a stagnation in the rice market and ultimately harming farmers.

He also recalled that during the previous administration, rice imports were halted, causing Iranian rice prices to soar to 150,000 toman per kilogram. As a result, in 2022, a large quantity of rice remained unsold with Iranian farmers. To address this surplus, the Rice Producers and Suppliers Association purchased the excess rice and sold it in chain stores at a regulated price of 80,000 toman per kilogram, stabilizing the market. In return, the government promised import privileges to the association members who participated in purchasing the surplus. However, not only has the government failed to fulfill this promise, but the current issues with currency allocation and order registration have also made conditions difficult for private rice importers.

Exports of 45m Barrels of Iranian Oil to China



TEHRAN - Statistics from Vortexa show that 45 million barrels of Iranian oil were unloaded in Dalian, China, between October 2023 and June 2024. Since late last year, Iranian crude oil imports have been flowing into the port and refinery city of Dalian, China, helping to maintain Iran's oil export figures near their record levels, according to oil traders and tanker tracking companies. Data from Vortexa, a consultancy for oil cargo movements, indicate that 23 shipments, or a total of 45 million barrels of Iranian oil, were unloaded in Dalian, China, between October 2023 and June 2024. These shipments include 28 million barrels of oil unloaded on Changxing Island, about 85 kilometers northwest of Dalian's center. Another tanker tracking institute, Kpler, estimates that Beijing imported 34 million barrels of oil from Iran during the same period. These figures amount to 124,000 to 164,000 barrels per day and represent nearly 13% of China's total oil imports from Iran in the first half of 2024. Analysts say China imported 1.2 to 1.4 million barrels of crude oil from Iran in the first half of this year. According to this company, Iran exported an unprecedented 1.52 million barrels per day to China last October. China's Foreign Ministry told Reuters regarding Dalian's oil imports that China and Iran "have always maintained normal and legal trade within the framework of international law." There are four possible destinations for Dalian's cargoes: the 400,000-barrel-per-day Hengli Petrochemical refinery and its 44 million-barrel storage farm, two refineries operated by the state giant PetroChina, and a 30 million-barrel storage base operated by the Liaoning Port Group on Changxing Island. Three trade sources close to Hengli said the company purchased at least three shipments. One source estimates that Hengli bought 4 million barrels of oil monthly in the first few months of 2024, while another estimates this figure at 4 to 6 million barrels per month.

Iranophobia Benefits Regional Competitors in Tourism Industry



TEHRAN - The head of the Association of Air Travel and Tourism Services Offices of Iran said: "Iranophobia is created by foreign enemies and benefits our regional tourism rivals. To counteract it, we need to use the tools and capacities of tourism diplomacy and public diplomacy, along with ideas and creativity in prevention."

Hormatollah Rafiei discussed the policy of Iranophobia and its impact on the tourism industry in an interview with IRN. He said: "Iranophobia is a policy against which no effective action has been taken so far. One way to counteract it is by developing tourism and facilitating the presence of foreign tourists in Iran so that they can come, see, and then leave with the message that Iran is a safe, beautiful, and free country."

He said: "Iranophobia is an obstacle to the development of tourism. However, a proper plan and path to overcome it have not yet been implemented. While Iranophobia is a problem, no problem in Iran is without a solution. We need to strive, think, and have the will and ideas."

He added: "If there is a will to control Iranophobia, foreign tourists should be allowed to come easily, and outgoing tourists should also be allowed to leave easily. Increasing tourists in the country leads to the development of travel and trade and reflects effective, clear, and real advertisements about Iran and its people in the global public opinion."

Rafiei highlighted the importance and role of advertising in developing tourism, saying: "The cost of advertising to introduce and develop Iran's tourism, given its vastness, diverse attractions, and numerous competitors, is high. The private sector cannot afford these costs; the government must invest. Our ambassadors should specifically promote tourism in the host countries, and cultural advisors should make special efforts."

He emphasized: "To advertise and market tourism, we must conduct various roadshows for different types of tourism; we must participate in various global exhibitions and target both traditional and new markets, especially the active tourism sectors and tourists from neighboring countries."

Rafiei stated: "Who creates Iranophobia? Foreign enemies; who benefits? Our tourism competitors in the region. They unjustly benefit from it, but we cannot rightfully counteract it because we do not use our tools and capacities. We lack speed and creativity in prevention. Overall, our 'public diplomacy,' 'cultural diplomacy,' and 'tourism diplomacy' are weak. While the thought might exist, the will and tools are also necessary."

He also said: "The Minister of Tourism, as the government's responsible entity in the tourism industry, must bear the costs and losses of tourism, understand the pain and suffering of hotels and airlines without tourists and passengers, be able to withstand difficulties and crises, and firmly support this industry to secure its share in the national economy."

He said: "We must learn from global tourism management experiences, be smart and brave, and not allow tourism facilities to be the first to close down during crises like floods, earthquakes, and the pandemic. Energy and fuel imbalances should not make the tourism industry the first casualty."

Rafiei said: "Our western and northwestern neighbors did not completely close their borders during the pandemic, implementing and enforcing health protocols instead. They kept religious and recreational tourism alive. If we compare with various countries, these two countries had almost the lowest fatalities during the pandemic."

Two New Bio-Capsules Added to Iran's Space Fleet



TEHRAN - Hassan Salarieh, the head of the Iranian Space Agency, announced in an interview the overall success of last year's launch of the country's "bio-capsule." This capsule ascended to a suborbital altitude of 130 to 140 kilometers above the Earth's surface before returning to the ground.

Discussing the technical challenges of this launch, Salarieh said: "The launcher section performed very well, but the 'gentle return' subsystem of the capsule encountered issues. This subsystem plays a crucial role in controlling the speed and ensuring the safe landing of the capsule." However, he emphasized that most components and subsystems of the capsule operated correctly, and the biological payloads inside the capsule were in excellent condition upon recovery. Tests conducted on these payloads showed that the internal environment of the capsule was suitable for living organisms. Referring to the enhancement of bio-capsule capabilities, he mentioned: "To provide suitable living conditions for larger organisms, two new projects have been defined. In these projects, two types of bio-capsules with capacities of 1500 and 500 kilograms have been designed. Both types are upgraded versions of previous models and have their own specific advantages." The head of the Iranian Space Agency highlighted the importance of navigation and control systems, stating: "The new bio-capsules will be equipped with advanced guidance, navigation, and control systems to ensure a smooth and precise landing. These systems will allow the capsules to determine their trajectory accurately and return to Earth safely." He also noted the importance of motion control systems for the capsules, saying: "The bio-capsules will be equipped with thrusters that, in addition to maintaining the proper orientation of the capsule in space, will allow for maneuvering and changing its course. The performance of these systems will be thoroughly tested in suborbital launches." Salarieh indicated the progress of the projects, announcing: "Both projects are in the design phase. The contract for one of these projects has been signed, and the contract for the other project will be finalized soon. We hope to see successful launches of these capsules soon. It should be noted that these contracts are signed between the Iranian Space Research Institute and the Aerospace Research Institute of the Ministry of Science."

Iran Importing Wood From Russia



TEHRAN - The furniture-making and woodworking industry is one of the country's largest industries. Although imports in this sector have been banned, smuggled goods are widely available in the market at high prices. We had a conversation with Alireza Abbasi, Vice President of the National Furniture Council of Iran and related industries, which follows below:

He noted: "Our biggest problem is sourcing raw materials. While we take pride in our domestic production, some raw materials, such as upholstery fabrics, lack the necessary quality and we face quantity issues as well. The ban on imports, justified as support for domestic production, has led to an increase in smuggled goods in the country."

He added: "Smuggled goods are abundant in the market, which in turn raises the price of the final Iranian product. People ask us why furniture is expensive. Good raw materials are not distributed, and raw materials are essential for production. Instead of blocking imports, services should be provided to facilitate high-quality production."

He said: "Despite having good export potential, we face issues with currency transfers due to sanctions, with the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade performing inadequately in this area. Our furniture and wood product exports have weakened, while countries like Turkey and China have taken over our market. Five hundred million people live around our country, from Armenia to Iraq, Afghanistan, Georgia, etc., who all need our wood and furniture industries. Unfortunately, our market has been taken over by Turkey and China."

He concluded: "The furniture industry accounts for 10% of employment. A country with such production statistics should pay special attention to it. We hope these interviews help the industry and production in this sector."

He reiterated that Iran imports wood from Russia and blamed sanctions for problems for this industry in the country.

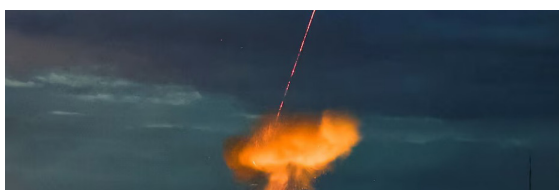
Israel Army Ready to Launch Decisive Offensive Against Lebanon's Hezbollah

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - An Israeli military commander said Friday that troops in the country's north were preparing for "a decisive offensive" against Lebanon's Hezbollah after months of deadly cross-border exchanges. Israeli forces have traded near-daily fire with Hamas ally Hezbollah since the Palestinian militant group's October 7 attack on southern Israel started the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip. Major General Ori Gordin, Israel's commanding officer in the north, told troops that "we have already eliminated more than 500 terrorists in Lebanon, the great majority of them from Hezbollah", an army statement said. According to an AFP tally, more than nine months of violence have killed at least 523 people in Lebanon. Most of them, 342 people, have been confirmed to be Hezbollah militants but the tally also includes 104 civilians. Gordin did not mention civilian casualties. In northern Israel, at least 18 Israeli soldiers and 13 civilians have been killed, according to the military. The exchanges of fire have been largely restricted to the border areas and displaced tens of thousands of Lebanese as well as Israeli residents. The Israeli military has "destroyed thousands" of targets across the border, Gordin said.



IRAN NEWS

Russia Deploys Cheap Drones to Locate Ukraine's Air Defenses



LONDON (Dispatches) - Russia has begun including new, cheaply-made drones in its long-range attacks on Ukraine, to try to identify air defenses, film any damage and act as decoys, a Ukrainian military spy official said.

The two new types of drone, which Russia has used in five drone attacks in the last two to three weeks including an overnight strike on Thursday, are produced from materials like foam plastic and plywood, the official told Reuters.

One type carries a camera and a Ukrainian mobile phone SIM card to send images back to the Russian military.

"They identify where our mobile groups are positioned, where the machine guns are that can destroy them. They're trying ... to get a picture of where all our air defenses are located," said Andriy Cherniak, a military spy agency spokesperson.

The previously unreported details from Cherniak are further evidence of Russia seeking to adapt its tactics and try new technology to gain an edge during its daily missile and drone strikes on Ukrainian cities and infrastructure.

Iranian-designed Shahed attack drones, which fly to their target and detonate on impact, have become a staple of Russian aerial attacks since they began being used in the first year of Russia's full-scale invasion launched in February 2022.

Ukraine, which has been appealing to the West to provide more air defenses to repel increased Russian airstrikes on its power facilities since March, tries hard to conceal the locations of its air defense systems.



Massive Attack on French Rail Threatens More Chaos

PARIS (Dispatches) - French rail officials warned of travel chaos for hundreds of thousands of people throughout the weekend after saboteurs following a meticulous plan paralysed much of the train network Friday as the Olympic Games started.

No immediate claim of responsibility was made for the arson attacks on cabling boxes at junctions strategically picked out north, south-west and east of the capital where the Olympics opening ceremony was staged on Friday night. Rail workers thwarted a fourth attempt to destroy safety equipment.

The SNCF rail company called it a "massive attack".

"Our intelligence services and law enforcement are mobilised to find and punish the perpetrators of these criminal acts," Prime Minister Gabriel Attal posted on X, calling the attacks "prepared and coordinated acts of sabotage".

Services from Paris to much of France saw mass cancellations and delays.

The Eurostar company said it scrapped about a quarter of its trains between London, Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam. It predicted cancelling about a fifth of trains over the weekend and all services will face delays.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer had to take a plane instead of a high speed train to the Olympics ceremony. Four special trains bringing Olympic athletes to Paris, including some US team members, went ahead, SNCF said.

With one of France's busiest holiday travel weekends clashing with the start of the Olympics, SNCF said about a quarter of trains will be cancelled on Saturday and Sunday on the lines attacked. Trains that run will face delays.

The company said thousands of staff worked to repair the damage and try to get services running again. It estimated that about 250,000 passengers were affected on Friday. Junior transport minister Patrice Vergriete said 800,000 could face the fallout over the three days.

The coordinated attacks were staged at 4am (0200 GMT).

At each site, the perpetrators targeted fibre optic cables that carry safety information for drivers and control rail changes, SNCF chief executive Jean-Pierre Farandou said.

Gerard Due, mayor of Croisilles in northern France, one of the sites hit, said the attackers had specialised equipment to access the cables and then "threw a flammable liquid" on them.

Vergriete said that the saboteurs had been spotted with "vans", while "incendiary devices were found at the scene".

Paris prosecutors opened an investigation into attacks on "the fundamental interests of the nation" and criminal conspiracy.

A similar sabotage attack was staged in Germany last year and in eastern France in January 2023.

The attacks left passengers stranded in stations across Paris and in many cities in eastern, western and northern France.

Some at Montparnasse station in Paris were left in tears.

Charles Fazio, a 70-year-old American from Florida, went to the station to try to get information. "I don't understand anything," he said. "We have to go to Lille tomorrow for the Olympics".

French security forces are on their highest alert to prevent attacks during the Paris Olympics.

Workers carrying out maintenance at Vergigny, south-east of Paris, stopped one attempted attack there.

French officials refused to comment on the identity of the saboteurs.

Far-left French anarchists have a history of targeting the train network with arson attacks. The arson method used resembled past attacks by extreme-left activists, a security source told AFP.

President Emmanuel Macron has said in the past that Russia was planning to target the Games. Police arrested a Russian man this week in Paris who was suspected of "organising events likely to lead to destabilisation during the Olympic Games".



U.S. May Calibrate Venezuela Sanctions Policy Post-Election

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Biden administration will "calibrate" its sanctions policy towards Venezuela depending on how the high-stakes election unfolds in the OPEC nation on Sunday, U.S. officials said, signaling that Washington could ease punitive measures if President Nicolas Maduro holds a fair vote.

But the U.S. also put Maduro on notice that if he claims victory without providing concrete proof, it would "call into question" whether the international community should accept the outcome. Maduro is seeking his third term as leader of Venezuela, which is under heavy U.S. sanctions. His challenger, opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez, has attracted significant support. Maduro, a Socialist whose 2018 reelection in the South American nation was rejected by the U.S. and most Western governments as a sham, has said Venezuela has the world's most transparent electoral system. The opposition and some independent observers have questioned whether Sunday's vote will be fair, saying decisions by Maduro-appointed electoral authorities and the arrests of some opposition campaign staff are meant to create obstacles. Senior U.S. officials said on Friday they were closely watching the final lead-up to the election. Washington relaxed but then reinstated sanctions on Venezuela's vital oil industry in recent months after it said Maduro failed to comply with an electoral deal guaranteeing an inclusive democratic vote. The officials, briefing reporters on condition of anonymity, said they would not prejudice the outcome, but expressed concern about possible repression. They also warned Venezuela's military, which has long supported Maduro, not to interfere and "put its thumb on the scale." "The United States is prepared to calibrate our sanctions policy vis a vis events as they may unfold in Venezuela," one U.S. official said. "As we look at the post-electoral period, we will continue to evaluate and update our sanctions policy as required based on our foreign policy goals."

G20 Pledges to Work Together to Tax Ultra-Rich

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - G20 nations have agreed to work together to make the super-rich pay their taxes, but stopped short of a more substantial deal, according to a declaration adopted Friday after a meeting of finance ministers in Rio de Janeiro.

The thorny topic of tackling tax-dodging billionaires dominated the two-day meeting in the Brazilian city, which will host the next G20 summit in November.

The initiative is a key priority for Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who heads this year's grouping, which includes the world's major economies, the European Union and the African Union.

Lula was hoping for a minimum tax on the moneyed elite, but the final statement represents a compromise on a topic that divided member states.

"With full respect to tax sovereignty, we will seek to engage cooperatively to ensure that ultra-high-net-worth individuals are effectively taxed," said the statement.

"Wealth and income inequalities are undermining economic growth and social cohesion and aggravating social vulnerabilities."

Brazil's Finance Minister Fernando Haddad said that "from a moral point of view it is important that the twenty richest nations consider that we have a problem, which is to have progressive taxation on the poor and not on the rich."



Brazil.

On the sidelines of the thorny tax discussions, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Brazilian Economy Minister Haddad announced on Friday the signing of a partnership on climate protection.

The United States and Germany dismissed the need for a global deal on taxing billionaires, an initiative which is backed by France, Spain, South Africa, Colombia and the African Union.

International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva hailed the G20's position on "tax fairness." "The shared vision of G20 Ministers on progressive taxation is timely and welcome, as the need to rebuild fiscal buffers while also attending to social and development needs involves difficult decisions in many countries," she said in a statement.

French economist Gabriel Zucman, who authored a report on taxing the rich, welcomed the fact that "for the first time in history, there is now a consensus among G20 countries that the way we tax the super-rich must be fixed."

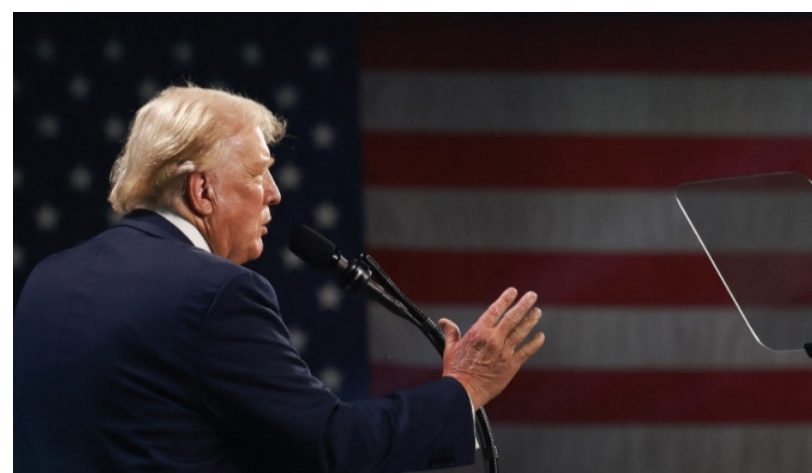
"Now it is time to go further," said Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz on Friday, urging heads of state to coordinate minimum standards by November.

"The climate crisis is expected to cost trillions of dollars every year and it is outrageous to expect that the regular taxpayer should pay for it, while the super-rich evade taxes," said Camila Jardim of Greenpeace.

Trump Vows Return to Site of Assassination Attempt, Obamas Endorse Harris

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said on Friday he will return to the Pennsylvania town where he narrowly survived an assassination attempt, while Vice President Kamala Harris capped her week-long bid to become the Democratic presidential nominee with former President Barack Obama's endorsement. "I WILL BE GOING BACK TO BUTLER, PENNSYLVANIA, FOR A BIG AND BEAUTIFUL RALLY," former President Trump wrote on his Truth Social site, without providing details on when or where the rally would take place. Harris, the first Black woman and first Asian American to serve as vice president, swiftly consolidated Democratic support after President Joe Biden tapped her to succeed him on Sunday. A handful of public opinion polls this week have shown her beginning to narrow Trump's lead. A Friday Wall Street Journal poll showed Trump holding 49 per cent support to Harris's 47 per cent support, with a margin of error of three percentage points. A poll by the newspaper earlier this month had shown Trump leading Biden 48 per cent to 42 per cent. Obama and his wife Michelle endorsed Harris on Friday, adding their names to a parade of prominent Democrats who coalesced behind Harris' White House bid after Biden, 81, ended his reelection campaign under pressure from the party. "We called to say Michelle and I couldn't be prouder to

endorse you and to do everything we can to get you through this election and into the Oval Office," Obama told Harris in a phone call posted in an online video by the campaign. Smiling as she spoke into a cellphone, Harris expressed her gratitude for the endorsement and their long friendship. "Thank you both. It means so much. And we're gonna have some fun with this too," said Harris, who would also be the nation's first female president if she prevails in the November 5 election. Barack Obama, the first Black US president, and Michelle remain among the most popular figures in the Democratic Party, almost eight years after he left office. A Reuters/Ipsos poll early this month showed that 55 per cent of Americans — and 94 per cent of Democrats — viewed Michelle Obama favourably, higher approval than Harris' 37 per cent nationally and 81 per cent within the party. The endorsement could help boost support and fundraising for Harris' campaign, and it signals Obama is likely to get on the campaign trail for Harris. Trump met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the former president's Florida resort on Friday, a day after Netanyahu sat down with Biden and Harris in separate meetings in Washington. Trump greeted Netanyahu warmly and told reporters they have a "very good relationship," dismissing any suggestion of tensions between them.





Paris Olympic Games Kick Off in Style Amid Security Concerns

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron declared the Olympic Games open on Friday after a soaking wet ceremony in which athletes were cheered by the crowd along the Seine, dancers took to the roofs of Paris and Lady Gaga sang a French cabaret song.

France's three-time Olympic gold medallists Marie-Jose Perec and Teddy Riner then lit the Olympic cauldron, suspended on a hot-air balloon, before Canada's Celine Dion sang Edith Piaf's Hymn to Love, in her first public performance in years, drawing huge cheers from the crowd.

The 30-metre high balloon carrying a 7-metre diameter ring of fire took to the air and was hovering dozens of metres above the ground.

It will be in the air from sunset until 2am local time every day, organizers said. "We are so proud of this show, I'm so proud that sport and culture were celebrated in such a fantastic manner tonight, it was a first and the result was fantastic despite the rain," Paris 2024 organising president Tony Estanguet told reporters.

A fleet of barges took the competitors on a 6km-stretch of the river alongside some of the French capital's most famous landmarks, as performers recreated some of the sports to be showcased in the Games on floating platforms.

It was the first time that an opening ceremony has taken place outside a stadium, adding to the headaches for a vast security operation, just hours after a sabotage attack on the high-speed TGV rail network caused travel chaos across France.

"I invite everybody: dream with us. Like the Olympic athletes, be inspired with the joy that only sport can give us. Let us celebrate this Olympic spirit of living in peace," International Olympics Committee President Thomas Bach said as the ceremony came to an end at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

More than 10,500 athletes will compete at the Olympics, 100 years since Paris last staged the Games. Competition started on Wednesday and the first of the 329 gold medals will be awarded on Saturday.

As the show started four hours earlier, a giant plume of blue, white and red smoke, resembling the French flag, was sent high above a bridge over the Seine as part of a show that included many postcard-like depictions of France, including a huge cancan line performed by Moulin Rouge dancers on the banks.

A more modern image of the country was on display when French-Malian pop star Aya Nakamura, the most-listened to French female singer in the world, sang some of her biggest hits, accompanied by the French Republican Guard's army choir.

Nakamura's performance drew some of the ceremony's biggest cheers. Rumours of her inclusion had sparked a row over French identity, with supporters saying she represented the vibrancy of modern-day France while her detractors said her music owes more to foreign influences than France.

While the celebration of French culture, fashion and history was warmly cheered

by many of the 300,000 spectators lining the river, hundreds were seen leaving early as the rain fell.

"It was good other than the rain, it was nice, it was different, instead of being in a stadium being on the river, so that's always a good thing - interesting, unique," said Avid Pureval, 34, who came to the Games from Ohio.

The cauldron, with the Olympic flame lit, lifts off while attached to a balloon during the opening ceremony for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France, Friday, July 26, 2024. — AFP pic

The cauldron, with the Olympic flame lit, lifts off while attached to a balloon during the opening ceremony for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France, Friday, July 26, 2024. — AFP pic

"Once you're wet, it's fine," he said. Still, he was heading back to his hotel after the French boat passed, long before the ceremony ended.

"It would have been better with sun," said Josephine, from Paris, sitting beside her 9-year-old daughter and who paid €1,600 for her seat.

With many world leaders and VIPs present, the ceremony was protected by snipers on rooftops. The Seine's riverbed was swept for bombs, and Paris' airspace was closed.

Some 45,000 police and thousands of soldiers were deployed in a huge security operation in Paris for the ceremony. Armed police patrolled along the river in inflatable boats as the armada made its passage along the Seine.

A mix of French and international stars, including soccer great Zinedine Zidane, 14-times French Open champion Rafa Nadal, 23-times Grand Slam champion Serena Williams and three paralympic athletes were among the last torchbearers before the cauldron was lit.

It will blaze until the closing ceremony on August 11.

At the start of the parade, applause erupted for the Greek boat — the first delegation, by tradition — and there were even bigger cheers for the boat that followed, carrying the refugees' team. The French, US and Ukrainian delegations also got loud cheers.

The two most decorated athletes in the Games' history, Michael Phelps and Martin Fourcade, unveiled the gold, silver and bronze medals.

At one point, there was a live crossover to the early morning welcome ceremony at the surfing venue, 16,000 km away in the Pacific island of Tahiti.

France is at its highest level of security, though officials have repeatedly said there was no specific threat to the opening ceremony or the Games.

But since the last Games — the Winter Olympics held in Beijing in 2022 — wars have erupted in Ukraine and Gaza, providing a tense international backdrop.

Israeli competitors are being escorted by elite tactical units to and from events and are given 24-hour protection throughout the Olympics due to the war in Gaza, officials say.

Berrettini Stays Red Hot; Reaches Kitzbuhel Final



LONDON (Dispatches) - Former Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini reached his fourth final of the season in Kitzbuhel, Austria, defeating Yannick Hanfmann 6-4, 6-4.

In a straight forward contest that lasted 90 minutes, Berrettini slammed 11 aces, won 89 percent of his first serve points and broke the serve of his German opponent on two occasions. Berrettini, who won the tournament in Gstaad, Switzerland last week, currently stands at 20-5 on the year. The 28-year-old is also up to No. 46 in the world. Berrettini won 32 of 36 first-serve points, saved the lone break point he faced and clubbed 27 winners against six errors in a 90-minute victory. The 2021 Wimbledon finalist improved his 2024 clay-court record to 14-1 with his lone loss on dirt coming to Miomir Kecmanovic at Masters 1000 Monte-Carlo in April. Berrettini is now 9-0 in clay-court semifinals becoming the first Italian finalist in Kitzbuhel since Paolo Lorenzi won the title in 2016. He will face Hugo Gaston in the final. Gaston advanced to the championship match after Facundo Diaz Acosta was forced to retire trailing 6-1, 2-0. The Frenchman will be playing in his second career final on Saturday. Gaston is currently ranked No. 60 in the world. Meanwhile Top seed Andrey Rublev was ousted in the semifinals of the Croatia Open on Friday, losing to No. 4 seed Francisco Cerundolo 7-6(4), 6-4. In a match that lasted one hour and 53 minutes, Cerundolo hit four aces, saved five of six break points and hit 25 total winners. The 25-year-old will next face either No. 2 seed Lorenzo Musetti or up-and-comer Jakob Mensik.

Cerundolo will be looking to win his third career title on Saturday.

Chinese Qualifier Shang to Face Thompson in ATP Atlanta Semis



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Chinese teen tennis qualifier Shang Juncheng overcame two rain delays and advanced to the ATP Atlanta Open semi-finals on Friday by defeating Australia's Max Purcell 7-6 (7/3), 6-4.

The 19-year-old left-hander from Beijing shrugged off rain stoppages late in each set to reach a Saturday semi-final match against Australian fourth seed Jordan Thompson, who ousted fifth-seeded Spanish wild card Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-3.

Shang captured the match against the eighth-seeded Aussie after two hours and one minute on a service winner in the first US hardcourt tune-up event on the path to the US Open, which begins on August 26.

"Tough conditions. It rained twice, especially the first time in the tie-break it was crucial," Shang said. "I kept my mindset together, played really good tennis. Just super good match and happy to be through."

Shang, who ousted US top seed Ben Shelton in the round of 16, reached his second career ATP semi-final, having lost the first to Russian Andrey Rublev at Hong Kong earlier this year.

"Coming from qualies has not been easy and the first two rounds have been challenging, really hard," said Shang. "But tomorrow it's semis. You don't get that every week. Just happy to be in the weekend."

Thompson, a 30-year-old from Sydney, won his first ATP title in February at Los Cabos, defeating Norway's Casper Ruud in the final.

US third seed Frances Tiafoe will face Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka and Italian qualifier Mattia Bellucci will play France's Arthur Rinderknech in later quarter-finals.

Tiafoe seeks his fourth ATP career title and second final of the year after losing to Shelton in defending his US Clay Court crown at Houston.

Nishioka chases his third ATP title after trophies at the 2018 Shenzhen Open and 2022 Korea Open in Seoul.

Nadal Trains Ahead of Doubles Opener Despite Injury Worries

PARIS (Dispatches) - Rafa Nadal practised alongside doubles partner Carlos Alcaraz at Roland Garros on Friday as doubts continued about the Spaniard's fitness ahead of the Olympic tennis competition. The 38-year-old had missed his training slot on Thursday with Germany's Alexander Zverev with Spain's coach Carlos Moya saying he was struggling with a thigh injury.



Fourteen-time French Open champion Nadal wore a strapping on his right thigh on Friday as he practised under the closed roof of Court Philippe Chatrier but appeared untroubled. Spain's so-called dream team partnership are scheduled to begin their quest for gold on Saturday against Argentine seeds Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni. Nadal, who won the Olympic singles in 2008 and doubles in 2016, is drawn against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics in the singles with a potential blockbuster clash against old rival and top seed Novak Djokovic in the second round. Moya, who was supervising the practise session, gave an optimistic update on Nadal's fitness late on Thursday, although he suggested that he could yet prioritise the doubles. "It is practically confirmed that he will play, unless the recovery is going very badly," Moya was quoted by SER. "He is going to try out and we are optimistic that he will play on Saturday. I don't know how it's going to go any further. As of today, it is that on Saturday he will go out on the court to play doubles with Alcaraz." While doubles might be possible even with a niggle, Nadal would be reluctant to play singles with an injury and risk then scuppering his doubles chances with French Open and Wimbledon champion Alcaraz. "The idea of giving up one of the competitions has not been raised, but if the time comes and he is limited for the singles, it can be raised without any doubt," Moya said. "Doubles is much less demanding and there are real options, if they play well, of a medal." Meanwhile Lebanon's Hady Habib thought he was dreaming when he walked into the

player's gym at Roland Garros and saw Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic working out ahead of the Paris Olympics. Now, because of a quirk of fate, the Houston-born 25-year-old will walk out on Court Suzanne Lenglen to face Carlos Alcaraz in the first round of the men's singles. Ranked 275th in the ATP's singles rankings, Habib was only slated to play doubles in Paris with Benjamin Hassan. But when world number one Jannik Sinner withdrew from the Olympics with tonsillitis on Wednesday, Habib, who plays his tennis on the second-level Challenger Tour, received a call-up. Things rapidly escalated and Thursday's draw pitched him against Spanish second seed Alcaraz, the new force in men's tennis and winner of the French Open and Wimbledon this year. "Originally, I was supposed to play only doubles with Benjamin. On Wednesday, I heard I got in as an alternate," he said. "And the day after that I'm drawn to playing Carlos Alcaraz. So this has been an interesting five days for me." Habib began playing as a youngster in Mtyleb, Lebanon, before his parents Fady and Suzy moved back to the U.S. to help him and his sister Hoda pursue tennis careers. He will now become the first player to represent Lebanon in Olympic tennis. "I've been filled with emotions, excitement, a little bit of nerves, but it's good. I'm really excited to get this opportunity to play, represent Lebanon," he said after training on Friday. "I was just happy to be an Olympian. Now I'm playing Alcaraz on (Court) Suzanne Lenglen. I'm so happy and stoked, and ready and excited to play."