

Masoud Pezeshkian Will Be Sworn In as the 9th President of Iran at a Ceremony in the Parliament on Tuesday, July 30 to Be Attended by the head of the Supreme Court of Iran, the members of the Constitutional Council, the Judiciary Chief, and Other Top Political and Military Officials

IRAN NEWS

The Latest Figures by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) Puts the Country's Jobless Rate at 7.7% in the First Three Months of the Calendar Year to Late June as the Data Showed that 7.7% of the Iranian People Aged 15 or Older Were Jobless Which Is 0.5% Lower Than That of Last Year's Corresponding Period

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Palestinians Will Certainly Achieve Victory Against Israel



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's president-elect Masoud Pezeshkian assures Hamas' Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh of Palestinians' eventual victory in the face of the Israeli regime's genocidal war against the Gaza Strip.

Pezeshkian made the remarks in a message that he addressed to Haniyeh on Wednesday as means of responding to the Palestinian resistance movement leader's earlier congratulation of his victory in the Islamic Republic's run-off presidential vote.

"I am certain that, under the aegis of the resisting people of Palestine and the oppressed and strong Gaza's historic steadfastness, and the heroic diligence of the fighters of the Palestinian resistance in the ongoing war, triumph and divine victory will be awarded to dear Palestine," Pezeshkian wrote.

Pezeshkian also pledged "all-out support" on the part of the Islamic Republic for the oppressed Palestinian nation "until realization of all of its ideals and rights as well as liberation of the noble al-Quds" from Israeli occupation.

The support, he noted, was in line with the "lofty goals" of the country's Islamic Revolution and within the framework of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini's ideals and Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's directives.

U.S. Anti-Iran Claims Aimed at Covering Up Washington's Aggression Against Yemen



TEHRAN - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations has considered the US's allegations against the Islamic Republic of supplying arms to Yemen as a smokescreen for Washington's act of aggression against the Arab Peninsula country.

Amir Sa'eed Irvani made the remarks in a letter addressed to the UN Security Council on Thursday.

On Monday, Stephanie Sullivan, the US's deputy envoy to the United Nations, had repeated Washington's allegations against Tehran of providing arms to Yemen's popular resistance Ansarullah movement. Sullivan had claimed that the Islamic Republic's "own state-affiliated media has touted the country's supply of prohibited ballistic missile technology" to Ansarullah.

Irvani denounced the American diplomat for "deviating from the agenda and once more misusing the Security Council platform to level unfounded allegations against the Islamic Republic on the situation in Yemen."

"Iran regards these allegations as nothing more than a political agenda by the United States to cover up and legitimize its ongoing acts of aggression against Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity," he added.

Together with the United Kingdom, the US has been carrying out sporadic airstrikes against Yemen's western provinces as means of trying to stop Sana'a's pro-Palestinian operations that have been targeting Israeli ships or the vessels that head towards the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Iranian representative, meanwhile, warned that, by repeating its allegations against the Islamic Republic, the US was "seeking to pressure UN experts to compromise their independent mandate."

"This destructive approach by the US undermines the credibility of both the Security Council and the reports of UN experts that should be



Iran Says De-Dollarization Will Cut U.S. Pressure on Emerging Economies

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker emphasized the role of BRICS countries in the global value chain, stating that de-dollarization and the use of alternative currencies will eliminate U.S. pressure on emerging economies.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, in today's BRICS summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, said: "The presence of new countries and the growing trend of countries wanting to join this multilateral international organization highlight its importance in international relations and its established position on the global stage."

The Speaker noted that the current global system has been ineffective in resolving regional and international disputes, ending wars, conflicts, and inequalities. Therefore, new economic and political capacities are forming within multilateral organizations to spread global governance based on the principle of multilateralism.

He emphasized that the longstanding stance of the Islamic Republic is the necessity of a multilateral system, and such an outlook drives Iran's government and parliament to seek beneficial participation and cooperation among members and the practical realization of BRICS' lofty goals.

Qalibaf asserted that BRICS countries should aim for greater and more effective participation in the global value chain, believing that the economies of BRICS countries, with their diverse and strategic capacities, complement and strengthen each other. This presents valuable opportunities for mutual bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

He identified de-dollarization and the use of alternative currencies for trade among members as key initiatives pursued by BRICS. He stated, "This approach will cut one of the main levers of U.S. pressure on emerging economies. The recent financial agreement between Iran and Russia is a successful example of cooperation in de-dollarizing bilateral relations. Expanding cooperation in establishing processes for money transfers among member countries and developing trade corridors for the transfer of goods and services among BRICS members are important capacities that should be pursued and activated by member parliaments."

He outlined transit, energy, trade, and banking as the main areas of cooperation among

BRICS members, expressing Iran's readiness to collaborate fully with its partners in all these domains.

The Speaker further emphasized the critical role of member parliaments in BRICS' success, stating that they can facilitate trade development by enacting laws to overcome legal barriers to expanding commercial cooperation.

Qalibaf noted that the BRICS Parliamentary Forum, through facilitating discussions, political cooperation, and defending the rule of law, sets the stage for enhancing relations among member governments. He mentioned that the alignment of BRICS member parliaments with member governments can broaden the capacity for the swift implementation of economic and trade policies.

He reiterated Iran's proposal, initially made at the previous meeting in South Africa, for establishing a BRICS Parliamentary Friendship Group in the parliaments of member countries to ease and strengthen bilateral parliamentary relations.

Qalibaf proposed that economic sanctions and combating unilateral coercive measures be placed on the BRICS Parliamentary Assembly's agenda as major threats to the security and welfare of the people and ordinary citizens of BRICS members. He believes that collective legal and procedural solutions and collective action can yield effective results.

He concluded by stating that the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran considers expanding relations and enhancing parliamentary interactions as fundamental principles aligned with national interests and the promotion of multilateralism. He expressed full readiness for active and purposeful cooperation and interaction with his counterparts in BRICS parliaments to strengthen this valuable convergence approach.

Qalibaf traveled to this event at the invitation of Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma of Russia, and Valentina Matviyenko, Chairwoman of the Federation Council of Russia, to participate in and deliver a speech at the 10th BRICS Parliamentary Forum. This trip marks the first official presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in BRICS.

Supporting Resistance Iran's Strategic, Permanent Policy



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian commander has considered lending support to the regional resistance amid its ongoing struggle against the Israeli regime to be among the Islamic Republic's "strategic and permanent" policies.

Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), made the remarks on Thursday during a trip to regional resistance fronts, where he met with ranking resistance commanders and officials.

He said the support was especially geared towards "Palestine and the steadfastness of Gaza's strong people."

The policy "is agreed upon by all the pillars [of the country's] Islamic establishment and backed by various members of the Iranian nation," Qa'ani added.

For their part, the resistance figures expressed gratitude towards the Islamic Republic for the all-out support.

Qa'ani had last met with top resistance officials in Tehran back in May as they were visiting the Iranian capital to pay tribute to the Islamic Republic's late president Ebrahim Raisi.

That meeting saw the participants discussing the latest political, social, and military situation in the Gaza Strip, which has been enduring a genocidal Israeli war since last October, as well as al-Aqsa Storm, the retaliatory operation by Gaza's resistance groups, following which the occupying regime launched the military onslaught.

Nearly 38,350 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed in the war so far.

Iran Court Rules U.S. Must Pay Nearly \$7b in Damages to EB Patients



TEHRAN - An Iranian court has ruled that the United States must pay some seven billion dollars in damages over its illegal sanctions affecting the country's patients suffering from Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB), a rare hereditary disease that causes the skin to become fragile and easily injured.

The Tehran Legal Court of International Relations issued the verdict on Thursday and said the U.S. government and officials have been sentenced to pay 6,785,000,000 dollars as part of material, moral and punitive damages to the plaintiffs in the case of Iran's EB patients.

The ruling was made after 295 Iranian EB patients and family members of patients lodged lawsuits in protest at the U.S.-imposed sanctions that had hampered the import of much-needed pharmaceuticals and wound dressings for those suffering from the rare skin disease. In the ruling, the court addressed cases such as the illegal and illegitimate nature of unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran, the illegitimate blocking of humanitarian items, including medicine, the illegitimate sanctions against children and other vulnerable groups, the adverse effects of sanctions on the life, health and well-being of EB patients and their families. The Tehran Legal Court of International Relations said that after the withdrawal of the US administration from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), some companies affiliated to the US and Europe cut off business trade with the Islamic Republic, among them the Swedish company Mölnlycke. The world-leading MedTech company is a major producer of medical bandages and healing dressings for EB patients across the world. It stopped transactions with Iran as soon as new sanctions were imposed by the then-U.S. President Donald Trump.

Israel Under Fire of Resistance



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The commander of the IRGC highlighted the considerable clout that Iran carries in support of Muslims, warning the Zionist regime that it is in the cross hairs of the resistance forces in the entire region.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a sanctuary for all Muslims, no matter where they live, Major General Hossein Salami said in an address to a conference commemorating the martyrs of the IRGC Ramezan Base, held in Tehran on Wednesday.

He noted that Iran takes action to support Muslims who are in danger everywhere in the Islamic world and won't let oppressors persecute Muslims.

The commander also hailed the "proliferation of Islamic resistance", adding, "Today the Zionists are under fire from Yemen to Iraq and Lebanon

and in the True Promise (operation carried out) by Iran."

The commander described the retaliatory True Promise operation that Iran launched against the Israeli military targets in the occupied territories in the fact that the Islamic Republic acts single-handedly and supports other Muslims when necessary.

In the early hours of April 14, the IRGC Aerospace Force launched tens of missiles and drones against military targets in the occupied territories in retaliation for the Israeli regime's April 1 airstrike that killed seven Iranian military commanders and advisers in Syria.

The IRGC said the Iranian missiles that hit the Israeli targets indicated that the retaliatory operation had been considerably more successful than expected.

IRAN NEWS



Iran's Crude Oil Price Rises in H1 2024

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's crude oil price rose by \$4.76 per barrel from January to June 2024 compared to last year's corresponding period, the report said. According to OPEC, Iran's crude oil was sold at \$83.65 per barrel. This is while Saudi Arabia's crude oil price decreased 29 cents and reached \$85.31 per barrel, it said, Mehr news agency reported. The OPEC's average crude oil price in June 2024 decreased 37 cents and reached \$83.32 per barrel, the report added.

Trade With Afghanistan Witnessing Upward Trend



TEHRAN - The commercial attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan announced an increase of \$123 million in Iran's non-oil exports to Afghanistan in the first three months of Iranian calendar year 1403 compared to the same period last year.

According to the Public Relations of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, Hossein Roustaei reported an increase in Iran's non-oil exports to Afghanistan in the first quarter of 1403. He added that after a pause due to the initial political changes in Kabul, Iran's exports to Afghanistan have resumed their upward trend. Iran's exports to Afghanistan have reached over \$517 million, marking a 31% increase compared to the same period last year, and a 23% increase in weight compared to the same period last year.

He attributed the expansion of economic relations and the increase in trade volume between the two countries to the special focus of the thirteenth government on developing trade relations with neighbors. He added that the increase in official and economic-trade delegations between the provinces of the two countries, especially Tehran and Kabul, has strengthened the foundations for enhancing trade relations.

Listing the main export items from Iran to Afghanistan, Roustaei said: "Light oils and petroleum products, petroleum gases, iron and steel ingots, polyethylene compounds, non-velvet woven carpets, urea, eggs and edible poultry eggs, light and heavy hydrocarbons, cement, tomatoes, apples, various polyethylenes, potatoes, various shoes, fruits and vegetables, oranges, powdered milk, and various tiles and ceramics are the main export items to Afghanistan."

The commercial attaché of Iran in Afghanistan continued: "The average customs value per ton of exported goods to Afghanistan in the first quarter of 1403 was more than \$430, which, compared to the same period in 1402 (\$404), shows an increase of more than \$36 per ton. This indicates the export of higher value-added goods to Afghanistan during the period under review. The comparison of the 31% growth in export value and the 23% growth in weight also confirms this."



KRG Eager to Boost Iran Ties during Pezeshkian's Tenure

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Nechervan Barzani expressed his autonomous region's readiness to expand friendly relations and cooperation with Iran in all fields as Iranian President-Elect Masoud Pezeshkian is going to take office in coming weeks.

In a telephone conversation on Wednesday, Barzani congratulated Pezeshkian on his victory in the presidential election of Iran.

The KRG president also wished the Iranian president-elect success in his duty and responsibility, according to a statement from the Kurdistan Region Presidency.

"His Excellency emphasized the Kurdistan Region's and its people's readiness and intention to bolster long-standing friendly relations and cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran in all fields, based on respect, mutual interest and a good neighborhood which could bring prosperity for both nations," the statement added, Rudaw reported.

The Kurdish leader also said he was certain that Pezeshkian's presidency will "deepen" bilateral relations and friendship between Erbil and Tehran.

For his part, Pezeshkian thanked Barzani for the phone call, stressing that Iran seeks improved relations with Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

The Iranian president-elect held separate telephone conversations with the presidents of Syria and Venezuela on Wednesday.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

Barter of Oil for the Construction of Imam Airport With the Chinese

TEHRAN - Saeed Chalendar, CEO of Imam Khomeini Airport City Company, stated in today's press conference that the aviation industry cannot be sanctioned. He mentioned that the most important action taken in the past 33 months has been the construction of the second phase of Imam Airport, which has been a long-held wish of the people since the current terminal was not meeting the needs.

He noted that in Imam Airport City, which spans 14,000 hectares, three airports have been positioned: the Salam Terminal, which is the size of Mashhad Airport, Terminal 1 with an area of 114,000 square meters, and the second phase terminal, which is under construction in the airport city and will be six times the size of the current terminal.

The CEO of Imam Khomeini Airport City Company, referring to the second phase development plan of Imam Airport, said that a consortium consisting of Khatam al-Anbia Construction Headquarters and the Chinese company Hu Ko An is executing the second phase of Imam Airport, which has achieved 40% progress so far. The first stage of the second phase of Imam Airport will be operational by the end of this year.

Chalendar mentioned that currently, 1,100 billion tomans worth of construction projects are underway and one of the major problems at Imam Airport is water shortage, with a significant project being the water transfer line to the airport.

He reported a significant increase in the revenue of Imam Airport. He stated that the revenue in 2021 was around 900 billion tomans, which increased to 2,700 billion tomans in 2022 and reached 4,700 billion

tomans in 2023. The goal is to achieve 8,000 billion tomans in revenue by the end of this year.

Chalendar also spoke about the increase in passenger transfers, stating that in 2021, the number of passengers transferred was 4 million, which increased to 6.6 million in 2022 and 7.6 million in 2023. By July of this year, 2.5 million passengers have been transferred, amounting to a total growth rate of 203%.

He continued, stating that currently, flights are being conducted from Iran to 35 countries and 80 cities abroad.

In response to ILNA's question regarding the use of the Supreme Leader's authorization for the development of the second phase of Imam Airport, Chalendar stated that the contract value for the development of the second phase of Imam Airport is 2.5 billion euros over 5 years. For the first stage of the second phase, 500 million euros have been allocated, and the project is currently 40% complete. The funding is sourced through oil barter with the Chinese, who will supply the necessary equipment while Khatam al-Anbia Construction Headquarters handles the construction, supervised by the Imam Airport City Company.

Chalendar also mentioned the number of flights to Turkey, the UAE, and Iraq, stating that daily there are 22 round-trip flights to/from the UAE with 4,000 passengers transferred, 55 flights with 9,000 passengers on the Turkey route, and 30 flights with 4,000 passengers on the Iraq route.

7.5-Fold Growth in Investment Projects in FTZs



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Ministry of Economy announced that investment projects in the free trade zones that were contracted last year saw a threefold increase from 112 trillion IRR to 363 trillion IRR. Additionally, the investment projects that commenced construction experienced more than a 7.5-fold growth, rising from 21 trillion IRR to 157 trillion IRR.

Before the start of the current administration, the free trade zones faced numerous challenges, including financial crises and the slow and unclear process of establishing new free trade zones as approved by the Expediency Discernment Council. Furthermore, the local economic activities and benefits were hindered by bureaucratic complexities and restrictions, which increased dissatisfaction among economic activists and residents.

With the onset of the current administration, which faced serious challenges in paying staff salaries and maintaining urban services due to financial crises, new strategies were implemented to secure financial resources and maximize the use of legal capacities. This included support from the Council of Ministers to increase the income share of free trade zone organizations, facilitate trade through relevant systems, and implement policies for a resilient economy. These measures not only resolved the issue of operating expenses but also revived incomplete infrastructure and construction projects, leading to significant growth in project inaugurations and utilizations.

The new approach to attract domestic and foreign investments through investment packages and facilitating processes such as land provision, issuing unnamed permits, and defending legal exemptions has opened new horizons. Active participation in international

investment events further highlighted the role of free trade zones, resulting in a remarkable response from investors.

In the past year, based on reports from the free trade zone organizations, there was a more than threefold increase in contracted investment projects (from 112 to 363 trillion IRR), over 7.5-fold growth in projects that began construction (from 21 to 157 trillion IRR), more than 2.5-fold growth in operational projects (from 33 to 93 trillion IRR), and over threefold increase in actualized domestic and foreign investments (from 43 to 131 trillion IRR). Plans for the current year aim to multiply these achievements.

Regarding the trade balance of free trade zones, a positive balance of over 106 million euros was recorded in 2023. The total exports from the free trade zones amounted to 1,136 million euros, while imports were 1,030 million euros, resulting in a positive trade balance of 106 million euros.

In international relations, the idea of creating joint free trade zones with neighboring and target countries was pursued, leading to agreements with various countries and the ongoing process of establishing these zones.

The past three years have seen significant production growth in the free trade zones, with a production volume of over 260 trillion IRR in 2023 and the revival of over 70 inactive units. This indicates a shift towards increased production in these areas.

Additionally, the government has focused on meeting the country's essential needs through ports and customs of the free trade zones and providing commercial facilities for supplying raw materials and parts for production units, achieving notable growth in these areas.

Import of 1.6m Tons of Oil Last Year



TEHRAN - Alireza Sharifi, President of the Association of Vegetable Oil Producers and Exporters of Iran, touched upon about oil production in the past year. He stated that approximately 1,981,880 tons of various vegetable oils were produced in the country in Iranian calendar year 1402 (2023), marking an 8% increase from the previous year, 2022. Regarding oil imports, he mentioned that about 800,000 tons of sunflower oil, 520,000 tons of palm oil, 246,000 tons of crude soybean oil, and a small amount of about 40,000 tons of canola oil were imported last year. In total, slightly more than 1.6 million tons of crude oil were imported. The remaining oil was supplied from domestic oilseed extraction and imported oilseeds. Sharifi continued: This year, according to pre-planned arrangements by the Ministry of Agriculture, 600,000 tons of crude oil for consumption will be supplied from domestic oilseed extraction or imported oilseeds. He highlighted some challenges in the sector, such as issues related to commercial profits in the first three quarters of last year. Despite relying on government and vice-presidential decrees exempting a 6% duty for crude oil importers, the parliament later informed the government that these commercial exemptions should not be retroactively applied. Sharifi noted: Although previous years' resolutions suggested that the agricultural ministry's committee-approved prices should be the customs valuation basis, we have encountered challenges in this area. He continued: Last year, correspondence issues between customs and the Ministry of Agriculture caused problems. Customs remain uncertain whether to use their own criteria or rely on registration orders. Additionally, it's unclear whether the registration date or the last edit date before the declaration should be considered. This issue remains unresolved for the past four months, with customs filing numerous cases for value discrepancies for oil importers. Sharifi added: If customs records for oil importing companies are tampered with, they will be deprived of benefits granted to reputable companies. He also noted that 100% of the currency for imported crude oil has been supplied at the preferential exchange rate of 28,500 tomans per dollar. Due to consistent policies, no problems arose, with the currency allocation waiting period being about five to six months. However, there have been recent discussions about a mixed currency, possibly involving 20% NIMA exchange rate and 80% preferential rate of 28,500 tomans, which has not yet been finalized.

Moscow-Tehran Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement in Near Future



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko has called Iran one of the most important partners and friends of his country, emphasizing that Moscow hopes to sign a comprehensive cooperation agreement with Tehran in the near future.

Rudenko made the remarks during a press conference while pointing to the growing ties between Russia and Iran and several meetings held between the two countries over the past few years.

"As a result of these numerous meetings, Iran became one of the most important partners and friends of Russia", he said.

Stating that Russia is currently working on signing a new fundamental agreement with Iran, which covers all areas of cooperation between the two countries, Rudenko stressed: We hope that we will soon be able to finalize our 2-year efforts to compile an important document for a comprehensive cooperation agreement with Tehran.

The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister noted that a comprehensive agreement will create a foundation for Russia's relations with Iran for decades to come.

Russia and Iran have historic bilateral relations that have enhanced in recent years as the two countries share common platforms on several regional and world forums such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Hungary's Orban Visits Trump at Mar-a-Lago

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Viktor Orban travelled to Florida on Thursday night to meet with Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago, just weeks after the Hungarian prime minister met Russia's Vladimir Putin. His visit is the latest in a number of meetings between the two men. Orban travelled to Florida on Thursday to meet with former President Donald Trump following a NATO summit in Washington, a move likely to aggravate frustrations among Western allies over similar secretive trips he made to Russia and China in recent days. Orban met with Trump at the former president's beachside compound Mar-a-Lago, according to a person familiar with the plans who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private event. The Hungarian leader has openly endorsed Trump's candidacy in this year's presidential election, and pinned hopes on the Republican being able to bring an end to Russia's war in Ukraine. The European Union's longest-serving leader has become an icon to some conservative populists for championing what he calls "illiberal democracy," which includes restrictions on immigration and LGBTQ+ rights. He has also cracked down on the press and judiciary in Hungary and been accused by the EU of violating rule-of-law and democracy standards.



Turkey Will Not Approve NATO Attempts to Cooperate With Israel



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday it is not possible for NATO to continue its partnership with the Israeli administration.

"Until comprehensive, sustainable peace is established in Palestine, attempts at cooperation with Israel within NATO will not be approved by Turkey," Erdogan said at a news conference at the NATO summit.

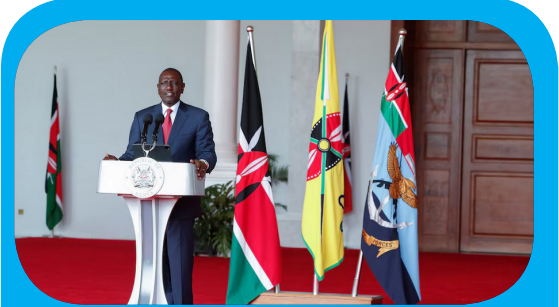
Turkey also continues its diplomatic efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war, he said. Erdogan said as well that he has instructed Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to start to restore relations with Syria. Turkey will extend an invitation to Assad "any time" for possible talks to restore relations between the two neighbours, Erdogan had said on Sunday. Regarding F-16 sales to Turkey, Erdogan said: "I talked to Mr. Biden. 'I will solve this problem in 3-4 weeks' he said". In March, the U.S. Senate defeated an effort to stop a \$23 billion sale of F-16 jets and modernization kits to Turkey allowed by President Joe Biden's administration after Turkey approved Sweden joining the NATO alliance. He also said Turkey expects solidarity from NATO allies in its fight against terrorism.

"It is not possible for us to accept the crooked relationship that some of our allies have established especially with the PYD/YPG, the extension of the terrorist organization PKK in Syria," he said.

Turkey says the YPG militia is a terrorist organisation, closely tied to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group. Turkey's Western allies list the PKK as terrorist group, but not the YPG.

Turkey's goal is to become a permanent member, not just an observer, of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Erdogan also said.

The SCO is a security, political and economic club launched in 2001 by Russia and China and Central Asian states as a counterweight to Western alliances.



Kenyan President Sacks Cabinet

NAIROBI (Reuters) - Kenyan President William Ruto on Thursday fired his entire cabinet apart from the foreign minister, bowing to pressure from nationwide protests that have created the biggest crisis of his two-year presidency. The youth-led protests against planned tax hikes started off peacefully but turned violent, killing at least 39 people in clashes with the police last month. Some demonstrators briefly stormed parliament, before Ruto abandoned the new taxes. "I will immediately engage in extensive consultations across different sectors and political formations and other Kenyans, both in public and private, with the aim of setting up a broad-based government," Ruto said in a televised address to the nation, adding that he would announce additional measures later. He also dismissed the attorney general but said the office of the deputy president was not affected. The sweeping cabinet changes were what Kenyans have been asking for, veteran anti-corruption activist John Githongo told Reuters. "Let us see what happens now if the new ministers deal with big issues around corruption and just the arrogance and excess of his administration and the fact that a lot of Kenyans died during the demonstrations," he said. "Hopefully this should temporarily calm things." Ruto has been caught between the demands of lenders such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to cut deficits and a hard-pressed population reeling from rising cost of living. Last week he proposed spending cuts and additional borrowing in roughly equal measure to fill the nearly \$2.7 billion budget hole caused by the withdrawal of the tax hikes.



Zelensky Urges NATO Leaders to Drop Restrictions on Hitting Military Targets in Russia

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday called on NATO leaders to drop all restrictions on letting Kyiv strike inside Russia with Western weaponry as they wrapped up a three-day summit in Washington.

The 32-nation alliance has used the pomp-filled 75th anniversary gala in the US capital to showcase its resolve against Moscow and backing for Kyiv.

The gathering has been overshadowed by uncertainty in the United States as President Joe Biden -- who will give a press conference Thursday -- fights for his own political survival.

The Ukrainian leader joined his NATO counterparts after receiving promises of new air defenses for Ukraine and as allies began the transfer of long-promised F-16 jets.

But Zelensky called on Kyiv's backers, especially the United States, to go further -- including by giving his outgunned forces greater scope to strike inside Russia.

"If we want to win, if we want to prevail, if we want to save our country and to defend it, we need to lift all the limitations," Zelensky said.

Key allies such as Washington and Germany relaxed conditions on Ukraine hitting inside Russia in May in response to Moscow's offensive toward the second city Kharkiv, but they kept in place some limits on how far and under which circumstances Kyiv could strike.

"The only way to hit military targets, missile launchers or airfields which are conducting attacks against Ukraine is to hit military targets on Russian territory, because the frontline and the borderline is more or less the same," NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said.

NATO allies have put together a package of support for Ukraine including the pledge of more Patriot missile systems to defend the skies over the war-torn country.

Zelensky said he hoped to see the air defenses -- including one new Patriot system from the United States -- delivered "as soon as possible."

NATO's leaders at the summit once again risked disappointing Zelensky by refusing to issue Ukraine a

clear invitation to join their alliance.

But in a bid to soften any upset, leaders called Ukraine's path to membership "irreversible."

They also pledged to provide Kyiv a minimum of 40 billion euros (\$43 billion) in military support "within the next year."

"We are doing and will continue to do everything to ensure that the day comes when Ukraine is invited and becomes a NATO member, and I am confident we will achieve this," Zelensky said.

The United States on Wednesday also announced an important step to bolster NATO's own deterrence against Russia in Europe by saying it would begin "episodic deployments" of long-range missiles to Germany in 2026.

The White House said it would eventually look to permanently station them in Germany, and the missiles would "have significantly longer range" than current US systems in Europe.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz welcomed the move and said it would help "securing peace."

But the Kremlin on Thursday struck back, saying it was planning "response measures" to contain the "very serious threat" from NATO, accusing the alliance of being "fully involved in the conflict over Ukraine."

CNN meanwhile reported that the United States foiled a Russian plot earlier this year to assassinate the chief executive of a major German arms maker supplying weaponry to Ukraine.

Stoltenberg said he did not want to comment on those specific reports.

But he said there has been "a Russian campaign organized by the security services to conduct hostile actions against NATO allies, across the alliance, with sabotage attempts, with cyber attacks, with arson, with different types of hostile actions."

"The purpose of this campaign is, of course, to intimidate NATO allies from supporting Ukraine, and what we have seen over the last months that NATO allies have not been intimidated," he said.

Israel Bombards Gaza City in One of the Fiercest Weeks of War

GAZA (Dispatches) - Israel rained bombs on Gaza City during a week that residents described as comparable to the fiercest battle of the war, while a Palestinian Islamic Jihad official on Thursday said a new round of peace talks ended with no agreements yet.

Israel has been bombarding the Gaza Strip for 10 months in a war that has laid waste to the territory and killed more than 38,000 Palestinians, according to medical authorities in Gaza.

On Thursday, Israeli airstrikes killed at least six people in Gaza City and 19 in the rest of the Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian authorities. The civil emergency service said the bodies of at least 30 Palestinians killed in the previous three days also laid scattered on unreachable roads in Gaza City.

The latest round of peace talks ended with no agreements, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Palestinian militant group Hamas of making demands that contradicted a framework deal brokered by Washington. Netanyahu did not say what those demands were.

In a statement, the Palestinian Islamist militant group said mediators had yet to provide it with updates on the state of the talks since it made concessions last week in response to a U.S.-backed Israeli peace offer.

Washington is pushing for a peace deal at talks in Egypt and Qatar to end the Gaza war, now in its 10th month. The head of Israel's Shin Bet intelligence agency was headed to Cairo to pursue the negotiations, Netanyahu's office said.



In Washington, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said many details still need to be hammered out to secure a deal.

In its statement on Thursday, Hamas accused Israel of "stalling to buy time to foil this round of negotiations, as it has done in previous rounds", all of which have ended in failure since a week-long truce in November.

As peace talks dragged on, Gaza City residents endured a fierce night of bombing.

Home to more than a quarter of Gaza's residents before the war, Gaza City was largely razed to the ground in late 2023, but hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have returned to homes in the ruins. Israel has once again ordered them out, though it is unclear where residents can go safely. Israel controls most of Gaza's borders.

Many say they will not leave.

"We will die but not leave to the south. We have tolerated starvation and bombs for nine months and we are ready to die as martyrs here," said Mohammad Ali, 30, reached by text message.

Ali, whose family has relocated several times within the city, said they had been running short of food, water and medicine.

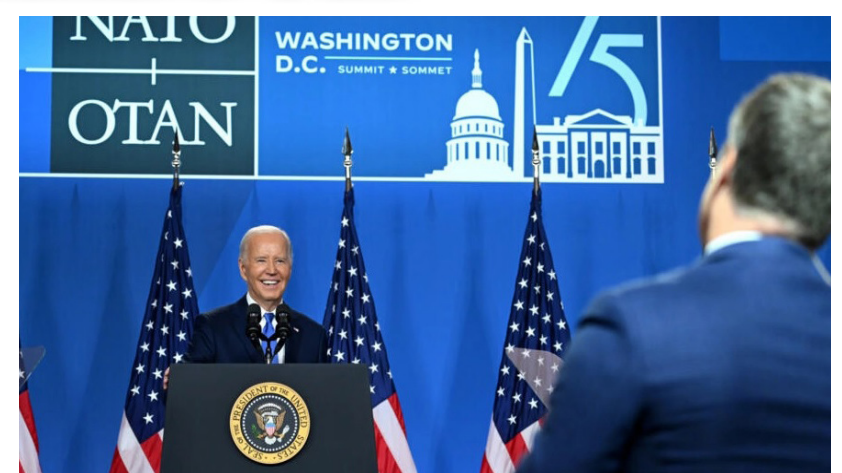
"The occupation (Israel) bombs Gaza City as if the war was restarting. We hope there will be a ceasefire soon, but if not then is God's will."

The Israeli army told Gaza City residents on Wednesday to use two "safe routes" to head south. Some posted a hashtag on social media: "We are not leaving".

Biden Sees Progress on Gaza Deal

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Joe Biden said Thursday that US mediators were making progress in reaching a Gaza ceasefire deal as he called for an end to the Israel-Hamas war. Biden, in a high-stakes, nearly hour-long news conference aimed at repudiating doubters of his reelection bid, acknowledged concerns about Israeli actions despite his overall support for the US ally. "There's a lot of things in retrospect I wish I had been able to convince the Israelis to do, but the bottom line is we have a chance now. It's time to end this war," he said after a NATO summit in Washington. Biden acknowledged there remained "difficult, complex issues" between Israel and Hamas. "There are still gaps to close. We're making progress," Biden said. "The trend is positive, and I'm determined to get this deal done and bring an end to this war, which should end now," he said. Biden more than a month ago laid out a plan in which Israel would temporarily halt its offensive in Gaza and Palestinian militants would release hostages, setting the stage for talks for a permanent end to the devastating nine-month war. Hamas came back with counterproposals and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has faced pushback from some of his hard-right government

allies. But diplomats have spoken of progress in the latest round of talks that closed Thursday in Qatar, the key mediator. Biden threw his support behind Israel after the October 7 attack by Hamas which resulted in the deaths of 1,195 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures. Israel responded with a military offensive that has killed at least 38,345 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to figures from Hamas-run Gaza health ministry. Biden, 81, recalled his meeting a half-century ago as a young senator with Israeli prime minister Golda Meir -- and acknowledged that times have changed. "We pushed it really hard, and Israel occasionally was less than cooperative," Biden said of Netanyahu's government. "This war cabinet is one of the most conservative war cabinets in the history of Israel, and there's no ultimate answer other than a two-state solution here," he said. Biden also stood firm on his decision to hold up delivery of massive 2,000-pound bombs, even as his administration moves forward on other munitions. "I'm not providing the 2,000-pound bombs. They cannot be used in Gaza or any populated area without causing great human tragedy and damage," Biden said.





Djokovic Gets Free Pass to Wimbledon Semis

LONDON (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic progressed to a record-equalling 13th Wimbledon semi-final without hitting a ball after Alex de Minaur pulled out injured as former champion Elena Rybakina eased through.

Australian ninth seed De Minaur, 25, announced shortly after midday at the All England Club that he was "devastated to pull out due to a hip injury".

It means Djokovic has now equalled Roger Federer's men's record of 13 semi-final appearances at Wimbledon as he closes on the Swiss great's mark of eight singles titles.

The 37-year-old Serbian is also through to a record-extending 49th men's Grand Slam semi-final where he will face Italy's Lorenzo Musetti.

De Minaur, who beat Djokovic at the United Cup in January, said: "It's no secret that this would have been the biggest match of my career but it's a unique injury."

"I woke up this morning wanting to feel some sort of miracle, but there was a high risk of making the injury worse if I stepped on court. One stretch, one slide could take this from a three to six weeks' injury to four months out." Djokovic will play 25th seed Musetti for a place in Sunday's showpiece match after the Italian beat US 13th seed Taylor Fritz 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, 3-6, 6-1. The world number two — who had knee surgery last month — does not have a title to his name this year and is still seeking a first victory against a fellow top-10 player. But a historic 25th Grand Slam triumph is coming into sharp focus for Djokovic, who demolished Holger Rune in straight sets in the fourth round. The Serb has a 5-1 winning record over 22-year-old Musetti, including a come-from-behind five-set victory at the French Open last month. "Djokovic knows the stadiums here better than me," admitted the

Italian. "He's a legend everywhere and has done unthinkable things. We've played lots of times and I expect a huge fight. It's the toughest challenge in tennis but I am an ambitious guy and I like to be challenged. I will give 100 per cent." In early action, 2022 champion Rybakina barely broke sweat in swatting aside last year's semi-finalist Elina Svitolina 6-3, 6-2 in 61 minutes. She will face Barbora Krejckikova for a place in the final after the Czech 31st seed came out on top against Jelena Ostapenko in a battle of former French Open champions.

Russian-born Rybakina, now 19-2 in main-draw matches at Wimbledon, broke the Ukrainian 21st seed four times in the match on Centre Court. The fourth seed was broken in the first game in front of the watching Queen Camilla but hit back straight away and barely put a foot wrong after that. The 25-year-old, who crunched 28 winners to Svitolina's eight, said she had "amazing memories" from 2022 but does not like the favourite tag.

"I have an aggressive style of game, I have a huge serve so it's a big advantage," she said. Krejckikova took the first set against Latvian 13th seed Ostapenko with a single break on Court No. 1. Ostapenko, the 2018 Wimbledon semi-finalist, finally broke through in the fourth game of the second set for a 3-1 lead and backed it up with a hold.

But she went dramatically off the boil as Krejckikova reeled off the next four games for a 5-4 lead. Ostapenko clung on to break the Czech in the 10th game but 2021 French Open champion Krejckikova played the more composed tie-break to seal the victory.

"I told myself that I'm going to leave here everything I have and I'm really happy that I did and it's a great moment for me," said Krejckikova.

Van Nistelrooy Returns to Man United as Assistant to Ten Hag



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United have appointed their former striker Ruud van Nistelrooy as an assistant to manager Erik ten Hag in another move they hope will restore the record 20-times English champions to former glories. Rene Hake was also hired in an assistant role to complete an all-Dutch managerial team. Ten Hag has signed a contract extension that will keep him at the Premier League club until 2026 despite a poor season in which United finished eighth in the standings. "Now is a good time to refresh the coaching team as we look to build on the achievements of the past two years and push to the next level," Ten Hag said in a statement. The 48-year-old Van Nistelrooy scored 95 goals in 150 Premier League appearances for United between 2001 and 2006 and is the team's top Champions League scorer with 35 goals. He netted 35 goals in 70 appearances for the Netherlands. Van Nistelrooy guided PSV Eindhoven to a second-place finish in the Eredivisie and a Dutch Cup triumph in 2022-23. "Together with Erik, we are working to strengthen all areas of our men's first-team operations, and refreshing the coaching staff is an important part of that," United's sporting director Dan Ashworth said.

"It's a particular pleasure to welcome Ruud back to the club where he enjoyed so much success as a player, and I know that he and Rene will help reinforce the winning mentality and high standards we are aiming for."

Super-Sub Watkins Sends England Past Netherlands and Into Euro 2024 Final

DORTMUND (Dispatches) - Ollie Watkins struck a stunning injury-time winner as England beat the Netherlands 2-1 to set up a Euro 2024 final showdown with Spain in Berlin. It was an incredible finish to an evening that began badly for England, as Xavi Simons gave the Netherlands an early lead in the semi-final in Dortmund. However, England were soon level through a Harry Kane penalty following a contentious VAR call by German referee Felix Zwayer, and the match looked set for extra time until Watkins struck. On for Kane, Watkins received a pass from fellow substitute Cole Palmer with his back to goal in the first minute of stoppage time, turned and fired low into the far corner to leave the Netherlands bewildered. "I'm lost for words really," said Watkins, the Aston Villa striker. "I don't think I've hit a ball that sweet before, and obviously in such a special moment." It has rarely been a convincing campaign from Gareth Southgate's England side, but they are through to their second consecutive European Championship final as they dream of finally winning a first major trophy since 1966. To do that they will surely have to perform better than at any point so far in Germany as they face an outstanding



Spain team, who beat France 2-1 on Tuesday. "We play the team who've been the best team in the tournament and we have a day less to prepare so it's a huge task. But we're still here and we're fighting," Southgate said. The Netherlands had been hoping to repeat their triumph at the last Euros in Germany, in 1988, but their current side lacks anyone with the star quality of Marco van Basten or Ruud Gullit. A victory for them would have seen this Euros conclude with the same final as the 2010 World Cup. Instead they now go home. "I am disappointed about the final result in a match which started really good for us," said their coach, Ronald Koeman. "A great goal, and then it's over, and that is difficult to accept." England had got to this stage despite not winning any of their last four matches in 90 minutes, and having been taken to extra time by Slovakia and Switzerland. That might have given the Dutch an edge physically, after the Oranje shrugged off finishing third in their group to brush aside Romania and see off Turkey. England welcomed back Marc Guehi in defence after suspension, while Koeman opted to start Donyell Malen in attack on the ground where he plays club football for Borussia Dortmund.

LeBron, Curry Impress as USA Romp Past Canada



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James and Steph Curry made a winning start as USA team-mates in an 86-72 victory over Canada in a pre-Olympics exhibition game in Las Vegas on Wednesday.

The two NBA superstars are part of a formidable USA basketball roster that will be chasing a fifth consecutive gold medal when the Paris Olympics get under way this month.

James and Curry are playing alongside each other for the first time as international team-mates, and showed glimpses of a near telepathic understanding during Wednesday's game.

Curry finished with 12 points while James had seven as the US recovered from an early 11-1 deficit to cruise to victory in their final game at home before Paris.

They decamp to the United Arab Emirates for exhibition games against Australia and Serbia next week.

Los Angeles Lakers ace James gathered the USA team for a huddle following a win which suggested the Americans will, unsurprisingly, be red hot favourites for the gold in France.

"We know we can be a lot better but we've only been together four days," James said afterwards.

"All the miscues offensively, and the turnovers. We'll get better with that — but it starts on the defensive end."

"As long as we defend we'll give ourselves a good chance to win every night."

Curry agreed that defence would be the key to the Olympic campaign.

"We can work out the kinks and the timing on offense, but if we compete like that and commit to playing defense, we'll be fine against anybody," Curry said.

James, the NBA's all-time leading points scorer, meanwhile said he had enjoyed joining forces with Golden State star Curry.

"We're just two guys who love to play the game of basketball," James said.

"It's fun. We play the game at a high level but more importantly, we just play the game that we love the right way."

Curry said winning a fifth consecutive gold would be a team effort.

"We just want to win gold, whatever that takes," Curry said.

"No matter what your stats are, no matter how many minutes you play — if everybody on the floor commits to just doing what you're asked to do, we'll be good."

Colombia Defeat Uruguay to Reach Copa America Final

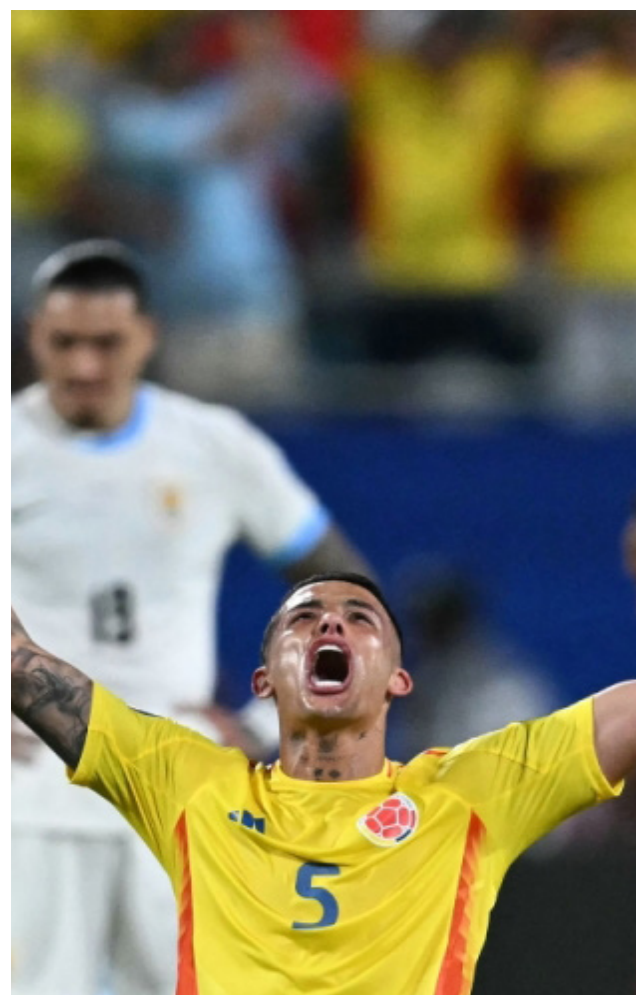
MIAMI (Dispatches) - Ten-man Colombia defeated Uruguay 1-0 to reach the final of the Copa America for the first time in 23 years after an ill-tempered semi-final.

A 39th-minute Jefferson Lerma header sealed victory for the Colombians, who will now face holders Argentina in Sunday's final in Miami.

It was an anarchic semi-final played in front of a packed and passionate crowd which ended with scuffles on the field and fighting in the stands, including several players who had climbed in among supporters amid the flying punches.

Colombia, despite having Daniel Muñoz sent off just before the interval and facing plenty of Uruguay pressure, hung on for a famous victory to the delight of their massive following of fans. The win was the 28th game without defeat for Colombia, setting a new record for the team. The downtown streets of the North Carolina city were packed with partying fans in bright yellow Colombia jerseys hours before the kick-off. Not surprisingly in such an atmosphere, Colombia started strongly with their livewire Liverpool winger Luis Díaz doing well to wriggle some space for a cross on the left, finding Daniel Muñoz at the back post but the full-back's header was off target. Uruguay were, as always, a threat on the counter-attack and their Liverpool star, Darwin Núñez, was close to finishing off one break when Rodrigo Bentancur found him with a clever pass but the forward poked his shot wide. Núñez had another opening when Maximiliano Araújo played him clear in the inside-right channel but the striker rushed his shot, blasting high and wide. At the other end, Colombia forced a turnover which led to James Rodríguez curling in a cross from the right but Jhon Córdoba's header was off target.

The breakthrough came in the 39th minute when Lerma



rose majestically above Jose Maria Gimenez and powerfully headed home Rodríguez's corner. It was the sixth assist of the tournament for Rodríguez with the former Real Madrid midfielder beating the record for most assists in a single Copa, which was set by Lionel Messi in 2021. Colombia looked to make the most of their momentum with Richard Ríos forcing a save out of Uruguay keeper Sergio Rochet, after being played in by Muñoz. But having been so influential down the right in the opening half, Muñoz lost his head completely, just before the break, picking up a second yellow card, after landing an elbow on Manuel Ugarte.

It was a moment of madness which left Colombia to defend their lead with just 10 men for the entire second half. Colombia coach Nestor Lorenzo took off Rodríguez, who was also on a yellow card, in the 62nd minute as Uruguay gradually began to turn their numerical advantage into real pressure.

Nicolas de la Cruz threatened with a low drive before substitute Luis Suárez clipped the outside of the post with a drive from the edge of the box after good work from Federico Valverde.

Valverde, the Real Madrid midfielder, then went close himself with a low drive as Colombia's back-line continued to ride their luck.

Giveaway from Uruguay keeper and fell to Mateus Uribe, who despite time and space placed his shot wide of the post.

In stoppage time Uruguay had a great chance to force penalties when Núñez laid the ball off to substitute Giorgian de Arrascaeta on the edge of the box but he leaned back and put his shot over the bar.