

Iran Has Proposed the BRICS Group of Major Emerging Economies to Establish an Information Sharing Network to Strengthen Media Ties Within the Alliance While Also Combating the Flow of Fake News and Misinformation by Western Media

# IRAN NEWS

Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf Said That the Most Important Issue Raised in the BRICS Members' Meeting Was to Deal With U.S. Sanctions, Adding that BRICS Members Control More Than Half of the World's Population and 30% of the World's Economic Capacity

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DOMESTIC



## Nicaragua, a Gateway to Latin American Market

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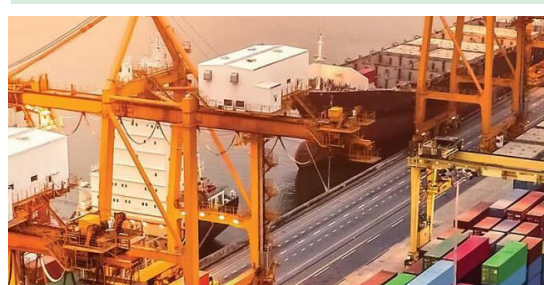
INTERNATIONAL

## Biden Insists He Is OK

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## Iran-EU Trade Up Under the Martyr Raisi Administration



TEHRAN - Eurostat statistics indicate an increase in trade between Iran and the European Union during the 13th administration. This comes after a significant decline in trade between Iran and Europe in the final years of the previous administration.

The 13th administration's constructive approach has not only increased trade volume with neighboring and friendly countries, but Eurostat data also shows that this administration has successfully developed trade relations with the European Union. Iran's trade with the European Union in the last year of the previous administration, 2020, saw a 12% decrease compared to 2019, amounting to about 4.4 billion euros, which was one-quarter of the trade volume in 2018.

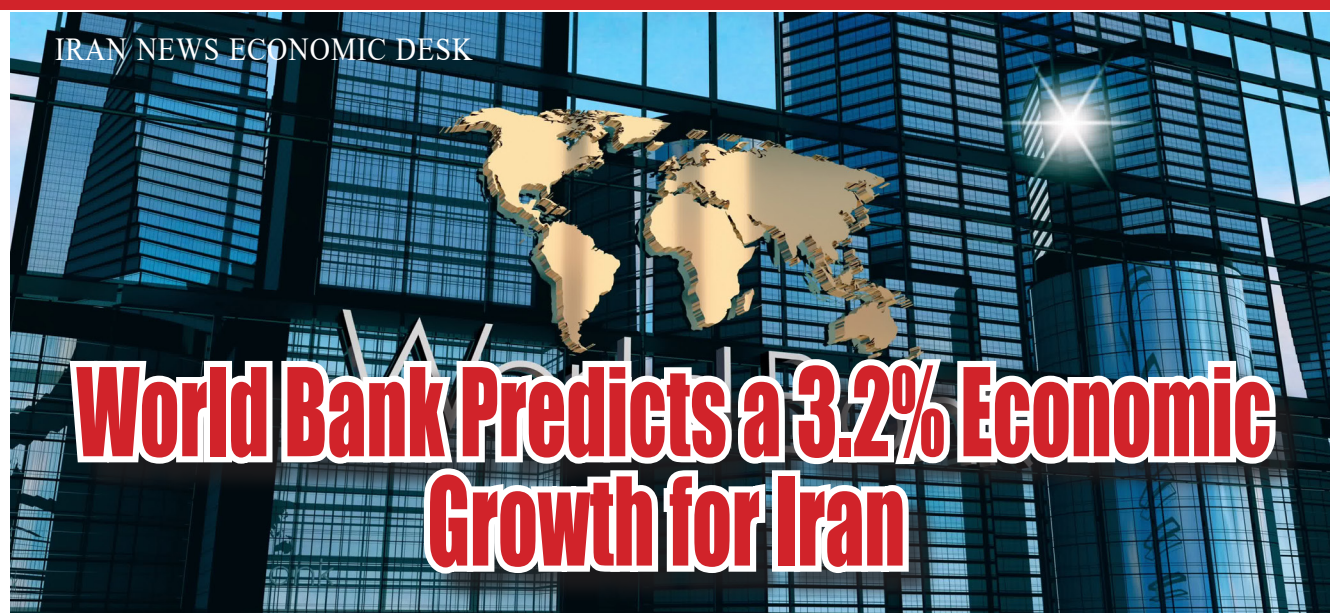
However, with the advent of the 13th administration, despite the resumption of the country's nuclear activities and the adoption of an assertive and demanding policy towards the West, Iran's trade with the European Union has grown. The European Union's imports from Iran in 2021 increased by 29% compared to the last year of the 12th administration, rising from 712 million euros to 923 million euros. In 2022, the European Union's imports from Iran reached 1.057 billion euros, 48% more than in 2020. In 2023, the European Union imported 800 million euros worth of goods from Iran, a 12% increase compared to 2020.

Similarly, the European Union's exports to Iran have increased under the Martyr Raisi administration, growing from 3.74 billion euros in 2020 to 3.9 billion euros in the first year of his administration, marking a 4% increase.

In 2022, European exports to Iran grew by 12% compared to the last year of the 12th administration, reaching 4.18 billion euros, and in 2023, they amounted to 3.92 billion euros, a 5% increase compared to 2020.

According to this report, during the three years of the 13th administration (2021-2023), the total trade between Iran and the European Union amounted to 14.78 billion euros, with 12 billion euros of this figure related to the European Union's exports to Iran and 2.78 billion euros related to imports from Iran.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



## World Bank Predicts a 3.2% Economic Growth for Iran

TEHRAN - The World Bank has forecasted a 3.2% growth for Iran's economy in the year 1403.

Based on the World Bank's estimation, Iran's economy grew by 5% in the previous year.

Iran's non-oil sector grew by 3.8% last year, and according to the World Bank's prediction, this figure will reach 3% in 1403. Iran's oil sector, which experienced significant growth of 17.1% in 1402, will also grow by 5% in 1403.

According to the forecast of this international institution, Iran's oil production is expected to increase by 200,000 barrels per day compared to the previous year, reaching 3.2 million barrels per day.

It is expected that Iran's agricultural sector will grow by only 0.9% in 1403, while the industrial sector will reach 4.9% growth and the services sector will grow by 2.6%.

Iran's inflation rate was over 40.7% in 1402, and it is predicted to decrease to 35.3% in 1403.

This report is published while one month ago the bank in a report had claimed after relatively strong GDP growth in 2023, Iran's economic growth would decelerate in the current and next two years.

According to that report, Iran's GDP experienced a 5% growth in 2023, but it would slow down to 3.2% in the current year, 2.7% and 2.3% in next two years.

The relatively strong economic growth was related to Iran's oil export boom as well as the service sector.

According to OPEC's statistics, Iran's oil production surpassed 3 million barrels per day in 2023, 22% more than the previous year. The production level reached 3.2 mb/d in March and hasn't increased more.

Before US sanctions imposed in 2018 and expanded in 2019, Iran's crude oil output was above 3.8 mb/d in 2017. It declined to below 2 mb/d in 2020, but since Joe Biden took office at White House, Iran's oil production began to increase. This was the result of more crude exports to China that had dwindled to less than 200,000 barrels p/d during the Trump administration.

Kpler's, an industry analyst, has issued figures showing that Iran's oil exports increased from 350,000 b/d in 2020 to about 1.5 mb/d in the first half of 2024.

Iran's Statistical Center's reports show the country's 5% GDP growth in the last year was related to 22% oil production growth as well as 17% growth in government expenditures (compared to 2011 base-year).

World Bank claimed GDP growth was projected to moderate in the Islamic Republic of Iran for the three fiscal years beginning in FY2024/25, while uncertainty around the outlook is elevated: "The moderation partly reflects subdued global demand, the ongoing effects of international sanctions, and domestic energy shortages."

## Iran's Foreign Debt in Lowest Level in Three Decades



TEHRAN (IRNA) - During President Hassan Rouhani's 8-year presidency, the country's international reserves fell while Iran's foreign debt increased. However, the thirteenth government both increased the country's international reserves and reduced its foreign debt to the lowest level in three decades.

According to IRNA, at the end of 2020, Iran's foreign debt was \$9.142 billion, and by the end of June 2021, it was around \$8.7 billion. The latest statistics indicate that the Raisi administration has paid off nearly \$4 billion of this debt. Central Bank statistics show that by December 2023, Iran's foreign debt had decreased to \$5.142 billion, the lowest level in three decades, thanks to the significant repayment efforts by the Raisi administration.

Foreign debt includes a country's debts to foreign lenders, such as loans from private foreign banks, other governments, and international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

At the end of 2021, coinciding with the start of the thirteenth government's term, the government's foreign debt stood at \$8.675 billion, with \$467 million paid off during that period. This was just the beginning, as in 2022, the Raisi administration successfully paid off \$2.393 billion in foreign debt, marking the highest debt repayment in the past decade.

Now, as the fourteenth government begins its work, it faces the lowest level of foreign debt in three decades, with minimal concerns about the borrowings of previous administrations. This achievement is credited to the thirteenth government's efforts in increasing the country's foreign exchange earnings and settling debts.

## Iranian Co. Has Built Armenia's Most Important Bridge



TEHRAN - Herovik Yarijanyan, President of the Iran-Armenia Joint Chamber of Commerce, in an interview, stated that the value of Iran's exports to Armenia amounts to \$680 million annually. He explained that Iran's exports to Armenia include both raw materials and finished products. Currently, the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the main suppliers of raw materials needed by Armenia, with export goods including polyethylene materials, road construction materials, and building materials. He added that one of Iran's major commercial activities in the Armenian market today is the export of technical and engineering services. To the extent that an Iranian company is now constructing the most important bridges in Armenia, this company has also played a significant role in constructing the route from Armenia to Georgia and has been effective in advancing the North-South Corridor. Therefore, it can be said that Iran performs very well and precisely in exporting technical and engineering services to Armenia. Yarijanyan stated that, however, Iran's imports from Armenia are very limited and are restricted to copper concentrate and raw mineral materials, with a value not exceeding \$10 million. In fact, the trade balance disparity between the two countries is one of the existing problems in Iran-Armenia trade. He noted other problems in the trade between the two countries: Iranians do not act professionally in their transactions. Among the unprofessional behaviors is creating unhealthy competition by lowering prices in the market, which in the short, medium, and long term seriously damages the country's image. Lowering prices also results in a decline in the quality of Iranian goods in the medium term, which is not good for our country's brand. In response to the question of why Armenia, with its 3 million population, does not have strong trade relations with Iran compared to other neighbors, the President of the Iran-Armenia Joint Chamber of Commerce said: Armenia is a member of the World Trade Organization and also part of the Eurasian Economic Union, so it must adhere to these pacts in its trade relations. However, Iran is not a member of any regional pacts in West Asia. Additionally, Iran is under sanctions, which increases the costs of trade and has halted banking transactions. Despite all these issues, today Iran is the third-largest supplier of goods to Armenia after China and Russia, and Yerevan has the capacity to be a bridge connecting Iran to Europe.

## Trade Balance Increased More Than Six-Fold Under 13th Gov't



TEHRAN - The trade balance of the country, which had plummeted to its lowest level in the past two decades at the end of President Hassan Rouhani's government, has returned to a desirable level under the thirteenth and President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi's government.

According to IRNA, the fourteenth government is starting its work without concerns unlike the thirteenth government regarding the country's foreign exchange revenues, oil and non-oil exports, and trade balance.

During the eight years of the eleventh and twelfth governments, Iran's trade relations with many countries were restricted, especially from 2018 to the first half of 2021, when economic activists lost significant export opportunities to neighboring countries.

During this period, the twelfth government only promised the JCPOA. During this period, Iran's trade with 15 neighboring countries decreased, and traders complained that the government was not supporting them. The disruption of economic activists' relations with traders in neighboring countries led to some products being lost and our country's competitors entering neighboring countries' markets with their products.

Therefore, from the second half of 2021, the thirteenth government began negotiations with neighboring countries and other countries to revitalize the country's trade. As a result, in a very short time, our country's traders were able to reclaim their lost markets and compete in export markets. Now that Iran's trade with neighboring countries has reached \$60 billion, it means

that the commercial infrastructure has been provided to increase the country's exports, and, on the other hand, if necessary, raw materials for production and intermediary goods can be obtained and purchased from neighboring countries. In this regard, the fourteenth government can continue its trade with neighboring countries without any worries and increase the non-oil export figures of the country.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Oil of the thirteenth government revived oil exports, which had fallen to less than half a million barrels per day during the Rouhani period, and increased it to over 1.5 million barrels per day, multiplying the country's oil revenues several times.

As a result of this approach of the thirteenth government, the trade balance of the country returned to its desirable level. In 2020, Iran's trade balance of goods plummeted to \$3.2 billion, the lowest figure since 1998.

However, in 2021, Iran's trade balance of goods reached \$15.8 billion, and in 2022 and 2023, it increased to \$22.2 billion and \$20.6 billion, respectively. Based on this, in 2023, compared to the end of Rouhani's government, Iran's trade balance of goods shows a growth of more than six times. The improvement in Iran's trade balance of goods is the result of the success of the thirteenth government in increasing non-oil exports due to relations with neighbors and neutralizing oil sanctions with the growth of oil exports.

## Lebanon FM Warns of Devastating Regional War if Israel Escalates Tensions



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's caretaker Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib has warned against the fallout of a full-blown Israeli war on his country, as tensions continue to escalate between the Hezbollah resistance movement and the Tel Aviv regime.

If there is war, it "is going to be not just devastating to Lebanon, it's going to be devastating to Israel, and possibly to neighboring countries, Jordan and Syria. It's going to be terrible," the top Lebanese diplomat said in an exclusive interview with al-Monitor news website during his visit to Washington.

He stressed the "need for dialogue and calm," noting that "the security of southern Lebanon depends on the full and comprehensive implementation of Resolution 1701, which ended the 33-day 2006 Israeli onslaught on the country, support for the Lebanese army, and conclusion of a final agreement on the southern borders."

Bou Habib further noted that "the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, if it breaks out, could trigger a regional war in which external parties would be involved." Therefore, he underlined "the need for all parties to prioritize dialogue and peaceful solutions."

The Lebanese foreign minister then referred to the ongoing diplomatic efforts, including those led by international partners, which aim to ease tensions and enhance stability along Lebanon's southern border.

He stressed "Lebanon's commitment to the initiatives that enhance regional peace and security."

Bou Habib also reiterated his country's "readiness to participate constructively in international efforts aimed at preventing conflict and achieving lasting peace" in West Asia.

# IRAN NEWS



## Iran and Iraq to Launch the Khorramshahr-Basra Sea Line

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi says Iran and Iraq have reached an agreement to launch the Khorramshahr-Basra sea line, in south of the two neighbors. He made the announcement during a visit to Iraq's al-Seeba port in Basra Governorate for the necessary arrangements in order to holding the Arbacen march. Vahidi noted that the details will be discussed in the next executive meetings with the Iraqi officials.

On the Iraqi side of the border, Vahidi met with his Iraqi counterpart Abdul Amir Al-Shammari and held talks with him about strengthening public transportation from Iran's Shalamchah to the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala.

The Iraqi side agreed to the proposal, saying if there are suitable buses, it will help facilitate transportation.

Millions of people will take part in the Arbacen march, marking the 40th day after the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein, the third Shia Imam.

## Country to Face 37,000 Megawatts of Electricity Deficit in Next 10 Years



TEHRAN - Reza Riyahi, Vice Chairman of the Board of Electricity Producers, discussed the current electricity imbalance and the strategies the 14th government must implement to address this issue. He stated that the current electricity grid load requires all private and state power plants to operate at maximum capacity, yet consumption needs surpass production. Consequently, many industrial consumers, including factories and the production sector, face severe restrictions to meet the needs of residential, commercial, and agricultural sectors, with some limitations also applied to agricultural wells. Riyahi added that the Ministry of Energy focuses primarily on restricting consumption in the agricultural and industrial sectors to supply residential and commercial needs, due to the imbalance between production and consumption. The Vice Chairman of the Board of Electricity Producers mentioned that currently, there is an imbalance of about 15,000 MW during peak consumption. If this trend continues, in the next 10 years, there will be a 37,000 MW imbalance, which is 33% of the consumption needs. Essentially, one-third of the country's required electricity will not be supplied unless significant policy changes and new measures are implemented to annually reduce a substantial part of this imbalance. He emphasized that solving the imbalance issue is only possible through investment. The lack of investment in production in recent years has led to this production deficit. If this continues, we will face more serious blackouts, and extensive outages will spread to residential and commercial sectors, doubling social problems. Riyahi explained that current industrial power cuts limit their consumption to 10% during peak hours, negatively affecting factory production. This leads to supply shortages and economic losses for the industrial sector and entrepreneurs. When the necessary infrastructure, such as electricity, gas, and water, is not available, industrialists and entrepreneurs will refrain from expanding industries and establishing new factories, losing their motivation for development. He continued, stating that the lack of infrastructure and electricity prevents factories from producing adequately, reducing product supply and increasing market prices. These inflationary effects ultimately burden society and the public. The Vice Chairman highlighted the adverse effects of inadequate power supply for industries during peak summer, which will become evident in the near future. This issue must be resolved seriously before it escalates into a nationwide crisis.

He pointed out that the main issue behind the imbalance is insufficient investment in production over the years. The Ministry of Energy has not addressed the problems of production investors, most of whom have used National Development Fund loans, supplemented by their own contributions.



## Nicaragua, a Gateway to Latin American Market

TEHRAN - The President of the Shahr-e Kord Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture Mr Shahram Zare stated that Nicaragua is an importer of cement. He noted that Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari cement is one of the best cement brands in Iran and the world, and it is possible to facilitate the export of this product to Nicaragua. Zare, in a specialized meeting on examining the trade opportunities between Nicaragua and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, held in the presence of the Nicaraguan Ambassador to Tehran, added that Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province has excellent productions that can be the basis for exports to Nicaragua. Additionally, the province is ready to import products such as red meat from Nicaragua, and local traders are prepared to collaborate in this regard. He highlighted that the value chain for products like almonds and cold-water fish in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari has been completed. The majority of the province's almond production is exported to India, and there is readiness to export these products to Nicaragua as well. Referring to the visit of the late Ayatollah Raisi, the former President of Iran, to Nicaragua, Zare emphasized that economic interactions between the two countries can have positive effects. Ramon Alberto Moncada Colindres, the Nicaraguan Ambassador to Tehran, stated that this visit provided an opportunity to strengthen economic interactions between his country and the province. He noted that a trade agreement between Iran and Nicaragua was signed during the Thirteenth Administration. The Nicaraguan Ambassador emphasized that initially, political relations between Iran and Nicaragua need to be strengthened to subsequently enhance trade relations. He expressed a desire to strengthen political and trade ties, stating that a strong political relationship would also protect trade relations. He pointed out that products exported from Iran to Nicaragua must be competitive in terms of quality and price in the Nicaraguan market. He also mentioned that Nicaragua's trade growth is not comparable to Iran's, noting that Iran is a country with high potential in various sectors, especially tourism. Moncada mentioned that Nicaragua is a significant importer of cement and that the diversity of products produced in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari is very high, indicating a potential to expand trade with the province. He added that most of

Nicaragua's imports come from the United States, and for Iranian products to replace American ones, they must be competitive. Referring to Nicaragua's plans to construct a 20-kilometer canal to replace the Panama Canal for shipping, Moncada said that excavating and widening the river is a major operation, and they intend to use the capabilities of friendly countries for this project. Additionally, for this project, they will need iron and cement, providing a good investment opportunity. Moncada also noted that Nicaragua is an agricultural country with high red meat production. However, the country is not advanced in agriculture and needs to import advanced machinery, urea, and ammonia fertilizers to develop and strengthen this sector. He highlighted that Nicaragua has many gold and silver mines and produces high-quality coffee, though there are standardization challenges with their products. Regarding carpet usage, Moncada mentioned that a small percentage of people in Nicaragua use carpets, unlike in Mexico and the USA, where carpet usage is more common. Therefore, groundwork is needed to promote carpet sales. Emphasizing Nicaragua's strength in generating electricity from renewable sources, Moncada stated that 99% of household electricity is provided by renewable energy. However, they need a new source for industrial electricity supply. In the meeting, Mohammad Kazem Manzavi, Deputy Coordinator of Economic Affairs of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, welcomed trade interactions between Iran and Nicaragua. He stated that multiple meetings are needed to establish trade processes. He noted that Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari's productions have much to offer on the international stage and emphasized the need to introduce trade opportunities properly, aiming for sustainable exports. Manzavi pointed out that Latin American markets are suitable for exporting products from Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari and stressed the need to strengthen trade relations with Nicaragua. He reiterated that Nicaragua is a gateway to the markets of Latin American countries and expressed hope that by following up on the issues discussed in the meeting and considering the trade agreement between Iran and Nicaragua during the Thirteenth Administration, there would be positive outcomes and strengthened trade relations between the two countries.

## 40% Growth in Seafood Exports in Q1



TEHRAN - The Director General of the Office for Quality Improvement, Processing, and Market Development of Aquatic Products announced: In the first quarter of this Iranian calendar year 1403, the export of various seafood products increased by more than 40% in weight and over 30% in value compared to the same period last year.

Abbas Mokhtari Abkenari commented on the trend of seafood product exports in the first quarter of this year: Based on the announcement of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, in the first three months of this year, the export of various seafood products increased by more than 40% in weight and over 30% in value compared to the same period last year.

He stated: The export volume in the first quarter of 1403 was 52,282 tons, valued at \$93.1m, which in 1402 reached 73,369 tons, valued at \$121.4m.

He specified regarding the amount of caviar export: In the first quarter of this year, 1,353 kg of caviar worth \$721,000 was exported, showing an 82% increase in weight and 41% in value compared to the same period in 1402.

Mokhtari Abkenari reported over a 65% growth in the export of fish feed, stating: This year, 23,724 tons of fish feed worth \$20.2m were exported, reflecting over a 65% increase in both weight and value compared to the same period last year.

He noted that the export of various carp species in the first quarter of 1403 amounted to 7,563 tons worth \$8.8m, and added: By the end of June 1403, the export of these fish reached 8,683 tons, valued at \$12.1m.

He also stated: The export of rainbow trout increased from 2,431 tons in the first quarter of 1402, valued at \$6.9 million, to 3,094 tons valued at \$6.6m in the first quarter of this year.

Mokhtari Abkenari stated that the export of various marine fish in the first quarter of last year was 18,301 tons valued at \$30.6 million, and clarified: With a very significant increase, the export of various marine fish this year reached 29,582 tons valued at \$53.3m.

## Construction of New Chabahar Airport at Konarak Military Airport



TEHRAN - Captain Reza Nakhjavani in an interview regarding the latest status of the construction of the new Chabahar Free Zone Airport and the transfer of passenger flights from Konarak Military Airport, stated: "The Chabahar Airport is currently a military airport within the army complex, and the construction of an airport by the Free Zone in that area conflicts with the military and civilian flight zones. To resolve this issue, Mr. Hossein Dehghan, as the head of Makran Development, took charge of the matter, received special instructions from the President, and coordinated with the army during this period."

He continued: "I am aware that a tripartite agreement was reached between the Secretary of the Makran Coastal Development Council, the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, and the Chief Commander of the Army. The steps for its approval in the Armed Forces General Staff and its implementation have been completed."

The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development said: "The decision on who will build this airport and with what investment will be made in this process."

In response to whether this airport will be built in the Chabahar Free Zone, the Head of the Airports and Air Navigation Company added: "This airport must be constructed in a way that does not interfere with military missions. It will be built to international airport standards to support the development of the Chabahar region. The financial resources will be provided by the Chabahar Free Zone, and the Civil Aviation Organization is responsible for pursuing this matter."

Nakhjavani continued: "The Airports Company will only act as an advisor to the responsible person or entity intending to build the airport in that area. According to the law, for the construction of any airport, the National Airspace Committee in the Civil Aviation Organization must first approve it, followed by the final authorization from the Civil Aviation Organization."

He emphasized: "The current military airport is in a very suitable location for airport construction, but regarding the construction of an airport outside Chabahar, it should be noted that a new Chabahar city is planned to be built."

## Talks Underway With Russia for Egg Exports



TEHRAN - Hossein Mahdizad, head of the Poultry Working Group of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, told ILNA about the ongoing issue of surplus chicken and eggs in the country. He mentioned that the Union and the Ministry of Agriculture have implemented a strategy to halt egg production in the Iranian months of Tir and Mordad.

According to this strategy, poultry farmers with flocks aged 65 to 85 weeks can give their flocks a two-month break from production. This two-month period started on July 5 and will continue until September 5, aiming to balance the supply and demand of eggs in the country.

He added that currently, poultry farmers are selling each kilogram of eggs 6,000 tomans cheaper than the approved price of 2022, incurring significant losses. The new approved price for eggs for this year has not yet been announced, but it is promised to be announced by the end of July.

Mahdizad continued: In the past two years, the highest revenue in the agricultural sector has been from egg exports. However, we are now in a situation where Iraq, the main market for Iranian egg exports, has its own production. Additionally, due to the hot weather, domestic demand for eggs has decreased, so the production for the next two months must be managed.

The head of the Poultry Working Group of the Iran Chamber of Commerce pointed out that apart from Iraq, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf countries are the current destinations for Iranian egg exports. We are also in talks with Russia and are confident that there will be good demand for Iranian eggs in Russia because Iranian eggs are of higher quality compared to those from other regional countries, especially Turkey, whose eggs are only presented in attractive packaging.

## Drilling Operations for 35 Infill Wells in South Pars Begin

TEHRAN (Shana) - The operational plan for drilling 35 infill wells in the joint South Pars field commenced in the presence of the CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company, as the employer, and the CEO of PetroIran Company, the contractor for the second package of this project, at the location of the SPD12B platform in Phase 12 of South Pars. Accordingly, the contract for drilling 35 infill wells in South Pars was signed in November 2023. With the installation and commencement of the drilling rig at the SPD12B platform location, the drilling of the first well adjacent to the production wells of this platform began. This contract, structured into four work packages, was awarded by the Pars Oil and Gas Company to qualified contractors in the upstream sector of the oil and gas industry in January 2024. The duration of the contract for the South Pars infill well drilling project is three years, with the necessary investment estimated at 1.2 billion dollars. Pasargad, Petropars, PetroIran, and North Drilling companies are the contractors for the 35 infill well drilling project in the joint South Pars field. According to the plan, 35 infill wells will be drilled in four work packages with Petropars (the first package with 8 wells), PetroIran Development (the second package with 9 wells), North Drilling (the third package with 9 wells), and Pasargad Energy Development Group (the fourth package with 9 wells) across 17 platforms in South Pars.

## Moscow Slams Australia's Arresting Russia-Born Couple

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Russia has accused Australia of inciting "anti-Russian paranoia" for charging a Russian-born couple with espionage, the Australian Broadcasting Corp (ABC) reported today. The married couple, who hold Australian citizenship, were arrested on charges of working to access material related to Australia's national security, though no significant compromise had been identified, the Australian Federal Police said.

The woman, 40, an information systems technician in the Australian Army, travelled to Russia and instructed her husband in Australia to log into her official account to access defence materials, police said.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, speaking to reporters yesterday, warned that "people will be held to account who interfere with our national interests and that's precisely what these arrests represent."

Russia's embassy in the capital Canberra said a press conference by Australian authorities yesterday about the arrests "was clearly intended to launch another wave of anti-Russian paranoia in Australia," the ABC said, citing an embassy statement.

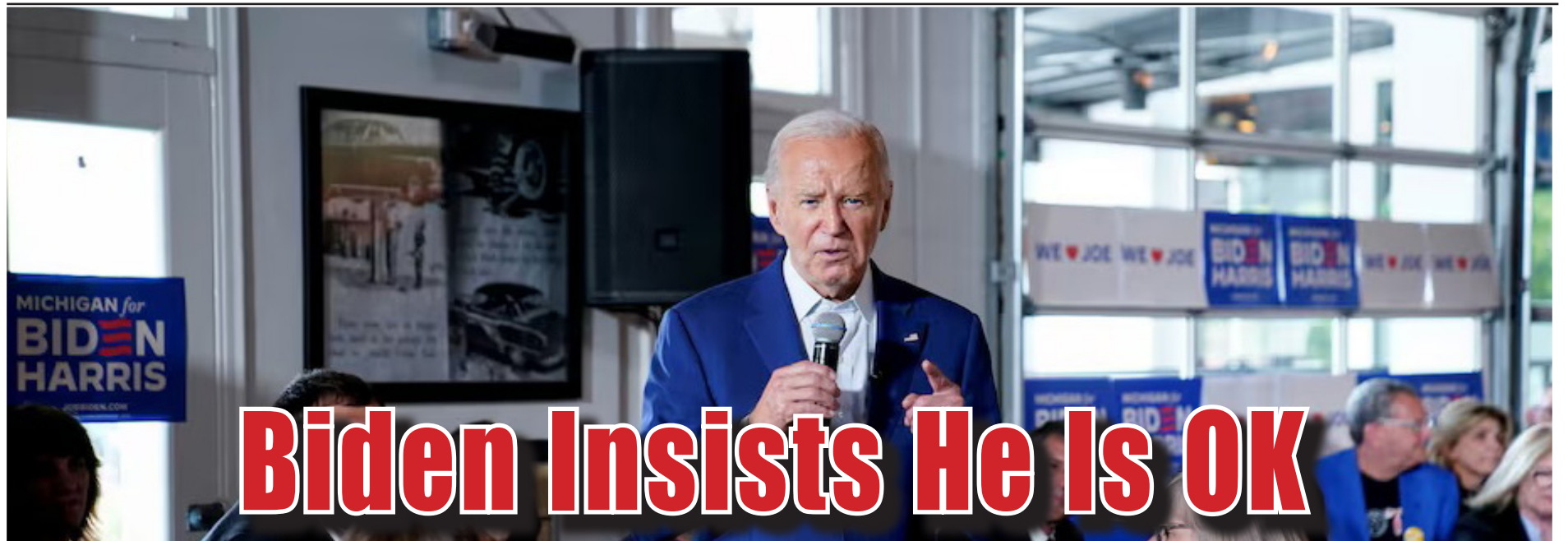


## India's Modi Delays Privatization Plans



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India plans to overhaul more than 200 state-run firms to make them more profitable, signaling a departure from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aggressive program to privatize a major portion of India's lumbering \$600 billion state sector announced in 2021, had slowed ahead of the general election in April-May and now faces more resistance after Modi lost his majority in parliament and had to rely on coalition allies to return to office.

Expected to be unveiled as part of the annual budget on July 23 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the new plans include selling large parcels of underutilized land owned by these companies and monetization of other assets, said two officials who are aware of the policy. Some aspects are yet to be fine-tuned, they added. The aim is to raise \$24 billion in the current April-March fiscal year and re-invest the funds in the companies, while setting five-year performance and production targets for each company, instead of short-term targets. The plans to overhaul state firms have not been reported previously. The officials declined to be identified as they were not authorized to speak on confidential deliberations. The finance ministry did not respond to requests for comment. In an interim budget presented before the election, the government did not provide any figures on stake sales for the first time in more than a decade. "The government is shifting focus from indiscriminate asset sales to enhancing intrinsic value of state-owned companies," said one of the officials. Among other plans, the government intends to introduce succession planning in majority-owned companies alongside a proposal to train 230,000 managers across firms to prepare them for senior roles, the officials said. Currently, the government appoints top executives in state-owned companies. The government is likely to implement a plan that includes training of managers, professional recruitment to company boards and incentives for high performance from the 2025/26 fiscal year, with the expectation that increased autonomy would make companies more competitive.



DETROIT (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden returned to the campaign trail seeking to reassure voters and Democrats alike about his fitness for office, after a major news conference failed to silence calls for him to quit.

"We've got to finish the job. And I promise you I am OK," the 81-year-old told supporters at a diner in Northville in the battleground state of Michigan, which he must win in November to beat Donald Trump.

Biden was to give a speech later in Detroit warning of the "nightmare" of a second Trump term under a hard-right manifesto that his campaign is pinning to the former president.

But the drumbeat of Democrats urging Biden to step aside kept getting louder, with 19 lawmakers having now openly called on him not to seek reelection following a disastrous debate performance against Trump on June 27.

The bloodletting continued despite a defiant Biden insisting in a high-stakes press conference at a Nato summit in Washington on Thursday that he would run again, and win.

A series of gaffes, including referring to Vice President Kamala Harris as "Vice President Trump" and mixing up Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky with Russian strongman Vladimir Putin, kept the focus on his mental acuity.

"The president understands that there's still some anxiety," Biden campaign communications director Michael Tyler told reporters traveling to Michigan with the president aboard Air Force One.

"That's why he's laser focused on demonstrating that he is the best person to take on Donald Trump and defeat him in November."

Tyler played down the verbal slip-ups, saying Biden has been known for making them throughout his long political career.

"Joe Biden has been making gaffes for 40 years, he made a couple of last night, he probably will continue to do so," he said.

As the row sparked by the debate enters a third week, Biden has been making efforts to reach out to

lawmakers, speaking by telephone to Latino and Asian members of the House of Representatives.

The top Democrat in the House of Representatives, Hakeem Jeffries, meanwhile said he had met with Biden late Thursday after the press conference.

Jeffries said he "expressed the full breadth of insight, heartfelt perspectives and conclusions about the path forward" but did not give further details.

The campaign event in Detroit is Biden's fourth trip this year to the state, part of the industrial "blue wall" along with Wisconsin and Pennsylvania that were key to his 2020 win against his rival.

Biden's speech is expected to focus on "Project 2025", a blueprint for power by hardline conservatives that Democrats have said the former president would implement, despite the 78-year-old's denials.

"Project 2025 is run and paid for by Trump people," Biden was to say according to excerpts released by the campaign.

"And here is the nightmare it would unleash."

The concerns over Biden are affecting Democratic donors, with Hollywood star and high-profile supporter George Clooney calling on Biden to step aside on Wednesday.

A number of other key donors have told the largest Biden campaign fund that around US\$90 million in pledged donations is on hold if he carries on running, the New York Times reported yesterday.

Trump, who mocked Biden on social media during the news conference, followed up yesterday by saying the Zelensky gaffe was "unpardonable."

But he added that Biden "shouldn't allow complete losers like George Clooney, under the total auspices and control of Barack Hussein Obama, to push him out of office. That must be his decision, and his decision alone."

Trump was referring to reports in U.S. media that some in Biden's camp believe former president Obama, under whom Biden served as vice president, is involved behind the scenes with the rebels.

## Rescuers Find Dozens of Bodies After Israelis Scale Back Gaza City Fight

GAZA (Dispatches) - Israeli forces pulled back from parts of Gaza City overnight, after a fierce, week-long offensive that met with Hamas resistance, leaving dozens of dead and wrecked homes and roads in the Palestinian enclave's biggest urban area, rescuers said.

The offensive, 10 months into Israel's campaign to eliminate Hamas militants, took place as U.S.-backed mediators sought to finalise a peace deal that would free remaining hostages taken by the militants in their cross-border rampage on Oct. 7. The Gaza Civil Emergency Service said teams had collected around 60 bodies of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces over the past week from the area of Tel Al-Hawa and the edges of the Sabra neighborhood in Gaza City. While tanks withdrew from some areas, Israeli snipers and tanks continued to control some high ground, residents and rescue teams said, warning residents against trying to return. "There are bodies scattered in the streets, dismembered bodies, there are bodies of entire families, there are also bodies inside a home of an entire family that was completely burned," Gaza Strip Civil Defense spokesperson Mahmoud Basal said on Friday in comments carried by media in Hamas-run Gaza. Israel's military said it had found drones and other weaponry in what is called a Hamas combat complex inside the former UNRWA headquarters in Gaza City and had evacuated civilians from the area before attacking. "The troops engaged in close-quarters combat with terrorist cells that had fortified themselves inside the UNRWA compound," it said, adding that it had also found an important Hamas tunnel nearby and weapons production under a university building. The armed wings of Hamas and Islamic



Jihad said they had attacked Israeli forces with anti-tank rockets and mortar fire, killing and wounding many. There has been no Israeli army comment on those claims. 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 had returned to homes in the ruins before Israel once again ordered them out.

Dozens of residents returned again on Friday to check the damage after civil emergency teams put out fires in the early hours. Reuters footage showed wrecked roads and buildings, including the former UNRWA headquarters. Bodies wrapped in white shrouds and bearing the names of the dead women and men lay on the floor at Al-Ahli Hospital. Musa Al-Dahdouh recalled heavy aerial and tank fire and said Israeli forces had detained and interrogated his two sons and their wives and children before allowing them to leave. "My mother is in a wheelchair, my wife as well, as she has metal in her arms and legs. My grandson is paralyzed in the legs, his father had to carry him on his back," he said. In Khan Younis in the southern Gaza, Hamas media said four people working for the Al-Khair Foundation, a Muslim NGO based in Britain and Turkey, were killed in an air strike at an aid distribution centre. Arab mediators, backed by the United States, are trying to reach a ceasefire deal that would free Israelis held hostage by Hamas in return for many Palestinians jailed by Israel. On Friday, a senior Hamas official blamed Israel for a failure to build on momentum created when the Islamist faction dropped a key demand in the U.S.-drafted ceasefire offer a week ago to clear the way for a deal. "Israel hasn't given a clear stance over Hamas proposal," the official, who asked not to be named, told Reuters, accusing Israel of "stalling and wasting time."

## Russia Increases Income Taxes for the Wealthy

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday signed a bill that raises income taxes for the rich, part of efforts to help fill government coffers depleted by the war in Ukraine. The tax hikes were being presented domestically as "systemic reforms". Moscow's spending has outrun revenue by tens of billions of dollars since it ordered troops into Ukraine in February 2022, helping the economy defy expectations of a deep recession but also pushing it into rare budget deficits. Russia ran a budget deficit of around 3.2 trillion rubles (\$36 billion) in 2023, equivalent to two percent of GDP. Putin on Friday signed into law a set of amendments to Russia's tax code that includes increases on income taxes for high earners and corporate taxes paid by businesses in a bid to help plug the fiscal hole. They were passed by Russia's rubber-stamp parliament earlier this week. "The changes are aimed at building a fair and balanced tax system," Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said when the proposed changes were laid out in May. He said the extra funds would bolster Russia's "economic well-being" and go towards a series of public investment projects. The tax hikes - which are being presented domestically as "systemic reforms" - will raise around 2.6 trillion rubles (\$29 billion) in 2025 when they come into force, the finance ministry estimates. Russia has budgeted for a 1.1-percent shortfall this year - modest compared to many countries. But with Russia locked out from Western financial markets and around \$300 billion of its foreign currency reserves frozen by sanctions, Moscow's public finances are a key indicator of how long and how aggressively the Kremlin can fund its military campaign on Ukraine.

## China's Exports Top Forecasts

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's exports grew at their fastest in fifteen months in June, suggesting manufacturers are front-loading orders ahead of tariffs expected from a growing number of trade partners, while imports unexpectedly shrank amid weak domestic demand. The mixed trade data keeps alive calls for further government stimulus as the \$18.6 trillion economy struggles to get back on its feet. Analysts warn that the jury is still out on whether strong export sales in recent months can be sustained given major trade partners are becoming more protective. "This reflects the economic condition in China, with weak domestic demand and strong production capacity relying on exports," said Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. "The sustainability of strong exports is a major risk for China's economy in the second half of the year. The economy in the U.S. is weakening. Trade conflicts are getting worse." Outbound shipments from the world's second-biggest economy grew 8.6% year-on-year in value in June, customs data showed on Friday, beating a forecast 8.0% increase in a Reuters poll of economists and a 7.6% rise in May. But imports hit a four-month low, shrinking 2.3% compared with a forecast 2.8% increase and a 1.8%

rise the previous month, highlighting the fragility of domestic consumption. Stronger-than-expected exports have been one of the few bright spots for an economy otherwise struggling for momentum despite official efforts to stimulate domestic demand following the pandemic. A prolonged property slump and worries about jobs and wages are weighing heavily on consumer confidence. Still, as the number of countries stepping up curbs on Chinese goods increases, so too does the pressure on its exports to prop up progress towards the government's economic growth target for this year of around 5%. China's trade surplus stood at \$99.05 billion in June, the highest in records going back to 1981, compared with a forecast of \$85 billion and \$82.62 billion in May. The United States has repeatedly highlighted the surplus as evidence of one-sided trade favouring the Chinese economy. Washington in May hiked tariffs on an array of Chinese imports, including quadrupling duties on Chinese electric vehicles to 100%. Brussels last week confirmed it would impose tariffs on EVs as well, but only up to 37.6%. Chinese exporters are also on edge heading into U.S. elections in November in case either major party tips fresh trade restrictions.





## Yamal Shines as Spain Sink France to Reach Euro 2024 Final

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Lamine Yamal, 16, became the tournament's youngest ever goalscorer as Spain came back to beat France 2-1 in Munich and reach the Euro 2024 final. Trailing after Randal Kolo Muani headed in a Kylian Mbappe cross in the ninth minute, Spain turned the match around in a four-minute period, scoring twice against a side who had only conceded once in five previous games in this tournament. Yamal, who turns 17 a day before Sunday's final against either the Netherlands or England, equalised with a superb strike from outside the box, curling a long-range effort into the top corner and past the fingertips of an airborne Mike Maignan. Spain took the lead on 25 minutes, Dani Olmo expertly gathering a loose ball and firing a low shot into the net with the aid of a deflection off Jules Kounde. "I got the ball, didn't think about it for too long and just shot," Yamal said of his brilliant strike. "I'm just enjoying myself and I'm proud to be in the final." Three-time champions Spain became the first team to win six games at a Euros and are one game away from a record-breaking fourth crown. This weekend in Berlin will be Spain's first appearance in a major tournament final since a much-vaunted side thrashed Italy 4-0 in the Euro 2012 showpiece. Masters of midfield game management, Spain shut up shop after taking the lead, frequently holding possession rather than attacking on the counter, controlling the match and claiming the win. "They're a very good team, we knew that, they proved it tonight even if we were able to open the scoring," France coach Didier Deschamps.

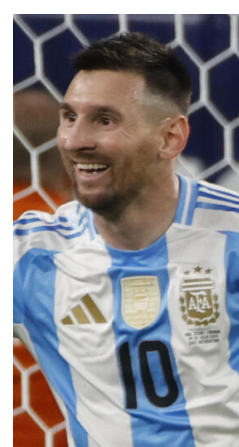
"They created difficulties for us as they controlled the game better than us, even if we kept going until the end." Finalists in three of the past four major tournaments, questions will be asked of how France failed to click up front despite boasting enviable attacking riches. Mbappe again struggled to make a serious impact despite playing without the mask he had been wearing since breaking his nose in France's opening game against Austria. The Real Madrid-bound striker's only goal in nine career appearances at the Euros remains the penalty he netted in the 1-1 group-stage draw with Poland last month. France had scored just three goals in Germany heading into the match, none of which were scored by a French player from open play and Deschamps reacted, benching forward Antoine Griezmann for Ousmane Dembele. Yamal created the first chance of the match four minutes in, lofting a curling cross to an unmarked Fabian Ruiz, who headed over from point-blank range. Four minutes later, Mbappe skated down the left flank and sent in a carbon copy of Yamal's cross, but Kolo Muani's header was on target to give France the lead. While the pre-match doubts focused on Spain veterans Jesus Navas, 38, and Nacho, 34, who replaced suspended duo Dani Carvajal and Robin Le Normand, the younger Aymeric Laporte and Marc Cucurella were at fault for Kolo Muani's opener. France's strike seemed to take the wind out of Spain's sails but it was the youngest player on the pitch who produce a piece of sublime brilliance to level the scores.

## Vinicius Apologizes After Brazil's Early Copa America Exit



BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Brazil forward Vinicius Jr apologized to their supporters after he missed their Copa America quarter-final exit due to suspension, but he said that the nine-times champions would return to their former glory. The 23-year-old Real Madrid winger was suspended due to an accumulation of yellow cards and watched from the stands as Brazil lost to record 15-times winners Uruguay 4-2 in a penalty shootout following a goalless draw on Saturday. Brazil had failed to impress at the Copa, drawing twice in the group stage while beating only Paraguay. It was their second straight quarter-final exit from a major tournament after they lost to Croatia on penalties at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. "The Copa America is over and it's time to reflect, to know how to deal with defeat," Vinicius posted on Instagram. "The feeling of frustration takes over again. Again on penalties. I failed to pick up two avoidable yellow cards. Once again, I watched the elimination takes over again. But this time, it was my fault. I apologize for that. I know how to listen to criticism and, believe me, the harshest criticism comes from home. Fortunately, my career with the national team has only just begun. Together with my teammates, I'll have the chance to put our national team back where it belongs. We'll get back to the top! I love you and let's go together!" Vinicius, who enjoyed a fine 2023-24 season at Madrid, has scored five goals in 34 appearances for Brazil since making his international debut in 2019.

## Argentina See Off Canada to Reach Copa America Final



EAST RUTHERFORD (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi was on target as world champions Argentina turned on the style to beat Canada 2-0 and reach the Copa America final where they will look for a third straight major title. The defending Copa champions will face the winners of semi-final between Uruguay and Colombia in what will be a highly anticipated final in Miami on Sunday. The 15-times Copa champions produced their best display of the tournament in front of a capacity crowd at the 82,500 MetLife Stadium and as in their 2022 World Cup triumph they look to be peaking at the perfect moment. Canada, who surprised many by reaching the last four in their first Copa America appearance, can take great credit for their run in the tournament but Messi and company were simply a step too far. Jesse Marsch's side had progressed by hitting teams with high-energy football straight out of the gate but after an early opening for left-winger Jacob Shaffelburg, who fired wide after cutting in from the flank, the South Americans took control and never gave it up. Angel Di Maria, the veteran

wide-man playing in his final tournament for his country, was seeing plenty of the ball down the right and he offered an early warning of his threat when he picked out Messi with a ball inside which the forward flashed just wide of the post. But it was Rodrigo De Paul who was to create the breakthrough in the 22nd minute, picking the ball up on the half-way line, taking a quick glance up and then lofting the ball over the top to Julian Alvarez. The Manchester City forward, recalled to the starting line-up ahead of Lautaro Martinez, delivered a deft first touch that took him away from Moises Bombito and gave him just enough room to drive the ball home. The classy triangle of Di Maria, Messi and De Paul, was a constant source of danger for Canada's back line and the former threatened a second with a chip from the right which floated over the bar. The assuredness of Argentina's build-up play reflects the confidence of coach Lionel Scaloni's team, a well-drilled unit but one that never allows their organisational solidity dominate over their creativity. Two minutes before the break, former Real Madrid winger Di Maria provided a slide-rule pass to Messi, who worked himself space for a shot on his right-foot, but he was narrowly wide of Max Crepeau's right-hand post. Canada's American coach Marsch had plenty of work to do at the interval if he was to find a way of getting his team back on level terms and any strategy went out of the window when the world champions doubled their lead, just six minutes after the restart.

## Woods Turned Down Ryder Cup Captain Offer



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tiger Woods said on Tuesday he rejected the U.S. captaincy for the 2025 Ryder Cup due to his time-consuming role in the PGA Tour's talks with the Saudi backers of LIV Golf but that does not mean he will never lead the team in the future. Woods, who was the overwhelming favourite to take over as captain, released a statement that was read by PGA of America Senior Director Julius Mason during newly-appointed Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley's introductory news conference. "With my new responsibilities to the Tour and time commitments involved, I felt I would not be able to commit the time to Team USA and the players required as a captain," Woods' statement read. "That does not mean I wouldn't want to captain a team in the future. If and when I feel it is the right time, I will put my hat in the ring for this committee to decide." The 48-year-old Woods is part of a subcommittee that is engaged in direct negotiations with the Saudi Public Investment Fund as the two sides try to sort out a potential deal that would bring the fractured sport back together. Woods, who plays a limited schedule, discussed the captaincy with the PGA of America and, given his experience as a player and assistant at the Ryder Cup and Presidents Cup, was widely expected to lead the team into Bethpage Black. Bradley has not yet talked to anyone about serving as one of his vice captains but did speak with Woods and told the 15-times major champion that he can be as involved as he wants to be with the 2025 Ryder Cup team. "We as players all look up to Tiger and his opinion means a lot to us," said Bradley. "Being in team rooms with Tiger, the public doesn't realise how important this (the Ryder Cup) is to him. It's everything. "He lives and breathes this event, and I think it shows you how much he cares by turning this position down because he didn't feel like he could put in what he needed to do with all of his responsibilities with what's going on with the tour."

## Colombia Defeat Uruguay to Reach Copa America Final

LONDON (Dispatches) - Defending Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz returned to the semi-finals with an enthralling comeback but there will be no blockbuster showdown with Jannik Sinner after the world number one was dragged the distance and dumped out. Having taken his Grand Slam tally to three at the French Open last month, Alcaraz pushed on in his quest to retain a major trophy for the first time and cement his big-league status by rallying past American Tommy Paul 5-7 6-4 6-2 6-2. "When I'm not playing my best tennis, I'm going to try to find solutions just to be a bit better and beat the opponent," said Spaniard Alcaraz. "Sometimes it's going to be difficult to do it but sometimes, like in these matches, I didn't play brilliant but I played enough just to (win) the match." The clash between the two most recent Queen's Club champions still produced some breathtaking shot-making on Court One before Paul's bid to end a 21-year U.S. wait for a men's Grand Slam champion faded. "I'm really happy to be back in the semi-finals here. Really happy about the level that I'm playing," added Alcaraz, who was still in a crib when American Andy Roddick won the U.S. Open title in 2003. Sinner is another of the men's tour's young guns who was heavily backed to succeed at



the grasscourt Grand Slam after his breakthrough Australian Open triumph and a potential encounter with Alcaraz had left fans excited following the draw. The ailing 22-year-old came crashing down to earth against fifth seed Daniil Medvedev in a rematch of their Melbourne Park title clash, however, a sobering result that snapped a run of five straight wins over the Russian. Sinner put up a brave fight under the Centre Court roof after a timeout due to illness but the Italian was unable to prevent a 6-7(7) 6-4 7-6(4) 2-6 6-3 defeat. "This morning I didn't feel great. I had some problems. Then with the fatigue, it was tough," said Sinner. "But take nothing away from Daniil. He played smart. Played good tennis. That's it ... It wasn't an easy moment. I tried to fight with that what I had today." Sinner's compatriot Jasmine Paolini was grinning from ear to ear on the main showcourt after her utterly dominant performance against American 19th seed Emma Navarro later on Tuesday. The seventh seed cruised to a 6-2 6-1 victory in 58 minutes on another damp day at Wimbledon to set up a meeting with Croatian Donna Vekic, who ended the extraordinary run of 123rd ranked qualifier Lulu Sun.