

On the Occasion of India's Independence Day and in a message, Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani Said the Growing Ties Between the Islamic Republic and India Play an Important Role in Regional Peace and Stability

IRAN NEWS

Commander of the Iranian Navy, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani Has Hailed the Recent Successful Operation to Save the Sahand Frigate, Which Had Rolled Over in Bandar Abbas While Undergoing Repairs

VOL. XXIX, No. 8059 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SATURDAY AUGUST 17, 2024 MORDAD 27, 1403

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Israel Not Deserve to Preside Over Any of UN Institutions



TEHRAN (MNA) - The Israeli regime does not have the necessary competency and legitimacy to preside over any of the United Nations bodies, including the Conference on Disarmament, Iran's envoy in Geneva said.

Speaking in a detailed statement at the meeting of the United Nations Disarmament Conference, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the International Organizations in Geneva Ali Bahreini stated that presiding over an institution affiliated to the United Nations requires commitment to the fundamental rules and principles of the international law and also the international collective arrangements.

Tearing up the UN Charter by the ambassador of the criminal Zionist regime before the eyes of the world in the United Nations shows that this fake regime does not adhere to and believe in any of the basic and fundamental principles of the United Nations and international law, Bahreini emphasized.

Israel's non-membership in any of the international treaties, observing on prohibiting the production and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), clearly proves that the Israeli regime lacks the minimum qualifications and necessary criteria to lead the international institutions including the United Nations Conference on Disarmament, Iran's envoy maintained.

Referring to the heinous crimes committed by the Zionist regime since its illegal establishment up to the present time, he said that since the outbreak of war in the besieged Gaza on October 7, 2023, the Israeli regime has massacred more than 40,000 people in Gaza, at least two-thirds of whom are innocent women and children.

Deliberate targeting of civilians and also the civilian targets, including hospitals, schools, and places of worship, are the clear examples of war crimes committed by the Israeli regime, he said, adding that starvation, forced displacement of the Palestinian people and use of prohibited weapons such as white phosphorus in Gaza are war crimes against humanity, and the regime authorities must be held accountable for these crimes.

The Israeli cowardly assassination of ex-Hamas Chief Martyr Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran is a clear example of violating the principles of international law, including the United Nations Charter, and violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iran's ambassador in Geneva added.

Israeli Settlers Kidnap Palestinian Boys, Break Their Legs



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Israeli settlers kidnapped and abused two 15-year-old Palestinian boys in the occupied West Bank earlier this week, the UN says.

In a "Humanitarian Situation Update" on Thursday, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the boys were assaulted as they were herding sheep around the suburb of Irtas south of Bethlehem on August 12.

The settlers put knives on the boys' necks and took them to their settlement outpost, where they beat them, broke their legs, and urinated on them, according to the report. They then put the boys in a vehicle and threw them in open land near Irtas.

Other Palestinians found them there and called an ambulance, which took them to a hospital for treatment.

Israeli settlers injured at least four other Palestinians in attacks on August 6, 7 and 9. In one incident, they tried to steal a herd of 400 sheep from Palestinian shepherds near al-Khalil.

The report said there had been 1,250 assaults by Israeli settlers against the Palestinians in the West Bank since Israel launched its campaign of death and destruction in the besieged Gaza Strip on October 7.

In another development, settlers burned dozens of olive trees in Khalil al-Lawz, near Bethlehem.

Dozens of the trees belonging to the al-Abayat and al-Mawaleh families burned in the blaze.

Many Palestinian farming families cultivate olive trees and depend on the olive harvest for their livelihood.

"Approximately one million olive trees, many of which were centuries old, have been uprooted by Israel since 1967," Saad Dagher, a Palestinian agronomist earlier said.

"They don't only uproot them on the pretext that they need to make space for settlements or other occupation infrastructure. They also claim that the olive trees represent 'security threats' towards Israelis, as trees are posts behind which Palestinians hide to target soldiers. It's madness."



Iran Urges Practical Measures to End Israeli Genocide in Gaza

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's interim Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani has underlined the need for all-out diplomatic efforts and "practical measures" aimed at putting an end to Israel's ongoing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

In an X post early on Friday, Bagheri Kani said that he had discussed over the phone the latest developments regarding a new round of the Gaza ceasefire talks with Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani.

The top Iranian diplomat added that Sheikh Mohammed described as critical the outcome of the current stage of the Gaza truce discussions.

"I emphasized the need for the continuation of all-out efforts and practical measures, including diplomatic activities, to stop the genocide by the Zionists in Gaza," he added.

The remarks came after the first day of the ceasefire negotiations, mediated by the US, Egypt, and Qatar, ended in Doha on Thursday.

Hamas officials did not join the talks, saying Israel has been adding new demands to a previous proposal to which the Palestinian resistance group had agreed in principle.

However, an Israeli delegation, led by the heads of Mossad and Shin Bet spy agencies, took part in the negotiations.

An unnamed US official briefed on the discussions in Doha told Reuters that Thursday's talks were "constructive."

Reports say the ceasefire negotiations are set to resume for a second day on Friday.

Israel waged its genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023 after Hamas carried out its historic operation against the occupying entity in retaliation for

the regime's intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people.

So far, the Tel Aviv regime has killed at least 40,005 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 92,401 others.

Successive rounds of talks have failed to broker a truce in the brutal Israeli onslaught on Gaza.

Meanwhile the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, has once again stressed that any agreement with Israel must ensure a comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza, the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces and a prisoner exchange deal.

The Palestinian resistance group said in a statement on Thursday that the agreement should also facilitate the return of the displaced Palestinians and the reconstruction of the devastated territory.

"Hamas views the ongoing negotiations in Doha regarding a ceasefire and prisoner exchange from a strategic perspective aimed at ending the aggression on Gaza," Hamas official Hossam Badran said in the statement.

"Hamas believes that any negotiations must be based on a clear plan to implement what was previously agreed upon. The obstacle to reaching a ceasefire in Gaza is the continued 'Israeli' evasion," Badran added.

"Any agreement must achieve a comprehensive ceasefire, a complete (Israeli) withdrawal from Gaza, (and) the return of the displaced, along with a prisoner exchange deal," he said.

The Hamas statement emphasized that any negotiation must be based on a clear plan to implement the existing agreement, which was agreed upon in early July. The agreement was also upheld by the UN Security Council.

Iranian POWs Symbol of Resistance Against Enemies



TEHRAN - The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said that Prisoners of War (POWs) are symbols of resistance and steadfastness of the great nation of Islamic Iran against any excessive demands of enemies of this border and land.

In a post on his X account, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kan'ani wrote, "We celebrate the 26th of Mordad (August 16) the anniversary of the return of valiant prisoners of war to their homeland."

The prisoners of war are the symbols of resistance, perseverance and steadfastness of the great nation of the Islamic Iran against any aggression, extravagance and excessive demands of the enemies of this history-making border and land, Kan'ani emphasized.

"We honor the dignified and firm resistance of the valiant prisoners of war and cherish their unflinching efforts for elevating status of the country and the noble nation of the Islamic Iran in the international arenas," the spokesman added.

"We also pay tribute to all the martyrs of the Sacred Defense (Iraqi imposed war against Iran in 1980-1988) and revere all the released war prisoners," he noted.

Meanwhile Tehran Friday prayer leader emphasized that August 17th is a day of freedom and pride for the Iranian nation, stating that the Iranian POWs used every opportunity during their captivity to turn threats into opportunities.

Hojatoleslam Seyyed Mohammad Hassan Aboutorabi-Fard, during this week's Friday prayer sermon held at the Imam Khomeini Mosque in Tehran, referred to the anniversary of the release of Iranian prisoners from Saddam's regime, noting that this day is truly a day of freedom and pride for the great Iranian nation.

He highlighted that for the brave children of Iran, who defended all of our human and revolutionary values in the torture camps of Saddam's Ba'athist forces for periods ranging from six months to ten years, embodying these values before the world, and created the most beautiful scenes of joy and celebration upon their victorious return to Islamic Iran, today is a significant day.

The interim Tehran Friday prayer leader added, "If we say that the days of the return of the freed prisoners to the homeland were the most glorious, passionate, and hope-inspiring days in the history of the revolution, we would not be exaggerating."

Aboutorabi-Fard emphasized that the enemy used all tools, including psychological warfare, pressure, and threats, to achieve its malicious goals. However, an event occurred that astonished everyone: the Iranian prisoners became a united and cohesive group.

Response to Israeli Assassinations Definite

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's resistance movement Hezbollah has once again stressed its resolve to retaliate against the Israeli assassination of its senior commander, despite US efforts to spare its ally the consequences of its crimes.

"The response is a decision and this decision will take place, God willing," Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem said in an interview with Lebanon's al-Manar television network that was aired on Thursday.

Qassem described the visit of US envoy Amos Hochstein to Lebanon, which was allegedly aimed at easing tensions between Israel and Hezbollah, as a "show" in a "vicious cycle", noting that he didn't present "specific American proposals."

On Wednesday, Hochstein said he believed all-out war between Israel and Hezbollah could be avoided, adding that a ceasefire deal for Gaza would also help prevent an outbreak of a wider war.

"We continue to believe that a diplomatic resolution is achievable because we continue to believe that no one truly wants a full-scale war between Lebanon and Israel," Hochstein said after talks with parliament speaker Nabih Berri.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Naim Qassem noted that the victory of Lebanon against the Israeli enemy in the July 2006 war "is not an exceptional" incident, but "a choice that turned out to be a foundation for the future."

He referred to the operations conducted by Hezbollah in support of Gazans who are subjected to an Israeli genocidal war, saying "We are confident that the outcome of confronting the July 2006 aggression, including thwarting all of Israel's goals and achieving the great divine victory, will also be achieved in this battle [al-Aqsa Storm Operation], amid all these sacrifices, all this patience, and all this time."

Noting that the current battle is "tougher and harsher" one, he said it as "a battle of



choices."

"We have a clear choice. We have the choice of liberation, independence, pride and dignity. And that's more sophisticated than... the choice of occupation and aggression."

"The issue needs patience, and... we are the people of patience and generosity," he stressed.

Hezbollah and Israel have been exchanging fire since early October, shortly after the occupying regime launched its war on Gaza.

The movement has vowed to keep up its retaliatory operations as long as the Tel Aviv regime continues its onslaught on Gaza that has so far killed more than 40,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured tens of thousands others.

Israel waged its genocidal war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian Hamas resistance group carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the usurping entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people.

In its most daring attack against Lebanon since the beginning of the Gaza onslaught, Israel assassinated Fuad Shukur, a senior Hezbollah military commander and an advisor to the movement's Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, in a strike against a building in a suburb of Beirut late in July.

Hezbollah officials have repeatedly said they do not want a war with Israel while stressing that they are prepared in case it occurs.

Two Israeli wars waged against Lebanon in 2000 and 2006 were met with strong resistance from Hezbollah, resulting in the retreat of the regime in both conflicts.

Iran Car Imports Exceed 13,000 Since Late March



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said 13,227 brand-new passenger cars were imported into the customs campuses of the country since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20 to August 15, 2024).

Offering the latest report on the situation of import of passenger cars into the country, Mohammad Rezvanifar put the value of the imported cars at about \$227 million, Mehr News Agency reported.

"Last year, during the same period, 738 cars worth 15.6 million dollars entered the country and cleared customs," the official said.

Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade lifted the ban on car imports in late May 2022.

The decision was made to reduce the imbalance between supply and demand and to improve the country's economic conditions with regard to foreign currency revenues.

Iranian automakers currently produce about one million cars annually, while the domestic demand for automobiles is over 1.5 million, so since the domestic manufacturers are not able to meet the market's demand the government decided to allow imports.

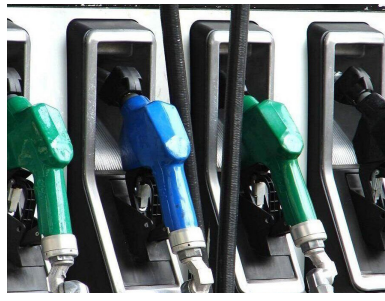
Iran's major carmakers produced more than 1.13 million passenger cars in the previous calendar year ending March 19, showing a six percent growth compared to the figure for the previous year, an industry official said.

Mehrdad Khosravi, director of the Automotive Industries Office of the Ministry of Industry, Mining, and Trade, said the production of pickup trucks also saw a 32 percent increase this year at 166,000 vehicles.

Over 40,000 commercial vehicles, including different kinds of vans, minibuses, buses, trucks, and trailers, have also been manufactured this year, which is about two percent more than last year's output in this sector, he added.

Khosravi pointed out that the private sector's share in the automotive industry was 23 percent of the total production with around 307,000 vehicles.

IRAN NEWS



Iran Acting FM Felicitates Pakistan on Independence Day

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani has congratulated the government and nation of Pakistan on their Independence Day.

In a message on his X account on Thursday, Bagheri Kani congratulated Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar as well as the government and people of the neighboring country on their Independence Day.

In his message in Urdu, he said, "I would like to extend my heartiest felicitations to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan and honorable nation of Pakistan."

Independence Day, observed annually on 14 August, commemorates the day when Pakistan achieved independence from the United Kingdom and was declared a sovereign state following the termination of the British Raj between the 14th and 15th August 1947.

Share of Euro Standard Gasoline Reaches 71%



TEHRAN - The share of Euro standard gasoline in the country has reached 71%.

The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company announced the readiness of the Shiraz Refinery's gasoline quality improvement project for operation, stating that with the launch of this project, the refinery's daily production of 1.6 million liters of gasoline will be upgraded to Euro 5 standards.

Jalil Salari explained that quality improvement projects were initiated in all refineries across the country with the start of the thirteenth administration, and some have already been completed. In Shiraz Refinery, one of our projects was the gasoline production unit, which, as a result, will produce all gasoline in compliance with Euro standards.

He also mentioned that the refinery's diesel optimization project will be operational within the next few months, adding that about 3.2 million liters of diesel are produced at the Shiraz Refinery, and upon the completion of this project, all of it will meet Euro standards.

The Deputy Oil Minister for Refining and Distribution emphasized that the gasoline and diesel quality improvement projects at Shiraz Refinery started simultaneously, and with the completion of these two projects, it will be possible to supply the required products of Fars Province at Euro quality standards.

Salari stated that the investment in this project exceeded 35 million euros and added that Shiraz Refinery is currently the only refinery in the country where the gasoline quality improvement has been fully implemented.

He noted that with an average daily production of 105 million liters of gasoline in the country, 68% of the total gasoline production currently meets environmental standards, and with the addition of 1.6 million liters from Shiraz Refinery, this share will increase to about 71%.

The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company also pointed out that gasoline quality improvement projects are underway in Kermanshah and Abadan, and with the completion of these two projects, the entire gasoline production in the country will meet Euro standards.

Financial and Banking Exchanges With Turkey "Not Possible"

TEHRAN - Mehrdad Saadat Dehghan, the head of the Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce, in an interview with ILNA, spoke about the impact of the opening of the Koozeh-Resh border terminal in Salmas County on the trade between the two countries.

He stated that this terminal is being established in response to the demands of Iranian and Turkish border residents in this region, who have been requesting the opening of a crossing for years. Furthermore, the opening of this new crossing will reduce traffic at the three other crossings and significantly lower the cost of transporting goods, subsequently reducing the overall cost of trade and enhancing Iran's competitiveness in transnational markets.

He added that, however, the opening of this crossing does not necessarily mean the development and facilitation of trade between Iran and Turkey. What is more important than opening the crossing is equipping it with modern facilities. Today, no border crossing is functional without an X-ray machine.

The head of the Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce emphasized that the main demand of private sector traders regarding Turkey is the establishment of free trade between the two countries and the elimination of trade tariffs. Of course, the establishment of multiple well-equipped crossings is considered a prerequisite for this.

Saadat noted that the finalization of this crossing dates back to the former President Mr. Raisi's trip to Turkey, and the Turkish side also agrees with its establishment and has taken on its share of the investment in this project.

He stated that our country has the potential to export 15 billion dollars worth of goods annually to Turkey, and a trade value of 30 billion dollars between the two countries has been projected. However, achieving this figure is possible with free trade, and even preferential trade is no longer effective and is considered outdated. It should be noted that not only Iranian traders but also Turkish private sector traders welcome the establishment of free trade with Iran.

In response to whether achieving a 30 billion dollar trade volume with Turkey requires the annual import of 15 billion dollars worth of goods from Turkey to Iran, he explained: Rest assured that the current volume of imports from Turkey to Iran is more than the recorded figures, and the real statistics are not being recorded due to sanctions. However, in a free trade system, everything is transparent.

He added that currently, there is no possibility of financial and banking exchanges with Turkey through official channels, and one of the prerequisites for free trade is the elimination of this challenge. However, trade using national currencies could be a solution for international financial exchanges under sanction conditions. The Central Bank of Iran has also made proposals to its Turkish counterpart regarding trade using lira and rial, but no results have been achieved so far. It seems that the Turkish side is cautious, considering its national interests in these matters, and the dollar remains the dominant currency in transactions between Iran and Turkey.

Collaboration Between Commercial Platforms and West Asian States

TEHRAN - Abdulmir Rabiavi, Director General of the West Asia Office at the Iran Trade Promotion Organization, emphasized the necessity of establishing joint collaborations between commercial platforms and West Asian countries. He also announced the organization of a conference on this topic next month.

He highlighted the importance of strengthening joint efforts between startups and commercial platforms in neighboring countries, stating that the Iran Trade Promotion Organization, as the authority responsible for foreign trade, has incorporated developmental planning in various fields to boost exports.

Rabiavi continued by stating that creating the necessary groundwork for collaboration between commercial platforms and startups in West Asian countries, particularly Iraq and Oman, has been prioritized by the Iran Trade Promotion Organization. To explore how this objective can be achieved, a joint meeting was held with the Director General of the Office for Planning, Monitoring, and Strategic Studies at the Trade Development Center.

The Director General of the West Asia Office at the Iran Trade

Promotion Organization described the organization of an e-commerce conference as the outcome of this meeting. He added that the West Asia Office, in collaboration with the E-Commerce Development Center, will hold the e-commerce conference in September 2024, with the participation of stakeholders from various sectors of the e-commerce industry.

He identified the goals of the conference as explaining the development of international businesses based on existing resources, identifying the current state of the target countries' systems, and assessing the feasibility of creating hardware and software infrastructures.

According to the Director General, the presence of capable companies with e-commerce capacities could pave the way for expanding non-oil exports to various countries, including our western neighbors, and lead to a significant increase in exports.

In conclusion, this official stated that Iraq and Oman provide suitable opportunities for the presence of startup companies and that active Iranian companies will be welcomed in these countries.



Iran Ready to Stand Up to Any Aggression

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali has said that his country stands ready to any aggression on its soil, and that the Israeli regime will receive a response to its actions against the Islamic Republic.

Jalali made the remark in an interview with Russia TASS news agency on Wednesday, as he commented on the possibility of abandoning plans to respond to Israel ahead of a new round of talks in Qatar on a ceasefire in Gaza.

"There will be a response, but we do not know when exactly. In any case, the Islamic Republic of Iran is always ready to stand up to any aggression, we will respond to it (Israel)", the ambassador said.

Iran has promised to retaliate against Israel for the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31, a day after he attended the inaugural of the new president Masoud Pezeshkian.

Iran says that the assassination taking place on its soil in a clear violation of Iranian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and that the country reserves the right to legitimate defense against any act of aggression against its territory.

Pakistan Independence Day Celebrated in Tehran

TEHRAN - An official ceremony to mark the 78th anniversary of Independence of Pakistan was held at Pakistan House Tehran on Wednesday. Members of Pakistani community in Iran and officials of the Embassy, attended the ceremony.

The ceremony commenced with the playing of national anthem and hoisting of the national flag by Charge d' Affaires Mr. Ahmad Shami. It was followed by reading out of Messages of President and Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Charge d' Affaires Mr. Ahmad Shami paid rich tributes to the founding fathers of the nation Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal and other leaders who led the Pakistan movement and offered sacrifices for the



creation of an independent Muslim state.

While congratulating the Pakistani diaspora on Pakistan's Independence Day, Charge d' Affaires urged them to serve the country with dedication. Pakistan has faced multiple challenges, since Independence but by the grace of Almighty Allah and with the dedication and hard work of our citizens, the nation has continued its forward march as a modern and progressive state.

Charge d' Affaires reiterated that Pakistan and Iran are two brotherly and fraternal nations whose relations are rooted deep in historical, cultural and religious affinities. The trajectory of Pak-Iran relations is going upwards due to commitment of leadership of the both countries.

Export of \$13m Worth of Hand-Woven Carpets in 4 Months



TEHRAN - Head of the National Center for Creative Industries and Carpets of Iran Mohammad Reza Zare Borzashi announced that in the first four months of the year 1403 (2024), 1.35 million square meters of hand-woven carpets were produced nationwide, representing a 6% increase compared to the same period last year.

He highlighted the increasing production trend in the hand-woven carpet industry over the past three years, noting that 3.3 million square meters were produced in 1400, 3.5 million square meters in 1401, and 3.9 million square meters in 1402, marking an 11% growth.

The head of the National Center for Creative Industries and Carpets of Iran also reported a rising trend in carpet exports after 20 years of decline. According to customs statistics, \$11.5 million worth of hand-woven carpets were exported in the first four months of 1402. This year, the figure has reached \$13 million, indicating a 12% increase in exports after years of downward trends.

He added that this export growth resulted from removing obstacles faced by producers, such as extending the export commitment period from one year to 3-5 years, reducing the required amount from 100% to 20% of raw materials, resolving the temporary transit issue for hand-woven carpets, reducing import duties on raw silk, and registering hand-woven carpets.

Zare Borzashi further explained that since 1401, one of the serious issues in carpet exports was the ban on exporting hand-woven carpets through postal services. The center conducted necessary correspondence with the Export and Import Regulations Office of the Iran Trade Promotion Organization to resolve this issue, allowing carpet exports through postal services. According to the cabinet's resolution, each person can export up to 24 square meters of Iranian hand-woven carpets and 40 square meters of hand-woven kilims per year through postal services, without any restrictions on the number of pieces within these size limits.

He noted that with the actions taken in the hand-woven carpet sector, the growth in production alongside exports could play a significant role in employment and foreign exchange earnings for the country.

Iran Invited to Municipal BRICS Forum Hosted by Russia



MOSCOW (IRNA) - As the rotating chair of the group of emerging economies known as BRICS, Russia is preparing to host the 6th International Municipal BRICS (IMBRICS) Forum in Moscow.

The forum aims to facilitate the exchange of experiences in the technological, economic, and social development of municipal territories of member states and their partners.

The event is scheduled to take place on August 27 and 28 at the Expocenter, an international exhibition center in Moscow, according to the BRICS television network.

The Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry announced that delegations from 126 countries, including Iran, have been invited to participate in the event.

The forum will encompass 13 working areas and feature over 70 business events.

Discussions will focus on cooperation among municipalities on various fields, including economy, digital technologies, industry, energy, urban infrastructure, transportation, environment, healthcare, education, science, culture, sports, and tourism.

Additionally, the event will be accompanied by a large-scale exhibition, showcasing innovations and developments in urban management and planning.

North Korea, Russia Vow Deeper Ties

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reaffirmed a pledge to deepen cooperation with Russia in a message to President Vladimir Putin as Pyongyang marked an anniversary of independence from Japan's colonial rule, KCNA state news agency said on Friday. It was in reply to a message of congratulations from Putin on the Aug. 15 liberation day anniversary where the Russian leader said the bond forged as Soviet soldiers fought against Japan continues to serve as the basis of their ties, KCNA said.

"The friendly feelings of the armies and peoples of the two countries forged and deepened in the bloody struggle against the common enemy serve as a strong driving force for developing ... relations of friendship and cooperation into comprehensive strategic partnership and invincible comradeship," Kim said.

Kim and Putin held a second summit meeting in less than a year in June in Pyongyang, signing a pact on "comprehensive strategic partnership" that includes a mutual defence agreement.

It came amid accusations by South Korea, Ukraine and the United States that Kim is helping Russia in the war against Ukraine by supplying rockets and missiles in return for economic and other military assistance from Moscow.



IRAN NEWS

Biden, Harris Celebrate Deal to Lower Drug Prices



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Joe Biden and Kamala Harris made an upbeat show of unity Thursday as they held their first joint public event since Harris replaced the president as the Democratic Party's candidate in November's election.

Chants of "Thank you Joe!" rang out from the audience at a community college in the Maryland suburbs outside Washington.

Biden announced a major deal to reduce medication prices for retirees on social welfare programs.

But the biggest star was Biden's vice president who has surprised many by uniting the Democratic Party and surging in the polls against Republican Donald Trump since her abrupt entry into the White House race.

"She can make one hell of a president," Biden said of Harris.

Shortly after the joint appearance, Trump delivered rambling remarks from his New Jersey golf club, before taking questions from a handful of journalists.

Harris has a "very strong communist lean" and will mean the "death of the American dream," he said.

The real estate billionaire and scandal-engulfed former president has struggled to pivot his campaign since Biden dropped out on July 21 amid Democratic concerns that he lacked the stamina at 81 to do the job.

Until then, Trump was rising steadily in the polls, in large part on his message that Biden was losing his mental acuity - a charge that gained currency when the president badly flubbed a televised presidential debate against his predecessor.



BOGOTA (Dispatches) - The presidents of Brazil and Colombia on Thursday called on Venezuela to hold a new presidential election amid the ongoing political crisis over Nicolas Maduro's disputed re-election. The proposal was swiftly rejected by the Venezuelan opposition and the United States.

The presidents of Brazil and Colombia called Thursday for fresh elections in Venezuela after last month's disputed victory by Nicolas Maduro - a proposal quickly rejected by the opposition, who slammed the strongman for blocking a "political transition."

The two South American leaders, who spoke on the phone Wednesday to discuss a possible political way forward from Venezuela's post-election crisis, independently urged Maduro to consider a new election.

But Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado said it would show "a lack of respect" for the popular will already expressed on July 28.

And opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, a 74-year-old retired diplomat who claims he defeated Maduro by a wide margin, accused the longtime leftist leader of "playing with the lives of millions" by refusing to cede defeat.

"The country's economy is getting worse and worse with each passing day with no political solution in sight, and you are responsible for this tragedy," Gonzalez Urrutia said in a video posted to social media on Thursday.

"Venezuela deserves a future of stability, prosperity and peace, but in order to have that, the will of the people must be respected."

For his part, Maduro, while not directly mentioning a new election, said: "Conflicts in Venezuela... are resolved by Venezuelans, with their institutions, laws and Constitution."

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said if Maduro were "sensible... he could try to appeal to the people of Venezuela, perhaps even organize elections."

Lula told a Brazilian radio station there should be "criteria for participation of all candidates" in a new election, which should "allow observers from all over the world."

Colombian President Gustavo Petro meanwhile called on X for the lifting of all sanctions against Caracas, a "general national and international amnesty," "new, free elections" and a "transitional cohabitation government."

In Washington, US President Joe Biden signalled he would back such a move, but the White House walked back his comment, with a spokesman suggesting Biden had been "speaking to the absurdity of Maduro and his representatives not coming clean about the July 28 elections."

It is "abundantly clear" that Gonzalez Urrutia won, the US spokesman said.

When asked about statements made by foreign leaders, Maduro said: "We're not going to conduct diplomacy at microphones. Every president, every country knows how to manage domestic affairs."

Machado, who was barred from seeking election by Maduro-friendly state institutions, told a virtual press conference Thursday that Venezuelans had voted "in very adverse conditions where there was fraud and we still managed to win."

The country's CNE electoral council proclaimed Maduro the winner of a third, six-year term, giving him 52 percent of votes cast but without providing a detailed breakdown of the results.

The opposition says polling station-level results show Gonzalez Urrutia won easily.

Gonzalez Urrutia and Machado have been in hiding since the president accused them of seeking to foment a "coup d'etat" and called for the pair to be jailed.

Maduro's victory claim has been rejected by the United States, European Union and several Latin American countries.

The Organisation of American States will meet Friday at Washington's request to consider a resolution that would call on the CNE to publish detailed election results and allow independent verification of that data.

Anti-Maduro protests have claimed 25 lives so far, with dozens injured and more than 2,400 arrested.

Maduro has previously rejected the possibility of new elections and asked the country's highest court, also viewed as loyal to him, to certify the outcome.

Meanwhile, Venezuela's legislature on Thursday approved a law to regulate the registration and funding of NGOs described by Maduro's regime as a "facade for the financing of terrorist actions."

The law is one of several under consideration in the regime-friendly National Assembly that critics say are meant to criminalise Maduro's opponents.

The vast majority of the 277 lawmakers in the single-chamber National Assembly are loyal to Maduro, who had warned of a "bloodbath" if he lost his reelection bid.

Rights activists in Venezuela on Thursday raised the alarm over the NGO law, which they said would "deepen the persecution" of Maduro critics.

Since coming to power in 2013, Maduro has presided over an economic collapse that has seen more than seven million Venezuelans flee the country as GDP plunged 80 percent in a decade.

His previous reelection, in 2018, was also rejected as a sham by dozens of countries.

Indian Medics Call for Nationwide Shutdown

MUMBAI (Dispatches) - Anger over the brutal rape and murder of a doctor in eastern India showed no signs of dying down on Friday, as medics called for the largest shutdown of hospital services in recent times, and political parties geared up for protests.

A 31-year-old trainee doctor was raped and murdered last week inside a medical college in the eastern city of Kolkata where she worked, triggering nationwide protests among doctors and drawing parallels to the notorious gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old student on a moving bus in New Delhi in 2012. Late on Thursday, the Indian Medical Association, the country's largest grouping of medics, said it would implement a nationwide shutdown of most departments, except essential services, for 24 hours from Saturday morning, the largest such strike in at least a decade.

"Doctors, especially women are vulnerable to violence because of the nature of the profession. It is for the authorities to provide for the safety of doctors inside hospitals and campuses," the IMA said in a statement issued on X late on Thursday night. Political parties, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which is in opposition in West Bengal, of which Kolkata is capital, said they will hold protests in the city on Friday.

Bollywood actors, other celebrities and politicians have voiced shock at the crime, calling for stricter punishments for perpetrators of crimes against women. A police volunteer who worked at the hospital has been arrested and charged with the crime.

Doctors say the circumstances of the rape point to the vulnerability of medics left without proper protection and facilities.

The government brought in sweeping changes to the criminal justice system, including tougher sentences, after the Delhi gang-rape, but campaigners say little has changed despite the tougher laws.

Ukraine Racks Up Gains With Russia Incursion

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine has chalked up a string of victories more than a week since blindsiding Russia with a lightning cross-border assault, but the risks are piling up as its troops make plans to hold territory and Russia recovers its footing.

Ukraine poured thousands of troops into the western Russian region of Kursk last week, pulling down Russian flags in towns seized by its soldiers and wresting the war initiative from Moscow for the first time in months.

On Wednesday, officials in Kyiv said Ukraine would use seized Russian territory as a "buffer zone" to shield its north from Russian strikes. Oleksandr Syrskyi, head of the Ukrainian armed forces, said on Thursday that Kyiv had set up a military commandant's office in the occupied part of Kursk, suggesting ambitions to dig in.

The occupied area exceeds 1,150 sq km, Syrskyi said.

Ukraine's goals in Kursk include distracting Russian forces from the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas, where Russia has made steady advances for months and which it is seeking to take in its entirety, former Ukrainian defence minister Andriy Zagorodnyuk said in an interview.

There is, however, no sign of that happening for now.

Apart from a reputational blow to President Vladimir Putin, the biggest invasion of Russia since World War Two has destroyed Russian forces, captured soldiers who can be traded and created a sore on Russia's flank, said Polish military analyst Konrad Muzyka.

The Russian defense ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Ukraine's defense ministry referred questions to the armed forces, which did not immediately respond.

Russian officials have said the Ukrainian attack on Russian territory is a "terrorist invasion" and that civilian infrastructure was targeted, which Ukraine denies.

Putin said that Russia will deliver a "worthy response" to the attack but that the immediate task is to eject all Ukrainian troops from Russian territory.

Ukraine, which has not said how long it might remain, was "not interested" in permanently taking Russian land, a foreign ministry spokesperson said this week. Putin has said Ukraine wants the territory as a bargaining chip in eventual peace talks.

Serhiy Zgurets, a Kyiv-based military analyst, predicted Ukraine would seek to retain control of the land between the



towns of Rylsk, Korenevoye and Sudzha and the border, giving it control of a roughly 20-km-wide strip of Russian territory.

The area, he said, could be defended by a small force using long-range artillery systems and air defenses.

"This line is not difficult to defend, given there are few roads and a large number of rivers," Zgurets said, adding that the area could be easily supplied from the Ukrainian region of Sumy across the border.

He said he didn't expect troops to press towards the Russian regional capital of Kursk, something that could expose them to attacks from the flanks.

Muzyka was more circumspect, warning that trying to hold a swathe of Russian land could open up Ukrainian forces to potentially heavy losses, pointing to manpower problems that have dogged Ukraine for months in its war with a much larger foe.

The counter-invasion was "a massive gamble" that in the short term was paying off, Muzyka said. "But there may soon come a time when costs associated with the attack in the Kursk region will outweigh the benefits, especially given the steady pace of Russian advances in the Donetsk region," he said.

After a shambolic response to the early days of Ukraine's assault that saw tanks and Western-supplied armoured vehicles among convoys that carried troops across the border, Russia finally appears to have slowed the advances. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said forces had advanced a few kilometres on Wednesday.

A senior Russian commander said on Thursday that Ukrainian forces had been pushed out of one village in Russia's border region but that Kyiv's forces were still probing along the front.

Satellite images from Planet Lab and Maxar showed multiple, apparently new, Russian-built trenches further from the border in Kursk region.

Russia has so far relied on military units from near Kursk to try to push back the Ukrainian forces, said Pasi Paronen, an analyst with Finland's Black Bird Group, which studies publicly available footage from the Russia-Ukraine war.

By bringing the war to Russia, Zelenskyy faces the risk of weakening Kyiv's defences along the front in Ukraine while Russia has already sent in thousands of reserves in a bid to expel the Ukrainian soldiers.

Paetongtarn Elected Thailand's Youngest PM

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand's parliament elected political neophyte Paetongtarn Shinawatra as its youngest prime minister on Friday, only a day after she was thrust into the spotlight amid an unrelenting power struggle between the country's warring elites.

The 37-year-old daughter of divisive political heavyweight Thaksin Shinawatra sailed through a house vote and now faces a baptism of fire, just two days after ally Srettha Thavisin was dismissed as premier by a judiciary central to Thailand's two decades of intermittent turmoil.

At stake for Paetongtarn could be the legacy and political future of the billionaire Shinawatra family, whose once unstoppable populist juggernaut suffered its first election defeat in over two decades last year, and had to do a deal with its bitter enemies in the military to form a government.

Paetongtarn has never served in government and will become Thailand's second female prime minister and the third Shinawatra to take the top job after aunt Yingluck Shinawatra, and 75-year-old father Thaksin, the country's most influential and polarising politician.

Paetongtarn won with 319 votes, or nearly two-thirds of the house. She was not present in parliament and watched the vote from Pheu Thai's headquarters.

She will immediately face challenges on multiple fronts, with the economy floundering and the popularity of her Pheu Thai Party dwindling, having yet to deliver on its flagship cash handout programme worth 500 billion baht (\$14.25 billion).

The fall of Srettha after less than a year in office will be a stark reminder of the kind of hostility Paetongtarn could face, with Thailand trapped in a tumultuous cycle of coups and court rulings that have disbanded political parties and toppled multiple governments and prime ministers.

The Shinawatras and their business allies have borne the brunt of the crisis, which pits parties with mass appeal against a powerful nexus of conservatives, old money families and royalist generals with deep connections in key institutions.

Nine days ago, the same court that dismissed Srettha over a cabinet appointment also dissolved the anti-establishment Move Forward Party - the 2023 election winner - over a campaign to amend a law against insulting the crown, which it said risked undermining the constitutional monarchy. It has since formed a new opposition party.

The upheaval in the past few days also indicates a breakdown in a fragile trust struck between Thaksin and his rivals in the establishment and military old guard, which had enabled the tycoon's dramatic return from 15 years of self-exile in 2023 and ally Srettha to become premier the same day.

The decision to put Paetongtarn in play at such a critical juncture has surprised many analysts, who had expected Thaksin to delay his dynasty and avoid exposing Paetongtarn to the type of battles that led to the downfall of himself and sister Yingluck, who both fled overseas to avoid jail after their governments were ousted by the military.





Mbappe Scores on Debut as Real Beat Atalanta 2-0 in Super Cup

WARSAW (Dispatches) - France striker Kylian Mbappe marked his Real Madrid debut with a clinical goal as the European champions outclassed Atalanta 2-0 to win the Super Cup.

Uruguayan Federico Valverde put the European champions ahead after 59 minutes from close range and Mbappe fired the ball into the top corner from Jude Bellingham's pass to double the advantage nine minutes later.

Real clinched a record sixth Super Cup crown to move ahead of Barcelona and AC Milan who have each won the annual match between the Champions League and Europa League winners five times.

"It was a very difficult game," Real manager Carlo Ancelotti told a press conference. "The second half was much better, we had more space in front and we showed our qualities. In the first half, however, we struggled a lot. Atalanta played really well defensively, and we had difficulty in finding space."

Mbappe, who joined Real in June from Paris St Germain, could have opened the scoring in the 15th minute but his first-time attempt was blocked by the Atalanta defence.

Italy's Atalanta, without injured striker Gianluca Scamacca and midfielder Teun Koopmeiners, showed no fear against their illustrious opponents as they played in their first Super Cup.

After soaking up Real's initial pressure, Gian Piero Gasperini's side grew increasingly confident and Marten de Roon's deflected shot crashed against the bar.

Atalanta continued to make chances, Ederson shooting just wide from distance before Real keeper Thibaut Courtois saved Ademola Lookman's strike.

Rodrygo missed an excellent chance for Real in first-half stoppage time, sending a low pass from Vinicius Jr. against the bar.

Atalanta continued to press after the break and Mario Pasalic tested Courtois with a header which the Belgian goalkeeper brilliantly denied with his finger tips.

Real broke the deadlock when Valverde converted a precise pass from Vinicius.

They could have doubled their lead through Vinicius following a fine counter-attack and Bellingham wasted two good chances before he set up Mbappe for Real's second, cutting the ball back for the Frenchman to provide a neat finish.

The 25-year-old, who won seven Ligue 1 titles with PSG and Monaco but had never previously won a European club competition, was substituted seven minutes from time.

"Real Madrid are undoubtedly strong. They deserved to win at the end of the game because they opened up, they then had the situations to score an extra goal," Gasperini said.

"As a team we lacked the cynicism of the finals... We had the feeling that with a bit of cynicism, at a certain point, it was even within our reach."

Mbappe eventually delivered it with a lethal finish after Bellingham, named player of the match, kept an attack alive and spotted the Frenchman's clever movement.

The 25-year-old striker was given an ovation by Madrid's fans after Ancelotti brought him off in the 83rd minute, likely the first of many.

Mbappe said that he expected to improve in the weeks ahead, with Madrid's La Liga campaign starting on Saturday against Real Mallorca.

"I am sure we will get better and me first of all — but today is a positive step," added the striker. Rodrygo said Ancelotti had told the forwards to shift their positions frequently, something evident in the second half.

Ajax Edge Panathinaikos in Record-Breaking 34-Penalty Shootout Thriller



AMSTERDAM (Dispatches) - It took Ajax 34 penalties to beat Panathinaikos 13-12 in a marathon shootout on Thursday, setting a UEFA competition record after their Europa League third qualifying round tie ended 1-1 over two legs and extra time.

Ajax, who won 1-0 at Panathinaikos last week, conceded in the 89th minute in Amsterdam, leading to the shootout that broke the previous record of 32 attempts at the European U-21 Championship semi-final in 2007 where Netherlands beat England 13-12.

The world record for the longest shootout was set in May when Israeli third-tier clubs SC Dimona and Shimshon Tel Aviv took 56 penalties to resolve their semi-final promotion playoff tie.

Ajax keeper Remko Pasveer made five saves and scored on his own attempt to help the hosts win the shootout as Dutch international Brian Brobbey missed two penalties.

"Five is quite a lot, yes. I save a penalty every now and then, but I don't think you often experience something as crazy as this," Pasveer said.

"Every time I thought we would do it. Brobbey behind the ball, we will do it. But he missed, while he always scores during training."

Defender Anton Gaaei ultimately delivered the winning penalty for Ajax. The Eredivisie club will now face Polish side Jagiellonia Bialystok in the playoff round later this month.

Gauff Upset in WTA Cincinnati Opener; De Minaur Fit to Play

CINCINNATI (Dispatches) - Defending champion Coco Gauff was upset 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 by Yulia Putintseva in her opening match at the WTA Cincinnati Open on Thursday.

World number two Gauff, who carried the flag for the US Olympic team in Paris, had beaten her Kazakh opponent in all three previous meetings.

Gauff, who won last year's US Open for her first Grand Slam title, won at Cincinnati last year, becoming the event's youngest champion at age 19.

Her next match is set to be in defending her title at the US Open, which starts on August 26.

Meanwhile Alex de Minaur said he will play in this month's US Open, weeks after withdrawing from the Paris Olympics due to a hip injury.

De Minaur pulled out of his Wimbledon quarter-final against Novak Djokovic last month after sustaining a cartilage tear in his hip in the fourth round.

"Been working hard trying to recover from my injury," De Minaur, 25, wrote on Instagram on Wednesday.

"It's been very tough missing tournaments and excited to say I'll be playing US open. Thanks to all the support I've gotten, it's definitely helped me through these tough times."

The US Open is set to kick off its 144th edition in New York on Aug. 26.

Meanwhile former champions Naomi Osaka, Bianca Andreescu and Stan Wawrinka have received singles main draw wildcards into the U.S. Open, the United States Tennis Association said.

Japan's Osaka, who counts the 2018 and 2020 U.S. Opens among her four Grand Slam titles, returned to competition in January after the birth of her daughter and has advanced to the third round or better at four WTA 1000 events this season.

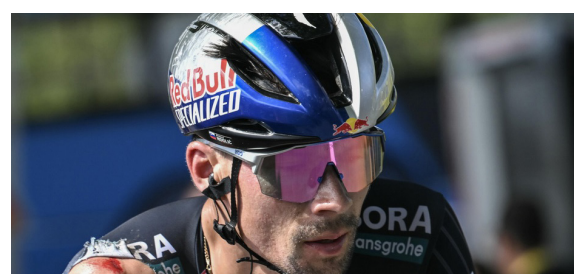
Canada's Andreescu, the 2019 U.S. Open champion, returned to action this year after missing nine months due to a back injury and reached the French Open third round in her first event back.

For Swiss Wawrinka, who won the most recent of his three Grand Slam titles at the 2016 U.S. Open, the wildcard allows him to make his 72nd main draw appearance in one of the game's four blue-riband events, which puts him fifth on the all-time list.

Austrian Dominic Thiem, the 2020 U.S. Open champion who announced this year that he will retire following the 2024 season due to a wrist injury, was also given a wildcard.



Kuss, Roglic to Battle for Wide Open Vuelta a Espana



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - The gruelling Vuelta a Espana begins today (Saturday) with Sepp Kuss aiming to defend his crown while veteran Primoz Roglic hopes to secure a joint-record fourth victory in the Spanish race.

With star trio Tadej Pogacar, Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel not competing this year, several other cyclists are eyeing the chance to claim a Grand Tour triumph.

American rider Kuss has endured a tough season after competing in all three Grand Tours last year.

Kuss withdrew from the Tour de France in June after struggling with Covid-related fitness issues, but won the Vuelta a Burgos last week to gear up for his Spanish tour defence.

"I quickly got over the disappointment of missing the Tour, but it was definitely a letdown... luckily, I was able to focus on the Vuelta afterwards," said Kuss, who lives in Andorra and enjoys some 'home' support.

"I definitely don't see myself as the top favourite for the overall victory. I'm ready to lead the team in the Vuelta, but I don't feel any pressure."

"Hopefully, I can grow into the race and quickly find a good rhythm."

Wout Van Aert is also riding for Visma in the Vuelta for the first time, aiming to claim stage wins as well as supporting teammate Kuss.

While Kuss started last year's Vuelta set to play second fiddle to Visma team-mates Vingegaard and Roglic, now of German team Bora-Hansgrohe, the 29-year-old took the lead in stage eight never relinquished it.

It completed a remarkable treble of Grand Tour wins for the Dutch team after Roglic won last year's Giro d'Italia and Vingegaard was crowned Tour de France champion.

This year Pogacar's Giro and Tour triumphs mean UAE Team Emirates can replicate that success if they emerge victorious in Spain.

Despite Pogacar's absence they boast a powerful team led by Adam Yates and Joao Almeida, and 20-year-old Mexican rider Isaac del Toro will make his Grand Tour debut, but Spaniard Juan Ayuso is not competing.

Del Toro triumphed at the Vuelta a Asturias in April in a superb first year with UAE.

La Vuelta departs from Almeida's native Portugal with a 12 kilometre individual time trial.

Manchester United Not Ready for Season Opener

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Erik ten Hag will have newcomers Matthijs de Ligt and Noussair Mazraoui available for the season opener just days after they signed from Bayern Munich, but the manager lamented that his team is not quite ready for the new Premier League campaign.

United kick off their season against Fulham at Old Trafford but have had little time to integrate the new players, Ten Hag said.

"It's true, it's not the pre-season where in five to six weeks you work on a team, it's very complicated," the Dutchman said at a press conference on Thursday.

"The USA tour squad, and then we added the players (who had been at) Euros and Copa America and now new signings, and we have to make a team from it."

"That team is not ready, but the league starts and more managers have this problem. Still, we have some room, have some principles and we have to make a start. We can't hide, we have to deal with it."

Harry Maguire will feature in Friday's squad after the defender missed England's Euro 2024 campaign due to his recovery from



injury.

But left back Luke Shaw will not be available. Shaw played in England's final three games at Euro 2024 after battling a troublesome hamstring injury that resulted in him missing most of last season.

"He will return in the short term, it doesn't take long. We are looking forward, of course, for Luke Shaw. A very important player for our team so we want to get him back as soon as possible but we can't force this process."

Ten Hag said Mazraoui, Lisandro Martinez and Diogo Dalot can all fill in at left back.

While there was plenty of speculation about Ten Hag's job last season as United finished eighth in the Premier League, the 54-year-old signed a new contract to stay at the club until 2026 after they upset Manchester City to win the FA Cup.

Ten Hag has high hopes for the team this season.

"We know our targets, we know our direction. Now we have to integrate new players where we think they can improve the team levels and to take it from there."