

The Iranian Judiciary Has Held a Second Court Hearing on a Complaint Brought Against the U.S. Government and Its Military Commanders for Their Support for Terror Groups in the West Asia Region

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani Has Said That the Islamic Republic Does Not Seek Conflict in the Region, Rather It Supports Peace and Stability and Works Towards Achieving That Goal

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Iran Warns Sworn Enemies



TEHRAN - The World Bank has analyzed the monetary policies of the Central Bank of Iran, stating: Despite a moderating trend, consumer price inflation remained above 40 percent for the fifth consecutive year in 2023. Since the announcement of changes in exchange rate subsidies in June 2022 and the subsequent rise in inflation, inflation has gradually decreased from 55.5 percent (year-over-year) in April 2023 to 31 percent (year-over-year) in May 2024. This trend has been supported by recent monetary tightening policies and the stabilization of the rial's value following some minor progress in negotiations with the United States and news regarding the unfreezing of funds abroad.

Overall and core inflation in 2023 reached 40.7 percent and 40.8 percent, respectively. High inflation is primarily attributed to food prices, which account for about one-third of the overall inflation rate, followed by housing costs. High inflation disproportionately impacts low-income households, as food and housing comprise about 80 percent of their consumption basket. Minor progress in nuclear negotiations and efforts to tighten monetary policy have contributed to this trend. Similarly, producer price inflation also decreased in 2023 to 32.6 percent, the lowest rate in the past five years.

The rial has experienced a period of relative stability, partly due to the reintroduction of a new preferential exchange rate for essential goods, although the parallel market remains influenced by expectations. Six months after the elimination of the subsidized exchange rate in May 2022 (initially pegged at 42,000 rials per dollar following the reimposition of US sanctions in 2018), the Central Bank introduced a new fixed rate (285,000 rials per dollar) for the import of essential goods in December 2022. The tendency to maintain a fixed exchange rate through direct market intervention, while keeping export and import markets at low levels, has widened the gap with the parallel (free market) exchange rate. The parallel market exchange rate continues to reflect supply and demand conditions and market sentiments, which, after months of relative stability, increased by 19.3 percent from January to May 2024 in line with rising geopolitical tensions and the upcoming US elec

Iran Warns Against Any New Adventurism by Zionists Against Lebanon



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry has strongly warned against any new adventurism by the Zionist regime against Lebanon under the pretext of the "Majdal Shams" incident in the occupied Golan Heights.

The spokesperson for the diplomatic apparatus, referring to Hezbollah's statement and the positions of some senior officials in Lebanon denying any involvement in the Majdal Shams attack, said: "The apartheid regime of Israel, after ten months of mass killings in the Gaza Strip and the massacre of Palestinian children and women, is seeking to divert public opinion and global attention from its extensive crimes in Palestine with a fabricated scenario."

Nasser Kanaani emphasized that the Zionist regime lacks the minimum moral authority to comment on and judge the incident in the Majdal Shams area, and the regime's claims against others will not be heard.

The spokesperson for our country's diplomatic apparatus considered supporting the stability and security of Lebanon and the region against the adventurism of the aggressive Zionist regime as the duty of the international community, especially the United Nations Security Council, and stressed: "Any foolish action by the Zionist regime can lead to the expansion of instability, insecurity, and the flames of war in the region, in which case the mentioned regime will be the definitive and main responsible party for the consequences and unforeseen reactions of such foolish behavior."

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommended to the US government to, instead of continuously arming the Zionist regime with weapons of mass destruction and praising this regime's criminal prime minister after ten months of continuous crimes against Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, fulfill its international and moral responsibility towards global peace and security and prevent the Zionist regime from engaging in new arson that will engulf the Zionists themselves.



Leader Formally Endorses Pezeshkian as Iran's President

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has formally endorsed Masoud Pezeshkian as Iran's new president.

At a ceremony broadcast live on state television on Sunday, Ayatollah Khamenei gave his official approval for Pezeshkian, who emerged victorious in the second round of the presidential vote on July 5.

Iranian state and military officials, seminary and university professors, representatives of various guilds, a group of families of martyrs, and foreign ambassadors in Tehran attended the ceremony.

The Leader's decree, endorsing the mandate of President Pezeshkian, was read out at the event by the head of the leader's office.

In the decree, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "The fate-determining test of the presidential election ended with calmness and sobriety in difficult conditions thanks to the endeavors of people and officials, and the person chosen by the nation became ready to take on a great responsibility."

The Leader also expressed prayers and wishes for Pezeshkian's success, adding that the nation's vote and his endorsement will persist as long as the president follows his usual approach on the straight path of Islam and the Revolution.

The Supreme Leader stated: "One should not pay attention to the temptations of polarization; the sense of dissatisfaction in electoral debates should not continue."

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized on Sunday during the inauguration ceremony of the elected president: "The day of endorsement is the final page of the extensive and meaningful book that the dear Iranian nation and officials compiled through this highly motivated election, making it an enduring part of Iran's proud history."

He asserted: "We thank God that the fourteenth presidential election, despite the general atmosphere of sorrow due to the loss of our late martyred president Ayatollah Raisi, was conducted in the best possible manner, with calmness and safety. The ethical competition and interactions between the candidates and the elected president were commendable, especially post-election. This was a very significant test for the country, and thankfully, it was successfully completed, and the people will enjoy its sweet results."

The Leader of the Revolution stated: "I must acknowledge and thank Mr. Mokhber, the acting president, and the government for their significant role in managing the country over the past two months. They successfully led the country to a peaceful and well-spirited election, concluding it in the best possible way."

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized: "We, by the grace of God, have a democracy imbued with competition and integrity in our country."

In part of his remarks, the Supreme Leader added: "Democracy is the result of the people's uprising against the previous unfavorable conditions. The prominent feature of Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime was harsh dictatorship, oppression of the nation, and submission to foreign powers. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi resorted to the US and UK to overthrow a national government. The Islamic Revolution granted the people the power to intervene in the country's affairs."

Stating that the branches of the government should interact, and that meetings of the heads of branches are a good opportunity, he mentioned: "Priorities must be observed, and today, the priority is economic issues."

He added: "One should not pay attention to the temptations of polarization; the sense of dissatisfaction in electoral debates should not continue."

U.S.-Occupied Military Base in east Syria Comes Under Missile Attack

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - An illegal military facility housing U.S. occupation forces in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr has reportedly come under a fresh missile attack from nearby areas amid growing anti-US sentiments over Washington's support for the Israeli onslaught on Gaza.

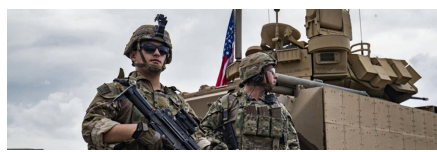
Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network, citing local sources, reported that several explosions were heard in the area close to the U.S.-controlled Conoco gas field early on Sunday after several projectiles struck the site.

There were no immediate reports about possible casualties or the extent of damage at the installation.

The sources added that U.S. military aircraft and helicopters flew over the eastern side of Dayr al-Zawr province and the area where the base is located after the missile attack.

The American aircraft also launched a number of flares in the sky over the Conoco gas field.

The missile strike is the third of its kind in 24 hours. Missile salvos had targeted the base twice during the early hours of Saturday.



The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of anti-terror fighters, usually claims responsibility for most of the retaliatory strikes on US military bases in Iraq and Syria.

It says the attacks are in solidarity with the Palestinians amid Israel's genocidal war against Gaza.

that has killed at least 39,258 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured over 90,589 others.

Israel launched the war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, after Hamas-led resistance groups waged the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in response to the Israeli regime's decades-long campaign of bloodletting and devastation against Palestinians.

However, more than nine months into the offensive, the Tel Aviv regime has failed to achieve its objectives in Gaza.

The U.S. remains Israel's most important ally and biggest supplier of arms. It has provided Israel with weapons and intelligence support during the Gaza war and blocked UN resolutions calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in the besieged Palestinian territory.

Germany's Closure of Islamic Center Political Move Aims to Serve Israel



TEHRAN - Iran's acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani says Germany's "political" move to shut down the Islamic Center Hamburg (IZH) and its subsidiary organizations aims to serve the Israeli regime's interests.

In a phone conversation with Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Saturday, Bagheri Kani strongly condemned the German police's "illegal" move to ban the Islamic centers in the European country, including the IZH, saying it runs counter to human rights principles.

"The closure of Islamic centers in Germany is a completely political action in line with Islamophobia and serving the interests of the Zionist regime. The German government must accept its consequences," he added.

Germany's Interior Ministry said on Wednesday it had "banned the Hamburg Islamic Centre and its affiliated organizations throughout Germany to date, as it is an Islamist extremist organization pursuing anti-constitutional objectives."

The center is accused of supporting Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement, which Berlin designates as a "terrorist" organization, as well as promoting "aggressive anti-Semitism" and spreading "authoritarian, theocratic rule."

As part of the ban, the ministry said it will also close four Shia mosques, including Hamburg's Blue Mosque, one of Germany's oldest mosques.

The German foreign minister, for her part, said Islamic centers in Germany can pursue their rights through legal mechanisms.

Baerbock stressed the importance of solving the differences and expressed hope that the existing obstacles in mutual relations will be removed through dialogue and diplomatic channels.

In a post on his X account on Thursday, Bagheri Kani said the decision by German judicial and law enforcement authorities on the inspection of premises affiliated to IZH is an unjustified move and flouts all principles of freedom of religion and thought.

He added that the measure is a gift to extremists, violence mongers and advocates of terrorism.

Iran to Pursue Dual-Track Policy of Neutralizing, Lifting Sanctions



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani says Tehran should pursue the policy of neutralizing and lifting sanctions at the same time.

In an interview on Saturday, Bagheri Kani said Iranian authorities should use productive experience to improve the situation in the next steps.

"We have two ways in the face of sanctions. One is the neutralization of sanctions, which aims to reduce dependence on foreign sides," he added.

He noted that the other approach is based on the lifting of sanctions through negotiations and consensus with foreign parties.

"This means reaching agreements that are within the framework of our national interests," the top Iranian diplomat emphasized.

Bagheri Kani described the 2015 nuclear deal - formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - as a multilateral mechanism aimed at lifting sanctions.

The initiative was correct in principle and it seems to be unlikely that someone would oppose it, he said.

Bagheri Kani added that the main issue is whether the JCPOA has been successful in securing Iran's interests or not.

Despite the ongoing hiatus in the negotiations to revive the JCPOA and remove sanctions, Iran has continued its progress in various fields, he pointed out. The JCPOA was a multilateral international agreement signed between Iran and five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany in 2015, which required Iran to scale back some of its nuclear activities in return for the lifting of cruel sanctions imposed on the country, especially by the United States.

IRAN NEWS



Iran's Envoy Meets Putin Economic Advisor

MOSCOW (IP) - The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Moscow met and consulted with the economic adviser of the Russian president Anton Kobyakov. Kazem Jalali, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Moscow, the capital of the Russian Federation, met and discussed with Anton Kobyakov, the economic adviser to the president of the Russian Federation.

In this meeting, the two sides discussed the process of developing economic cooperation between the two countries, including the projects on the agenda, the meeting of the presidents of BRICS member states this year in the city of Kazan of the Russian Republic of Tatarstan, regional and international economic cooperation, Iran's role in peace and stability in region, Russia's participation in the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway in the North-South Corridor and other related issues.

13th Gov't Attracts \$2.2b More Than Entire Rouhani Administration



TEHRAN - While the Hassan Rouhani administration managed to attract only \$9.6 billion in foreign investment over its 8 years in office, the 13th government has succeeded in bringing approximately \$12 billion in foreign capital into the country within just 3 years by restructuring. One of the significant achievements of the 13th government, which sets a record compared to the 11th and 12th governments, is attracting foreign investment for development projects. Previously, foreign investments were primarily concentrated in the oil and gas sectors, with little investment in industrial and infrastructure sectors. However, the 13th government has expanded investment demand in Iran to many industrial and infrastructure sectors as well as the energy sector (oil and gas). During the 8 years of Hassan Rouhani's administration, from 2013 to the end of 2020, the total approved and valid foreign investment in Iran was \$9.7 billion. In contrast, from the beginning of the 13th government until the end of June 2024, \$11.926 billion in foreign investment has been attracted.

Thus, in less than 3 years, the 13th government has attracted \$2.2 billion more in approved and valid (actual) foreign investment in Iran than the entire 8 years of the 11th and 12th governments.

Notably, the over \$5.5 billion in foreign investment in 2023 is unprecedented in the past 16 years and has broken a 16-year record.

According to the Ministry of Economy (Organization for Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran), out of the approximately \$12 billion in foreign investment during the 13th government, only \$2.1 billion (specifically \$2.148 billion) came from Chinese individuals and entities, with the remainder coming from other countries.

By the end of the 11th government (2017), based on a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Iran ranked 45th among countries in attracting foreign investment. However, in the final year of the 12th government (2020), Iran experienced a 27-place drop in this index, falling to 72nd place among the countries reviewed by UNCTAD in 2020.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 reduced investment in many countries worldwide, in the same year, the United Arab Emirates attracted \$20 billion, Turkey \$7.9 billion, and Saudi Arabia \$5.5 billion in foreign investment.



Transit of 4.6m Tons of Goods by Railways

TEHRAN - Seyyed Miad Salehi, Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, said today, Saturday, July 28, during the inauguration of the final section of the second Ahvaz-Andimeshk railway line between Bamdeh and Ahvaz, which was opened by order of the acting president: From 2021 to 2024, with the efforts made by this government, we managed to increase the railway budget annually by 50%, addressing some of the existing backlogs.

Salehi mentioned the renewal of freight locomotives, stating that the number of freight locomotives increased from 63 to 93 over the 33 months of the 13th government, indicating a significant increase in this area.

Regarding the construction and operation of railway lines during the 13th government, the CEO said: During the 33 months of the 13th government, 883 kilometers of railway lines have been put into operation, including 320 kilometers of the second line, 160 kilometers connecting major companies to the railway lines, and 380 kilometers of the first railway lines.

He continued: In the passenger sector, the record for the number of passengers transported was broken twice, with a new record set in 2023 by transporting over 31 million passengers by rail.

Salehi also explained the railway incidents: The number of railway accidents in 2023 reached the lowest in recent years.

Regarding rail transit, the CEO stated: 4.6 million tons of goods were transported by rail during the 13th government, marking a 70% increase compared to the same period

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

Selling Afghan Carpets as Iranian Carpets

TEHRAN - The head of the Carpet, Art, and Handicrafts Commission of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, referring to the easy and illegal import of Afghan carpets into Iran, said: "In some cases, these carpets are sold as Iranian carpets, which is another violation. The reason is the attractiveness of Afghan carpets due to their low price."

Morteza Haji-Aghamiri, head of the Carpet, Art, and Handicrafts Commission of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, in an interview with Eghtesad Online, regarding the smuggling of Afghan carpets into Iran, said: "What is more concerning than the presence of Afghan carpets in the domestic market is their increasing trend. This growth poses a serious threat to our domestic market and employment, which is reflected in the decline of our export statistics."

He added: "These carpets are smuggled in with ease. Naturally, they do not pay import duties, and since they are not high-quality carpets, they are offered to customers at a lower price than Iranian carpets, which not only disrupts the market but also harms domestic production."

Haji-Aghamiri continued: "The fact that an Afghan carpet producer can commit to delivering any number of carpets in Tehran within 48 hours is a worrying trend. Consider that even for commercial shipments, it would not reach its destination in 48 hours, yet these individuals make such claims about illegal carpet imports."

The head of the Carpet, Art, and Handicrafts Commission of Iran's Chamber of Commerce explained: "One of the actions taken in recent years by the Carpet Exporters Union and the Chamber of Commerce at various exhibitions has been to confront those who bring Afghan carpets to the carpet exhibitions in Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan and prevent them from selling."

Haji-Aghamiri stated: "In recent years, American traders have invested in Afghanistan and developed carpet weaving in that country. In the past three years, we have also seen an increase in the number of smuggled Afghan carpets in Iran."

A member of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce's Board of Representatives, stating that importing carpets from the eastern borders of the country is very easy, said: "Some carpets were also imported from Pakistan, but that trend did not continue. Apparently, some Afghan carpets change after being washed once, and others wear out within a year or two of use, making them not durable, and buyers waste their money."

He said: "In some cases, Afghan carpets are sold as Iranian carpets, which is another violation. The reason is the attractiveness of Afghan carpets due to their low price."

Haji-Aghamiri mentioned: "Afghan carpets differ in both design and weaving technique from Iranian carpets, and this can be identified by experts, but it is not recognizable to ordinary people. We need to provide resources to educate and inform people about what constitutes a good carpet and what features Iranian carpets have that Afghan and Indian carpets do not."

The head of the Carpet, Art, and Handicrafts Commission of Iran's Chamber of Commerce said: "When we are under sanctions, those working in the carpet sector will fulfill their needs from other sources. As a result, right after the sanctions, India captured the US market in our absence."

He said that government and private sector support can correct this trend. Agencies such as customs and the Anti-Trafficking Headquarters should intervene to prevent the easy smuggling of goods, including carpets, which are in a vulnerable situation.

A member of the Hand-Woven Carpet Exporters Union regarding the latest status of hand-woven carpet exports said: "According to the latest report from the National Carpet Center, positive changes occurred in the first two months of the year, with about \$7 million worth of carpets exported, showing slight growth compared to the same period last year. I think by the end of the year, we will see the same \$40 million in exports as last year, without significant fluctuations."

Most Significant Economic Exchanges Between Fars and Iraq in Medical and Tourism Sectors



TEHRAN - Secretary-General of the Fars Chamber of Commerce Ali Avazpour stated in a meeting on the development of trade interactions with Iraq, held as a webinar at the Fars Chamber of Commerce: "For years, traders from Fars Province have had a consistent presence in the Iraqi market, and our trade and economic relations with this country are positive. However, despite all efforts, we are not satisfied with the volume and extent of these interactions."

He mentioned that there are many commonalities between Fars Province and Iraq for expanding communications, adding: "Fars is a leading province in Iran in agriculture, industry and mining, oil and gas, petrochemicals, technical and engineering services, food industries, and tourism. Each of these sectors in Fars has unique capacities that can serve as a basis for increasing bilateral interactions."

Avazpour noted: "The most significant economic exchanges between Fars and Iraq are in the medical and tourism sectors. We expect that in addition to these areas, the export and import in other economic sectors will also be considered by traders and businessmen from both sides."

The Secretary-General of the Fars Chamber of Commerce emphasized that our traders need to be specialized and up-to-date for a more effective presence in the Iraqi market, adding: "The economic capacities of both Fars Province and Iraq indicate that we can have good interactions in other areas as well." In continuation of the session, Farzad Pilten, the Special Trade Representative of the Iran Trade Promotion Organization in Iraq, said: "Iraq is one of the destination countries for Iranian goods, and in many sectors, it is considered a large market for our country's products.

However, our export balance with this country is not yet actualized and there is much room for improvement."

He added: "Iran's trade capacity with Iraq is very high, but our products face competition in this market. This requires our traders to have an intelligent presence in the Iraqi market."

Pilten stated: "A notable point in trade with Iraq is that in addition to Iran's old competitors in this market, some Arab countries alongside European countries are also entering the market as new competitors. This issue, especially in some export sectors, could become a challenge for our country."

He added: "An important point regarding Iranian traders' competitors in the Iraqi market is that traders from other countries benefit from government support and the absence of sanction limitations, which makes the trade path smoother for them compared to our traders." Pilten emphasized that our private sector should have planning for the development of trade exchanges with Iraq, continuing: "To increase trade and economic exchanges with Iraq, it is necessary to move towards balancing bilateral trade." In this session, specialized discussions were held regarding the presence of Iranian goods in the Iraqi market. Discussions included the capabilities of the province for exports to Iraq, the main export development programs of the year by the Special Trade Representative of the Iran Trade Promotion Organization in Iraq, consulting and guiding traders and economic activists in establishing connections with Iraqi traders, and the dispatch and reception of trade delegations between Iraq and Fars Province in a question-and-answer format.

Presence of the Largest Russian Bank in Tehran



TEHRAN - The presence of Russia's largest bank at a financial event has been confirmed, with VTB Bank being the first Russian bank to establish a representative office in Tehran. Senior managers from VTB will attend the event, scheduled from August 10 to 13, to identify and collaborate with Iranian stock market industry leaders, banks, and commercial insurance companies.

VTB Bank, with assets valued at \$290 billion in 2022, is recognized as the second-largest bank in Russia. For comparison, the total assets of all Iranian banks in 2023 were approximately \$265 billion, making VTB's assets alone about 10% greater than the entire Iranian banking system. In recent months, VTB has expanded its correspondent relationships with Iranian banks and the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and is now prepared to conduct banking operations and services. With 22 independent banks and 4 branches outside of Russia, VTB is ready to offer services in the CIS, Africa, Latin America, and Asia, with its Shanghai and New Delhi branches being among the most significant. Utilizing the bank's capabilities, especially in essential goods, banking services such as Letters of Credit (LC), Bank Guarantees (BG), and other payment methods like CAD can be leveraged. The mission of VTB's office in Tehran is to act as a banking intermediary for Iranian banks to the Russian banking system via VTB and vice versa. This includes ensuring confidence among Iranian and Russian traders regarding collaborations and expanding economic activities, as well as providing fast and secure settlement of commercial accounts. The VTB representative office primarily functions as a banking liaison and messenger, enhancing service delivery to traders and bank customers on both sides. Additionally, the VTB office aims to identify credit and investment opportunities in Iran and Russia to foster cooperation between the two countries' public and private sectors.

Iran Concerned About Development Activities of Upstream Countries on the Aras River



TEHRAN - Isa Bozorgzadeh discussed the water challenges in the Aras River basin and how to interact with neighboring countries, particularly Turkey, in this regard. He stated, "The Aras is one of the significant border rivers of our country, forming a substantial part of our border. Its water resources are supplied by four countries: Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan, and Iran. However, a large volume of water is sourced from upstream countries, specifically Armenia and Turkey, due to their higher elevations and greater rainfall."

He added, "We have consistently requested that these countries, which naturally supply the Aras's water, sit together to discuss and decide the fate of this river. We have treaties with Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Nakhchivan, as well as with the former Soviet Union, to split the water 50-50. This agreement has been respected and precisely implemented by the successor states after the Soviet Union's collapse. Therefore, we have fair and optimal conditions for water sharing with Armenia and Azerbaijan. We inaugurated the MirMugan dam on the Aras over half a century ago, which we are jointly operating, and we have traditional rights."

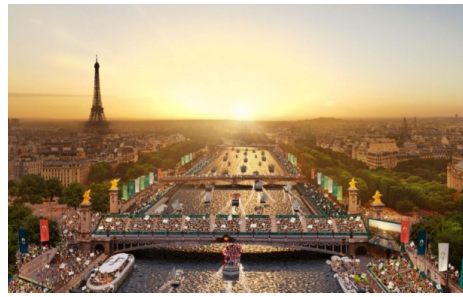
The spokesperson for the water industry said, "We believe that the four countries should discuss water utilization and allocation through diplomatic channels. We have repeatedly mentioned this in joint meetings and expect cooperation from the upstream countries."

He emphasized, "We are concerned about the extensive developmental actions of upstream countries and their impact on the three provinces of West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, and Ardabil. We expect that the extent and manner of development in upstream countries consider the interests of our people in these three provinces, as well as the interests of the people in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan, and downstream parts of Armenia."

Bozorgzadeh concluded, "The spirit of neighborliness, friendship, and brotherhood in the region necessitates that our request be heeded. We have held bilateral meetings and, on the 50th anniversary of the Aras's joint exploitation with the Republic of Azerbaijan, exchanged minutes with the Azerbaijani side to negotiate with upstream countries so that upstream development considers these concerns."

France Temporarily Shuts Paris Olympic Media Center for Explosion Risk

PARIS (Dispatches) - French police temporarily closed the area around the media center Saturday that is serving journalists covering the Paris Olympic Games because of an "explosion risk". Journalists and citizens were evacuated and the cause of the risk was not disclosed, Anadolu Agency reported. Police later reopened the area to pedestrian traffic and access to and from the media centre returned to normal. Journalists and citizens were evacuated and the cause of the risk was not disclosed, Anadolu Agency reported. Police later reopened the area to pedestrian traffic and access to and from the media center returned to normal. France increased security measures to prevent a new sabotage on train lines. French Transport Minister Patrice Vergriete told the LCI channel that after the arson attacks Friday, security and surveillance of the railway network have been significantly strengthened. Vergriete noted that more than 1,000 employees and 250 security personnel have been deployed to monitor the railway network, and gendarmerie helicopters and 50 drones have been mobilised. He indicated that officials anticipate disruptions to train services Sunday and operations are expected to return to normal starting Saturday.



Trump Tells Christians They Won't Have to Vote After This Election



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump told Christians that if they vote for him this November, "in four years, you don't have to vote again. We'll have it fixed so good, you're not gonna have to vote."

It was not clear what the former president meant by his remarks, in an election campaign where his Democratic opponents accuse him of being a threat to democracy, and after his attempt to overturn his 2020 defeat to President Joe Biden, an effort that led to the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Trump was speaking at an event organized by the conservative group Turning Point Action in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Trump said: "Christians, get out and vote, just this time. 'You won't have to do it anymore. Four more years, you know what, it will be fixed, it will be fine, you won't have to vote anymore, my beautiful Christians.'"

He added: "I love you Christians. I'm a Christian. I love you, get out, you gotta get out and vote. In four years, you don't have to vote again, we'll have it fixed so good you're not going to have to vote," Trump said.

Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung did not directly address Trump's remarks when asked to clarify them.

Cheung said Trump "was talking about uniting this country," and blamed "the divisive political environment" on the attempted assassination of Trump two weeks ago. Investigators have yet to give a motive for why the 20-year-old gunman opened fire on Trump.



North Korea Vows Total Destruction of Enemy on Korean War Anniversary

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea vowed to "totally destroy" its enemies in case of war when leader Kim Jong Un gives an order, state media KCNA reported on Sunday.

Senior military officials including Army Colonel Ri Un Ryong and Navy Lieutenant Commander Yu Kyong Song made the comments "out of surging hatred" towards the U.S. and South Korea at a meeting on Saturday attended by Kim to celebrate the 71st Korean War armistice anniversary, according to KCNA.

North Korea and the United States do not have diplomatic ties and talks over reducing tensions and denuclearising North Korea have been stalled since 2019. North Korea's state media recently said it doesn't expect that to change no matter who is next elected in the White House.

While accusing the U.S. and South Korea of "being hell-bent on provoking a nuclear war," the military officials vowed to strengthen war efficiency to stage an "overwhelming attack on the enemy anytime and without delay and totally destroy them once the respected Supreme Commander Kim Jong Un gives an order."

North Korea signed an armistice agreement with the United States and China on July 27, 1953 ending hostilities in the three-year war. U.S. generals signed the agreement representing the United Nations forces that backed South Korea.

North Korea calls July 27 "Victory Day" while South Korea does not mark the day with any major events.

Hostilities ended with a truce, not a treaty, meaning the two sides are still technically at war.



GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) - The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said an Israeli strike on a school killed 30 people Saturday, while a rocket fired from Lebanon killed 12 youngsters in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights. Israel's army said Hezbollah fired the rocket from Lebanon, hitting a football pitch in the Arab town of Majdal Shams and killing the youngsters, who were between 10 and 20 years old.

The initial toll reported was 11, but a 12th victim later died. Another 18 youths were wounded in the attack, said the emergency services. Rear Admiral Hagari said it was the deadliest attack on Israeli civilians since October 7, when Hamas militants attacked southern Israel sparking war in Gaza.

"Israel will not let this murderous attack go unanswered and Hezbollah will pay a heavy price for it, a price it has not paid before," said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to a statement from his office.

He later said he would hold a security cabinet meeting on his return to Israel from the United States.

A statement from the US National Security Council condemned what it described as a "horrific attack".

"Our support for Israel's security is iron-clad and unwavering against all Iranian backed terrorist groups, including Lebanese Hezbollah," said a spokesman. The European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement: "I strongly condemn this bloodbath." He called for an independent investigation and for all parties to exercise restraint to avoid escalation. Hezbollah had earlier claimed several attacks on Israeli military sites after an air raid on southern Lebanon killed four of its fighters. But it denied it was responsible for the deadly strike on Majdal Shams. "The Islamic Resistance has no connection to this incident," it said, referring to its military wing. The latest deadly exchanges between Lebanese Hamas ally Hezbollah and Israeli forces, which have traded cross-border fire since early October, have increased fears of a broader regional conflict. But Israeli military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said in a statement early Sunday: "The rocket fired by Hezbollah was a Falaq 1 Iranian rocket, carrying a 50-kg warhead. This is a model that is owned exclusively by Hezbollah, and tonight it caused the deaths of 12

young boys and girls."

The latest strike on a school in Gaza came after a days-long military operation further south that killed around 170, said emergency services there.

The health ministry reported "30 martyrs and more than 100 wounded" in the strike on Khadija school in the central Deir el-Balah area. Israel's military said Palestinian militants were using the compound as a "hiding place". The latest Gaza strike, which Israel said targeted "terrorists", was at least the eighth time since July 6 a school has been hit. The strikes that have killed more than 100 people, based on figures given by the health ministry and a hospital source. With most of the Gaza Strip's 2.4 million people displaced at least once during the war started by Hamas's October 7 attack, many have sought refuge in school buildings including the one hit on Saturday.

Further south, in the Khan Yunis city area, around 170 people have been killed "and hundreds wounded" in an Israeli operation since Monday, Gaza's civil defence agency said.

It issued the toll after the military warned of new operations in the Khan Yunis area, where troops had earlier recovered the bodies of five Israelis killed during the October 7 attack and held in Gaza since.

The United Nations said that by Thursday, more than 180,000 Palestinians had already fled fierce fighting there. Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defence agency, told AFP that many people had been displaced again on Saturday as the Israeli operation continued.

But with large parts of Khan Yunis "not suitable for living" and "no other options available", civilians have struggled to find safety, he said.

The evacuation orders and "intensified hostilities" have "significantly destabilised aid operations", the UN said, reporting "dire water, hygiene and sanitation conditions" in the Palestinian territory.

Khan Yunis was left devastated after heavy fighting early in the year but the military withdrew in April.

Orban Says Russia Stands to Gain as Irrational West Loses Power

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said Russia's leadership was "hyper rational" and that Ukraine would never be able to fulfil its hopes of becoming a member of the European Union or NATO.

Orban, a nationalist in power since 2010, made the comments during a speech in which he forecast a shift in global power away from the "irrational" West towards Asia and Russia.

"In the next long decades, maybe centuries, Asia will be the dominant centre of the world," Orban said, mentioning China, India, Pakistan and Indonesia as the world's future big powers.

"And we Westerners pushed the Russians into this bloc as well," he said in the televised speech before ethnic Hungarians at a festival in the town of Baile Tusnad in neighbouring Romania.

Orban, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency, has sharply differed from the rest of the bloc by seeking warmer ties with Beijing and Moscow, and he angered some EU leaders when he went on surprise visits to Kyiv, Moscow and Beijing this month for talks on the war in Ukraine.



He said that in contrast to the "weakness" of the West, Russia's position in world affairs was rational and predictable, saying the country had shown economic flexibility in adapting to Western sanctions since it invaded Crimea in 2014.

Orban, whose own government has passed a number of anti-LGBT measures, said Russia had gained clout in many parts of the world by cracking down on LGBTQ+ rights.

"The strongest international appeal of Russian soft power is its opposition to LGBTQ," he said.

He added that Ukraine would never become a member of the EU or NATO because "we Europeans do not have enough money for that".

"The EU needs to give up its identity as a political project and become an economic and defence project," Orban added.

The EU opened membership talks with Ukraine late last month, although a long and tough road lies ahead of the country before it can join the bloc.

A declaration at the end of the NATO summit this month said the alliance will support Ukraine on "its irreversible path" towards membership.

Venezuelans Go to Polls

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelans went to the polls on Sunday in the most consequential election in a quarter-century of socialist party rule, with President Nicolas Maduro confident of victory even as the opposition has attracted impassioned support and warned of possible irregularities. Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has been the star of the coalition campaign, even after a ban on holding public office forced her to pass the torch to candidate Edmundo Gonzalez, a 74-year-old ex-diplomat known for his calm demeanor. Gonzalez has won backing even from some former supporters of the ruling party, but the opposition and observers have questioned whether the vote will be fair, saying decisions by electoral authorities and the arrests of opposition staff are meant to create obstacles. Maduro - whose 2018 reelection is considered fraudulent by the United States, among others - has said the country has the world's most transparent electoral system and has warned of a "bloodbath" if he were to lose. People attending Maduro's closing rally in Caracas on Thursday spoke enthusiastically of his late mentor - long-time socialist President Hugo Chavez - and said Maduro, in power since Chavez' death in 2013, was continuing his predecessor's legacy of helping the poor. "Nicolas Maduro is building up the country and continuing the legacy of Commander Chavez," said Conde Miranda, 54, who traveled from

southern Ciudad Guayana to attend. Others alluded to a more challenging environment. "Maduro has done both good things and bad things, the problem is the people below him," said 30-year-old public employee Alejandro Goldteims. Maduro's government has presided over an economic collapse, the migration of about a third of the population, and a sharp deterioration in diplomatic relations, crowned by sanctions imposed by the United States, European Union and others which have crippled an already struggling oil industry. Maduro has said he will guarantee peace and economic growth, making Venezuela less dependent on oil income. But many Venezuelans are tired of high inflation and public service cuts. "There is a fatigue about this 25-year path, people don't see us moving ahead, the situation is worse all the time," said Angel Luna, a city councilor in the central state of Carabobo, after attending an opposition campaign event this month. "My pension doesn't stretch to anything at all," said Carmen Puente, 69, who is retired but sells candy to make ends meet. "Getting old in this country is a drama, it's very sad, there is no social security." The minimum wage is equivalent to \$3.50 per month, while basic food for a family of five is estimated to cost about \$500. Gonzalez and Machado, who have promised major changes and said a fresh start may motivate migrants to return, have urged people to hold

"vigils" at polling stations. They have said they expect the military to uphold the results of the vote. Venezuela's military has always supported Maduro, a 61-year-old former bus driver and foreign minister, and there have been no public signs that leaders of the armed forces are breaking from the government. Defense Minister General Vladimir Padrino has said the armed forces will respect the outcome of the election.





Nadal May Skip Olympic Singles After Alcaraz Dream-Team Win

PARIS (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal said Saturday that he does not know if he will play singles at the Paris Olympics after picking up a thigh injury in training. Nadal is due to face Hungary's Marton Fucsovics in the first round on Sunday and victory would hand him a 60th career clash with old rival Novak Djokovic.

"I don't know what's going to happen, I don't know if I am going to play tomorrow or not," said the 38-year-old Spaniard, who is at his farewell Olympics and is also in the men's doubles.

"I will talk to my people and make the smartest decision that I can have the best chance of bringing a medal home, so let's see."

Nadal, who has been plagued by injuries throughout his career, teamed up with Carlos Alcaraz for the first time and defeated Argentina's Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in front of a packed, raucous crowd under the roof on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Nadal, a singles gold medallist at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and doubles title winner at Rio four years later, appeared on court with a bandage strapped around his right thigh.

The Olympics is just his seventh tournament of 2024, in a season where he has also battled a hip injury and seen his singles ranking plummet to 161.

"Sometimes more isn't always more, sometimes more is less," added Nadal over the decision he faces.

"I am just enjoying the moment playing doubles together with Carlos," added Nadal, who featured in the opening ceremony on Friday when he carried the Olympic torch.

"It has been an unforgettable day for me today and an unforgettable day yesterday. I am enjoying every single moment, having the best experience possible."

Hours earlier when Alcaraz had opened his singles campaign with a straight sets victory over Hady Habib, the 21-year-old said it was a "dream" to play alongside his compatriot Nadal.

The duo appeared to a standing ovation on the same packed court where Nadal won 14 French Opens and Alcaraz collected his first just last month.

Gonzalez and Molteni, the sixth seeds, entered the arena to a chorus of boos in the aftermath of a recent racism row between Argentina and France.

The Spanish pair endured a nightmare start when Alcaraz was broken in the first game. Having not played doubles on tour since 2022, the rustiness was not surprising.

The greater experience of Nadal was key and the break was quickly retrieved with the veteran's reflexes as razor sharp as ever at the net.

Alcaraz and Nadal went to three set points in the tiebreaker and a pinpoint backhand down the line by Nadal secured the opener.

Gonzalez and Molteni raced to a 3-0 lead in the second set but back came the Spanish pair to level.

Nadal secured another key break with a rasping backhand return to allow him and his partner to lead 5-4 and the opportunity to serve for the match.

That honour fell to the 22-time Grand Slam title champion and victory was secured when Alcaraz slapped the winning forehand crouching at the net.

AC Milan Edge Man City; Arsenal Beat Man United

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Lorenzo Colombo scored two first-half goals and Marco Nasti netted the game-winner to give AC Milan a 3-2 victory over English Premier League champion Manchester City on Saturday at New York. Nasti lifted Milan ahead in the 78th minute, the 20-year-old Italian striker taking a centering pass from Belgian right wing Alexis Saelemaekers and firing an inside right foot blast into the goal. Several European sides are playing pre-season tune-ups in US venues ahead of next month's start of their league campaigns.

Norwegian striker Erling Haaland opened the scoring for Manchester City in the 19th minute, but Italian forward Colombo answered for AC Milan in the 30th and 34th minutes to lift the Italian side ahead 2-1 at half-time at Yankee Stadium. City equalized in the 55th minute when Manchester hometown winger Micah Hamilton crossed the ball from the left side into the box. English striker James McAtee headed the ball into the net, setting the stage for Nasti's decider. At Los Angeles, Gabriel Martinelli scored for Arsenal in the 81st minute to give the Gunners a 2-1 victory over Manchester United in a friendly at SoFi Stadium. Danish 21-year-old striker Rasmus Hojlund opened the scoring in

the 10th minute for United. Marcus Rashford lofted a clearing pass down the left wing and Hojlund took the ball and battled Arsenal defender Ayden Heaven into the box, where he got a step ahead and blasted a goal between the legs of Gunners goalkeeper Karl Hein. Arsenal's Gabriel Jesus netted the equalizer in the 26th minute, the Brazilian tapping in a centering pass from point-blank range as the Red Devils appealed in vain for an offside call. Martinelli, who helped Brazil to Tokyo Olympic gold, came in from the left side and flicked in a right-footed shot inside the near post to give Arsenal the winning margin. Earlier, Japan's Kyogo Furuhashi and Denmark's Matt O'Riley scored first-half goals to power Celtic over Chelsea 4-1.



Thompson to Face Nishioka in ATP Atlanta Final

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Australia's Jordan Thompson, seeking his second ATP title of the year, and Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka advanced to the ATP Atlanta Open final with three-set triumphs.

Thompson outlasted Chinese teen qualifier Shang Juncheng 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 while Nishioka beat France's Arthur Rinderknech 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 in the first US hardcourt tuneup event for the US Open.

Nishioka, ranked 86th, has defeated 41st-ranked Thompson in all four of their prior ATP meetings, all on hardcourts, the most recent last year at Paris.

After breaking in the eighth game of the third set, Thompson blasted his 13th ace to reach match point and captured the match after two hours and 21 minutes on a forehand slam winner.

"I served really well," Thompson said. "I only was broken one time, held off a couple of games. I felt like my serve really kept me in it."

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

He could jump from 41st in the world rankings into the top 30 for the first time by winning the crown.

Nishioka, 28, seeks his third career ATP title after the 2018 Shenzhen Open and 2022 Korea Open in Seoul.

Nishioka got a break chance and match point on Rinderknech in the final game and the Japanese star's backhand winner ended matters after two hours and 19 minutes, advancing him to a sixth career ATP final.

Spain Into Knockouts in Olympic Men's Football



PARIS (Dispatches) - Argentina bounced back from the chaos of their opening game in the Olympic men's football tournament to beat Iraq 3-1 on Saturday, while Spain are the first team through to the quarter-finals.

Two-time gold medallists Argentina began their campaign at the Paris Games with a 2-1 defeat by Morocco on Wednesday in Saint-Etienne in a match marred by crowd trouble.

The South Americans had a late equaliser disallowed and the final minutes took place in an empty stadium following the disruption.

However, Javier Mascherano's side registered their first points in Group B on Saturday thanks to goals by Thiago Almada, Luciano Gondou and Ezequiel Fernandez in Lyon, with Aymen Hussein replying for Iraq.

The result, coupled with Ukraine's last-gasp 2-1 win over Morocco in Saint-Etienne later, means all four teams in the group are now level on three points.

Argentina went ahead on 14 minutes in Lyon when Manchester City's Julian Alvarez laid the ball off for Almada to fire in.

Iraq drew level in first-half stoppage time as captain Hussein rose to head home.

But Argentina went back ahead just after the hour mark. Argentinos Juniors forward Gondou had been on the pitch barely two minutes when he appeared unmarked at the back post to head in an inviting cross.

The third goal came five minutes from time as Kevin Zenon laid the ball back for Fernandez, of Boca Juniors, to curl in from range.

Morocco were caught by a 98th-minute sucker punch against Ukraine, who grabbed the victory and their first points when Oleh Fedor set up Ihor Krasnopir to score from close range.

Ukraine had gone ahead midway through the first half through Dmytro Kryskiv but appeared in trouble when Volodymyr Saliuk pulled back Soufiane Rahimi in the box on the hour mark.

Suryakumar's India Begin New T20 Journey With Sri Lanka Thrashing



KANDY (Dispatches) - New captain Suryakumar Yadav hit an attacking half-century to set up a dominant 43-run victory for India in the first of three T20 internationals against Sri Lanka.

Suryakumar, 33, hammered 58 off 26 balls at Kandy's Pallekele in his first match as T20 skipper with India beginning a new era in the format after its T20 World Cup triumph last month.

India posted 213-7 and then bowled out the hosts for 170, after spinner Axar Patel struck twice in one over including taking the key wicket of Pathum Nissanka for 79.

Nissanka looked like setting up the chase, but Sri Lanka lost nine wickets for 30 runs to be bowled out in 19.2 overs.

"We practised here for two-three days and we knew how the wicket would play," said Suryakumar, who was named player of the match.

"We never thought it would go away from us, given we won the World Cup. Fortunately, there was no dew."

India have made a fresh start to T20 cricket after long-term stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja announced their retirements from the format following their World Cup win in Barbados.

Suryakumar, who was picked as leader ahead of

Hardik Pandya -- Rohit Sharma's deputy in the World Cup -- put on a key stand of 76 with wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant, who smashed 49.

Fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana took four wickets, including Suryakumar and Pant, but could not stop India from crossing 200 after a sloppy fielding effort by the home team.

Charith Asalanka was appointed new Sri Lanka T20 skipper following their early exit in the T20 World Cup and elected to field first after he won the toss.

Both Sri Lanka and India have got new coaches as well, with Gautam Gambhir joining India and Sanath Jayasuriya named in an interim role for Sri Lanka.

Yashasvi Jaiswal, who smashed 40 off 21 balls, and Shubman Gill, who hammered 34, handed India an explosive start in a partnership of 74 in the first six overs.

The openers departed in the space of two deliveries with Dilshan Madushanka taking down Gill and leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga getting the left-handed Jaiswal stumped with his first ball.

Suryakumar steadied the innings and took on the opposition attack with eight fours and two sixes in a partnership with the left-handed Pant.

Pathirana, known as "Baby Malinga" for his slinging action and yorkers similar to former Sri Lanka quick Lasith Malinga, trapped Suryakumar lbw after the batsman's 22-ball fifty.