

The Kremlin Confirmed That Incoming Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian Has Been Invited to Attend a Summit of BRICS in Kazan, Russia, Slated for October in Moscow

IRAN NEWS

The Spokesman of the Foreign Ministry Has Extended Iran's Congratulations to the Government and People of Venezuela for Their Successful Presidential Elections

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Details on the Launch of the Iran-China Train Revealed



TEHRAN - The President of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce said: In the future, the Dogharoun and Mirjaveh borders will be added as entry points for Chinese trains into Iran, both for transit to other countries and for cargo transport to Iran. Majidreza Harii, President of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce, explained to an ILNA reporter about rail cargo transport between Iran and China: Since 2015, freight train traffic between Iran and China has been active, and the rail lines on which these trains travel can extend from Iran to the westernmost ports of Europe. These trains can enter Iran from four eastern border points and exit from the western regions. Currently, entry from the Incheh Borun and Sarakhs borders is possible, and in the future, Dogharoun and Mirjaveh borders will also be added as entry points for these trains to Iran, serving both as transit routes to other countries and for cargo transport to Iran. He added: Currently, one to two trains per year travel from Incheh Borun to China, but the issue is the lack of a regular schedule for cargo transport from Iran to China and vice versa. This inconsistency is particularly noticeable for cargo destined for China from Iran, as the volume of cargo coming from China to Iran is greater than that going from Iran to China. Additionally, the type and weight of products exported from Iran to China are more suitable for maritime transport, as most of them consist of minerals or petrochemical products. For increased use of this rail route for transporting cargo from eastern Iran to China, infrastructure such as dry ports and freight vehicles from production units to the railway route are needed, which currently exist in our maritime ports, but there are no equipped dry ports in the country. He noted: Therefore, these trains are only used for cargo transport from China to Iran, and they are empty on the route from Iran to China. In response to the question of whether currency allocation restrictions have affected imports from China this year, the President of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce said: This year, Iran's imports from China have not decreased, and their weight has even increased. Regarding the trade value between the two countries in the Iranian calendar year 1403 (2024/2025), he stated: It is currently not possible to provide reliable information on the value, as what I mentioned about imports to Iran was based on Chinese customs data, and the values reported by Chinese customs differ from Iranian customs. Additionally, part of the cargo exported from Iran to China goes through ports in the southern Persian Gulf, so Iranian customs statistics need to be published and matched with Chinese customs data to comment on the value of traded goods.

ECO-IOM Joint Workshop Kicks off in Tehran



TEHRAN - The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), organized a two-day workshop on "Combating Trafficking in Persons and Human Smuggling in the ECO Region" on May 29-30, 2024, at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran.

The workshop aims to bring together experts, policymakers and practitioners from relevant regional and international organizations, as well as ECO member countries.

The participants will delve into the critical issues surrounding human trafficking, discussing root causes and challenges in combating this menace.

Additionally, they will share knowledge, best practices and insights on the prevention, protection and prosecution of human trafficking.

The Chief of Mission of IOM in Iran, Lalini Veerassamy, in a speech stated: "Combating human smuggling is a priority for ECO members."

ECO Secretary General Ambassador, Khusrav Noziri, also said: "The support of ECO member states are a must to deal with any problems." He reiterated the need for more collaboration, cooperation, and support to counter the issues.

Noziri pointed out that the delegates must identify the root causes and challenges and focus upon the legal and operational frameworks.

He went on to conclude: The workshop aims to Foster and strengthen cross-border collaboration and agree on meaningful actions and recommendations which would benefit all ECO members to help fight against these growing transnational crimes at regional and global level.

Strengthening People's Livelihoods Is a Priority for the 14th Gov't



TEHRAN - The President said: Strengthening people's livelihoods and solving economic problems are priorities for the 14th government.

In his first interview after the inauguration ceremony, President Masoud Pezeshkian stated that the current priorities for the 14th government include addressing economic conditions, supporting domestic production, and ultimately strengthening people's livelihoods to resolve their issues.

He emphasized: We will strive to implement the intentions of the Leader in practice.

The endorsement and official commencement of the 14th term of the Presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran took place on Sunday with the presence of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution and a group of officials and state executives at the Imam Khomeini Hussainiya. The Leader endorsed the elected President's decree according to Article 110, Clause 9 of the Constitution.

In this program, the Minister of Interior provided a report on the process of the first and second rounds of the 14th presidential elections. After reading the text of the endorsement decree for the elected President and delivering speeches by the President, Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Revolution, gave a speech.

Following the endorsement of the presidency by the Supreme Leader, Masoud Pezeshkian received his office from Mohammad Mokhber, the acting President.

In his first decree, he appointed "Mohammad Reza Aref" as the First Vice President and then "Mohsen Haji Mirzaei" as the Chief of Staff of the President.

Meanwhile high-ranking dignitaries from different countries have arrived in the Iranian capital Tehran to take part in President Pezeshkian's inauguration ceremony.

The Iranian parliament's ICANA news agency reported on Monday that officials from Cuba, Columbia, Mongolia, Malta, Niger, Libya, Gambia, Sudan, Myanmar, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and Madagascar have so far arrived in Tehran.

They are expected to attend a ceremony at the parliament on Tuesday afternoon, during which Pezeshkian, a 69-year-old heart surgeon, will officially swear in as Iran's new president.

Pezeshkian will take the oath of office before Iranian lawmakers, as well as the Judiciary chief, and members of the Constitutional Council.

More than 70 foreign delegates will be present at the event, which will be broadcast live on state television and covered by over 600 reporters, photographers and cameramen from domestic and foreign media outlets.

Pezeshkian garnered more than 16 million votes against ex-nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, who secured upwards of 13 million out of over 30 million votes cast, with the voter turnout standing at almost 50 percent.

Meanwhile Executive Deputy of Majlis Alireza Sharifi elaborated on the manner of conducting the President's inauguration ceremony to reporters, stating: "According to the notification from the Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the inauguration

committee's activities were organized at the highest level."

Sharifi, noting the highest level of participation by various agencies in holding the ceremony, added: "There has been extensive cooperation in coordinating the ceremony with the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Roads, Protocol Office of the Presidency, Ministry of Interior, security and law enforcement agencies, the Armed Forces, and service agencies like the Water Organization, Electric Company, Telecommunications Company, Tehran Municipality, and emergency services like Tehran's Emergency Medical Services and the Red Crescent have all devoted their efforts to holding the ceremony in the best possible manner."

The head of the inauguration committee mentioned the presence of foreign guests at the ceremony, adding: "Countries such as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the Central African Republic, Pakistan, Syria, Serbia, Cuba, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Guinea-Bissau will participate at the level of President and Prime Minister."

He continued: "The Speakers of the Parliaments from Russia, Algeria, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Iraq, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Comoros, Mali, Sri Lanka, Senegal, and North Korea will attend the ceremony. Additionally, countries such as the UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Kyrgyzstan, Brazil, the Maldives, and Gabon have confirmed their attendance at the level of Vice President and Deputy Prime Minister."

Sharifi specified: "Countries such as Tanzania, Niger, Venezuela, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Bolivia, Kuwait, Mauritania, Myanmar, Congo, Gambia, and Eritrea will be represented by their Foreign Ministers. Moreover, other countries including India, Nicaragua, Niger, Ghana, Bulgaria, Iceland, Tunisia, Hungary, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, Malta, and Sierra Leone will send their ministers or ambassadors to this ceremony."

He added: "Besides the aforementioned countries, the Secretaries-General of international organizations including OIC, APA, ECO, D8, PUIIC, IORA, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and others will also be present at the ceremony."

He emphasized: "These numbers are not final, and there is a possibility of an increase in the number of participating countries, which will be announced accordingly."

He added: "In addition to the foreign guests, domestic guests at the level of the Head of the Office of the Supreme Leader, the Head of the Judiciary, the Speaker of the Assembly of Experts, the Secretary of the Guardian Council, the Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, a number of ministers and officials of the 13th government, and high-ranking national and military officials will be present, and the Speaker of the Assembly will host both domestic and foreign guests."

Sharifi, referring to the media coverage of the ceremony and the presence of domestic and foreign journalists, said: "The ceremony will be broadcast live on domestic television channels. Additionally, over 600 journalists, photographers, and cameramen from domestic and foreign media will attend the inauguration ceremony to cover the news."

Iraqi Resistance Warns Israel as Lebanon Says More United Than Ever

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - An Iraqi anti-terror group has warned that the new rules of engagement will hurt the United States and Israel terribly in case the Tel Aviv regime opts to launch an onslaught against the Hezbollah resistance group under the pretext of an alleged rocket attack in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Kata'ib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades) made the warning in a statement on Monday as Lebanese media outlets reported several Israeli strikes on towns in southern Lebanon, amid rising tensions after the strike on the town of Majdal Shams. There were reports of raids on Hula, Markaba, Aita al-Shaab, Khiam, Shaheer, Yaroun, Meiss el-Jabal, Kfar Kila and Bourj al-Shamali. "In case the Zionist entity decides to commit an act of adventurism and increases the extent of its offensives against a division of the Axis of Resistance, new rules of engagement would not be in favor of the usurping regime and the United States as its wicked ally," Jaafar al-Husseini, a spokesman for Kata'ib Hezbollah group, said. At least 12 people were killed and several others wounded on Saturday in an alleged rocket attack on a football pitch in the town of the Majdal Shams in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. In a written statement, Hezbollah said, "The Islamic Resistance has absolutely nothing to do with the incident, and categorically denies all false

allegations in this regard." Some reports, meanwhile, said the explosion might have been caused by a stray projectile fired by the regime's Iron Dome missile system. The regime, however, insisted on blaming the resistance movement for the incident. Netanyahu said Hezbollah was to "pay heavy price" after the incident. "The regime is approaching the moment of an all-out war against Hezbollah and Lebanon," Israeli foreign minister Israel Katz said. Meanwhile, a senior Lebanese official has underlined that the rocket strike on the town of Majdal Shams in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights has no benefit for Hezbollah. Lebanese Parliament Deputy Speaker Elias Bou Saab said in an interview with al-Jazeera Arabic television news network that Hezbollah has no interest in the bombing. "The mediators are in constant contact with us and trying to avoid a major escalation," he said, emphasizing that Lebanon "does not want war." "This is while the Israelis want to cover up what is happening in Gaza by escalation," Bou Saab stated. The top Lebanese lawmaker further noted that US Special Envoy Amos Hochstein is well aware of the difficulty of controlling the fronts while the Israeli offensives against Palestinians in Gaza continue.

One-Month Delay for Iranian Truck Drivers in Afghanistan



TEHRAN - Vice President of the National Association of Truckers Seyed Jalal Mousavi, in an interview regarding the latest status of 400 Iranian truck drivers carrying Iraqi fuel stranded in Afghanistan, stated: The reason for the delay of the fuel trucks at the Mahrood border in Afghanistan was the sampling of the fuel loads to ensure they meet standards. In the first group, where the fuel load of 90 trucks was tested, only 14 trucks met the standards. The rest of the trucks in this group either need to return to their country or pass through another border.

He continued: The test results and sampling of the second group of 90 fuel-carrying trucks are expected to be announced today, with an estimated 60 to 70 percent of this group likely to be non-standard and needing to return to their country.

The Vice President of the National Association of Truckers emphasized: Another 100 trucks have been dispatched to Herat, and it may take another week to determine their status.

Mousavi said: Overall, it is expected that the status of all these approximately 400 fuel-carrying trucks will be determined within the next 10 days.

Regarding the condition of the truck drivers during this period, he stated: These drivers have been stranded in Afghanistan for 3 weeks so far, and this delay is likely to continue for another 10 days. It is unclear whether compensation will be provided to these drivers for this delay and the downtime of their trucks.

He continued: I believe this chaotic situation is due to the weakness of our country. If we are confident that the fuel is up to standard, such an incident should not occur. And now that it has happened, why have the drivers been left stranded? Afghanistan has no obligation to provide comfort and facilities to Iranian drivers. Although that area is not secure, it is not suitable for staying. Who will answer for the one-month uncertainty faced by Iranian drivers? Now, most likely, a large number of these trucks will have to return to their country, and it is unclear whether the cargo owners will pay compensation.

Cuba Ready to Cooperate With New Iranian Gov't



TEHRAN - Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Elio Rodriguez Perdomo emphasized his country's full readiness to cooperate with Iran's new government and officials to comprehensively strengthen relations. He announced that the Prime Minister of Cuba will attend the inauguration ceremony of Iran's new president. In a meeting with Ali Bagheri Kani, the Head of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Rodriguez Perdomo, who traveled to Tehran to attend the inauguration of the new president, Massoud Pezeshkian, discussed the latest developments in bilateral relations and key issues in international cooperation. Ali Bagheri welcomed the presence of the high-ranking Cuban delegation at the swearing-in ceremony of the new president and emphasized the extensive capacity for bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Iran and Cuba, especially in enhancing economic relations alongside political ties. He described Iran and Cuba as independent in their policies and stressed the need for cooperation in facing global threats, adopting a more active approach, and seeking new mechanisms and procedures to strengthen relations. He added that it is essential to develop economic relations, pursue strengthened cooperation, and create new capacities to confront the threats of unilateralism and manage upcoming international challenges. In this meeting, Rodriguez Perdomo expressed his condolences for the loss of Ayatollah Raisi and the martyred President and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. He announced the Cuban Prime Minister's presence at Massoud Pezeshkian's inauguration ceremony, considering it a sign of his country's interest and commitment to developing relations between Cuba and Iran. He declared Cuba's full readiness to cooperate with Iran's new government and officials to comprehensively strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations.

IRAN NEWS



Foreign Guests Arrives Iran to Attend Pezeshkian's Inauguration Ceremony

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign guests and senior officials across the world arrived in Iran to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the country's President Masoud Pezeshkian, on Tuesday. Speakers of parliaments of Russia, Algeria, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Iraq, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Comoros, Mali, Sri Lanka, Senegal, and North Korea will participate in this ceremony. The UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Kyrgyzstan, Brazil, Maldives, and Gabon have finalized their presence at the level of vice president and deputy prime minister. The countries of Tanzania, Niger, Venezuela, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Bolivia, Kuwait, Mauritania, Myanmar, Congo, Gambia, and Eritrea have also announced their presence at the level of foreign ministers. Also, other countries including India, Nicaragua, Niger, Ghana, Bulgaria, Iceland, Tunisia, Hungary, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, Malta, and Sierra Leone will send their ministers or ambassadors to the ceremony.

Iran Ranked 73rd in the Travel and Tourism Development Index



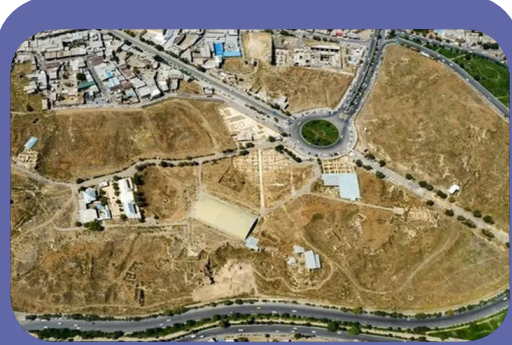
TEHRAN - The Deputy for Specialized Commission Affairs of the Iran Chamber has released the comparative-analytical review results of Iran's tourism indices against selected global countries. According to this research, Iran, with a score of 3.72, ranked 73rd out of 119 countries in the Travel and Tourism Development Index for the year 2023. This position is unfavorable compared to countries like the United Arab Emirates, ranked 18th, and Turkey, ranked 29th. This trend is also reflected in Iran's standing among Middle Eastern and North African countries, where it ranked 9th out of 14 countries.

Additionally, regarding the index of the safest countries for travel (holidays) in 2023, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and Denmark scored above 90, securing the top five positions as the safest countries in the world, with Iran not making it onto this list.

According to the review's results, in the Global Muslim Travel Index, which evaluates halal tourism worldwide, Iran ranked 6th among the top 20 countries in 2023, following Turkey and Qatar. Malaysia and Indonesia have maintained their top positions, jointly ranking first for several years. Although Iran holds a good position in this index compared to other indices under review, it still ranks lower than Qatar and Turkey.

Despite an increase in the number of international tourists visiting Iran, from 2.94 million in 2010 to approximately 5.8 million in 2023, this figure remains very low compared to the total number of international tourists worldwide and even compared to the United Arab Emirates, which saw 28 million tourists in 2023.

Furthermore, Iran's tourism revenues are limited when compared to the total global tourism revenues and those of regional countries. According to the World Tourism Organization's 2022 report, while Iran's tourism revenues amounted to about 3.7 billion dollars, the United Arab Emirates earned over 21 billion dollars, highlighting Iran's relatively low earnings in this sector compared to various countries worldwide.



Hegmataneh Site Listed as World Heritage

TEHRAN - The Hegmataneh archaeological site has been registered as the 28th Iranian heritage site on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

The Hegmataneh archaeological site, with its unparalleled evidence from the Median, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanian periods, was globally registered with the consensus of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee members. The file "Hegmataneh and the Historical Center of Hamedan" was evaluated by global experts at the 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Despite opposition from the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the file managed to gain the approval and positive opinion of UNESCO members and experts, and was added to the World Heritage list. Previously, ICOMOS, the advisory body to UNESCO, opposed the global registration of this file due to existing flaws. However, countries such as Qatar, Lebanon, Turkey, Zimbabwe, Saint Vincent, Greece, South Korea, Senegal, and Japan raised suggestions and questions regarding the file at the UNESCO global session held in India. Iran's Deputy Minister and Cultural Heritage Assistant Ali Darabi announced that the Hegmataneh archaeological site has been registered as the 28th Iranian heritage site on the UNESCO World Heritage list. The site, with its unparalleled evidence from the Median, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid periods, was globally registered with the consensus of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee members. He continued: In the initial evaluation by the ICOMOS, the proposed file from Iran titled "Hegmataneh and the Historical Center of Hamedan," which included two parts: the archaeological site and the historical center of Hamedan city, was declared deferred. Therefore, with the strategy of the Cultural Heritage Department and consulting with relevant experts, the narrative strategy of the proposed file was revised. After extensive negotiations, the global registration of the Hegmataneh archaeological site was approved, making it the 28th World Heritage site of Iran to be registered by UNESCO. Darabi added: According to the resolution of the World Heritage Committee, there are no restrictions for the future registration of the historical center of Hamedan city, with the explanation that this part is currently within the protection and support perimeter of the global registration area by UNESCO. He emphasized: Hegmataneh is the ancient name of a city from the Median period and can be considered the mother of ancient Persian civilization cities.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



ICCIMA Ready to Establish Trade-Exhibition Center in Serbia

TEHRAN - The president of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) stated that the chamber is ready for any cooperation to develop trade relations with Serbia.

In a meeting with Demir Kovacevic, the new Serbian ambassador to Iran, Samad Hasanzadeh referred to the long-standing economic and cultural relations between the two countries and continued: "Iran and Serbia have many opportunities for trade cooperation which should be seized."

He added, "Serbia is considered Iran's gateway to Europe, providing many opportunities for both countries. I hope the Serbian government and embassy will pay more attention to this matter."

Hasanzadeh said that if a suitable environment is created for Iranian traders to operate in Serbia, the Iran Chamber is ready to establish a trade-exhibition center in Serbia with the participation of Iranian traders and businessmen.

Referring to the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the establishment of a joint economic cooperation commission between Iran and Serbia in 2021, he continued: "Unfortunately, this memorandum has not yet yielded the desired results. Additionally, the request to sign a free trade agreement between the two countries has not been finalized, which I hope the Serbian ambassador will pursue."

Highlighting Iran's economic and industrial capabilities, he said: "Joint investments in areas such as technical and engineering services, building materials, refinery and petrochemical construction, power plants, dam and road construction, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, joint academic and educational collaborations, art and cinema, tourism and health tourism, new technologies, automotive and industrial machinery, and food and agriculture industries are very suitable areas for developing trade cooperation between the two countries."

Demir Kovacevic, the Serbian ambassador to Iran, emphasized that he has come to meet with the president of the Iran Chamber in his

first official visit since taking office, indicating Serbia's high regard for developing trade cooperation between the two countries.

He stated that the cooperation potentials of the two countries need to be more actively engaged and continued: "To develop bilateral cooperation, the banking and money transfer issues between the two countries must be resolved. Although solutions have been proposed in the past, practical steps need to be taken."

Kovacevic suggested the formation of a business council composed of traders and businessmen from both countries to exchange and introduce trade information and cooperation potentials further.

He mentioned that establishing two logistics centers in Iran and Serbia for Serbian and Iranian traders, as export hubs to surrounding regions, could enhance trade cooperation levels between Iran and Serbia.

Kovacevic emphasized that the Serbian embassy in Iran will utilize all its capacities to achieve the trade targets and operationalize the cooperation and free trade agreements between the two countries.

Referring to Serbia's capabilities in battery manufacturing and automotive industries, he said: "Iran's capabilities in stem cell research, health tourism, and the cinema industry have attracted significant attention from Serbian investors, presenting good cooperation opportunities for the two countries."

Mahdi Bakhshandeh, the head of the Iran-Serbia Joint Committee, also emphasized the importance of developing Iran-Serbia relations under the current limitations on Iran's relations with the European Union. He stated that two primary considerations for cooperation are: first, completing our semi-finished products in Serbia for re-export to other countries, and second, turning Iran into a hub for Serbian traders to export to 15 neighboring countries.

He noted that good progress has been made in resolving financial and banking issues and stressed that the free trade agreement between the two countries should be finalized as soon as possible.

6.1m People Lifted Out of Poverty in Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The World Bank reported on poverty in Iran, stating that recent trends indicate progress in reducing poverty and improving income inequality. Between 2020 and 2022, the poverty rate, measured by the \$6.85 per day standard, decreased by 7.4%, lifting approximately 6.1 million Iranians above the poverty line. Using the lower-middle-income standard of \$3.65 per day, poverty decreased from 6.05% to 3.8%. Income inequality, measured by the Gini index, improved slightly from 35.8 to 34.8.

The reduction in poverty levels was attributed to broad-based consumption growth, driven by increased income from wages and self-employment. Social programs, including temporary cash subsidies and pensions, played a significant role in reducing poverty, particularly in 2022 and beyond.

The improvement in poverty levels in recent years contrasts with the period between 2011 and 2020, when 9.5 million people fell into poverty. During this period, the poverty rate increased from 19.7% to 29.1% in 2020, based on the 2017 purchasing power parity standard of \$6.85 per day.

Iran is the only country in the Middle East and North Africa region that collects high-quality household budget survey data annually and makes it publicly available. With newer household survey data, time-series analysis in Iran extends to 2020-2022, a period during which Iran's economy saw renewed growth and corresponding poverty reduction.

New household survey data indicates a significant reduction in poverty levels. Economic recovery from 2020 to 2022 led to a considerable decrease in poverty. In 2022, the poverty rate was 21.9%, close to the 2018 level.

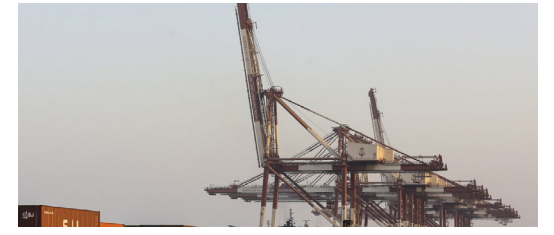
By the end of 2022, the percentage of people living below the upper-middle-income poverty line of \$6.85 per day decreased by a total of 7.4 percentage points, lifting approximately 6.1 million Iranians above the poverty line. The lower-middle-income poverty line, measured at \$3.65 per day, saw a reduction of 2.25 percentage points over two years, indicating that 0.8 million Iranians were exiting

poverty. Income inequality, as measured by the Gini index, decreased from 35.8 to 34.8. Compared to the previous decade, which saw a slight increase in income inequality with the Gini index rising from 35.5 in 2011 to 36.7 in 2020, this represents a minor improvement.

Recent poverty dynamics have been primarily driven by broad-based consumption growth. Between 2020 and 2022, poverty reduction in Iran was mainly due to significant consumption growth. Income redistribution from the wealthiest to the poorest contributed only slightly to poverty reduction. From 2011 to 2020, the poorest segments suffered the most during recessions and gained the least during economic growth periods. This pattern changed in the subsequent period from 2020 to 2022, with the entire population experiencing positive consumption growth. However, the increase in consumption among the top 60% outpaced that of the bottom 40%. This was primarily due to relatively greater consumption increases among the poorer deciles, aligning with the trend of reduced inequality within the country. The macroeconomic trends in Iran and poverty levels have been strongly correlated in recent years. There is a correlation between real GDP growth rates (including both oil and non-oil sectors) and the poverty rate using the 2017 PPP \$6.85 standard. There was a significant reduction in poverty in 2021, coinciding with a 4.4% increase in real per capita GDP. This poverty reduction trend continued in 2022, with a 4% increase in real per capita GDP and a 3.2% growth in non-oil GDP, emphasizing the positive impact of economic growth on poverty reduction in Iran.

Increased income from wages, self-employment, and enhanced social subsidies have been factors in the recent reduction in poverty levels. As confirmed in the recent poverty assessment for Iran, income volatility is a key determinant of poverty fluctuations.

Increase of \$1.35b in Non-Oil Exports in Four Months



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesperson for the International Relations and Trade Development Commission of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture announced: In the first four months of this year, \$17.5b worth of non-oil goods were exported from the country. This represents an 8.3 percent growth, with an increase of 1.35 billion dollars compared to the same period last year. Seyyed Rouhollah Latifi, referring to the country's foreign trade this year, stated: In the first four months of this year, about \$17.5b worth of non-oil goods were exported, showing an 8.3 percent growth compared to the same period last year, and over 1.35 billion dollars more than the first four months of the previous year. He added: The country's non-oil exports in April reached 3.173 billion dollars, and despite a 17 percent decrease in exports compared to April 2023, in the second month of the year, not only was the decrease compensated, but exports also grew by 24 percent compared to May last year. In May, with exports of \$4.849b worth of non-oil goods, 934 million dollars more goods were exported compared to May last year. The spokesperson for the International Relations and Trade Development Commission of the Iran Chamber of Commerce said: The highest amount of non-oil goods exports during this period was in June, with 5.496 billion dollars, which showed a 14 percent growth compared to June last year, and 663 million dollars more goods were exported compared to the third month of last year. Latifi, referring to exports in July, said: According to trade statistics published by customs, in the fourth month of this year, \$4b worth of non-oil goods were exported, which was more than 400 million dollars more than July last year, showing an 11.5 percent growth compared to July 2023. He expressed hope: In the fourteenth government, while continuing and accelerating the growing trend of exports from the thirteenth government, by reducing unprofessional interventions, coordinating institutions related to foreign trade whether policy makers or executors, the government will play a more effective facilitative role in marketing and market access, create suitable conditions for continuous and cheap transportation, activate economic diplomacy, increase cooperation and partnership between the government and the private sector, facilitate financial exchanges, remove currency barriers inside and outside the country, steer the country towards producing more value-added, high-quality, and competitively priced goods instead of raw and semi-raw goods.

Self-Sufficiency a Priority of the 13th Administration



TEHRAN (Shana) - The Deputy Minister of Petroleum for Petrochemicals called self-sufficiency in producing petrochemical products one of the priorities of the outgoing 13th administration.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the first phase of Padjam petrochemical plant in Assaluyeh, Morteza Shahmirzaie further noted that the 13th administration's policy in the petrochemical sector was focused on cutting dependency on foreign commodities and equipment in five years.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he said that the country will celebrate self-sufficiency in the production of catalysts, a year ahead of schedule, this summer, 115 years after the discovery of oil in Iran, which means coming true the 13th administration's promise to the people.

The managing director of the National Petrochemical Company also said that 99 catalysts, which play a significant role in the petrochemical industry's various processes, are being produced locally implying a culmination of producing this type of products.

Padjim petrochemical project came on stream after 14 years of uncertainty in the light of Iranian youths' revolutionary and Jihadi movement, Shahmirzaie told the audiences.

According to him, 130 large and small petrochemical projects are underway in the country, of which 15 projects will be completed before the end of the current Iranian calendar year on 19 March 2025.

Accelerating the implementation of petrochemical projects as a movement and operating them turns the country's dependency into strength, which can be used as a bargaining chip in energy scenes, helping to collect foreign exchange revenues.

The inauguration of the first phase of the Padjam petrochemical plant is a big honor that completes not only the production cycle but also cuts the car-making industry's dependency on abroad, the NPC chief concluded.

Turkiye Might Enter Israel to Help Palestinians

ANKARA (Dispatches) - President Tayyip Erdogan said that Türkiye might enter Israel as it had done in the past in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, though he did not spell out what sort of intervention he was suggesting. Erdogan, who has been a fierce critic of Israel's offensive in Gaza, started discussing that war during a speech praising his country's defence industry. "We must be very strong so that Israel can't do these ridiculous things to Palestine. Just like we entered Karabakh, just like we entered Libya, we might do similar to them," Erdogan told a meeting of his ruling AK Party in his hometown of Rize. "There is no reason why we cannot do this... We must be strong so that we can take these steps," Erdogan added in the televised address. AK Party representatives did not respond to calls asking for more detail on Erdogan's comments. Israel did not immediately make any comment. The president appeared to be referring to past actions by Türkiye.

In 2020, Türkiye sent military personnel to Libya in support of the United Nations-recognised Government of National Accord of Libya.



Putin Warns the U.S. of Cold War-Style Missile Crisis



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday warned the United States that if Washington deployed long-range missiles in Germany then Russia would station similar missiles in striking distance of the West. The United States said on July 10 that it would start deploying long-range missiles in Germany from 2026 in preparation for a longer-term deployment that will include SM-6, Tomahawk cruise missiles and developmental hypersonic weapons.

In a speech to sailors from Russia, China, Algeria and India to mark Russian navy day in the former imperial capital of St Petersburg, Putin warned the United States that it risked triggering a Cold War-style missile crisis with the move. "The flight time to targets on our territory of such missiles, which in the future may be equipped with nuclear warheads, will be about 10 minutes," Putin said. "We will take mirror measures to deploy, taking into account the actions of the United States, its satellites in Europe and in other regions of the world." Putin, who sent his army into Ukraine in 2022, casts the war as part of a historic struggle with the West, which he says humiliated Russia after Soviet Union fell in 1991 by encroaching on what he considers Moscow's sphere of influence.

Ukraine and the West say Putin is engaged in an imperial-style land grab. They have vowed to defeat Russia, which currently controls about 18% of Ukraine, including Crimea, and parts of four regions in eastern Ukraine.

Russia says the lands, once part of the Russian empire, are now again part of Russia and that they will never be given back.



Hezbollah Evacuates Positions Ahead of Expected Israel Raids

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Hezbollah has evacuated positions in south and east Lebanon after Israeli threats of reprisals for a deadly strike on the annexed Golan Heights, a source close to the group said Sunday.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant vowed to "hit the enemy hard" a day after rocket fire from Lebanon killed 12 minors in Majdal Shams, again raising fears that the war in Gaza will spread.

Israel blamed Lebanon's Hezbollah movement for firing a Falaq-1 Iranian rocket but the Iran-backed group — which has regularly targeted Israeli military positions — said it had "no connection" to the incident.

"Hezbollah has evacuated some positions in the south and in the Bekaa valley that it thinks could be a target for Israel," the source close to the group told AFP, requesting anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Hezbollah has a strong presence in east Lebanon's Bekaa valley, which borders Syria, and in south Lebanon, where it has been launching near daily attacks on Israeli positions since October in support of ally Hamas.

The cross-border exchanges of fire have largely been limited to the border area, but Israel has repeatedly struck deep inside Lebanon, including overnight.

Hezbollah is also deployed in Syria, where for years it has been fighting in support of President Bashar al-Assad in his country's civil war.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor, said pro-Iran groups and Hezbollah-affiliated fighters have "evacuated their positions" south of the capital and in the Damascus countryside, as well as in parts of the Syrian-controlled Golan Heights, in anticipation of "potential Israeli airstrikes".

Hezbollah had already abandoned positions in Syria in early June after Israeli raids, according to the Britain-based Observatory, which relies on a network of sources on the ground.

Since Syria's civil war erupted in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes in the country, mainly targeting army positions and Iran-backed fighters, including from Hezbollah.

The raids also seek to cut off Hezbollah supply routes to Lebanon.

Israeli authorities rarely comment on individual strikes in Syria, but have repeatedly said they will not allow arch-enemy Iran to expand its presence there.

Israel's raids on Gaza intensified after Palestinian militant group Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel sparked war in the Gaza Strip, then eased after an April 1 strike blamed on Israel hit the Iranian consular building in Damascus.

That strike prompted Iran to launch a first-ever direct missile and drone attack against Israel on April 13-14, sending regional tensions skyrocketing.

Lebanon's Middle East Airlines said in a statement that it had rescheduled a number of flights on Sunday and Monday, citing "technical reasons related to the distribution of (aircraft) insurance risks".

In October, the carrier said it was relocating some planes abroad in light of regional developments.

During a 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, Israel struck Beirut airport, Lebanon's only international facility.

The cross-border violence since October has killed at least 527 people in Lebanon according to an AFP tally, most of them fighters but also including 104 civilians.

On the Israeli side, 22 soldiers and 24 civilians have been killed, according to Israeli authorities.

Israeli strikes have killed at least 25 Hezbollah fighters in Syria since the Gaza war erupted, according to an AFP tally.



Meloni Vows to Re-Launch Italy's Cooperation With China

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni vowed on Sunday to "re-launch" cooperation with China, signing a three-year action plan during her first official visit to Beijing since taking office.

Meloni, who has led a right-wing government since 2022, made the announcement during a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, as Rome seeks to improve trade ties with Beijing after it exited President Xi Jinping's flagship Belt and Road infrastructure investment scheme last year. The Italian leader said her five-day trip was a "demonstration of the will to begin a new phase, to re-launch our bilateral cooperation". The action plan aims to experiment with new forms of cooperation, she added. Later in the day Meloni said that an industrial cooperation memorandum signed by Italy and China includes strategic industrial sectors such as electric mobility and renewables. Li Qiang pointed to "mutually beneficial cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises in the fields of shipbuilding, aerospace, new energy, artificial intelligence," in a statement released by his office. Meloni, who sees Chinese investment as a way to spur Italy's anaemic economic growth, will meet Xi and China's top legislator, Zhao Leji, third in the leadership hierarchy. On Sunday, Meloni also attended an Italy-China business forum, to which companies including Italian tyre-maker Pirelli, energy group ENI, defence group Leonardo, wine producers and several Italian luxury fashion groups such as Dolce & Gabbana were invited. The forum gives "another signal of the mutual interest... (to) balance more our interests, our commercial exchange," she said. Meloni is expected to raise Chinese overcapacity with Chinese officials, as well as Chinese economic support for Russia in its war with Ukraine. "China and Italy should adopt a win-win mentality and increase trade and investment cooperation, making cooperation even more dynamic and sustainable," said Li at the opening of the forum, according to a video shared by Meloni's office.

Venezuelans Await Results in Tense Presidential Vote

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelans were awaiting results in the most consequential election in a quarter-century of socialist party rule, with the opposition saying they believed there were "reasons to celebrate" but asking supporters to continue monitoring vote counts.

Government officials also cheered the vote, with Jorge Rodriguez, a ruling party lawmaker and the head of its campaign, saying on state television: "Love won."

In the run-up to Sunday's election, President Nicolas Maduro had expressed confidence that he would secure a third term in office even as it was clear that the opposition had attracted impassioned support.

Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has been the star of the coalition campaign, despite a ban on her holding public office that forced her to pass the torch to candidate Edmundo Gonzalez, a 74-year-old ex-diplomat known for his calm demeanor.

Gonzalez won backing even from some former supporters of the ruling party, but the opposition and observers raised questions ahead of the vote as to whether it would be fair, saying decisions by electoral authorities and the arrests of opposition staff were meant to create obstacles.

Maduro — whose 2018 reelection is considered fraudulent by the United States, among others — has said Venezuela has the world's most transparent electoral system and warned last week of a "bloodbath" if he loses.



The timing of an official result announcement remained unclear as of Sunday evening.

The opposition asked voters to remain at polling stations to closely watch the count.

"I want to reiterate to our witnesses at the ballot boxes that they should not leave the voting centers until they have the voting record in hand," said opposition official Delsa Solorzano. "Having the records in our hands is a legal right."

"With the percentage of records that we have, there are reasons to celebrate," she added.

Solorzano was not allowed to enter the electoral authority's main facility to observe the national count, though two other opposition witnesses were inside, the opposition said.

There were several polling stations where opposition observers were not being allowed to observe the count, she added.

Attorney General Tarek Saab told Reuters on Sunday evening that he did not anticipate any

violence and that except for some isolated incidents voting had been peaceful.

Less than a block from Saab's office in central Caracas, dozens of ruling party supporters arrived together on motorcycles outside Andres Bello secondary school, the country's largest voting center, scuffling with opposition supporters gathered outside.

The crowd dispersed after about 20 minutes, but videos on social media showed similar incidents in other locations around the country.

U.S., Japan Take a Swipe at China and Its Unlawful Maritime Claims in South China Sea

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The United States and Japan issued scathing verbal attacks on China and Russia on Sunday after high-level discussions on enhancing already close defense collaboration between Tokyo and Washington in an increasingly unstable region.

A joint statement issued after "2+2" talks in Tokyo between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and their Japanese counterparts said China's "foreign policy seeks to reshape the international order for its own benefit at the expense of others". They also reiterated their "strong objections" to China's "unlawful maritime claims, militarization of reclaimed features, and threatening and provocative activities in the South China Sea". The communique also criticized Russia's "growing and provocative strategic military cooperation" with China, as well as Moscow's procurement of ballistic missiles and other materiel from North Korea "for use against Ukraine". It also expressed alarm at China's "ongoing and rapid expansion of its nuclear weapons arsenal". Blinken said U.S. alliances were all "defensive in nature". "They have no ambitions toward anyone else, and never have been or ever will be offensive in nature," he told a news conference. "But at a time when unfortunately these threats are increasing, our alliances, our partnerships, they're getting deeper, they're getting stronger, they're getting more effective," he said. Japanese

Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa said: "We are at an historic turning point." "Developments that shake the very foundation of free and open international order based on rule of law are continuing." "We must deepen and develop the US-Japan alliance to safeguard the international order and enhance deterrence," she said. China claims the South China Sea, through which trillions of dollars of trade passes annually, almost in its entirety, while Tokyo and Beijing are also at loggerheads over disputed Japan-controlled islands in the East China Sea. The statement also confirmed US plans to establish in Japan a new Joint Force Headquarters, headed by a three-star U.S. commander, for the 54,000 US military personnel stationed there. It will serve as a counterpart to Japan's planned Joint Operations Command for all its armed forces, making the two militaries more nimble in the case of a crisis over Taiwan or the Korean peninsula. U.S. forces in Japan currently report back to Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii, around 6,500 kilometers away and 19 hours behind Tokyo. Japan and the United States also agreed to enhance planning for contingencies and "improve and expand" the scope of joint training and exercises. Japan has been shedding its strict pacifist stance in recent years, ramping up defence spending and moving to obtain "counterstrike" capabilities.





Hamilton Wins Dramatic Belgian GP After Russell's Disqualification

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Lewis Hamilton emerged as the winner of a dramatic Belgian Grand Prix on Sunday after Mercedes teammate George Russell, who took the chequered flag, was disqualified when his car was found to be underweight following the race. It is the second win of the season for the seven-time world champion following his success at Silverstone earlier this month and the 105th of his Formula One career. It was also the third Mercedes victory in the last four races following a poor run of results in the last two years although they initially thought they had wrapped up a compelling one-two. McLaren's Oscar Piastri was elevated to second with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc moving up from fourth to third. The 26-year-old Russell, who started sixth on the grid, produced a stunning performance on the track, the only driver to opt for a one-stop policy that saw him nursing his second set of tyres for 34 of the 44 laps. He was able to hold off Hamilton and the flying McLaren of Piastri, who finished third, to claim what he thought was his third grand prix victory. His joy, however, was short-lived as a technical report released after the race said Russell's car had been found to be 1.5kg below the minimum weight limit for car and driver combined. "Car 63 is disqualified from the race classification," the stewards announced in a statement. "All other drivers move up in the classification," they added. Russell's car was initially weighed at 798kg, which is exactly on the minimum weight limit for car and driver combined. But stewards found it had not been fully drained of fuel and when it was weighed again it registered 796.5kg. Leclerc, who started on pole position, crossed the line in fourth ahead of three-time world champion and series leader Max Verstappen of Red Bull, Lando Norris in the second McLaren

and Carlos Sainz in the second Ferrari. They were followed by Sergio Perez, who started second, in the second Red Bull, two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin and Esteban Ocon of Alpine. After Saturday's deluge, the race began in bright, warm and dry conditions. Leclerc enjoyed a smooth start from pole as Hamilton beat Perez to take second into La Source, where they battled wheel to wheel. Norris had a poor start and ran through a gravel trap, falling to seventh behind Russell and Sainz as the early order settled while Verstappen gained two places to rise to ninth, having started 11th due to a 10-place penalty for taking an additional new engine. Hamilton's pace took him within reach of Leclerc on lap three when, using Drag Reduction System (DRS), he swept into the lead on the Kemmel Straight. He stayed there and by lap five led Leclerc by a second ahead of Perez, Piastri and Russell with Sainz sixth, the only top 10 driver on hard tyres, ahead of Norris and Verstappen. Russell and Verstappen came in after 10 laps, both switching from mediums to hards and re-joining in 13th and 14th respectively before Hamilton, Perez and Piastri pitted one lap later. Norris finally pitted on lap 16, rejoining eighth behind Verstappen with whom he battled until the end of the race. With all of the other contenders pitting a second time, Russell became the fifth race leader and opted to stay out on the one-stop strategy. Hamilton closed but instead of waving his teammate through, Russell was given the all-clear to race him, a potentially dangerous strategy from Mercedes as Piastri quickly closed on them. With five laps to go, Hamilton was two seconds behind Russell and Piastri 5.4 adrift, the top three setting up a grandstand finish that saw Piastri close up to within two seconds while the Mercedes men tussled to the flag.

Durant Inspires USA in Rout of Serbia to Launch Olympic Defense

PARIS (Dispatches) - Kevin Durant returned from injury to produce a shooting masterclass as the United States launched the defense of their Olympic basketball crown with a 110-84 win over Serbia on Sunday. Durant, who missed the entirety of the USA's Olympic build-up with a calf injury, shot a near-perfect 8-of-9 from the field to finish with 23 points in a convincing win for the reigning champions, who are eyeing a fifth straight Olympic crown. "It feels good to make some shots," Durant told reporters after the win. "Everybody played their role pretty well tonight and my role was to come in and make some space for the team -- glad I was able to knock some down. "It's just basketball at the end of the day. I just tried to follow the gameplan, be there for my team-mates on the defensive end, and when the ball touched my hands be aggressive." The 35-year-old Phoenix Suns ace, the all-time leader for the USA in points, points-per-game and field goals, entered the game in the first quarter with the star-studded American line-up trailing 19-14. The 14-time NBA All-Star, a member of the USA's gold medal-winning Olympic teams in 2012, 2016 and in Tokyo three years ago, then proceeded to take over, raining in a succession of buckets

to get the Americans back on track. LeBron James provided scoring support with 21 points, with Jrue Holiday adding 15 points and Devin Booker finishing on 12. Denver star Nikola Jokic led the Serbia scoring with 20 points. The USA are the overwhelming favourites for the Olympic crown and have arrived in France with a squad featuring a galaxy of NBA stars led by the likes of James, Durant and Stephen Curry. James and Curry lavished praise on Durant after Sunday's win. "KD was phenomenal," James said. "It's almost like he never missed anything. If you watch him at practice, everything he does is at game speed. So there's no surprise he comes out and gets right into it -- it's good to have him on our side."



Peaty Denied Third straight Olympic Breaststroke Gold



PARIS (Dispatches) - A tearful Adam Peaty was denied a third straight 100m breaststroke gold medal by Italy's Nicolò Martinenghi Sunday, as Leon Marchand earned France their first Olympic swimming title in 12 years to send the home fans wild. On a blockbuster night in a packed and raucous La Defense Arena, Torri Huske was also crowned women's 100m butterfly champion, stunning world record holder Gretchen Walsh. The evening was billed as a showdown between Peaty and Chinese world champion Qin Haiyang, but Martinenghi stole their thunder, touching first by a fingertip in 59.03secs. Peaty and American Nic Fink both clocked 59.05 to share second place with Qin fading to seventh after leading at the turn. The shock win shattered Peaty's hopes of matching American legend Michael Phelps as the only men to win three consecutive Olympic titles in the same event. "It's been a very long way back," said Peaty, who stepped away from the sport in recent times to deal with depression, among other issues. "It doesn't matter what the time is, to me I've already won. It took so much to get here." "In my heart I have won, these are happy tears," he added, sobbing. While Martinenghi excelled, it was Marchand who brought the house down with the second-fastest 400m individual

medley ever, obliterating the field in 4:02.95. The 22-year-old was the Olympic hosts' big hope after last year demolishing Michael Phelps' 15-year-old world record with a phenomenal 4:02.50. Trained by Phelps' old coach Bob Bowman, he pulled clear after the opening butterfly leg and surged home as the stadium erupted to end a French gold-medal drought stretching back to London in 2012. "The atmosphere was amazing, I don't know how to explain it. I had goosebumps before, and during the race too," said Marchand, who will also swim the 200m medley and 200m butterfly. "I was trying to focus on myself, but it's really hard when 15,000 people are cheering for me. I did well in trying to use this energy to swim as fast as possible." Japan's Tomoyuki Matsushita was second, nearly six seconds behind, with American Carson Foster third. Huske upset American teammate Walsh to clinch the 100m butterfly crown, hitting the wall in 55.59, with Walsh second in 55.63 and China's Zhang Yufei third. It was a shock win, with 21-year-old Walsh heavily favoured after shattering Sarah Sjoestroem's eight-year-old world record last month and owning the top three times in history. "I don't really remember my race that much," said Huske. "It's just very overwhelming when you've been training for this moment for so long." In other action, defending women's 200m freestyle champion Ariarne Titmus surged into Monday's final a day after taking the 400m title. She showed few signs of tiredness, clocking 1:54.64 in the semi-finals ahead of teammate Mollie O'Callaghan (1:54.70).

Japan's Kano Breaks French Hearts in Olympic Fencing Final



PARIS (Dispatches) - Fencer Koki Kano became Japan's first individual epee Olympic champion on Sunday, beating France's Yannick Borel 15-9 as American defending champion Lee Kiefer won the women's foil. Kano, 26, added to his team gold from Tokyo but for a second successive night the French crowd had to make do with silver after Auriane Mallo-Breton was runner-up in the women's epee on Saturday. The men's final proved to be one-sided despite the best efforts of the 9,000 spectators at the magnificent Grand Palais. Cries of "Yannick Yannick" rang out as Borel, 35, appeared on the balcony overlooking the great hall with his opponent before descending the grand staircase. Kano edged ahead but Borel kept in touch initially before his Japanese opponent opened up a 8-4 lead. The crowd tried to lift the Frenchman, drumming their feet on the floor but Kano was in total charge at 12-6 and was rarely troubled as he wrapped up the win. "I'm so happy to win gold in the individual event," said Kano. "Three years ago in Tokyo (2020 Games) I won gold, but it was the team event." "I wanted to come here and get gold in the individual and I just did it." Egypt's Mohamed Elsayed beat Hungary's Tibor Andrasi to take bronze, celebrating by sprinting down the piste and brandishing the Egypt flag. In the women's foil, American defending champion Lee Kiefer beat compatriot Lauren Scruggs 15-6. Kiefer was rarely troubled by Scruggs in winning her second successive individual title. "No matter how much I tried to prepare, there's still so much pressure I put on myself to just fence well and stay present," she said. "Each day was a rollercoaster, but here we are at the top." Canada's Eleanor Harvey beat Italian Alice Volpi in the bronze medal match.

Nadal says Djokovic 'clear favourite' in Olympics blockbuster



PARIS (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal insists Novak Djokovic will be the favorite when they clash at the Paris Olympics, after the Spaniard battled to victory over Marton Fucsovics in the first round on Sunday. Nadal had left his participation in the singles in doubt until the last minute because of a thigh injury, and was made to work hard for his 6-1, 4-6, 6-4 victory. The 38-year-old -- who has won 14 of his 22 Grand Slam titles on the clay of Roland Garros -- believes old rival Djokovic will be favourite when they meet for the 60th time. "Situations are completely different for him, for me. He's being very competitive. I was not being very competitive for the last two years, so in that case, I think probably he is the clear favourite," said Nadal, who holds an 8-2 head-to-head advantage over the Serb at Roland Garros. "I'm going to try my best to bring the best to the court and then let's see how far I can go and how many problems I can create for him." The latest chapter of a generation-defining rivalry, and perhaps the final act, will bring Nadal and Djokovic full circle -- the duo having met as teenagers in their very first meeting in the 2006 Roland Garros quarter-finals. Outside round-robin matches in the season-ending ATP Finals, their second-round encounter at the Olympics will be the earliest they have ever met at a tournament. "It has always been super special to play against Novak, no doubt about that," said Nadal. "But the difference is normally we have been playing for finals or for semi-finals. "Of course, it's an Olympics... every match is super special. But it's true that at the same time, almost every single match that I played against Novak, I arrive at it with a different situation that I am today. "So that makes the match more difficult for me and more unpredictable. But, I always have hope, I always believe."