

The Chief Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami Has Strongly Warned the Israeli Regime of Consequences of the Assassination of a Senior Hezbollah Figure

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Secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi Announced That the 8th Islamic Human Rights Award Ceremony Will Be Held in Tehran on Sunday in the Presence of Iran's Judiciary Chief and Ambassadors of Islamic Countries

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Bright Prospects in Iran-Russia Trade



TEHRAN - Roshanali Yektaye Ghorbani, Vice President of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce, outlined a bright outlook for trade between the two countries this year. He stated that the Central Bank of Iran's promise to enable the use of banking cards from both countries in Iran and Russia, along with the newly established transportation capacity, could herald the development of Iran-Russia trade this year. Another positive development is the complete connection of the North-South Corridor with the Rasht to Anzali railway, which provides a significant boost to Iran-Russia trade. He added that the Central Bank has not yet detailed the exchange rate mechanism for banking transactions via these cards. Although there are discussions suggesting that the central banks of Iran and Russia plan to resolve this issue through China, he believes the best solution is a single exchange rate. He hopes the 14th government will fulfill its campaign promise of a unified exchange rate. The Vice President noted that Russia's trade value is \$700 billion annually. Although this figure has decreased by about 10% since the Russia-Ukraine war, it still represents a strong opportunity for the development of Iran's trade. He emphasized that Iran could be a mediator for the trade of Russian goods worldwide. This advantage stems from Iran's location near the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. Not only Russia but other Eurasian countries north of Iran are also interested in using Iran as a conduit to access open waters and subsequently reach different parts of the world. Today, Iran serves as a gateway for these countries' products to global markets. However, this gateway's opening is contingent on resolving Iran's financial transaction issues with the world. Through Iran, countries in this region can access markets in Africa, China, and India. Ghorbani noted that the current trade value between Iran and Russia is about \$4 billion annually. Furthermore, the topic of free trade between Iran and Eurasia has not been halted, and Iran remains an observer member of this union. He recalled that Iran, leveraging its economic diplomacy, has joined BRICS and now must fully utilize this membership's potential. Although achieving this requires overcoming existing financial transaction limitations, if resolved, it could lead to significant growth in Iran's trade. Hence, it is expected that the upcoming government will review financial mechanisms.

Iran's Oil Production Reaches Highest Level in 6 Years



TEHRAN - According to Reuters, OPEC oil production increased in July. It appears that the rise in Saudi Arabia's oil supply has offset the voluntary production cuts by other members of the OPEC+ coalition.

Data from ship tracking and industry sources show that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries produced 26.70 million barrels last month, which is 100,000 barrels per day higher than in June.

This increase in production comes despite the OPEC+ coalition announcing that it will maintain its production cuts until the end of 2025 to support the market amid weak demand growth, high interest rates, and rising U.S. production.

OPEC+ kept its production policy unchanged at the ministerial meeting on Thursday, according to which the group's production will gradually increase from October but will stop and decrease again if necessary.

Saudi Arabia had the highest increase in production among OPEC members with 70,000 barrels per day. The country's oil production in July reached 9 million barrels per day, close to the set target.

Nigeria had the largest decrease in production with 30,000 barrels per day, and its exports decreased compared to the previous month.

Libya and Iran, which are exempt from production cuts, as well as Iraq, have increased production. Iran's oil production reached 3.22 million barrels per day, the highest level since 2018.

Despite ongoing U.S. sanctions, Iran has increased its oil exports over the past few years. Iraq's oil production has also risen, with the country's exports increasing compared to the previous month.

OPEC produced about 240,000 barrels per day more than the target set for the nine members included in the production cut agreement, with most of this excess production attributed to Iraq.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - Ali Fekri, the head of the Iranian Organization for Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance, explained the organization's responsibilities regarding policy-making and guiding foreign investments, liaising with international development banks, securing foreign financing, and managing economic relations with target countries. He noted that although the organization does not directly handle domestic investments, defining investment opportunities, especially under the production and infrastructure financing law, has become part of their role. Both foreign and domestic investors benefit from these defined opportunities.

Regarding the latest foreign investment statistics, Fekri explained that previously, any issued license was counted as the organization's performance. However, since the start of the government led by the martyred Raisi, only investments with valid licenses, where either part of the capital has entered or is about to enter, are counted in the statistics.

Fekri noted that under these conditions, the total approvals by the organization and the foreign investment board amounted to nearly \$17 billion. However, the officially announced figure during Raisi's administration was slightly over \$11 billion, with the difference being licenses that were revoked and thus excluded from the statistics.

When asked whether Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS has impacted investment growth, Fekri emphasized that the main investors in Iran under Raisi's government are SCO member countries. Additionally, the government prioritized developing relations with neighboring countries.

Fekri highlighted that neighboring countries are major foreign investors, with Russia leading in 2023, followed by China, Turkey, and the UAE. Iranians residing abroad are also significant foreign investors.

He stressed that economic diplomacy facilitates investment, crediting the efforts of both the martyred president and the foreign minister, Dr. Amir Abdollahian. One of the first tangible benefits of SCO membership was hosting a conference in Tehran to encourage investments from SCO member countries, which helped build trust and attract investments.

Fekri stated that these investments have visibly impacted the economy, citing increased oil production and investments in mining, which have boosted employment and national revenue.

However, Fekri acknowledged that the current level of foreign investment is still far from making a significant impact on the large Iranian economy. The goal is to increase investment to a level where it has a tangible effect on the public.

Regarding measures to build investor trust during the thirteenth government, Fekri noted significant progress in fostering trust with aligned and neighboring countries through foreign visits and commitments made by the Islamic Republic. Investments increased as a result of this improved trust and cooperation.

Fekri remarked that the investments from China and Russia before Raisi's administration are not comparable to the levels afterward, partly due to collaborations within organizations like the SCO and BRICS and partly due to bilateral relations and trust-building efforts.

Fekri highlighted that over the past three years, trust-building with neighboring countries reached a satisfactory level, resolving many long-standing issues. Political developments have led to economic effects, such as resuming relations with the Islamic Development Bank, which had been nearly halted but are now normalized thanks to improved relations with countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

He mentioned that over 14 projects in various provinces, previously stalled, are now being implemented with the bank's capacity, and debts are being paid off more easily.

Regarding cooperation documents with Russia and China, Fekri explained that these documents outline the strategic direction of bilateral relations without specifying numbers or particular projects. Last year, China became the largest foreign investor in Iran, a result of such negotiations, with investments rising from under \$500 million to \$2 billion, a fourfold increase.

Fekri noted that the announced figure of \$11 billion is based on approved licenses. Additionally, there are about \$2.7 billion in investments that have begun operations but did not receive official licenses from the investment organization. Thus, the total investment during Raisi's administration is approximately \$13.46 billion, with the remainder being mainly in oil and gas projects. He emphasized the importance of regulatory stability to prevent investor confusion, noting that regulation changes have decreased under the thirteenth government, though investors expect even more consistency.

Fekri mentioned that about \$2.2 billion from Iranian expatriates has been invested in projects already underway in Iran. Most investments enter the country as production lines and machinery due to currency policies that facilitate importing equipment.

Lastly, he highlighted a policy allowing foreign investment in the form of gold bars, implemented during Raisi's administration, enabling investors to bring in gold, have it priced, and even repatriate profits or capital if needed.

Iran Reiterates Inherent Right to Punish Israeli Gang



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran will certainly exercise its inherent and legitimate right to punish the "criminal Zionist gang" for its terrorist attack on Wednesday, which resulted in the killing of Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, saying the European Union's silence has emboldened Israel to commit atrocities. Ali Baqeri Kani, acting Foreign Minister, made these remarks during a phone call with Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs.

Baqeri emphasized that the Israeli regime's terrorist act, in addition to violating Iran's territorial integrity and national sovereignty, has endangered regional and international peace and stability.

The top Iranian diplomat criticized certain European countries for aligning with the US to prevent the UN Security Council from condemning Haniyeh's assassination during an extraordinary session on Wednesday. Baqeri stressed that the pro-Israel stance of these states, evident in their silence regarding the Zionists' warring in Yemen and Lebanon, has emboldened the regime to continue its aggressive actions, jeopardizing regional peace and stability. He urged the EU to fulfill its responsibility to maintain international peace and security by pressuring the Israeli regime to cease its crimes. He warned that a lack of serious action by the EU to restrain the Zionist regime would encourage the criminal gang in Tel Aviv to continue actions that endanger regional and international peace and stability. Borrell acknowledged Iran's legitimate right to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty and expressed concern about the increasing tensions and the potential for a full-scale war in the region and its consequences for the people. Haniyeh, who was in Tehran to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Iran's newly-elected President Masoud Pezeshkian, was assassinated along with his bodyguard in an Israeli attack on his residence on Wednesday. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has warned the Israeli regime of a "harsh response" for the assassination of Haniyeh, stating that the Islamic Republic has to avenge the blood of the Palestinian resistance leader.

"The criminal and terrorist Zionist regime martyred our dear guest in our homeland and left us bereaved, but it also set the ground for a harsh punishment for itself," the Leader said.

OIC Calls for Urgent Probe Into Israeli Violations Against Palestinian Inmates



GAZA (Dispatches) - The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has called for an urgent investigation into Israeli abuse of Palestinian prisoners, amid harrowing testimonies from released Palestinians and a new UN report that the Palestinians are subjected to ill-treatment including dire physical conditions and torture. In a statement, the 57-member organization expressed "deep concern regarding the increased violent acts and severe violations committed by the occupying Israeli regime against numerous Palestinian prisoners." "These violations have been well-documented by various legal entities and include acts such as execution, torture, starvation, rape, isolation and forced disappearance," it added. The organization highlighted that such violations have resulted in the deaths of 18 Gazan prisoners in Israeli detention centers since the outbreak of the Gaza war on October 7 last year. The OIC also denounced the "ongoing indiscriminate detention drives carried out by Israeli authorities." "These actions have resulted in a significant increase in the number of Palestinian detainees, with the current count exceeding 9,700 individuals. Among them are 80 female detainees, 52 journalists, and over 250 children, in addition to more than 3,380 individuals held in administrative detention without formal charges or trial," it said, noting that "close to 600 detainees are serving life sentences." The OIC finally called for an immediate international inquiry into the "cruel conditions and continuous Israeli infringements against Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons." The Israeli military is believed to have detained thousands of Palestinians, including women, children and medics ever since it started its devastating ground and aerial offensives against Gaza. Those released have shown signs of torture. CNN television news channel and the New York Times are among the American media that have reported on the abuse of Palestinians in Israeli detention since the bombing of Gaza began.

Hezbollah Will Hit Broader, Deeper Israeli Targets



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations says Hezbollah's response to the recent Israeli assassination of one of its top commanders will be a much "broader and deeper" attack on targets.

The mission made the statement in response to queries on the quality of Hezbollah's retaliation against the illegal entity's targeted killing of Fuad Shukur, who lost his life alongside several others in an Israeli airstrike on a building in the southern Beirut suburb of Dahieh on Tuesday.

"Until now, Hezbollah and the regime have, in an unwritten understanding, practically adhered to certain limits in their military operations, meaning that confining their actions to border areas and shallow zones, targeting primarily military objectives," a spokesperson for the mission said on Friday night.

"However, the Israeli regime's attack on Dahieh in Beirut and the targeting of a residential building marked a deviation from these boundaries. We anticipate that, in its response, Hezbollah will choose both broader and deeper targets, and will not restrict itself solely to military targets and means."

Asked to clarify where these targets might be, the spokesperson stressed that they would be "within" the Israeli-occupied territories.

Shukur, who had an important role in the formation and consolidation of the

resistance front against the Israeli occupation, was martyred along with two children and two women in the attack on a residential apartment in Dahieh.

In a fiery speech broadcast at the funeral of Shukur on Thursday, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah said Israel had "crossed a red line" and must brace for a stern response from the resistance.

While offering his condolences to the families of those martyred in the bombing, Nasrallah vowed during his hour-long address that Hezbollah would avenge the blood of Shukur with an "inevitable retaliation" against the Israeli regime and that Tel Aviv must expect "rage and revenge on all the fronts supporting Gaza."

At least 39,480 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed and 91,128 people wounded in Israel's genocidal war against the besieged Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023.

Israel's assassination of Shukur comes amid heightened tensions following the Israeli targeted killing of Palestinian resistance movement Hamas's Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh in the Iranian capital of Tehran.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has warned the regime of a "harsh response" for the assassination, saying it is the Islamic Republic's duty to avenge the blood of the resistance leader.

IRAN NEWS



Haniyeh Assassination Carried Out With U.S. Green Light

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Intelligence Esmacel Khatib has said that the Zionist regime's assassination of Hamas top leader Ismail Haniyeh has happened with the U.S. green light. Haniyeh was targeted and martyred in a pre-dawn attack in Tehran on Wednesday as he had just attended the inauguration ceremony of Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian.

The Iranian minister said that his assassination which was carried out by the occupying Zionist regime and with the go-ahead of the US, once again demonstrated the brutality of the Tel Aviv regime.

In a statement on Wednesday, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei reacted to the assassination of Haniyeh, vowing harsh retaliation against the Zionist regime which he said "martyred our dear guest in our home."

"We consider his revenge as our duty," the Supreme Leader said.

China's Official Entry Into Iran's Housing Industrialization



TEHRAN - Saeed Ghafoori stated at a specialized meeting of technology-based and knowledge-based consortia for housing industrialization: "Given the leader's directive to utilize a knowledge-based economy and support the growth of knowledge-based production, especially in the construction and housing sector, we have come together today to host consortia of the country's knowledge-based companies and sign agreements in this field."

He explained, "We are implementing the construction of 1,000 units of the National and Partnership Housing Movement with the cooperation of knowledge-based companies. Our support for these companies is not just financial or through facilities; we aim to create platforms that change the bureaucratic structure and reach a network structure that allows us to utilize the capacities of knowledge-based companies."

The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development continued, "For better outcomes, making buildings more sustainable, and most importantly, reducing overall costs, we have turned towards knowledge-based companies."

The CEO of the New Towns Development Company announced the entry of Chinese companies into housing construction and said, "Although we do not need foreign companies, including Chinese companies, for housing construction, the important issue is utilizing new technologies worldwide. We aim to introduce new construction technologies into the country with the cooperation of Chinese companies. Several Chinese companies have visited housing projects in Parand and Pardis, and we have seen good potential in these companies for technology integration in our country during negotiations."

He emphasized, "This technology will enter the operational sector and factories. If we can integrate this technology with domestic experience, we can achieve our goals."

IRAN NEWS ENGLISH DESK



Tehran, Dhaka Keen to Broaden Trade Ties

TEHRAN - The President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture stated that Iranian traders and businessmen are ready to participate in investment projects in Bangladesh with the aim of re-exporting goods. In a meeting with A. K. Abdul Momen, the Minister of Commerce of Bangladesh, Samad Hasanazadeh said, "We want to export products that are about 80% complete to Bangladesh so that, with the participation of Bangladeshi partners, the remaining 20% can be completed and then re-exported to other countries." He emphasized that realizing such cooperation requires the implementation of double taxation avoidance agreements and preferential trade agreements between Iran and Bangladesh, which have not been enacted in the past 20 years. Referring to the start of the new Iranian president's term, Hasanazadeh continued, "The two countries must redefine their trade relations with a new plan." The President of the Iran Chamber highlighted Bangladesh's population of 170 million and its promising market for Iran, stating that Iran has significant capacities in food production, textile industries, knowledge-based products, pharmaceuticals, and medical equipment, construction materials, information technology, and the export of technical and engineering services. Hasanazadeh noted that the level of trade relations between the two countries has not kept pace with their good political relations. He continued, "By holding the joint economic commission, which has not convened in 10 years, and by dispatching and receiving trade delegations through the chambers of commerce of both countries, we can enhance trade relations." A. K. Abdul Momen, the Minister of Commerce of Bangladesh, emphasized the importance of developing Iran-Bangladesh relations in this meeting. He stated, "Bangladesh can serve as a gateway for Iranian traders to the Bay of Bengal and countries such as Nepal and ASEAN nations." Highlighting Bangladesh's significant capacities in the production of jute, leather, and textiles, Momen continued, "Iran also has good capacities in the production of bitumen, LPG gas, polyester, and petrochemical products, as well as dried fruits, saffron, and carpets, and we are keen to import these items from Iran." Momen added that payment issues between the two countries have hindered the development of economic relations between Iran and Bangladesh. He expressed hope that with ongoing efforts between the governments of the two countries, this problem will soon be resolved and alternative solutions will be defined. He emphasized the need to expedite the implementation of double taxation avoidance and preferential trade agreements between the two countries. Momen said, "By connecting our ports and establishing a payment system between the two countries, we can fully utilize the existing capacities."

Welcoming the investment of the Iranian private sector in Bangladesh, Momen continued, "We are working to facilitate interactions between the private sectors of the two countries and provide necessary information to Iranian traders."

Earlier Ghafoori Ghayfeh, Vice President of the (ICCIMA) stated that current trade volume between Iran and Bangladesh is \$200

million, which does not reflect the trade potential of the two countries. In the "Strategies to Overcome Trade Barriers Between Iran and Bangladesh" meeting, Ghayfeh noted the complementary economies of the two nations. Iran can supply Bangladesh with chemical fertilizers, urea, oil, gas, and dried fruits, while Bangladesh can meet Iran's needs in textiles, clothing, and certain agricultural products. Ghayfeh stressed the need for direct banking connections and emphasized the private sector's request for the Bangladeshi government's commitment to this issue. Bangladesh's Commerce Minister, Ahsan Islam Tito, highlighted efforts to establish various infrastructures and access to a surrounding population of 300 million. He encouraged Iranian traders to produce in Bangladesh and export their products globally through the country. Tito added that foreign investments in Bangladesh are 100% tax-exempt and noted special economic zones available for Iranian investors. He suggested exploring trade using local currencies to enhance financial and banking transactions, which would support increased trade relations. Tito urged maximizing the bilateral and D-8 preferential trade agreements to enhance trade interactions between Iran and Bangladesh. Niloufar Asadi, Director of Asia and Oceania at the International Affairs Department of the Iran Chamber, highlighted the significant cooperation potential between the two countries. She mentioned opportunities in jute, dates, dried fruits, machine-made carpets, knowledge-based products, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, tourism, and building materials for joint trade and investment. Asadi reiterated the Chamber's efforts to facilitate bilateral trade and expressed hope for smoother trade relations following the implementation of double tax avoidance agreements and bilateral and multilateral preferential trade agreements with D-8 countries. Manjurul Karim Khan Chowdhury, Bangladesh's Ambassador to Iran, acknowledged the challenges in trade relations due to sanctions but expressed optimism for a swift resolution within a few months. He confirmed Bangladesh's commitment to implementing the preferential trade agreement with Iran, which would ease bilateral trade. Chowdhury emphasized rejuvenating Iran-Bangladesh trade through new-generation traders and modern trade methods, with the Bangladeshi embassy in Iran fully supporting this initiative. Khurshid Gazdarazi, Chair of the Iran-Bangladesh Joint Committee, proposed several measures to enhance trade relations, including forming a corresponding committee in Bangladesh, implementing preferential tariffs, bartering goods, active engagement with Bangladeshi chambers of commerce, signing trade agreements, investing in Iran's petrochemical sector, developing transportation links, and managing financial and banking relations. Gazdarazi requested the Bangladeshi embassy to provide investment opportunities and market entry details, including tariffs and import regulations, to inform Iranian traders. He emphasized the importance of trade delegations and participation in exhibitions to boost Iran-Bangladesh trade relations.

Tabriz to Hold Int'l Tourism Exhibition



TEHRAN - Alireza Bayramzadeh emphasized the importance of the Tabriz International Tourism Exhibition in showcasing the attractions and capacities of the province. He stated that the Tabriz Tourism Exhibition, aimed at a comprehensive introduction of travel facilities in East Azerbaijan province, as well as its service, accommodation, and recreational capacities, will be held in Iranian month of Mehr (October-November) at the Tabriz International Exhibition Center.

The Deputy Director of Tourism for East Azerbaijan continued: In this exhibition, domestic and international tourism companies, international tourism industry activists, especially from neighboring countries and target tourism countries, along with artists and handicraft products from the province, will comprehensively present the unique capacities of East Azerbaijan.

He added: This year marks the third edition of the Tabriz International Exhibition, which last year received a warm welcome from enthusiasts, investors, and domestic and international tourism industry activists. The approach of the Tabriz International Tourism Exhibition last year created a favorable environment for investors and tourism industry activists, and following this exhibition, the province attracted even more attention from both domestic and foreign tourists.

Regarding the importance of the Tabriz Tourism Exhibition, Bayramzadeh said: Given the numerous historical sites and attractions in this province, holding the tourism exhibition can facilitate a comprehensive introduction of most travel necessities and concerns for tourists, providing them with an overview of the capacities, attractions, and available facilities in this province.

Cuba: A Promising Market for Iranian Products and Services



TEHRAN - The Head of the Europe and Americas Office of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), highlighted the organization's efforts to expand Iran-Cuba trade relations, announcing the establishment of the Iranian pavilion at the 40th Havana International Fair, set to be held from November 4 to 9 this year.

Ahmad Firoozi, Head of the Europe and Americas Office, emphasized the strong friendship between Iran and Cuba. He stated that the long-standing friendship between the two nations is at an excellent level and that the vast potential for cooperation between them needs to be identified and promoted so that Iranian companies can gain a significant share of the Cuban market. Firoozi continued by noting the organization's recent efforts to increase trade between the two countries. These efforts include developing necessary infrastructure, utilizing trade tools such as delegations at specialized exhibitions, updating and implementing the preferential trade agreement signed in 2007, and organizing market introduction meetings. He pointed out that a significant portion of Cuba's market needs are met through imports from other countries, presenting numerous opportunities for exports in all categories of goods and services. Firoozi listed Iran's export capacities to Cuba, explaining that in recent years, Iran has initiated and executed projects in various Cuban sectors, including railways, machinery, flour production, dairy, refrigerator exports, electricity network improvements, and other industries. Currently, there are ample opportunities for cooperation in the reconstruction and modernization of sugarcane fields and sugar production factories in Cuba. Overall, there are mutual trade cooperation opportunities in industrial, mining, petrochemical, and medical (pharmaceutical and medical equipment) fields. He added that in recent years, Cubans have become familiar with Iran's production capabilities. High-ranking Cuban delegations participated in the fifth and sixth Iran Expo exhibitions held last year and this year. According to Firoozi, a Cuban delegation, led by the Minister of Transportation and accompanied by the President of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce and Cuban traders, visited the Iran Expo 2024 this year, gaining further insight into Iran's production capacities. During this event, numerous meetings with organizations and institutions with bilateral cooperation potential took place, along with visits to Iran's production lines, resulting in the signing of memoranda of understanding and contracts. Referring to the Cuban President's visit to Iran last December, Firoozi noted that this visit, in response to the visit of Iran's martyr president to Havana in June 2023, involved TPO and the Cuban Embassy in Tehran organizing a business seminar with about 140 Iranian economic and industrial activists. Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel expressed a strong interest in cooperating with Iran and detailed the products and services needed by Cuba to Iranian companies.



Iran-Africa Trade Surpasses \$1b

TEHRAN - President of the Iran-Africa Joint Chamber of Commerce Masoud Barhaman, during a meeting with traders from North Khorasan, said: "Africa, comprising 55 countries with a population of 1.45 billion, engages in financial transactions amounting to 1,500 billion dollars, with half of this being exports and the other half imports of goods." He added: "90% of diamond mines, 70% of gold mines, and the majority of the world's bauxite mines are located in this continent. Additionally, Africa has substantial capacities in natural resources, environmental, and agricultural sectors. Unfortunately, Iran's trade with this continent amounts to only 1.3 billion dollars, with one billion from exports and the remainder from imports." Barhaman noted that most of the imports to Africa consist of petroleum products, oil, and steel products. He emphasized that North Khorasan has a high potential for exporting these products to Africa, as it is a producer of steel and petrochemical products. He also mentioned that Iran shares borders with 15 countries, collectively housing a population of 600 million. He stated that Iran's trade with neighboring countries amounts to 38 billion dollars. Countries like Iraq, one of Iran's target export markets, tend to restrict the export of products they start producing domestically. Thus, Iran has a window of three to four years to export products to Iraq. Moreover, trade tensions with countries like Russia and China affect Iran's exports, underscoring the need to expand export markets. African countries present significant opportunities in this regard. The President of the Iran-Africa Joint Chamber of Commerce stressed the importance of increasing Iran's presence in Latin American and African countries. He remarked that Iran has primarily been an importing country and lacks professional exporters. Although Iran exports goods worth 60 billion dollars, the capacity for exports is 360 billion dollars. Historically, strong domestic sales have been favorable, but with the onset of recession last year, there has been a need to shift towards exports. He emphasized planning for exports and said: "Africa is an underdeveloped continent with no substantial industry, which presents an opportunity for our export-oriented producers. 80% of Africa's population is engaged in agriculture, predominantly non-mechanized, and there is a lack of processing industries for agricultural products."

Barhaman concluded by stating that the economic growth of African countries surpasses the global average. This is due to their focus on infrastructure development, including power plants, dams, roads, overseas cultivation, and the exploration and extraction of minerals. In five years, the competition in Africa will intensify due to its rapid development.

80% Reduction in Coal Production in the Country



TEHRAN - Despite having vast coal reserves and a high potential for coal production, Iran has seen a significant decline in coal production in recent years due to various factors, including increased production costs and export regulations.

Saeed Samadi, Secretary of the Coal Association, in an interview talked about the level of coal production: "Annually, about 1.8 million tons of coal are produced in the country, covering an average of 400 to 450 tons each season."

He continued: "Due to the low cost and availability of this mineral, there is high demand, but the country's production capacity is not sufficient, forcing us to import 1.5 million tons of coal and coke annually from countries such as Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, and Australia."

The Secretary of the Coal Association added: "The coal sector is not in good condition, and because it does not have much domestic consumption, this commodity is primarily for export. About 85% of thermal coal production is exported, generating significant

foreign exchange for the country."

Samadi emphasized: "Unfortunately, since the beginning of the year, according to a government directive, exporters must hand over their foreign exchange earnings from exports to the government at the Nima rate, making coal exports uneconomical. Despite a 30-40% increase in production costs due to rising prices, exporters are forced to sell their foreign exchange to the government at a very low rate."

He stated: "This situation has caused significant losses for many coal exporters, leading to the cessation of activities and closure of production units. As a result, we are currently facing an 80% reduction in coal production in the country, and soon our mines will face closure."

The President of the Coal Association also commented on suggestions to the fourteenth government to help the coal sector: "The government should reconsider the export of thermal coal and support exporters."

Tunisian Presidential Candidates Complain of Restrictions, Intimidation

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Tunisian opposition parties, presidential candidates and human rights groups have accused the authorities of using "arbitrary restrictions" and intimidation in order to ensure the re-election of President Kais Saied in a vote set for Oct. 6. Saied announced on July 19 that he would seek another five-year term. Elected in 2019, Saied dissolved parliament in 2021 and began ruling by decree in a move the opposition described as a coup. He has said he will not hand over power to what he calls "non-patriots". As an Aug. 6 deadline for registering as a presidential candidate looms, 11 opposition figures who hope to run against Saied issued a joint statement this week criticising the authorities. "The violations have affected most of the serious candidates to the point that they appear to indicate a desire to exclude them (from the election) and restrict them in order to make way for a specific candidate," they said in the joint statement. None of the 11 opposition candidates have yet obtained a document certifying that they have no criminal record - a new condition - which will then allow them to register. The Election Commission spokesperson said the interior ministry would contact the candidates to provide them with the necessary document, without saying when this would happen. The Commission also rejected the accusations of bias.



IRAN NEWS

Harris Secures Democratic Nomination, Set to Face Trump in November



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris effectively secured the Democratic party's presidential nomination yesterday, confirming her remarkable rise to party standard bearer in November's showdown against Republican Donald Trump.

Harris, 59, was the sole candidate on the ballot for a five-day electronic vote of nearly 4,000 party convention delegates. The first Black and South Asian woman ever to secure a major party's nomination, she will be officially crowned at a Chicago convention later this month.

Harris said on a phone-in to a party celebration she was "honoured" to have amassed the required support by the second day of the marathon virtual vote and declared: "We are going to win this election."

"And it is going to take all of us... We are going to talk with people about the fact that we are all in this together, and we stand together," Harris said. "And so, let's let folks know that our campaign is about the future. And it's about an expansion of rights and freedoms, and for the opportunity of everyone to not just get by, but to get ahead." In the two weeks since Joe Biden ended his reelection bid, Harris has gained full control of the party, smashing fundraising records, packing arenas and erasing the polling leads Trump had built over the president.

"I couldn't be prouder," Biden posted on X after her nomination. The nomination milestone came with Harris preparing to hit the campaign trail next week for a swing across seven crucial election states alongside her yet-to-be-named running mate. The roll call - held earlier than usual and online due to altered state registration rules - marks the official beginning of the 2024 convention, with the traditional festivities starting when the party faithful descends on Chicago on August 19.



U.S. to Send More Warships, Fighter Jets to Middle East

WASHINGTON (Dispatches)- The U.S. military will deploy additional fighter jets and Navy warships to the Middle East, the Pentagon said on Friday, as Washington seeks to bolster defenses following threats from Iran and its allies Hamas and Hezbollah.

The U.S. is bracing for Iran to make good on its vow to respond to the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh two days ago in Tehran - one in a series of killings of senior figures in the Palestinian militant group as the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza rages.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had approved sending additional Navy cruisers and destroyers-- which can shoot down ballistic missiles-- to the Middle East and Europe.

It is also sending an additional squadron of fighter jets to the Middle East.

"Austin has ordered adjustments to U.S. military posture designed to improve U.S. force protection, to increase support for the defense of Israel, and to ensure the United States is prepared to respond to various contingencies," the Pentagon said in a statement.

There had been speculation that the Pentagon might not replace the USS Theodore Roosevelt carrier strike group in the Middle East once it completed its ongoing deployment. But Austin decided to rotate in the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier strike group to replace it.

The Pentagon statement added it would increase readiness to deploy more land-based ballistic missile defenses.

The U.S. military also intensified deployments prior to April 13, when Iran launched an attack on Israeli territory with drones and missiles. Still, the threat from Hezbollah in Lebanon could present unique challenges to any efforts by the United States to intercept drones and missiles given the group's vast arsenal and immediate proximity to Israel.

Biden, in a phone call on Thursday with Netanyahu, discussed new U.S. defensive military deployments to support Israel against threats such as missiles and drones, the White House said.

Iran and Hamas have both accused Israel of carrying out the killing and have pledged to retaliate against their foe. Israel has not claimed responsibility for the death nor denied it.

Haniyeh's death was one in a series of killings of senior Hamas figures as the war in Gaza between Hamas and Israel nears its 11th month and concern grows that the conflict is spreading across the Middle East.

Earlier, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said the U.S. did not believe escalation was inevitable. "I think we are being very direct in our messaging that certainly we don't want to see heightened tensions and we do believe there is an off ramp here and that is that ceasefire deal," Singh said.

An Israeli delegation will travel to Cairo in coming days for negotiations to reach a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said on Friday.

Venezuela Set for New Protests After Maduro Win Ratified

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela braced for fresh protests, after President Nicolas Maduro's disputed election victory was ratified -- and a growing number of nations recognized his opposition rival as the true winner. Both Maduro and the opposition, led by Maria Corina Machado and her presidential candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, have called on their supporters to demonstrate this weekend, in the wake of Sunday's controversial vote. The South American country's CNE election authority, which is loyal to Maduro, on Friday proclaimed him the winner with 52 percent of the vote and said Gonzalez Urrutia had garnered 43 percent of ballots. But Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and Uruguay recognized opposition Gonzalez Urrutia as the true president-elect, joining the United States and Peru in rejecting the official results. For his part, the 61-year-old Maduro -- who has reacted fiercely to criticism of his victory -- described allegations of vote fraud as a "trap" orchestrated by Washington to justify "a coup." He also has threatened Machado and Gonzalez Urrutia, saying they "should be behind bars." Maduro has led the oil-rich, cash-poor country since 2013, presiding over a GDP drop of 80 percent that pushed more than seven million of once-wealthy Venezuela's 30 million citizens to emigrate. Experts blame economic mismanagement and US sanctions for the collapse. Gonzalez Urrutia did not show up to a hearing at the Supreme Court after Maduro requested the tribunal investigate and certify the election result. However, other opposition candidates summoned to the hearing called for a detailed vote count to be made public after Sunday's vote, which was held amid widespread fear the vote would be rigged. Voting records "are fundamental for transparency, they are fundamental for peace," said Enrique Marquez, who also ran against Maduro as part of a smaller opposition group. The opposition this week launched a website with copies of 84 percent of ballots cast, showing an easy win for Gonzalez Urrutia. The government claims these are forged. Machado, who was barred from running herself,



wrote in The Wall Street Journal that she was in hiding and "fearing for my life," along with other opposition leaders. She called on supporters to rally Saturday in cities across the country to "assert the truth" about the opposition's victory. "We have the evidence and the world already recognizes it," Machado wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Maduro has called for daily mobilization, with "the mother of all marches to celebrate the victory of peace" on Saturday. He accused the opposition of plotting attacks against security forces during their rallies.

The NGO Foro Penal reported 11 dead in protests Monday and Tuesday as angry Venezuelans took to the streets, saying their votes had been stolen. Machado said at least 20 people had been killed. Authorities said more than 1,000 people were arrested in post-election protests. That crackdown has sparked fear among opposition supporters. "We have dead, wounded, detainees, missing people... People know it. They are afraid. They know they are going to find themselves facing armed people," said Katusca Camargo, an activist in the Petare slum in eastern Caracas. US

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday there was "overwhelming evidence" that Gonzalez Urrutia had won the election. Blinken spoke with Machado and Gonzalez Urrutia on Friday, expressing "his concern for their safety and well-being" and congratulating Gonzalez Urrutia "for receiving the most votes," the State Department said. In a joint statement, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico urged an "impartial verification" of the result, also calling for Caracas to publish voting data broken down by polling stations. Maduro's previous reelection, in 2018, was rejected by dozens of Latin American countries as well as the United States and European Union member states. He enjoys loyalty from the military leadership, electoral bodies, courts and other state institutions, as well as the backing of Russia, China and Cuba.



Russian Troops Inch Forward in Ukraine's East

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian assaults are raising pressure on the strategic eastern logistics hub of Pokrovsk, Ukraine said on Friday, as waves of guided bombs and infantry lead to some of Moscow's largest territorial gains since the spring.

The push is fuelling a surge in civilians fleeing, with requests for evacuation in the area increasing about tenfold over the past two weeks, according to a volunteer helping people leave.

Russian forces have been steadily inching forward on several fronts in the eastern Donetsk region, staging particularly fierce attacks near Pokrovsk with Kyiv's troops stretched thin 29 months since Russia's full-scale invasion.

Russia's gains of around 57 square km (22 square miles) in the space of a week are the third largest recorded since April after they made only modest gains in June, Pasi Paroinen, an analyst with the Black Bird Group, told Reuters.

Russian forces are using warplanes and artillery fire to support waves of infantry assaults in the area near Pokrovsk, Ruslan Muzychuk, a spokesperson for Ukraine's National Guard said in televised remarks.

"These assaults are not always supported by armoured vehicles, often it is infantry assaults," he said, flagging the bombing by Russian warplanes as a particular problem.

"It's a significant threat ... because the Pokrovsk and Toretsk fronts are taking a large share of the daily aviation strikes carried out on the positions of Ukrainian defenders."

Russia's Ministry of Defence said its forces had captured five settlements in the Donetsk region in the past week.

Hezbollah Resumes Steady Rocket, Artillery Fire Against Israel

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Hezbollah forces on Friday resumed rocket and artillery attacks against Israel, ending the lull along the border following Israel's killing of the Lebanese group's military commander in Beirut.

Hezbollah said it had fired a surface-to-air missile at an Israeli warplane flying in Lebanese airspace overnight and forced it to turn back. Its forces also carried out two artillery attacks and two rocket strikes at military positions in northern Israel, it said.

The Israeli military said in a statement it had successfully intercepted an aerial target coming from Lebanon into the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Israeli airstrikes and artillery fire hit several villages in southern Lebanon on Friday, according to Lebanese state media, a day after an Israeli strike killed at least five Syrian migrant workers in southern Lebanon, according to medics.

The Israeli military also said it had hit two Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said in an address on Thursday that he had ordered calm along the border following the Israeli airstrike in Beirut on Tuesday that killed military commander Fuad Shukur out of respect for the victims and to consider what the next steps should be.

The strike on the Hezbollah stronghold of Dahiyeh in Beirut's southern suburbs also killed an Iranian military adviser and five civilians.

Nasrallah said Hezbollah would retaliate but it would need to study what their response would be, and would otherwise resume its usual military operations against Israel.

Hezbollah and the Israeli military have been trading fire for nearly 10 months in parallel with the Gaza war, with exchanges mostly limited to the border area.

But strikes since last week have threatened to tip the conflict into a full-scale regional war.

Israel and the United States have accused Hezbollah of killing 12 youths in a July 27 rocket attack on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, a claim Hezbollah has denied.

The United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, told Reuters on Friday it had not investigated the incident as the Israeli-occupied Golan is outside its mandated area of operations.



Djokovic and Alcaraz Set Up Golden Showdown

PARIS (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic snapped his Olympic semi-final jinx with a 6-4 6-2 defeat of Italy's Lorenzo Musetti on Friday to set up a blockbuster battle for gold against Spain's Carlos Alcaraz. The 37-year-old Serb had lost his three previous Olympic singles semi-finals but was in no mood to suffer more heartache as he dominated a high-quality duel at Roland Garros.

Earlier on Court Philippe Chatrier, the 21-year-old Alcaraz thrashed Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-1 6-1. Djokovic needs only the Olympic gold to complete the full set of achievements in a career that has earned him 24 Grand Slam titles and the relief of reaching the final was clear as he laid on his back, arms outstretched, after match point. "Three of the (previous) four Olympic Games I played I made semi-finals but failed to overcome that hurdle," Djokovic, whose only medal was a singles bronze in 2008, told reporters. "Just to secure a higher medal for my country, whatever happens on Sunday, is a huge pride and honour. I'm going for gold, but this is a big deal." Djokovic lost to Rafa Nadal in the semi-final in Beijing, Andy Murray in the 2012 last four in London and in Tokyo it was Alexander Zverev who blocked his path. Musetti, bidding to emulate the Italian duo of Jasmine Paolini and Sara Errani who reached the women's doubles final, started superbly but Djokovic found another gear to break serve in the 10th game from 40-0 down and take the first set. Djokovic, who had concerns over his strapped-up knee ahead of the match, lost his cool in the second after twice dropping his serve, and was raging after a code violation. But he responded like the warrior he is, reeling off five games to become the oldest Olympic men's singles finalist since tennis returned to the Games in 1988. Second seed Alcaraz is the youngest and judging by his demolition of Auger-Aliassime he will be a formidable obstacle. The 21-year-old, who

outplayed Djokovic to win his second Wimbledon title last month, was in devastating form and needed little more than an hour to earn his shot at gold. "It means a lot to me being in a final at the Olympic Games and giving myself the chance to fight for a gold medal for my country. It is a special moment for my career and my life," Alcaraz, who like Djokovic has not dropped a set, said. "I'm really happy to bring a medal to my country, and hopefully, it's going to be the gold one."

Auger-Aliassime, bidding to become the first Canadian to reach an Olympic singles final, was outclassed. "In every aspect, I was dominated, there's not much more to say," the 23-year-old said. Realistically, Sunday's final is Djokovic's last chance to scratch his Olympic itch but he said he has nothing to lose. "Alcaraz has proved the best player in the world at the moment," he said. "He's definitely favourite, but it's the Olympics, it's anybody's game." The first gold medal of the tennis event went to Czech pair Katerina Siniakova and Tomas Machac who won the mixed doubles, beating China's Wang Xinyu and Zhang Zhizhen 6-2 5-7 10-8. Poland's Iga Swiatek earned some consolation for her tearful semi-final defeat on Thursday as she easily beat Slovakia's Anna Karolina Schmiedlova 6-2 6-1 to win bronze. "I think if I hadn't played today I would cry for a week, so I needed to get it together," the world number one said. Swiatek's conqueror Zheng Qinwen of China plays Croatia's Donna Vekic in the women's gold medal match on Saturday. Italy are guaranteed their first Olympic tennis medal since 1924 after Paolini and Errani eased past Czech duo Karolina Muchova and Linda Noskova 6-3 6-2 to reach the doubles final. They will play Russians Mirra Andreeva and Diana Shnaider, who are competing as neutrals, after they crushed Spain's Cristina Bucsa and Sara Sorribes 6-1 6-2.

Biles Seals GOAT Status With Gold Medal and Goat Bling



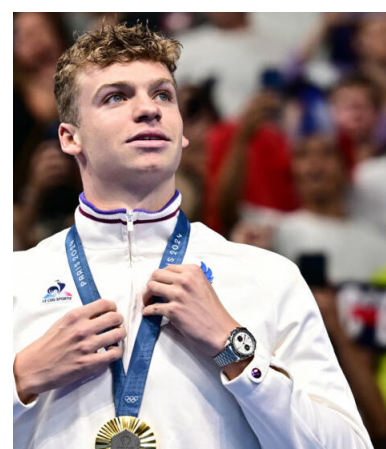
PARIS (Dispatches) - Simone Biles' sixth Olympic gold medal hung around her neck, and so did a twinkling little goat — just a reminder to the gymnast hailed as the greatest of all time that she does indeed belong in the pantheon of sports greats. "I was like, OK, if it goes well we'll wear the goat necklace," Biles said after winning a tense all-around final for her second gold medal of the Paris Games. "I know that people will go crazy over it, but at the end of the day it is crazy that I am in the conversation of greatest of all athletes, because I just still think I'm Simone Biles from Spring, Texas, that loves to flip." Biles, who has pushed her sport's limits on the way to an astounding haul of 39 world and Olympic medals — 29 of them gold — hasn't been beaten in an all-around competition since 2013 — when she won her first all-around world title. She won four gold medals at the 2016 Rio Olympics and looked poised to burnish her Olympic legacy in Tokyo three years ago before she withdrew from most of her events as she was struck by the mental block gymnasts call the "twisties." "It's been eight years," she said of the gap between her Olympic all-around golds. "It feels amazing. I was a little bit naive in the process. So I appreciate my craft a little bit more." Biles, who said she wasn't sure in the immediate aftermath of Tokyo if she would return to the world stage, credits coaches Cecile and Laurent Landi, her family and her own willingness to diligently work through mental health issues, with her ability to return from a near two-year absence and be even better than ever. She needed all of her mental strength after a miscue on uneven bars left her in third place midway through the final, albeit just .267 points behind leader and eventual silver medalist Rebeca Andrade of Brazil.

Marchand Emulates Phelps With Fourth Gold at Paris Olympics

PARIS (Dispatches) - Leon Marchand called it a "perfect week" after winning his fourth gold of the Paris Olympics with an emphatic victory in the 200m individual medley on Friday in front of an ecstatic home crowd. The Frenchman becomes the first male swimmer since American record-breaker Michael Phelps at Beijing 2008 to win four individual golds in a single Games. Marchand won in 1min 54.06sec, the second-fastest time in history and an Olympic record, with Britain's Duncan Scott taking silver and China's Wang Shun third. It was another memorable night for the host nation at La Defense Arena with French President Emmanuel Macron among those in the crowd celebrating the latest night of glory for the 22-year-old poster boy. "I don't think anything went wrong this week. It was just perfect," said a beaming Marchand after fans sang La Marseillaise. Marchand had already pocketed golds in the 200m butterfly and 200m breaststroke, along with the 400m individual medley, making him the clear favourite in Friday's race.

China's Wang, the defending champion, led after the opening butterfly leg but Marchand got himself in front during the backstroke. He extended his lead with a strong breaststroke 50 before holding on to his advantage in the final, freestyle, leg as the crowd roared him towards the wall. Marchand is trained by Phelps' former coach, Bob Bowman, and the American was searching for superlatives to describe the week's work from his swimmer. "It was just a complete success in terms of the way I see things. He's just 100% successful. I'm so very proud of him. It takes a lot to be perfect," he said. For Britain's Scott it was another silver to add to his collection — he finished second to Wang in Tokyo and now has eight Olympic medals. He said Marchand's impact on the sport was immeasurable. "He's becoming a sort of global superstar now and he kind of runs France now, which is what we're hearing in the crowd," he said. "It's amazing, and the kid, he's loved it. You can see he's doing it with a smile on his face and the crowd's giving him so much energy, it's

been amazing to witness it," he said. The bad news for any rivals hoping that this is a one-off burst of glory in a home pool is that Marchand is already thinking towards 2028. "It's not over for me. It's only the beginning. I'm really excited... my next goal is LA." He will also swim in Paris in two relays.



Cheptegei Holds off Ethiopian Trio to Win Olympic 10,000m Gold



PARIS (Dispatches) - Uganda's Joshua Cheptegei withstood Ethiopian team tactics to claim gold in the men's Olympic 10,000m at the Stade de France on Friday. The three-time world champion and world record holder, silver medalist at the Tokyo Games, timed an Olympic record of 26min 43.14sec for victory. That beat the previous best of 27:07.17 set by Ethiopian great Kenenisa Bekele at the 2008 Beijing Games. Ethiopia's Berihu Aregawi edged fast-finishing American Grant Fisher by two-hundredths of a second to take silver in 26:43.44. Cheptegei admitted to having been inspired by Bekele's Beijing triumph. "It's the dream of young people to achieve what they want to achieve in life," said Cheptegei. "Barely 16 years ago when I was watching the great Kenenisa Bekele win in Beijing, it was something that grew in my heart." "I said, one day, one time, I want to be Olympic champion." Cheptegei, 27, added: "I've wanted this for a long time. When I took silver in Tokyo, I was disappointed. I wanted just to win the 10,000m." "It took a lot of courage. It's really amazing, this one was still missing. Three times world champion, now I can add the Olympic title to this." The first surge came after just two laps of the 25-lap race, defending champion Selemon Barea and Ethiopian teammate Yomif Kejelcha accelerating away to split the field. The 25-strong field dissipated but all runners held in there. Aregawi had his turn after Kejelcha as the Ethiopian trio dictated the pace in front of a noisy near-capacity 69,000 crowd at the Stade de France in perfect warm conditions. Cheptegei and Jacob Kiplimo saw their own team tactics take a dent when Martin Magengo Kiprotich fell off the pace early on. Aregawi and Kejelcha again increased the rhythm through the halfway stage, the main pack now cut to 15. Barea was back at the helm with 10 laps to run, Canada's Mohammed Ahmed and Kenya's Bernard Kibet muscling their way through to sit on Kejelcha's shoulder. As Cheptegei and Fisher made their way up through a bunching pack, Kejelcha was again on hand to offer a spurt of acceleration. Into the last kilometre, Aregawi took up the running, but the race promised a pulsating finish as the pack of 12 all clung on. Just before the bell rang for the final 400 metres, Cheptegei surged to the front and the race to the line was on. Ahmed followed, Fisher fell off the pace, but made a remarkable recovery to medal.

Teddy Riner Reigns Supreme With Fourth Gold



PARIS (Dispatches) - Tempers ran high Friday in Paris's pop-up Champs de Mars Arena, with Georgian judoka Guram Tushishvili disqualified after throwing a rare tantrum following his defeat at the hands of French judo giant Teddy Riner. Riner went on to win his fourth Olympic gold medal, with Brazil's Beatriz Souza securing first place in the women's competition after beating French hopeful Romane Dicko in the semi-finals. One of the legion of French fans has smuggled what sounds like a snare drum into Paris's Champ de Mars Arena, and the Gallic chants that shake the packed stadium throughout the evening are backed by a harsh, martial beat. As France's judo giants throw challenger after challenger to the mat, the abrupt thunder of a vuvuzela cuts through the tumult, a clarion call urging the two judokas on to ever greater feats of strength. It feels appropriate. Custom-made for the Paris Olympics, this "pop-up Grand Palais" has been built on the expansive public park that stretches between the Eiffel Tower and the École militaire, a sprawling military academy founded in the 18th century. Overlooking the red and yellow tatami mats in the centre of the arena is a bronze sculpture of Joseph Joffre, Marshal of France and Victor of the Battle of the Marne in the First World War. He sits astride a champing horse, his cape trailing behind him, a baton of command clutched in his imperious metal fist. If he's at all surprised to find himself in a judo stadium instead of under the open sky, he doesn't show it. Friday morning marks the elimination rounds of the men and women's judo, where the world's heavyweight judokas will fight it out on the mat to determine who makes it through to the afternoon's finals. The French supporters are here in

force, and they're here for gold — floating through the crowd are the cut-out faces of Romane Dicko and Teddy Riner, who fans are hoping to crown as king and queen of today's competition. Teddy Riner, who was one of the athletes that lit the Olympic cauldron in the Paris Olympics' Opening Ceremony a week ago, seems a safe bet. The 35-year-old colossus, who comes from France's overseas territory of Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, won gold medals in the individual judo in London and Rio, and in the team competition in Tokyo. Romane Dicko, for her part, won bronze in Tokyo, and has been training hard ahead of the Paris Olympics. The crowd is — well, partisan doesn't really begin to cover it. Whenever Dicko or Riner's names come up on the screen, the whole stadium shudders with the noise long before the athletes have actually set foot in the arena. Dizzy in the throes of patriotic feeling, the crowd launches into La Marseillaise more than once, belting out the chorus — "to arms, citizens!" — with such raw conviction that you start to think the École militaire missed a trick by not setting up a recruitment centre at the door. Then Riner steps onto the mat, and the crowd is overcome. In keeping with the emphasis on gender parity at these Games, the men and women's bouts take place side by side throughout the elimination rounds. When Riner lays hands upon his opponent, the women on the neighbouring tatami might as well be knife-fighting for all the crowd would notice. The other competitors seem to be taking the crowd's uneven enthusiasm in good spirit. Speaking after his elimination, Senegalese athlete Mbagnick Ndiaye said that he had loved the arena's raucous atmosphere.