

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Mission to the United Nations Announced That Tehran Has Not and Will Not Participate in the Indirect Ceasefire Talks Between Israel and Hamas, Mediated by Egypt, Qatar and the United States

# IRAN NEWS

Iranian President's Pick for Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi Has Ruled Out the Chance of Revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Claiming That He Would Focus on the Removal of Sanctions on the Basis of Unification of Diplomacy and the Field

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## Operation Al-Aqsa Storm Turned Palestinian Resistance Into Global Movement



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's interim Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani says Operation Al-Aqsa Storm has transformed the Palestinian and regional resistance into a global movement against Israel.

Bagheri Kani made the remarks at a ceremony on Tuesday to commemorate Ismail Haniyeh, the politburo chief of the Hamas resistance movement who was assassinated in the Iranian capital, Tehran.

"The Palestinian resistance was able to spread in the whole world with its bravery, courage and self-sacrifice. Operation Al-Aqsa Storm changed many calculations and balances in the world. One of them was the transformation of Palestinian resistance into a global resistance," Bagheri Kani said.

"Today, in all parts of the world, resistance is mentioned as an efficient solution, and therefore global resistance has become a political discourse in the political arena," he added.

The top diplomat went on to say that the pure blood of martyr Haniyeh has made the Palestinian cause stronger in the world, stressing that global resistance has become an undeniable fact.

Haniyeh, who was in Tehran to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian, alongside other Axis of Resistance leaders, was martyred in an attack on July 31.

The terrorist act came amid the Tel Aviv regime's October-present Gaza onslaught, which has so far claimed the lives of almost 40,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has warned Israel of a "harsh punishment," saying Iran sees it as its duty to avenge the blood of Haniyeh.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Bagheri Kani called Israel a "cancerous tumor" established and backed by Western countries in the region to sow discord and war among Muslim countries. "The Zionist regime is not an independent entity, but a cancerous tumor in the region, which is considered an extension of American and Western policy in the region," he said. "They want to place an impure nucleus in a region where Muslim countries are present and create tension, discord and war among them."

## President Defends His Cabinet Picks



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The President emphasized that national consensus is a fundamental element in preparing the proposed list of ministers, stating that while the list might not be ideal for everyone, it was created based on the Fourteenth Government's deep belief in collective wisdom, consultation, and engagement with all political currents.

President Masoud Pezeshkian, in separate meetings with members of the Assembly of Representatives of West Azerbaijan Province and the Parliament's Industry and Mines Commission, identified national consensus and the avoidance of division among officials as the missing link in solving the country's problems. He stressed the importance of interaction, consultation, and synergy between the government and parliament to find scientific and principled solutions to the nation's issues.

The President considered national consensus to be a key element in preparing the proposed list of ministers for the Fourteenth Government's cabinet, adding that although the proposed list may not be ideal for some and may face criticism, it was compiled based on the Fourteenth Government's deep belief in collective wisdom, consultation, and engagement with all political currents. The reason that even individuals who voted for rival candidates in the elections are included in the list is due to this deep belief in the necessity of national consensus.

He stated, "I will strive to be a sincere servant to the people, ensuring that all those who live in this country, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or culture, participate in decision-making and execution." He further expressed that being of the people, being with the people, and moving in the direction of implementing justice are fundamental characteristics of the Fourteenth Government.

The President also identified expanding interactions with all countries, especially neighbors, as a priority of the Fourteenth Government's foreign policy for the country's progress, emphasizing that the key to success in engaging with the world is fostering internal consensus and unity.



## Enemy's Psychological Warfare in Military Arena Aimed at Creating Fear and Retreat

TEHRAN - The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution referred to the enemy's goal in psychological warfare in the military arena as the creation of fear and retreat. He stated: According to the Holy Quran, non-tactical retreat in any field—whether military, political, propaganda, or economic—invites divine wrath.

In a meeting with the organizers of the National Congress of Martyrs of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei pointed to the tricks of Iran's ill-wishers in creating psychological warfare and fear to force the Iranian nation into retreat in various fields. He described the way to counter this trick as recognizing one's own abilities and avoiding the exaggeration of the enemy's capabilities. He further said that the martyrs, through their sacrifice and struggle, stood against this psychological warfare and neutralized it. In honoring them, this truth must be highlighted and kept alive.

Ayatollah Khamenei identified one of the main pillars of psychological warfare against the beloved nation of Iran as the exaggeration of the enemy's capabilities. He said: Since the beginning of the revolution, they have tried to instill in our nation the notion that they should fear the United States, Britain, and the Zionists.

He considered the great achievement of Imam Khomeini (RA) to be the removal of fear from the hearts of the people and instilling them with self-confidence and trust. He added: Our nation realized that relying on their inner strength, they are capable of great accomplishments, and the enemy's hand is not as strong as it is portrayed.

The Supreme Leader reiterated that the enemy's goal in psychological warfare in the military field is to create fear and retreat. He emphasized: According to the Holy Quran, non-tactical retreat in any field—whether military, political, propaganda, or

economic—brings about divine wrath.

He noted that feeling weak, isolated, and yielding to the enemy's demands is the result of exaggerating the enemy's power in the political arena. He added: Governments, whether large or small, that submit to the demands of the oppressors today could, if they relied on their people and recognized the enemy's true strength without exaggeration, refuse to comply with their demands.

Ayatollah Khamenei also addressed the impact of the enemy's exaggeration in the cultural sphere, stating that it leads to feelings of passivity, attraction to the enemy's culture, and the degradation of one's own culture. He said: The result of such passivity is the acceptance of the other side's lifestyle and even the adoption of foreign words and expressions.

The Supreme Leader highlighted martyrs and warriors as key figures standing against the enemy's psychological warfare. He added: We must appreciate the young people who stood against this psychological warfare without fear or being influenced by others' words. This truth should be embodied and kept alive in artistic works and commemorations.

He emphasized the importance of producing cultural and artistic works about the martyrs and the Sacred Defense, including books and films, in a way that leaves a lasting impact, particularly on the lifestyle of the audience and youth. He commended the organizers of this congress and said: The martyrdom and sacrifice of a nation's youth are a significant reserve and support for the progress of the country, which must be preserved and protected from distortion or oblivion.

## Iran Calls for Israeli Regime's Entities to Be Designated as Terrorist Organizations



TEHRAN - Ali Bahraini, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, sent three separate letters on August 12 to Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Morris Tidball-Binz, the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions, and Francesca Albanese, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories. In these letters, he expressed the Islamic Republic of Iran's strong objection to the inhumane actions and policies of the Zionist regime, particularly the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, a political leader of Palestine.

In his letters, Bahraini explicitly stated that, from the perspective of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hamas is a liberation organization fighting for the freedom and independence of Palestine. He argued that the assassination of Hamas leaders is aimed at undermining the Palestinian people's resistance to end the occupation and achieve their right to self-determination.

He emphasized that Israel, by eliminating Palestinian leaders, seeks to erase the political identity of Palestine and the inherent right of the Palestinian people to have an independent state.

The Iranian Ambassador in Geneva explained that according to Article 2.1 of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, entities of the Zionist regime should be recognized as terrorists. Therefore, the actions carried out by the Israeli regime against civilians and Palestinian areas are clear examples of terrorism.

Bahraini also referred to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice,

which recognizes the Palestinian right to self-determination, describing any action violating this right as illegal.

The Iranian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva strongly condemned the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, considering it a blatant violation of international law, and called for its unequivocal condemnation.

In the conclusion of his letters, the ambassador urged UN officials to clearly and decisively condemn this assassination and to document it in their future reports.

He also emphasized the need for greater efforts to achieve justice for the Palestinian people and to hold the Israeli regime accountable for its crimes.

These letters reflect the serious concern of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the human rights situation in the Palestinian territories and the country's firm determination to pursue international action against the inhumane actions of the Zionist regime in international forums.

Meanwhile the Israeli army reportedly uses Palestinian men as human shields to search tunnels in the besieged Gaza Strip for Hamas resistance fighters and booby traps, according to a report.

"It is better that they (Palestinians) explode and not the (Israeli) soldiers," Israeli army officials said in a Haaretz newspaper report published on Tuesday.

Multiple Israeli troops said they abducted Palestinian civilians to use them as human shields with the full knowledge of top army officials, including Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi, according to the report.

## 2006 Lebanon War a Symbol of Resistance Against Zionist Entity



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has commemorated the 18th anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, saying the 33-day conflict with Israel has become a symbol of resistance against the Zionist entity.

Eighteen years ago, Israel launched a full-scale military offensive against Lebanon, but Hezbollah fighters defeated the regime's military and forced it to embarrassingly retreat without achieving any of Tel Aviv's objectives.

The war started on July 12, 2006, and continued until a UN-mediated ceasefire went into effect in the morning of August 14, 2006, though it formally ended on September 8, 2006, when the Israeli regime was forced to remove its naval blockade against Lebanon.

In a statement on Tuesday, Iran's Foreign Ministry extended its congratulations to the people, government, army, and resistance of Lebanon, particularly to Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement and the broader resistance front, on the 18th anniversary of the "glorious victory of the valiant sons of the Islamic Resistance of Lebanon in the 33-day war in 2006."

"The 33-day war became a symbol of the resilience and strength of the Lebanese people against the Zionist regime and will always be remembered as a great victory in the minds of the people in the region," the ministry said.

The 2006 Lebanon War began with the Israeli army launching airstrikes against Lebanese cities as well as Hezbollah positions, resulting in the demolition of thousands of homes and the deaths of over 1,000 Lebanese civilians.

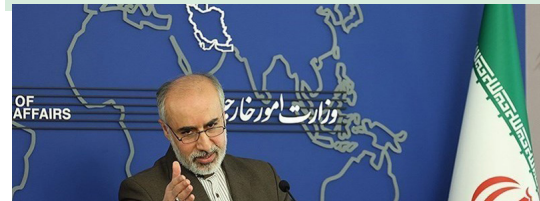
At least 162 Israelis, including 119 soldiers, were also killed during the fighting. As Tel Aviv realized that it could not bomb Hezbollah into submission, it accepted UN Resolution 1701 to end the war.

"August 23rd, the Day of Islamic Resistance, as described by the wise leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, is 'a day when the Resistance and Hezbollah restored dignity to the Arab and Islamic world.' With the collapse of the Zionist regime's hollow dominance, the robust tree of resistance against the Zionist occupiers and aggressors has grown stronger and more resilient," the statement read.

The ministry said the "brilliant victory" of the Islamic Resistance, achieved through the unity and solidarity among various sects and the collective determination of the brave and resilient people of Lebanon, has "ensured stability and security, bringing pride and honor to the Lebanese people and the region, particularly to the resistance front against the Zionist occupiers."

The ministry also stressed that Iran's principled stance in support of the resistance and against the Zionist regime has further been proven during the past 18 years since that historic resistance, and especially after more than ten months of Israel's genocidal war in the besieged Gaza Strip that killed nearly 40,000 Palestinian people and wounded more than 100,000 others.

## Iran Condemns Aqsa Mosque Incursion



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned a recent incursion by far-right Israeli ministers and illegal settlers into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Old City of al-Quds as a provocative move aimed at escalating tensions in West Asia.

"The incursion by some ministers of the fake Israeli regime and Zionist settlers into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound is a blatant desecration of Muslim sanctities, a violation of the rights of Muslims worldwide, and a provocative step meant to foment tensions and instability in the region," spokesman Nasser Kanaani wrote in a post published on the social media platform X on Tuesday evening.

He went on to denounce the unlawful and controversial act, calling upon the international community, particularly Muslim nations and governments, to show a strong reaction in response.

"The international community and world bodies have an objective and immediate responsibility to stop the Zionist regime's barbaric actions, which are in violation of international rules and regulations," the top Iranian diplomat stated.

Earlier on Tuesday, Kanaani had stated that the Israeli settlers' incursion into al-Aqsa Mosque was aimed at exacerbating tensions.

"This wicked move is indicative of the undeniable fact that the leaders of the Israeli regime intend to advance their warmongering policies through hurting the religious feelings of Palestinian Muslims and the Muslim world," the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said.

He emphasized that the United States and certain Western countries should immediately restrain the criminal Tel Aviv regime, help end the ongoing genocide in Gaza and stop the Zionist entity's adventurism in Palestine and elsewhere in the region if they are genuinely concerned about security and stability in West Asia.

On Tuesday morning, more than 2,200 illegal settlers forced their way into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound to commemorate Tisha B'Av, an annual Jewish fast day that marks the occurrence of several disasters in Jewish history.

# IRAN NEWS



## Iranians Keen on Investing in Afghanistan's Mines, Oil, Gas Sector

KABUL (IRNA) - The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum of the caretaker government of Afghanistan has announced that Iranian investors are interested in investing and operating in the mining sector of metals and oil and gas in the neighboring country. In a statement, officials of Afghanistan's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum said that Deputy Minister Zia ur-Rahman Aruobi met with Iran's deputy ambassador to Kabul, university professors and a number of Iranian investors in the capital city of Afghanistan. The Iranian and Afghan delegations held talks on investment in Afghanistan's mining sector, they said. According to the statement, Iranian investors provided explanations about the activities of their companies and expressed interest in investing in metals mining as well as oil and gas sectors in Afghanistan. The Afghan deputy minister also welcomed the willingness of Iranian businessmen to invest in Afghanistan's mining sector, stating that the ministry will not spare any effort and cooperation with Iranian investors.

## Latest Developments on the Labor Force Dispatch Agreement to Qatar



TEHRAN - The Secretary of the Iranian Association of International Employment Agencies explained the details of the agreement to send workers to Qatar and outlined the ways to learn about the methods of labor dispatch.

In an interview with ISNA, Mohammad Hassan Ahmadpour discussed the labor force dispatch agreement to Qatar, which was signed between Iran's Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare and the Qatari government.

He stated that the labor and social cooperation agreement between the Qatari government and the Islamic Republic of Iran was signed on November 10, 1991. The sixth meeting of the joint committee for cooperation in the labor field, chaired by Ali bin Samikh Al Marri, Qatar's Minister of Labor, and Seyyed Solat Mortazavi, Iran's Minister of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, was held from February 20 to 21, 2024, in Doha. The meeting was attended by several officials from Qatar and their Iranian counterparts, along with the chairman of the Asakaba board.

He continued, stating that during this meeting, both parties agreed to collaborate through the Qatari Human Resources Solutions Company and the Iranian Association of International Employment Agencies to facilitate the recruitment of skilled Iranian workers in Qatar, with the cooperation of the two ministries.

Ahmadpour also mentioned that in order to identify the necessary requirements for implementing the resolutions of the sixth joint cooperation committee between Iran and Qatar, Iranian Association of International Employment Agencies plans to issue an official invitation to the managers of the Qatari company to conduct formal negotiations.

He expressed hope that the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare would provide the necessary executive and financial support to accomplish this important task.



## Iran to Pursue Joining OIC Women Development Organization

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Deputy President for Women and Family Affairs, Zahra Behrouz-Azar, has announced the pursuit of a bill to join the Women's Development Organization of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Behrouz-Azar and former vice president Ensiyeh Khazali as well as colleagues in international affairs of this vice presidency reviewed the measures taken to join OIC Women Development Organization during a Tuesday meeting.

In presenting a report on the undertaken measures, they highlighted achievements and key programs including the bill for joining the OIC Women Development Organization, the Global Movement for Family Commitment, the second round of management for the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Committee on Women and Human Rights, the International Conference on Women and Anti-Corruption, the South Africa Exhibition of IORA, collaboration with the BRICS Women's Business Alliance, the Women's Forum of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the organization of an NGO empowerment course.

Behrouz-Azar examined the details of various initiatives and ordered the follow-up on certain issues, including the parliamentary approval of the bill for joining the OIC Women Development Organization, the Global Movement for Family Commitment in government commissions, and the formation of a working group on women and human rights.

Behrouz-Azar was recently appointed as the vice president for women and family affairs by President Masoud Peshkian.



## Foreigners Blamed for Raise of Property Prices in Iran

TEHRAN - Secretary of the Real Estate and Property Market Regulation and Control Working Group at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development Mr. Yaser Dastmalchian, in an interview, touched upon the entry of foreign nationals and non-Iranian investors into the country's real estate market.

He stated, "We are certainly not opposed to the entry of foreign investors into our country, but we do oppose their investment in the real estate market rather than in housing production. The purchase of property by foreigners through loopholes that bypass the law prohibiting the sale of land, property, and housing to foreigners disrupts the distribution network and leads to price increases in this market."

Referring to the rise in property sales in certain regions of the country, particularly in Shiraz, Chabahar, and elsewhere, he continued, "Local regulatory bodies are aware of this issue, and there are solutions to these tactics used by foreigners to circumvent the laws. We are fully aware of the tricks employed to bypass the prohibition on the sale of land and property to foreigners."

The Secretary of the Real Estate and Property Market Regulation and Control Working Group at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development stated, "People need to be informed about the consequences of selling land and property to foreigners, and this issue should become a public demand."

Dastmalchian emphasized, "Currently, we are witnessing investments by Omanis, Qataris, and occasionally Emiratis in the Shiraz real estate market. Additionally, Afghan investors have entered the Chabahar real estate market. In Khuzestan and some western provinces, investors from the Kurdistan Region and Iraq have also made their presence felt."

He highlighted the unusual real estate market situation in Khuzestan, stating, "Recently, I visited cities in the western provinces and met with local economic activists. It was mentioned that today, property prices in a city like Malayer are only 20-30% lower than in the capital, and the reason for this increase in

Malayer's housing prices is the migration of Khuzestanis to this city. Northern Khuzestan cities are close to Malayer, which is known for its vineyards and furniture-making industry. Malayer is also very active in terms of employment, so there has been a need to expand land in Malayer. But what has caused Khuzestanis to migrate to Malayer?"

He further added, "The locals of Khuzestan are not buying land and property in Khuzestan because there is no land left. The prime lands have been bought by foreigners, and if any land remains, its price has skyrocketed due to the foreign demand."

He said, "In this situation, the population and demand from Khuzestan spill over into Malayer, disrupting Malayer's real estate market, and this situation is also reaching Arak. Foreign investors have such a destructive impact on the real estate market."

Dastmalchian continued, "Why aren't foreign investors entering Sistan and Zahedan? Currently, the price of housing in Zahedan is cheaper than the cost of construction, but in Chabahar, housing prices are rising. There is an opportunity for increased investment in the Zahedan housing market, and it is a vast region, but foreigners are focusing on Chabahar. Why aren't they investing in Zahedan?"

The Secretary of the Real Estate and Property Market Regulation and Control Working Group at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development emphasized that investment in property purchases harms the country's economy. He stated, "Due to the increased demand for housing in Malayer, the wood carving industry and this Iranian art are currently disappearing, with all attention focused on the real estate market. No matter how much land we add to Malayer, it is immediately sold, and this situation is also observed in Shiraz and Chabahar."

## Construction of 11,000 MW of Renewable Energy Through Private Sector Investment



TEHRAN - Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian provided an overview of his three-year performance in the electricity industry during an interview.

He said: "At the start of the 13th government, we faced a significant imbalance in the electricity sector. Our plan needed to solve two issues: the first was addressing the imbalance, and the second was managing the additional demand that would arise during the implementation of this plan. Generally, the government faced an annual increase in demand of between 4,000 to 5,000 MW. Thus, our initial task was to design a plan to address the 15,000 MW imbalance and meet the annual demand increase of 5,000 MW."

He added: "The planning was carried out on two fronts. First, we needed to expand the capacity of power plants. Additionally, we had to enlarge the network sufficiently, resolve network disruptions, and fix points where voltage drops occurred. The second front was consumption management, ensuring that it was done intelligently without affecting the nation's welfare and production. To this end, alongside utilizing the power plant capacities under the Ministry of Energy's oversight, a comprehensive plan was devised to bring industrial self-supply power plants online. Special attention was also given to the development of renewable energies."

He further said: "During the 13th government, more than 10,382 MW were added to the country's power plant capacity, and approximately 22,000 MW of power plants are currently under construction, with progress ranging from 10% to 95%. The country's current power generation capacity has reached 93,000 MW."

In the seventh development plan, which covers the next five years, it is predicted that by the end of the plan, the country's installed power plant capacity will reach 123,000 MW. Currently, the installed capacity stands at 93,000 MW, meaning 30,000 MW must be added. Over 22,000 MW are under construction, and if

efforts continue, these power plants can be connected to the grid within the next one to two years. In other words, to complete the goals of the seventh development plan, only an additional 8,000 MW of power plants need to be added, he noted.

He went on to say: "To date, contracts have been signed for the construction of approximately 11,000 megawatts of renewable energy power plants with private sector investment. The private sector has provided guarantees to the government to ensure that these power plants will be operational within the scheduled timeframe. These power plants are being commissioned one after another. We hope that, according to the planned schedule, these power plants will come online on time and significantly meet the country's electricity needs."

Mehrabian also said: "According to reports from reputable global energy institutions, specifically the Energy Institute (EI), which have been published in well-known international journals, the development of power plants has seen significant acceleration over the past three years. During this period, Iran's electricity production has increased by 45.7 terawatt-hours, placing the country in seventh place globally. The countries ahead of Iran—China, India, the United States, Russia, Brazil, and Indonesia—are all very large, with high populations and significant economies."

The industrial sector plays a major role in consuming the majority of the electricity produced in the country, with 45.7 terawatt-hours, or 87%, being added to the production and industrial sectors. This indicates that there has been corresponding growth in production, the economy, and the country's development. This increase in production has positioned Iran as seventh in the world, third in Asia, and first in West Asia, which is a notable ranking. This places Iran above all European countries, the Arab countries in the region, Turkey, South Korea, Japan, and most other countries with large economies."

## Qeshm and Russia's Krasnodar Sign Sisterhood MoU



MOSCOW (IRNA) - The Iranian resort Persian Gulf island of Qeshm and Russia's Krasnodar lying along the Kuban River have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establishing sister-city relationships in a ceremony hosted by the Russian side.

The MoU was signed by Mayor of Qeshm, Mirdad Mirdadi, and his Krasnodar counterpart Yevgeny Naumov on Monday.

According to this memorandum, which was signed in the presence of regional officials and the head of the Russian Krasnodar city council, as well as the advisor of Qeshm Free Zone Organization, these two cities will interact with each other in the fields of construction, education and cultural exchanges.

The mayor of Qeshm emphasized the development of cooperation, referring to close relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation.

Referring to the geographical location of Qeshm as well as being the largest island in the Persian Gulf, Mirdadi noted its potential in playing a role in the North-South corridor that connects Russia to open waters through Iran.

He announced the island's readiness to transport and load goods to Russia on the North-South international route.

This island hosts more than three million domestic and foreign tourists every year, Mirdadi said while highlighting Qeshm's tourist and natural attractions.

The mayor of Krasnodar during the ceremony talked about the potential of cooperation with Qeshm, saying the Iranian island is a free trade zone and also a tourist center, and by relying on these capacities, cooperation with this region can be strengthened in both tourism and construction sectors.

Naumov also spoke about the possibilities of cooperation with Qeshm Island in the field of higher education institutions, continuous exchange of students and participation in commercial and cultural projects.

In April 2024, the mayors of Qeshm and Krasnodar discussed the prospect of bilateral cooperation during a video conference call.

Iran's Qeshm Free Zone Organization and Dubna Special Economic Zone (SEZ Dubna) of the Russian Federation recently signed a memorandum of understanding to attract mutual investment and enhance infrastructure development.

Eris Ramouz, deputy for cultural, social and tourism affairs of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization, and Igor Koroglov, Deputy CEO of the Dubna Special Economic Zone last week.

## Iran Welcomes the Return of Migrant Athletes



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, referring to the historic achievements of Iranian women in the Paris Olympics, stated that the success of our women in this major event is a source of pride for us.

On Tuesday evening, Zahra Behrouz Azar, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, who attended the welcoming ceremony for the country's Olympic champions, expressed, "It is an honor for me to participate in this ceremony, which is a reception for our historic athletes and girls. For the first time, we won a silver medal in the Olympics, and it is a source of pride for us that Iranian women are bringing honor in all arenas. In sports, this championship is particularly significant for us, and we appreciate the efforts of our champions."

She added, "I hope we can announce the championship of Iranian women in all fields to the people. I am here on behalf of the Iranian people, and I extend my gratitude to the girls of our country, hoping they shine in all stages of life."

Regarding Mobina Nemat Zadeh, the bronze medalist in the Paris Olympics from the 80s generation, and the government's plans for this generation, she said, "The most important issue that must be considered for this generation is that the path of growth and progress should be clear and transparent so that our dear ones can reach the future they desire. The government is responsible for providing every platform possible to achieve these goals."

Behrouz Azar also addressed the issue of some girls emigrating in recent years and the government's plans for their return, saying, "Certainly, one of the greatest sorrows that settled in our hearts was the absence of some girls alongside their 'own' team members. No one would wish for anything other than the conditions to be set for these dear ones to return. The conditions are provided, and if they wish to return to the country, we will welcome them."

In conclusion, she addressed the girls of Iran, saying, "Dear girls, Iran belongs to you, and you are the future builders of our country in various fields."

Iranian athletes shone in the Olympics, securing 3 gold, 6 silver, and 3 bronze medals, placing 21st in the medal distribution table. The last group of the Iranian sports delegation arrived at Imam Airport today and was welcomed by officials.

### Japan PM Kishida to Step Down as Scandals Prove Too Much

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he will step down in September, ending a three-year term marred by political scandals and paving the way for a new premier to address the impact of rising prices.

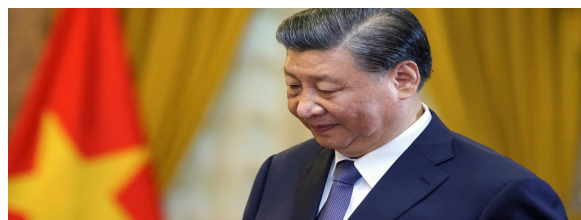
"I will continue to do everything I can as prime minister until then end of my term in September," Kishida said in a televised press conference on Wednesday to announce his decision not seek re-election as Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leader. His decision to quit triggers a contest to replace him as party boss, and by extension as the leader of the world's fourth-biggest economy.

Kishida's public support eroded amid revelations about the party's ties to the controversial Unification Church, and more recently, unrecorded political donations made at LDP fundraising parties.

"He's been a dead man walking for quite some time," said Michael Cucek, a professor specialising in Japanese politics at Temple University in Tokyo. "There was no way to add up the numbers so that he would get reelected," he added. The successor the LDP chooses will have to unite a fractious ruling group and tackle likely further increases in living costs, escalating geopolitical tensions with China, and the potential return of Donald Trump as U.S. president next year.



### Blow for Xi as Investors Scramble to Quit China



LONDON (Dispatches) - Foreign investors have pulled a record £12bn out of China in an economic blow for President Xi Jinping.

Fears over the future of the world's second largest economy meant foreign investors withdrew \$14.8bn (£11.6bn) between April and June, data from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange shows.

It was only the second time more foreign money has been withdrawn from China than invested since records began in 1998, and was a massive swing from the net \$10bn pumped into the country during the first three months of the year.

It came as the Saudi-led Organisation for Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) cut its forecast for oil demand growth, citing concerns over the Chinese economy.

Geopolitical tensions, an ailing domestic economy, a slump in the value of the renminbi and low interest rates have all become major deterrents to the market, economists warned, amid a race to sell assets and divert profits overseas.

Foreign direct investment in China last turned negative in the autumn of 2023, when investors pulled out \$12bn. Chinese companies also invested a record \$71bn overseas between April and June, up 80pc year on year.

Combined, this meant China suffered a record net outflow of \$86bn in direct investment.

Duncan Wrigley, chief China economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said: "I think what is going on is that foreign investors are selling assets and exiting China or pulling profits out of China."

### More Than 1,000 Arrested Following UK Riots

LONDON (Dispatches) - British authorities have now arrested more than 1,000 people following days of rioting involving violence, arson and looting as well as racist attacks targeting Muslims and migrants, a national policing body said on Tuesday.

The riots, which followed the killings of three young girls in the northern English town of Southport, began after the July 29 attack was wrongly blamed on an Islamist migrant based on online misinformation.

Violence broke out in cities across England and also in Northern Ireland, but there have been fewer instances of unrest since last week after efforts to identify those involved were ramped up.

Many have been swiftly jailed, with some receiving long sentences. The National Police Chiefs' Council said in its latest update that 1,024 had been arrested and 575 charged across the UK.

Those arrested include a 69-year-old accused of vandalism in Liverpool and a 11-year-old boy in Belfast.

A 13-year-old girl pleaded guilty to violent disorder at Basingstoke Magistrates' Court, prosecutors said, having been seen on July 31 punching and kicking the entrance to a hotel for asylum seekers.

"This alarming incident will have caused genuine fear amongst people who were being targeted by these thugs - and it is particularly distressing to learn that such a young girl participated in this violent disorder," prosecutor Thomas Power said.

The last time Britain witnessed widespread rioting was in 2011, when the fatal shooting of a Black man by police triggered several days of street violence.

Fast and tough judicial action was viewed as helping quell the unrest in 2011, when around 4,000 people were arrested over several weeks.

## Pakistan Marking 78th Independence Day



TEHRAN - Every year Pakistanis celebrate their Independence Day on August 14 and this year the country has prepared to mark the day in style. On the eve of the day, Pakistan Prime Minister and President send messages to their nation.

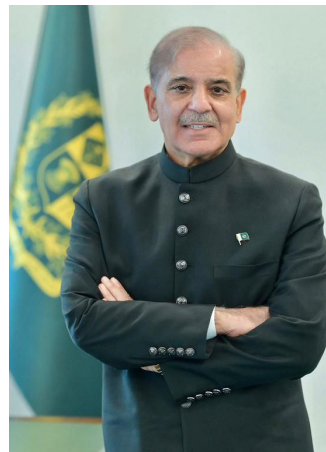
Pakistan Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in his message said: "On the auspicious occasion of the Independence Day, I extend heartfelt felicitations to the people of Pakistan at home and abroad. We pay homage to the immense sacrifices of our forefathers and countless unsung heroes of the Pakistan Movement, who fought tirelessly for an independent country for millions in South Asia, where they could live according to their beliefs and values. As envisioned by Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Pakistan emerged as an independent and sovereign state on the map of the world on 14th August 1947 through the unwavering and steadfast leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and unmatched sacrifices of our ancestors."

He further said: "Through the selfless and continuous struggle of our founding fathers, Pakistan was able to cope with the monumental challenges it faced in the formative phase. Over the decades, Pakistan has achieved significant milestones. The resilience of our people has been tested through natural disasters and economic and social challenges, yet the spirit of determination and unity has always prevailed."

Sharif added: "I acknowledge the key role of our Overseas Pakistanis in the progress and prosperity of Pakistan. Though you may be thousands of miles away from your homes in Pakistan, you are an integral part of this country. We are proud of your hard work and achievements and consider you as true Ambassadors of Pakistan to project its positive image to the world wherever you are."

He also expressed his gratitude to their armed forces, who safeguard their borders and protect their sovereignty as their sacrifices and dedication deserve their utmost respect and appreciation.

He emphasized: "While we celebrate our freedom, we also remember the brave people of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK) and Palestine who have been fighting for their right to self-determination for over seven decades and are facing the worst form of state atrocities. Pakistan shall continue to extend moral, political and diplomatic support to the people of IIOJK until they achieve their universal right to self-determination."



Our support for the oppressed Palestinians shall also continue for their legitimate rights."

He added: "Since assuming power after the February 2024 elections, our consistent focus is on creating the right conditions for economic growth and stability. The government's focus is also on education and skill development that will further empower our youth and equip them with the tools needed in the competitive global economy."

Sharif felicitated the day and reiterated: "I am confident that together we will continue our journey with the spirit of independence for the benefit and welfare of our citizens. Through collaborative efforts, we all will work for an inclusive and prosperous Pakistan, for us, and for our future generations, as envisioned by our founders."

Meanwhile Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari in a separate message felicitated the day and in his message said: I felicitate the entire Pakistani nation on the 78th Independence Day of Pakistan. This day marks the culmination of the historic political struggle of the Muslims of India for their right to self-determination. The creation of Pakistan through a peaceful and democratic struggle marks an unprecedented and unparalleled chapter in history. On this day, we pay homage to leaders and workers of the Pakistan movement as well as our forefathers who rendered innumerable sacrifices for Pakistan.

He added: "Today, we need to set aside our differences and work committedly for the unity, integrity, and economic stability of the country in the face of current challenges. Our country has been blessed with abundant human and natural resources and it is our responsibility to utilize these for the welfare of our people. We need to uphold the rule of law, strengthen democratic institutions, and work wholeheartedly in the public interest. Our nation has great hopes from us, and we must strive to meet their expectations."

He further said: "As we celebrate our freedom, let us also remember our Kashmiri and Palestinian brethren, who have been struggling for over seven decades for their freedom and right to self-determination. Pakistan reaffirms its support to the people of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and Palestine for their legitimate rights. Let's pledge to work for the uplift of our people and make Pakistan a prosperous country. May Allah be with us all."



## Russia Strikes Back at Ukrainian Forces in Kursk Region

MOSCOW (Reuters) -Russian forces struck back at Ukrainian troops with missiles, drones and airstrikes in actions that one senior commander said had halted Ukraine's advance after the biggest attack on sovereign Russian territory since the war began.

Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers smashed through the Russian border a week ago in a surprise attack that Russian President Vladimir Putin said was aimed at improving Kyiv's negotiating position ahead of possible talks and slowing the advance of Russian forces along the front.

The Ukrainian forces carved out a slice of Russian territory, prompting Moscow to evacuate almost 200,000 people while it rushed in reserves.

Russian war bloggers reported intense battles across the Kursk front as the Ukrainians tried to expand their control, though they said Russia was bringing in soldiers and heavy weaponry and had repelled many Ukrainian attacks.

Russia's defense ministry published images of Sukhoi Su-34 bombers striking at what it said were Ukrainian troops in the Kursk border region and said it had repelled attacks at villages about 26-28 km (16-17 miles) from the border.

Russian forces had destroyed a total of 35 Ukrainian tanks, 31 armoured personnel carriers, 18 infantry fighting vehicles, and 179 other armoured vehicles during the week-long battle, it said.

"The uncontrolled ride of the enemy has already been halted," said Major General Aпти Alaudinov, the



commander of the Chechen Akhmat special forces unit. "The enemy is already aware that the blitzkrieg that it planned did not work out."

It was not clear which side was in control of the Russian town of Sudzha, through which Russia delivers gas from Western Siberia through Ukraine and on to Slovakia and other European Union countries. Gazprom said Tuesday it was still pumping gas to Ukraine through Sudzha.

Kursk's acting governor, Alexei Smirnov, said on Monday that Ukraine controlled 28 settlements in the region, and the incursion was about 12 km deep and 40 km wide. Ukraine claimed it controlled 1,000 square km (386 square miles) of Russian, more than double what the Russian figures indicate.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Western leaders said they would help Ukraine defeat Russian troops on the battlefield and

drive them out.

Ukraine recaptured large swathes of territory in 2022. But its counteroffensive in 2023 failed to pierce heavily dug-in Russian lines, and Russian forces have been advancing this year deeper into Ukrainian territory. Russia controls just under one fifth of territory internationally recognised as Ukraine.

At his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow, Putin told officials that Russia would force out the Ukrainian troops, saying Russian forces were speeding up their advance along other parts of the front.

## U.S. Approves \$20b Weapons Package for Israel

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on Tuesday approved more than \$20 billion in new weapons sales to Israel, brushing aside pressure from rights activists to stop arms deliveries over the death toll in Gaza.

The sale comes as Biden has pressed Israel and Hamas to reach a ceasefire after 10 months of bloodshed, although the weapons would take years to reach Israel. In a notification to Congress, the State Department said it had approved a sale of 50 F-15 fighter jets to Israel for \$18.82 billion.

Israel will also buy nearly 33,000 tank cartridges, up to 50,000 explosive mortar cartridges and new military cargo vehicles.

The F-15 aircraft, which will begin to be delivered in 2029, will upgrade Israel's current fleet and include radar and secure communications equipment.

"The United States is committed to the security of Israel, and it is vital to US national interests to assist Israel to develop and maintain a strong and ready self-defense capability," the State Department said in its notice on the F-15s, which are made by Boeing.

On the tank cartridges, the United States said the sale "will improve Israel's capability to meet current and future enemy threats, strengthen its homeland defense and serve as a deterrent to regional threats."

The U.S. Congress can block weapons sales, but such a process is difficult. Human rights groups and some left-leaning members of Biden's Democratic Party have urged the administration to curb or stop weapons sales to Israel,

voicing revulsion at civilian casualties in the Gaza conflict.

Josh Paul, who resigned from the State Department last year in protest at policy on Gaza, said Israel had given the United States no reason to believe it is moving away from "abject brutality."

"Authorizing billions of dollars in new arms transfers effectively provides Israel a carte blanche to continue its atrocities in Gaza and to escalate the conflict to Lebanon," said Paul, now at the Middle East rights group Dawn.

On Saturday, rescuers in the Hamas-run territory of Gaza said that 93 people were killed in an Israeli air strike at a school housing displaced Palestinians.

Israel said it was targeting militants operating out of the school. Biden administration officials voiced concern over civilian deaths and declined comment on whether U.S. weapons were used.

In May, Biden froze a shipment to Israel that included 2,000-pound bombs as he warned against a mass-scale assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where vast numbers of displaced Palestinians were living.

But the administration said it has not stopped other weapons and dismissed complaints in June by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the United States was slowing down deliveries.

In a speech to Congress last month boycotted by many Democrats, Netanyahu called on the United States to fast-track military aid, saying it would "dramatically expedite an end to the war in Gaza."





## Rangers and Mourinho's Fenerbahce Knocked Out of Champions League

PARIS (Dispatches) - Rangers exited the Champions League after losing 2-0 to Dynamo Kyiv in the second leg of the third qualifying round on Tuesday, while Jose Mourinho's Fenerbahce were knocked out by Lille.

Hosts Rangers paid the price for a harsh second yellow card issued to defender Jefe as Dynamo struck twice in the final 10 minutes through substitutes Oleksandr Pikhonok and Nazar Voloshyn. Rangers coach Philippe Clement blasted the referee's decision that left his team with 10 men.

"It's hard for my team. They don't deserve this after these two games versus Dynamo Kyiv. One person with one decision made a really big change for us," Clement told BBC Scotland.

"It's the second time in my career of over 30 years that something unjust has happened. We can only accept it and move forward towards the league and the Europa League."

Clement, who is looking to overhaul his squad in an attempt to challenge Celtic, said the defeat would have serious ramifications for the club's finances.

"Financially, it's a big difference for the club. It will make a difference for the transfers coming in also. I don't expect this rebuild to be done in a few weeks' time."

Ukrainians Dynamo advanced 3-1 on aggregate and head into a play-off tie against Salzburg, who edged FC Twente 5-4 after a 3-3 draw in the return leg in the Netherlands.

Jonathan David's penalty secured Lille a place in the next round as the French club snatched a 3-2 aggregate victory in Turkey, marking a disappointing start to Mourinho's time in charge of Fenerbahce.

Fenerbahce lost the first leg 2-1 last week and appeared to be going out until Bafode Diakite's

late own goal sent the match to extra time.

Lille substitute Aissa Mandi was sent off on his debut for a reckless challenge on Irfan Can Kahveci, but the visitors were awarded a penalty for a handball by Jayden Oosterwolde and David made no mistake from the spot.

Cenk Tosun then headed against the bar as Lille held on. Their reward is a meeting with Slavia Prague, who were 4-1 aggregate winners over Union Saint-Gilloise.

Slovan Bratislava, who entered in the first qualifying round, overcame APOEL Nicosia 2-0 over two legs.

They will take on Midtjylland for a place in the new-look, 36-team tournament after the Danish champions beat Hungary's Ferencvaros 3-1 on aggregate.

Norwegian champions Bodo/Glimt eased through with a 4-1 win over Poland's Jagiellonia Bialystok, completing a 5-1 aggregate triumph.

Sweden's Malmo won a thrilling tie with PAOK, striking late in Greece to force extra time and then winning the second leg 4-3 to prevail 6-5 overall.

Sparta Prague beat Romanians FCSB 4-3 on aggregate, while Qarabag stunned Ludogorets with four goals in extra time to pull off a remarkable 7-2 win in Bulgaria.

Switzerland international Kwadwo Duah netted twice on the night to put Ludogorets 4-2 ahead in the tie, but the visitors from Azerbaijan scored six times without reply to run away with an 8-4 aggregate success.

## Basketball Double-Bill Finale Sets Up Worthy France-U.S. Rivalry After Paris



PARIS (Dispatches) - Defending champions the United States took gold at a memorable Olympics in both the men's and women's basketball competition as top NBA talent thrilled fans at the Games in Paris to create a healthy rivalry with France.

The group stage in northern France became a basketball oasis as teams battled for a place in the quarter-finals, with the Pierre Mauroy stadium in Lille packed full of frenzied fans.

South Sudan and Nigeria demonstrated the skills of the African continent, while Latin America was represented by Brazil and Puerto Rico and Asia by Japan and China.

The real battle, however, began at the Bercy Arena in Paris, where France fought hard to deny the USA further glory. The U.S. men's team showed their superiority with victory over Brazil in the last eight only to have a tough time getting past three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic's Serbia, needing a stirring fourth-quarter rally to tame their feisty rivals.

Victor Wembanyama, the first French player to be selected number one overall in the NBA draft, was a major factor in the hosts' path to the final, defeating Canada and Germany.

Meanwhile in the women's race, France reached the semi-finals after a convincing win over Germany, with Marine Johannes and Gabby Williams shining as they then beat Belgium.

## Sinner Plays Down Hip Issue Ahead of Cincinnati

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - World number one Jannik Sinner said he is not worried about a hip issue that had been troubling him over the last couple of months and that he is looking forward to getting back on court at the U.S. Open tournament in Cincinnati this week.

The 22-year-old has struggled to shake off the injury he picked up in May in Madrid and looked to have aggravated it during a shock quarter-final defeat by Andrey Rublev in Montreal on Saturday.

However, Sinner put his struggles down to the intensity of recent matches after skipping the Paris Olympics due to tonsillitis. "I feel quite good. Obviously I made nearly one week without practising before, and then after playing for two-three days in a row, a bit more than usual, (that) could (have had) a potential impact to the hip," Sinner told reporters.

"But I'm not afraid. I feel good with the hip, and I'm just looking forward to going back on court here."

The Australian Open champion said conditions at the Cincinnati Open this week could prove to be a bigger test as he gears up for the U.S. Open, which runs from Aug. 26-Sept. 8. "Here usually I struggle a little bit to play because of the conditions but I'm looking forward to see my reaction this year,

because it's a great test," said Sinner, who plays Tallon Griekspoor or Alex Michelsen in his opener.

"I believe this tournament can give you a lot of confidence for the U.S. Open, which is the last Grand Slam we have. So in my mind, this is a very important tournament.

"We go day by day ... I have a couple of days to prepare and hopefully show some good tennis."

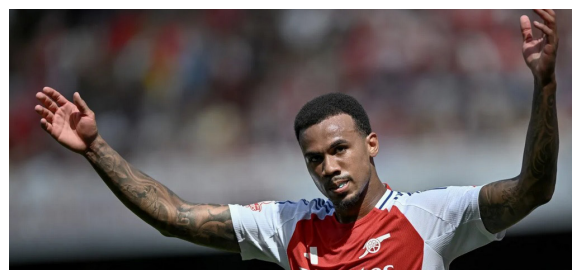
Meanwhile Iga Swiatek expects a tough return to hardcourt tennis at the Cincinnati Open but the top-ranked Pole said she will not heap pressure on herself and approach the WTA 1000 event like a "practice tournament" before the U.S. Open.

Swiatek last competed on the surface at the Miami Open in March and then went on to win titles on clay at Madrid, Rome and the French Open before crashing out in the third round on the grasscourts of Wimbledon.

After swapping turf for clay again and claiming the Olympic bronze at Roland Garros earlier this month, the 23-year-old will begin her Cincinnati campaign with measured expectations. "I know that the first tournament on hardcourts isn't going to be easy," said Swiatek, who plays Ajla Tomljanovic or Varvara Gracheva in the second round this week.



## Arsenal's £250m Defensive Wall the Key to Third-Time-lucky Premier League Charge



LONDON (Dispatches) - Mikel Arteta prefers not to leave things to chance. The Arsenal manager is a believer in data, percentages and minimising footballing risk. He hopes to win the Premier League not by gambling, but by going through the right processes, again and again, in the most consistent and sustainable way possible.

In other words, Arteta has no intention of sitting back and hoping that Arsenal get lucky this year. He has had enough of that, after a season in which he and his coaches effectively crossed their fingers and prayed to the heavens that their key defenders would not get injured.

As they chased the Premier League title last season, Arsenal knew their hopes of overcoming Manchester City would be drastically reduced by the absence of any one of William Saliba, Gabriel Magalhaes and Ben White. The squad, as it was then, could barely have handled an injury to one of those players, let alone two or three of them.

"We were really short in the backline last year in terms of numbers," Arteta said this summer. "We demanded so much from them. We only had six defenders in the backline and at this level you have to be really lucky to sustain the season like this. We were."

The perfect illustration of his point is that Saliba played every minute of Arsenal's Premier League campaign. Gabriel started 34 of 38 league matches, while White started 35. Those three stalwarts bore the heaviest of physical loads, and they cannot be asked to do so again.

"William and Gabriel played nearly every minute," said Arteta. "Are we able to do that consistently over the next three or four years? That is a big question mark. Obviously you cannot just bet on that. That is a big bet, and we don't want to take that bet."

All of which effectively answers the question that many Arsenal supporters have been asking this summer: why was the club's top priority in the transfer market to sign yet another defender? Riccardo Calafiori, the Italy international, joined in July for a deal that could ultimately be worth £42 million.

With Calafiori on board, and with Jurrien Timber back in action after missing almost all of last season through injury, Arsenal suddenly have genuine depth in their backline. Their defence was the best in the league last season - with just 29 goals conceded - and it is now more formidable.

## Manchester United Sign Bayern's De Ligt and Mazraoui

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United have signed Matthijs de Ligt and Noussair Mazraoui from Bayern Munich, the Premier League club announced Tuesday.

Fees for the pair were not disclosed by the English giants, but British media reports estimated the duo had arrived at Old Trafford for a combined £60 million (\$77 million, 70 million euros).

Netherlands defender De Ligt, 25, will now join up again with United manager Erik ten Hag, having played under him at Dutch side Ajax, after agreeing a five-year contract with the option of another year.

"As soon as I heard that Manchester United wanted me, I felt an excitement about the opportunity of a new challenge at such a historic club," said De Ligt.

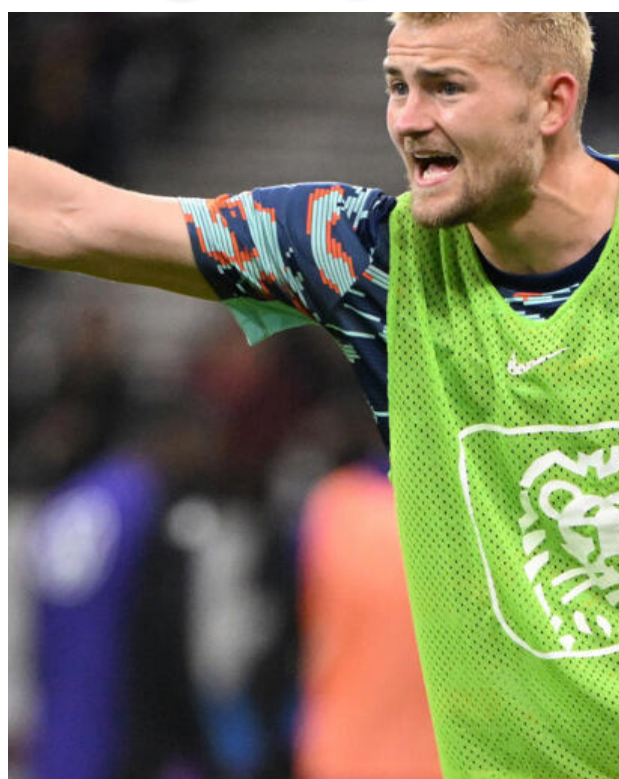
"In the conversations that followed, I was impressed by the vision that the football leadership set out, and the role they saw for me in it.

"Erik ten Hag shaped the early stages of my career so he knows how to get the best out of me and I cannot wait to work with him again."

De Ligt has already won league titles in three different countries with Ajax (Netherlands), Juventus (Italy) and Bayern (Germany).

He added: "I know what it takes to succeed at the highest level, and I'm determined to continue that record at this special club."

De Ligt bolsters United's central defence following the departure of Raphael Varane, with fellow summer transfer



window arrival Leny Yoro in danger of being sidelined for up to three months with a foot injury sustained against Arsenal in pre-season.

Mazraoui, 26, also played under Ten Hag at Ajax, winning three league titles with the Dutch club and another with Bayern.

The full-back has also made 28 appearances for Morocco and reached the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup.

He has signed a four-year deal with the option of a further year and his arrival comes on the day that full-back Aaron Wan-Bissaka's departure to Premier League rivals West Ham was confirmed.

"It's an incredible feeling to be a Manchester United player, and I cannot wait to walk out at Old Trafford wearing the red shirt," said Mazraoui.

"I know that I'm joining the club at an exciting time; everyone I've spoken to has the same ambition for us to win trophies together and I can feel the determination to achieve that."

The new arrivals are set to be available for United's season opener against Fulham at Old Trafford on Friday, with the Red Devils desperate to improve on last season's eighth-place finish.

That left United a huge 31 points adrift of champions Manchester City.

They did beat their local rivals in the FA Cup final before returning to Wembley last weekend to lose to Pep Guardiola's side on penalties in the Community Shield.