

IRAN NEWS

Commander of the Iranian Air Defense Force Brigadier General Alireza Sabahifard Highlighted the Critical Role of This Military Force in Safeguarding the Country's Airspace and Countering Aerial Threats

Iranian Embassy in London Strongly Denounced Benjamin Netanyahu Over Using a Map That Erased the Occupied West Bank in an Address to the Media, Questioning Where a Future Independent Palestinian State Should Be Created

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DOMESTIC

Uzbekistan Eyes Boosting Trade With Iran to \$1b

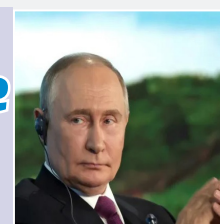
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INTERNATIONAL

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Iranian, Bahraini FMs Discuss Bilateral Ties



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian and Bahraini foreign ministers have discussed bilateral ties and expressed hope to promote joint political dialogues between Tehran and Manama.

In a telephone conversation on Thursday night, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Rashid al-Zayani congratulated Abbas Araqchi for becoming the new foreign minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Regarding the importance of bilateral relations with Iran, the Bahraini foreign minister expressed hope that joint political dialogues between the two nations will be promoted in the new era.

Araqchi thanked his Bahraini counterpart for his call and his participation in the inauguration ceremony of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Araqchi described the development of relations with neighbors within the framework of the Islamic Republic's policy toward neighboring countries as one of the Pezeshkian government's important priorities.

Both foreign ministers emphasized the continuation of talks and exchange of views within the framework of the agreements made.

Last month, Iran's acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani talked to Bahrain's Foreign Minister al-Zayani. He pointed out the continuation of the Israeli regime's aggression and crimes against children, women and other innocent people in Gaza.

He said on August 5 the evil behavior of Israel must be stopped in expanding the war to the capitals of Lebanon, Yemen, and Tehran where the regime committed the crime of assassinating Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh on July 31.

Bagheri Kani said Iran considered any silence against the expansion of the evils of the regime to the detriment of the stability of the West Asia region.

He added that silence against the recent actions of the Israeli regime is considered as a kind of reward.

"Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran considers it its right to take countermeasures based on international rules and procedures," he said.

In his remarks, al-Zayani emphasized Bahrain's position on the need for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and demanded support for civilians and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians.

Growing Chemical Weapons a Threat From Terrorist Groups



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations Amir Saied Iravani has expressed "deep concern" over the threat of terrorist groups acquiring chemical weapons.

Speaking at a United Nations Security Council meeting on "The Situation in the Middle East: (Syria - Chemical)" in New York on Thursday, Iravani called for enhanced "international cooperation" to address this escalating threat to global peace and security.

Iravani emphasized the need for global collaboration, stating, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is deeply concerned about the threat posed by terrorist groups acquiring chemical weapons and stresses the necessity of stronger international cooperation to counter this danger for global peace and security."

He reaffirmed Iran's support for continued "constructive dialogues" between Syria and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), noting, "This approach is vital to ensure transparency, accountability, and to resolve all outstanding issues."

Iravani further highlighted Iran's commitment as an active member of the OPCW, stressing the need for the organization's "independent, professional, and unbiased" efforts, particularly regarding the fulfillment of member states' obligations concerning Syria.

"As a great victim of chemical weapons," Iravani stated, "the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances," urging the international community to take all necessary steps to prevent the recurrence of such atrocities.

During the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, the Iraqi army repeatedly deployed chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers and civilians, resulting in tens of thousands of immediate deaths and leaving many more to suffer long-term effects. Two Dutch firms, Melchemie (now Ojiaha) and Forafina Beleggingen (formerly KBS Holland), supplied Iraq with chemicals between 1982 and 1984, fully aware that their substances were being used to produce mustard gas, according to Iranian victims of chemical weapons.



Three Iranian Islands "Important Operational Area"

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has inspected the operational readiness of military units stationed in key strategic locations, including the Strait of Hormuz, Great Tunb, and Lesser Tunb—referred to as the Nazaat Islands.

Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri conducted evaluations of the IRGC's naval, missile, and floating units in the region on Thursday, the IRGC Navy's public relations office said.

"God willing, the psychological and operational readiness of Islam's fighters is at the highest level," he said.

The commander emphasized the significance of the islands, describing them as an "important operational area" within the IRGC's 5th Naval Region.

He reiterated the guidance of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on maintaining the highest level of preparedness among the forces stationed there.

"Today we witnessed high morale and full operational readiness, which stems from the wisdom of our Commander-in-Chief, the Leader," said Admiral Tangsiri, underscoring the "special directive" issued by the Leader concerning the strategic islands.

Tangsiri highlighted the addition of military equipment to the force, stating that one of his "main goals" in visiting the islands was to assess the "operational effectiveness" of the

defense systems deployed across the islands and the Strait of Hormuz.

"All systems, including missile, drone, and other defensive equipment, are in the best possible condition, fully operational and ready to ensure the peace and security of our beloved nation."

Addressing the neighboring countries and allies in the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea, Admiral Tangsiri conveyed the Islamic Republic's message of "friendship, brotherhood, and unity," while condemning the presence of foreign enemies in the region as a source of "division and sedition."

He further asserted that the Islamic Republic would "stand strong" against any adversaries.

In early August, the commander praised the IRGC Navy's advancements in precision and surgical strike capabilities, introduced as part of a major upgrade to the force's arsenal. The enhancement was unveiled during a ceremony in Bandar Abbas, where 2,654 new missile systems, drones, and other cutting-edge military equipment were delivered to the IRGC Navy.

"We placed special emphasis on innovation and technical originality in the equipment and capabilities we operationalized today," the commander stated during the event.

U.S., Western Allies Prolonged War by Sending Arms to Ukraine



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has rejected as "baseless" claims by the United States, Britain and France about Tehran's role in Russia's military campaign in Ukraine, saying the Western countries—not the Islamic Republic—have prolonged the war by supplying weapons to Kiev.

Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations Amir Saied Iravani made the remarks in a letter sent to the UN chief and the Security Council's president on Wednesday, after the US, British and French envoys leveled coordinated accusations at Tehran concerning the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict during a Security Council meeting on August 30.

He said Iran "categorically rejects" any allegations suggesting its involvement in the sale, export, or transfer of arms in violation of its international commitments to Russia as "misleading, completely unfounded" and "entirely baseless".

The Islamic Republic regards the accusations "as merely the narrow and shortsighted political agendas of these three permanent members of the Council, aimed at advancing their own political interests," he added.

"It is both ironic and hypocritical that three countries directly involved in the Ukraine conflict and significantly contributing to its escalation through the supply of advanced weaponry have boldly made such baseless claims against Iran. The United States and its allies cannot deny the undeniable reality that their provision of ... advanced weaponry ... has prolonged the war in Ukraine and inflicted harm on civilians and civilian infrastructure."

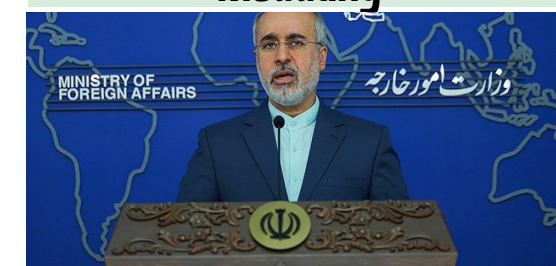
Iravani also said that it is indeed the United States—not Iran—that is the "primary advocate and propagator of terrorism" both in the region and the entire world.

"The United States is number one in sponsoring Israel, the most dangerous terrorist regime in the world," he emphasized.

Russia launched what it called a special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022 partly to prevent NATO's eastward expansion after warning that the US-led military alliance was following an "aggressive line" against Moscow.

Russia has repeatedly warned against the flow of Western weapons to Ukraine, saying it prolongs the conflict.

Tehran Rejects Washington Allegations of Election Meddling



TEHRAN - Iran has rejected as "hackneyed and groundless" the US administration's claims of Tehran's interference in the forthcoming American election.

"Once again, we consider these hackneyed allegations to be groundless, biased, and to serve domestic political purposes in the United States, and we reject such accusations," Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said on Friday.

The comment came after US Attorney General Merrick B. Garland, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and some other American spying agencies accused certain countries, including Iran, of engaging in efforts to influence the outcome of the U.S. presidential vote in November by conducting cyberattacks.

Kanaani stressed that US officials, unable to heal rifts and settle their country's internal problems, which have structural, political and social roots, seek to shift the blame on others by leveling accusations against various countries.

"The U.S. government, which spearheads illegal interference in the internal affairs of the other independent states and has a long list of such destructive measures on its record, cannot attribute its domestic problems and crises to other countries by making accusations against them or cover up the dark record of its extrajudicial actions and interference in the internal affairs of the independent states," Kanaani added.

Garland recently accused Iran of "aggressive" actions aimed at swaying the November election in the U.S., citing what he claimed as intelligence reports.

In a joint statement last month, the FBI, Office of the Director of National Intelligence and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) also claimed that Iran was taking measures to target political campaigns and American public with cyber and influence operations.

Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations rejoiced at the time the "unsubstantiated" allegations of efforts to interfere in the 2024 US presidential election.

Redrawing of Boundaries a Red Line for Iran



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has described any threats to the territorial integrity of neighboring countries or redrawing of boundaries as a red line for the Islamic Republic.

In a post published on the social media platform X on Thursday, the top Iranian diplomat emphasized that regional stability plays a very significant role in his country's national security.

"Regional peace, security and stability is not merely a preference, but a pillar of our national security," he wrote in the post.

"Any threat from North, South, East, or West to the territorial integrity of our neighbors or redrawing of boundaries is totally unacceptable and a red line for Iran," Araghchi added.

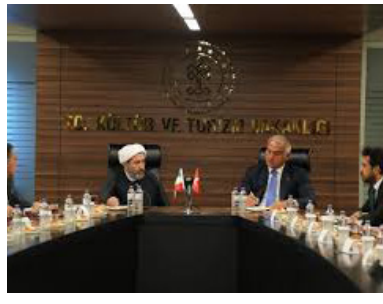
Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's recent remarks expressing support for Azerbaijan's demand to get unimpeded access to its Nakhchivan exclave by opening the Zangezur transport corridor through Armenia have drawn criticism in Iran.

Moscow and Baku want Russia to monitor and control the corridor, but Yerevan and Tehran are opposed to such a scheme.

In a Monday "meeting" with Russia's ambassador to Tehran, the director-general of the Foreign Ministry's Eurasia Department expressed Iran's opposition to "any geopolitical changes in the Caucasus".

The Iranian official told Russia's envoy that "respecting national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and mutual interests of countries is the guarantor of lasting peace and a foundation for regional cooperation in the Caucasus," according to the Foreign Ministry's readout of the talks.

IRAN NEWS



Iran, Turkiye to Further Boost Cultural Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of the Iranian Islamic Culture and Relations Organization has described 2025 as a unique year in cultural relations between Iran and Turkiye. Mohammad Mehdi Imanpour emphasized in a meeting with Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism Mehmet Nuri Ersoy that Tehran prefers the opening ceremony of the cultural year to be held in February 2025, which will coincide with Iran's National Day.

The Turkish minister, for his part, underlined that 2025 will be the year during which the two nations will witness special developments in their bilateral cultural relations, stressing the need to hold specialized and technical meetings to achieve that goal.

Nuri Ersoy also said that the Turkiye Culture Route Festival is being held each year, which is attended by 60% of the country's population, and that the Turkish authorities are fully prepared to welcome Iran as a special guest in this festival, where Iranians will enjoy the opportunity to directly communicate with Turkish citizens.

Unauthorized Individuals Will Be Expelled as Soon as Possible



TEHRAN - Eskandar Momeni, in a meeting with Ayatollah Dejkam, the representative of the Supreme Leader in Fars province and the Friday prayer leader of Shiraz, stated: "Addressing social harms is one of the main responsibilities of the Ministry of Interior. Last year, the related department was upgraded to an organization."

The Minister of Interior added: "Social harms might not be immediately noticeable, but over time, they can severely impact all areas of the country. Therefore, attention must be paid to resolving these issues."

He reminded that social harms are a cross-sectoral issue, stating: "The main work to combat social harms must be informative and positive for the people."

Momeni emphasized the need for a specific and structured program, utilizing maximum capacity in this field, and added: "We will proceed with a program in this area to manage social harms."

The Minister also referred to the seventh development plan of the country in the field of social harms, stating: "The seventh development plan has outlined several tasks in the area of social harms, one of which is the management of foreign nationals, which is intertwined with social harms."

He mentioned that the country cannot accommodate so many guests, saying: "Even a house has limited capacity to host guests, and exceeding that capacity disturbs both the host and the guest. Therefore, we will expel unauthorized individuals as soon as possible, as their presence has not only caused problems but also taken away many job opportunities, which was evident during today's visit to the Sang-e Siah neighborhood of Shiraz."

The Minister emphasized: "Our macro policy is to act in accordance with the leader's visions, the constitution, and the implementation of the seventh development plan to achieve success."

Momeni further highlighted the role of Fars province in various fields, stating: "Fars holds a special position in the country, and the government is making efforts to support all provinces, including Fars, to the best of its ability."



US Seizure of Venezuelan Plane Poses Threat to Airspace Peace, Security

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry condemned the recent move by the US government to seize a plane used by the Venezuelan president, saying it poses a threat to the peace and security of the airspace.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, while stressing the necessity to respect international laws and regulations, considers the recent move by the US government in confiscating the plane used by the Venezuelan president contrary to the rules and norms of international law, especially the immunity of property belonging to governments and the international civil aviation law regulations, including the Chicago Convention, and deems it unacceptable," said Nasser Kanaani, the spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

He added, "The move, which is in line with the unilateral hostile measures by the US against other nations and international law, is fomenting chaos and promoting skyjacking and poses a threat to the peace and security of the airspace."

Kanaani voiced solidarity and support for the Venezuelan government in protecting and reclaiming public property belonging to the people of the country, and stressed that cooperation between countries should be promoted in order to confront the US unilateral sanctions and hostile moves, the Foreign Ministry's website reported.

Uzbekistan Eyes Boosting Trade With Iran to \$1b

TEHRAN - Uzbekistan Embassy held a ceremony on Thursday September 5 to mark the 33rd Independence Day

At the premise of Uzbekistan Embassy, Uzbek Ambassador Farridin Nasriev hosted a ceremony marking Uzbekistan Independence Day with the presence of some distinguished guests and media persons.

Addressing the event, Uzbek Ambassador Nasriev congratulated the Independence Day and said Uzbekistan with population over 37m is one of the top 40 populous countries in the world which began fundamental reforms with the orders of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He added that these drastic reforms have been approved by the international community and the IMF. He reiterated that the GDP of the country in 2023 surpassed \$100b for the first time in the history of the country and it has been forecasted it would grow by 5.7%.

The country in recent years and especially in 2023 and 2024 have witnessed major achievements as in 2013 Samarkand of Uzbekistan was chosen as World Tourism Capital by the UNESCO, and the historic city of Khiva was declared the Tourism Capital of the Islamic World and in 2025, Samarkand of Uzbekistan will host 43rd session of the UNESCO General Conference in 2025.

He also hailed the performance of Uzbek athletes in Paris Olympic Games as well as their performance in the Paris Paralympics which is underway.

Nasriev then touched upon cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan which is

growing fast. He said that in 2023 leaders of both countries had constructive meetings and many good agreements were signed between the two states, adding that some major events have been planned between the two countries for this year like the Iran-Uzbekistan Economic Commission Forum which will be held on September 19-20 in Tashkent and Khorazm and an Iranian trade delegation led by the Head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, is to attend the event.

Then some of major activities of Uzbekistan during the past six months under management of Nasriev were presented to the participants.

The ambassador also on the sidelines of the event said that the number of Iranian visitors to Uzbekistan this year has surpassed 10,000 and expressed hope the number would increase more.

He also reiterated that currently the trade volume between Iran and Uzbekistan is \$500m and both countries have set target to increase it to \$1b.

The ceremony continued by some musical performance of Iranian traditional band and showing some clips on Bukhara of Uzbekistan.

At the end of the ceremony, an especial cake prepared for the event was cut by Mr. Nasriev.

Independence Day is an official national holiday in Uzbekistan since 1991 when the country gained its independence from the collapsed Soviet Union and the day is on the first of September every year.

Iran Halts Rebar Exports to Afghanistan



TEHRAN - A member of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce stated that Iran, once Afghanistan's largest supplier of rebar, has not exported even a kilogram of rebar to Afghanistan in the past year. Instead, the export of steel billets has replaced rebar exports.

Hussein Mohammadian, a member of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce, explained to ILNA the reasons behind the recent increase in trade between the two countries aimed at developing industrial activities. He noted that after achieving political stability, Afghanistan's government has heavily focused on attracting domestic and foreign investments and is welcoming the participation of other countries to boost its economy. Afghanistan's untouched mineral reserves have attracted considerable interest from investors, with reports suggesting that the country contains almost every element from the periodic table in its soil. Even though some countries, like China and European nations, may hesitate in establishing political relations with Afghanistan, they are actively pursuing economic opportunities, with countries like Uzbekistan also investing in Afghanistan.

He added that countries with traditional markets in Afghanistan feel threatened by its economic development, as many goods previously exported to Afghanistan are now being produced domestically, leading to the loss of these markets. For instance, while Iran was once the largest supplier of rebar to Afghanistan, it hasn't exported any in the past year. Afghanistan now uses imported steel billets to manufacture rebar and other steel products domestically. This trend is not limited to the steel industry; products like cakes, cookies, and sweets, which were once imported from Iran, are now being produced locally due to high import tariffs. These tariffs have made Iranian exports less economically viable as Afghanistan has established its own production units for these goods.

Mohammadian also reported a significant increase in the

export of industrial machinery from Iran to Afghanistan over the past year. In Herat's industrial zone, it has become difficult to find land for allocation, as the Afghan government is committed to supporting domestic production, even willing to purchase local products at a 20% higher price.

He further noted that Iran shares many commonalities with Afghanistan and hosts around 10 million Afghan nationals. Given this background, Iran has endured challenges due to Afghanistan's situation. Therefore, if serious investments are to be made in Afghanistan, Iran should also secure a share. To this end, Iranian delegations have held various expert meetings to enhance mining cooperation with Afghanistan. There are plans to form a consortium to participate actively in Afghanistan's mining sector. In this context, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Afghanistan's Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, has been invited to Iran several times, and the outcomes of these meetings have been promising.

As a result of these discussions, customs-related issues have been minimized, and transit between Iran and Afghanistan has increased by about 60% compared to the previous year.

When asked whether the visit of the CEO of Iran's largest steel company to Afghanistan indicates an effort to collaborate in the steel industry, Mohammadian confirmed that this is one of their major initiatives. In line with this, the Khaf-Herat railway, constructed around three years ago, is now ready for use.

He added that the Sangan iron ore mine, located near the border of both countries, will allow Iranian steel companies to import iron ore concentrate from Afghanistan temporarily and export steel billets to Afghanistan. This move could significantly help balance trade between Iran and Afghanistan, as Afghanistan has often complained that Iran's exports to Afghanistan far exceed Afghanistan's exports to Iran.

Definition of a Joint Project Between Iran and ESCAP on the Role of Technology in Combating Natural



TEHRAN (IRNA) - During his participation and speeches at the morning and afternoon sessions of the ministers' meeting of ESCAP member countries, the Minister of Communications of Iran received a proposal for defining a joint project on the role of technologies in combating natural disasters between Iran and ESCAP. He also visited the "Astana Hub," a complex consisting of a science and technology park and an accelerator.

"Seyed Sattar Hashemi," Minister of Communications and Information Technology, attended the second and final day of the ESCAP meeting. He participated in both the morning and afternoon sessions, including the session on the acceptance of the ESCAP ministers' declaration and the session on the approval of the ESCAP ministers' conference report, where he also gave speeches.

Hashemi then had a separate meeting with Zhaslan Madiyev, Minister of Digital Development, Innovation, and Aerospace Industry of Kazakhstan. In this meeting, both sides expressed interest in cooperating in areas such as information technology, infrastructure, e-government, and research collaborations. They agreed to identify contact points for closer collaboration.

Additionally, there was hope expressed that after finalizing the provisions of an agreement proposed by Kazakhstan, it could be signed at the first meeting between the ministers of the two countries.

The Minister of Communications also met with Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP. During the meeting, with reference to past collaborations between Iran and ESCAP, such as the ESCAP regional office in Iran related to disaster management, it was hoped that a joint project between Iran and ESCAP could be defined regarding the role of technology in combating natural disasters.

Following this, the Minister visited the "Astana Hub," a complex including a science and technology park and an accelerator. During the visit, he expressed hope for the presence of Iranian companies in the Astana Hub and invited the Kazakh delegation to visit the Iranian ICT Park.

Commander Reiterates Iran's Resolve to Retaliate Israeli Assassination of Haniyeh



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Israeli regime should have no doubt about the Islamic Republic's resolve to retaliate over the regime's assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, the political bureau chief of the Hamas resistance movement, a senior commander said.

"The Zionist regime should not dream that Iran would not respond to this atrocity...because the Islamic Republic has (already) proven its will to deploy all its capacities towards responding to enemies' violation of its soil and waters," the Iranian Armed Forces' Deputy Chief of Staff for Coordination, Brigadier General Ali Abdollahi said during a ceremony in the northwestern Iranian city of Koumeleh.

The official quoted remarks made by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei following the assassination, in which the Leader pledged that the Islamic Republic would deliver a "harsh response" to the atrocity.

"The time of the response, however, will be determined by the Leader and the country's senior commanders," Abdollahi noted.

Haniyeh, the late head of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas' Political Bureau, was assassinated alongside one of his bodyguards in the Iranian capital Tehran on July 31, a day after he attended the swearing-in ceremony of Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Abdollahi cited several instances of the country's successful retaliation against aggressors such as its steadfast defense of its soil during the 1980s in the face of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's invading army, which was being heavily armed by the West.

"The country's security, power, and advancement are the results of the sacrifices that were made by its martyrs and fighters (during the war)," he said, according to Press TV.

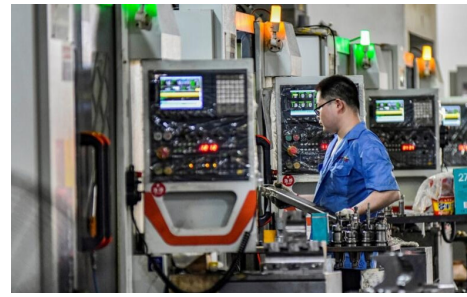
Deadly Super Typhoon Yagi Headed for Southern Chin

BEIJING (dispatches)- Powerful gales and heavy rain from the deadly Super Typhoon Yagi drenched southern China on Friday, with schools shut for a second day and flights cancelled as Asia's strongest storm this year headed for landfall along the coast of Hainan province.

Packing maximum sustained winds of 245 km per hour (152 mph) near its centre, Yagi registers as the world's second-most powerful tropical cyclone in 2024 so far, after the Category 5 Atlantic hurricane Beryl, and the most severe in the Pacific basin this year.

After more than doubling in strength since killing 16 people in the northern Philippines earlier this week, Yagi's eye was about 100 kilometres (62 miles) offshore Hainan as of midday, with no loss of wind speed overnight.

Yagi is expected to make landfall along China's coast between Wenchang in Hainan and Leizhou in Guangdong province from Friday afternoon. It is then predicted to hit Vietnam and Laos over the weekend.



Telegram Chief Denounces French Charges as Surprising and Misguided



PARIS (Dispatches) - Telegram founder and chief executive Pavel Durov on Thursday hit out at France for arresting and charging him last month over the publication of extremist and illegal content on the popular messaging app.

In a lengthy post on Telegram, his first comment since his arrest, Durov said it was "surprising" he was being held responsible for other people's content.

"Using laws from the pre-smartphone era to charge a CEO with crimes committed by third parties on the platform he manages is a misguided approach," he said.

He also lashed out at claims that "Telegram is some sort of anarchic paradise" as "absolutely untrue", insisting: "We take down millions of harmful posts and channels every day."

He denied accusations from France that Paris had not received responses from Telegram to its requests, saying he had personally helped French authorities "establish a hotline with Telegram to deal with the threat of terrorism in France".

But striking a more conciliatory tone at the end of his message, Durov said Telegram's soaring user numbers -- which he now put at 950 million worldwide -- "caused growing pains that made it easier for criminals to abuse our platform".

"That's why I made it my personal goal to ensure we significantly improve things in this regard," he said, adding that this was being worked out "internally" and more details would be shared in the future.

"I hope that the events of August will result in making Telegram -- and the social networking industry as a whole -- safer and stronger."

Trump to Tap Musk to Lead Gov't Efficiency Commission If Elected

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said on Thursday he would establish a government efficiency commission headed by billionaire supporter Elon Musk if he wins the Nov. 5 election, during a wide-ranging speech in which he laid out his economic vision for the country.

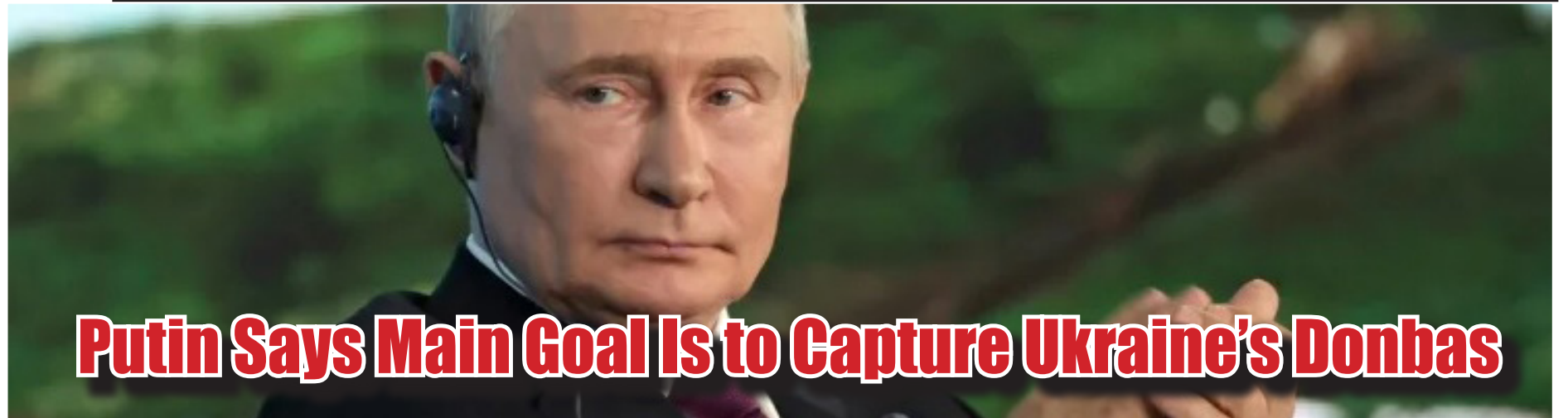
Speaking at the New York Economic Club, the former president also pledged to slash corporate tax rates for companies that manufacture domestically, establish "low-tax" zones on federal lands where construction companies would be encouraged to build new homes, and start a sovereign wealth fund.

Trump had been discussing the idea of an efficiency commission with aides for weeks, people with knowledge of those conversations have told Reuters. His Thursday speech, however, was the first time he publicly endorsed the idea.

It was also the first time Trump said Musk had agreed to head the body. Trump did not detail how such a commission would operate, besides saying it would develop a plan to eliminate "fraud and improper payments" within six months of being formed.

"I will create a government efficiency commission tasked with conducting a complete financial and performance audit of the entire federal government," Trump told an audience that included Trump's former treasury secretary, Steve Mnuchin, and financiers Scott Bessent and John Paulson.

Musk said on an Aug. 19 podcast that he had held conversations with the former president about the commission and that he would be interested in serving on it. "I look forward to serving America if the opportunity arises," the Tesla chief wrote on X on Thursday. "No pay, no title, no recognition is needed."



Putin Says Main Goal Is to Capture Ukraine's Donbas

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday his main aim in Ukraine after 30 months of fighting was to capture the eastern Donbas area -- and claimed that Ukraine's Kursk counter-offensive had made that easier.

Putin was speaking a day after Russia attacked Ukraine's western Lviv region with deadly strikes, and after recent advances by Moscow's forces in the Donbas.

Since the start of its offensive in February 2022 when it failed to capture the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, Russia has adapted its aims, concentrating instead on trying to conquer eastern Ukraine.

While Ukraine's surprise push into Russia's Kursk region last month caught Russian forces off-guard, Putin stressed that the move had failed to slow Moscow's advance in occupied Ukraine.

"The aim of the enemy (in Kursk) was to force us to worry, hustle, divert troops and to stop our offensive in key areas, especially in the Donbas, the liberation of which is our main primary objective," Putin said at a forum in Vladivostok, in Russia's far east.

Russia claims the eastern Donetsk region and three other Ukrainian regions, as its own.

Moscow has this summer advanced strongly and its troops are now around a dozen kilometers from the city of Pokrovsk -- a key logistics hub in east Ukraine from where thousands have now fled.

Putin said Ukraine had sent "quite well-prepared units" into Kursk and so had made Moscow's advance in Donbas quicker.

"The enemy weakened itself in key areas, our army has accelerated its offensive operations," he argued.

Putin also claimed that Moscow's army has begun to push out Ukrainian forces from the Kursk region, where Kyiv's forces have held on to towns and villages for almost a month.

"Our armed forces have stabilised the situation and started gradually squeezing (the enemy) out from our territory," Putin said.

It was not possible to verify these claims.

Russia did not mount a large-scale response in the first days of the incursion, which became the biggest on Russian soil since WWII. He has since played down the significance of the Ukrainian attack.

But Putin hardened his rhetoric in recent days.

"It is the holy duty of the Russian army to do everything to throw out the enemy from this territory and to protect our citizens," he said Thursday.

Earlier this week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told US TV channel NBC that Ukraine would hold on to the territory captured in the Kursk region.

Zelensky has previously said that one of Kyiv's "goals" in Kursk was to show Russians "what is more important to him (Putin): occupation of the territories of Ukraine or the protection of his population".

Kyiv has also said that it wants to force Moscow into "fair" negotiations.

While Russian officials have rushed in recent weeks to say that the Kursk incursion makes any talks with Ukraine impossible, Putin appeared to roll back those statements.

Russia was ready to talk, he said -- but on the basis of an aborted deal reached in Istanbul in 2022, the details of which were never made public by either side.

But Putin has repeatedly said that Moscow can only negotiate with Ukraine if Kyiv surrenders four of its regions -- Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

"Are we ready to negotiate with them? We have never refused to do so," Putin said Thursday.

"But not on the basis of some ephemeral demands, but on the basis of those documents that were agreed and actually initialled in Istanbul," he added.

The Kremlin has claimed Russia and Ukraine were on the verge of a deal in the spring of 2022, shortly after Moscow launched its offensive in Ukraine.

Blinken Urges Israel, Hamas to Finalize Truce



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday urged both Israel and Hamas to finalize a Gaza truce, standing by US assessments that 90 percent of a deal was ready.

Blinken said that the United States would be offering further ideas in coming days through mediators Egypt and Qatar in hopes of sealing an agreement.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in an interview with Fox News on Thursday denied a US official's assessment that 90 percent of a deal was ready, saying "it's not close."

But Blinken repeated the assessment at a news conference during a visit to Haiti, saying, "I think based on what I've seen, 90 percent is agreed."

"It's really incumbent on both parties to get to yes on these remaining issues," Blinken said.

"As close as I believe we are to getting a ceasefire agreement, every day that goes by where it is not finalized and

the parties don't say, 'yes, period,' is a day in which something else happens, and there is an intervening event which simply pushes things off and runs the risk of derailing what is a pretty fragile apple cart," he said.

The United States in recent weeks has pushed a proposal to bridge gaps between both sides, which include disagreements over Netanyahu's insistence on leaving some Israeli troops on the border between Gaza and Egypt.

Blinken said he believed that Netanyahu, who has put a top priority on normalizing diplomatic relations with Arab states, could still reach a historic deal with Saudi Arabia, the guardian of Islam's two holiest shrines.

Blinken did not rule out an agreement before Biden leaves office in January.

"I think if we can get a ceasefire in Gaza, there remains an opportunity through the balance of this administration to move forward on normalisation," he said.

Macron Names Brexit Negotiator Barnier as New PM



PARIS (Dispatches) - After two months of political chaos following snap

elections, French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday named as prime minister Michel Barnier, who pledged to cooperate across the political spectrum but gave few clues on his plans.

The EU's former chief Brexit negotiator - a discreet conservative who is relatively unknown in France despite former ministerial roles - faces the daunting challenge of steering tough legislation like the 2025 budget through a hung parliament while under constant threat of being toppled.

The fates of Barnier - and Macron - rest with Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN), which gave tentative support to Barnier's nomination. But the party made clear it could withdraw support at any point if its concerns on immigration, security and pocketbook issues are not met.

Speaking in the courtyard of the Matignon prime minister's residence, Barnier said his tenure "will be about addressing, as much as we can, the challenges, the anger, the suffering, the feeling of abandonment, of injustice running through many of our cities, suburbs and rural areas."

At 73, Barnier is the oldest prime minister in France's modern political history, taking over from Gabriel Attal, who was the youngest. It took Macron two months to appoint him, after the election failed to give any group a clear majority.

Barnier said he would listen to all political groups, citing health care, security and jobs as well as reducing the country's excessive debt as priorities.

"The French ... expressed their need for respect, unity and appeasement," Barnier said, standing next to Attal.

The left, which placed first in the election, but without an absolute majority, made clear it would fight Barnier in office.

"The election was stolen from the French people," hard-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon said, calling for street protests on Saturday. Another hard-left lawmaker, Mathilde Panot, called it an "unacceptable democratic coup".

RN lawmaker Laurent Jacobelli said a condition for not voting Barnier down would be that parliament be dissolved as soon as possible - which would be early July next year.

Jordan Bardella, the president of the RN, parliament's biggest single party, demanded the far right's concerns be addressed. "We reserve all political means of action if this is not the case in the coming weeks," Bardella said.

Barnier is a pro-European and a moderate career politician, though he toughened his discourse considerably when he unsuccessfully sought his party's presidential nomination in 2021, saying immigration was out of control.

He became a lawmaker at age 27 and served in several French governments, including as foreign minister and agriculture minister. He has spent most of the past 15 years working at EU headquarters in Brussels, where he led the EU's talks with Britain over its exit from the bloc.



Spain Held in Nations League, Ronaldo Scores 900th Goal

PARIS (Dispatches) - Spain were held by Serbia in the UEFA Nations League on Thursday in their first game since winning Euro 2024, while Cristiano Ronaldo reached another milestone by scoring his 900th career goal as Portugal beat Croatia.

Eight of Spain's starting line-up in their Euro 2024 final victory over England almost two months ago were on the field at kick-off against Serbia in Belgrade.

Among them was Lamine Yamal, with the Barcelona prodigy just one of the Spain players to be denied by home goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic.

Luis de la Fuente's team are also the reigning Nations League champions having won the most recent edition of the tournament last year.

They will now hope to register their first victory in League A, Group 4 when they travel to face Switzerland in Geneva on Sunday.

The Swiss lost 2-0 to Denmark on Thursday, with Patrick Dorgu and captain Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg scoring late goals for the home side in Copenhagen.

Switzerland finished the match with nine men as both Nico Elvedi and Granit Xhaka were sent off in the second half.

In Lisbon, Ronaldo's 900th career goal proved to be the winner as 2019 Nations League champions Portugal edged Croatia 2-1 in Group A1.

Ronaldo, 39, put behind him a disappointing Euro 2024 in which he failed to score as he turned in a Nuno Mendes cross in the 34th minute at the Estadio da Luz to reach the landmark.

He appeared emotional as he celebrated the goal, his 131st in a Portugal shirt. Half of his goals were scored for Real Madrid, with the remainder spread across his spells at Sporting Lisbon, Manchester United and current club Al-Nassr.

Diogo Dalot's goal had put Portugal in front early on before Ronaldo netted, with a Dalot own-goal reducing the deficit before the break.

Portugal next host Scotland, who lost 3-2 to Poland at Hampden Park, with the visitors grabbing the victory thanks to a 97th-minute Nicola Zalewski penalty.

Poland had been 2-0 up as Sebastian Szymanski gave them an early lead and captain Robert Lewandowski added a penalty just before the break.

However, Billy Gilmour pulled one back for League A newcomers Scotland moments after the restart, and Scott McTominay equalised before Roma's Zalewski sneaked his spot-kick under Angus Gunn deep into stoppage time.

Elsewhere, there were wins for Slovakia and Northern Ireland in League C, while Sweden -- now being coached by Jon Dahl Tomasson -- beat Azerbaijan 3-1 away in Baku with Newcastle United's Alexander Isak netting twice.

History was made in League D as San Marino, the world's worst team according to the FIFA rankings, beat Liechtenstein 1-0 to claim their first ever competitive win.

The tiny country of barely 30,000 people, surrounded by Italy, came into the match at their San Marino Stadium looking for a first win of any sort since beating Liechtenstein in a friendly in 2004.

Liechtenstein had a goal disallowed for a tight offside in the first half before San Marino pounced on a defensive error to grab the winner in the 53rd minute through Nicko Sensoli.

Aged 19, he had not been born when the team who sit 210th and last in the world rankings last won a game.

Argentina Cruise Past Chile, Bolivia Thrash Venezuela



BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Alexis Mac Allister, Julian Alvarez and Paulo Dybala were on target as Argentina tightened their grip on South America's 2026 World Cup qualifying tournament with a 3-0 win over Chile on Thursday.

Liverpool midfielder Mac Allister swept in a low finish three minutes after half-time to break the deadlock at the Estadio Monumental in Buenos Aires against a defensive Chile side.

Former Manchester City striker Alvarez doubled the lead in the 84th minute with a thumping shot from outside the area before substitute Dybala put the seal on the victory with a late strike in stoppage time.

It was another clinical victory for the reigning world champions, who are now cruising towards confirming their place at the 2026 finals being staged in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Lionel Scaloni's team lead South America's 10-team round-robin qualifying table by five points after seven games.

The top six teams in the final standings qualify automatically for the 2026 finals in North America with the seventh-placed team advancing to a playoff.

Argentina, who also beat Chile 1-0 on their way to clinching back-to-back Copa America titles earlier this year, went into Thursday's game missing injured captain Lionel Messi and veteran winger Angel Di Maria, who retired from international football after the Copa America triumph in July.

Di Maria was feted by his former teammates at a pre-game ceremony before taking his place in the stands to watch the world champions secure their sixth win from seven qualifying games.

Chiefs Edge Ravens by a Toe in Stunning NFL Season Opener

KANSAS CITY (Dispatches) - Defending champion Kansas City edged Baltimore 27-20 in Thursday's 105th NFL season-opener after a video review denied the Ravens a touchdown on the game's final play.

Two-time NFL Most Valuable Players Patrick Mahomes of the Chiefs and Lamar Jackson of Baltimore started at quarterback in a rematch of last season's AFC Championship game and produced a spectacular start to the campaign.

Baltimore's Justin Tucker kicked a 32-yard field goal with 4:54 remaining to lift the Ravens within 27-20 and later Mahomes made a great catch of his own deflected pass to prevent an interception just before the two-minute warning, allowing a Chiefs punt that left the Ravens 87 yards away from a tying touchdown.

Jackson threw a 38-yard pass to Rashod Bateman to put Baltimore at the Chiefs' 10-yard line in the dying seconds, but missed on two passes to open receivers in the end zone.

On the final play, Baltimore's Isaiah Likely caught a Jackson pass in the back of the end zone but his toe came down on the out of bounds line and what referees called a touchdown on the field was overruled on video review, giving the Chiefs a dramatic triumph.

Mahomes is trying to lead the Chiefs to an unprecedented Super Bowl "three-peat" and fourth title in six seasons while Jackson hopes to guide the Ravens to their first Super Bowl title since the



2012 campaign. "It was nerve-wracking," Mahomes said. "It's a game of inches. That's what they say. That's a great football team and to come out here and get a win, it's a great start to the season."

Mahomes completed 20-of-28 passes for 291 yards and a touchdown with an interception. He improved to 5-1 against Baltimore since becoming a starter in 2018 with 14 touchdowns against three interceptions.

"Our guys responded well," Mahomes said. "We've got a lot of things to work on but that's a great start."

Jackson threw for 273 yards and a touchdown and ran 16 times for

122 yards in a losing effort.

A severe thunderstorm delayed the kickoff by 20 minutes but fans who sheltered from lightning were back in their seats to roar when the Chiefs ran out for pre-game workouts.

Among those who waited out the lightning was superstar singer Taylor Swift, the girlfriend of Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce.

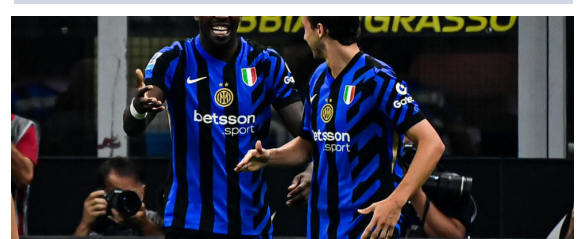
Baltimore opened with an 11-play, 70-yard touchdown drive capped by new rusher Derrick Henry's five-yard scoring run 6:46 into the contest.

Kansas City answered immediately on a five-play, 67-yard march that ended with rookie receiver Xavier Worthy scoring on his first NFL touch of the ball, a 21-yard run around the right end, to lift the Chiefs' level 7-7.

Chris Jones sacked Jackson to open the second quarter and Kansas City's Felix Anudike-Uzomah, a defensive end of Nigerian descent, recovered at the Ravens' 14-yard line, setting up a 32-yard Harrison Butker field goal that gave the Chiefs a 10-7 lead.

Kansas City forced a turnover on downs at midfield and three plays later Mahomes escaped three defenders to connect with Kelce on a 23-yard pass to become the Chiefs' all-time pass yardage leader, breaking Len Dawson's mark of 28,507 yards in 183 games with 86 games to spare.

Duplantis Wrecked as Tebogo, Richardson Star in Zurich



ZURICH (Dispatches) - Armand Duplantis admitted to feeling "wrecked" after an exhibition 100m race, while Sha'Carri Richardson and Letsile Tebogo steamed to sprint victories at the Zurich Diamond League meeting on Thursday.

So much is now expected when Duplantis takes to the runway of the pole vault, but it was for him a relatively disappointing competition in cold and rainy conditions, albeit a victory.

The Swede won with a best clearance of 5.82m on countback from American Sam Kendricks.

"Mentally, I felt good today, but my body felt wrecked after yesterday's race," he said in reference to the 100m showdown with 400m hurdles world record holder Karsten Warholm.

Duplantis won the sprint in a "very impressive" 10.37sec to Warholm's 10.47.

"For both of us it was a great experience," said Duplantis. "It was super amazing. I think we built a super event, it was very new and innovative."

While Duplantis at least picked up another win, Warholm was an absentee after pinching his hamstring after his sprint endeavours.

But as the loser, Warholm was deigned to wear one of the Swede's national tops in action on Thursday.

While not competing, Warholm duly made an appearance on the track dressed in Duplantis' kit, but said it was "terrible. I need to take a really good shower after this!"

The Norwegian added: "I would prefer to race rather than do the walk of shame. But I felt something in my hamstring. I tried to warm up but I made the decision not to run."

"I hope my good friend Mondo will let me get away with this. I hope not to do this ever again!" he said, passionately kissing a Norway flag thrown from organisers, to rapturous applause from the crowd.

Roshawn Clarke of Jamaica, in 47.49sec, won the 400m hurdles in his absence.

World champion Richardson went some way to avenging her Olympic defeat by Julien Alfred by reversing the tables in the 100m.

Richardson headed into the final 20 metres in third behind Saint Lucia's Olympic champion Julien Alfred and Britain's Dina Asher-Smith.

Pegula in Thrilling Comeback to Face Sabalenka in US Open Final

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jessica Pegula staged an astonishing recovery from a set and a break down to defeat Karolina Muchova and reach her first Grand Slam final at the US Open on Thursday.

The sixth-ranked American came through 1-6, 6-4, 6-2 and will take on world number two and Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka in Saturday's championship match.

Sabalenka reached her second successive US Open final by seeing off another American, Emma Navarro 6-3, 7-6 (7/2).

"I thought I was lucky to still be in it," admitted Pegula after seeing Czech opponent Muchova miss an easy chance to go 3-0 up with a double break in the second set.

"She made me look like a beginner, she was destroying me and I was about to burst into tears but it all came down to small moments.

"I don't know how I turned that around."

Pegula has now won 15 of 16 matches on the US summer hard court swing which saw a title in Toronto and defeat in the Cincinnati final to Sabalenka.

"It's a chance for revenge, but she'll be tough to beat," said Pegula.

Muchova saved three break points in the third game of the first set which sparked a rapid



collapse by Pegula.

The 30-year-old American dropped serve in the fourth and sixth games and lost a set for the first time in the tournament.

Muchova's all-court game yielded 11 winners to her opponent's three as the opener was wrapped up in just 28 minutes.

It was a severe comedown for Pegula who had knocked out world number one Iga Swiatek on Wednesday to reach her first Grand Slam semi-final after losing all six of her previous last-eight matches.

Muchova then broke for a 2-0 lead in the second set, racking up a seventh game in a row before Pegula stopped the rot.

That suddenly reinvigorated the American who went 4-2 ahead before being pulled back to 4-4 but then levelled the semi-final when Muchova double-faulted on set point.

Pegula sprinted to a break up at 3-0 in the decider and then 5-2 after a seventh game which stretched to almost 10 minutes.