

Iran's Government Spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani Says the International Community Must React to the Israeli Regime's Recent "Inhuman" Acts in Lebanon

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Ministry Has Summoned the Acting Head of Afghanistan's Embassy in Tehran Following a Disrespectful Act by a Taliban Representative During the Playing of Iran's National Anthem

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TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian says the Islamic Republic is seeking to expand its ties with the world's countries based on mutual respect, but stressed that the country doesn't tolerate bullying.

"As I have frequently stated from different platforms, we have no fight with any country, and our basis is peace and friendship and expansion of ties based on good understanding and mutual respect, but we will definitely never brook bullying," Pezeshkian said.

He made the remarks at a meeting with members of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Iranian parliament that addressed the policy of the country's 14th administration.

During the meeting, the president stressed the importance of the role played by the parliament in updating communications and interactions with the neighboring countries.

"The government has seriously signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and agreements with neighboring countries, including in gas and energy, transportation and transit and the activation of border markets with the aim of turning Iran into a regional trade hub," he said.

"And in this regard, the role played by the countries' parliaments to pave the way for and facilitate the implementation of these agreements is very effective."

Pezeshkian also stressed that national unity is the basis for the success of the country's foreign policy.

"We believe that the country's salvation hinges on unity and reaching a common vision and language to solve the issues."

He noted that some Western countries, which claim to be advocates of human rights and defenders of democracy, are supporting the brutal Israeli aggression on Gaza.

"These countries must say, apart from any religion and belief, how... they support the killing of tens of thousands of women and children and the bombing of schools and hospitals, while at the same time, they accuse other countries of not respecting human rights," he said.

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

The regime's genocidal war on Gaza has so far killed more than 41,272 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured tens of thousands of others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under rubble.

Israel to Face Crushing Response for Acts of Terror in Lebanon



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Israel will face "a crushing response from the axis of resistance" for its acts of terror in Lebanon which are the result of the regime's despair.

In a letter to Hezbollah head Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on Thursday, Major General Hossein Salami condemned "the terrorist crime of the occupying regime, which resulted in the martyrdom and mass injury of beloved Lebanese nationals and Hezbollah fighters".

"I declare that such terrorist acts, that are undoubtedly due to the desperation and successive failures of the Zionist regime, will soon be met with a crushing response from the resistance front and we will witness complete destruction of this cruel and criminal regime," he said.

Gen. Salami praised Nasrallah and Hezbollah resistance fighters as well as the Lebanese nation for supporting the Palestinians in their struggle against the Israeli occupation.

"Almighty God has granted this special blessing to Your Excellency and the resistance fighters and the great people of Lebanon to come to the field with body, soul and the soul of your loved ones without a moment's delay to defend the oppressed of Palestine, especially the great men and women of Gaza and turn the scene of the disgraceful and beastly crime of the disgraced Zionists into a fragrant flower garden of resistance, success and victory of God's dignified men," he wrote.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Leader Asks Muslims to Tap Inner Strength to Eject Zionist Regime

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has called on Muslims to summon their "inner power" and remove the "malignant cancerous tumor of the Zionist regime from the heart of Islamic society, which is Palestine".

Ayatollah Khamenei told Muslim ambassadors and participants of an Islamic unity conference in Tehran Saturday that what is urgently needed is to form an Islamic ummah in order to unleash this inner power.

"What the Zionist regime is doing today and the crimes they commit without shame and concealment in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria, they literally are not fighting men, but people from all walks of the society in Palestine," he said.

"They were unable to deal a blow to men in Palestine, so they unleashed their ignorant and malicious anger on small children, on patients in hospitals, and on schools of young children," the Leader added.

"This is because we do not use our own inner power which we should. This internal power can remove and eliminate the Zionist regime, this evil cancerous tumor from the heart of the Islamic society, which is Palestine, and destroy the influence and dominance and bullying

intervention of America in the region."

Ayatollah Khamenei said the first step in the unity of the Islamic world is for the Islamic countries to completely cut off their economic relations with "this criminal and terrorist gang that rule Palestine and have usurped the land of Palestine".

"This is the least they can do, it must be done. They must destroy economic ties, weaken political ties, strengthen press and media attacks, and openly express and show that they are on the side of the oppressed Palestinian nation."

Ayatollah Khamenei said if Muslims "are united and become a single hand against our enemies, we will not allow foreigners to do whatever they want".

"If we unite against our enemies regardless of our differences, we can both improve our society and our country, and Muslim countries can have a relationship with each other with dignity," he said.

"This is how Islamic countries can safeguard their economy, culture, trade and security together and not allow foreigners to do whatever they want here."

Iran Parades 23 Ballistic Missiles, Unveils New Drone With 4,000 km Range

TEHRAN - Iran has paraded an unprecedented number of ballistic missiles at the start of its Sacred Defense Week which also marked the unveiling of a new kamikaze drone with a range of more than 4,000 km.

"23 ballistic missiles were displayed Saturday, which included 2 Kheibar Shekan missiles, 2 Fatah missiles, 4 Haj Qasem missiles, 2 Qadr H missiles, 2 Emad missiles, 3 Khorramshahr missiles, 4 Sejil missiles and 4 Jihad missiles," Tasnim news agency reported.

The Jihad is the latest liquid fuel ballistic missile of the IRGC Aerospace Force, which was displayed for the first time in the parade. With a high-explosive detachable warhead, it has a range of 1000 km, it added.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps also paraded the Shahed-136B, the latest version of the Shahed-136 kamikaze drone, for the first time.

The new military products were showcased at the mausoleum of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, in southern Tehran. The parades were staged to mark the beginning of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran 44 years ago.

The Shahed-136 is a delta-wing shaped, low-observable and low-signature loitering munition with a range of 2,000 kilometers that carries a warhead of 50 kilograms.

The unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) uses an Iranian-made piston engine and has a speed of about 200 km/h.

Other indigenous products put on display in the parade included Kheibar Shekan and Sejil Iranian solid-fuel medium-range ballistic missiles, Emad liquid-fuel and medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM), Khorramshahr medium-range ballistic missile, Haj Qasem ballistic missile as well as Fatah hypersonic medium-range ballistic missile.

Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to



strengthen its military capabilities, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will never be subject to negotiation.

Meanwhile on Saturday Iran's armed forces held military parades across the country on the first day of Sacred Defense Week, which marks an eight-year war of aggression on Iran by then-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in the 1980s.

In Tehran, the parades began at the mausoleum of the late founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini in southern Tehran morning to commemorate the anniversary of the day when Saddam Hussein's regime launched a war on Iran between 1980 and 1988.

Similar processions are also held in other Iranian provinces to mark the auspicious occasion.

Forces from the Iranian Army, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Police, Border Guards, and Basij are participating in the parades.

During the countrywide parades, the most recent achievements of the Iranian armed forces in missile industry, equipment for the ground, naval and air defense forces as well as communication gear were put on display.

The southern port city of Bandar Abbas was also witness to a large-scale military parade involving hundreds of vessels and submarines.

The IRGC-hosted parade fielded military units from ground, air and naval forces as well as paratroopers.

The surface and subsurface units of the Army, IRGC, Police and the popular forces also paraded simultaneously in the southern waters of the country in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman.

The Air Force, the IRGC's Aerospace Force along with the pilots of the Navy also demonstrated their prowess in the sky.

As many as 580 heavy vessels, ocean liners, frigates, and light and speedy vessels of the IRGC and the Army participated in the sea parade.

Iran Fully Supports Maduro Gov't in Venezuela



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh says the Islamic Republic fully supports the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, stressing that the change of governments does not alter the overall policy and approach of Tehran toward Caracas.

Nasirzadeh, who is also the Iranian head of the Joint Economic Commission of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Venezuela, made the remarks at a meeting with Venezuela's Minister of Transportation Ramon Blazquez in Tehran on Thursday.

Nasirzadeh further told Blazquez, who is also the Venezuelan head of the Joint Economic Commission of the two countries, that late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi and late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez were the founders of a new chapter in the relations between the two countries.

"We must strive, as the officials of the joint commission for economic cooperation, to further develop these relations," the Iranian defense minister stressed.

"Mr. Chavez was a pioneer of the anti-imperialist struggle, leaving a rich legacy for Venezuela, which is today stands at the forefront of the fight against imperialism and global hegemony," Nasirzadeh said.

Referring to these developments in Venezuela, the Iranian defense minister said the thwarting of the coup and assassination plot in recent days indicated the continuation of imperialist conspiracies aimed at countering Venezuela's independence.

"I believe that with the unity and solidarity between the government and the people of Venezuela, the vigilance of the armed forces, and the wise and intelligent leadership of the country, such conspiracies will fail," Nasirzadeh stressed.

The Iranian defense minister also stated that the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Venezuela is special and significant, with Venezuela holding a unique position in Iran's foreign policy.

Israeli Regime Fails to Achieve Goal of Increasing Tension and War



NEW YORK (IRNA) - Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said that Israel regime will not achieve the goal of increasing tension and war, but will receive decisive response for its crimes.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Araqchi arrived in the United States on Friday night. Araqchi and his accompanying delegation are visiting the US to attend the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Addressing the media reporters on Friday night, Araqchi said that this year's session of the United Nations General Assembly is being held in the conditions of West Asia; in a situation where the region is facing daily increase in tension and terrorist and criminal actions of Israel against the Palestinian people in Gaza, West Bank and Lebanon, and this has made very dangerous situation in the region, and Israel's goals to create war.

In this situation, it is natural that the most important issue in our meetings on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly and in the meetings held in the General Assembly and on its sidelines is the Non-Aligned Movement, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, BRICS, ECO, and etc., these are the main issues of the discussion of increasing tension and the criminal actions of the Zionist regime, which must be confronted by the international community, he added.

The Iranian foreign minister added that the Zionist regime is trying to move the region to a dangerous situation, and this is really a big danger for the entire international community, and the tension in the region has the possibility of expanding to other regions.

In addition to bilateral relations, which are always the subject of discussion, there are many issues such as regional issues, international crises such as the Ukraine crisis, nuclear negotiations, and other issues, Araqchi added that it is natural that the crimes of the Zionist regime, especially the crimes committed in the last two or three days, will be the main topic of these talks.

IRAN NEWS



Leader Pardons, Commutes Sentences for 2,887 Inmates

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has agreed to pardon and commute sentences for 2,887 prisoners. On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Imam Sadiq (AS), Ayatollah Khamenei has agreed to pardon and commute the sentences of 2,887 prisoners following a proposal from the Iranian Judiciary Chief, Gholmhossein Mohseni-Ejei.

The deputy head of the Judiciary, Sadeq Rahimi, provided details on the pardon and commutation of sentences for convicts, stating that out of 2,887 individuals eligible for pardon and sentence commutation, 2,745 are convicts from the public and revolutionary courts, 11 from the Judicial Organization of the Armed Forces, and 131 from the Discretionary Punishments Organization of Iran.

Among the pardoned individuals, 140 were women, 40 were foreign nationals, 39 were convicted on security charges, and 6 were under the age of 18, he further noted.

Iran's Products Are Unfamiliar to the Malaysian Market



TEHRAN - The Malaysian ambassador to Iran stated that Iranian products are unfamiliar to the Malaysian market, and efforts must be made to introduce Iranian goods more extensively through broader interactions in the country's markets.

Khairi bin Omar said on Thursday, in a gathering of several economic activists from Zanjan province, that there are numerous connections and commonalities between Iran and Malaysia, which necessitate the expansion of relations between the two countries.

Khairi bin Omar added that the two countries share many similarities in the food sector, and if imports and exports between them are established, accepting these similarities will become easier.

He emphasized that despite the existing restrictions and sanctions, the expansion of relations and financial interactions between the two countries will lead to economic growth and vitality on both sides.

He further noted that both parties must come together and create mutual relations in order to achieve practical outcomes.

The Bangladeshi ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran also mentioned in this meeting that the current trade volume between Iran and Bangladesh is \$100 million annually, but this figure has the potential to surpass \$1 billion.

Manjural Karim Khan Chowdhury stressed the need for increased understanding and communication between economic activists from both countries. He mentioned that Bangladesh is active in the pharmaceutical and textile sectors and imports many chemical, petrochemical, and cement products from Iran.

He noted that some minerals from Zanjan are also imported into Bangladesh, adding that Iranian economic actors are well-informed about the Bangladeshi market, and Bangladeshi actors are equally familiar with opportunities in Iran.



Tashkent Holds Iran-Uzbekistan Business Forum

By: F. Taherpoor

Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Tehran H.E. Fariddin Nasriev Is Seen Addressing the Iran-Uzbekistan Business Forum in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on September 19

TEHRAN - During the meeting between the Hungarian ambassador to Tehran and the president of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, the suitable areas for cooperation between Iran and Hungary were outlined. This came alongside a reference to the fifth joint commission between the two countries, which is scheduled to be held early next year.

Sammad Hasanzadeh, the president of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the past meetings of the joint economic commission and said: "Considering Hungary's geographical location in Europe and the friendly relations between the two countries, we are striving to expand our economic relations with Hungary."

He continued: "We need the cooperation of embassies to advance our commercial goals, and governments need to support the private sector because there are capacities to strengthen relations in various fields. Iran has made significant progress in industries such as food, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, etc. However, achieving only \$36 million in trade between Iran and Hungary is very limited."

Hasanzadeh also mentioned Hungary's significant activity in the automotive sector and noted that Iran has also succeeded in producing auto parts to global standards. Therefore, the two countries can cooperate in car production and enter the global market together.

He believes that food industries, home appliances, electronics, petrochemicals, tourism, student exchanges, and other areas are good grounds for cooperation between Iran and Hungary. The limited volume of trade so far is due to a lack of familiarity with each other's capacities. He suggested exchanging trade delegations to overcome this issue.

The president of the Iran Chamber of Commerce also highlighted the potential for joint cooperation in mining, stating that Hungary can meet its mineral needs through effective cooperation with Iran, as Iran has substantial capacities in various mineral products.

He emphasized that Iran, while maintaining its sovereignty, is committed to engaging with all countries, a policy that will be actively pursued under the new government. He noted that it is necessary to prepare for an increase in trade relations and to create the right infrastructure for it.

Hasanzadeh also said that they are ready to welcome a Hungarian trade delegation to become more familiar with Iran's industrial, agricultural, and service capacities.

In response, Gyula Petho, the Hungarian ambassador to Tehran, expressed satisfaction with the ongoing friendly relations between the two countries. He pointed out that there are always untapped areas in the economy that can be identified and invested in.

According to him, the fifth joint commission between Iran and Hungary will be held in the first half of next year, and preparations for this meeting are being pursued by both sides.

Petho noted that the Hungarian embassy in Tehran is working to find new ways to strengthen and elevate relations between Iran and Hungary.

The ambassador said it is essential for the business communities of both countries to get to know each other better. During the fourth joint commission meeting, a business forum was held, and a similar event will be organized during the fifth meeting. This will allow businesspeople to become more acquainted with each other.

He referenced the successful organization of an exhibition by Iran in Budapest, where various Iranian products were showcased, followed by a smaller food industry exhibition held at the Iranian embassy in Budapest last February. Such activities are effective in influencing the level of relations, although the effects may not be immediate.

Tabriz to Host 3rd Int'l Exhibition on Tourism in Oct.

By: F. Taherpoor



TEHRAN - The 11th National Handicrafts and 3rd International Tourism Exhibition will be held in Tabriz, East Azarbaijan, on October 16-19.

According to the Public Relations Office of the East Azerbaijan Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Tabriz International Fairground will host the event on October 16-19 as the exhibition will be open to the public from 15 to 21 p.m. everyday.

Director-General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of East Azarbaijan Mr. Ahmad Hamzehzadeh, in a speech during the coordination meeting for the Tabriz International Tourism and Handicrafts Exhibition, said: "Handicrafts, by creating a tangible connection in the minds of tourists, not only contribute to the development of the local economy but also enhance tourist satisfaction and introduce the country's handicraft products. This direct connection between tourists and handicraft products helps to engrain the cultural identity of different regions in the minds of visitors."

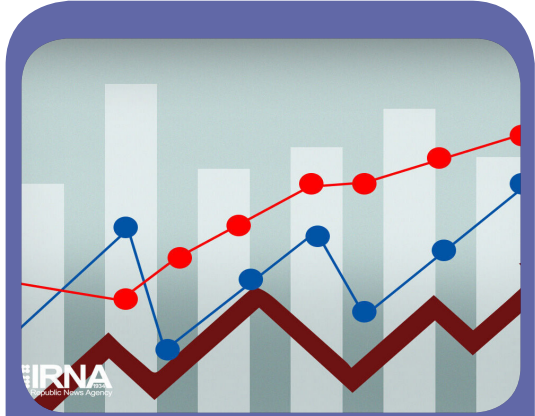
The Director-General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts continued: "Iranian handicrafts, as representatives of rich culture and art, hold special significance in international communities. Handicrafts, combining creativity with traditional techniques, serve as powerful ambassadors, reflecting the identity of Iran and Iranians."

He added: "As per the plans made, special attention will be given to showcasing a variety of handicraft products from across the country at the Tabriz International Tourism and Handicrafts Exhibition, so that artists and producers can present their achievements to both domestic and foreign visitors in a suitable setting."

Hamzehzadeh, highlighting the focus on handicraft products at the Tabriz International Tourism and Handicrafts Exhibition, said: "The Tabriz International Exhibition, which will be held from October 16 to 19, will focus on handicrafts and provide a golden opportunity to showcase the capabilities of Iranian artists and expand the export markets for these products."

Meanwhile Head of the East Azerbaijan Tourism Associations Mr. Rashid Rajabpoor, emphasizing the special importance of holding the Tabriz Tourism Exhibition, described this event as an exceptional showcase for the comprehensive introduction of the province's attractions, infrastructure, and potential tourism capacities. He also stressed the importance of presenting special travel packages as one of the main goals of organizing this exhibition.

The event will be held in collaboration between East Azerbaijan Tourism Associations and the East Azerbaijan Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.



Economic Growth of 4.2% Recorded in Spring

TEHRAN - The Central Bank announced that the economic growth for the first quarter of current Iranian calendar year 1403 was 4.2% at market prices and 3.2% at base prices.

According to the Central Bank, the gross domestic product (GDP) for the first quarter of 1403, "including oil" and "excluding oil," at constant prices of 1395, reached 3,905.1 trillion rials and 3,480.5 trillion rials, respectively, showing an increase of 3.2% and 2.5% compared to the same period last year.

Additionally, economic growth at market prices for the first quarter of 1403 increased by 4.2% compared to the same period last year. The realization of 3.2% economic growth (at base prices) in the first quarter of 1403, following 4.5% growth in 1402, indicates continued positive economic activity in the country.

Based on this report and preliminary calculations from the Central Bank's Economic Accounts Department, GDP at base prices (constant prices of 1395) for the first quarter of 1403 reached 3,905.1 trillion rials, reflecting a 3.2% growth compared to the first quarter of 1402. Economic growth excluding oil during this period was 2.5%. Additionally, according to final spending calculations, the growth rate of gross domestic expenditure at market prices for the first quarter of 1403 compared to the same period last year was estimated at 4.2%.

An analysis of investment across different economic sectors (at constant prices of 1395) shows that in the first quarter of 1403, gross fixed capital formation grew by 4.6% compared to the same period last year. During this period, growth in gross fixed capital formation in the two main subsectors, "machinery" and "construction," was 0.7% and 7.5%, respectively.

An examination of economic growth by activity groups (at constant prices of 1395) shows that the GDP growth in the first quarter of 1403 resulted from positive value-added growth across all major groups. It is noteworthy that in this period, the growth of the "oil and gas," "industries and mining," "agriculture, forestry, and fishing," and "services" sectors compared to the same period last year was 9.5%, 3.6%, 3.1%, and 1.9%, respectively. The contribution of these groups to the 3.2% growth recorded in the first quarter of 1403 was 1.0, 0.8, 0.3, and 1.1 percentage points, respectively.

In Absence of Iranian Gold, Turkey Has Taken Over Foreign Market



TEHRAN - Tehran Gold and Jewelry Union President stated that Iran's gold exports amounted to a negligible 870 kilograms, adding that individual retail units on average trade between 5 to 10 kilograms of melted gold daily.

In an interview with ILNA, Nader Bazrafshan spoke about the amount of gold transactions, stating: "There are no exact statistics available, no calculations have been done, and it's impossible to gather this information, but on average, retail units trade 5 to 10 kilograms of melted gold daily."

He continued: "Small retail units also trade around 2 grams to 40 grams of gold per day, while wholesalers trade between 200 to 300 grams to 2 kilograms of gold daily."

Regarding Iran's gold exports to international markets, the head of the Tehran Gold and Jewelry Union said: "Due to domestic obstacles, Iran's gold and gold products are not exported. Last year, only about 875 kilograms of gold products were exported from Iran, which is not a significant amount. Compared to countries like Turkey, Iran's export volume is nearly zero."

Bazrafshan added: "The export of Iranian gold products is very

weak, not because Iranian manufacturers lack the ability to export, but because cumbersome domestic regulations and export and customs issues have hindered exports. Otherwise, in the past 10 years, gold production capacity in the country has increased."

He expressed regret, saying: "Despite having the capability and foreign demand to export gold, the laws do not allow it. There are many foreign customers for Iranian gold, and our gold production is on par with Italy's, but with Iran absent from the market, Turkey has captured foreign markets."

The president of the Tehran Gold and Jewelry Union emphasized: "While two decades ago, Turkey had no significant presence in the gold market and was far behind Iran, even using weak and second-hand Iranian gold for sale in their own country, today they have seriously entered the market and exported more than 700 tons of gold between 2021 and 2023."

Bazrafshan concluded: "There is no problem such as lack of reserves or production for entering global markets, but the laws do not permit exports."

Gas Agreement With Russia Soon to Become Operational



TEHRAN - Managing Director of the National Iranian Gas Company Saeed Tavakoli, speaking on the sidelines of the event for the completion of the gas pipe production cycle, commented on the gas deficit figure. He stated that currently, there is a minimum daily gas deficit of 260 million cubic meters in the country. However, this does not imply that the Ministry of Oil and the National Iranian Gas Company are not doing their jobs well. This winter, with the completion of repairs and the satisfactory storage of liquefied gas by the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company, in cooperation with the Ministry of Energy, there will be no issues.

Regarding the gas agreement with Turkmenistan, he added that the implementation of this agreement requires a timeline, and actions have already been taken.

Ukraine Bans Official Use of Telegram App Over Fears of Russian Spying

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine has banned use of the Telegram messaging app on official devices used by government officials, military personnel and critical workers because it believes its enemy Russia can spy on both messages and users, a top security body said on Friday.

The National Security and Defence Council announced the restrictions after Kyrylo Budanov, head of Ukraine's GUR military intelligence agency, presented the council with evidence of Russian special services' ability to snoop on the platform, it said in a statement.

But Andriy Kovalenko, head of the security council's centre on countering disinformation, posted on Telegram that the restrictions apply only to official devices, not personal phones. Telegram is heavily used in both Ukraine and Russia and has become a critical source of information since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

But Ukrainian security officials have repeatedly voiced concerns about its use during the war.



Sri Lanka Votes in First Poll Since Economic Collapse



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Cash-strapped Sri Lanka voted for its next president Saturday in an effective referendum on an unpopular International Monetary Fund austerity plan enacted after the island nation's unprecedented financial crisis.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe is fighting an uphill battle for a fresh mandate to continue belt-tightening measures that stabilised the economy and ended months of food, fuel and medicine shortages.

His two years in office restored calm to the streets after civil unrest spurred by the downturn in 2022 saw thousands storm the compound of his predecessor, who promptly fled the country.

"I've taken this country out of bankruptcy," Wickremesinghe, 75, said after casting his ballot in the morning.

"I will now deliver Sri Lanka a developed economy, developed social system and developed political system."

But Wickremesinghe's tax hikes and other measures, imposed per the terms of a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout, have left millions struggling to make ends meet.

"The country has been through a lot," lawyer and musician Soundarie David Rodrigo told AFP after casting her vote in Colombo.

"So I just don't want to see another upheaval coming soon."

Wickremesinghe is tipped to lose to one of two formidable challengers. One is Anura Kumara Dissanayaka, the leader of a once-marginal Marxist party tarnished by its violent past.

The party led two failed uprisings in the 1970s and 1980s that left more than 80,000 people dead, and it won less than four percent of the vote in the last parliamentary elections.

But Sri Lanka's crisis has proven an opportunity for the 55-year-old Dissanayaka, who has seen a surge of support based on his pledge to change the island's "corrupt" political culture.

UN Denounces Lebanon Device Blasts Linked to Israel



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations said yesterday the detonation of hand-held communication devices in Lebanon could constitute a war crime as Beirut's top diplomat accused Israel of orchestrating what he called a "terror" attack.

The blasts that killed at least 37 people and wounded nearly 3,000 on Tuesday and Wednesday targeted communication devices used by the Iran-backed Hezbollah group.

Pagers and walkie-talkies exploded as their users were shopping in supermarkets, walking on streets and attending funerals, plunging the country into panic.

"International humanitarian law prohibits the use of booby-trap devices in the form of apparently harmless portable objects," the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, told the Security Council during an emergency session on Lebanon requested by Algeria.

"It is a war crime to commit violence intended to spread terror among civilians," he added, repeating his call for an "independent, rigorous and transparent" investigation.

Lebanese authorities blame Israel for the attack and have said the targeted devices were booby-trapped before they entered the country.

Hezbollah has vowed retribution and launched its own internal probe into the explosions.

"I am appalled by the breadth and impact of the attacks," said Turk.

"These attacks represent a new development in warfare, where communication tools become weapons," he added.

"This cannot be the new normal."

Speaking at the Security Council, Lebanon's top diplomat Abdallah Bou Habib called the attack "an unprecedented method of warfare in its brutality and terror."

"Israel, through this terrorist aggression has violated the basic principles of international humanitarian law," he said, calling Israel a "rogue state."

Israel has not commented on the device blasts but has said it will widen the scope of its war in Gaza to include the Lebanon front.

"I can tell you that we will do everything we can to target those terrorists," Israel's ambassador to the UN Danny Danon told reporters on Friday when asked about the device explosions.

He spoke after Israel announced it had killed the commander of Hezbollah's elite unit in a strike on Beirut.

"We have no intention to enter a war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, but we cannot continue the way it is," Danon said.

Speaking at the Security Council, Danon said Israel will do "whatever it takes" to restore security in northern areas.

"If Hezbollah does not retreat from our border... through diplomatic efforts, Israel will be left with no choice but to use any means within our rights," he said.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said the body was "very concerned about the heightened escalation" across the Lebanon-Israel frontier after Friday's Israeli strike on Beirut.

He called for "maximum restraint" from all sides.

Hezbollah is an ally of Palestinian militant group Hamas, which has been fighting a war in Gaza since its October 7 attack on Israel.

Sandu Launches Moldova Re-Election Bid

CHISINAU (Dispatches) - Pro-European President Maia Sandu staged a city center rally on Friday to kick off her bid for re-election in a month-long campaign held alongside a referendum to cement her drive to join the European Union.

Sandu drew an evening crowd of 3,000 chanting supporters at Chisinau's opera house while one of her main rivals, Alexandr Stoianoglo, the prosecutor general she dismissed, addressed about 100 backers at the city's triumphal arch.

As the deadline for filing nominations closed, Moldova's Central Election Commission said four candidates had been registered for the Oct. 20 election. That number could rise to a record 12 next week once the commission examines the 15,000 signatures accompanying each submission.

Sandu has denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine and derides Russia and corruption as the two biggest threats facing her ex-Soviet state lying between Ukraine and Romania.

"Every generation has its mission. Those before us fought for freedom, their language, self-determination...and risked losing their jobs or being arrested," Sandu told her supporters.

"For our generation of democracy, it is integrating Moldova into the broad European family of lasting peace and prosperity."

Stoianoglo was fired by Sandu on grounds of failing to pursue her anti-corruption drive with sufficient vigour.

He has the backing of the pro-Moscow opposition Socialist Party, which says it does not oppose EU membership but accuses Sandu of manipulating the referendum to secure a second term.

Also registered are Renato Usatii, who finished third behind Sandu in the 2020 election and adopts a middle ground between Russia and Western Europe, and Former Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev.

Top Hezbollah Commander Ibrahim Aqil Among 14 Martyred in Strike on Beirut

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Israel killed a top Hezbollah commander and other senior figures in the Lebanese movement in an airstrike on Beirut yesterday, vowing to press on with a new military campaign until it is able to secure the area around the Lebanese border.

The Israeli military and a security source in Lebanon said Ibrahim Aqil had been martyred with other senior members of an elite Hezbollah unit in the airstrike, sharply escalating the year-long conflict between Israel and the Iran-backed group.

Hezbollah confirmed Aqil's death in a statement just after midnight that called him "one of its top leaders," without providing details of how he died.

In a later statement summarizing Aqil's biography, Hezbollah said he was killed in Beirut's southern suburbs of Dahiyeh in what it called a "treacherous Israeli assassination".

Lebanon's health ministry said at least 14 people died in the strike and the toll was expected to climb as rescue teams worked through the night. It was not immediately known whether the toll included Aqil and other Hezbollah commanders.

Earlier, the ministry said at least 66 people were injured, nine of whom were in critical condition.

A second security source said at least six other Hezbollah commanders died when multiple missiles slammed into the opening of a building's garage. The explosion tore into the building's lower levels as Aqil met other commanders inside.

Witnesses reported hearing a loud whistling and several consecutive blasts at the time of the strike.

In a brief statement carried by Israeli media, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel's goals were clear and its actions spoke for themselves.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who said this week that Israel is launching a new phase of war on the northern border, posted on X: "The sequence of actions in the new phase will continue until our goal is achieved: the safe return of the residents of the north to their homes."



Tens of thousands of people have been evacuated from homes on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border since Hezbollah began rocketing Israel in October in sympathy with Palestinians in the nearly year-old Israeli war against Hamas in Gaza.

Israel, which last fought an all-out war against Hezbollah 18 years ago, has said it will use force if necessary to ensure its citizens can return to northern Israel.

The Israeli military described Aqil as the acting commander of the Radwan special forces unit, and said it had killed him along with around 10 other senior commanders as they met. Aqil sat on Hezbollah's top military council, sources in Lebanon told Reuters.

The strike inflicted another blow on Hezbollah after two days of attacks in which pagers and walkie-talkies used by its members exploded, killing 37 people and wounding thousands. Those attacks were widely believed to have been carried out by Israel, which has neither confirmed nor denied its involvement.

Local broadcasters showed groups of people gathered near the site, and

reported they were searching for missing people, most of them children. Drones were still flying over Beirut's southern suburbs hours after the strike.

"We are not afraid, but we want a solution. We cannot continue with the country like this," said Alain Feghali, a resident of Beirut who spoke to Reuters. "War? I don't know if it started or not, but nothing is reassuring. It is clear that the two sides will not stop."

The UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Jeanine-Hennis Plasschaert, said yesterday's strike in a densely populated area of Beirut's southern suburbs was part of "an extremely dangerous cycle of violence with devastating consequences. This must stop now."

The strike marked the second time in less than two months that Israel has targeted a leading Hezbollah military commander in Beirut. In July, an Israeli airstrike killed Fuad Shukur, the group's top military commander.

Aqil had a US\$7-million bounty on his head from the United States over his link to the deadly bombing of Marines in Lebanon in 1983, according to the U.S. State Department website.

The Israeli military said Aqil had been head of Hezbollah operations since 2004 and was responsible for a plan to launch a raid on northern Israel, similar to the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7 that triggered the war in Gaza.

Hezbollah said it twice fired Katyusha rockets at what it described as the main intelligence headquarters in northern Israel "which is responsible for assassinations".

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said he was not aware of any Israeli notification to the United States before the Beirut strike, adding Americans were strongly urged not to travel to Lebanon, or to leave if they were there.

However he added that, "war is not inevitable ... and we're going to continue to do everything we can to try to prevent it."

The current conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, ignited by the Gaza war, has intensified significantly this week.

Harris Slams Trump for Hypocrisy on Abortion as U.S. Start Voting

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Kamala Harris on Friday attacked Republican rival Donald Trump and his party as "hypocrites" over abortion, as the first voters cast their ballots for November's knife-edge US election.

The Democrat unleashed one of the most forceful speeches of her campaign so far as she blamed Trump for an abortion ban in the battleground state of Georgia that she said had caused the deaths of two women.

"And these hypocrites want to start talking about how this is in the best interest of women and children," the vice president told a rally in Atlanta, Georgia to cheers from a mainly female audience.

"Well, where have you been? Where have you been when it comes to taking care of the women and children of America, where have you been? How dare they."

Since replacing President Joe Biden at the top of the Democratic ticket two months ago, Harris has repeatedly focused on what she calls "Trump abortion bans."

Trump has frequently bragged on the campaign trail that his three Supreme Court picks paved the way for the 2022 overturning of the national right to abortion.

At least 20 states have since brought in full or partial restrictions, with Georgia banning most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy.

Harris doubled down on the issue later Friday at a raucous rally in



Madison, a liberal-leaning city in swing state Wisconsin where she slammed the bans as "immoral."

"This is a health care crisis, and Donald Trump is the architect."

In both speeches Harris mentioned Amber Nicole Thurman, a 28-year-old mother-of-one from Georgia who developed a rare complication from abortion pills and died during emergency surgery in 2022.

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An official Georgia state committee blamed the fatal outcome on a "preventable" lag in performing a critical procedure.

"We will make sure Amber is not just remembered as a statistic," Harris said in Atlanta, a day after meeting Thurman's family during a campaign event hosted by talkshow icon Oprah Winfrey.

Harris's campaign speeches came as three states -- Virginia, Minnesota and South Dakota -- began early voting 46 days before election day in what is an agonizingly close race.

"The election is basically here," she told Madison rallygoers. "It's basically here and we have work to do, to energize, to organize and to mobilize."

Former president Trump has previously cast doubt on early voting and mail voting to back his false claims that he won the 2020 election against Biden.

Most US states permit in-person voting or mail-in voting to allow people to deal with scheduling conflicts or an inability to cast their ballots on election day itself, November 5.

Dozens of people waited at a polling station in the center of Arlington, Virginia, just outside the capital Washington.



Fritz, Shelton Draw Team World Level With Europe

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Americans Taylor Fritz and Ben Shelton defeated Carlos Alcaraz and Alexander Zverev 7-6(5) 6-4 in Friday's doubles to draw Team World level with Team Europe at the of the first day of the Laver Cup.

After Europe secured a 2-point-to-1 lead following the singles matches, with Stefanos Tsitsipas thumping Thanasi Kokkinakis 6-1 6-4 and Grigor Dimitrov squeezing past Alejandro Tabilo 7-6(4) 7-6(2), Fritz and Shelton made sure the day would end with honours even.

The blockbuster pairing of Wimbledon champion Alcaraz, who was making his Laver Cup debut, and world number two Zverev struggled to keep up with the American duo who scorched 20 winners to secure the win.

"We both served really well under pressure," Fritz said during an on-court interview. "Ben served incredibly well, so I didn't have to hit any volleys. That was huge."

Bulgaria's Dimitrov kicked off the evening session at the Uber Arena with his thrilling victory over Tabilo as he battled back from 5-1 down in the second set to beat the Chilean.

"Great fight," Dimitrov said. "When I was down in the second set I just tried to be very patient and look

after every point, point by point I started building a little bit more, and yeah, had good momentum coming into the tiebreak."

Not everything went the way Dimitrov wanted, however, as he appeared to be in pain and grimaced several times during the match.

"The body's been struggling, I'm not going to lie," he said. "I feel like I'm playing great tennis but my body is not allowing me to push through a little bit more."

Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo secured the day's first point for Team World with a 6-4 6-4 win over world number nine Casper Ruud, withstanding an impressive start by the Norwegian before turning the match in his favour on the Laver Cup's striking trademark black hard court.

Tsitsipas then got Europe on the scoreboard as he swept past Kokkinakis of Australia.

Players from both teams arrived at Berlin's Uber Arena dressed in black tuxedos and bow ties ahead of the three-day team contest that sees first-day victories worth one point apiece, with two points being awarded for wins on the second day, and three points each on the third and final day.

FIFA Unveils Intercontinental Cup Schedule



ZURICH (Dispatches) - The first edition of the annual FIFA Intercontinental Cup for club teams from around the world will have five matches, with European Champions League winners Real Madrid to play in the final on Dec. 18 in Doha, the world soccer body said on Friday.

The tournament, which was announced in December last year, replaces the annual Club World Cup which will now be played every four years with 32 teams from 2025.

AFC Champions League winners Al Ain will first host OFC Champions League winners Auckland City on Sept. 22 in the African-Asian-Pacific Cup playoff, with the winners set to face CAF Champions League winners Al Ahly in Cairo on Oct. 29.

The first two games will be on the home turf of the higher-ranked team, allowing locals to watch their club play.

The action then switches to Doha, Qatar, where the 2024 CONMEBOL Libertadores winners play Mexican side Pachuca, the winners of the CONCACAF Champions Cup, on Dec. 11 - a match described by FIFA as the "Derby of the Americas".

The winners of the these two matches play each other in the Challenger Cup three days later to earn a spot in the Intercontinental Cup Final against Real Madrid on Dec. 18.

The day is celebrated as Qatar's National Day while it also marks the two-year anniversary of the 2022 World Cup final where Argentina beat France.

Ten-Man Barcelona Downed 1-2 by Monaco in Champions League Opener

PARIS (Dispatches) - French club Monaco upset 10-man Barcelona by grinding out a 2-1 victory on in the Champions League, while a stunning David Raya double-save ensured Arsenal a goalless draw away to Europa League winners Atalanta.

Barca have started the season with a perfect record after five La Liga matches but, hindered by a red card in the 11th minute for Eric Garcia, fell to defeat on the French Riviera.

Maghnes Akliouche fired the French side into the lead five minutes after Garcia was dismissed for a last-man challenge on Takumi Minamino.

Teenage sensation Lamine Yamal equalised in the 28th minute with an arrowed shot after cutting in from the right onto his favoured left foot, but George Ilenikhena grabbed the winner for Monaco inside the final 20 minutes.

"After 10 minutes with the red card the game changed totally, but what I can see is really the positive thing," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick told reporters.

"We tried to defend as a team and also attack as a team, and we had chances, but today they deserve the 2-1 (win), so we have to accept that."

In Italy, Arsenal goalkeeper Raya earned his side a point in a tough start to their campaign against Atalanta with a 0-0 draw.

A tight match was lit up six minutes after the interval when Mateo Retegui saw Raya plunge down to his right to keep out his penalty, after a foul by Thomas Partey on Ederson.

The ball rebounded up in the air and Retegui looked set to casually nod the dropping ball into the gaping net but the Spaniard sprang to his feet and hurled himself back across the goal-line to claw the ball to safety.



"It's just a penalty and I was lucky to go the right way and save it," Raya told TNT Sports.

"I was unlucky to give the rebound straight back to him but I was quick enough to get up and save it."

A 90th-minute header by Jose Maria Gimenez sent Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone scuttling down the touchline in delight as his side edged visitors RB Leipzig 2-1.

Benjamin Sesko had put the German side in front just four minutes in, but Antoine Griezmann equalised just prior to the half-hour with a controlled finish from inside the penalty area.

The Frenchman then turned provider as he chipped a cross into the box, which Gimenez leapt highest to win at the back post and glance the ball back across Peter Gulacsi and into the Leipzig goal to spark wild celebrations in the Metropolitan Stadium.

"It's amazing, to get a last-minute goal like this is always fantastic and it's good to give the fans something to cheer about,"

Atletico's former Leipzig striker Alexander Sorloth told DAZN.

Bayer Leverkusen starlet Florian Wirtz enjoyed a dream Champions League debut as the Bundesliga champions thumped Dutch side Feyenoord 4-0 away from home.

The 21-year-old scored a brace either side of an Alex Grimaldo strike before an own goal by Feyenoord goalkeeper Timon Wellenreuther ensured Leverkusen had the points wrapped up by half-time.

"It may have looked pretty easy, but it's really not," Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso told reporters.

"Overall it was a very serious, very efficient performance from us, but it's never easy."

French side Brest made a winning start in their first-ever appearance in European competition by seeing off Austria's Sturm Graz 2-1.

Playing at Brittany rivals Guingamp's home ground as their own stadium does not meet UEFA standards, Brest took the lead midway through the first half through Hugo Magnetti.

An own-goal by Edimilson Fernandes on the stroke of half-time levelled matters but Abdallah Sima's smart finish in the 56th minute was enough to divide the sides.

Benfica held on in Serbia against Red Star Belgrade to claim a 2-1 win courtesy of goals in the first half by Turkish duo Kerem Akturkoglu and Orkun Kokcu.

The second matchday of the Champions League league phase will take place on October 1 and 2 with Arsenal hosting Paris Saint-Germain, Bayern Munich travelling to Aston Villa and reigning champions Real Madrid visiting Lille.

Embiid Agrees to NBA Contract Extension With 76ers

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Joel Embiid has signed a contract extension with the Philadelphia 76ers, the team announced on Friday, with the Cameroon-born center saying he wants to stay a Sixer his NBA entire career.

Multiple reports said the deal was a maximum extension for three years and about \$193 million that would keep him with the 76ers through the 2028-29 campaign.

"Philadelphia is home. I want to be here for the rest of my career," Embiid posted on his Instagram account. "I love this community and everything you've given me and my family. There is a lot more work to do. You guys deserve a championship and I think we're just getting started!"

Embiid, the 2023 NBA Most Valuable Player, is a seven-footer (2.13m) and seven-time NBA All-Star who helped the United States win Olympic gold in Paris last month.

The two-time NBA scoring champion, set to begin his ninth NBA campaign next month, said in a statement he wants to bring the 76ers their first NBA crown since 1983.

"I started a Sixer and want to be right here for the rest of my career," Embiid said. "I had no idea when I was drafted as a



20-year-old kid from Cameroon how lucky I was to be in Philadelphia.

"Through all the ups and downs, this city and the fans have been everything and I am so grateful for how they've embraced me.

"Philadelphia is home and it's time to bring this community an NBA championship."

Embiid averaged a career-high 34.7 points, 11.0 rebounds and

career-bests of 5.6 assists and 1.2 steals plus 1.7 blocked shots last season and had career-high accuracy from 3-point range and the free throw line.

"Joel has cemented himself as one of the greatest Sixers of all time and is well on his way to being one of the best players to ever play the game," 76ers president of basketball operations Daryl Morey said.

"We're ecstatic that this extension keeps him and his family in Philadelphia for years to come.

"He's an elite two-way player with a combination of size, strength, and athleticism that this league has rarely, if ever, seen. He's integral to this franchise's quest for another NBA championship and we're honored that he continues to choose this organization as his NBA home."

Embiid, the third pick in the 2014 NBA Draft, has averaged 27.9 points, 11.2 rebounds, 3.6 assists and 1.7 blocked shots over 433 games with the Sixers.

The 76ers have reached the playoffs in each of the past seven seasons but have not reached the Eastern Conference finals during the run.

Italy to Face Argentina in Davis Cup Final 8 Opener



LONDON (Dispatches) - Reigning champions Italy will face Argentina in the Davis Cup Final 8 Knockout in Malaga in November with the United States set for a blockbuster clash against Australia.

The top eight nations qualified from the Group Finals and will play to a finish in the Spanish coastal city.

Hosts Spain will face the Netherlands while Canada are up against Germany in their opening tie.

Ties will consist of two singles and a doubles decider.

Italy were without world number one Jannik Sinner for the Group Finals in which they won all three of their ties but the world number one could return in Malaga. Argentina qualified from a tough group including Britain and Canada.

The U.S. were also under-strength in the Group Finals but the 32-times Davis Cup champions could call on some of their big guns in Malaga where they will need to get past Australia, the second most successful nation with 28 titles.

Italy and Spain are on opposite sides of the draw meaning a potential final showdown between Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz.

The Final 8 Knockout rounds take place between Nov. 19-24 in the Palacio de Deportes Jose Maria Martin Carpena.

Meanwhile a foot injury forced former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu to retire from her Korea Open quarter-final clash with top seed Daria Kasatkina after losing the first set 6-1 on Saturday.

Britain's Raducanu struggled to serve with her injured left foot, her landing leg, as she played on after a medical timeout, committing a double fault and not chasing returns across the court.

The foot injury also surfaced during 21-year-old Raducanu's round of 16 clash with Yuan Yue, where she was able to continue after a medical timeout and win 6-4 6-3.

"I feel sorry for Emma... it's a pity to get injured, especially in the deeper stages on the tournament," Kasatkina said after the match. "I wish her a speedy recovery."

Kasatkina will play fellow Russian Diana Shnaider in the semi-finals later on Saturday, after rain washed out Friday's play in Seoul.

Fourth seed Shnaider beat Australian Open quarter-finalist and Ukrainian fifth seed Marta Kostyuk 7-6(7) 6-3 in the quarter-finals.

Brazilian third seed Beatriz Haddad Maia faces former French Open quarter-finalist Veronika Kudermetova in the other semi-final, after brushing aside Veronika's sister Polina Kudermetova 6-2 6-1 in the last eight.