

A Senior Official of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Has Said That The Country Is Becoming More Determined to Respond to Israeli Crimes as the Regime Is Increasing Its "Evil" Acts in the Region

Iran's Flag Carrier Airline the Iran Air Has Urged Passengers of Its Flights Between Tehran and the Lebanese Capital Beirut to Avoid Carrying Pagers and Handheld Radios

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FM Warns of Desperate Israeli PM's Plot to Drag Entire Region Into War



TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has failed to achieve any of his objectives in almost a year of its genocidal war in Gaza and is now trying to escalate tensions across the entire region.

"Almost a year into his genocide, Netanyahu has achieved none of his aims, desperate to drag the region into war," Araqchi said in a post on his X account on Saturday.

Araqchi also attached a picture of 12 members of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah, who were killed in an Israeli air attack in Beirut's southern suburbs on Friday, and said Hezbollah proudly honors the sacrifices of its martyrs.

"While the Israeli regime hides its losses, Hezbollah honors martyrs by showing their sacrifices for us all—inspiring countless more to dedicate themselves to their noble goals," the top Iranian diplomat pointed out.

At least 37 people, including three children and seven women, were killed and 68 people injured in an Israeli strike that wrecked two buildings in the Lebanese capital's Dahiyeh district during rush hour on Friday.

Hezbollah confirmed that two of its top commanders, Ibrahim Aqil and Ahmad Mahmoud Wahabi, along with 12 other members, were killed in the strike.

Speaking upon arrival in New York to attend the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly on Friday night, Araqchi said Israel will not achieve its objective of inflaming the region to extricate itself from the Gaza quagmire, stressing, however, that the regime will get a response to its atrocities.

Hezbollah Hits Rafael Arms Facility in Initial Response to Israel's Terror Attack



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The Hezbollah resistance movement has targeted the Rafael weapons manufacturing facility in Haifa in an "initial response" to Israel's recent mass terrorist attack in Lebanon. In a statement released on Sunday, Hezbollah said that it had bombed the military industry complexes of the Rafael company, located in the Zevulun area north of Haifa, with dozens of Fadi 1, Fadi 2, and Katyusha rockets.

The group noted that its operation was a show of support for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and their resistance, adding that it was also an "initial response to the brutal massacre committed by the Israeli enemy in various Lebanese regions" by the explosion of telecommunication devices.

Thousands of booby-trapped pagers and walkie-talkie radios belonging to Hezbollah members detonated across Lebanon in simultaneous blasts on Tuesday and Wednesday, killing 42 people and wounding almost 3,500 others.

A preliminary investigation by the Lebanese authorities has found the devices were implanted with explosives before arriving in the Arab country and that they were detonated via electronic messages. US media reports said the mass terrorist attack was a joint effort between the Israeli military and the Mossad spy agency.

Hezbollah has vowed to retaliate against the occupying regime, which is also waging a genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip. The Rafael company targeted in Hezbollah's Sunday operation is one of the three biggest Israeli arms manufacturers and is owned by the regime.

It produces systems for armored vehicles, Iron Dome David's Sling missile systems, and various kinds of cruise and guided missiles.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



President Urges UN to Do Its Job Correctly

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed hope that we can be the voice of our people and present the rightful and justice-seeking positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the world at the United Nations. He emphasized that the United Nations, as one of the important organizations and a great achievement of humanity, is a place where all presidents can come together to work on creating and promoting peace, tranquility, and resolving conflicts and problems.

Pezeshkian, speaking before departing for New York to participate and speak at the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, explained the goals and programs of this trip. He expressed hope that they can represent the voices of the Iranian people and present the rightful and justice-seeking positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the global audience. He emphasized that the United Nations, as one of the significant organizations and a great human achievement, provides a platform for all heads of state to gather and work toward creating and promoting peace, tranquility, and resolving global conflicts and issues.

The President stated that if the duties and missions of this important international organization are properly fulfilled, there should no longer be a regime that, due to its power and technological capabilities, easily targets and kills women and children in hospitals, schools, and shelters. He added that today, a criminal regime commits crimes with ease, bombing wherever it chooses, and then justifies its crimes by claiming that terrorist activities were being conducted in those locations. Worse still, some countries that claim to support human rights accept and repeat these claims.

Pezeshkian noted that such actions tarnish the spirit of humanity and honor in the eyes of free and conscious individuals. He stated that during this trip and session, they will seek to engage with world leaders to discuss peace and security.

The President also mentioned that meeting with Iranian expatriates and countering the negative portrayal of Iran is another objective of the trip. He stated: "Iran is far safer and freer than what has been portrayed globally. Of course, we have problems, but the intent and foundation of our system and country are to strive for justice and equality for all people. During the elections, we said that we want Iran for all Iranians, and therefore, we must provide opportunities for all Iranians to contribute to the prosperity and development of the country."

He highlighted that they will make efforts in their meetings with world leaders to discuss peace, security, economic cooperation, production, investment, tourism, and other forms of cooperation,

expressing hope to fulfill their responsibilities properly and achieve significant results.

In conclusion, the President referred to the recent coal mine accident in Tabas, expressing sympathy with the families of the victims. He mentioned that he had spoken with the Ministers of Health, Interior, and Industry, and instructed them to promptly and seriously address the concerns of the victims' families and the injured. Additionally, he called for measures to be taken to raise workplace standards in the country's mines to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

Meanwhile earlier Pezeshkian, during the inauguration ceremony of the 1403-1404 school year in schools across the country, attended the late Dr. Hassan Askari Shirazi School in the Yafabad neighborhood of Tehran.

During the ceremony, he said, "The future of this country will be built by the students, and we, as officials, must ensure that you, the students, acquire the necessary skills and competencies along the way." He emphasized, "You must be able and willing to become effective individuals for Iran."

The President added, "If we, as officials, provide the proper environment for your education and you study well, the future of this country will undoubtedly be better than today. We will do our part to improve and enhance the educational infrastructure and systems of the country to the best of our ability."

Pezeshkian highlighted that building the future of Iran requires avoiding disputes and fostering unity and solidarity. He stated, "Schools should teach students lessons of friendship and camaraderie so they understand that they must be friends and work together towards the goal of building the country. You should care for all those who face difficulties or suffering and empower yourselves to address these problems, so no one in the future of this country faces pain or hardship."

The President pointed out that the path students choose today will determine the country's future. He said, "You, the students, must first desire and then learn that the way to the country's prosperity is through unity and solidarity. Today's main obstacle to building Iran is disagreements over trivial and unnecessary matters, which have led to the exclusion of some capable individuals from the nation-building process. Disputes not only reduce our ability to build the country but also weaken us in the face of enemies. Therefore, let's learn cooperation, unity, and synergy in schools to use all our power and strength to solve problems and stand against the ill-will of enemies."

Regional Countries Should Cooperate Towards Thwarting Israel's Evil Acts

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said the Israeli regime's violations and acts of deadly aggression posed a great danger to peace and security across the region and the world.

The top diplomat made the remarks during a meeting with his Kuwaiti counterpart Abdullah Ali al-Yahya on Saturday in New York, to which the Iranian official has travelled to attend the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

"The countries of the region should cooperate with one another towards thwarting this regime's evil acts," Araqchi said.

"Therefore, the Islamic Republic lays emphasis on maximal negotiation and interaction with the countries lying to the south of the Persian Gulf," he added.

Araqchi's remarks came amid the regime's ongoing genocidal war against the Gaza Strip and escalated attacks across the occupied West Bank as well as its intensified deadly aggression against Lebanon.

A day earlier, the regime attacked a southern suburb of the Lebanese capital Beirut, killing at least 38 people, including three children, seven women, and a senior commander of the country's resistance movement Hezbollah, named as Ibrahim Aqil.

The Iranian foreign minister described these measures as an attempt by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at trying to take the regime out of the deadlock that it has faced in Gaza.

"By its own perception, the Zionist regime went to Gaza to bring about complete elimination of [the territory's] Hamas' resistance movement," Araqchi said.

"It (the regime), however, suffered defeat and is in a state of desperation now," he added.

Araqchi, meanwhile, reiterated Iran's pledge not to leave the regime's assassination of Hamas' former Political Bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh unanswered. Haniyeh was assassinated on July 31 while he was in the Iranian capital Tehran to attend the swearing-in ceremony of President Masoud Pezeshkian.

The Iranian official finally considered the policy of good-neighborliness to be among the principles that are adhered to by the Islamic Republic's current administration. He

pledged that the country's relations with the regional countries would deepen further under the administration.

For his part, the Kuwaiti official welcomed Tehran's favorable policy towards its neighbors, expressing hope for further expansion of the Islamic Republic's relations with the countries of the region.

Meanwhile Araqchi expressed Iran's solidarity with Cuba in the face of illegal sanctions imposed by the United States on the Latin American country.

Araqchi made the remarks during a meeting with his Cuban counterpart Bruno Rodriguez in New York on Saturday.

The top Iranian diplomat condemned the US Congress's unilateral and political move to put Cuba on a list of the so-called state sponsors of terrorism, saying the measure is the continuation of Washington's hostile policies.

"As one of the victims of US sanctions, Iran fully understands the conditions of the Cuban people and supports the country against US bans," he added.

Also in his remarks, Araqchi said that the crimes that Israel is committing in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon are acts of desperation caused by the regime's failure in its genocidal war on the besieged Gaza.

He further renewed an invitation by Iran's former President Ebrahim Raisi for his Cuban counterpart to visit Iran and voiced Tehran's readiness to expand relations with Havana in all fields.

Rodriguez welcomed the development of Iran-Cuba ties in the economic, academic and scientific areas, and the holding of a joint economic commission in the near future.

He also emphasized that Cuba backs the Islamic Republic against hostile US policies. Iran and Cuba, which are both subject to unjust U.S. sanctions, have historically maintained close relations and stood by each other in challenges posed by Washington's unilateralism.

The meeting between the Iranian Cuban foreign ministers took place in New York on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

38th Int'l Islamic Unity Conference Urges Muslim Cooperation to Realize Common Goals



TEHRAN - The 38th International Islamic Unity Conference has wrapped up in Iran, emphasizing the importance of cooperation in the Islamic Ummah to realize common goals and values.

The three-day conference came to an end on Saturday in Tehran, issuing a final communique in which participants stressed the need for cooperation among Islamic countries to realize their common goals and values.

"This conference is being held at a time when the Islamic world is full of grief due to barbaric crimes by the usurping Zionist regime. The widespread assassinations of resistance leaders and commanders as well as the brutal massacre of the oppressed Palestinian people on one hand, and Western countries' decisive support for the crimes of this regime make it necessary the cooperation of Islamic countries and Ummah more than ever to realize common values and goals."

The communique also said that the Israeli regime, under support by US-led global arrogance, is pursuing two plans namely the occupation of all Palestinian territories and legitimizing its fake identity through normalization of ties with Islamic countries.

"It is hoped that Islamic countries, through cooperation, can prevent the realization of the sinister goals of Islam's enemies."

According to the conference's final statement, the participants termed the Quds issue as one of the most important common values of the Islamic world and one of the issues unifying Muslim countries.

"Based on religious principles and rules, supporting and defending the oppressed people of Palestine is one of the religious and moral obligations, and silence in the face of the Zionist regime's crimes against humanity is in contrast with all Islamic and human values."

According to the statement, scholars of the Islamic world considered the Al Aqsa Storm Operation launched by Palestinians against the Israeli regime as a decisive, obvious and legitimate response to the occupation and the Zionist regime's racist and aggressive policies. The operation was also a response to 70 years of crimes by the Zionist regime and international silence on those crimes, it added.

Growing Strength of Resistance Continues to Surprise Enemies



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani has said that resistance movements in the West Asia region have become stronger and caught their enemies off guard despite years of intense challenges coupled with sacrifices and martyrdom of their members.

Kanaani made the comment on Sunday on X social media platform, in reaction to the martyrdom of senior Hezbollah commander Ibrahim Aqel and several other members of the Lebanese resistance movement in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut on Friday.

"These martyrs have given their lives for the cause of al-Quds, and their sacrifice brings the goal of liberating al-Quds closer", the Iranian official said, adding that Israel, the United States, and their allies will not achieve their objectives despite the deaths of the resistance figures.

The sacred defense against the Israeli regime is now playing out on a new scale across the region, the spokesman said, noting that the fate of the Israeli "criminals" will not be different from that of toppled Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

Kanaani said that Israel and the US have failed to emerge victorious in their conflicts with the resistance front in the past years, suggesting that they are destined to fail once again.

"The enemy, upset and vengeful, continues to repeat its past mistakes, and the outcome this time will be even more humiliating," he added.

He concluded by reaffirming that victory for the resistance is inevitable.

IRAN NEWS



FM Condolences Nasrallah on Martyrdom of Hezbollah Cmdr.

TEHRAN (IP) – Iran Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi issued a message addressed to Seyed Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and congratulated and condoled the martyrdom of Ibrahim Aqeel, the commander, and hero of the struggle against the Zionist occupation regime, along with a group of commanders of the Lebanese Islamic Resistance Front.

Araghchi stated that at the same time as arriving in New York to participate in the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, he will be the voice of the heroic people of Palestine and Lebanon against the aggressor and criminal Zionist regime.

Belarus, Zanjan Prov. Have Significant Potential for Expanding Trade Relations



TEHRAN - The Ambassador of Belarus to the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that there is considerable potential for expanding economic relations between Zanjan and Belarus, and our focus is on strengthening these capacities.

Dmitry Koltsov, in a meeting with the Governor of Zanjan on Thursday, noted that Iran and Belarus have a history of various collaborations and emphasized the importance of strengthening these ties. He added that their presence in Zanjan is in line with this goal.

He continued: "There are numerous areas for cooperation in trade and economic sectors, and we welcome the activation of these potentials."

Koltsov pointed to the presence of mines and mineral industries in Zanjan province and said: "Belarus has good capabilities in providing mining machinery, and this can be a focal point for bilateral cooperation."

The Ambassador of Belarus to Iran expressed hope for strong trade and economic cooperation between Zanjan and Belarus in various sectors.

Koltsov also added that meetings between Belarusian and Iranian officials should increase to elevate the level of cooperation between the two countries beyond its current state.

The Governor of Zanjan, Mohsen Afsharchi, also highlighted the numerous capacities of the province in various sectors during the meeting, stating that Iran and Belarus have good relations that are expanding.

Afsharchi noted that there is further potential for developing economic and trade relations between Zanjan and Belarus in the industrial and agricultural sectors.

He emphasized the need for strengthening the connections between the chambers of commerce to facilitate this process.

Earlier the Belarusian ambassador said, "40% of Belarus's land is arable, and over 70% of the country's gross domestic product is related to this sector."

Koltsov, in a meeting with several economic activists from Zanjan province on Thursday, added that "Belarus has also made significant progress in the industrial sector, with exports from both agriculture and industry reaching more than 160 countries worldwide."



Cultural Exchanges Between Tehran and Moscow to Increase

TEHRAN - According to the Public Relations Department of the Social and Cultural Affairs Deputy of Tehran Municipality, Mohammad Amin Tavakolizadeh, in an interview with Russian television on the sidelines of a meeting with the Deputy Mayor of Moscow and the head of the BRICS Tourism Committee, stated: "BRICS has shown that the potential in global interactions and diplomacy goes beyond what anyone can sanction or limit. Through the initiatives of other countries, topics that others think can be limited can be expanded."

He referred to the achievements of the Iranian delegation's visit to the BRICS summit and added: "The Islamic Republic of Iran had a good experience with Russian groups during the negotiations, and we have become more familiar with each other's common points and interactions than before."

The Deputy Mayor of Tehran emphasized that finding commonalities and using them as a foundation for further interactions will benefit the future of both countries.

Tavakolizadeh said: "A special meeting in the field of tourism was held, and it was agreed that travel companies from Iran and Russia will have more coordination and communication. By recognizing the tourism capacities of both countries, we can pave the way for tourists to visit tourist areas in Iran and Russia. In this regard, a book introducing Tehran's tourism capacities in Russian has been compiled and published, and it has been provided to the Russian side. We hope that with this information, Russian tourists will visit the tourist attractions of Iran's capital more than before. It is also expected that a Russian delegation will travel to Tehran to hold joint meetings with city officials and other Iranian authorities."

He pointed to Iran's historical and cultural background and said: "Iran is a civilized country with a rich history, possessing historical monuments, pristine nature with four distinct seasons, and valuable local cultures and identities. If properly introduced to the Russian people, it will be warmly welcomed by the citizens and intellectuals of this country."

The Deputy of Social and Cultural Affairs of Tehran Municipality also emphasized the importance of cultural exchanges between Iran and Russia, stating: "Holding cultural weeks between the two countries, such as the Tehran Cultural Week in Moscow and the Moscow Cultural Week in Tehran, and the installation and introduction of landmarks and notable figures from both countries in Tehran and Moscow, have been well-received by both parties, and their implementation is now on the agenda."

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Iran and Turkey Urged to Focus on Joint Investments

TEHRAN - In a meeting between the Director General of Iran and Iraq from Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, emphasis was placed on expanding cooperation and joint investments, alongside trade, and creating predictable economic conditions for investors to enter the Iranian market.

Samad Hassanzadeh, the President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, emphasized that the volume of relations between Iran and Turkey is insufficient and needs to be strengthened. He added that the embassies of both countries, in collaboration with the chambers of commerce, must work hard and plan to enhance the level of relations.

He noted that despite the pressures and restrictions caused by sanctions, both domestically and in relations with countries like Turkey, they have tried to maintain a path for strengthening ties in all areas. Particularly in the 14th administration, efforts have been made to engage in commercial and social relations with all countries.

Hassanzadeh, citing the existing capacities in Iran and Turkey, stated that by leveraging the strengths of both countries, they can cooperate to improve the well-being of their people. Today, Turkish investors have entered the Aras Free Zone in Azerbaijan, Iran, and are respected by the Iranian government. Additionally, conditions are such that Turkish investors can jointly participate in projects in Iran's petrochemical, oil, and food industries.

He also noted that the necessary support for foreign investors has been defined by the Iranian government, and sectors like copper, steel, and pharmaceuticals are suitable for this purpose. In collaboration with the government, 10 major projects in various fields have been identified, with the plan to use foreign investors for their implementation. Some European countries have already expressed their readiness to participate in these projects, as they anticipate sanctions pressure will decrease in the near future.

The President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce believes Turkey, due to its geographical location, can serve as a good route for connecting Iran and Europe. He also considers the presence of Turkish trade delegations in Iran to be effective so that Turkish traders, industrialists, and economic activists can become familiar with Iran's potential.

Hassanzadeh criticized the imposition of certain tariffs on the import of some Iranian goods into Turkey, calling it discriminatory and urging a reconsideration of this policy.

Ali Reza Guney, Director General of Iran and Iraq from Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, evaluated the level of relations between Iran and Turkey as different from other countries. He said the nature of Iran-Turkey relations is distinct from Turkey's relations with other nations, although the level of cooperation is far from ideal, which is due to external factors. He expressed hope that with the establishment of the new government in Iran, this gap would narrow.

Good Opportunities for Developing Iran-Uzbekistan Trade Exchanges

TEHRAN - The President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture met with the mayor of Tashkent during his visit to Uzbekistan. In this meeting, both sides described the trade between Iran and Uzbekistan as very low compared to the existing potential.

Sammad Hassanzadeh, emphasizing the need to strengthen economic relations between Iran and Uzbekistan, said: "We have experience in Iran with free and special economic zones, which can provide an easy path for foreign investors, especially from Uzbekistan."

He continued: "Iran's strong capacities in the fields of engineering services, petrochemicals, and the construction of power plants, roads, bridges, and buildings provide a good opportunity for economic cooperation with Uzbekistan."

Hassanzadeh, stating that economic relations with Uzbekistan are not ideal, said: "In the food industry, we export \$2 billion annually, and in agricultural equipment, especially tractors, we also have good capacities to meet the needs of other countries."

The President of the Iran Chamber referred to Uzbekistan's need for cooperation in engineering services, stating: "High-quality Iranian companies have exported \$4 billion worth of engineering services through power plant construction and road building projects in Sri Lanka and Tajikistan. Additionally, we have strong capabilities in urban infrastructure and waste management, and in this regard, greater connections between the municipalities of Tehran and Tashkent could be beneficial."

Hassanzadeh also described cooperation in the restoration of historical and ancient monuments as a good opportunity for expanding collaborations and said: "Iran is ready to cooperate with Uzbekistan and the Tashkent municipality in all these areas."

He invited the mayor of Tashkent to visit Iran to attend economic

He stated that Iran is rich in minerals and underground resources, but its most important asset is its human resources. If external pressures on this country are lifted, we will witness an economic boom in Iran. Currently, 2.5 to 3 million tourists travel from Iran to Turkey, and some buy property there for living, but the trade volume between the two countries is not satisfactory.

Guney suggested that preparations should be made for a time when sanctions against Iran are lifted, but before that, transportation corridors should be diversified, and the borders between the two countries should be turned into gateways for trade, maximizing the benefits of neighborhood.

The Director General believes that effective cooperation between Iran and Turkey will yield extraordinary results, though relations should not only be viewed through a commercial lens. Joint investments should be the focus.

He noted that if predictable conditions are created, Turkish investors will enter the Iranian market, bringing employment and mutual benefits. Unfortunately, Turkish investors in Iran face challenges, and he hoped that the Iran Chamber of Commerce, as the most important player in Iran's trade sector, would play a constructive role.

Hicabi Kirlanguç, Turkey's Ambassador to Tehran, described the role of the embassy as a facilitator of relations between the two countries. He stated that strengthening trade relations is one of the embassy's defined priorities, and he hopes they will be successful in this area.

Yousef Najafi, Senior Advisor to the President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, pointed to the historical relations between Iran and Turkey, describing their relationship as long-standing and strong.

He emphasized that the level of trade relations between Iran and Turkey is low. He noted that the Iranian president has a positive approach toward strengthening relations with Turkey. On the other hand, it is understood that investment requires security and a stable economy, and with the groundwork that has been laid, these conditions are within reach. The signing of a memorandum of understanding between the chambers of commerce can also facilitate investment opportunities.

Morteza Miri, a member of the board of the Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber, identified building relations with Turkish associations as a priority for the chamber. He believes there is potential for joint cooperation between the two countries in the field of knowledge-based companies and startups. He also suggested that specialized exhibitions could be held to enhance relations.

This economic activist deemed the imposition of trade tariffs as a necessary strategy for the development and continuity of relations.

At the end of the meeting, they discussed a memorandum of understanding that is expected to be signed between the Iran Chamber of Commerce and the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) on the sidelines of the Iran-Turkey Joint Commission."



exhibitions and view Iran's technical, engineering, and urban development capabilities. He said: "There is significant potential for cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan. For example, in the textile industry, we have good capacities, and considering Uzbekistan's resources for cotton and thread production, collaboration in this area can be strengthened."

He asked Uzbek officials to provide information on large projects in Uzbekistan to the Iran Chamber so that top Iranian

companies can be introduced to Uzbekistan and facilitate connections between companies from both countries.

Shavkat Umurzakayev, the mayor of Tashkent, also thanked the President of Iran's Chamber and his delegation for their visit to Uzbekistan. He said: "The groundwork for cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan in Tashkent has been prepared, and the path for developing relations is open."

He continued: "The Iran-Uzbekistan business forum in Tashkent and Khwarezm provides new opportunities to explore and determine solutions for enhancing relations between the two countries. Since the President of Uzbekistan has issued a new directive for foreign trade, new steps can be taken to cooperate with Iranian traders."

The mayor of Tashkent stated: "Today, significant achievements have been made in various fields, and Uzbekistan believes there are good opportunities for cooperation with foreign investors and traders that have not yet been utilized."

Umurzakayev noted that Uzbekistan is the most industrialized country in Central Asia and has the highest trend of industrialization, saying: "Conditions are favorable for economic activities by traders in Uzbekistan, and Uzbekistan can be a gateway for countries, including Iran, into the region."

10 of Iran's Global Works Will Be Added to UNESCO in Next 4 Years



TEHRAN - The ceremony for the commendation and introduction of the former and new ministers of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts took place on Wednesday in the Hall of Pilgrimage and Travel.

Mohammad Reza Aref, the First Vice President, during the ceremony for the commendation and introduction of the former and new ministers of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, congratulated the Unity Week and said: "The key to the revolution's success was unity, and the key to the progress of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the unity of everyone together."

While praising the efforts and activities of Minister Zarghami in the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, he added that the new minister is one of the prominent cultural figures of the country. He further stated that cultural heritage is a symbol of Iran's rich civilization and a trust that must be restored and passed on to future generations.

Aref emphasized that cultural heritage represents national pride and is one of the most prominent cultural indicators of the country. He noted that cultural heritage has always been respected both inside and outside of Iran, and this is due to the country's priceless works in this field.

The Vice President also emphasized the valuable work done so far by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and said that a deep analysis and strategic planning are necessary moving forward, as there are still fundamental challenges in some areas.

He pointed out that drafting strategies and policies for this sector at the beginning of the seventh development plan should be taken as an opportunity. He also stated that in the fields of handicrafts and tourism, the government's involvement should decrease, with the private sector taking on the main role, while the government serves as a facilitator and supporter.

Aref added: "If we give minimal attention to the tourism sector, we can create 100,000 stable job opportunities annually. The Parliament's mandate is less than this number."

He said that misconceptions have been spread about Iran, leading to unnecessary fear. "If people stay in Iran for just two days, they will experience the hospitality, facilities, and tranquility, and their mindset will change."

Aref also mentioned that the country has significant infrastructure problems. "There are no rest stops on our roads, even in a 50-kilometer stretch, yet we expect to attract tourists?"

The Vice President continued: "Handicrafts are one of Iran's honors. Many countries recognized Iran for its handicrafts, especially before the revolution."

He added that the process of registering global heritage sites is going well, and in the next four years, 10 more works should be added. He mentioned reports of illegal excavations and said that neglecting cultural heritage tempts some people to turn curiosity into economic ventures, leading to unfortunate consequences. Each year, according to the plan, 950 immovable works must be restored and preserved.

Aref also addressed Salehi Amiri, stating that the government cannot solely rely on public resources for governance and should seek private sector support. He concluded that private sector expectations are for the government not to obstruct their work and that any legal barriers should be amended.

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.

Trump Rejects Harris' Challenge to Debate Again on CNN

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Donald Trump yesterday rejected another debate with Vice President Kamala Harris before the US presidential election, hours after the Democratic candidate's campaign said she had agreed to an Oct. 23 matchup with her Republican rival on CNN.

"Vice President Harris is ready for another opportunity to share a stage with Donald Trump, and she has accepted CNN's invitation to a debate on October 23. Donald Trump should have no problem agreeing to this debate," Jen O'Malley Dillon, the chair of the Harris campaign, said in a statement.

Trump stuck to his previous position that there would not be another debate before voters go to the polls in the November 5 election.

"The problem with another debate is that it's just too late. Voting has already started," the former US president told supporters at a rally in Wilmington, North Carolina.



France Unveils a More Right-Wing Government After Deadlock



PARIS (Dispatches) - France unveiled a new government on Saturday that aims to strike a fine balance between right-wingers and centrists, as Prime Minister Michel Barnier hopes to break political deadlock following snap elections that delivered a hung parliament.

After 2-1/2 months of political uncertainty since centrist President Emmanuel Macron's surprise decision to call early elections, Barnier has put together a cabinet he hopes will find cross-party support in the fragmented parliament.

With few political heavyweights, his team includes one of the leaders of the conservative party of former President Nicolas Sarkozy, Bruno Retailleau, who negotiated the coveted interior ministry as the price for support in parliament.

However, showing the government's fragility, the prestigious job of finance minister was given to a little-known 33 year-old, Antoine Armand of Macron's party, having been turned down by more senior politicians.

The public finances portfolios, shared with new budget minister Laurent Saint-Martin, will have the unenviable task of putting together a budget bill before January, at a time France is struggling to contain a spiralling budget deficit.

"We must cut public spending and make it more efficient," Armand told the Journal du Dimanche newspaper in an interview published on Saturday. "If the solution was to raise taxes, France would have long been the world's top superpower."

But despite the entry of 10 politicians from Barnier's conservative Republicans (LR) party in cabinet, Macron kept a number of outgoing ministers in key posts. Only one left-wing politician joined cabinet, Didier Migaud as justice minister.

Jean-Noel Barrot, the outgoing Europe minister, was promoted to foreign minister.

Sebastien Lecornu will stay on as defence minister.

Macron named Barnier, the European Union's former Brexit negotiator and a 73-year-old veteran politician, as prime minister earlier this month, but the lengthy talks he had to lead to pull together a team were an illustration of the tough tasks ahead.



Zionists Strike on Beirut Killed 37

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Rescue workers in Beirut searched on Saturday for people still missing in rubble a day after an Israeli airstrike, targeting Hezbollah commanders, killed at least 37 people in a suburb of the Lebanese capital, according to authorities.

Hezbollah, a powerful Iran-backed group, said 16 members including senior leader Ibrahim Aqil and another commander, Ahmed Wahbi, were among those killed in the deadliest strike in nearly a year of conflict with Israel.

Israel's army said it hit an underground gathering of Aqil and leaders of Hezbollah's elite Radwan forces, and had almost completely dismantled its military chain of command.

The attack levelled a multi-story residential building in the crowded suburb and damaged a nursery next door, a security source said. Three children and seven women were among those killed, according to Lebanon's health ministry.

Cross-border strikes continued on Saturday: Israeli warplanes carried out the heaviest bombardment in 11 months of fighting across Lebanon's south, and Hezbollah claimed rocket attacks on military targets in Israel's north.

The Israeli army said it hit around 180 targets, destroying thousands of rocket launch barrels.

Friday's strike sharply escalated the conflict and inflicted another blow on Hezbollah after two days of attacks in which pagers and walkie-talkies used by its members exploded.

The death toll in those attacks has risen to 39 with more than 3,000 injured.

The attacks on communications devices were widely believed to have been carried out by Israel, which has neither confirmed nor denied involvement.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati cancelled a planned trip to the U.N. General Assembly in New York.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said he was worried about escalation but that the Israeli killing of a top Hezbollah leader brought justice to the group, which Washington designates terrorists.

"While the risk of escalation is real, we actually believe there is also a distinct avenue to getting to a cessation of hostilities and a durable solution that makes people on both sides of the border feel secure," Sullivan told reporters.

Hezbollah has said it will keep fighting Israel until it agrees to a ceasefire in its war against Hamas in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza - triggered by a Hamas-led rampage in southern Israel on Oct. 7.

U.S. officials say that is unlikely anytime soon. Israel wants Hezbollah to cease fire and withdraw forces from the border region,

adhering to a U.N. resolution signed with Israel in 2006, irrespective of any Gaza deal.

Anticipating retaliation, the Israeli military restricted gatherings and raised the alert level for residents of northern communities. The alert went as far south as the coastal city of Haifa, signalling Israel thought Hezbollah could strike deeper than it had since the war with Hamas began.

In southern Lebanon on Saturday, people described huge explosions that lit up the night sky and shook the ground as Israel carried out its latest strikes.

Hezbollah-aligned transport minister Ali Hamieh told reporters at the scene of Friday's strike in the Beirut suburb that at least 23 people were still missing. "The Israeli enemy is taking the region to war," he said.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, who said this week Israel was 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 left their homes on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border since Hezbollah began firing rockets at Israel in October in sympathy with Palestinians in Gaza.

Though Hezbollah has vowed a harsh response, an Israeli official told Reuters: "This escalation could provide Hezbollah an incentive to agree to a diplomatic solution." Months of U.S.-led efforts to broker an Israel-Lebanon border deal have failed to resolve the crisis.

The Israeli military said on Saturday it had been "striking extensively" in southern Lebanon after detecting plans by Hezbollah to target Israeli communities.

Early on Sunday, Hezbollah said it had targeted Israel's Ramat David Airbase with a missile barrage in response to "repeated Israeli attacks on Lebanon, which claimed lives and wounded civilians." The Israeli military said it intercepted the missiles.

A few hours later, the Lebanese militant group said it targeted the airbase for the second time with another barrage of missiles.

A communique from a U.S. summit hosted by President Joe Biden with the leaders of Japan, India and Australia stressed the need to prevent the Gaza war "from escalating and spilling over in the region" but did not specifically mention the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.

Ukraine Hits Two Russian Munitions Depots Overnight

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said it had hit two Russian munitions depots overnight, in attacks that illustrated its growing capability to strike targets deep inside Russia.

Russian officials acknowledged the Ukrainian attack on one of the depots in southern Krasnodar region, saying it was carried out with drones. They introduced local emergency measures to mitigate the effects of the assault.

A statement by Ukraine's military general staff said the munitions depots were at Tikhoretsk in Krasnodar region and Oktyabrsky in the western region of Tver.

"The (Tikhoretsk) facility is in the top three largest munitions storages of the occupiers, and is one of the key points in the Russian military logistical system," the general staff wrote in a statement on Telegram.

It said Ukraine had information that a train carrying 2,000 tonnes of munitions, including from North Korea, had been on the territory of the depot at the time of the strike.

Reuters was unable to verify the report independently.

A Ukrainian security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said drones were used in the attacks.

The source said Ukraine's domestic SBU intelligence service hit the depot in Tikhoretsk in a joint operation with the Ukrainian military, while the SBU hit the target in Oktyabrsky on its own.

The SBU has conducted regular drone attacks deep inside Russia over the past year of the war.

Krasnodar region governor Venyamin Kondratyev, writing on the Telegram messaging app, said officials had evacuated some residents while tackling the effects of the attack.

"What is important is that there is no longer any threat to residents," he wrote. "But time is needed to carry out fully all the necessary checks of the territory."

Quad Group Expands Maritime Security Cooperation

CLAYMONT (Dispatches) - Leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the United States expanded joint security steps in Asia's trade-rich waters as outgoing U.S. President Joe Biden hosted counterparts from the Quad grouping established due to shared concerns about China.

Biden, meeting Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese near his Delaware hometown on Saturday, stressed the importance of maintaining the Quad, which he sees as a signature foreign policy achievement. He will leave office after the Nov. 5 U.S. presidential election.

The leaders announced joint coast guard operations next year that will include Australian, Japanese and Indian personnel spending time on a U.S. coast guard vessel. The countries plan increased military logistics cooperation, officials said. They did not comment on where the coast guard activity would take place.

While the White House said the Quad summit was directed at no other country and that Beijing should find no issue with the initiative, Biden started the summit's group session with a briefing on China. In a joint statement that did not name the Chinese government by name, the leaders condemned "coercive and intimidating maneuvers in the South China Sea."

Analysts said new maritime security initiatives would send a message to Beijing and represent a further shift of emphasis of the Quad's activities to security issues, reflecting growing concerns about China's intentions.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has objected to the Quad grouping as an effort to encircle Beijing and ramp up conflict.

Biden described Beijing as shifting tactics but not strategy, while continuing to test the United States in the South and East China Seas as well as the Taiwan Strait.

"We believe Xi Jinping is looking to focus on domestic economic challenges and minimize the turbulence in China diplomatic relationships, and he's also looking to buy himself some diplomatic space, in my view, to aggressively pursue China's interest," Biden said in remarks carried on an official event feed.

Beijing claims almost the entire South China Sea, including territory claimed by the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam. It also claims territories in the East China Sea contested by Japan and Taiwan. China also



views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory.

The leaders' joint statement included sharp language about North Korea, condemning its ballistic missile launches and "malicious cyber activity." A U.S. official said the leaders shared concern about Russian military assistance for North Korea.

The group is stepping up work to provide critical and security technologies, including a new open radio access network, to the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia, regions of intense competition with China.

A health initiative by the leaders is aimed at combating cervical cancer.

Lisa Curtis, an Asia policy expert at the Center for a New American Security and a former administration official, said India, which is not part of any military alliance, has been worried about perceptions that the Quad could be militarizing the Indo-Pacific.

"But I think China's recent maritime aggression could be changing the equation for India and could be prompting India to become a bit more open to the idea of Quad security cooperation," she said.

Analysts and officials say Biden hosting the Quad is part of efforts to institutionalize the body ahead his departure from office and that of Kishida, who is stepping down after a leadership contest next week, and elections in Australia by next year.

Asked about the group's staying power, Biden grasped Modi by the shoulder and said the group was here to stay.

Albanese called the Quad's coast guard plan "very important" as the "four countries will have personnel on perhaps a single vessel, improving the interoperability and the cooperation that occurs," according to the transcript of a press conference he held in Philadelphia.

Before the summit, Albanese met with Biden at his home and discussed bilateral cooperation between the two close allies across defense and security, including in the Indo-Pacific.

The Quad met at foreign minister level under the previous administration of Donald Trump, who is running against Vice President Kamala Harris in November, and enjoyed bipartisan support, as reflected by the formation of a congressional Quad Caucus ahead of the summit. Biden elevated the Quad to the leader level in 2021.

Sri Lanka's Marxist-Leaning Dissanayake in Early Lead to Become President

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's Marxist-leaning leader, Anura Kumara Disanayake, grabbed a commanding early lead on Sunday in his bid to become the next president of the debt-ridden country seeking to elect a leader to bolster its fragile economic recovery.

Disanayake won about 53% of a million votes counted so far in the election, Sri Lanka's Election Commission data showed. Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa was second at 22%, ahead of President Ranil Wickremesinghe in third place.

About 75% of the eligible 17 million people in the Indian Ocean island nation cast their votes in Saturday's election, according to the poll body.

Disanayake contested as candidate for the National People's Power (NPP) alliance, which includes his Marxist-leaning Janatha Vimukthi Peremuna (JVP) party that has traditionally backed stronger state intervention, lower taxes and more closed market economic policies.

Although JVP party has just three seats in parliament, the 55-year-old Disanayake has been boosted by his promises of tough anti-corruption measures and more pro-poor policies.

He presented himself as the candidate of change, promising to dissolve parliament within 45 days of coming to power in order to seek a fresh mandate for his policies in the general elections.

"After a long and arduous campaign, the results of the election are now clear," Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said on X.



"Though I heavily campaigned for President Ranil Wickremesinghe, the people of Sri Lanka have made their decision, and I fully respect their mandate for Anura Kumara Disanayake."

This was Sri Lanka's first election since the economy buckled in 2022 under a severe foreign exchange shortage, leaving the country unable to pay for imports of essentials including fuel, medicine and cooking gas.

Thousands of protesters marched in Colombo in 2022 and occupied the president's office and residence, forcing then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee and later resign.

Butressed by a \$2.9 billion bailout programme from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the economy has posted a tentative recovery but the high cost of living was still a critical issue for many voters.

Although inflation cooled to 0.5% last month from a crisis high of 70%, and the economy is forecast to grow in 2024 for the first time in three years, millions remain mired in poverty, with many pinning hopes of a better future on the next leader.

The winner will have to ensure Sri Lanka sticks with the IMF programme until 2027 to get its economy on a stable growth path, reassure markets, repay debt, attract investors and help a quarter of its people climb out of poverty.

In his manifesto, Disanayake, known for his ability to deliver stirring speeches, has pledged to slash taxes that would impact fiscal targets, leaving investors and market participants worried about his economic policies.

However, during campaign speeches he has taken a more conciliatory approach, saying any changes would be undertaken in consultation with the IMF and that he is committed to ensuring repayment of debt.



Liverpool Back in Groove, Chelsea Thrash West Ham

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool returned to winning ways in the Premier League with a 3-0 victory over Bournemouth that sent Arne Slot's side top of the table for 24 hours on Saturday. Winger Luis Diaz scored twice and Darwin Nunez netted his first league goal of the season as Liverpool avoided any repeat of last week's home defeat by Nottingham Forest. Aston Villa completed a superb week when they hit back from a goal down to beat Wolverhampton Wanderers 3-1 and also move to 12 points from their opening five games. Chelsea showed further signs of improvement as they cruised to a 3-0 win at West Ham United but Newcastle United, who could have gone top, suffered their first defeat of the season, going down 3-1 away to Fulham. Southampton and Everton both secured their first points of the season with 1-1 draws against Ipswich Town and Leicester City respectively. Brentford scored inside the opening minute for the second successive week but lost 3-1 at Tottenham Hotspur, for whom Dominic Solanke scored his first goal. Manchester United drew 0-0 at Crystal Palace in the late game. Slot's honeymoon period was brought to an end by Nottingham Forest last week but Liverpool have responded impressively, winning 3-1 away to Milan in the Champions League and then overpowering Bournemouth at Anfield, scoring three goals in 12 minutes. "After the big win against AC Milan I was curious to see how we would react today -- and it was a much,

much better reaction than we had against Nottingham Forest," Dutchman Slot said. "Bournemouth kept on going, kept on going and kept on going. It was tougher than the result might look like." Villa returned to Europe's top table when they beat Young Boys in their opening Champions League match this week and they backed it up with a hard-earned three points against Wolves. Matheus Cunha gave winless Wolves the lead but Ollie Watkins equalised in the 73rd minute and late goals by Ezri Konsa and Jhon Duran wrapped up the points for Unai Emery's side. "It shows the character and the togetherness we have here. We knew we were not good enough in the first half. We came out firing in the second half and punished them," Konsa said. Defeat left Wolves bottom of the table. Manchester United dominated the first half of their scoreless draw but were left to rue missed chances -- particularly two shots that rang off the crossbar in quick succession from Alejandro Garnacho and Bruno Fernandes. "When we don't win, I'm not content," manager Erik ten Hag said. "We should have won. I think first half, we ate them alive. "We probably lose two points because of the first half but the thing is that we don't lose this game in the end."

Dubois Destroys Joshua to Retain IBF World Heavyweight Crown



LONDON (Dispatches) - Daniel Dubois retained his IBF world heavyweight title with a brutal fifth-round knockout of Anthony Joshua in an all-British spectacular at Wembley on Saturday. The 27-year-old dominated the bout from the start in front of 96,000 passionate fans, dropping the former two-time heavyweight champion multiple times. Dubois had spoken of his determination to "legitimise" his reign as IBF champion after being handed the belt that Oleksandr Usyk vacated in June. He produced a destructive display that raises major questions over Joshua's future, though Joshua's promoter Eddie Hearn said he expected his fighter would pursue a rematch. Underdog Dubois went after his celebrated rival from the start and was rewarded as his big shots wobbled the 2012 London Olympic champion time and again. In an action-packed fifth round of the breathless clash, Dubois landed the decisive blow, having come through worrying moments himself as Joshua finally found his range. "Are you not entertained?" he said, speaking to DAZN after the biggest win of his 24-fight career. "It's been a journey and I'm grateful to be in this position. I'm a gladiator, I'm a warrior until the bitter end. "I want to get to the top of this sport and reach my full potential." Oasis's Liam Gallagher fired up the expectant crowd with a live set of three songs before fireworks exploded over Wembley. The British rivals locked horns in a dramatic opening round that ended with Joshua being saved by the bell after he was floored by a savage overhand right.

Team World Takes Laver Cup Lead

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Ben Shelton and Alejandro Tabilo defeated Stefanos Tsitsipas and Casper Ruud 6-1 6-2 to hand Team World an 8-4 lead over Team Europe at the end of day two of the Laver Cup. After a blistering first set and an early break by Team World in the second, the European duo squandered their only two break chances to hand John McEnroe's team the two points. Shelton had earlier been beaten 6-4 6-4 by Carlos Alcaraz in the singles as the Spaniard levelled the overall score to 4-4 following American Frances Tiafoe's 3-6 6-4 10-5 comeback win over Russian Daniil Medvedev in Saturday's opening clash. "I love playing here, I love the format, singles and doubles. I couldn't get it done in the singles but I wanted to come here tonight and redeemed myself," Shelton said.



"Alejandro put me on his back a little bit and we were able to get it done, so I'm really happy and thank you everyone for staying late." Prior to the doubles match, American Taylor Fritz put Team World ahead as he outclassed German Alexander Zverev 6-4 7-5. The U.S. Open finalist rallied from a 2-4 deficit in the second set to seal his third victory over the world number two. First-day victories at the three-day team contest at Berlin's Uber Arena are 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 on Sunday.

Vinicius Helps Faster Madrid Overturn Stubborn Espanyol



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Vinicius Junior's decisive impact helped a "much faster" Real Madrid come from behind to beat Espanyol 4- and move a point behind La Liga leaders Barcelona. After struggling to find their best form this season coach Carlo Ancelotti praised his team's victory, even though it took its time to crystallise against the determined Catalans. Brazil star Vinicius started on the bench but created a goal for Rodrigo Goes before scoring himself to complete Madrid's turnaround after a Thibaut Courtois own goal gifted the visitors the lead early in the second half. Dani Carvajal levelled for Madrid soon afterwards before Vinicius took the reins, with Kylian Mbappe adding a late penalty to net in his fourth consecutive game for the club. Hansi Flick's Barcelona, boasting a perfect record of five wins from five matches, visit unbeaten Villarreal, fourth, on Sunday, looking to restore their four-point lead. "I thought it was a good game, (the players) reacted well after Espanyol's goal, we played much better, having more chances and I am happy," Ancelotti told reporters. Madrid have not been at their most fluent but this was a cut above their recent displays and the Italian was impressed. "We played much faster, touching the ball quicker up front, with some better movement," noted Ancelotti. "Mobility is a very important weapon... bit by bit we're returning to our best version." The comprehensive victory was Madrid's 38th consecutive La Liga game without defeat, their last loss in the competition coming just under a year ago, against Atletico Madrid in September 2023. "That says a lot, not losing games in so many weeks is really nice, but we have to continue," said Madrid captain Luka Modric. "It's quality, character, commitment from the team, everyone is ready when called on... those are the key factors." Madrid had a stranglehold on the first half without being able to make the breakthrough, with Mbappe heavily involved, hunting for his sixth goal of the season across all competitions. Espanyol goalkeeper Joan Garcia made a fine save at his near post to thwart the France captain's effort from a tight angle, among other stops. Increasingly frustrated, Mbappe was booked for protesting against a decision called against him. Madrid have been able to score just one first half goal in eight matches this season but on this occasion they were racking up the chances.

Verstappen Stages Protest Over Ridiculous Swearing Punishment

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen staged a one-man protest at the Singapore Grand Prix against his "ridiculous" punishment for swearing in an earlier session this week. Verstappen qualified second on the grid for the race behind Lando Norris then gave only short answers or said "no comment" to reporters in the official FIA post-qualifying press conference for the top three drivers. Three-time world champion Verstappen was effectively slapped with Formula One "community service" by the governing body FIA for his use of foul language. The Red Bull driver must "accomplish some work of public interest", said a panel of FIA stewards, after using the F-word in Thursday's drivers' press conference which was being broadcast live. Verstappen was deemed to have used language "which is generally considered 'coarse, rude' or may 'cause offence' and is not considered suitable for broadcast," read the stewards' decision. Dutchman Verstappen said that he was happy to answer journalists' questions outside, but not in the official FIA media session. "I find it, of course, ridiculous what happened," he said of his sanction. "So why should I then give full answers? "It's very easy to get a fine, or you get some sort of penalties. So I prefer then not to speak a lot, save my voice. "I mean, we can do the interviews also somewhere else, if you need some answers to the questions asked." He later told Sky Sports F1: "It's just ridiculous to get a penalty for that. When you insult someone, that's pretty clear. I didn't even aim it at a person. It's a bit of a slip of the tongue moment."



Verstappen received support from both Norris and Lewis Hamilton, who was third in qualifying at the Marina Bay Circuit, during the official press conference. "I think it's pretty unfair," said McLaren's Norris of the sanction. "I don't agree with any of it." Mercedes driver Hamilton agreed. "I think it's a bit of a joke, to be honest," said the seven-time world champion and he urged Verstappen to ignore the punishment. "This is the pinnacle of the sport. Mistakes are made. I certainly won't be doing it (community service), and I hope Max doesn't do it." Drivers had been asked this week to tone down their use of foul language over team radio during races. FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem said in an interview that motorsport was not "rap music" and drivers should mind their language, especially as children might be watching. Leading drivers hit back at Ben Sulayem, saying in the heat of battle emotions run high and their words could be simply edited out of the broadcast. Hamilton took umbrage at Ben Sulayem's comparison with rap music. "I don't like how he's expressed it, saying 'rappers' is very stereotypical. And most rappers are black," said Hamilton. "That was the wrong choice of words. There's a racial element there."