

Hours Before Departure to Saudi Arabia, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, the Foreign Ministry's Spokesperson Highlighted Tehran's Determination to Promote Cooperation With Neighbors to Ensure Regional Security and Stability

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Israel Dragging Region Into War to Manipulate U.S. Upcoming Election



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman has rejected accusations about Tehran's interference in the US upcoming presidential election, saying it is Israel that seeks to expand the war in the region with the aim of manipulating the outcome of the November vote.

"The occupying regime's haste in dragging the whole region into an ever-expanding war is primarily aimed at malignantly manipulating the US upcoming elections," Esmail Baghaei said in a post on X on Wednesday.

"At the same time, the US security agencies are falsely accusing Iran of trying to interfere in the country's internal affairs. What an absurd twist of facts," he added.

The foreign ministry spokesman made the remarks after an annual assessment by the Department of Homeland Security alleged that Iran, Russia and China are trying to influence the November vote, including by employing artificial intelligence to disseminate fake or divisive information.

In reaction to the assessment, Baghaei on Friday rejected the accusations as "baseless", saying Washington, with a record of interference in other countries' affairs, is "in no position" to make such claims against the Islamic Republic.

Back in August, the campaign of US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump claimed that it had been hacked, pinning the blame on Iran without providing evidence.

Meanwhile, the FBI and other US agencies alleged that Iranian hackers had sought to interest President Joe Biden's campaign in information stolen from Trump's campaign, and had sent unsolicited emails to people associated with the then-Democratic candidate.

At the time, Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations roundly rejected the allegations about the Islamic Republic's interference in the 2024 US presidential election, calling the assertion "unsubstantiated."

It said the Islamic Republic does not accord any credence to the accusations, emphasizing that it has no intent or motive to meddle in the American election.

Iran Dismisses Allegation of Threat to UK



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry rejected the accusations leveled by a British official that Tehran has been involved in "potentially lethal" plots against the UK.

In a statement on Wednesday, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmail Baghaei roundly deplored the allegations made by the UK official, saying such hackneyed anti-Iran accusations have been leveled over the past two years without a shred of evidence or documentation.

His comments came after the head of Britain's MI5 intelligence agency alleged that Iran has increased its number of "potentially lethal" plots on the UK soil.

In a wide-ranging speech on Tuesday outlining the current threat picture, Security Service (MI5) Director General Ken McCallum accused Iran of being behind "plot after plot" on British soil.

McCallum alleged that Britain was experiencing a staggering rise in assassination attempts and other crimes by Russia and Iran, with these countries allegedly recruiting criminals to "do their dirty work."

Charting out threats from Iran, he said that his agents and police have tackled 20 Tehran-backed plots since 2022 and warned that Iran could expand its targets in the UK if Israel attacks in response to Iran's missile barrage.

In response, Baghaei pointed to the UK authorities' recurrent use of the term "potential" about the fabricated accusations against Iran, saying the British security organizations' allegations against Tehran are part of the policy of inventing fake enemies and diverting the public opinion's attention from the UK government's role in the unrelenting massacre of Palestinians and the Zionist regime's warmongering policies in the region.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



Iran Urges Action on Gaza Genocide in Pact of the Future Discussions

TEHRAN - At a pivotal United Nations meeting, Iran's UN envoy, Zahra Ershadi, raised alarm over what she described as genocide in Gaza and war crimes against the people of Lebanon. Her statement came during the discussions on the "Pact of the Future," a document aimed at addressing global challenges and strengthening the United Nations system. In a forceful speech, Ershadi criticized the pact for its failure to address critical issues in the Middle East and called for immediate attention to ongoing atrocities.

Ershadi's speech, delivered during a session on strengthening the UN system, highlighted the need for the international community to confront what she referred to as "genocide" in Gaza. She lamented that the draft of the Pact of the Future, which seeks to create a framework for global cooperation and peace, had failed to tackle the root causes of conflict and violence in the region, particularly the situation in Gaza and Lebanon.

She did not hold back in expressing her disappointment with the current draft of the pact. According to her, the document falls short of its objectives, particularly in addressing pressing global issues. While it aims to promote peace, sustainable development, and cooperation, she argued that it neglects the immediate threats facing certain regions, especially in the Middle East.

"The Pact for the Future does not reflect the reality of the challenges of our world," Ershadi said, pointing out that the document failed to provide tangible measures to respect the rights and sovereignty of developing nations. She expressed concern that the text lacked mechanisms to "protect succeeding generations from the scourge of war," an omission she deemed especially troubling in light of the ongoing violence in Gaza and Lebanon.

Ershadi's remarks also drew attention to what she described as the international community's failure to address the impact of foreign occupation, nuclear weapons, and unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) on developing nations. She emphasized the need for the pact to include stronger provisions to eliminate these obstacles to economic and social development.

The Iranian envoy's speech centered on the situation in Gaza, where she accused foreign powers of committing genocide. She called on the UN and member states to take immediate action to halt the violence, stressing that the ongoing conflict should be prioritized in any future global agreement.

"It is regrettable and disheartening that, despite the fact that genocide is occurring right in front of our eyes, this document ignores this problem," Ershadi stated. She further criticized the international community for diverting attention from what she called "immediate and basic threats" to focus on other issues, which she suggested were less urgent.

In addition to Gaza, she pointed to war crimes and atrocities being committed in Lebanon, underscoring the need for a global response to these violations of international law. She argued that the Pact of the Future, in its current form, fails to uphold the UN's commitment to preventing such atrocities and ensuring accountability for those responsible.

Ershadi's speech also touched on the broader issue of national sovereignty and the right of states to chart their own course of development. She argued that the pact undermines the sovereignty of

developing nations by failing to address the negative impact of unilateral sanctions imposed by more powerful countries.

"The imposition of unilateral coercive measures, external economic sanctions, and other restrictive measures are against the sovereign equality of states," Ershadi stated. She called for the pact to include provisions that address and remove these obstacles, which she said severely hinder the ability of developing nations to achieve sustainable development and guarantee basic human rights.

She emphasized that Iran, like many other developing countries, does not view the outcome documents of the Summit of the Future as legally binding. She reiterated that Iran is not committed to any provisions of the pact that contradict its national priorities, laws, or values, and insisted that national sovereignty should take precedence over international agreements in determining a country's development path.

Another major point of contention in Ershadi's speech was the issue of environmental responsibility. She criticized developed countries for not meeting their obligations under the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). According to Ershadi, wealthier nations that have contributed the most to climate change should provide financial support and technology transfer to developing countries without any conditions.

She also expressed dissatisfaction with the pact's approach to fossil fuel reduction, noting that the document did not account for the voluntary nature of such transitions or the differing national contexts of developing countries.

In her speech, Ershadi voiced strong objections to the provisions in the Global Digital Compact, part of the Pact of the Future, which she claimed do not respect the sovereign rights of states in the digital domain. She argued that digital governance should be aligned with the national laws and regulations of individual countries, particularly when it comes to emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.

Ershadi also highlighted the importance of ensuring that the benefits of digital technologies are shared equitably, particularly with developing nations. She expressed concern that the pact's current draft lacked sufficient measures to ensure inclusive governance in the digital sphere, particularly in regard to the role of private technology companies.

Finally, Ershadi addressed the issue of nuclear disarmament, expressing disappointment that the Pact of the Future had not taken stronger action on this front. She called for nuclear-weapon states to fulfill their disarmament obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and urged the UN to prioritize the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

In conclusion, Ershadi's speech was a forceful critique of the current draft of the Pact of the Future. She urged the international community to take immediate action on the most pressing issues facing the world, particularly the situation in Gaza and Lebanon, and called for a more balanced and inclusive approach to global governance.

Hezbollah Repels Incursion Attempts Into Lebanon



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Hezbollah says it has thwarted Israeli military incursion attempts into southern Lebanon and inflicted "direct casualties" on troops, as tensions continue to escalate between the resistance group and the occupying regime.

In a statement, Hezbollah said its fighters have targeted Israeli forces with artillery and rocket fire as they attempted to advance towards the border area of Labouneh at 4:55 a.m. local time, inflicting direct casualties on enemy soldiers and forcing them to retreat.

The attack was carried out in response to the Israeli bombardment of cities, villages, and civilians in Lebanon and in support of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah stated.

In a separate statement, Hezbollah said it has detonated an explosive device targeting Israeli forces as they attempted to infiltrate the town of Blida in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah went on to say that its fighters clashed with Israeli troops, inflicting injuries

on them.

The Israeli military confirmed the attack, saying three of its soldiers had sustained serious injuries in the fighting.

Since last Thursday dawn, the Lebanese resistance fighters have been repelling every attempt by the Israeli elite forces to advance on multiple fronts in southern Lebanon, inflicting heavy losses in terms of equipment and personnel.

Israel has escalated its barbarism in Lebanon over the past weeks.

Hezbollah has been responding to the aggression with numerous retaliatory operations, including with hypersonic ballistic missiles, targeting the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Lebanese resistance movement has vowed to keep up its operations against Israel as long as the Israeli regime continues its Gaza war, which has so far killed 41,965 Palestinians, mostly women and children.

Iran, Russia Discuss Cooperation on Supporting Civil Rights



MOSCOW (IRNA) - Head of the Iran's State Inspectorate Organization Zabihollah Khodaian and Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov have discussed cooperation on supporting the rights of the citizens and supervisory activities, as well as legal and judicial affairs.

The meeting took place in Moscow on Tuesday on the sidelines of a meeting of the heads of inspectorate organizations of the member states of BRICS group of developing countries.

Speaking during the meeting, the Iranian side said that, as two countries which are under the US and Western sanctions, Iran and Russia can give a boost to their cooperation so as to neutralize the impacts of sanctions.

Khodaian also appreciated Russia's supportive stances for Iran at the United Nations, particularly in the UN Human Rights Committee.

He added that the US and other Western countries have been exploiting the human rights as an instrumental tool.

He referred to the killing of over 40,000 innocent people, including women and children, by the Zionist regime in the tiny Gaza Strip by means of US weapons, regretting that the human rights bodies have kept silent and are turning a blind eye to this brutality.

The Russian official, for his part, said that the leaders of Iran and Russia are determined to promote the level of their strategic relations, adding that finalizing a comprehensive cooperation agreement between the two countries in the near future will turn a new page in bilateral relations.

Krasnov stressed that Iran's joining the BRICS group is considered as a new chance for multilateral cooperation in line with countering global unilateralism.

Noting that imposition of sanctions on independent countries is one of the main tools used by the US and the Western world to weaken these countries, he added that Iran and Russia can neutralize these sanctions through bilateral cooperation and using the potentials of BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Iran Achieves Production of Artificial Corneas



TEHRAN - The president of the Iranian Ophthalmology Association announced that Iran's achievement in producing artificial corneas for transplants has led to the treatment of many eye patients. He emphasized that the allocation of government-subsidized foreign currency (NIMA rate) for ophthalmic devices and equipment is essential; otherwise, the treatment process for patients will be disrupted.

Mahmoud Jabbarvand stated during a press conference held at the association's headquarters: "We have made significant advancements in terms of equipment and facilities for eye surgeries in the country. With experienced doctors in this field, no patient is referred abroad for treatment, and we even receive many patients, especially from Iraq."

He further explained that advanced smart systems are now being used in ophthalmic treatments, and with 2,500 ophthalmologists, there is no shortage. People in various cities have access to ophthalmic services.

Jabbarvand noted that Iranian ophthalmology is on par with that of the U.S. and Europe, stating: "Now, everyone has full and easy access to eye care services, and unlike other countries, patients don't face long waiting lists or high costs."

The Tehran University of Medical Sciences professor added: "Despite the valuable achievements in treating eye diseases, in the past year, some organizations have stopped collaborating in providing tissue for the eye bank, causing problems for patients."

Jabbarvand pointed out that while corneal transplant surgeries in the country used to be up-to-date, the lack of required tissue for patients has created limitations, and the eye bank is no longer able to provide timely services.

He continued, "There was a time when Iran's eye bank was a global leader, offering the best tissues at low prices. Now, however, many patients are waiting for corneal transplants."

IRAN NEWS



Export of 77,000 Tons of Eggs

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The CEO of the Mihan Poultry Farmers' Union stated that since the beginning of the year, 77,000 tons of eggs have been exported to target countries. He added that they are currently following up on the new approved price of this product from the Market Regulation Headquarters based on conducted assessments.

Mohammad Moradi, in a ceremony on World Egg Day today (Tuesday), mentioned that the country's egg supply is sufficient, and the production volume since 2021 has exceeded the Ministry of Agriculture's program.

Moradi said that since the beginning of the year, 77,000 tons of eggs have been exported to target countries, and it is expected that this figure will reach 135,000 tons by the end of the year.

Europe Bans Loading of 182 Goods Into Iranian Trucks



TEHRAN - The European Union has implemented new sanctions against Iran, prohibiting the loading of 182 European goods into Iranian trucks. This restriction, which has been in effect for the past month, has significant implications for the transport industry, according to Ali Mahmoudi Sarai, Chairman of the Board of the Iran Transport and Logistics Federation.

In an interview with ILNA, Sarai noted that only Italy and Germany are currently providing limited visa access to Iranian drivers among European nations. He emphasized the ongoing challenges faced by Iranian transport operators due to these sanctions.

Amid these challenges, Sarai addressed the status of green insurance for transit truck drivers, suggesting that there is potential for lifting Iran's suspension from the Green Card insurance system convention. He reported that recent discussions with officials indicated that issues surrounding green insurance coverage for Iranian truck drivers could be resolved within the next five months.

Fatemeh Ghanbarzadeh, Vice Chair of the Transport, Transit, and Logistics Commission of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, echoed Sarai's comments, revealing that a Green Insurance Office has been established in Iran. This office has assured its counterparts in Geneva regarding the necessary mechanisms for compliance, leading to promises of lifting Iran's suspension.

Ghanbarzadeh explained that the suspension arose from a requirement for a private insurance company to manage third-party insurance liabilities, a role previously held by state-owned entities such as Iran Insurance and the Central Insurance of Iran. However, with the establishment of an independent reinsurance company and the settlement of arrears owed to the Central Insurance, Iranian officials believe they have demonstrated goodwill towards resolving the suspension.

She stated, "We are working to position the Iran Chamber of Commerce's Transport Commission as the supervisor and guarantor of Iran's Green Insurance to ensure that the issue of our suspension remains permanently resolved."

Looking ahead, Ghanbarzadeh expressed optimism that Iran could be removed from suspension by early 2025, allowing Iranian transit drivers to regain access to green insurance coverage as they had prior to 2024.

Minister Vows to Overcome "Iranophobia" Through Cultural Diplomacy and Heritage Revival



TEHRAN - In a significant event today, the Achaemenid tablets, ancient artifacts representing Iran's historical legacy, were unveiled at the National Museum of Iran. The ceremony took place on the sidelines of a high-profile meeting between President Ebrahim Raisi and key figures from Iran's cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts sectors. The event highlighted the government's renewed emphasis on using Iran's rich cultural assets to combat negative global narratives and promote unity.

Seyed Reza Salehi Amiri, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, addressed attendees during the conference held at the National Museum. He emphasized that the participation of President Raisi in this meeting underscores the priority placed on cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts in the government's agenda. "The presence of the President sends a clear message that these three important sectors are prioritized by the 14th government and the Presidency," Amiri said.

Amiri spoke extensively about the unifying force of Iranian culture, describing it as a source of national cohesion. "Iranian culture is a unifying and cohesive force. Cultural diversity has always been rooted in the history of this land, but the center of gravity of this civilization has always been national unity," he stated. The unveiling of the Achaemenid tablets serves as a potent symbol of Iran's rich historical and cultural achievements, he added, further emphasizing the significance of national identity and heritage in modern times.

Reflecting on the long-standing role of Iranian culture as a builder of civilization, Amiri noted, "Iranian culture has been a source of unity and solidarity throughout history. The cultural richness of this land is something that the President recognized today, and this speaks to the depth of our civilizational achievements."

During his address, Amiri also introduced the idea of "cohesion" as a key discourse within the government's approach to national governance. He defined cohesion as the promotion of rationality over prejudice, dialogue over conflict, and empathy over division. "Cohesion means rationality instead of prejudice, unity and empathy instead of division and revenge. Cohesion means dialogue to solve issues instead of destruction and defamation," he stated, stressing that such values are deeply rooted in Iran's national and Islamic heritage.

Amiri pointed out that cohesion also involves justice, ethical behavior, and tolerance of opposing views. "Cohesion means justice for both oneself and society, moving beyond false boundaries within those loyal to Islam, the revolution, and leadership. It is about creating space for all voices within society, even those with differing beliefs," he explained.

Addressing Iran's tourism sector, Amiri called it the "greatest capacity for cultural diplomacy," noting that tourism fosters peace and dialogue between nations. He argued that Iran must utilize its tourism industry not only to boost its economy but also to challenge the widespread "Iranophobia" that has distorted global perceptions of the country. "We must overcome the false project of Iranophobia. Iranians strive to expand unity, cooperation, and peace in the world. Through tourism, we can build trust with Iranians abroad and introduce them to our national capacities," he said.

Amiri also highlighted the need for foreign investment in tourism infrastructure, citing the goal of increasing the number of hotels from 1,430 to 1,930 by the end of the seventh national development plan. "Investment and investors are the driving force of this sector. We must provide the right infrastructure for foreign investors, as development cannot be achieved without the involvement of people," he remarked.

Furthermore, the Minister stressed the importance of handicrafts as part of Iran's cultural identity and economy. He set an ambitious target of boosting handicraft exports to \$492 million and called for strategic planning to remove obstacles to achieving this goal. "One of the solutions for this is using the capacity of elites to identify possible strategies. We have formed a strategic meeting in this regard to extract the macro strategies and, in coordination with institutions, remove the obstacles," Amiri said.

In conclusion, the unveiling of the Achaemenid tablets and the broader discussions on cultural heritage and tourism reflect Iran's determination to leverage its rich history and cultural assets to counter negative narratives and foster unity. By focusing on cultural diplomacy and domestic cohesion, the Iranian government hopes to challenge Iranophobia and promote a more positive and accurate image of the country on the global stage.

Details of Importing 300m Cubic Meters of Gas From Russia Unveiled



TEHRAN - Malek Shariati stated in a press conference for the third conference on energy consumption optimization held at Majlis: "The issue of energy imbalance has been discussed in specialized, legislative, and societal contexts for several years. Although some deny the imbalance, it is a new term, but not a new concept. If production and consumption do not align, an imbalance occurs, resulting in a mismatch between income and expenditure, which needs to be addressed."

He added: "Resolving the energy imbalance is possible through two methods: increasing production and supply, and managing and reducing consumption. Unfortunately, despite the Supreme Leader's overarching policies, we have not achieved the goals of the second method in the fifth and sixth development programs, nor in the general policies for reforming consumption patterns and the principles of resistance economy. While it was supposed that the energy consumption intensity in the country would be halved over the past ten years, not only has this not happened, but it has actually increased, indicating that the policies and laws drafted to achieve this important goal have been insufficient and not pursued effectively."

A member of the Energy Commission of Majlis stated: "If we solely focus on production, we will never compensate for the imbalance. While production is crucial and should be increased in terms of oil, gas, and electricity, if we only focus on production without managing consumption, it's like a race we are already losing, and we won't achieve our goals."

Shariati stated: "The issue of energy imbalance and the necessity of optimizing energy consumption are being addressed by the government and parliament, and the seventh development program emphasizes that the government is required to approve the charter of the Energy Optimization and Strategic Management Organization within three months of the program's announcement. The law for the seventh development program was announced on the second of Mordad 1403 (July 24, 2024), leaving little time until the legal deadline for approving the charter of this organization."

He stated that 60 percent of the targets for increasing efficiency are related to the government and executive bodies, saying: "The fact that fuel-inefficient vehicles are provided to the public does not mean that the problem of excessive gasoline consumption lies with the public, nor does the introduction of high-consumption electronic equipment in the market. The processes and structures must be reformed, and the public should not be blamed for increased consumption."

Regarding the actions taken for importing gas from Russia, he stated: "Iran is set to import 300 million cubic meters of gas from Russia daily, although converting this agreement into a contract and implementing it may take a few years. However, both sides are negotiating, and we must view this contract as a trade agreement because if this gas is not consumed domestically, not only will problems not be solved, but we will also become dependent."

Kyrgyzstan Welcomes Cooperation With Iranian Water and Electricity Industry Companies



TEHRAN - Mojtaba Akbari, the head of the International Center of the Ministry of Energy, announced the readiness of the water and electricity industry to provide services to Kyrgyzstan during a virtual meeting between the two countries.

Akbari stated that Iran ranks at the highest level of global standards in water and electricity among countries worldwide. He expressed that Iran collaborates with many neighboring countries as well as countries in Africa and South America in providing technical and engineering services, which are well-known in these countries.

Following this, "Nazgul Zhorubikova Yunova," Deputy Minister of Energy of the Kyrgyz Republic, mentioned that Iran is one of the leading countries in the region in terms of oil and gas reserves and electricity, and the specialized capabilities of Iran have always been admirable for them.

Road Transit Growth in the Country Reaches 63%



TEHRAN - From the beginning of this year until the end of September 2024, road transit recorded a significant increase of 63%, with a total of 9.3 million tons of goods transported compared to the same period last year.

According to the Statistics, Information, and Monitoring Office of the Planning and Resource Management Department of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, road transit in the first half of this year showed a notable increase of 63% compared to last year, with 9.3 million tons of goods registered. Of this amount, 4.7 million tons were non-oil goods, and 4.6 million tons were oil goods. Shahid Rajaee Port accounted for the highest incoming transit with 2.5 million tons, while the Parviz Khan border terminal had 2.4 million tons.

Based on this report, the movement of passengers via road transport in the first six months of 2024 reached 67 million people.

The highest number of passengers were headed to Khorasan Razavi and Kerman provinces, with 9 million and 7 million passengers, respectively, while Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad provinces had the lowest movement with 268,000 passengers and Semnan with 497,000 passengers. Of the total 67 million passengers, 51% used buses, 34% used minibuses, and 15% used private cars for their journeys.

In the cargo transport sector, 283 million tons of goods were moved during the same period, reflecting a 3% increase compared to 276 million tons in the same period last year. Analysis indicates that the highest volume of goods transported was to Isfahan province with 29 million tons and Tehran with 26 million tons, while the lowest was to Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad with 1 million tons and North Khorasan with 2 million tons.

Of the total 283 million tons of goods transported, 33% consisted of construction and mineral materials, 20% chemical materials, 19% agricultural, livestock, and food products, 16% metal goods, and 12% other goods, including machinery, paper, wood, and waste.

Iran Negotiates with China for Electrification of Mashhad Railway



TEHRAN - In a significant move for the Iranian railway sector, the Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Jabbar Ali Zakeri, announced ongoing negotiations with China for financing the electrification of the Mashhad railway. This development comes as part of broader efforts to modernize the country's aging railway fleet and enhance operational efficiency.

Zakeri addressed reporters on the sidelines of the seventh excellence award ceremony for maintenance, where he highlighted the need for a comprehensive review of the maintenance processes of Iran's rail fleet. "We must adopt new systems that can help reduce costs, increase effectiveness, and extend the lifespan and maintenance periods of our railway equipment," he stated, underscoring the urgency for improvement in the sector.

The Deputy Minister pointed out that one of the biggest challenges facing the railway sector today is the aging infrastructure, particularly the obsolescence of locomotives. He emphasized that limitations in domestic production have compounded these issues, making it imperative for private sector investments to play a crucial role in revitalizing the industry.

In response to questions regarding the approval of importing passenger wagons, Zakeri confirmed that the purchase of new equipment would primarily be handled by the private sector, with the government acting as a facilitator. "The seventh development plan includes provisions for purchasing and modernizing passenger fleets, and private companies are already presenting their plans for acquiring locomotives and wagons both domestically and from abroad," he elaborated. By the end of the seventh development plan, Iran aims to import 550 locomotives without restrictions on passenger wagons,

though priority will be given to utilizing domestic production capabilities.

Zakeri also provided insights into the electrification project for the Mashhad railway, stating, "The project is currently under review, and we are negotiating with China to secure financing." He assured that a technical program would soon be presented to the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, marking a pivotal step in advancing the electrification initiative.

Additionally, discussions are set to take place regarding the Rasht-Astara railway project on October 11, with the Minister of Roads and Urban Development attending. Zakeri noted that 20 kilometers of the land required for this project has already been acquired, with plans for constructing 40 kilometers as an overpass.

In an effort to enhance the quality of passenger services, Zakeri announced plans to boost investment in five-star trains. "We are in talks with the private sector to encourage investments in our passenger fleets, particularly in the development of five-star trains," he said, indicating no restrictions on private sector involvement in this area.

The conference also served as a platform for discussing the importance of the excellence award ceremony for maintenance, which Zakeri believes is crucial for improving productivity across executive bodies. He noted that the ceremony serves as an external evaluation mechanism, complementing internal assessments within the sector.

Zakeri stressed the importance of revising maintenance and repair processes to address the increasing costs associated with the aging fleet. He stated that railway services must align their pricing with production costs, emphasizing the need to reduce operational expenses through a comprehensive review of processes.

At Least 339 Dead, Over 1m Displaced Due to Niger Floods

NIAMEY (Dispatches) - Torrential rains in Niger have left 339 people dead and more than 1.1 million displaced since June, state media reported Tuesday, updating a previous toll.

Niger's interior minister last month stated at least 273 were dead and more than 700,000 affected as extreme weather slammed the Sahel nation.

As of September 23, the floods had impacted more than 1.1 million people, resulting in 339 fatalities and leaving another 383 injured, state news agency ANP said Tuesday, quoting the country's civil protection agency.

Areas throughout the country were affected, including the capital Niamey, where nine people had died.



Harris, Trump Trade Blows in U.S. Election Media blitz



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Kamala Harris and Donald Trump exchanged barbs over the airwaves Tuesday as they reached out to the few remaining undecided voters in the final stretch of an election seen as one of the closest in modern US history.

Harris has maintained a lead of two-to-three points in national polling since mid-August, despite presidential and vice presidential debates, encouraging jobs data, an interest rate cut, escalating international crises and a devastating hurricane.

"I literally lose sleep -- and have been -- over what is at stake in this election," the Democratic vice president, 59, told radio icon Howard Stern in a 70-minute live interview.

A poll from Siena College and The New York Times out Tuesday highlighted the deadlock, finding Harris ahead of her Republican rival by 49 percent to 46 percent -- although it had the pair in a dead heat in September.

Poll-watchers expect the stalemate to break only in the last couple of weeks before election day on November 5, as the small fraction of wavering Americans who will decide the election break one way or the other.

In the seven battleground states seen as likely to determine the election, the race is even tighter.

The new poll gave Trump the edge on who is the stronger leader but, crucially, revealed that registered voters see Harris as the change candidate.

Harris -- who has spent much of the campaign under pressure to sit down for more interviews -- is spending the week targeting women, Latinos and young voters through traditional media and via appearances on influential podcasts and YouTube shows.

"The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," a staple of the evening comedy talk show circuit, was set to air a pre-recorded interview late Tuesday with Harris -- and in excerpts shared ahead of the broadcast she called Trump a "loser."

Trump "openly admires dictators and authoritarians," she said during a weighty section of what was, at times, a light-hearted conversation in which both host and interviewee sipped beer.

Floridians Flee Looming Catastrophe as Hurricane Milton Approaches



TAMPA (Dispatches) - Floridians on Wednesday had one final day to evacuate or hunker down ahead of the Category 5 Hurricane Milton, potentially one of the most destructive ever to hit the Gulf Coast of Florida.

With more than 1 million people in coastal areas under evacuation orders, those fleeing for higher ground clogged highways and gas stations ran out of fuel, further rattling a region still recovering from the devastating impacts of Hurricane Helene less than two weeks ago.

The storm was on a collision course for the Tampa Bay metropolitan area, home to more than 3 million people, though forecasters said the path could vary before the storm makes landfall late Wednesday night or early Thursday morning.

The storm is on a rare west-to-east path through the Gulf of Mexico and is likely to bring a deadly storm surge of 10 feet (3 meters) or more to much of Florida's Gulf Coast.

Officials from U.S. President Joe Biden to Tampa Mayor Jane Castor warned people in evacuation zones to get out or risk death.

Michael Tylenda, who was visiting his son in Tampa, said he was hearing that advice.

"If anybody knows anything about Florida, when you don't evacuate when you're ordered to, you can pretty much die," Tylenda said. "They've had a lot of people here stay at their homes and they end up drowning. It's just not worth it. You know, the house can be replaced. The stuff can be replaced. So it's just better to get out of town."

Hezbollah Targets Israeli Troops on Lebanese Border, Sirens in Northern Israel



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Hezbollah militants targeted Israeli soldiers near the Lebanese border village of Labbouneh with artillery shells and rockets on Wednesday, the group said in a statement, a day after Israel said it had killed two successors to Hezbollah's slain leader.

The group, which has been launching rockets against Israel for a year in parallel with the Gaza war and is now fighting it in ground clashes, said it had pushed the troops back.

The Israeli military said three of its troops were severely injured on Tuesday and Wednesday during combat in southern Lebanon. Sirens sounded in northern Israel on Wednesday morning, while Israel renewed bombing of Beirut's southern suburbs overnight.

The conflict in Lebanon has escalated dramatically in recent weeks as Israel carried out a string of assassinations of top Hezbollah leaders and launched ground operations into southern Lebanon that expanded further this week.

The bombardment has left more than 2,100 people dead in Lebanon, most of them in the last two weeks, and displaced roughly 1.2 million across the country.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday Israeli airstrikes had killed two successors to Hezbollah's slain leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, killed in an Israeli air attack on Beirut's southern suburbs on Sept. 27.

Netanyahu did not name them, but Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said Hashem Safieddine, the man expected to succeed Nasrallah, had probably been "eliminated". It was not clear whom Netanyahu meant by the second replacement.

Later, Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari said Israel knew Safieddine was in Hezbollah's intelligence headquarters when fighter jets bombed it last week and Safieddine's status was "being checked and when we know, we will inform the public."

Safieddine has not been heard from since that strike.

Hezbollah's deputy leader Naim Qassem said on Tuesday the group's capabilities were intact despite the "painful blows" inflicted by Israel's mounting military pressure.

Qassem said the group endorsed efforts by Lebanon's speaker of parliament to secure a ceasefire, and conspicuously left out an oft-repeated condition of the group - that a Gaza ceasefire would have to be reached before Hezbollah put down its arms.

Netanyahu's office declined to comment on Qassem's remarks.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told a briefing in Washington that Hezbollah had "changed their tune and want a ceasefire" because the group is "on the back foot and is getting battered" on the battlefield.

Hezbollah is the most formidably armed of Iran's proxy forces across the Middle East and has been acting in support of Palestinian militants fighting Israel in Gaza.

The heightened regional tensions kindled a year ago by Palestinian armed group Hamas' attack on Gaza on southern Israel have escalated to engulf Lebanon and prompt several direct confrontations between Israel and Iran.

On Oct. 1, Iran fired missiles at Israel. On Tuesday, Iran warned Israel not to follow through on threats of retaliation.

Its foreign minister said any attack on Iran's infrastructure would be avenged while a senior Iranian official told Persian Gulf states it would be "unacceptable" and would draw a response if they allowed their airspace to be used against Iran.

U.S. President Joe Biden is expected to hold a phone call with Netanyahu about any plans to strike Iran, Axios reported late on Tuesday, citing three U.S. officials.

"We want to use the call to try and shape the limitations of the Israeli retaliation," a U.S. official was quoted as saying by Axios.

Axios cited the U.S. official as saying that Washington wants to make sure Israel attacks targets in Iran that are significant without being disproportionate.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

Western powers are seeking a diplomatic solution, fearing the conflict could roil the wider, oil-producing Middle East, and draw in the United States.

Biggest Kashmir Party Opposed to India's Stripping of Region's Autonomy Wins Most Seats in Election

SRINAGAR (Dispatches) - Kashmir's biggest political party opposed to India's stripping of the region's semi-autonomy won the most seats in a local election, according to official data on Tuesday, following a vote seen as a referendum against the move by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government five years ago.

National Conference, or NC, won 42 seats, mainly from the Kashmir Valley, the heartland of the anti-India rebellion, according to the data. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party secured 29 seats, all from the Hindu-dominated areas of Jammu.

India's main opposition Congress party, which fought the election in alliance with the NC, succeeded in six constituencies.

"People have supported us more than our expectations. Now our efforts will be to prove that we are worth these votes," Omar Abdullah, the NC leader and the region's former chief minister who won from two seats, told reporters in the main city of Srinagar.

His father and president of the party, Farooq Abdullah, said that the mandate was to run the region without "police raj (rule)" and try freeing people from jails. "Media will be free," he said.

Late Tuesday, Modi in an address to his party workers in New Delhi said the peaceful election in the region was "the victory of the Indian Constitution and democracy."

"The people of Jammu and Kashmir gave the mandate to the NC alliance. I congratulate them too. If we look at the vote share percentage, BJP has emerged as the biggest party" in the region, he said.

The vote will allow Kashmir to have its own truncated government and a regional legislature, called an assembly, rather than being directly under



New Delhi's rule.

However, there will be a limited transition of power from New Delhi to the assembly as Kashmir will remain a "union territory" -- directly controlled by the federal government -- with India's Parliament as its main legislator. Kashmir's statehood must be restored for the new government to have powers similar to other states of India. But it will not have the special powers it enjoyed before the 2019 changes.

"People have given their mandate," Farooq Abdullah said. "They have proven that they don't accept the decision that was taken on August 5," he added referring to India's move in Aug. 2019.

Hundreds of the NC workers gathered outside counting centers and at the homes of the winning candidates to celebrate the party's victory. Waving the party flags, they danced and burst firecrackers while chanting pro-Kashmir and pro-party slogans.

It was the first such vote in a decade and the first since Modi's Hindu nationalist government scrapped the Muslim-majority region's long-held semi-autonomy in 2019.

The unprecedented move downgraded and divided the former state into two centrally governed union territories, Ladakh and Jammu-Kashmir. Both are ruled directly by New Delhi through its appointed administrators along with unelected bureaucrats and security setup. The move -- which largely resonated in India and among Modi supporters -- was mostly opposed in Kashmir as an assault on its identity and autonomy amid fears that it would pave the way for demographic changes in the region.

China Calls Trade Talks With U.S. Candid and Pragmatic

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The United States and China yesterday raised concerns about trade between the world's two biggest economies, with China's commerce minister urging Washington to lift sanctions on his country's firms "as soon as possible".

Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao's call with US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo was described by Beijing as "candid, in-depth and pragmatic".

It comes shortly after sharp U.S. tariff hikes on Chinese electric vehicles, EV batteries and solar cells took effect--with levies down the line on other products also recently finalised.

In addition, the United States is planning to ban the sale of connected vehicles incorporating Chinese and Russian technology, citing national security risks.

Washington has also restricted technology exports to China such as semiconductors and the machinery used to manufacture them.

On Tuesday, Wang "focused on expressing serious concerns about U.S. semiconductor policy on China and its restrictions on China's network-connected cars," said a statement from Beijing's commerce ministry.

Wang "stressed that it is particularly necessary to clarify national security boundaries in economic and trade fields".

That would allow for "maintaining the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains", the ministry said.



But a separate statement released by the U.S. Commerce Department said Raimondo had reiterated that U.S. national security is "not negotiable".

She pointed to the U.S. government's approach of being targeted with security policy "while leaving space for healthy trade and investment", the statement said.

Raimondo flagged ongoing concerns as well from U.S. businesses about China's "decreasing regulatory transparency", non-market policies and industrial overcapacity, the U.S. statement added.

Meanwhile, Beijing urged Washington "to attach importance to the specific concerns of Chinese companies, lift sanctions on Chinese companies as soon as possible, and improve the business environment for Chinese companies in the United States".

Recent tariff hikes targeting \$18 billion in Chinese goods came weeks before November's US presidential election, with both Democrats and Republicans pushing a hard line as competition between Washington and Beijing intensifies.

U.S. President Joe Biden has largely maintained tariffs imposed by former president Donald Trump, which impacted some \$300 billion in goods from China. The hikes this year affect earlier products and added ones.

The United States defends its restrictions on sensitive high-tech goods as aimed at limiting Chinese companies' access to cutting-edge equipment purchased abroad, particularly for military purposes.



Tiafoe Apologizes for Swearing at Umpire After Loss in Shanghai

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - Frances Tiafoe has apologised for his foul-mouthed tirade directed at a chair umpire after the American received a time violation and then lost to Roman Safiullin in the third round of the Shanghai Masters.

Unseeded Safiullin beat 13th seed Tiafoe 5-7 7-5 7-6(5) in a three-hour contest where the American initially lost his cool when he received a time violation while serving with the score tied at 5-5 during the final set tiebreak.

"No, no, I tossed the ball up... I was ready to serve. Dude, that's the rule," Tiafoe said repeatedly as he walked towards the net while trying to convince the Ecuadorian chair umpire Jimmy Pinoargote.

"I'm not buying it, it's the second serve," the umpire said in response, putting an end to the discussion by announcing "second serve" on the microphone. Tiafoe went on to lose the point and eventually the match.

After shaking Safiullin's hand at the net, Tiafoe directed his anger at Pinoargote, repeatedly hurling expletives at the umpire as he walked back to his seat, as the small crowd of fans who had stayed behind laughed at his antics.

The ATP did not immediately comment on the incident but the rule-book says the 26-year-old can expect to be fined, with the amount going up to \$60,000 for each violation at Masters 1000 tournaments.

Tiafoe later posted an apology on Instagram for the way he acted.

"That is not who I am and not how I ever want to treat people. I let my frustration in the heat of the moment get the best of me and I'm extremely disappointed with how I handled the situation," Tiafoe said. "That's not acceptable behavior and I want to apologize to the umpire, the tournament, and the fans."

Tiafoe, who is ranked number 17 in the world, had enjoyed some late-season form where he reached the finals of the Citi Open and the Cincinnati Open while he also advanced to the semi-finals of the U.S. Open. Meanwhile pursuing a 100th career title, Novak Djokovic had an easier time in his second match at the

Shanghai Masters in ousting Flavio Cobolli 6-1, 6-2.

Djokovic clinched the match with his 19th winner, placing a forehand behind the Italian who was racing back across the baseline after being pushed wide by the service.

The fourth-seeded Serb did not allow a break point in the third round, after previously being stretched to two tiebreakers and saving set points against Alex Michelsen of the United States.

"Cobolli was evidently exhausted after last night's match," Djokovic said of his opponent, who had advanced by beating three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka. "I think that has taken a toll, physically, on him today."

Djokovic, who has won four of his 99 titles in Shanghai, next faces 61st-ranked Safiullin who upset Tiafoe 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 (5).

Later, third-ranked Alexander Zverev also used expletives in an exchange with the umpire. A double bounce of the ball was correctly called when Zverev stretched to play a shot approaching the net.

Zverev converted his eighth match point to beat Tallon Griekspoor 7-6 (6), 2-6, 7-6 (5).

Stefanos Tsitsipas' rivalry with Daniil Medvedev will add another chapter after the Greek player beat Alexandre Muller 6-3, 7-5.

The 12th-ranked Tsitsipas and the Russian former U.S. Open champion will meet for a 14th time, and first in nearly a year. The fifth-ranked Medvedev has a commanding 9-4 lead in the head-to-head series, which has spilled over into a war of words off the court in the past.

"We've had some heated things on the court in the past, but I think those things have resolved themselves over time," Tsitsipas said.

No. 16-ranked Ben Shelton put away Roberto Carballes Baena 6-3, 6-4, firing eight aces and 24 winners to line up top seed Jannik Sinner in the fourth round.

Celtics Voted Massive Favorites to Repeat as NBA Champions



LONDON (Dispatches) - Cole Palmer has been named the 2023-24 England men's Player of the Year, the Football Association said.

Chelsea midfielder Palmer, 22, was voted Three Lions' fans' favourite player ahead of Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham, in second, and Arsenal forward Bukayo Saka — the winner of the previous two editions — in third.

Palmer made his England debut in a 2-0 home win over Malta in November 2023 and earned nine senior caps, including five appearances at Euro 2024, scoring twice in that period.

One of his goals came in July's final defeat to Spain in Berlin, after he set up Ollie Watkins for a late winner against the Netherlands in the semi-final.

Palmer, who has scored six goals in seven Premier League games this season, became the first Chelsea player to win the award since current England assistant coach Ashley Cole in 2010.

Celtics Voted Massive Favorites to Repeat as NBA Champions



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The NBA released its annual general manager survey Tuesday, and executives have a very clear favorite when it comes to which team will be lifting the Larry O'Brien Trophy this summer.

An overwhelming 83% of respondents think that the Boston Celtics will repeat and win the NBA Finals this season. The Celtics beat the Dallas Mavericks 4-1 in the Finals earlier this year, which marked the franchise's 18th championship. The Oklahoma City Thunder earned 13% of the vote in the survey, and the Mavericks earned 3%. By comparison, the Celtics and the Denver Nuggets split the vote last season at 33% each to lead the survey.

Naturally, the Celtics are favored to win the Eastern Conference, too. They earned 97% of the votes there, compared to just 53% last season. The New York Knicks finished in second in the voting, slightly ahead of the Philadelphia 76ers. In the West, the Oklahoma City Thunder were voted to finish first. The Minnesota Timberwolves, Denver Nuggets and Mavericks were close behind in that order.

Injuries and Retirements Rush Germany Into a New Phase of Post-Euro 2024 Rebuild



DUESSELDORF (Dispatches) - Florian Wirtz is only 21 and he's already one of the most experienced players in a new-look Germany team.

As Germany switches focus to the 2026 World Cup, injuries, retirements and a short-term focus on Euro 2024 have left it with a Nations League squad that lacks international experience but isn't especially young either.

Wirtz, the star attacking midfielder from Bayer Leverkusen, is the second youngest player in the squad but also the fifth most experienced player on 25 caps, as Germany prepares to play Bosnia-Herzegovina on Friday and the Netherlands on Monday.

None of the three goalkeepers in the squad — Oliver Baumann, Alexander Nübel and Oliver Blaswich — have ever played for Germany. With Barcelona's Marc-André ter Stegen injured for months to come, one of them will have to step up.

Iniesta Sheds Tears of Pride as He Announces Retirement at 40

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Former Barcelona and Spain midfielder Andres Iniesta announced his retirement on Tuesday after a glittering trophy-laden career spanning 24 years.

Iniesta, 40, was at the heart of the Spain and Barcelona midfield during a period of sustained success for both teams in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

"Please allow me to be a little emotional today," a tearful Iniesta, who most recently played for Emirates Club in the United Arab Emirates, told a press conference.

"I never thought this day would come. I never imagined it. Yes, all these tears we have shed these days are tears of emotion, of pride. They are not tears of sadness.

"They are tears of that boy from a small town like Fuentebilla, who had the dream of being a footballer and we achieved it after a lot of hard work, sacrifice... of never giving up, essential values in my life. I feel very proud of this path, with all the people who have accompanied me."

The technically-gifted Iniesta made 131 appearances for Spain, scoring the only goal of the 2010 World Cup final with a last-gasp strike to earn his country victory over the Netherlands as they lifted the global title for the first time.

He also played a key role in Spain winning the 2008 European Championship to snap a 44-year trophy drought and was named player of the tournament when they successfully defended the title in



2012.

Born in the tiny village of Fuentebilla, less than an hour's drive Southeast from capital Madrid, Iniesta joined Barcelona's La Masia youth academy at 12 years old and made 674 appearances for the Spanish side, captaining them for three seasons.

A year before becoming Spain's World Cup final hero, Iniesta worked his magic in a Champions League semi-final against Chelsea.

His brilliant shot deep in added time secured Barca a place in the final and they went on to lift the trophy, Pep Guardiola's first European Cup triumph as a coach.

Iniesta won nine LaLiga titles with Barca, four Champions League titles, six Copa del Rey crowns, two UEFA Super Cups and three FIFA Club World Cups, many of them alongside Xavi Hernandez, a rival for the accolade of being described as the best Spanish footballer of all time.

"One of the most magical teammates and one of those who I most enjoyed playing together, Andres Iniesta, the ball will miss you and so will we! I wish you all the best, you are a phenomenon," former Barcelona team mate Lionel Messi wrote on social media.

Runner-up for the 2010 Ballon d'Or behind Messi, Iniesta called time on his magnificent spells with Spain and Barcelona in 2018 and moved to Japan to play for Vissel Kobe.

Prolific Japan Set Sights on Saudi Arabia as Top Teams Clash

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Japan face second-placed Saudi Arabia in Group C of Asia's third round of World Cup preliminaries in Jeddah on Thursday looking to continue their prolific start as top-of-the-table clashes take center stage across the continent.

Hajime Moriyasu's Japan arrive in the Persian Gulf state having handed out thrashings to China and Bahrain, scoring 12 times in the previous window to sound a warning to the sides chasing one of two automatic World Cup berths available from Group C.

Australia, under new coach Tony Popovic, entertain China in Adelaide while Bahrain host Indonesia but all are in the shadow of a dominant Japan team that are already favourites to secure qualification for an eighth consecutive World Cup.

The top two finishers in each of Asia's three groups in this phase of the preliminaries secured direct passage to the finals while the third and fourth placed nations progress to a further round. Teams in the fifth and six spots are eliminated.

Moriyasu's Japan squad is largely unchanged for the meeting with the Saudis, who will be without Mohammed Kanno after the midfielder was sent off in their last-gasp 2-1 win over China in Dalian last month.

That victory, secured through a pair of headers from Hassan Kadesh, added some gloss to an uneven window for Roberto



Mancini's team and has left the Saudis two points adrift of Thursday's opponents Japan.

"As we've always done, we'll prepare the best we can to win each match," Moriyasu said. "The hardest thing is the battle against the heat. Whether we can perform to our level will be key."

South Korea will take on Group B leaders Jordan without their injured captain Son Heung-min with coach Hong Myung-bo aiming to build on a 3-1 win over Oman last month having seen his side draw 0-0 with Palestine in Seoul on Sept. 5.

Jordan, who beat the Koreans in the Asian Cup semi-finals in February, lead the standings on goal difference, with Iraq joining their fellow west Asians and South Korea on four points.

Jesus Casas' Iraq side will host Palestine in Basra with Oman, under new coach Rashid Jaber, taking on Kuwait, who drew their opening fixtures against Jordan and Iraq.

Group A leaders Uzbekistan face Iran in Tashkent with both teams on six points after their first two games to open up a three-point gap over the United Arab Emirates.

The Paulo Bento-coached Emiratis host North Korea while back-to-back Asian Cup winners Qatar will be looking for their first win when Kyrgyzstan visit Doha.