

Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Mohammadreza Farzin Held Talks With his Russian Counterpart Elvira Nabiullina in Moscow on the Sidelines of Meeting of Central Banks' Governors of BRICS Member States

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Telecoms Minister Sattar Hashemi Says That a New Administration That Was Appointed in the Country in Mid-Summer Is Determined to Ease Restrictions on the Internet

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## Iran's Retaliatory Missile Operation Only Mapping of Future Fatal Blows to Israel



TEHRAN (PressTV) - An advisor to the chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran's recent retaliatory missile attack against Israel was only the "mapping" of fatal blows that the Islamic Republic would deal to the occupying regime in the future.

Brigadier General Ebrahim Jabbari made the remarks, more than a week after Iran carried out Operation True Promise 2 in response to Israel's barbaric acts of assassination against the resistance front's top leaders.

During the operation, Iran launched some 200 high-speed ballistic missiles at the Zionist entity's military, espionage and intelligence bases, sending almost 10 million settlers into bomb shelters.

"Operation True Promise 2 was the mapping of the fatal blows that we will later deal to them," Jabbari said.

The cyber attacks that Iran conducted prior to the operation helped 90 percent of the fired Iranian missiles hit their targets precisely, he noted.

The Americans and Israelis were terribly surprised by the attack, which targeted the hangar of F-35 fighter jets and a military base in the occupied territories.

The IRGC commander also said that foreign media admitted that Iran's operation shattered the myth of Israel's Iron Dome and proved that it was an "iron sieve system."

Since early October 2023, Israel has been waging brutal two-front aggression that has killed at least 42,010 people in the Gaza Strip and 2,141 others in Lebanon so far.

Over the same period, the usurping regime has also assassinated several resistance leaders, including Hamas's political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

In support of Palestinians in Gaza, resistance groups have launched retaliatory attacks on Israeli targets and vowed to keep fighting until the Gaza onslaught ends.

Jabbari said Israel is now in a weak social, political and military position and thus behaves like a rabid dog, adding, however, "Iran and the Resistance Front know how to treat this rabid dog."

"In the past year, the criminal Zionists did nothing but martyred 40,000 to 50,000 innocent people, while the power of the Axis of Resistance and Hamas has increased," he emphasized.

Touching on the Tel Aviv regime's potential strikes on Iran, the commander said "Israelis are afraid of a war with us and Americans, too, are more afraid than them (Israelis)."

## FM Urges Collective Efforts to Stop Israel in Letter to Counterparts



TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has called for collective diplomatic efforts to stop the Israeli regime's atrocities against the innocent people of Gaza and Lebanon, secure a ceasefire and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Araqchi made the comment in letters he sent to his counterparts around the world on Thursday.

He pointed to the ongoing Israeli brutalities against ordinary people in Gaza and Lebanon, which have resulted in the death, injury and displacement of a large number of innocent individuals as well as international aid workers, and large-scale destruction of residential and public buildings.

The top Iranian diplomat stated that the criminal actions of the Zionist regime pose a serious threat to regional and global peace, and represent a clear example of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

"The unlimited impunity the Israeli regime enjoys has prompted it to expand the scope of its attacks on Lebanon, and specifically launch massive airstrikes on residential areas using US-made bunker busters," Araqchi wrote, noting that the failure of the UN Security Council to fulfill its duties has emboldened the warmongering leaders of the Zionist entity to continue their crimes



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

## Pezeshkian, Putin Hail Strategic Ties Between Iran and Russia

TEHRAN - President Vladimir Putin has told his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian that relations with Iran are a priority for Russia and these relations are developing successfully.

The two presidents met on the sidelines of a forum in Turkmenistan's capital of Ashgabat on Friday, where Putin said the positions of Tehran and Moscow regarding international developments are very close.

"Moscow and Tehran actively cooperate with each other in the international arena and often agree on their assessments of world events," the Russian leader said.

"This year, we are witnessing an increase in the volume of trade between the two countries and its good trend," Russian media quoted him as saying.

Pezeshkian said Iran's relationship with Russia is "sincere and strategic". "From the economic and cultural point of view, our relations are getting stronger day by day," he said.

"The growing process of cooperation between Iran and Russia should be accelerated according to the will of the supreme leaders of the two countries and the need to strengthen these relations." Iran and Russia, Pezeshkian said, have good complementary capacities that they can use to help each other.

"Our positions in the world are much closer to each other than other countries," he added.

The Iranian president touched on a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement between Iran and Russia, hoping they will speed up the signing of the document.

"I hope we will finalize this agreement during the BRICS summit" in the Russian city of Kazan this month, he added.

The summit of emerging economies starts on October 22, with the leaders of 24 countries expected to attend it, including China's Xi Jinping and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

President Pezeshkian also touched on the developments in the region, including the Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian and Lebanese people.

"The Zionist regime does not respect any international legal and humanitarian framework, and the situation in the region is critical," he said.

Meanwhile, European and American countries do not want relations between the regional countries to continue on a peaceful footing, Pezeshkian added.

The conference in Ashgabat was attended by other regional leaders including Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and the heads of the other Central Asian nations, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Speaking at the forum opened, Putin said the countries want to create a "new world order" to counter the West.

Meanwhile later, Pezeshkian emphasized the need for introducing the common literary treasures and outstanding figures between Iran and the Republic of Turkmenistan.

Speaking at the commemoration ceremony of 300th anniversary of the birth of 18th-century renowned Iranian-Turkmen poet and scholar Magtymguly Pyragy in Ashgabat, President Pezeshkian stated, "Many of our language dialects are indebted to the unflinching efforts of the great poets such as Magtymguly Pyragy."

Just as the Persian language owes to the renowned poet Ferdowsi, the Turkmen language and literature also owes to Magtymguly Pyragy, he said, adding that paying attention to spirituality, morality, justice and freedom, along with the correct understanding of the Islamic concepts, is a manifestation of thoughts of this great mystic.

Divan of poems and precious works left by Magtymguly Pyragy show moral, political, social and cultural themes and taking distance from spirituality has created many problems for countries in contemporary world of today, the president emphasized.

It is hoped that an important step will be taken in introducing literary treasures and literary treasures by strengthening and developing cultural cooperation and holding similar ceremonies, he underlined.

## Israel Commits Barbaric Atrocities in Lebanon With Impunity, Military Support

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian diplomat says impunity, along with military and political support for Israel, has emboldened the regime to repeat its "barbaric atrocities" in its massive invasion of Lebanon amid the continuation of the catastrophic situation in Gaza.

The impunity, military and political support have "enabled the criminal regime of Israel to launch a massive invasion of Lebanon with an intention to repeat its barbaric atrocities," said Hadi Farajvand, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, in an address to the 107th session of the OPCW Executive Council.

"The catastrophic situation in Gaza and Lebanon continues amid genocide, displacement of people and destruction of civilian and humanitarian infrastructures," he added. He noted that the world is today witnessing heavy bombardment of densely-populated areas, displacement of people and inability of the international community to stop inhumanity.

Pointing to Israel's repeated violations of international law, the Iranian diplomat emphasized that the regime has targeted civilians and residential areas with white phosphorus and other prohibited munitions.

According to confirmed reports, he said, Israel has once again used chemical weapons in its latest attacks in Lebanon which targeted the headquarters of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah.

He called on the OPCW to use its expertise and closely monitor and investigate the serious matter thoroughly.

"Israeli's Chemical Weapons as well as other Weapons of Mass Destruction pose a major threat to international peace and security," Farajvand emphasized.

Israel is estimated to possess 200 to 400 nuclear warheads in its arsenal, making it the sole possessor of non-conventional arms in West Asia.

It has refused to either allow inspections of its nuclear facilities or sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The Iranian ambassador said that the CWC will fail to achieve its ultimate goal of a "world

free from the use or threat of the use of Chemical weapons", unless it accomplishes its universal adherence by those who still stay outside the Convention.

"Our concern becomes more serious when we know that some of these non-parties, particularly Israeli regime, have extensive programs to produce and use chemical weapons," he warned.

Pointing to the latest developments in Syria, Farajvand added that Iran

encourages dialogue and cooperation within a mutually agreed framework, as the "most effective way to resolve any remaining issues" related to the Arab country.

Iran believes that consultation and consensus on all important issues and decisions of the Organization play "a pivotal role in the success and sustainability of all international disarmament agreements and it may not be ignored for short-sighted political gains," he said.

He encouraged all State Parties to preserve the Organization's technical nature and work in close collaboration for the implementation of the Convention to enjoy the intended benefits of adhering to the Convention.

"The policy of blockade and restriction is contrary to the letter and spirit of the Convention. Imposing illegal sanctions, which impede provision of medicine and medical supplies for treatment of chemical weapons victims, is also a serious violation of human rights," he pointed out.

He added that the Organization and State Parties shoulder the responsibilities of taking concrete measures to address the needs of the victims of chemical weapons.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, like many other States Parties, expects the [OPCW's] Centre for Chemistry and Technology to prioritize International cooperation and assistance in its activities, provide capacity-building programs, and promote scientific and academic partnerships," Farajvand emphasized.

He said Iran throws its weight behind new initiatives to study and analyze the impacts and implications of artificial intelligence for the implementation of the Convention and the work of the Organization.

## Iran Calls on UNSC to Condemn Israeli War Crimes



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's representative to the United Nations has criticized the Security Council for failing to hold Israel and its allies accountable for the crimes they commit against civilians in Lebanon and Gaza.

During an emergency Security Council meeting on Lebanon on Thursday, Amir Saeed Iravani said Israel has crossed every red line and flagrantly violated international law.

"The deliberate targeting of civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure is far more than a violation of international law; it is a flagrant war crime, a crime against humanity, and genocide," he said.

"It has destroyed vital infrastructure, slaughtered innocent civilians, and driven Lebanon further into an escalating humanitarian catastrophe. The regime has crossed every red line, showing complete disregard for international law," he stated.

He condemned Israel's deliberate attacks on Lebanese civilians and infrastructure, stating that these actions have driven the country into an escalating humanitarian catastrophe.

Iravani described Lebanon's people as victims of Israel's systematic campaign of terror aimed at crippling the nation.

He warned that the regime's actions pose a serious threat to international peace and risk igniting a full-scale regional war.

Iravani further stated that Israel assassinated resistance leaders to derail efforts toward a ceasefire.

"We extend our deepest sympathy and unwavering solidarity to the government and people of Lebanon who are enduring relentless acts of aggression and war crimes, by the most notorious terrorist regime in the world," Iravani said.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran stands firmly with Lebanon, fully committed to supporting its government, people, and resistance," he stated.

He slammed the regime's allies, particularly the US, for not only shielding Israel from accountability but also normalizing its atrocities.

## Regional States to Use All Capacities to End Israeli War Against Palestine, Lebanon



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has called on regional countries to exhaust all their capacities towards bringing an end to Israel's genocide against the Palestinian and Lebanese nations.

He made the remarks during a meeting with Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in Doha on Thursday, as more than a year of Israeli aggression has killed tens of thousands of people in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

Araqchi reviewed the efforts made by Tehran and Doha to stop the occupying regime's war on Gaza and Lebanon and appreciated Qatar's constructive role in this regard.

The Zionist regime's warmongering is the main cause of insecurity and instability in West Asia, he said, demanding the use of all capacities in the region to end the war and prevent the continuation of genocide and destruction of infrastructure in Lebanon and Palestine.

The top Iranian diplomat also described relations with Qatar as brotherly and advancing, urging the implementation of the agreements signed previously between the two countries.

He also emphasized that the Iranian government has prioritized the policy of good neighborliness and comprehensive expansion of ties with its neighbors with the goal of achieving regional peace, stability, security, as well as development and prosperity.

Sheikh Mohammed, for his part, stressed the expansion of close and friendly relations between Qatar and the Islamic Republic.

He further called for regional cooperation in order to stop the Zionist regime's war and crimes, ensure lasting stability and security in West Asia, and help the people of Palestine and Lebanon.

# IRAN NEWS



## Increase in Transit Exchange Between Iran and Turkmenistan to 400 Wagons

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Following previous virtual meetings and a border meeting in Sarakhs, Iran, between representatives of the railways of Iran and Turkmenistan, the railway deputies of both countries held an online virtual meeting on Monday, October 7th. The meeting was held with the aim of organizing train operations, speeding up, and increasing the exchange of trains through the Sarakhs railway border.

Mohammad Hadi Ziaei Mehr, Deputy of Commercial and Operations at the Railway Company, referred to the increase in freight transportation with Turkmenistan during the current calendar year. He proposed increasing the exchange of trains to 400 wagons per day, which was agreed upon by Turkmenistan.

## Task Force for Monitoring Iran-Uzbekistan Trade Agreements to Be Established



TEHRAN - A task force will be formed to monitor the trade agreements between Iran and Uzbekistan, following a review of the recent visit by an Iranian trade delegation to Uzbekistan. The decision was made during a meeting led by Sammad Hassanzadeh, president of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, and attended by members of the delegation. The task force will be overseen by the Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Chamber and the International Affairs Department of the Iran Chamber.

Hassanzadeh highlighted the potential for expanding trade relations between the two countries and presented a report on the discussions held with Uzbek officials. The report, which was shared with the Governor of the Central Bank, the Minister of Industry, Mining, and Trade, and the Minister of Economy, outlined steps to enhance collaboration between the private sectors of both nations.

According to Hassanzadeh, the government has expressed its support for the initiatives, allowing the private sector to strategize joint trade and investment activities in Uzbekistan.

Hamed Asgari, the Deputy of International Affairs for the Iran Chamber, stressed the importance of holding preparatory and follow-up meetings for trade delegations visiting target countries. He emphasized that the results of these trips should be reflected in Iran's trade balance and suggested that delegation members share their achievements and insights with others interested in similar ventures.

Before the departure of any delegation, Asgari recommended holding introductory meetings among its members to ensure familiarity with each other's work and to conduct assessments of the target country's potential, which would lead to a more focused and productive trip.

During the session, the trade delegation discussed the opportunities for Iranian companies to participate in technical and engineering service projects in Uzbekistan. It was agreed that information on investment-ready projects in Tashkent would be exchanged between companies and the Iran Chamber. There was also a focus on organizing exhibitions centered on joint project development, particularly the creation of a new city in Tashkent, which presents significant investment opportunities for Iranian businesses.

The delegation also addressed challenges in Iran's economy that are limiting the country's international relations. One suggestion was to form joint venture companies and focus on the transportation sector, which is seen as a major barrier to accessing the Uzbek market.

Bukhara was identified as a potential hub for Iranian trade and investment activities in Uzbekistan. Additionally, Uzbek officials suggested that Iranian companies could begin operations in the country by transferring just 20% of their production processes.

At the conclusion of the meeting, it was agreed to establish the task force to ensure that the negotiations and agreements made during the visit to Uzbekistan are effectively followed up.

The trade delegation, led by Sammad Hassanzadeh, visited Tashkent and the Khwarazm Province from September 18 to 22, aiming to foster greater trade cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan at the invitation of the Uzbek embassy.

## Iran, Oman Hold Joint Ground, Naval Drills



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The ground and naval forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as the Army and Navy of Oman have held two separate joint military exercises.

According to a report from the Iranian Army's public relations, Commander of Iran's Army Ground Force Brigadier General Kioumars Heidari stated that at the request and invitation of the Omani Army for holding an anti-terrorism exercise, the first joint and combined exercise of the Ground Forces of Iran and Oman was carried out with a focus on countering regional terrorism, establishing sustainable security, urban warfare, and exchanging and transferring experiences between the two states.

He added that the two-day ground exercise, held in Oman, involved rapid reaction units and the 65th Airborne Special Forces Brigade of Iran, supported by the Omani Air Force and police.

In the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Hormuz, a joint maritime rescue exercise was held with the participation of combat vessels from the Islamic Republic of Iran's Navy and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), as well as surface and aerial combat units of Royal Navy of Oman.

Iran-made Jamaran destroyer and Zereh (Armor) missile-launching ship were used during the exercises.

IRANNEWS/NATIONAL DESK

## Gov't Urged to Remove Barriers From the Path of Tourism Industry Activists

TEHRAN - Several activists in the fields of cultural heritage, handicrafts, and tourism voiced their demands and concerns to Massoud Pezeshkian, the President of Iran, during a ceremony unveiling the Achaemenid inscriptions. Although this event was lacking in the presence of restorers, archaeologists, and architects, the majority of the time was allocated to private sector representatives in the tourism industry.

The tourism industry does not need government help; remove barriers from the path of industry activists

"Horamattollah Rafiei," the president of the Association of Air Travel and Tourism Offices of Iran, stated: "Tourism does not ask anything from the government; it just wants the barriers that are unjustly placed on its shoulders to be removed."

He mentioned that one of the issues and barriers in this sector is the unjust tax imposed on tourists. "Why is the air travel industry not exempt from taxes? Right now, they say that due to delays and the shutdown of flight routes, you should refund people's money. We have no problem with that, but is it our product that we should pay back? We are not the owners of the product; hoteliers and airlines are the ones who should refund people's money."

He pointed out the additional pressures from tax authorities on private sector tourism activists, declaring: "Taxes have been unjustly placed on the tourism industry, while the private sector in Iran's tourism industry does not demand any facilities, advantages, or exemptions from the government. Its only request is to have a clear and transparent framework for taxation on tourism industry activists."

Referring to the Value Added Tax (VAT) imposed on tourism industry activists, he noted: "They say you must pay VAT. However, for instance, a passenger on the Tehran-Vancouver route is only in Iranian airspace for 40 minutes, and the rest of the time is not within Iran's space, while transportation is exempt from tax. Nevertheless, they insist that VAT must be paid on air transportation."

Rafiei criticized the exit tax imposed on travelers and tourists, stating: "Unfortunately, members of Parliament have proposed the strange idea of charging 10 euros for each departing passenger against the interests of the people. We should ask these representatives why they have suggested 10 euros? Isn't the country's currency rial and toman? Why then have they based their proposal on euros? What reason is there to charge 10 euros more from outbound passengers and tourists in this country? These are the main problems of the tourism industry that have led to increased travel costs."

He also criticized the circulars issued in recent days and the cancellation of flights in the country, stating: "Airports in Iran have been closed for days, and ineffective circulars are being issued requiring travel agencies to refund people's money. Of course, this money must be refunded, but are travel agencies the owners of the flights or hotels? Accommodation centers and airplanes are not connected to travel agencies, and they themselves must pay the passengers whose trips they have canceled; they do not pay the agencies, causing problems for the agencies and the public."

The tourism industry does not need government help; remove barriers from

the path of industry activists

In another part of the meeting, the representative of the handicrafts sector, Soheila Safarzadeh, who was said to be an entrepreneur in handicrafts, introduced herself as an activist in Quranic and social fields and had no demands other than more attention to the handicrafts sector. She concluded her remarks with the statement that we have problems in exporting handicrafts, and if special attention is given to exports, we can significantly contribute to the economy of this land.

She stated: "In recent years, the attention given to handicrafts has been minimal, whereas with the right approach and support for handicrafts, we can change Iran's economy and global market in our favor and become less dependent on oil exports."

This handicrafts activist also pointed to the weak management of the handicraft sector and added: "Currently, there are problems in this field, one of which is the very weak management of handicrafts. Therefore, we ask the President to support the insurance and fund for artists, considering the added value of handicrafts."

She urged the President to swear by the mothers of the land of Iran that if attention is given to handicrafts, economic prosperity will follow.

Jamshid Hamzeh Zadeh, the president of the country's hoteliers' community, was another speaker at the meeting. He stated: "The tourism industry needs government support and requires the efforts of the 14th government. Defining incentive packages and government support for this industry is crucial. In this regard, issues related to taxes and providing low-interest facilities play a very significant role in solving problems."

Hamzeh Zadeh announced: "One of the very good actions taken by the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts was the formation of a strategic council with the presence of elites and veterans from all three areas. I hope the government supports this strategic council, and the issues raised in these meetings are adopted as resolutions in the High Council for Cultural Heritage."

He stated: "I request that the High Council for Cultural Heritage and Tourism be formed to lead to resolutions aimed at solving existing problems. If we want to build a hundred hotels a year, the government must provide serious support for investors, and we need national consensus. These cannot be realized without government support. Defining supportive packages and incentives is also crucial. Among the supportive incentives that will help us achieve the goals of the Seventh Development Plan is providing facilities to tourism investors."

He presented the demands of the hoteliers' guild as follows: "A 7% subsidy from state facilities, increasing bank participation with a ten-year repayment period for loans, allocating 35 trillion tomans for building new hotels, with 10 trillion tomans designated for the renovation and restoration of old hotels; as well as granting a ten-year tax exemption to hoteliers are among our demands."

Hamzeh Zadeh stated: "Government guesthouses are competitors to the private sector. We ask the government to privatize these centers and prevent new accommodation units from being constructed by government institutions."

## Afghan Migration from Chabahar to Central Iran



TEHRAN - Majid Kuch Rezai, Secretary of the Zahedan Union of Real Estate Advisors, in an interview with ILNA, discussed the sale of real estate to Afghan nationals, especially in the Chabahar region. He stated that buying and selling property for Afghan nationals and any foreign nationals is prohibited and does not take place. Any transaction that occurs is invalid and will not be registered.

He emphasized that if Afghans do enter into a deal, the transaction is conducted in the name of an Iranian citizen, and the deed is registered under an Iranian's name. Neither the notary offices nor real estate agents will register an official and definitive deed in the name of a foreign national.

Rezai also referred to Afghans purchasing land and property through the registration of commercial companies, saying that foreign nationals do not easily have the ability to register companies. Only traders can register companies, and those traders must meet certain identity and other criteria. Any Afghan who is not a trader or investor and cannot obtain residency in the border province due to increased restrictions will definitely not be able to register a company.

Rezai added that Afghans who seek to rent housing must go through the legal process. If they have passports and residence permits, the Bureau for Foreign Nationals Affairs will grant them a permit to rent. With this permit, they can legally go to real estate agents and sign a rental contract for the duration specified in their permit from the

Bureau.

Referring to underground contracts with illegal Afghan immigrants, he said: "Beyond the legal process, we are witnessing secret and underground contracts where Afghans rent housing. In these cases, the rental contract is registered in the name of an Iranian, but the Afghans live in the property and pay the rent. Typically, Afghans form friendships with Iranians and can rent homes in their names. This applies not only to residential properties but also to commercial and office properties."

Rezai stressed that the primary route of Afghan entry into Iran is through Chabahar, which is why their stay in Chabahar is short-term, and if they do reside there, it is illegal. Most Afghans entering Sistan and Baluchestan province do not settle there and quickly migrate from this border province to central regions of the country. Afghans who have long-term residency in cities in this province, especially Chabahar, rent homes. However, we are currently witnessing a departure of Afghans from Sistan and Baluchestan to central provinces of Iran.

He continued by stating that Afghan traders remain in Chabahar and, after obtaining residence permits, rent properties in affluent areas of the city. However, even these Afghans cannot buy land or property, and no deed is registered in their name.

## Qeshm: Gateway to Iran's Civilization



TEHRAN - The National Tourism Industry Seminar titled "Hamsengar Qeshm Island" was held this morning at the House of Humanities Scholars.

During the seminar, Edris Ramouz (Deputy for Culture, Social Affairs, and Tourism of the Qeshm Free Zone) stated that Qeshm Island not only has a rich cultural and historical background but has also served as a gateway to Iran's civilization during various historical periods. He further announced the launch of a sea route connecting Bandar Kong, Qeshm, and Oman.

Ramouz emphasized that this national seminar aimed to develop relationships and projects based on Qeshm's cultural and tourism assets. He highlighted Qeshm's cultural significance in Iran and stressed the importance of this perspective in executing future projects. As a symbol of peace, the mangrove tree (Harra) was used in the design of the seminar's poster, drawing inspiration from a 4th-century world map that depicted Qeshm as a cultural gateway facilitating exchanges between different countries.

Ramouz also mentioned that dhow-building knowledge, which is on the list of endangered cultural heritage, is set to be revived in collaboration with the Supreme Council of the Seas. Negotiations with the Omani ambassador have been conducted to establish the sea route between Bandar Kong, Qeshm, and Oman, further promoting the traditional craft of dhow-building.

He stressed that such events offer significant opportunities for developing identity-driven tourism in Iran. Ramouz stated that tourism plays a vital role in fostering cultural exchanges and strengthening national images. The seminar invited ambassadors from various countries to highlight how Qeshm has historically engaged in diverse exchanges, particularly maritime. The aim is to showcase Qeshm's cultural diplomacy and its investment potential.

Ramouz also noted the importance of foreign investment and mentioned that due to sanctions, attracting foreign investors is challenging, leading to a greater focus on domestic investment.

He emphasized that Qeshm is more than just a destination for leisure and fun—it holds historical, health, and geotourism significance. Through branding, the perception of Qeshm as a unique destination can be transformed.

Ramouz also introduced the concept of "Qeshm House," a project aimed at promoting Qeshm's lifestyle and cultural experiences in other provinces. He responded to criticism about the lack of quality tourism facilities in Qeshm, acknowledging the need for improvements and announcing plans to build four- and five-star hotels and a beach resort within 15 months.

He also discussed improving local transportation and infrastructure on the island, including the revival of taxi services and upgrading the roads.

In response to concerns about "mass tourism," Ramouz confirmed that large numbers of tourists are unsustainable for Qeshm, noting that each "mass tourist" incurs a cost of 130,000 toman. He stressed the need for more time to shift the island's image towards sustainable and ecotourism.

Finally, Ramouz highlighted the upcoming "Hamsengar Qeshm Island" seminar, which will be held on October 16-17 with the participation of ambassadors from countries such as the UAE, Qatar, Oman, China, India, Tanzania, Portugal, Belarus, and Italy.

## Qalibaf Meets Tajikistan's President, Parliament Speaker



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has met with Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon and Chairman of the National Assembly Rustam Emomali in Dushanbe.

Qalibaf held talks with President Rahman after holding talks on a number of bilateral and regional issues with his Tajik counterpart Emomali.

In his meeting, the top Iranian parliamentarian, referring to the great capabilities and capacities of the two countries, said that the enhancement relations and implementation of 50-year cooperation document are important steps for boosting bilateral economic and commercial ties.

# Hurricane Milton Leaves at Least 10 Dead

FLORIDA (Dispatches) - Hurricane Milton plowed into the Atlantic Ocean y after cutting a destructive path across Florida that spawned tornados, killed at least 10 people and left millions without power. Still, the storm did not trigger the catastrophic surge of seawater that was feared.

Governor Ron DeSantis said the state had avoided the "worst-case scenario," though he cautioned the damage was still significant and flooding remained a concern.

The Tampa Bay area appeared to sidestep the storm surge that had prompted the most dire warnings, though the barrier islands along the shore south of the city endured extensive flooding.

US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said at a White House briefing that there were reports of 10 deaths thus far, adding it appeared tornados caused them. At least 27 twisters touched down in Florida, he said.

In St. Lucie County on Florida's east coast, a spate of tornados killed five people, including at least two in the senior-living Spanish Lakes communities, county spokesperson Erick Gill said.



## Japan PM Presses China's Li On Airspace Intrusion



VIENTIANE (Dispatches)- Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba called for a "full explanation" of an airspace intrusion by a Chinese military aircraft in his first face-to-face meeting with Premier Li Qiang, Tokyo said Friday.

"Prime Minister Ishiba reiterated Japan's serious concerns about the situation in the East China Sea, including... the intensification of Chinese military activities in areas surrounding Japan," Japan's foreign ministry said after Thursday's meeting on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Laos.

In particular, Ishiba said he wanted "a full explanation of the intrusion into Japan's territorial airspace" by a Chinese military aircraft in August.

Ishiba, on his first official trip abroad since taking office last week, also highlighted the passage of China's Liaoning aircraft carrier between two Japanese islands near Taiwan for the first time last month.

Soon afterwards, a Japanese warship sailed through the Taiwan Strait for the first time, drawing an angry response from Beijing.

Ishiba, 67, also urged China to ensure the safety of Japanese nationals after the fatal stabbing of a Japanese schoolboy in Shenzhen last month, and other recent incidents.

He also "expressed Japan's serious concerns about the situations in the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and others", and stressed the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

But Ishiba and Li agreed on the need for "constructive and stable" ties and said they would "maintain multi-layered communications between Japan and China at all levels, including at the summit level".

## Lithuania to Pick New Parliament in Election



VILNIUS (Dispatches) - Lithuanians are expected to punish the center-right government of Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte in Sunday's national election over soaring living costs while reaffirming their support for high defense spending to counter potential threats from Russia.

Opinion polls show the main opposition Social Democrats led by Vilija Blinkeviciute ahead in the race with about 18% support, while Simonyte's Homeland Union is placed third with 9%, behind the anti-establishment Nemunas Dawn party on 12%.

A former finance minister and fiscal hawk, Simonyte has built a broad consensus in the Baltic nation of 2.9 million over the need to raise military spending following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, doubling the size of the defence budget.

But with inflation topping 20% two years ago, then-second highest in the euro zone after neighbouring Latvia, cost of living concerns and a widening gap between haves and have-nots have weighed heavily on her popularity.

"After four years in power, you always have some, you know, challenges. Especially in Lithuania, where there's a tradition of power changing after elections," Laurynas Kasčiunas, Homeland Union's deputy leader, told Reuters.

The Social Democrats also support higher defence spending, the party's deputy leader Gintautas Paluckas said, suggesting it could rise further to 5% of national output from over 3% this year as Lithuania upgrades its armed forces and builds a new base for 5,000 combat-ready German troops due to open in 2027.

# Israeli Continues Genocide in Beirut as Hezbollah Official Evades Assassination



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Israeli strikes killed 22 people and injured more than 100 in central Beirut on Thursday, Lebanese authorities said, as a senior Hezbollah official evaded an Israeli assassination attempt in the city, according to three security sources.

In Lebanon's south, two United Nations peacekeepers were injured when an Israeli tank fired at a watchtower at the force's main headquarters in Naqoura, prompting the U.N. to say its personnel were facing increasing danger.

The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah erupted one year ago when the Iranian-backed group opened fire in support of Palestinian militant group Hamas at the start of the Gaza war.

It has intensified dramatically in recent weeks, with Israel bombing Beirut's southern suburbs, the south and the Bekaa Valley, and killing many of Hezbollah's top leaders.

Wafiq Safa, who heads Hezbollah's liaison and coordination unit responsible for working with Lebanese security agencies, was targeted by Israel on Thursday night but survived, the security sources said.

The Israeli strikes hit a densely packed residential neighbourhood of apartment buildings and small shops in the heart of Beirut.

"I was praying. We heard the first strike and I thought it was in my house. The second one was much more powerful than the first one," said Ala'a Baydoun, a resident whose house was damaged. "I went to see where the strike was and I saw that in my house, the glass and windows had shattered. We came and saw this scene. It was a horrifying scene, it was something unbelievable."

Israel did not issue evacuation warnings ahead of the strikes and had not previously attacked the area, which is removed from Beirut's southern suburbs where Hezbollah's headquarters have been repeatedly bombed by Israel.

Lebanon's Health Ministry reported 22 people killed and 117 wounded. Among the dead was a family of eight, including three children, who had evacuated from the south, according to a security source.

Israeli strikes have killed at least 2,169 people in Lebanon over the last year, the Lebanese government said in its daily update. The majority have been killed since Sept. 23, when Israel expanded its military campaign. The toll does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

The attempt to kill Safa, whose role merges security and political affairs, marked a widening of Israel's targets among

Hezbollah officials, which previously focused on the group's military commanders and top leaders.

There was no immediate comment on the incident by Israel or by Hezbollah.

Lebanese authorities and Hezbollah have both endorsed a ceasefire as a means to end the conflict, but diplomats fear that diplomacy has taken a back seat to military operations.

Lebanon's acting U.N. Ambassador Hadi Hachem told the council that "only diplomatic solutions and the implementation of international resolutions, the commitment to international law and international humanitarian law is the means to end this war and this aggression."

Israel did say it had killed Muhammad Abdullah, the head of the Islamic Jihad's network in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nur Shams in the West Bank. The Palestinian health ministry said on Friday that two people were killed in an Israeli strike on Nur Shams.

Abdullah, who Israel said had been involved in a number of attacks against its soldiers, was killed along with another "terrorist" in a strike near Tulkarm, the military and security agency said in a statement on Friday.

The United Nations' peacekeeping force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, said two of its personnel were injured when an Israeli tank fired at a watchtower on Thursday at its main headquarters in Naqoura, hitting the tower and causing the peacekeepers to fall.

The two peacekeepers were from Indonesia's contingent and were in good condition after being treated for light injuries, Indonesia Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said in a statement.

The safety of more than 10,400 U.N. peacekeepers in Lebanon is "increasingly in jeopardy" and operations have virtually halted since late September, U.N. peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix told the Security Council. That coincides with Israel's escalation of its conflict with Lebanon.

UNIFIL called attacks on peacekeepers "a grave violation of international humanitarian law."

The White House said the U.S. was deeply concerned by reports that Israeli forces fired on U.N. positions and was pressing Israel for details.

Israel's military said in a statement its troops operated in the Naqoura area, "next to a UNIFIL base."

The peacekeepers are determined to remain at their posts despite Israeli attacks and orders by Israel's military to leave, the force's spokesperson Andrea Tenenti said.

# Obama Lashes Out at Crazy Trump in First Rally for Harris

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Former U.S. President Barack Obama lashed out at "crazy" Donald Trump Thursday and urged voters to back Kamala Harris as he brought his star power to the 2024 election campaign trail for the first time.

As he hit the stump in the must-win state of Pennsylvania, Obama also chided Black male voters for what he called hesitancy in supporting Democrat Harris because they "just aren't feeling the idea of having a woman as president."

Obama trained his fire on Trump during a pumped-up rally in Pittsburgh, comparing the Republican's long speeches to late Cuban communist leader Fidel Castro's and calling the billionaire out of touch with ordinary people.

America's first Black president admitted that "this election's going to be tight" as many voters were still struggling with high prices.

But he told the crowd that "what I cannot understand is why anybody would think that Donald Trump will shake things up", adding: "You think Donald Trump ever changed a diaper?"

The popular Democrat called Trump's schemes to sell bibles as "crazy" and used the same word to describe the 78-year-old former president's embrace of conspiracy theories.

As the crowd booed Trump, his successor in the White House, Obama added: "Don't boo - vote."

"Kamala is as prepared for the job as any nominee for president has ever been," he added.

Vice president Harris's campaign said Obama's appearance, the first in a series in battleground states before the November 5 election, was designed to get people out to vote in crucial Pennsylvania.

Obama took aim at male voters who might be attracted by the Republican's appeals towards machismo.

"I'm sorry gentlemen, I've noticed this, especially with some men who seem to think Trump's behavior, the bullying and the putting people down, is a sign of strength," he said.

"And I am here to tell you that is not what real strength is."

Earlier, in a surprise stop before the rally at a campaign field office in Pittsburgh, Obama made an unusually direct appeal to Black men, whose support polls show Harris has struggled to mobilise.



Saying he had some "truths" that he wanted the Black community to hear, Obama said that "you're coming up with all kinds of reasons and excuses, I've got a problem with that."

"Because part of it makes me think -- and I'm speaking to men directly -- part of it makes me think that, well, you just aren't feeling the idea of having a woman as president."

Harris was in battleground Nevada for a town hall hosted by the Spanish language network Univision Thursday and later spoke at a rally in Arizona aimed at reaching out to Latino voters.

When a woman asked Harris at the town hall to name three of Trump's virtues, she replied: "I think Donald Trump loves his family, and I think that's very important.... But I don't really know him, to be honest with you. I don't have much more to offer you."

In Arizona, Harris addressed the devastation caused by Hurricane Milton in Florida, saying the federal government "has mobilised thousands of personnel" to recover and rebuild the region.

The White House said Harris had also taken part in a virtual briefing on Milton, which has sparked a political storm between Republicans and Democrats.

Trump was in the hotly contested state of Michigan on Thursday, unveiling new details of his protectionist plans for the US auto industry, including sweeping tariffs on vehicles not made in America.

Trump also ramped up his personal attacks on Harris, branding her "dumber than hell," and assailed the auto industry capital Detroit itself as run down as he was speaking to the city's economic club.

"Our whole country will end up being like Detroit if she's your president," he said.

Harris meanwhile said she had accepted an offer for a CNN town hall on October 23 in Pennsylvania, after Trump turned down a final televised debate with her.

"I think it's a disservice to the voters," Harris said in Arizona about Trump rejecting a second debate. "I also think it's a pretty weak move."

# Blinken Condemns China's Increasingly Dangerous Sea Moves

VIENTIANE (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned Beijing's "increasingly dangerous" actions in the South China Sea as he met leaders of the ASEAN bloc in Laos on Friday.

China has deployed military and coast guard vessels in recent months in a bid to eject the Philippines from a trio of strategically important reefs and islands in the South China Sea.

It has also been ratcheting up pressure over a disputed island group controlled by Japan in the East China Sea, rattling Tokyo and its allies.

"We remain concerned about China's increasingly dangerous and unlawful actions on the South and East China Seas, which have injured people, harmed vessels from ASEAN nations and contradicted commitments to peaceful resolution of disputes," Blinken told Southeast Asian leaders gathered in that Laos capital Vientiane.

"The United States will continue to support freedom of navigation and freedom of overflight in the Indo-Pacific," he said.

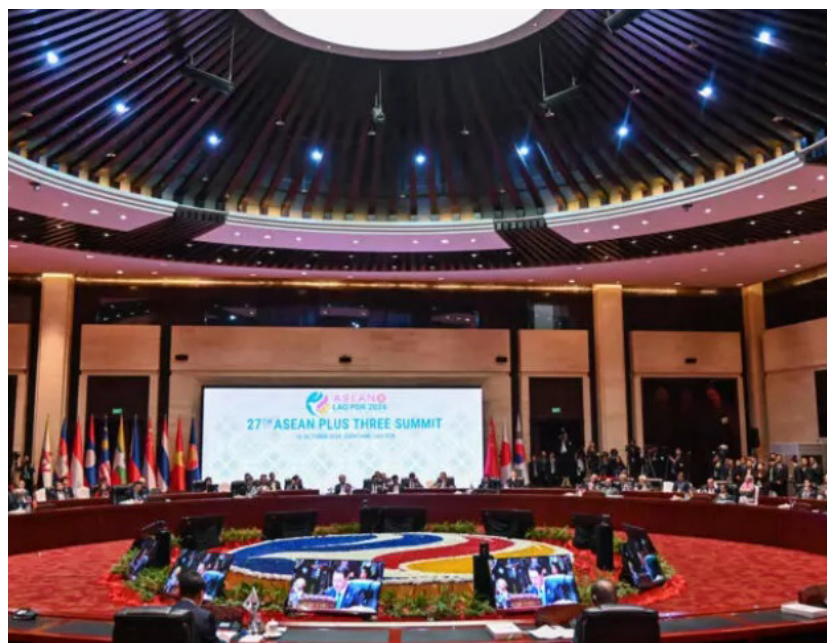
The top diplomat said the United States also hoped to work with ASEAN leaders to "protect stability across the Taiwan Strait", a source of constant tension with China.

Beijing this week denounced remarks by Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te who vowed to "resist annexation" by China, which claims the self-governing democracy.

In an interview with AFP on Friday, EU chief Charles Michel called for disputes to be resolved through peaceful means in the South China Sea.

"International law has to be respected, including the freedom of navigation and including the importance to resolve disputes through peaceful means," he said.

The summit marked the diplomatic debut of Japan's security-minded new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who in the past has called for a NATO-style Asian pact with an



unstated goal of deterring China.

Japan's foreign ministry said Friday that Ishiba reiterated "serious concerns" about the "intensification of Chinese military activities in areas surrounding Japan" in a meeting with Premier Li Qiang.

Li made a veiled swipe at Ishiba during an ASEAN-related meeting on Thursday, warning of the danger of "attempts to introduce bloc confrontation and geopolitical conflicts into Asia".

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos likewise challenged Li on Thursday over recent clashes in the South China Sea.

Leaders at the summit also discussed the situation in Myanmar, whose military junta sent a representative to the ASEAN meeting for the first time in more than three years.

Blinken said he wanted to discuss the "deepening crisis in Myanmar" -- a rare US usage of the country's official name and not the former Burma.

Blinken has urged no let-up in pressure until the junta, which seized power in 2021, moves on key concerns such as freeing political prisoners.

The Myanmar delegation attended the leaders' meeting with Blinken but it was unclear if there was direct interaction between them.

Thailand separately has led efforts at the summit to seek a diplomatic resolution on violence in Myanmar.

Blinken also urged firmness against Russia's "war of aggression" in Ukraine, ahead of a full East Asia Summit in which Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov participated.

The summit marked a rare occasion when the top diplomats of United States and Russia found themselves in the same room.



PARIS (Dispatches) - A 94th-minute winner by Vangelis Pavlidis gave Greece a 2-1 victory on Thursday against England in a Nations League clash overshadowed by the death of Greek player George Baldock on the eve of the game, while Italy were held to a draw by Belgium.

Greece's first-ever victory against England came in an emotionally-charged evening at Wembley, which started with a minute's silence prior to kick-off for Baldock, an English-born Greece international who drowned in his swimming pool in Athens on Wednesday.

"It was a really special day for us because of George. We are people and it's a special night because of him," Pavlidis told ITV.

"A difficult moment for us because George was part of the team. Special guy. We have to play for him and it doesn't matter the score today. We gave everything for him."

The Greeks took a deserved lead in the 49th minute when Pavlidis danced through flimsy defending in the England box, before driving the ball past Jordan Pickford.

The visitors had three disallowed goals in the match -- the last of which came just minutes before Real Madrid's Bellingham hammered in an 87th-minute equaliser for England.

However, Greece were not to be denied a third win in three Nations League matches as England failed to clear the danger in their area and Pavlidis took full advantage and drilled home a late winner. In Group A2, Italy and Belgium played out an eventful 2-2 draw in Rome.

The Italians raced into the lead inside 60 seconds when Andrea Cambiaso got his first international goal by bundling home from close range.

Mateo Retegui doubled the hosts' lead on 24 minutes, sweeping home with his left foot after a

spilled save.

Italy looked comfortable and were dominating the encounter until they suffered a double blow inside the final 10 minutes of the first half.

Lorenzo Pellegrini initially picked up a yellow card for his late lunge on Arthur Theate in the 38th minute but, after a VAR review, the Italy playmaker was instead shown a straight red.

Belgium then duly halved the deficit from the resulting free-kick, with Maxim De Cuyper finishing emphatically from 25 yards following a clever set-piece move.

Arsenal forward Leandro Trossard completed the Belgian comeback on 61 minutes.

A deep corner was nodded back across goal and Trossard ghosted past the static defence to prod the ball past Gianluigi Donnarumma from close range.

"There are episodes that can change a game, like their goal immediately after we went down to ten men," said Italy coach Luciano Spalletti.

"A result doesn't always depend on the football you play and your tactics. Certainly, we could have played better in the second half after a very good first half."

Italy remain top of their group with France sitting second after they beat Israel 4-1 in Budapest.

Eduardo Camavinga gave France a seventh-minute lead when the goalkeeper fumbled his tame effort, allowing the ball to bounce over the line.

Omri Gandelman levelled on 24 minutes, before Christopher Nkunku restored France's advantage four minutes later with a sharp finish.

## Kittle at the Double as Niners Hold Off Seahawks



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - George Kittle scored two touchdowns as the San Francisco 49ers held off a second-half rally from the Seattle Seahawks to clinch a 36-24 road win in a bruising divisional clash on Thursday.

Niners quarterback Brock Purdy threw for three touchdowns and 255 passing yards with no interceptions, while Deebo Samuel made three receptions for 102 yards and a touchdown.

San Francisco, who in recent weeks have struggled to close out wins when leading, looked poised to buck that trend with something to spare after surging into a 23-3 lead early in the third quarter at Lumen Field after touchdowns from Samuel and Kittle and three Matthew Wright field goals.

But the Seahawks came roaring back with a sensational 97-yard kickoff return into the end zone from Laviska Shenault Jr. to inject fresh belief into the home side's challenge.

After forcing a stop on the next 49ers possession, Seahawks quarterback Geno Smith marched his team 94 yards upfield on a 13-play drive which ended with running back Kenneth Walker blasting over for a touchdown from one yard out to help make it 23-17.

Yet the Seahawks' rally faltered midway through the fourth quarter, when 49ers cornerback Renardo Green picked off Smith as he attempted to find D.K. Metcalf.

That left the 49ers in prime field position at the Seattle 15-yard line, and from there Purdy made no mistake, finding tight end Kittle with a nine-yard pass for the touchdown, extending San Francisco's lead to 29-17.

Seattle refused to throw in the towel though and set up a nervy finale with 1min 44sec remaining after Smith connected with Tyler Lockett in the end zone for a touchdown that left the Seahawks within five of the lead.

Any hopes of a Seattle miracle, however, were snuffed out on the opening San Francisco possession after the restart.

Rookie running back Isaac Guerendo burst clear from the line of scrimmage on a 76-yard run before stopping short of the goal line.

From there fullback Kyle Juszczyk rumbled over from six yards to make the game safe.

## Retiring Nadal Remains an Inspiring Role Model and Humble Idol

MADRID (Dispatches) - As Rafa Nadal prepares to ride off into the sunset after a stellar career, his fellow professionals from eras old and new agree on one thing - the Spaniard remains an inspirational role model whose legacy has shaped tennis over the last 23 years.

With 22 Grand Slam titles in the bag, including a record 14 at Roland Garros where he was virtually unbeatable, 38-year-old Nadal said he is at peace with his decision to hang up his racket after the Davis Cup next month.

Nadal has won the Davis Cup four times and he will bow out on home turf where he will team up with his protege Carlos Alcaraz, the proverbial prince and reigning French Open champion ready to inherit the crown from the 'King of Clay'.

As a child Alcaraz had watched Nadal and was grateful for the "immense gift," of playing alongside him at the Paris Olympics earlier this year which was held at Roland Garros.

"I couldn't believe it when I watched it... It was tough to accept it. I was in shock a little bit," Alcaraz told reporters at the Shanghai Masters.

"It is really difficult news for everybody and even tougher for me. He has been my idol since I start playing tennis. I look up to him. Proudly, thanks to him, I really wanted to become a professional tennis player.

"Losing him, in a certain way, is going to be difficult for us, so I will try to enjoy as much as I can when he's going to play (and



enjoy the time with him as much as I can. But it is a shame for tennis and for me."

His 'Big Three' rival Novak Djokovic played him 60 times, winning 31, and the Serbian said Nadal's greatest achievement was inspiring millions of children to pick up the sport.

"Your tenacity, dedication, fighting spirit is going to be taught for decades. Your legacy will live forever. Only you know what you had to endure to become icon of tennis and sport in general," added Djokovic, a 24-times major winner.

"Thank you for pushing me to the very limit so many times in our rivalry that has impacted me the most as a player."

World number one Jannik Sinner said Nadal's announcement was a bitter pill to swallow and that he was "very lucky" to have got to know him on the Tour, adding that the younger generation learned from Nadal's values and on-court etiquette.

"We all saw how good he has been as a player, the lessons he taught us, the young players, how to behave on the court, how to handle situations on the court, tough situations. He gave to all of us a lot of emotions when we saw him playing," Sinner said.

"And also to stay humble at the same time, not changing with the success, choosing the right people around him, having a great family. There are so many great things he gave to all of us.

"Obviously it's tough, but in another way everything has a beginning and also an ending."

## Toyota Returns to Formula One as Haas Partner



TOYOTA (Dispatches) - Toyota announced their return to Formula One on Friday following a 15-year absence, signing a technical partnership with U.S. team Haas.

The Japanese manufacturers spent eight seasons in Formula One before leaving at the end of 2009 with a record of 13 podium finishes and no Grand Prix wins.

Haas, currently seventh in the 10-team constructor standings, said Toyota would provide "design, technical and manufacturing services".

The team said their cars would feature Toyota branding at the United States Grand Prix in Austin, Texas, later this month.

Toyota chairman Akio Toyoda said that he "had finally gotten back to being an ordinary older guy who loves cars".

"I think that, somewhere deep in his heart, that ordinary older car-loving guy Akio Toyoda had always regretted having blocked -- by pulling out of F1 -- Japanese youths' path toward driving the world's fastest cars," he said.

Toyoda added that he believed his decision to withdraw from the sport in 2009 "was not wrong".

Haas team principal Ayao Komatsu said he was "hugely excited" to work with Toyota.

"To have a world leader in the automotive sector support and work alongside our organisation, while seeking to develop and accelerate their own technical and engineering expertise -- it's simply a partnership with obvious benefits on both sides," he said.

Haas have signed French driver Esteban Ocon to drive for them next season on a multi-year contract.

Ocon will team up with 19-year-old British driver Oliver Bearman.

## Argentina Held, Brazil Leave It Late in 2026 World Cup Qualifiers

MONTEVIDE (Dispatches) - Argentina were held to a 1-1 draw by Venezuela on Lionel Messi's return as Brazil got their 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign back on track with a last-gasp 2-1 victory over Chile on Thursday.

Messi, who missed Argentina's last round of fixtures in September due to injury, looked to have put the world champions on course for victory after his free-kick helped set up Nicolas Otamendi's 13th-minute opener in the Venezuelan city of Maturin.

But a battling performance by Venezuela in front of their home fans was rewarded midway through the second half when veteran striker Salomon Rondon met Yeferson Soteldo's cross with a header that flew past Argentina goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli.

Despite the dropped points, 2022 World Cup winners Argentina remain firmly on course for a place at the 2026 finals, which are being staged in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

With the tournament expanded to 48 teams, the top six finishers in South America's 10-team round-robin qualifying competition will earn a ticket to the finals.

Argentina lead the standings with 19 points from nine games, three points clear of second-placed Colombia, who suffered a shock 1-0 defeat to Bolivia in other qualifying action on Thursday.

Yet while Argentina look poised to qualify comfortably, rivals Brazil continue to make hard work of their qualifying campaign.

Chile, who are one place off the bottom of the standings, rocked Brazil after just two minutes when veteran striker Eduardo Vargas steered a looping header over Manchester City goalkeeper Ederson to make it 1-0.

But Brazil drew level in first-half stoppage time after Savinho



worked himself into space before crossing for Botafogo forward Igor Jesus to head home.

The match looked destined to finish in a draw until the 89th minute, when Brazil substitute Luiz Henrique arrowed in a low shot from the edge of the area to make it 2-1.

The win moves Brazil into fourth place in the standings with 13 points from nine games, six points adrift from leaders Brazil.

Elsewhere Thursday, Bolivia boosted their hopes of a first World Cup appearance since 1994 with their gutsy 1-0 win over Colombia in a game played in the thin air of El Alto, which is situated at around 4,150m (13,600 feet) above sea level.

A superb individual goal from Miguel Terceros handed the Bolivians their fourth victory of qualifying and vaulted them up into the automatic qualification positions.

Bolivia's fortunes have taken a dramatic upturn since the team started playing qualifiers in El Alto, which is just over 500m higher than the Bolivians' usual home venue of the Estadio Hernando Siles in nearby La Paz.

Bolivia opted to move fixtures to El Alto after losing two out of their opening three home qualifiers in La Paz last year.

The move has paid off, with Thursday's 1-0 win coming after a 4-0 rout of Venezuela at the same venue in September.

After claiming a shock 2-1 win away to Chile last month, Bolivia are now sitting in sixth place in the South American standings with 12 points from nine games.

Terceros's winning goal arrived in the 58th minute, with the 20-year-old winger who plays for Brazilian club Santos cutting in from the right flank, shimmying past Colombian defenders Jhon Lucumi and Kevin Castano and unleashing a left-footed thunderbolt that flew into the top corner.