

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Condemned in the Strongest Terms a Call by an Israeli Minister for the Annexation of the Occupied West Bank and Called It Indication of the "Racist Nature, Expansionist Character" of the Israeli Regime

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said the ministry urged all Iranian Embassies to facilitate exporting of Iranian products, especially carpets.

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Resistance Front to Avenge Any Aggression



TEHRAN - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has warned that the resistance front will avenge any Israeli aggression, adding that the enemies of Islam will receive "painful" blows in case of a broader conflict with Muslims.

Major General Hossein Salami raised the alarm in an address to IRGC forces in a combat-security drill in the capital Tehran on Thursday as he praised the Iranian nation's resilience and determination in tough times as well as sacrifices of Muslims in defending their territories over the years.

Stressing that the world's major powers cannot stand up to the Islamic Republic's resolve, Salami said the whole "evil powers" have at the present time lined up against Islam and Muslims in a historical confrontation.

"The most modern armies of the world have come to the aid of the Zionist regime. The stage depicts a global formation of powers that intend to force us to submit to their will so that they will rule over the fate of Muslims, occupy their lands and rob them of their religious identity," the IRGC chief said.

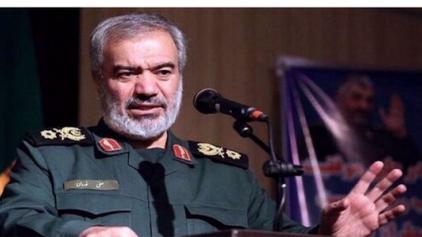
"A real and historical confrontation is in the making," Salami added. "You will lose and you will not be able to survive in the face of Muslims. Although you destroy houses, demolish cities and villages, and bury oppressed Muslims under the rubble, you should know that if you killed 40,000 Palestinians in the besieged and defenseless Gaza Strip, another 100,000 Palestinian children were born."

The chief commander said the resistance fighters are taking revenge for the blows that the Israeli regime inflicted on their commanders and youths, underlining that the "glorious path is not terminable" and will continue.

"We are standing face to face and we will fight with you until the end and we will not allow you to dominate the fate of Muslims," Salami said. "We will take revenge. You will receive painful blows; keep waiting."

Israel launched the war on Gaza on October 7, 2023 after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas waged the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in response to the Israeli regime's decades-long campaign of bloodletting and devastation against Palestinians.

Iran Will Make Israel Regret Its Act of Aggression



TEHRAN (PresTV) - A high-ranking commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran will "definitely" give a response to Israel that will make the regime regret its latest act of aggression against the country.

"During its more than 45-year existence, the Islamic Revolution has not left any vicious act unanswered and we will definitely give a regret-inducing response to this Israeli measure," the IRGC's Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi said.

He made the remarks in the Iranian city of Qom on Wednesday on the sidelines of a ceremony to mark the 40th day of the martyrdom of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah, and a number of other commanders of the resistance front by the Israeli regime.

Asked whether the re-election of Donald Trump as US president will make any difference for Iran, Fadavi said it is of no consequence to the Islamic Republic as the evil nature of the United States does not change.

He stressed the importance of providing full support for Hezbollah and the resistance front, calling on every individual to play a role in helping the resistance in the fight against enemies.

The IRGC commander emphasized that Iran has fully stood by Hezbollah for more than 40 years and will absolutely continue to support the movement.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

کنفرانس خبری Press Conference

Nov 2024

آبان ۱۴۰۳



TEHRAN - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has warned of an "immediate response" to any resolution by the UN nuclear agency against the country's peaceful atomic program.

Mohammad Eslami made the remarks during a joint press conference with Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi in the Iranian capital of Tehran on Thursday.

"Any resolution against Iran's nuclear program will be met with Iran's immediate response," he said, emphasizing that the Islamic Republic, undeterred by pressure, will advance its nuclear activities within the framework of its national interests.

The remarks came a day after Reuters reported that European powers are pushing for a new anti-Iran resolution at the IAEA's Board of Governors meeting next week to pile up pressure on Tehran.

Eslami said that such resolutions will naturally establish the right for Iran to take countermeasures.

"The main issue is that if the opposite side takes the path of confrontation, resolution and disruption against Iran, it will receive a reciprocal response," he added.

"If they take the path of interaction, Iran is willing to interact, but if they choose another path, Iran will take necessary decisions."

He also noted that Iran has always followed the path of interaction and honored its obligations

under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) before it was derailed by the United States.

In 2015, Iran proved the peaceful nature of its nuclear program to the world by signing the JCPOA with six world powers.

However, Washington's unilateral withdrawal in 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Eslami stressed that Iran's nuclear program has been used as an excuse to impose tough sanctions on the country.

Over the past 20 years, he said, the countries opposing Iran's interests fabricated cases and created ambiguity surrounding the nation's nuclear activities while assassinated scientists and committed acts of industrial sabotage.

However, Iran today enjoys the nuclear technology, which is not borrowed but built on endogenous research under the supervision of the IAEA.

Also during the conference, Grossi was asked about Israel's threats to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, to which he replied, "I say this with regards to Iran... nuclear installations should not be attacked."

Meanwhile President Masoud Pezeshkian in meeting with Grossi said the international community has come to believe that the Islamic Republic seeks peace and security in the world, stressing that Iran's nuclear program is fully peaceful.

U.S. Bombs Inflammate, Escalate Wars of Extermination in West Asia

SANAA (Dispatches) - The leader of Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement says the U.S. is complicit in Israeli atrocities in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, stressing that U.S.-made bombs and munitions are escalating wars of extermination in West Asia.

In a televised speech on Thursday, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi stated that the Americans are solely seeking to secure their interests in the region and subjugate regional nations and governments.

He said the presence and practices of the occupying Tel Aviv regime in West Asia pose a serious threat to the Muslim world's freedom and independence.

"The Zionist project, which the U.S. is advancing, is a vicious scheme. It robs nations of their freedom and independence and expropriates their motherland and inalienable rights.

"The Zionist project poses threats to the entire Muslim Ummah, and constitutes serious aggression against its identity, religious values, independence, freedom, and resources," the Ansarullah chief pointed out.

He also took a swipe at certain Arab regimes for their enhanced cooperation and trade relationship with Israel.

Houthi emphasized that such alignment would not guarantee their security and stability in the face of the Tel Aviv regime's expansionist objectives in the region.

"The U.S.-Israeli danger is not merely aimed at the Palestinian nation; it rather threatens the whole Muslim world. The U.S. and Israel seek to exterminate Muslims, and what they are



exercising in Palestinian territories could happen in any other country," the Ansarullah leader said.

He expressed regret over the failure of most Arab and Muslim governments to adopt a firm stance vis-à-vis Israeli crimes, stating such behavior has emboldened the Zionist enemy to press ahead with its brutalities.

Houthi also reiterated that Yemeni armed forces will continue their anti-Israeli operations in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, noting that Yemeni forces have carried out multiple attacks against Israeli interests this week using 29 ballistic and cruise missiles as well as an explosive-laden drone.

The Ansarullah leader hailed the hours-long operation by Yemeni naval units against the American aircraft carrier Abraham in the Arabian Sea, stating that the operation successfully achieved its objectives and forced the vessel to flee dozens of nautical miles

away from the coast of Yemen.

"In case the U.S. Navy opts to deploy an aircraft carrier in the Red Sea, it should be quite sure that it will be targeted," Houthi said.

Houthi hailed the resistance fighters' steadfastness against Israel, saying their numerous operations have inflicted heavy losses on the invading Israeli troops in Gaza and Lebanon.

Houthi finally called upon all walks of Yemeni society to take to the streets across the country on Friday and participate in massive pro-Palestine rallies.

Iran's Oil Output Falls Slightly in October



TEHRAN (PresTV) - Iran's oil output dropped slightly in October, according to figures by The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and amid reports of repair works at the country's largest oil terminal in the Persian Gulf.

OPEC figures cited in a report by the Fars news agency showed that Iran had produced 3.259 million barrels per day (bpd) of oil in October, down 68,000 bpd from figures reported in September.

Despite the drop in output, Iran remained the third largest OPEC producer in October, the data showed.

Saudi Arabia topped the ranking with 8.968 million bpd, up 4,000 bpd from the previous month, and was followed by Iraq at 4.068 million bpd which reduced its output by 66,000 bpd compared to September, showed the figures.

Iran has steadily increased its oil production this year. The country returned to its position as the third largest producer in OPEC in August after reports showed it had ramped up its exports to private refiners in China despite a regime of US sanctions that impose major penalties on buyers.

Iran, along with Libya and Venezuela, are exempt from a series of cuts agreed by OPEC members to stabilize global oil prices.

The drop in Iran's October oil output can be attributed to reports suggesting the country launched repair works in oil export facilities in Kharg, an Island in the Persian Gulf which hosts the country's largest oil export terminal.

OPEC figures showed Iran's average quarterly output had hit 3.306 million bpd in July-September, up from 3.238 million bpd in the previous quarter.

OPEC's October output increased by 0.466 million bpd compared to September to reach 26.535 million bpd mainly thanks to a major increase in production in Libya.

Meanwhile Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said Iran is not concerned that an incoming U.S. administration led by Donald Trump may decide to toughen sanctions on the country's oil exports.

U.S. Appeals Court Overturns 1983 Beirut Bombing Victims' Judgment Against Iran



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A U.S. appeals court has revoked a \$1.68 billion judgment against Central Bank of Iran (CBI), known as Bank Markazi, regarding the damages won by the families of the victims of a 1983 bombing in Beirut, which targeted a US Marine Corps barracks in the Lebanese capital and was blamed on the Islamic Republic.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan threw out the \$1.68 billion judgment on Wednesday and said a lower court judge should have addressed questions of state law before ruling against Bank Markazi and Clearstream, a subsidiary of Germany's stock exchange operator Deutsche Boerse where Iranian assets are held.

In a 3-0 decision, the panel also rejected a claim that a 2019 federal law designed to make it easier to confiscate Iranian assets outside the United States waived Bank Markazi's sovereign immunity.

That law "neither abrogates Bank Markazi's jurisdictional immunity nor provides an independent grant of subject matter jurisdiction," Circuit Judge Robert Sack wrote.

The court returned the case to US District Loretta Preska in Manhattan to address state law questions in the 11-year-old case, and decide whether the case can proceed in Bank Markazi's absence.

Bombing victims sought to hold Iran liable for what they claimed to be providing material support for the October 23, 1983, suicide attack that killed 241 US service members, by seizing bond proceeds held by Clearstream in a blocked account on the CBI's behalf.

The CBI declared immunity under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act, which generally shields foreign governments from liability in US courts.

The plaintiffs sued in 2013 to partially satisfy a \$2.65 billion default judgment they had won against Iran in 2007. Another judge dismissed the case in 2015, but the 2nd Circuit Court revived it in 2017.

IRAN NEWS



Russian Investment in Qeshm Bunkering Sector Welcomed

TEHRAN (ILNA) - The Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free and Special Economic Zones expressed support for Russian investors' plans in the bunkering sector in Qeshm Free Zone during a meeting with a Russian delegation. He highlighted that bunkering projects in the Persian Gulf free zones are among the council's priorities. Qeshm's closer proximity to open waters, compared to other countries, offers significant advantages for investors in this sector.

He emphasized that both Iran and Russia have substantial potential for collaboration, noting that Iran's free zones present attractive investment opportunities for Russian investors. "Russia is highly important to us, and the two countries have enjoyed strong ties for years," he added.

Importance of Developing a Trade Roadmap Between Iran and Russia



TEHRAN - Vice President of International Business Promotion at Iran's Trade Development Organization Emphasizes the Importance of an Iran-Russia Trade Roadmap. The Vice President of International Business Promotion at Iran's Trade Development Organization highlighted the significance of creating a trade roadmap between Iran and Russia, identifying Iran's rail industry, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and textile sectors as key strengths for trade with Russia.

According to the public relations office of Iran's Trade Development Organization, a meeting was held to outline the action plan for a collaborative roadmap between Iran and Russia. The meeting included Seyyed Mohammad Sadegh Qannadzadeh, Vice President of International Business Promotion, as well as managers from the Trade Development Organization and representatives from related agencies.

Qannadzadeh emphasized the importance of formulating a trade roadmap between Iran and Russia, stating that Russia is one of Iran's primary strategic partners. Recent international developments have further strengthened ties between the two countries, with Iran's membership in BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization deepening their working relationship.

He noted that Iran and Russia are major players in the global economy and energy sector. High-level diplomatic exchanges, including the Russian Prime Minister's visit to Iran and the Iranian President's participation in the BRICS summit, as well as the signing of the Iran-Eurasia Free Trade Agreement, demonstrate a strong commitment to expanding trade relations.

Qannadzadeh explained that the objective of the meeting was to identify obstacles and challenges faced by stakeholders in each sector, aiming to draft a comprehensive plan for high-level officials. The initial step involves identifying weaknesses in trade relations, followed by efforts to resolve them to remove barriers to trade expansion.

He further mentioned that the roadmap agreement was signed in March 2023, covering 14 sections. While progress has been made in some areas, there is still work to be done in others.

Armenia Eager to Establish Broad Economic and Political Ties with Iran



TEHRAN - Armenia's Deputy Minister of Economy announced that Armenia, as a regional crossroads for peace, is keen to develop extensive economic and political relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

According to a report from Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, Deputy Minister of Economy Naouk Hovakimian, heading an economic delegation, visited the port of Chabahar on Thursday, November 14. The visit aimed to explore investment opportunities and introduce them to Armenia's private sector, as well as to foster deeper economic and political ties with Iran.

In a meeting with the Director-General of Ports and Maritime of Sistan and Baluchestan, the Deputy Governor and Special Governor of Chabahar, and other local officials, Hovakimian highlighted that the purpose of the visit was to better understand the capabilities of Chabahar port and to present investment opportunities there to Armenian private sector companies.

Qasem Askarinasab, the Director-General of Chabahar Ports and Maritime Organization, provided an overview of Chabahar's strategic location on the northern Indian Ocean and the extensive infrastructure at Shahid Beheshti Port, which offers vast opportunities in loading, unloading, and private sector investments.

Askarinasab also mentioned that the Ports and Maritime Organization has introduced numerous incentives and discounts to support economic activities at Chabahar, emphasizing that investment opportunities at Shahid Beheshti Port are now available.

During the meeting, Javad Sepahi, the Deputy Governor and Special Governor of Chabahar, highlighted the Iranian government's priority in strengthening Iran-Armenia relations. He emphasized the unique features of Chabahar port, its access to open waters, its critical role in the North-South Corridor, and its status as one of Iran's major commercial ports offering attractive incentives and discounts.

Sepahi also pointed to Chabahar's significant economic potential and the stable security of the port and the Makran coast.

Additionally, a representative from Iran's Shipping Lines discussed maritime transport routes and cargo transport tariffs.

The growing trade between Iran and Armenia and the governments' determination to achieve sustainable trade promise flourishing economic relations between Iran and its northern neighbor in the coming years.

IRANNEWS/ECONOMIC/DESK



EU Grants Iran Six-Month Extension to Improve Quality of Exported Pistachios

TEHRAN - The European Union (EU) has given Iran's pistachio producers and exporters a six-month deadline to improve the quality of exported pistachios and address aflatoxin contamination, according to a member of the Pistachio Association's board of directors.

In an interview with Iran Chamber Online, Mozaffar Mohammadi noted that approximately a year ago, the EU had issued warnings about the possibility of banning Iranian pistachios if necessary quality improvements were not made. Despite these warnings, it appears that some neglect led to insufficient action on contamination control and quality enhancement, raising the likelihood of an impending ban.

Mohammadi emphasized that pistachios are a national product of high importance to Iran's economy, especially in terms of exports. He cautioned that any disruption to pistachio exports would be detrimental. In the past year, however, some Iranian automakers entered the pistachio export market without relevant expertise, causing significant disruptions. Their actions resulted in Iranian pistachios being sold below global prices, which negatively affected the ability of actual pistachio exporters to secure fair market rates.

In response to the EU's potential ban, the Pistachio Association, the Dried Fruit Union, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated negotiations. This led to a one-hour meeting at the EU headquarters, during which Iran's representatives sought a grace period to implement quality improvements, conduct professional testing, and enhance storage, handling, and shipping methods for pistachios.

Fortunately, the EU agreed to grant an additional six months to allow Iran to make these necessary adjustments. Mohammadi expressed hope that this extension would enable Iran to protect its export markets amid sanctions and prevent further disruptions to the economy.

Meanwhile Siamak Shahriari, a member of the board of the Iranian Dried Fruit Exporters Union, confirmed in an interview with ILNA that Iranian pistachios destined for export have been found to contain aflatoxin, a toxic fungus. Shahriari criticized the Ministry of Agriculture for failing to

respond adequately to a warning from the European Union, adding that the ministry's delayed response was unsatisfactory. The EU has announced that, starting November 18, it will ban the import of Iranian pistachios.

The Dried Fruit Exporters Union was only informed of the EU's decision two weeks ago, and Shahriari noted that the Ministry of Agriculture did not publicize the matter. Currently, the union president and a laboratory specialist have traveled to Europe to negotiate with EU officials, promising steps to ensure the EU's quality standards are met and that the ban may be reconsidered. The EU has warned that this is Iran's last opportunity to address the aflatoxin issue in its pistachio exports.

Shahriari stated that the private sector has taken the lead in addressing this problem, while the Ministry of Agriculture has been slow to act, despite repeated discussions with the ministry. Instead of collaborating on a solution, the ministry's response was to consider restricting pistachio exports to Europe altogether.

He attributed the presence of aflatoxin to improper processing and delayed harvesting, stressing that the Ministry of Agriculture should intervene to prevent these errors. He noted that the value of Iran's pistachio exports has dropped from \$2.5 billion to less than \$1 billion, with competitors like the United States and Turkey gaining ground in the global market.

Seyed Reza Nourani, president of Iran's National Agricultural Products Union, emphasized that adhering to international standards is crucial to prevent further restrictions. He highlighted that while pistachios may pass initial testing in Iran, they could become contaminated during extended sea transport or prolonged storage in warehouses.

Nourani pointed out that some Iranian exporters initially send pistachios to Gulf countries before re-exporting them, where they may be stored in sacks for extended periods, increasing the risk of contamination. He warned that such practices threaten Iran's standing in the global pistachio market.

Establishing Trade Centers to Boost Iranian Exports



TEHRAN - A meeting of the heads of chambers from across Iran was recently held, hosted by the Tabriz Chamber of Commerce. The discussions centered on expanding Iranian products into export markets, with a particular focus on Africa. Key topics included establishing trade centers in target markets and addressing issues related to foreign currency commitments for exporters.

Younes Jaelch, the head of the Tabriz Chamber, began by highlighting that the chamber had pioneered a national non-oil export development conference. For this year's conference, the focus will be on exchange rates. Jaelch emphasized the need to analyze whether the official "NIMA rate" exchange system accurately reflects the country's business environment. He argued that the private sector is aware of the discrepancy between free market and NIMA exchange rates, which has led to an increase in business licenses, as traders aim to benefit from the currency difference—a practice that poses serious risks to the economy.

Jaelch proposed that the government purchase foreign currency at daily rates with a slight premium, which would encourage exporters to sell to the government and strengthen the country's currency reserves. He argued that implementing this plan would support rather than harm the economy.

Jaelch further cautioned that, if the current conditions persist, economic losses and the devaluation of the national currency will continue. He urged that loss-making government-affiliated companies be restructured and suggested that private sector consortia could assume management of these units, helping to alleviate the government's financial burden.

Turning to market diversification, Jaelch advocated for establishing an African Committee within the Iran Chamber of Commerce to develop structured strategies for this largely untapped market. He also stressed the importance of creating trade centers in target countries to promote Iranian goods and help meet Iran's annual demand for \$12,000 to \$14,000 in raw materials. These centers, managed by chambers, would allow each to leverage their unique capacities in building international partnerships.

Jaelch described Africa as a major market requiring a dedicated strategy, urging private sector action rather than waiting on government initiatives.

Samad Hasanzadeh, head of the Iran Chamber, reflected on the 20-year legacy of the national non-oil export development conference. He noted that this event has traditionally provided a platform to address export challenges and liaise with officials. Hasanzadeh acknowledged that currency commitment issues can be resolved through expert review, and he mentioned that proposed solutions have been presented to policymakers.

He emphasized that exporters, despite facing obstacles, have continued operations, and he noted that the Ministry of Economy claims that 82% of currency commitments have been met, even amid internal and external barriers. Hasanzadeh also announced that the Central Bank will soon implement a currency exchange platform across partner banks to facilitate access to foreign currency for exporters and importers. Initially applied to steel exports, the pilot program is expected to gradually extend to other sectors.

Sudan Needs 600 Factories Rebuilt, Presents Opportunity for Iran's Gold Reserves



TEHRAN - Mohammadreza Safari, head of the Africa Desk at Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, highlighted the outcomes of the Sudanese Minister of Finance and Economic Planning's visit to Iran. Safari noted that in meetings between Iran's Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade, Seyed Mohammad Atabak, and the Sudanese Finance Minister, discussions centered around activating a joint economic and trade committee. This effort is part of the 10th session of the Iran-Sudan Joint Commission on Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation, aiming to strengthen collaborations in mining, industry, and trade exchange between the two nations.

Safari mentioned that Iran's Trade Promotion Organization has devised an operational plan to bring these objectives to fruition. Sudan, having achieved relative stability following internal conflicts, now has the opportunity to plan for infrastructure development. However, he acknowledged that there are still pockets of unrest in the country due to the Rapid Support Forces.

According to Safari, around 600 factories in Sudan currently require rebuilding. This presents an opportunity for Iran to contribute its expertise and resources to aid in the reconstruction efforts.

Highlighting the trade potential, Safari pointed out that Sudan possesses vast mineral resources that could be harnessed. Sudan could also serve as a source of goods like Arabic gum, cotton, peanuts, sesame, and meat, while Iran could export products needed by Sudan, such as urea fertilizer, machinery, building materials, and engineering services.

Safari emphasized that the establishment of an industrial committee and increased bilateral exchanges could facilitate Iran's export goals. He also noted that Sudan, under sanctions, is interested in enhancing trade with Iran. This cooperation could enable Iran to receive commodities and gold from Sudan in exchange for goods and services, a strategy that could bolster Iran's gold reserves.

Esfahan and Najaf Chambers of Commerce Sign Cooperation Agreement



ISFAHAN - In a significant step towards strengthening ties, the Esfahan Chamber of Commerce and the Najaf Chamber of Commerce have signed a cooperation agreement aimed at enhancing economic and cultural relations between Esfahan, Iran, and Najaf, Iraq.

Amir Kashani, President of the Esfahan Chamber, proposed establishing a "sister city" relationship between Esfahan and Najaf, emphasizing that this formal connection would foster deeper economic and cultural ties. During a meeting with Haider Al-Husseini, President of the Najaf Chamber of Commerce, Kashani highlighted the mutual interest in economic collaboration between the two cities. Al-Husseini and his delegation visited Esfahan to discuss the challenges and opportunities in bilateral trade.

Kashani noted that while Iraq is not currently a member of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) forum, which promotes regional collaboration in Asia, the inclusion of Iraq could further strengthen regional connections. He also expressed Esfahan's interest in creating a dedicated Najaf forum within the Esfahan Chamber to support further cooperation.

Al-Husseini, the Najaf Chamber President, suggested establishing an Iranian company in Iraq to simplify collaborative business efforts, emphasizing the need for projects that address both cities' mutual interests. Al-Husseini identified investment opportunities in Najaf's energy sector, particularly the development of a solar power plant, which would address Najaf's growing energy demands. He also expressed interest in introducing advanced drip irrigation technology in agriculture and noted a favorable outlook in Iraq's pharmaceutical sector, which sees potential collaborations with Esfahan-based businesses.

Mohammad Al-Moumen, head of the Najaf Chamber's Youth Council, highlighted the challenge of cross-border financial transactions, underscoring the need for infrastructure to streamline currency exchanges and enhance economic collaboration.

China Says Philippines Sent Supplies to Disputed Shoal

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China said on Friday the Philippines had sent supplies to a beached warship on Second Thomas Shoal, a disputed atoll in the South China Sea.

In a separate statement, the Philippine Coast Guard said it had rotated personnel staffing the Sierra Madre and sent supplies to the vessel.

China's Coast Guard said the supply run had proceeded "with permission" to what it considers an "illegally" beached ship. The Philippine Coast Guard had no immediate response to China's claim, which it has previously made, that it had allowed the mission to proceed.



Lebanese Ceasefire Efforts Inch Ahead as Israel Keeps Up Fierce Bombardment



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Diplomacy aimed at securing a ceasefire in Lebanon showed tentative signs of progress on Thursday as Israel pounded its northern neighbour including heavy airstrikes on the stronghold of armed group Hezbollah near Beirut.

Pressing its offensive against the Iran-backed group, Israel hit Beirut's Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs, carrying out intense attacks there for a third consecutive day.

Plumes of smoke rose over the suburbs known as Dahiyeh, where Israeli strikes destroyed five buildings, sources familiar with the damage said. "We say God help us," said Ayat, a 33-year-old Lebanese woman.

The Israeli military said its fighter jets targeted weapons warehouses, military headquarters and other Hezbollah sites.

In addition, Israeli strikes in the eastern city of Baalbek killed at least 20 people while 11 died in Israeli aerial bombardment of towns in southern Lebanon, authorities and Lebanon's National News Agency said.

In a more hopeful sign, the U.S. ambassador to Lebanon on Thursday submitted a draft truce proposal to Lebanon's parliament speaker Nabih Berri, two senior Lebanese political sources told Reuters, without providing details.

The draft was Washington's first written proposal to halt fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in at least several weeks, the sources said.

"It is a draft to get observations from the Lebanese side," one of the sources told Reuters. When asked about the proposal, a spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy in Beirut said, "Efforts to reach a diplomatic deal are ongoing."

Hopes have been buoyed before, notably late last month when Lebanon's prime minister expressed optimism a ceasefire could be reached before the end of October.

At that time, sources said it would entail an initial 60-day truce with Israel withdrawing forces from Lebanon in the first week. A permanent ceasefire would follow based on implementation of United Nations resolutions.

Sri Lankan President's Coalition Wins Majority in General Election



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lankans handed Anura Kumara Disanayake a thumping win in a snap general election, giving his new leftist president greater legislative power to pursue policies to alleviate poverty and fight graft as the country recovers from a financial meltdown.

Disanayake, a political outsider in a country dominated by family parties for decades, comfortably won the island's in September.

But his Marxist-leaning coalition, the National People's Power (NPP), had just three of parliament's 225 seats before Thursday's election, prompting him to dissolve it and seek a fresh mandate.

The NPP won 107 seats, receiving almost 62% or 6.8 million votes in Thursday's election, putting them past the majority mark in the parliament, latest results on the Election Commission of Sri Lanka's website showed. A two-third majority appeared within reach of the coalition.

Voters directly elect 196 members to parliament from 22 constituencies under a proportional representation system. The remaining 29 seats will be allocated according to the island-wide proportional vote obtained by each party.

"We see this as a critical turning point for Sri Lanka. We expect a mandate to form a strong parliament, and we are confident the people will give us this mandate," Disanayake said after casting his vote on Thursday.

North Korea Orders Mass Drone Production



SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has ordered the "mass production" of attack drones, state media reported on Friday, as concerns mount over the country's deepening military cooperation with Russia.

Pyongyang first unveiled its attack drones in August, with experts saying the capability may be attributable to the country's budding alliance with Russia.

The nuclear-armed country has ratified a landmark defence pact with Moscow and is accused of deploying thousands of troops to Russia to support its war in Ukraine, prompting South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol to warn about the potential transfer of sensitive Russian military technology to North Korea.

Kim on Thursday reportedly oversaw the tests of drones designed to hit both land and sea targets, produced by North Korea's Unmanned Aerial Technology Complex.

"He underscored the need to build a serial production system as early as possible and go into full-scale mass production," the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

The unmanned drones are designed to carry explosives and be deliberately crashed into enemy targets, effectively acting as guided missiles.

Thursday's test saw the drones "precisely" hit targets after flying along predetermined paths, KCNA reported.

"The suicide attack drones to be used within different striking ranges are to perform a mission to precisely attack any enemy targets on the ground and in the sea," the agency said.

Kim said the drones were an "easy to use... component of striking power" due to their relatively low production cost and expansive range of applications, as per KCNA.

He said the North had "recently attached importance" to developing unmanned hardware systems and to integrating them with the country's overall military strategy.

Experts said the drones -- in images released by state media in August -- looked similar to the Israeli-made "HAROP" drone, Russian-made "Lancet-3" and Israeli "HERO 30".

North Korea may have acquired these technologies from Russia, which in turn likely obtained them from Iran -- with Tehran itself suspected of accessing them through hacking or theft from Israel.

In 2022, Pyongyang sent drones across the border that Seoul's military was unable to shoot down, saying they were too small. This year, North Korea has been bombarding the South with trash-carrying balloons, in what it calls retaliation for activists in the South floating anti-regime propaganda missives northwards.

The North has also accused Seoul of violating its sovereignty by flying drones over its capital Pyongyang to drop propaganda leaflets.

By mentioning the "production and practical deployment of various drones", North Korea may be hinting it could follow suit, Yang Moo-jin, president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, told AFP.

Pyongyang could be "suggesting the possibility of using balloons to disseminate leaflets to the South with such drones," Yang said.

"Considering the effectiveness of drone attacks observed in the war in Ukraine, they could also be effectively utilised in the ongoing conflict there," he added.

South Korea launched a drone operation command last year to better address the growing threat.

In October, the North amended its constitution to define South Korea as a "hostile" state, an illustration of a sharp deterioration in ties since Kim in January declared Seoul his country's "principal enemy".

The North has continued to carry out UN sanctions-defying ballistic missile tests, and last month blew up its roads and railways linking it to the South.

Trump Picks Vaccine Skeptic Robert F. Kennedy as Health Secretary

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Donald Trump on Thursday tapped anti-vaccine activist and conspiracy theorist Robert F. Kennedy as his secretary of health in the latest provocative nomination from the incoming Republican president.

Trump announced on his Truth Social platform that he was "thrilled" to name Kennedy.

Moving quickly since his election last week, Trump has embarked on a campaign of political shock and awe as he rolls out an administration designed to upend -- and in some cases literally dismantle -- the US government.

Several of Trump's choices for top jobs -- including a TV news anchor at the helm of the Pentagon and an ally embroiled in sexual misconduct allegations for attorney general -- have unnerved Washington.

Kennedy, a scion of the famous political family who is popularly known as RFK Jr., is a longtime environmental campaigner who abandoned a fringe bid for the presidency to endorse Trump against Democratic candidate Kamala Harris.



Trump has said he wants Kennedy to "go wild" in changing healthcare.

Kennedy, 70, who has posted shirtless photos to boast of his weight-lifting prowess, argues that fundamental change is needed to the way Americans eat, exercise and use medicines.

If approved by the Senate, which Trump's Republican Party controls, he will take over the Health and Human Services Department, a mammoth institution with a budget of close to \$2 trillion.

In his statement, Trump said Kennedy will "Make America Great and Healthy Again!"

The 78-year-old president-elect echoed many of Kennedy's talking points, saying "Americans have been crushed by the industrial food complex and drug companies who have engaged in deception, misinformation, and disinformation."

"Mr Kennedy will restore these Agencies to the traditions of Gold Standard Scientific Research, and beacons of Transparency, to end the Chronic Disease epidemic," Trump said.

The nomination will meet serious opposition, given Kennedy's history of promoting medical conspiracy theories -- including the disproven claim that childhood vaccines cause autism -- and saying that the Covid-19 vaccine was deadly.

He is also burdened by a string of colorful and even bizarre stories about his personal life.

Israel Is Committing Ethnic Cleansing in Gaza

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Israel has carried out a violent and deliberate campaign of forced displacement against almost 2 million Palestinian civilians over the course of its bombardment and military occupation of the Gaza Strip since October 2023, according to a Human Rights Watch report released Thursday.

The report, which maintains that these policies amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, also accused the Israeli government of carrying out ethnic cleansing against Palestinians in areas where the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have razed swaths of homes and other civilian infrastructure to make way for "buffer zones" and "security corridors" throughout the besieged enclave.

In the 13 months since armed Palestinian groups led by Hamas launched deadly terrorist attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023, Israel's devastating retaliatory campaign in Gaza has driven roughly 1.9 million Palestinians from their homes, according to the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator -- almost nine-tenths of the people living in the Strip. These mass population transfers began in the first days of Israel's bombardment when the IDF ordered more than a million people living in the north to leave their homes and head to the southern half of the enclave within just 24 hours.

As more and more civilians have been driven from their homes to scattered "safe zones" across the Gaza Strip, the IDF has carried out controlled demolitions of civilian



infrastructure, which alongside Israel's relentless bombing campaign of Gaza has destroyed tens of thousands of houses as well as hospitals, schools and vast stretches of agricultural land, Human Rights Watch said. This devastation, the report says, risks robbing displaced civilians of the right to return to their homes when the fighting, one day, comes to an end.

The Israeli government has consistently maintained that its mass evacuation orders are intended to allow the IDF to fight Palestinian militant groups while minimising civilian casualties in the once densely populated Strip.

But Caitlin Procter, a political anthropologist and part-time professor at the Migration Policy Centre, said that repeated reports of Israeli attacks on its own designated safe zones and evacuation routes -- also verified and highlighted in the Human Rights Watch report -- painted a different picture.

"I think first and foremost we absolutely have to stop repeating this word 'evacuation'," she said. "Israeli officials have obviously continuously used this word, but actually they've completely misused the word over the last year in the way that they've forced Palestinians to displace from one place to another, upwards of ten times in some cases."

"The word 'evacuation', we associate it with safety -- with moving from a place of danger to a place of safety for a temporary period before then returning home. And every aspect of that is false in this case," she said.



Argentina Suffer Shock Defeat; Brazil Held to a Draw

ASUNCION (Dispatches) - A stunning bicycle kick from Antonio Sanabria and a second-half header from Omar Alderete gave Paraguay a well earned 2-1 home win over Argentina in the South American World Cup qualifiers on Thursday.

Argentina took the lead 11 minutes into the game when Enzo Fernandez's deep pass found Lautaro Martinez, whose thunderous shot was initially ruled out for offside, but was eventually awarded after a VAR review.

Paraguay went close moments later when Gustavo Gomez's header from a corner hit the crossbar. The home side quickly tried again with Gustavo Velazquez's cross finding Sanabria, who unleashed a superb overhead kick that left goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez helpless.

The shocked visitors struggled to find their feet, with captain Lionel Messi largely absent from the action for much of the first half and only managing one shot that went wide.

However, he was twice fouled by Alderete, but referee Anderson Daroco didn't show him a second yellow card before the break.

Two minutes into the second half, Paraguay defender Alderete headed in from a free kick following a foul by substitute Leonardo Balerdi on Julio Enciso.

Rodrigo de Paul had the best chance to equalise 20 minutes before the end but he failed to control the ball after a breakout and his shot went wide as Argentina's errors continued to mount with Paraguay holding firm in defence.

"I think, overall, we played a great game. We controlled the ball. Their goals came from two of our mistakes. We need to fix our lapses on set pieces," striker Martinez said after the match to TyC sports.

"The (goal) at the start of the second half made everything more difficult. We have to congratulate the opponent, who defended very well," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni told a press conference.

World Cup holders Argentina top the standings with 22 points from 11 games and will host ninth-placed Peru on Tuesday.

Meanwhile Brazil had to settle for a 1-1 draw at Venezuela after a quick-fire second-half strike by substitute Telasco Segovia canceled out Raphinha's opener for the dominant visitors in the South American World Cup qualifiers.

Vinicius Jr missed a chance to win the game with a penalty against a Venezuelan side who played the last minutes of the game down to 10-man after substitute Alexander Gonzalez was sent off for hitting both Gabriel Martinelli and Vinicius in the face in successive plays in the 89th minute.

Five-time World Cup champions Brazil are third in the standings on 17 points, five from leaders Argentina, while Venezuela are seventh on 12 points. The top six sides are guaranteed a berth at the 2026 finals.

The high-paced match saw numerous chances from both sides who registered 11 goal attempts each, with Brazil enjoying over 60% of possession but failing to turn their dominance into goals and getting often exposed to counter attacks.

Off the back of successive wins against Peru and Chile, Brazil were dangerous from the start with Vinicius a constant menace, hitting the post in the 20th minute.

Raphinha gave Brazil the lead, netting a fine left-footed strike from a free kick on the edge of the box in the 43rd minute that ricocheted off the left post before finding the back of the net.

It was Brazil's first goal from a free kick in over 19 years in World Cup qualifiers after former Real Madrid fullback Roberto Carlos scored also against Venezuela in 2005.

But Segovia stroke an unstoppable first-effort shot from the edge of the box 38 seconds into the second half to level the game assisted by Jefferson Savarino.

England Beat Greece 3-0 Despite Kane Dropped



ATHENS (Dispatches) - England's understudies ignored the controversy over Harry Kane's criticism of the team's absentee stars as they beat Greece 3-0 yesterday to keep alive their hopes of Nations League promotion.

Kane was surprisingly dropped by interim boss Lee Carsley just 24 hours after his scathing response to the rash of withdrawals from England's squad.

The England captain said international duty should "come before anything" amid suggestions several had been persuaded by their club managers to pull out to avoid injuries at a busy time of the season.

Cole Palmer, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Bukayo Saka, Declan Rice, Phil Foden, Jack Grealish, Levi Colwill, Aaron Ramsdale and even Jarrad Branthwaite, who was a late call-up, all opted to withdraw from Carsley's squad.

Carsley's decision to leave Kane on the bench for the first 66 minutes before introducing him as a substitute was seen in some quarters as a rebuke for his uncharacteristically divisive comments.

In truth, Kane may have been given a rest day in the midst of a hectic campaign with Bayern Munich.

But the stay-away players weren't missed as England's reserves powered to a victory that leaves them in control of their fate in Nations League Group B2.

Ollie Watkins, deputising for Kane, gave England an early lead in the Olympic Stadium in Athens before an own goal from Greece keeper Odysseas Vlachodimos doubled the visitors' advantage.

Like Watkins, Curtis Jones had benefitted from the England absences and the Liverpool midfielder marked his first England start with their third goal.

England have moved above Greece on goal difference and will be guaranteed to win promotion to Nations League A if they beat Ireland at Wembley on Sunday.

If England finish second in the group, they go into a promotion play-off against one of the third-placed League A sides next year.

That will be of particular interest to Thomas Tuchel, the incoming England manager who was notable by his absence in Athens.

Antetokounmpo Nets 59 in Bucks' OT Win

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo amassed an NBA season-high 59 points as the Milwaukee Bucks overturned an 18-point deficit to defeat the visiting Detroit Pistons 127-120 in overtime.

It was Antetokounmpo's ninth 50-plus outing and the second best of his career, after his 64-point effort against Indiana last season.

The two-time MVP hit 21 of 34 from the field, 16 of 17 from the foul line, and had 14 rebounds, seven assists and three blocks. Brook Lopez provided the support with 29 points.

Cade Cunningham had 35 points and 11 assists for the Pistons, while Malik Beasley hit eight 3-pointers in his 26-point, 10-rebound game.

Darius Garland scored 25 points and Donovan Mitchell took over down the stretch as Cleveland Cavaliers remained undefeated with a 114-106 road victory over short-handed Philadelphia 76ers.

Mitchell finished with 23 points, 13 rebounds



and nine assists for Cleveland (13-0), which is off to the NBA's best start since the Golden State Warriors' record-setting 24-game winning streak to begin the 2015-16 season.

Philadelphia fought hard without Joel Embiid (knee), Paul George (knee) and Tyrese Maxey (hamstring) but still lost for the ninth time in 11 games. Rookie Jared McCain took advantage of the available playing time by posting career highs in points (34) and assists (10).

Coby White made three free throws with 3.2 seconds left to cap his 22-point effort and Chicago Bulls rallied after squandering a 22-point lead to beat host New York Knicks 124-123.

After falling behind 90-68 late in the third quarter, New York -- playing the second leg of a back-to-back -- ended the period on a 17-0 run to set up an intense fourth quarter.

Tyson Lands First Blow on Jake Paul at Fiercy Weigh-In



TEXAS (Dispatches) - Mike Tyson could not wait to put on the gloves to take a shot at upcoming opponent Jake Paul, striking the social media influencer-turned-boxer in the face as they approached each other at weigh-in at Arlington, Texas.

The one-time "Baddest Man on the Planet," 58-year-old Tyson is returning to the ring for his first professional fight in 19 years against "ultimate heel" Paul in the wildly anticipated showdown at AT&T Stadium tomorrow.

There was no love lost between the two as Tyson, who weighed in at 228.4 pounds, approached Paul and immediately slapped the 27-year-old in the face and offered a two-word televised remark before walking off stage: "Talking's over."

Paul, who gained a cult following on YouTube before turning to boxing four years ago, was far more loquacious, offering an expletive-riddled rant about his plans to demolish Tyson, who has a 50-6 record with 44 knockouts.

"He's angry, he's an angry little elf," said Paul, who weighed in at 227.2 pounds. "It's personal now - he must die!"

The fight is the first live boxing match that Netflix has aired, as the streamer with more than 280 million subscribers makes inroads into the sports arena.

The match has drawn extraordinary global interest but also criticism, with British promoter Eddie Hearn dismissing the bout as "dangerous, irresponsible and disrespectful to boxing."

Tyson, a beloved pop culture icon in America despite his 1992 rape conviction, insisted to Reuters in an interview last month that the fight was not about the payday.

"This is not for financial reasons. My life is not going to change, not one percentage after this fight. We will always be able to live this way," he said.

"And I'm just doing it because I want to test myself."

Sinner Sees Off Medvedev at ATP Finals

TURIN (Dispatches) - Italian world number one Jannik Sinner eased past Daniil Medvedev 6-3 6-4 in their final group match, leaving Taylor Fritz to seal a place in the semi-finals of the season-ending ATP Finals after the American defeated Alex de Minaur 5-7 6-4 6-3.

Sinner gave Russia's Medvedev, who had to beat him in straight sets to eliminate U.S. Open runner-up Fritz, no chance of reaching the last four after taking an untroubled first set.

Despite Medvedev's best efforts, Sinner was far superior, serving to love to take a 4-3 lead and closing out the opening set with a triple set point when the Russian missed a forehand return at the net.

World number four Medvedev refused to go without a fight and took a tenacious 4-3 lead in the second set. But his hopes of a comeback were dashed when Sinner levelled the next game and then wrapped up the match in 73 minutes, finishing top of the group and completing a perfect group stage with three victories.

"I try to enjoy my time on the court. The atmosphere here is amazing, so I'm just trying to play good tennis this week," said Sinner in front of a cheering home crowd in Turin.

"I'm trying to win as many matches as possible. Me and Daniil, we know each other very well. So every time we step on the court we try to change something tactically," added the Italian, who holds an 8-7 head-to-head advantage over the former world number one.

Earlier, Fritz gave a dominant performance, bouncing back from a set down with a solid display in the second before running away with the third set as the match marked the first time a deciding set has been played at this year's tournament.

Seventh seed De Minaur, meanwhile, goes home without winning a single match in the Ilic Nastase group on his tournament debut.



"He was all over me (in the first set). What I did a great job of was in the second set, towards the end of the second set, I really started to find my serve," Fritz said.

"I started serving much better and then that allowed me to just stay with it and create more pressure on his service games... It just gave me a little bit of comfort to just stay in the match and not be under so much pressure all the time."

The two played some entertaining tennis in the opening set, including a 30-shot rally which De Minaur won with a passing shot while Fritz walked back to the baseline with a wry smile.

De Minaur converted the all-important break at 5-5 and served for the set, sealing it with an ace, which also confirmed world number one Sinner as the first semi-finalist.

De Minaur, however, needed to win the second set comfortably to stand a chance of advancing to the semi-finals and the Australian saw his slim hopes of going through evaporate when Fritz levelled the score at one set apiece.

That was all the motivation a fired-up Fritz needed as he raced into a 4-1 lead to gain control of the decider while De Minaur crumbled. At 5-3, Fritz had three match points and took the contest with an ace.

"I think all of us are pretty beat up, but if I'm in the semis of the World Tour finals, I've got energy to give it for the semis," Fritz added.

The last two semi-final places will be up for grabs on Friday with a showdown between Spanish Carlos Alcaraz and German Alexander Zverev, who tops his group with a 2-0 record, while Norwegian Casper Ruud will face Russian Andrey Rublev.