

In a Post on His X Account, Iranian Foreign Ministry's Spokesperson, Esmail Baqaei, Called on the World Nations to Support the Rights of Palestinian Women and Girls

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Iran, Azerbaijani Begin Joint Military Drill in Border Region



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Special units of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force and the elite divisions of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces have launched a large-scale joint military exercise to enhance security cooperation and strengthen counter-terrorism efforts between the two nations.

The four-day drill, codenamed "Aras Joint Exercise," began on Sunday in the high-terrain regions of Aslan Duz County in Iran's northwestern province of Ardabil.

Rapid reaction units from Iran's IRGC Ground Force and the Republic of Azerbaijan's military are engaging in the collaborative exercise.

The primary goals of this joint military exercise include bolstering the existing military ties between the two neighboring Muslim nations and furthering their joint efforts to combat terrorist organizations.

Another crucial aspect of the exercise involves safeguarding the shared borders of the two nations and fostering defense cooperation at both tactical and operational levels.

This collaboration also aims to enhance military capabilities and is in line with agreements made between the two sides to promote their mutual interests.

On November 19, military officials from Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan weighed plans to enhance defense cooperation between the two neighbors.

Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani and Azeri commander Major General Farid Aliyev discussed a range of issues during the fourth meeting of the Joint Commission on Military and Defense Cooperation in Tehran.

They talked about ways to promote military cooperation between the two countries.

The Iranian general pointed to the "significant and influential" place of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Iran's foreign policy, stressing that the South Caucasus developments would impact Iran's security.

For his part, General Aliyev called for closer cooperation between Baku and Tehran to ensure peace and stability in the region. He also hailed the joint military exercises between the two countries as a good example of interaction.

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Arrest Warrant Not Enough, Netanyahu Must Be Executed

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has called for death sentence for Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose arrest warrant has been issued by the ICC amid the regime's genocide in Gaza and carnage in Lebanon.

"The (ICC) arrest warrant is not enough, Netanyahu's death sentence must be ordered," Ayatollah Khamenei said during a meeting with members of the Iranian Basij volunteer force on Monday, on the occasion of Basij Week.

The Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants against Netanyahu and his ousted war minister Yoav Gallant over their war crimes related to the ongoing Gaza genocide.

Now, the pair are at risk of arrest if they step foot in any of the 124 countries that signed the Rome Statute establishing the ICC.

Referring to Israel's aggression in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, the Leader said the bombing of houses is not a victory but "a crime".

The enemy has not won its wars on Gaza and Lebanon, and it will never be able to do so, Ayatollah Khamenei asserted.

The Leader also hailed Basij as the direct opposite of hegemonic powers, which are trying to manipulate national beliefs.

Ayatollah Khamenei said hegemonic powers first try to take away capabilities of nations.

The Leader noted that Imam Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Revolution, created Basij volunteer force as a "bulwark" against threats.

Basiji is not intimidated by the US and Israeli propaganda, he asserted, adding that some of the prominent Iranian scientists, who were assassinated by the enemy, were members of the volunteer force.

Ayatollah Khamenei further said that Basij will definitely destroy the Zionist regime. Basij, he emphasized, should strengthen, expand and maintain preparedness.

The leader said the United States' ideal for the region is either submission or chaos, urging the force to counter US duality of dictatorship and anarchy.

Additionally in his remarks, the Leader praised Basij's successes in foiling enemies' plots against the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Khamenei touched on a deal around 15 years ago, when the US "vowed" to deliver uranium with 20 percent purity to Iran to be used for radiopharmaceuticals in return for taking all of the country's 3.5 percent uranium.

"The Americans were cheating, we realized that they were cheating. It (the deal) was stopped," the Leader said.

"Those who disrupted the US's evil conspiracy in the case of 20 percent enriched uranium, which was needed by the country, were Basij members."

He added a brave Palestinian youth and a brave Lebanese youth see that if they are in the battlefield, there is danger; and even if they are not in the battlefield, the threat from the enemy still exists.

Well, for this brave youth, there is no other way but to fight. They are forced into battle. These fools are expanding and intensifying the resistance front with their own hands, the Leader continued.

He further said: Those who were able to thwart America's evil conspiracy regarding the 20% enriched uranium, which was necessary for the country, were Basij members. Martyr Shahriari was a Basij member. Our nuclear martyrs were the country's Basij professors. It has a story, a long story."

Army Chief Vows Iran's Lasting Support for Resistance



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Iranian Army says Israel has "reached an impasse" and the Islamic Republic will continue to consistently support the "legitimate and just" resistance front in the face of the apartheid regime.

Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said that the Israeli regime has no plan for "the day after" the war in Gaza.

"It has been more than a year since the genocidal war on Gaza began and the Israelis have reached an impasse and been unable to devise a comprehensive strategy for the post-war Gaza as they are facing new challenges," Mousavi said on Sunday.

"The resistance front is still active and will remain active and has dealt severe blows to the Zionist regime over the past months," he pointed out.

He added that the resistance is the main "shield and spear" against oppressive and arrogant enemies.

"Resistance is not confined to military fields but includes all aspects of the components of power," he added.

The Iranian commander pointed to last year's Operation Al-Aqsa Flood (Storm) led by the Palestinian resistance group Hamas against Israel and said the event marked a pivotal turning point, effectively creating a clear division between the pre- and post-operation world.

"Even the most skeptical people have concluded that the Zionist regime would not exist in the world in the next 25 years," Mousavi added.

Operation Al-Aqsa Flood came in response to the Israeli regime's intensified aggression against Palestinians. It saw the fighters storming the occupied territories, taking control of Israeli military bases and illegal settlements around Gaza, and taking more than 240 Israelis captive.

The Israeli regime brought Gaza under a genocidal war following the operation. The war has so far claimed the lives of at least 44,211 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and wounded 104,567 people.

Iran Rejects Any Role in Murder of Israeli Rabbi Who Went Missing in UAE



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iranian Embassy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has rejected outright any role in the alleged killing of an Israeli-Moldovan rabbi, who went missing in the Persian Gulf country several days ago.

The diplomatic mission in Abu Dhabi told Reuters news agency that it "categorically rejects the allegations of Iran's involvement in the murder of this individual."

The body of the 28-year-old Zvi Kogan, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who went missing in Dubai on Thursday afternoon, was found dead on Sunday.

His corpse was discovered in the Emirati city of Al Ain, which borders Oman, though it was not clear if he was killed there or elsewhere. It was believed Kogan had last been seen at a Kosher supermarket in Dubai.

But certain Western media outlets and the Zionist regime missed no time to accuse Iran of being behind the murder without providing any evidence even prior to the launch of an investigation by Emirati authorities.

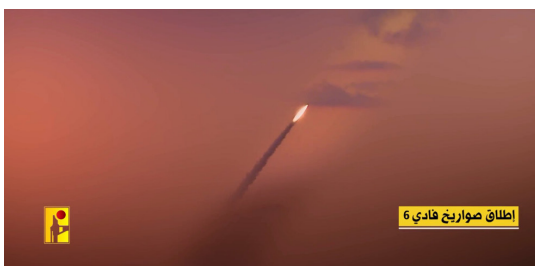
The UAE's Interior Ministry announced in a statement on Sunday night that three suspects involved in Kogan's murder have been arrested.

The ministry statement did not give details on the suspects or whether they had been charged, but said all legal powers would be used "to respond decisively and without leniency to any actions or attempts that threaten societal stability."

The UAE authorities stated that after Kogan's family reported him missing, an investigation team was formed, leading to the discovery of his body and the identification and arrest of the suspected perpetrators.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office has denounced the killing of the rabbi as a "heinous anti-Semitic terrorist act" and said Israel would do everything it could to bring those responsible to justice.

Hezbollah Breaks Record of Anti-Israel Operations



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has conducted a record number of anti-Israeli operations in a single day since last October, when it began defending the Lebanese soil against escalated deadly aggression by the Israeli regime.

"Fifty-one operations were executed, a record number, surpassing the record of 48 a month ago," various resistance media outlets said of the strikes that the movement had carried out on Sunday.

The movement's projectiles "reached a record depth of 150 kilometers (93 miles) with the bombing of the Asdod Naval Base with drones and the Palmachim Base south of Tel Aviv with missiles," they wrote.

"Sirens went off 543 times from over 350 rockets, sending four million settlers into shelter and inflicting significant damage and casualties."

Hezbollah also announced striking a military target in Tel Aviv with missiles and drones, besides targeting the Haifa Naval Base, the Gllot Base, the Shraga Base in the city of Akka, the Dado Base in the city of Safad, and many other sites.

Also on Monday, the group hit the regime's illegal settlements across the northern part of the occupied Palestinian territories, including Kiryat Shmona, Metulla, Manara, Safad, Maalot-Tarshiha, Meron, and Avivim.

Gov't Emphasizes Diplomacy, National Unity, and Economic Stability

TEHRAN - Government Spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani in an interview discussed Iran's foreign policy, economic challenges, and social reforms under the current administration. She stressed the government's commitment to diplomacy, national unity, and improving the economic conditions of the Iranian people.

Mohajerani began by emphasizing that Iran holds no hostility towards any nation, stating, "We have no quarrel with any country. Our approach is balanced, with priority given to neighboring nations and the East." She noted that the government is working to establish strong, peaceful relations within the region and with global powers, particularly through platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. Iran's participation in the BRICS summit this year, which includes major economic powers such as China and India, reflects a strategic push to enhance economic ties and open new markets for Iranian businesses.

Highlighting Iran's past diplomatic efforts, Mohajerani pointed to the country's negotiations with the P5+1, which led to the 2015 nuclear deal. "While the U.S. and the West withdrew from the agreement and failed to meet their obligations, Iran continues to pursue a balanced foreign policy that prioritizes peace and cooperation with all countries," she said.

Turning to domestic matters, Mohajerani praised the government's approach to building national unity through inclusivity and diversity. She pointed out the significant achievements in this regard, including the appointment of women and ethnic minorities to high government positions. "For the first time, a woman has been appointed as minister of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, and we now have Sunni governors in Kurdistan and Sistan and Baluchestan provinces," she explained. "This reflects the realization of the President's slogan of 'national unity.'"

She noted that these appointments, while an important first step, are only the beginning of the government's ongoing efforts to foster a more inclusive political environment. The



PHOTO: Mohammadreza Alimadadi

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spokesperson also emphasized that the government's core objectives remain improving the economy, balancing international relations, and ensuring the dignity and welfare of the Iranian people.

On the economic front, Mohajerani acknowledged the difficult economic climate, citing the rising inflation and the impact of international sanctions. She underscored that economic improvement is a long-term process, stating, "Inflation can only be reduced through economic growth, and vice versa. These issues cannot be solved with a single appointment—they

require time and sustained effort."

She highlighted the government's recent success in slowing the inflation rate as a notable achievement. "While we do not claim that the current situation meets the expectations of the people, the reduction in inflation's pace and the timely delivery of the first part of the budget to parliament are significant milestones," she said.

Regarding the upcoming budget, Mohajerani explained that a key focus will be supporting lower-income groups, with measures such as tax relief for wage earners and a 20% increase in civil servant salaries, potentially rising to 28% considering population growth. She also addressed the difficulty of achieving both inflation control and economic growth amid ongoing sanctions.

On domestic social issues, including internet censorship, Mohajerani stated that the government sees addressing the issue of filtering as a fundamental right of the people. "The Supreme Leader has emphasized the need for proper governance of the digital space, which does not necessarily mean blocking access, but regulating it to protect children and teenagers from harmful content," she explained.

While acknowledging the government's challenges with filtering and censorship, she confirmed that efforts are underway to lift some of these restrictions. "There is consensus in the first phase to address the issue, but the final decisions regarding the lifting of restrictions are still under discussion."

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Over \$5b in Foreign Investments Approved in Iran

TEHRAN - In a meeting chaired by Abolfazl Koudeei, Deputy Minister and Head of the Iranian Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance Organization, over \$5 billion worth of foreign investments were approved. The session, which took place at the Persian Gulf Hall of the Investment Organization, included members from key organizations such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Central Bank of Iran, Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, and other ministries, including Oil, Roads and Urban Development, Industry, Mining, and Trade, Energy, Agriculture, Culture and Islamic Guidance, and the Iranian Ports and Maritime Organization. During the meeting, 83 foreign investment requests were discussed, including new investment applications, capital increases, and changes to existing licenses. Of these, 77 requests were approved, totaling approximately \$5.08 billion.

Iran and Belarus to Strengthen Cooperation in Supplying Mining Machinery



TEHRAN - Dmitry Kaltsov, the Belarusian Ambassador to Iran, met with Mohammadreza Bahraman, Vice President of Iran Chamber of Commerce and President of the Iranian Mining House, at the Iran ConMine 2024 International Mining Exhibition.

During the meeting, Bahraman highlighted the strong ties between Iran and Belarus, noting that Belarus is a key supplier of mining machinery to Iran. He welcomed expanding collaboration between the two nations.

Bahraman also emphasized the private sector's efforts to foster mining partnerships with countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, despite the challenges posed by international sanctions. He called for innovative solutions to meet Iran's domestic needs.

The Vice President invited Ambassador Kaltsov to visit Iranian mines to explore the sector's potential firsthand. Kaltsov expressed interest, stating, "In my seven years in Iran, I have not had such an experience, and I am eager to visit Iranian mines."

The Belarusian ambassador invited the Iran Chamber of Commerce and the Mining House to participate in the upcoming Iran-Belarus Joint Economic Commission meeting, scheduled for December 14. Kaltsov underscored the potential for enhanced collaboration in the mining sector, particularly in the supply of Belarusian mining machinery.

Iran Launches ACUMER System as SWIFT Alternative

TEHRAN - Iran has officially launched the ACUMER system, a new international financial messaging platform designed to bypass SWIFT and enhance regional banking cooperation, according to Mohammadreza Farzin, Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI). Speaking at the 11th Annual Conference on Modern Banking and Payment Systems, Farzin emphasized the significance of this initiative in countering sanctions and fostering regional financial integration.

Farzin highlighted the need for Iran to remain adaptive in the rapidly evolving financial technology landscape. He noted that artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies necessitate proactive planning. The Central Bank, he said, is focused on several key areas, including payment systems, cryptocurrency regulations, anti-money laundering measures, and the development of new central banking systems.

Addressing the growing prominence of cryptocurrencies, Farzin announced that comprehensive regulations for crypto-assets would be released soon. Over the past six months, the Central Bank has been collaborating with various agencies to draft these regulations. This initiative aims to create a secure framework for crypto transactions, which have proliferated in recent years, both globally and within Iran.

Farzin acknowledged the challenges in regulating cryptocurrencies, especially given their potential role as a tool for circumventing sanctions. He stated that Iran currently has no specific laws governing cryptocurrencies but underscored the importance of addressing issues such as custodial requirements, taxation, and compliance with anti-money laundering standards. Iran's evolving stance reflects its efforts to balance the opportunities presented by digital currencies with the risks they pose to financial stability.

One of the key announcements at the conference was the operationalization of the ACUMER system in October. Originating from an Asian monetary union initiative, ACUMER aims to reduce dependency on the US dollar and provide an alternative to the SWIFT financial messaging network, which Iran has been largely excluded from due to international sanctions.

Farzin explained that ACUMER is currently operational with partners such as India and Pakistan. The system is part of Iran's broader strategy to circumvent sanctions and strengthen regional banking ties. He emphasized the importance

of platforms like ACUMER in ensuring the resilience of Iran's financial transactions under restrictive global conditions.

Iran is also leveraging its relationships with the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) to expand its financial and trade networks. Farzin noted that BRICS is developing a cross-border payment settlement platform based on Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT), which could further facilitate international transactions outside Western financial systems.

Iran has actively sought to enhance the use of local currencies in its trade with BRICS members. Farzin highlighted China's significant role in this shift and expressed optimism about Iran's progress in adopting similar measures.

In another major development, Iran has advanced its financial integration with Russia by connecting the Russian "Mir" payment system to Iran's "Shetab" network. The project, which comprises three phases, has already enabled Iranian cards to be used in Russia. Subsequent phases will allow Russian tourists to use their cards in Iranian point-of-sale terminals, with full implementation expected by early next year. Notably, transactions between Iran and Russia are now conducted in local currencies, bypassing the US dollar altogether.

Farzin also discussed the pilot implementation of Iran's digital currency, the "Digital Rial," on Kish Island. He emphasized its potential to improve financial efficiency and reduce transaction costs. While 23 countries are actively researching central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), Iran is among the nations exploring their practical applications.

Additionally, the Governor addressed the growing threat of cyberattacks on Iranian banks. Despite ongoing efforts to bolster cybersecurity, Farzin acknowledged that current measures are insufficient and called for more specialized expertise to safeguard financial data.

The launch of the ACUMER system and other initiatives underscore Iran's determination to mitigate the impact of sanctions while modernizing its banking infrastructure. By embracing regional cooperation, advancing cryptocurrency regulations, and exploring digital currency solutions, Iran aims to build a resilient financial ecosystem that aligns with global technological advancements and local economic needs.

Iran Halts Gas Exports to Iraq for 15 Days



TEHRAN - According to Middle East News via Iraq's official news agency, Iraq's Ministry of Electricity has reported a loss of 5,500 megawatts of electricity due to the complete suspension of gas exports from Iran. The ministry stated that it is coordinating with the Ministry of Oil to mitigate the effects of this disruption on the energy grid.

In a statement, the Ministry of Electricity announced that it has initiated strategic and emergency plans to enhance the capabilities of the national electricity system. These efforts span across production, transmission, and distribution sectors to stabilize the grid.

The ministry also highlighted the revival of delayed and stalled projects from previous years, aiming to recover lost production capacity. It plans to increase electricity output using domestic fuel and limited imported gas until government projects to develop national gas fields are completed.

The suspension of Iranian gas exports, according to Iranian authorities, is due to maintenance activities and will last for 15 days. This interruption has halted gas supplies to Baghdad, the central region, and the central Euphrates provinces, resulting in a loss of 5,500 megawatts of power.

The statement added that while Iran was expected to deliver 25 million cubic meters of gas daily as of Sunday, current deliveries are only around 7 million cubic meters. This reduced supply is being rerouted from Baghdad and central regions to southern Iraq.

The Ministry of Electricity emphasized its commitment to working closely with the Ministry of Oil to address the shortfall. It also urged citizens to cooperate by conserving energy during peak hours until gas pumping resumes after maintenance is completed.

Iran's Virtual Water Imports Six Times Higher Than Exports



TEHRAN - Safdar Niazi, the Deputy Minister of Water and Soil at Iran's Ministry of Agriculture, discussed the country's soil and water challenges, highlighting the significance of soil in food production and water conservation.

"95% of our food, and that of all living creatures, comes from the soil. Soil is also a key resource in reducing pollution, as it helps store water. Humans have placed their habitat within the soil, and thus, we must protect and preserve it against pollution and degradation," said Niazi.

He noted that Iran's Soil Law, which is one of the most advanced in the world, was implemented last year, with a mandate for 16 organizations to carry out its regulations.

Niazi also announced that World Soil Day is approaching, which takes place every December 5th. Last year, 3,400 events were recorded by FAO in connection with this day, and Iran was ranked first by FAO for raising awareness on soil issues. FAO has declared 2024 as the year for monitoring and managing soil care.

The deputy minister pointed out the alarming rates of soil erosion in Iran, exacerbated by land use changes and soil salinity. "This issue is particularly severe in provinces such as Sistan and Baluchestan and areas in the Zagros mountain range," he explained.

In terms of addressing soil management, Niazi revealed that 200 soil laboratories have been established across the country. "The Ministry of Agriculture is working to empower these laboratories, and we are also standardizing chemical fertilizers. We have issued guidelines for 13 biological and 28 chemical fertilizers," he said.

On water resource management, Niazi emphasized the need for coordination between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Energy, stating that water data is critical for determining how much water should be allocated to agriculture and when. "By the end of the 7th Development Plan, we aim to allocate 65 billion cubic meters of water to the agricultural sector, and I hope this issue will be resolved by then."

Niazi also revealed that Iran imports 35 billion cubic meters of virtual water, while exporting only 6 billion cubic meters. He stressed that agricultural exports should not be restricted solely based on water consumption but should also consider other factors, such as the country's surplus fruit production, which should be exported.

He concluded by reaffirming that the export of agricultural soil is prohibited by law, stating: "The law explicitly forbids the export of agricultural soil, unless it is illegally trafficked, and I deny any official exports."

Formation of Africa Desk in 14th Government of Iran



TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade, along with the head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), emphasized the need for strategic initiatives and operational proposals to increase Iran's trade share with Africa. This was discussed during a meeting of the Africa Desk Economic Commission.

The session, held at the Persian Gulf Hall of the Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds, was attended by senior officials from various ministries, including Agriculture, Roads and Urban Development, Social Welfare, and the Central Bank of Iran.

In his remarks, Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehghani, Head of the TPO, highlighted that Iran has not made significant efforts to capture a share of the African market. Despite Iran's advancements in Africa, they have not progressed in alignment with the directives from the Supreme Leader and the President. Dehghan stressed the importance of increased effort in engaging with Africa, pointing out that simply hosting meetings or forming committees is not enough. He emphasized the need for concrete solutions and projects to be defined for trade expansion.

Dehghan continued, stressing that these sessions should lead to project development and result in actionable outcomes, which would then justify further meetings with high-level officials, including the Vice President.

The Head of the TPO also emphasized that entering the African market requires initiative and creativity, which is largely driven by

the private sector. He noted that businesses seeking to expand in Africa are best equipped to identify challenges and propose solutions to overcome them.

Seyed Mohammad Sadegh Ghannadzadeh, Deputy for International Business Development at TPO, highlighted the formation of the first-ever Africa Desk in the 14th government, based on an instruction from the Vice President. He shared that while five prior Africa desks were established, they faced implementation issues. The aim now is to identify these challenges and offer actionable recommendations with detailed implementation plans.

Ghannadzadeh further noted that both the Supreme Leader and the President have strongly emphasized the importance of expanding trade with Africa, recognizing the continent's rich resources in minerals, oil, and agriculture. He pointed out that while Iran has overlooked these opportunities in recent years, competing countries have already capitalized on Africa's potential, rapidly investing in the market.

Finally, Ghannadzadeh stressed the need to complete commercial infrastructure to facilitate trade with African nations. In response, the TPO has begun collaborating with relevant agencies to develop a comprehensive report that identifies obstacles, provides solutions, and outlines a clear strategy for improving Iran's trade relations with Africa.

Two-Thirds of Iran's Imports are Agricultural Products



TEHRAN - At the 11th Annual Resistance Economy Conference, Ahmad Khani Nozeri, Deputy Minister of Agricultural Trade Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, stated that despite Iran's agricultural development and diverse climate, the country produces 130 million tons of agricultural products annually, three-quarters of which are crops. However, the country's total agricultural demand is 150 million tons, meaning 20% of the need is met through imports, with the remainder covered by domestic production.

He explained that agricultural imports consist of 10 million tons of corn, 5 million tons of soybean meal, and 3 million tons of barley.

Khani Nozeri emphasized that the low diversity of imported agricultural products and their supply sources are significant concerns. The current supply sources are distant regions, and there is potential to source alternative goods from closer locations. For example, sunflower meal could replace soybean meal. These few products account for 90% of Iran's agricultural import needs.

The deputy minister also noted that out of the total 40 million tons of imports, two-thirds are agricultural goods.

On the topic of overseas farming, he mentioned that the foreign cultivation regulation was implemented in 2016 to encourage Iranian traders to establish operations in supply regions abroad. However, despite this, no agricultural products have been imported through foreign farming initiatives. He pointed out that some Iranian investors are operating in foreign countries, producing and selling goods, but their activities are not governed by a cohesive system.

Khani Nozeri also discussed the Dabesh tea scandal, attributing its occurrence to the lack of adequate infrastructure for oversight. He explained that the problem arose from the high number of involved entities and the frequent changes among them.

Additionally, he shared that prior to 2024, over 100 companies held permits to import corn, but in practice, only about eight companies were active in the importation process. This led to a policy shift to remove human factors from the permit issuance process, which increased the number of importing companies from eight to more than 200 within 18 months.

Taiwan Spots Chinese Balloon in Airspace, Marks First Sighting in Six Months

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan's defense ministry on Monday reported that a Chinese balloon had been detected over the sea to Taiwan's north, the first time since April it has reported such an incident in what Taipei views as part of a pattern of harassment by Beijing.

Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, complained that in the weeks leading up to its presidential election in January Chinese balloon activity took place at an "unprecedented scale". It described the incidents as part of a Chinese pressure campaign — so-called grey-zone warfare designed to exhaust a foe using irregular tactics without open combat.

Taiwan strongly objects to China's sovereignty claims and says only the island's people can decide their future.



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Leftist Candidate Orsi Wins Uruguay's Presidential Election



MONTEVIDEO (Dispatches) - Left-wing politician Yamandu Orsi was elected president of Uruguay, official results showed on Sunday, in a rebuke by voters of five years of conservative rule.

Uruguayans went to the polls for the second round of voting in what became a tight race between Orsi, of the Frente Amplio (Broad Front) alliance, and Alvaro Delgado of the National Party, a member of outgoing President Luis Lacalle Pou's center-right Republican Coalition.

Orsi promised in a victory speech on Sunday evening to be a president "who calls again and again for national dialogue to find the best solutions."

Delgado meanwhile conceded defeat, saying he was sending "a big hug and a greeting to Yamandu Orsi."

Though the election will shift the balance of power in Uruguay, analysts did not foresee a massive change in the country's economic direction, with Orsi having previously promised "change that will not be radical."

Both candidates pledged to fight crime linked to drug trafficking and to boost economic growth, which is recovering from the slowdown brought by the Covid-19 pandemic and a historic drought.

With 94.4 percent of ballots counted, Orsi won 1,123,420 votes compared to Delgado's 1,042,001, the country's Electoral Court said.

Cheers broke out in the capital Montevideo, a bastion of Frente Amplio support, when projections showing Orsi leading were announced.

His campaign was boosted by support from Jose "Pepe" Mujica, a former guerrilla lionized as "the world's poorest president" because of his modest lifestyle during his 2010-2015 time in office.

Orsi, seen as an understudy of Mujica, had garnered 43.9 percent of the October 27 first-round vote — short of the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff but ahead of the 26.7 percent of ballots cast for Delgado.

The pair came out on top of a crowded field of 11 candidates seeking to replace Lacalle Pou, who has a high approval rating but is barred constitutionally from seeking a second consecutive term.

Hezbollah Rockets Land Near Tel Aviv After Large Israeli Strike on Beirut



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's Hezbollah movement fired heavy rocket barrages at Israel on Sunday, and the Israeli military said houses had been destroyed or set alight near Tel Aviv, after a powerful Israeli airstrike killed at least 29 people in Beirut the day before.

Israel also struck Beirut's Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs, where intensified bombardment over the last two weeks has coincided with signs of progress in U.S.-led ceasefire talks.

Hezbollah, which has previously vowed to respond to attacks on Beirut by targeting Tel Aviv, said it had launched precision missiles at two military sites in Tel Aviv and nearby.

Police said there were multiple impact sites in the area of Petah Tikvah, on the eastern side of Tel Aviv, and that several people had minor injuries.

The Israel Defense Forces said a direct hit on a neighbourhood had left "houses in flames and ruins". Television footage showed an apartment damaged by rocket fire.

Israel's military said Hezbollah had fired 250 rockets at Israel, of which many were intercepted, with sirens sounding across most of the country. At least four people had been injured by shrapnel.

Video obtained by Reuters showed a projectile exploding as it smashed into the roof of a building in the northern Israeli city of Nahariya.

Israel's military warned on social media that it planned to target Hezbollah facilities in southern Beirut before strikes that demolished two apartment blocks, according to security sources in Lebanon. Afterwards, the IDF said it had hit command centres "deliberately embedded between civilian buildings".

On Sunday, the Israeli military said it carried out strikes against 12 Hezbollah command centers in the southern Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh.

On Saturday, it had carried out one of its deadliest and most powerful strikes on the centre of Beirut.

Lebanon's health ministry on Sunday raised the death toll from 20 to 29. It said a total of 84 people had been killed on Saturday, taking the death toll to 3,754 since October 2023.

The IDF did not comment on Saturday's strike in the Lebanese capital or say what it had attacked.

Israel went on the offensive against the Iran-backed Hezbollah in September, pounding the south, the Bekaa Valley and

Beirut's southern suburbs with airstrikes after nearly a year of hostilities ignited by the Gaza war.

The Israeli offensive has uprooted more than 1 million people in Lebanon.

Israel says its aim is to secure the return home of tens of thousands of people evacuated from its north due to rocket attacks by Hezbollah, which opened fire in support of Hamas at the start of the Gaza war in October 2023.

U.S. mediator Amos Hochstein highlighted progress in negotiations during a visit to Beirut last week, before travelling to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Israel Katz, and then returning to Washington.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday said a U.S. ceasefire proposal was awaiting final approval from Israel.

"We must pressure the Israeli government and maintain the pressure on Hezbollah to accept the U.S. proposal for a ceasefire," he said in Beirut after meeting Lebanese officials.

Israeli media reported that Netanyahu had convened a meeting of his security cabinet for 5 p.m. (1500 GMT).

Axios reporter Barak Ravid in a post on social media cited an unnamed Israeli official saying that Israel is moving towards a ceasefire agreement in Lebanon.

But a separate report from Israel's public broadcaster Kan said there was no green light given on an agreement in Lebanon, with issues still yet to be resolved.

Diplomacy has focused on restoring a ceasefire based on U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended a 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli war. It requires Hezbollah to pull its fighters back around 30 km (19 miles) from the Israeli border, and the Lebanese army to deploy in the buffer zone.

The Lebanese army said on Sunday at least one soldier had been killed and 18 more injured in an Israeli strike that caused severe damage at an army centre in Al-Amiriya near the southern city of Tyre.

The Israeli military said it regretted the incident and was investigating, and that it was fighting against Hezbollah, not the Lebanese Army.

Lebanon's caretaker prime minister, Najib Mikati, said the attack "represents a direct bloody message rejecting all efforts to reach a ceasefire, strengthen the army's presence in the south, and implement ... 1701".

Borrell said the EU was ready to allocate 200 million euros (\$208 million) to support the Lebanese army.

Ukraine Studies Debris From New Russian Ballistic Missile



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian investigators are studying the debris of a new Russian intermediate-range ballistic missile that was fired at the city of Dnipro on Thursday, the first time such a powerful weapon has been used in the war.

Reuters was among a small group of reporters given access to the wreckage of the missile on Sunday. Reporters were asked not disclose the exact location of the site for security reasons.

The scorched and crumbled pieces of debris were laid out in a hanger at a facility which conducts weapons forensics. Ukrainian experts study such debris to gain insight into Russian military supply chains, production and how to develop counter-measures.

Russia has dubbed the missile the Oreshnik (Hazel Tree) and said it is impossible to intercept it with air defences. Ukraine has said the weapon reached a top speed of more than 13,000 kph (8,000 mph) on its way towards Dnipro on Thursday.

Intermediate-range ballistic missiles have a range of up to 5,500 kilometres.

Two state experts provided cautious assessments, saying only that the weapon was ballistic, flew on a ballistic trajectory and that the strike resulted in civilian damage. They declined to take questions or give their surnames.

"These are preliminary conclusions and to say something more concrete requires time and careful study of the remains of the missile," said Ivan, one of the experts.

Pro-Russia Candidate Surges in Romania Presidential Vote

BUCHAREST (Dispatches) - A far-right populist took the lead in Romania's presidential election Sunday, electoral data showed, and will likely face leftist Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu in a runoff in two weeks, an outcome that rocked the country's political landscape.

Calin Georgescu, who ran independently, led the polls with around 22% of the vote, while Ciolacu of the Social Democratic Party, or PSD, trailed at 20.6%. Elena Lasconi of the Save Romania Union party, or USR, stood at about 17.4%, and George Simion, the leader of the far-right Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, or AUR, took 14.3%.

After polls closed at 9 pm local time (1900GMT), 9.4 million people — about 52.4% of eligible voters — had cast ballots, according to the Central Election Bureau.

Thirteen candidates ran for the presidency in the European Union and NATO member country, and will go to a second round on Dec. 8. The president serves a five-year term and has significant decision-making powers in areas such as national security, foreign policy and judicial appointments.

Georgescu, 62, ran independently and was not widely known. He outperformed most local surveys, sending shockwaves through Romania's political establishment.

After casting his ballot on Sunday, Georgescu said in a post on Facebook that he voted "For the unjust, for the humiliated, for those who feel they do not matter and actually matter the most ... the vote is a prayer for the nation."

Cristian Andrei, a political consultant based in Bucharest, told The



Associated Press that Georgescu's unexpected poll performance appears to be a "large protest or revolt against the establishment."

"The mainstream political parties have lost the connection with regular Romanians," he said. "You don't have strong candidates or strong leaders ... there are weak candidates, weak leaders, and the parties in general are pretty much disconnected."

Georgescu lacks an agenda, Andrei added, and has a vague and populist manifesto with positions that are "beyond the normal discourse." His stances include supporting Romanian farmers, reducing dependency on imports, and ramping up energy and food production. He also has a rapidly growing on the social media platform, TikTok.

Ahead of Sunday's vote, many expected to see Simion, a vocal supporter of US President-elect Donald Trump, face Ciolacu in the second round. He campaigned for reunification with Moldova, which this year renewed a

five-year ban on him entering the country over security concerns, and he is banned for the same reason from neighbouring Ukraine.

Ecaterina Nawadia, a 20-year-old architecture student, said she voted for the first time in a national election on Sunday and hopes young people turn out in high numbers.

"Since the (1989) revolution, we didn't have a really good president," she said. "I hope most of the people my age went to vote ... because the leading candidate is not the best option."

Romania will also hold parliamentary elections on Dec. 1 that will determine the country's next government and prime minister.

Andrei, the political consultant, said Romania's large budget deficit, high inflation, and an economic slowdown could push more mainstream candidates to shift toward populist stances amid widespread dissatisfaction.

Ciolacu told the AP before the first-round vote that one of his biggest goals was "to convince Romanians that it is worth staying at home or returning" to Romania, which has a massive diaspora spread throughout EU countries.

Other candidates included former NATO deputy general secretary Mircea Geoana, who ran independently and obtained about 6%; and Nicolae Ciuca, a former army general and head of the center-right National Liberal Party, which is currently in a tense coalition with the PSD — who stood at 9.3%.

Geoana, a former foreign minister and ambassador to the United States, told the AP before Sunday's vote that he believed his international experience would qualify him above the other candidates.

More Than 80 Killed, Dozens Injured amid Pakistan Sectarian Violence

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Three days of bitter sectarian gunfights in northwestern Pakistan have killed at least 82 people and wounded 156 more, a local official said Sunday.

Pakistan is a Sunni-majority country but Kurram district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province — near the border with Afghanistan — has a large Shiite population and the communities have clashed for decades.

The latest bout of violence began on Thursday when two separate convoys of Shiite Muslims travelling under police escort were ambushed, killing at least 43 and sparking two days of gun battles.

"The clashes and convoy attacks on November 21, 22, and 23 have resulted in 82 fatalities and 156 injuries," said a local administration official speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Among the deceased 16 were Sunni, while 66 belonged to the Shia community," he told AFP.

Around 300 families fled on Saturday as the gunfights with both light and heavy weapons continued into the night, however no fresh casualties were reported on Sunday morning.

"The mobile network across Kurram remains suspended and traffic on the main highway is halted," said the local administration official.

Police have regularly struggled to stymie violence in Kurram, which was part



of the semi-autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas until it was merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018.

A delegation from the provincial government held talks with the Shiite community on Saturday and is scheduled to meet the Sunni community later on Sunday.

A security official in the provincial capital of Peshawar told AFP the negotiators' helicopter had come under fire as it arrived in the region, although no one was harmed.

"Our priority today is to broker a ceasefire between both sides. Once that is achieved, we can begin addressing the underlying issues," provincial Law Minister Aftab Alam Afridi said Sunday.

Last month at least 16 people, including three women and two children, were killed in a sectarian clash in Kurram.

Previous clashes in July and September killed dozens of people and ended only after a jirga, or tribal council, called a ceasefire.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said 79 people died between July and October in sectarian clashes.

Several hundred people demonstrated against the violence on Friday in Pakistan's second largest city of Lahore and Karachi, the country's commercial hub.



Italy Retains Davis Cup After Sinner, Berrettini Defeat the Netherlands

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jannik Sinner completed his sensational year by leading Italy to a successful defence of the Davis Cup with victory over the Netherlands in the final. The world number one eased to a 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 triumph against Tallon Griekspoor for the winning point after Matteo Berrettini had put the defending champions ahead with a convincing 6-4, 6-2 win against Botić van de Zandschulp. Sinner ends 2024 with titles at the Australian Open, US Open and the ATP Finals. "The whole team is amazing, we tried to defend our title and we have done it, so we're extremely happy... there's a lot of work behind it," said Sinner as Italy won the Davis Cup for a third time. Italy became the first team to defend the title since the Czech Republic in 2013, and the fifth nation to win it along with the Billie Jean King Cup in the same season. Strong Italian support, along with an orange wall of Dutch fans, made for a fine atmosphere at the Martin Carpena arena, with the Netherlands in the final for the first time in 104 years of trying. Defeating Sinner this year has been nigh on impossible for most players, let alone with the pressure of carrying a nation's hopes on their shoulders. Griekspoor, ranked 40th, has now lost all six meetings with Sinner. The Italian produced three aces in the first game in an ominous start but Griekspoor battled remarkably well.

He opened up two break points in the third game but Sinner saved both and held when the Dutchman sent a return wide. Serving brilliantly, Griekspoor twice held to love and hit two aces in the 12th game to force a tie-break. Sinner secured an early mini-break and another for a 5-2 lead, firing down his 12th ace to take the first set. The Italian brought up and converted his first break point of the match to take a 2-1 lead in the second set. Griekspoor produced a backhand winner to drag his way back on serve but undid his good work with a double fault that allowed Sinner to break again for a 3-2 lead, backed up with a hold to love. The game was up for the Dutch and Sinner broke again in the seventh game before sealing his triumph with his fourth match point with a scorching serve Griekspoor could not return. Berrettini edged the first set against Van de Zandschulp but hit his peak in the second and left the Dutchman no chance, winning in 76 minutes. The world number 35, who came to support Italy as they ended a 47-year wait for the trophy in 2023 as he missed out with an ankle injury, was crucial in their Davis Cup defence. The 28-year-old paired up with Sinner to help Italy triumph in a doubles decider against Argentina in the last eight, before winning his semi-final singles rubber against Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis.

Amorim's Man United Reign Begins With Lackluster Draw at Ipswich



IPSWICH (Dispatches) - Manchester United had to settle for a 1-1 draw at lowly Ipswich Town in Portuguese coach Ruben Amorim's first match in charge as Marcus Rashford's early goal was cancelled out by a deflected strike from Omari Hutchinson in the Premier League on Sunday. There was an electric atmosphere at Portman Road but United silenced the home fans as they took the lead after 81 seconds through Rashford who stole in between two defenders to steer the ball home after a brilliant run down the right by Amad. United keeper Andre Onana made a brilliant one-handed save to deny Liam Delap as halftime loomed but Ipswich equalised in the 43rd minute as Hutchinson curled a shot into the top corner helped by a deflection off visiting defender Noussair Mazraoui. After the break Ipswich striker Sam Szmodics almost scored with a back-heel that Onana saved with his feet but neither side could find a winner. The result leaves United in 12th place with 16 points, six off the top four. Ipswich are 18th with nine. "They are very good players but we have to improve physically, technically and tactically and we need time to do that," Amorim said as the enormity of the task facing him at United was on show again in a lacklustre performance. "It's hard to expect anything now. It's not a surprise but you have to see it... That's why I was a little bit anxious because you can't understand what will happen (until you're) in the game," the Portuguese coach told a press conference. "They were trying but they were thinking too much in the game. That is normal. But we should have had more possession of the ball and kept more of the ball," he added. Jonny Evans, Christian Eriksen and Alejandro Gamacho were back in the starting lineup as 39-year-old Amorim made three changes from the win over Leicester City in their final match under interim manager Ruud van Nistelrooy two weeks ago. Amorim replaced Erik ten Hag after the Dutchman was sacked and the United fans were keen to find out how he would change the lineup as the former Sporting coach tries to bring success to the Old Trafford club after years of underachievement.

Verstappen Lights Up Las Vegas With Fourth F1 Title

LAS VEGAS (Dispatches) - Red Bull's Max Verstappen lit up the Las Vegas night after securing his fourth Formula One title in a row in a race won by George Russell in a Mercedes one-two with Lewis Hamilton. Verstappen finished where he started in fifth but that was all the Dutch driver needed to put the championship, already effectively over, out of reach of McLaren rival Lando Norris with two rounds to spare. Norris took the chequered flag in sixth, also where he started, making a late pitstop for fresh tyres to secure a bonus point for fastest lap that still left him an insurmountable 63 points adrift. "What a season. Four times. Thank you guys. Thank you to everyone," Verstappen said over the radio after being congratulated by team boss Christian Horner. "It was a little bit more difficult than last year but we pulled through and we gave it all." Norris was quick to recognise his rival's achievement: "As much as it hurts a little bit, saying congrats doesn't hurt," he said. "He drove an incredible season and when you have the quickest car he dominated and when he didn't he was still there and always on my heels.



He made my life tough, we made his tough at times I'm sure, but he drove a better season." Russell led away cleanly from pole position, fending off Leclerc who surged from fourth to second at the start, and was never troubled as Hamilton charged back from 10th on the grid on a cold desert night. "I was planning on flying in a couple of hours but I'm definitely not getting on that flight," said the race winner. "I will enjoy this evening with all my team. "It's been a dream of a weekend. I don't know how I've been so quick but I'm just enjoying this ride right now." Ferrari's Carlos Sainz was third with team mate Charles Leclerc unhappy in fourth, after suffering early tyre trouble, as the Italian team cut the gap in the constructors' standings to McLaren to 24 points. Oscar Piastri was seventh for McLaren, despite collecting a five second penalty for a false start, and Nico Hulkenberg was eighth for U.S.-owned Haas.

Mbappe and Bellingham Inspire Real to 3-0 Thashing of Leganes



LEGANES (Dispatches) - Kylian Mbappe ended his goal drought with a close-range strike and midfielder Jude Bellingham scored a header as Real Madrid thrashed Leganes 3-0 on Sunday. With a game in hand, Real are second in the standings on 30 points, four behind Barcelona, who drew 2-2 with Celta Vigo on Saturday. Mbappe latched on to Vinicius Jr's through ball and found the net after 10 minutes, but his celebration was short-lived as the goal was ruled out for offside. The France international has struggled to find his feet in his first season with the LaLiga champions, having gone four games without scoring in all competitions, his last goal coming in a 2-1 win over Celta Vigo last month. However, the former Paris St Germain striker netted his seventh league goal of the campaign after combining again with Vinicius to give Real the lead two minutes before the break following a Leganes defensive error that Bellingham capitalised on. "We switched the position of the strikers a bit, with Mbappe on the outside and he did well, as did Vinicius on the inside. The team controlled the game very well," said coach Carlo Ancelotti after the match. Real enjoyed most of the possession in the second half, giving goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, back in the squad after a muscle injury, little to do. Uruguayan midfielder Federico Valverde scored the second from a free kick with an unstoppable long-range effort after Bellingham had been fouled in the 66th minute. The England international put the icing on the cake in the 85th minute when he headed home after the ball bounced off the crossbar. Real visit Premier League and Champions League leaders Liverpool on Wednesday before hosting Getafe in the Spanish top flight four days later.

Cavaliers Use Balanced Attack to Roll Past Raptors

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Ty Jerome came off the bench to score 26 points, Jarrett Allen and Evan Mobley each recorded double-doubles, and the Cleveland Cavaliers led nearly wire-to-wire in a 122-108 victory over the visiting Toronto Raptors. Jerome has scored at least 24 points in three of his past four games. Donovan Mitchell added 26 points, Allen finished with 23 points and 13 rebounds and Mobley chipped in 14 points and 11 rebounds in the fourth. Scottie Barnes and Grady Dick led the Raptors with 18 points each. Jakob Poeltl had 12 points and a game-high 19 rebounds. RJ Barrett added 16 points, six rebounds and six assists for Toronto, which has lost eight of its past 10 games. With the Cavaliers leading 94-90, Mobley threw down a dunk with 0.8 seconds left in the third to ignite a 12-1 run. Jerome's three-pointer, one of four he hit in the game, capped the surge and gave Cleveland a 106-91 lead with 9:23 left in the game. Mitchell stepped up in the fourth, hitting 5 of 8 shots from the floor and scoring 11 points as the Cavaliers pulled away in the quarter. Issac Okoro's shot from inside pushed the lead to 17 points -- the largest of the game -- with 8:30 left in the fourth. After Toronto went ahead 2-0 -- its only lead of the game -- the Cavaliers responded with a 23-7 run, which was capped by Jerome's three-pointer with 5:17 left in the first. Cleveland shot 65.2 percent from the floor in the quarter and held the Raptors to 36 percent shooting as the Cavaliers led 38-16 after one period. Toronto responded in the second. Jamison Battle



scored 11 of his 13 points in the quarter to help the Raptors trim the deficit. Ochai Abaji's runner cut Cleveland's lead to 50-46 with 3:20 left in the half. The Cavaliers battled back and took a 65-55 cushion into the break. Jerome had 17 points and Allen added 15 in the first half to pace Cleveland. Dick scored 12 points for Toronto. The Cavaliers outscored the Raptors 64-42 in the paint while also hitting 16 of 41 attempts from beyond the arc in the win. Meanwhile Jimmy Butler scored a game-high 33 points and added nine rebounds and six assists as the host Miami Heat defeated the Dallas Mavericks 123-118 in overtime. Mavericks star Kyrie Irving had 27 points and six assists, while P.J. Washington added 21 points and 10 rebounds. Naji Marshall had 19 of his 20 points after the first half and Dereck Lively II had 14 points, 13 rebounds, four assists and two blocks. Klay Thompson, who went 0-for-8 from the floor in Dallas' 123-120 win at Denver on Friday, bounced back with 15 points on 5-for-12 shooting. The Mavericks played without reigning NBA scoring champ Luka Doncic (wrist). Miami, which had been off since Monday, had double-doubles from Bam Adebayo (19 points, 11 rebounds) and Tyler Herro (18 points, 10 boards). The Heat went ahead for good on Adebayo's 3-pointer that made it 120-118 with 2:54 left in overtime. Dallas missed its final seven shots after Lively's dunk put the Mavericks up 118-117 with 3:21 remaining.