

Iran: US should stop arming Israel to bring about cease-fire in Gaza



Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein (R) and Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani attend a joint press conference in Baghdad, Iraq on June 13, 2024. **AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP**

International Desk

Iran's acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani said if the United States is determined to help end the "bloodshed" in Gaza, it should stop providing the Israeli regime with military aid. The US cannot lead a polit-

ical initiative with a peaceful image while providing the Israeli regime with the most advanced weapons, the Iranian official said in a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein in Baghdad. The US President Joe Biden has unveiled a multi-phased cease-fire

plan for the Gaza war, which has been supported by the United Nations Security Council. This comes despite the fact that the US has been providing the regime with arms, and time and again supported Tel Aviv in the international bodies since the beginning of Israel's

brutal war on Gaza in October last year. Only two US military sales to Israel have been made public. But US media have reported that Biden's administration has quietly made more than 100 military sales to Israel. The US is the biggest arms supplier to Israel, providing

an estimated 68% of the regime's foreign-sourced weapons. During the press conference on Thursday, Iran's acting foreign minister underlined that the genocide in the Gaza Strip should end as soon as possible, saying that cooperation of regional and Muslim countries can be helpful in this regard. Israel waged its bloody Gaza offensive on October 7, 2023 after the Palestinian resistance group Hamas carried out its historic operation against the usurping entity in retaliation for the regime's intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. So far, the regime has killed more than 37,200 Palestinians, mostly women and children, in the Gaza Strip.

War on Lebanon

During a separate press conference with Iraqi National Security Adviser Qasim al-Araji, Bagheri Kani cautioned Israel against waging a war on Lebanon, saying any such aggression is like going to "hell with no return."

"Lebanon will be hell with no return for the Zionists, and if they are wise, they will not try Lebanon again," Bagheri Kani said. Israel's "unbelievable defeats" began in Lebanon in 2000 and 2006, he added, referring to the two wars between fighters of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement and the Israeli military. The top Iranian diplomat said the balance of power has changed since October 7, when the Hamas carried out the surprise operation against the occupying entity. "The Zionists want to return conditions to those before October 7 by killing the people of Gaza, but to no avail," he said. Hezbollah and Israel have been exchanging deadly fire since early October, shortly after latter launched a genocidal war on the Gaza Strip following the Hamas operation. The reprisal attacks were shifted up several gears on Tuesday after Israel killed a senior Hezbollah commander in a strike on the southern Lebanese town of Jwaya.

Iran hails French raid on MKO headquarters



Iran's top human rights official hailed an attack by French police on the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) terrorist group's main headquarters in a Paris suburb, saying there will be "no safe place for terrorists." In a post on X on Thursday, Kazem Gharibabadi, who serves as head of the Iranian Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights, said the Islamic Republic welcomed the raid by the French police on MKO's main headquarters in the Paris suburb of Saint-Ouen-l'Aumône that led to the sealing of the premises and the detention of at least three members of the group, Press TV reported.

"We welcome the attack of the French police on the main headquarters of the MKO terrorist group, thorough inspection of the headquarters, the arrest of three members of the faction and the sealing of this headquarters. This operation was monitored live by Iran," he said. "Iran will leave no safe place for terrorists," Gharibabadi asserted. Iran's Tasnim news agency reported that France's security forces on Wednesday raided the headquarters of the MKO - also known as the so-called People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK) - and detained three of its members. The raid occurred at a site housing MKO's TV studio, the report said, adding that the group had to substitute live programming with archival content for several hours. According to the report, security forces also seized a cache of weapons hidden in the headquarters, suggesting the persistent engagement in terrorist and criminal activities by this group. The MKO terrorist group is responsible for the deaths of thousands of Iranian civilians during the past four decades. Out of the nearly 17,000 Iranians killed in terrorist attacks over the past four decades, about 12,000 have fallen victim to the MKO's acts of terror. Iran has brought a huge case against more than a hundred members of the terrorist cult. The notorious group sided with Saddam Hussein during Iraq's war with Iran in the 1980s but fell out of favor with Baghdad after he was toppled by a US-led invasion in 2003.

Election fever to grip Iran as debates loom

By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

OPINION

Iran is bracing for a critical presidential election in less than two weeks. Election competitions are heating up among six hopefuls - Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Masoud Pezeshkian, Saeed Jalili, Mostafa Pourmohammadi, Amir Hossein Qazizadeh Hashemi, and Alireza Zakani, whose qualifications were reviewed and consequently approved by the Guardian Council, the body overseeing the electoral process. The country will vote for a new president on

June 28. The election was called after President Ebrahim Raisi was killed along with seven of his companions in a helicopter crash in the northwest of Iran on May 19. With the expansion of Internet access among the public, it appears that discussions, canvassing, and opinions on elections and candidates' plans are now more focused in the virtual space. The campaigns also feature live, televised debates on the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), which are then shared on social media by the public, finding their ways into family gatherings, trade groups, and public spaces like the metro and city streets. It is anticipated

that political sensitivities and emotions surrounding the elections will peak with the start of televised election debates. Five live, televised debates on the IRIB are set to begin as of June 17. However, one important factor that will definitely play a role in the election results is the voter turnout. In the previous presidential election, the voter turnout rate was close to 49%, which means it was the first presidential election with a turnout below 50%. However, in the upcoming election, it is predicted that voter turnout will exceed 50%. This prediction is supported by a survey conducted by the Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA). According

to the survey carried out on June 8 and 9 before the final candidates were announced, 44.4% of citizens stated that they will definitely participate in the elections, and 7.3% said they are likely to participate. Abdollah Moradi, the director general of the Interior Ministry's Office of political affairs, also mentioned that the survey's results indicate that public interest in the upcoming presidential race will surpass the previous one on June 18, 2021. In contrast to the previous term, no political party has boycotted the upcoming polls and all factions have their own exclusive candidates in the June 28 vote.

Based on past experiences, whenever the competition among political groups in the elections was tougher, the people's participation rate was higher. The campaign processes of the candidates and their feedback in the media and social networks suggest that it is currently unpredictable which candidate will ultimately win the elections. However, it seems that Qalibaf, Pezeshkian, and Jalili have respectively secured the first to third positions in the polls, while Qazizadeh Hashemi, Purmohammadi, and Zakani are placed with a gap in the fourth to sixth ranks. These ranks are subject to change until the election day, given the fact that the

election debates have yet to begin. Although the five candidates boast different "political tastes," they linguistically belong to the Conservative political faction, and there is a possibility that some of them may withdraw in favor of others. Pezeshkian, however, is the only candidate of Reformists (led by former president Mohammad Khatami) who also enjoys the support of the Moderate reformist movement (led by former president Hassan Rouhani). As the temperature is undergoing a rise until June 28, the political sphere in Iran, along with the election debates and competitions, is warming up even more.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Tehran, Baku hold first joint military drill

International Desk

Iran and Azerbaijan on Thursday held their first joint military drill in Iran's northwestern province of West Azarbaijan as the two neighboring countries eye further promotion of bilateral relations in a wide range of spheres. The one-day military exercise was aimed at countering terrorism and ensuring the lasting security of the Aras River, which straddles the two

countries' common border and is subject to possible attacks by terrorist groups. Deputy Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Force for Operations Brigadier General Karim Cheshak said the exercise involved one battalion comprising the two countries' special and rapid reaction forces. Cheshak said the drill consisted of four operational stages, including reconnaissance operations involving drones and he-

licopters, military patrol operations and ambush operations. He added that the drill's most important message was to ensure regional peace and stability. This followed an agreement reached in October last year between military officials from both countries to hold a joint naval exercise in the Caspian Sea, and discussions on expanding military cooperation between the naval forces of the neighboring countries.