

The New Ambassadors of the United Kingdom (UK) Hugo Benedict Shorter and Ireland Ms. Lisha Teresa Moore Dorichek Presented Copies of Their Credentials to Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi on Monday

# IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and His Saudi Counterpart Faisal bin Farhan in a Phone Call Emphasized the Importance of Avoiding Anything That Might Destabilize the Region's Security, Especially After Israel's Recent Attacks on Iran

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### Iran's Share in Global Oil Production Rises



TEHRAN - The Iranian Ministry of Oil announced that Iran's crude oil and condensate production increased by over 8% in the third quarter of 2024 compared to the same period last year.

According to reports from the Ministry, Iran's oil industry has faced severe sanctions for decades, ranging from restrictions on international company participation to attempts to completely halt Iran's oil exports during the Trump administration in the United States. However, Iranian oil exports never reached zero, with even U.S. officials acknowledging the limited effectiveness of sanctions on Iran's oil sector.

Now, over six years after the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 and continued tightening sanctions, international bodies report that Iran has managed to increase its share of global crude oil production.

According to the latest report from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Iran's oil production increased by 21,000 barrels per day last month, marking the largest monthly increase among OPEC members with a 0.6% rise in September. In contrast, total OPEC production dropped by 2.3% in the same month.

In September, total oil production for OPEC+ increased by 47,000 barrels per day, reaching 14.06 million barrels per day from 14.013 million in August. Meanwhile, Russia's oil production saw a reduction of 28,000 barrels per day last month.

Data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) also confirms the rise in Iran's share of global oil production. The EIA reports that Iran's share in the third quarter of 2024 reached 4.3%, up from 3.9% in the same period the previous year. For the full year of 2023, Iran's share was also estimated at 3.9%.

According to the EIA, Iran produced an average of 4.42 million barrels of crude oil and condensate per day in the third quarter of 2024, compared to 3.99 million barrels per day in 2023, reflecting an 8.8% increase. This growth significantly outpaces OPEC's overall production growth, which stood at 0.8% for the same period, giving Iran a 13.8% share of OPEC's total production and placing it third among member countries.

A broader look at global oil production highlights the growth of Iran's output. The EIA notes that global oil production reached approximately 102.5 million barrels per day in Q3 2024, up from 101.8 million barrels per day during the same period last year, marking a 0.6% growth. Iran's production increase surpasses not only OPEC's but also global oil production, showing an 8.2% rise.

### Yemen Announces Striking 3 Ships Violating Its Ban on Sailing Towards Occupied Territories



SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen's Armed Forces announce carrying out strikes against three ships violating the country's ban on sailing towards the ports of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Brigadier General Yahya Saree, the forces' spokesman, made the announcement in a televised statement on Monday.

"The ship SC Montreal was targeted in the southern Arabian Sea with two drones," he said, adding that another vessel, identified as "Maersk Kowloon," was targeted in the Arabian Sea with a cruise missile.

"The ship Motaro was targeted in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab with several ballistic missiles," the official noted.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), meanwhile, reported that a ship had been struck 25 nautical miles south of the Red Sea port city of al-Mukha in southwestern Yemen.

The forces have been conducting hundreds of strikes against ships sailing towards or away from the ports of the occupied territories, besides hitting numerous targets lying across the territories since October last year.

### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



## Iran's Response to Israeli Attacks to Fit Within Int'l Law

TEHRAN - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations says the Islamic Republic reserves its inherent right to respond to the Israeli regime's recent attacks against the country, saying Tehran's potential retaliation will be perfectly aligned with the international law.

Amir Saeid Iravani made the remarks on Monday, speaking at a meeting of the UN Security Council that took place at Iran's request to address the issue of the attacks against defensive targets across Tehran, Khuzestan, and Ilam Provinces, which were successfully thwarted by the country's Air Defense Force.

"As a sovereign state, the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its inherent right to respond at a time of its choosing to this act of aggression, a right clearly affirmed under Article 51 of the UN Charter," he said, echoing various Iranian authorities' promise of retaliation against the aggression.

"Our response will be lawful, and fully compliant with international law," Iravani added. He denounced the Israeli atrocities as "egregious and severe violation of international law and the United Nations Charter" that led to the martyrdom of four Iranian servicemen and one civilian. The envoy considered the aggression to be part of the regime's broader and sustained pattern of aggression through which it is destabilizing the entire West Asia region with unchecked impunity.

He cited the regime's October 2023-present war of genocide on the Gaza Strip and escalated deadly attacks against Lebanon as the prime examples of the atrocities.

Iravani regretted that the United States, the regime's biggest ally, had emboldened Tel Aviv towards perpetrating the aggression with its "unwavering and unconditional" support and obstruction of the Security Council's efforts at holding the regime accountable.

He considered the US to be "complicit" in the regime's acts of aggression across the region due

to its provision of technical expertise and advanced military systems to Tel Aviv.

The support and the resultant Israeli insistence on committing the crimes "gravely undermine regional peace and security," the ambassador asserted.

He called on the international community and institutions, including the Council, to take decisive measures to respond robustly to such threats and restore peace and security throughout the region and the world.

"The international community cannot—and must not—remain silent in the face of such violations. The price of this silence is evident in Palestine and Lebanon, where Israel's impunity perpetuates a vicious cycle of violence and instability across the region."

Iravani, meanwhile, condemned the regime's backers for supporting its atrocities as acts of "self-defense," while "shamelessly" calling on the Islamic Republic to exercise self-restraint.

Meanwhile Russia's permanent representative to the United Nations says the "successful" conduct of Iran's air defense system during Israel's recent act of aggression prevented more casualties in the deadly attack.

Vasily Nebenzya made the remarks on Monday at an emergency UN Security Council meeting on the Israeli terrorist assault against Iran that killed five people, including four Army officers and a civilian, on Saturday.

"Had it not been for the successful operation of Iran's air defense system, which was on high alert, the number of casualties and injuries, primarily among civilians, would have been entirely different," he said.

## President Emphasizes Transparency in 2025 Budget Proposal

TEHRAN - In a session of Majlis, President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that the proposed budget for the year 2025 is completely transparent. He highlighted that the budget addresses four key principles: structure, stability, economic growth, employment, and justice. During his defense of the budget proposal, President Pezeshkian expressed gratitude for the cooperation, solidarity, and collaboration of parliamentary representatives in budget discussions. He noted that the Joint Commission had worked diligently over the past week to review the budget, which was approved in committee.

Pezeshkian addressed the representatives, stating that four foundational principles were considered to present the budget: structure, stability, economic growth, and employment.

He mentioned that discussions on the budget were held with representatives from the Economic, Planning and Budget Committees, as well as university professors. He asserted that despite numerous challenges, the budget was submitted to Parliament on time and remains transparent.

He stated that in the past, there were essentially two budgets: one that was not included in the treasury and one that was accessible to Parliament. He stressed that the current budget is transparent, with clear income and expenditure.

Regarding economic stability, he highlighted two areas of focus: banks and the stock market. Typically, when the government faced revenue shortages, it would borrow from banks. However, this time, not only would they refrain from borrowing, but they have allocated 200 trillion tomans to reduce bank debt.

The President indicated efforts to increase the capital of certain banks while avoiding imposing excessive obligations on them.

Regarding the stock market, he stated that no additional bonds will be issued. To avoid shortfalls, permission was obtained from the Supreme Leader to utilize some foreign currency

### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



that typically comes in mid-year during shortfalls and social unrest.

Pezeshkian emphasized that the budget reflects actual revenues and expenditures, aiming to establish legal stability without frequent changes to regulations.

He further explained that, for businesses listed on the stock market, the legal requirement was to pay 25% of profits in taxes, but they have considered a rate of 20%. If these businesses earn and reinvest, they will not be taxed on their income, reflecting a commitment to reform.

He elaborated that taxes would be imposed on merchants only if their income exceeds 24 million tomans. He noted that for wheat and animal feed, the budget initially allocated 124 trillion tomans, but 220 trillion tomans were actually required. With permission from the Supreme Leader, funds were drawn from the treasury to settle debts owed to wheat farmers.

He confirmed that while 20 trillion tomans were initially set aside for retirement bonuses, this amount was insufficient. Consequently, over 84 trillion tomans have been earmarked for the next year.

Pezeshkian stated that 250 trillion tomans have been allocated for wheat farmers in the upcoming year, and the aim is to direct available resources toward essential goals.

He highlighted that, regarding social justice, efforts have been made to support vulnerable groups. Salaries have been increased by 20%, but the average salary increase stands at 28%. Those with higher living costs, particularly families with dependents, have seen their salaries rise by up to 40%.

He mentioned that the tax exemption for salary earners has been raised from 12 million tomans to 24 million tomans, ensuring that currency for medicines and essential goods will continue to be funded.

He stressed the importance of being mindful of vulnerable groups in all economic interventions, emphasizing that problems such as water, electricity, gas, and financial imbalances require expert and coordinated interventions. He warned against ignoring these issues, stating that cutting off utilities to producers is unacceptable.

### Iran Strongly Faces Up to Any Assault on Its Territorial Integrity, Independence



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs has vehemently denounced the latest Israeli attack on several military installations in the country.

Kazem Gharibabadi said the Islamic Republic strongly faces up to any act of aggression against its territorial integrity and independence.

The Iranian official made the remarks on Monday during a ceremony held at the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) in the capital Tehran on the occasion of the 79th anniversary of the United Nations.

Stefan Prizner, resident coordinator of the United Nations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jila Mehdi-Aghaei, senior advisor to the head of the Iranian Department of Environment and a group of foreign diplomats and ambassadors living in Tehran were in attendance.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always taken the path of diplomacy and dialogue in order to resolve international and regional conflicts, and lays great emphasis on détente and stability in the region. We believe in and underline the principal role of the United Nations in this regard, and invite everyone to move in this direction."

"At the same time, the Iranian government and great nation strongly face up to any attack on the country's territorial integrity and independence," he noted.

Gharibabadi went on to say that Iran, as one of the founders of the UN, stands committed to promotion of multilateralism and efforts aimed at fostering the culture of global peace, justice, cooperation and coexistence based on international law and principles of the UN Charter.

"Resolution of existing regional and international crises and challenges is not possible without the collective efforts of all countries and nations," the Iranian diplomat said.

He described the Zionist regime's ongoing genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes against regional nations, especially the oppressed and defenseless Palestinian people in Gaza and Lebanese nationals, as the most serious tragedy and crisis in today's world.

### Iran Immediately Repaired Minor Damage Caused by Israeli Strikes



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh says Israel's recent aggression against several Iranian military facilities caused "minor" damage which was immediately repaired and replaced.

Nasirzadeh made the remarks in an address to non-Iranian students of the Supreme National Defense University and foreign military attachés residing in Tehran on Monday.

"The recent aggression of the Zionist regime against the Islamic Republic of Iran inflicted slight damage on us, which we immediately repaired and replaced by making use of our own know-how and scientific power," he said.

The defense minister, however, added that if Iran lacked such scientific capabilities, others would never have allowed it to do this. He emphasized that the Israeli regime has violated all international regulations which aim to defend human rights and justice.

The Israeli regime attacked several Iranian military facilities early Saturday, killing four servicemen of the Armed Forces and one civilian.

Iran's Air Defense Base said some limited damage was caused in some areas, the dimensions of which are being investigated.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Akbar Ahmadian said on Monday that the Israeli aggression has had no impact on the Islamic Republic's military power.

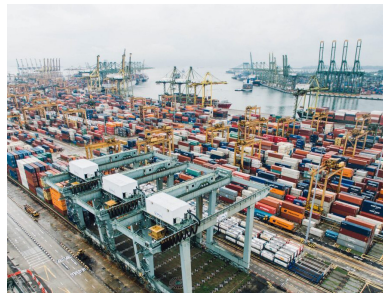
Iran has emphasized that it is not looking for war but will not abandon its right to give an appropriate and firm response to Israel's latest act of aggression.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Nasirzadeh said the United States' presence in all parts of the world, including the South China Sea and provocation of Taiwan, international straits and waterways such as the Bab el-Mandab Strait and the war between Russia and Ukraine, aims to promote the US unilateralism.

The Iranian defense chief urged justice-seeking Muslim and non-Muslim countries to use their scientific power and focus and their commonalities.



# IRAN NEWS



## 22% Increase in Exports to Islamic Countries

TEHRAN - Iran's Customs Authority has released details on the country's trade activities with member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for the first seven months of 2024. According to this report, Iran exported 50.6 million tons of goods valued at \$20.364 billion to OIC member countries during this period. Compared to the same period last year, these exports represent a 15% increase in volume and a 22% increase in value, highlighting significant growth in trade with Islamic countries.

In addition to exports, Iran also imported 12.4 million tons of goods worth \$20.356 billion from OIC member states. This marks a 14% rise in import volume and a 21% increase in the import value over the same period last year, signaling expanded economic engagement.

## China Interested in Strengthening Trade Exchanges with Iran



TEHRAN - In a recent meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Iran, Chang Hua, Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, emphasized that Iran-China trade relations are at their highest level. He expressed the organization's commitment to fostering constructive commercial ties between the two nations.

Dehnavi highlighted that Iran's membership in regional alliances like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will further facilitate trade collaboration between the two countries.

The Deputy Minister of Industry, Mining, and Trade also stressed the importance of expanding bilateral cooperation through international trade exhibitions, technology transfers, and the growth of trade in industrial and mining sectors.

Ambassador Chang Hua, for his part, underscored the positive momentum in trade relations, stating that China is eager to strengthen trade exchanges with Iran across all economic sectors.

The meeting also included Mohammad Aghajani, head of the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), who shared his insights on advancing joint mining and mineral industries cooperation.

Aghajani emphasized the need for technology transfer from China to Iran, pointing out that the latest expertise can improve mining efficiency and help add value through advanced mineral processing. He added that knowledge and experience sharing between Iranian and Chinese mining specialists can improve skills and elevate standards in the sector.

## Iran's Energy Consumption Intensity Rises by 32% Over the Past Decade



TEHRAN - According to Iran's Ministry of Energy, electricity consumption intensity in Iran has increased by 32% over the past decade, marking a stark contrast with global trends where energy intensity has generally declined. Speaking at a workshop on power sector imbalances, Reza Efatnejad, a senior official at the Ministry, explained that Iran's energy intensity metric — which measures energy consumed per unit of GDP — reveals significant inefficiencies compared to other countries, especially developed, energy-importing nations.

Efatnejad highlighted that Iran's energy intensity has continued to climb despite efforts in other nations to reduce consumption levels. The affordability of energy in Iran has, in part, disincentivized the adoption of more efficient technologies, contributing to this increase. He pointed out that, adjusted for purchasing power, Iran's energy intensity is double the global average, and over three times the average based on exchange rates.

While Iran's population has only grown by about 2.3 times since 1979, the country's nominal power generation capacity has surged by 13 times over the same period. However, even with this significant increase, the demand has outpaced supply. Globally, the total installed power generation capacity has only expanded by around 4.5 times during this time.

Annually, Iran adds roughly 2,309 megawatts of nominal electricity generation capacity, yet electricity consumption has surged nearly 24 times since the Islamic Revolution. Efatnejad attributes this discrepancy largely to economic imbalances in the power sector, alongside factors like climate change, higher baseline temperatures, and a 35,000-megawatt surge in summer electricity demand due to cooling needs.

Regarding electricity pricing, Efatnejad noted that the cost per kilowatt-hour in Iran is a mere 1 cent, starkly lower than rates in countries like Norway, Canada, and France, where prices range from 6 to 42 cents. Such low prices, he argued, further dampen incentives for energy efficiency upgrades across industries and households.

The Ministry of Energy has outlined several measures to address the sector's imbalances. These include enforcing energy-efficient building standards, optimizing equipment with energy-efficient labels, and enhancing trade with neighboring countries. Additionally, the ministry is prioritizing the construction of new power plants to stabilize voltage across the national grid and is working to attract private sector investment to expand the power industry.

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## Iran's Export Markets Constrained

TEHRAN - In a specialized meeting with the members of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce this morning, Industry, Mine, and Trade Minister Mohammad Atabak addressed the nation's trade issues, stating, "Our main challenge is the misalignment between currency and trade policies, causing difficulties for economic operators." He clarified that these challenges stem from currency policy aimed at inflation control, rather than actions by the Trade Promotion Organization. Atabak also noted recent progress in narrowing the gap between the NIMA exchange rate and the free market rate, with coordination underway with the Central Bank.

Atabak highlighted the inter-agency nature of export activities and mentioned the proposal to revive the High Council of Exports to establish a single authority over export issues, with plans to include exporters in this council.

Discussing trade policy, Atabak proposed easing certain governmental controls and tariffs that restrict businesses. He also addressed energy supply disruptions that impact production, particularly electricity shortages in summer and gas shortages in winter. Atabak stated that energy security is a top priority, with the president urging both the Energy and Oil Ministries to seek solutions, and added that private sector involvement in energy production would be encouraged with the necessary guarantees.

On government-private sector relations, he acknowledged internal disputes among Chamber members, clarifying that certain complaints would need judicial rather than ministerial intervention.

In terms of financial challenges for businesses, Atabak announced a comprehensive financing package to address industry needs, covering both foreign currency requirements for machinery and working capital. He also mentioned talks with the Central Bank to utilize Iran's international currency reserves.

Trade with Armenia has reportedly tripled compared to last year, and Iran aims to pursue preferential and free trade agreements to further expand regional commerce. However, Atabak warned that Iran's export markets are becoming limited, emphasizing the need to target the 200 million-strong

Eurasian market where demand for Iranian goods exists.

Regarding trade with Pakistan, Atabak noted the mutual benefits of an export relationship given Pakistan's population of 250 million and shared border, proposing a preferential tariff agreement. He also responded to concerns about Iran's limited global trade presence, contrasting Iran's seven trade envoys with Turkey's extensive network. To address this, he offered to appoint Chamber-nominated businesspeople as trade envoys to facilitate international commerce.

On the 2025 budget, Atabak stressed transparency, stating that all items are now accounted for within the general budget, with 11 percent allocated to development projects.

Commenting on the handwoven carpet export situation, Atabak remarked that production has partly shifted to Afghanistan and Pakistan due to lower labor costs there, and some Iranian carpets are now exported to Europe from these locations. He also noted that sanctions continue to impact the carpet sector.

Meanwhile in the meeting, Mehrdad Saadat, President of the Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce, has proposed streamlining joint commission responsibilities with neighboring countries. He argued that the current state of trade in Iran is unsatisfactory and that assigning these commissions to various ministries without specific expertise is ineffective. "This responsibility should be given to joint chambers of commerce, and let's see the results," Saadat suggested.

Ahmad Pourfallah, President of the Iran-Italy Joint Chamber of Commerce, voiced concerns about the diminished role of advisors within the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade. He emphasized the need to "utilize qualified individuals and re-establish advisory groups," highlighting the potential of joint chambers to support these efforts.

Pourfallah also addressed the economic challenges facing the government, which, he noted, exerts heavy pressure on industrial units. "During the energy crisis, industrial units are the first to experience shutdowns, which is unfair," he added.

## Decline in Saffron Exports to China

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ISNA PHOTO

TEHRAN - Saffron exports from Iran, primarily destined for China, the United Arab Emirates, and Spain, have faced a significant decline over the past year, according to industry expert Mohammad Reza Ordikhani.

Speaking to ISNA, Ordikhani shared that in the first half of last year, Iran exported approximately 30.3 tons of saffron to China. However, this figure has dropped by 65% to just 10.5 tons over the same period this year.

Iran maintains a dominant position in the global saffron market as the largest producer of this valuable spice, thanks to its unique soil and climate conditions. This year, around 127,000 hectares of land in Iran were dedicated to saffron cultivation. Saffron farming spans 23 provinces, with over 93% of production centered in Greater Khorasan, particularly Khorasan Razavi, which alone produces over 70% of the nation's saffron. Through agricultural improvements, average yields have increased from 3.5 kilograms per hectare to 9 kilograms per hectare, with some leading farms achieving up to 30 kilograms per hectare.

The production of saffron, which requires less water than many other crops, aligns well with Iran's efforts to encourage more water-efficient agricultural practices. Furthermore, saffron's high value and export potential position it as a key contributor to Iran's

non-oil exports and its economic resilience strategy. However, despite producing nearly 90% of the world's saffron, Iran holds only a modest share in global saffron trade. Iranian saffron faces competition from other countries, including China, Spain, and even Afghanistan, due to lower pricing and the costs associated with exporting Iranian saffron. This has sparked dissatisfaction among Iranian farmers and exporters, who view saffron as an iconic and historically significant export of the country.

Ordikhani noted that the UAE has now overtaken China as the leading importer of Iranian saffron, despite a 32% decrease in exports. Iran's saffron exports to the UAE fell from 23.1 tons in the first half of last year to 15.6 tons this year. Spain, another key market, also saw a reduction in imports, from 18.9 tons to 11.6 tons, representing a 41% decline over the same period.

The challenges facing Iran's saffron industry are multi-faceted. Ordikhani highlighted two primary reasons for this decline: increased illegal trafficking and an anticipated surge in domestic production. Since May, reports indicate that major saffron-producing regions, especially in Khorasan, have experienced higher yields, leading to an expected three- to four-fold production increase. This projection has subsequently reduced international demand as buyers anticipate lower prices.

## Kerman Should Rank Among Top Five Tourism Destinations in Iran



TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri, has stated that tourism routes should be developed to position Kerman as one of the top five tourist destinations in the country, emphasizing that this goal is achievable.

In a press gathering upon his arrival at Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani International Airport in Kerman on Monday evening, Salehi Amiri mentioned that the purpose of his visit to the province was to inspect certain tourism projects and evaluate various initiatives, including those in the Shadad area. He highlighted Kerman's leading status in cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts in Iran, noting that the province requires more focused attention.

Salehi Amiri praised the efforts of Kerman's diligent governor and local officials, acknowledging their dedication to the province's development. He remarked that Kerman is actively participating in the country's national growth trajectory. He further noted that currently, 100 projects related to cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts are underway in Kerman, with more than 10 projects specifically in Shadad, a major tourist attraction for both Iranian and foreign visitors.

The minister also pointed out numerous untapped opportunities in Kerman, including in health tourism. He underscored Kerman's historical legacy in cultural heritage and emphasized its role as a significant center for handicrafts in Iran. He added that the ministry plans to explore more of Kerman's towns and districts.

Salehi Amiri shared that prior to the Islamic Revolution, Kerman ranked 19th in development nationwide, but it is now one of Iran's top five most developed provinces. He stated that the virtuous people of Kerman deserve the best, and the government is committed to bringing substantial progress to the province.

The minister highlighted the archeological significance of Jiroft's Konar Sandal mound, describing Jiroft as a cultural center of ancient Iran. He remarked that if the anthropological theories about the area are confirmed, it would represent a major global discovery, as the region is considered one of the oldest known human habitats.

Salehi Amiri expressed hope for an international archeological conference on Jiroft, with invitations extended to renowned archeologists worldwide to showcase this civilization's heritage.

In discussing coastal tourism, the minister referenced his recent trip to Sistan and Baluchestan, noting significant progress there, aligned with the President's policy to boost industry, commerce, tourism, and coastal development.

## Iran-Oman Trade Growth Anticipates Launch of Shipping Line



TEHRAN - The head of the Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce announced plans to boost bilateral trade to \$5 billion, noting that one of the primary reasons Iran's trade with Oman lags behind that with the UAE is the absence of a regular shipping line between Iran and Oman. Although there have been negotiations to establish such a route, financial constraints have prevented its realization.

In an interview with ISNA, Jamal Razaghi explained that trade between Iran and Oman is growing, with the two countries showing increased trade activity in the first half of this year. However, he remarked that while these are official trade figures, Iran's trade volume with Oman still remains lower compared to the UAE.

Razaghi pointed out that besides sanctions, the lack of a consistent shipping line is a major factor. He shared that the Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce has reached an agreement with the Oman Chamber of Commerce, where each side will subsidize 50% of the shipping costs for a specified period. Oman has already expressed its readiness to support the initiative to facilitate a regular shipping service.

Despite repeated efforts, including written communications with the Trade Promotion Organization and verbal agreements with the former Minister, the plan has yet to materialize due to a shortage of financial resources.



## Lithuania Leftist Opposition Win Election, Eyes Coalition

VILNIUS (Dispatches) - The opposition Social Democrats claimed victory in Lithuania's parliamentary election on Sunday, which was dominated by frustration with the cost of living and worries over potential threats from neighbouring Russia. The left-leaning grouping has pledged to maintain the Baltic state's hefty defence spending programme, while criticising the centre-right coalition government of Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte over raising taxes to fund it. Official government data showed the centre-left grouping leading with 52 seats in the 141-member assembly, after 99% of the vote was counted. The ruling Homeland Union Party was on track to take second place with 28 seats.



## Protests Erupt in Georgia After Contested Vote as Hungary's Orban Visits



TBILISI (Dispatches) - Thousands of Georgians took to the streets Monday to protest against the ruling party's victory in parliamentary polls denounced as "stolen" by the pro-Western opposition, while Georgia's president alleged to AFP that the vote was rigged using "sophisticated" methods she linked to Russia.

The Caucasus country - rocked by mass protests earlier this year - has plunged into political uncertainty since Saturday's vote, with Brussels, Washington, France and Germany condemning "irregularities".

According to near-complete results announced by the electoral commission, the ruling Georgian Dream party won 53.92 percent of the vote, compared with the 37.78 percent garnered by a union of four pro-Western opposition alliances.

Georgian Dream has for months been accused by the opposition of steering Tbilisi away from its goal of joining the EU and back into Russia's orbit.

Some 20,000 people gathered outside the main parliament building in central Tbilisi Monday evening after the opposition called for protests, AFP journalists saw.

Speaking to AFP, Georgia's pro-European president Salome Zurbishvili claimed the use of "quite sophisticated" fraudulent schemes in the weekend vote.

The president had earlier declared the election results "illegitimate", alleging a "Russian special operation" to interfere with the election - a claim swiftly rejected by the Kremlin, whose spokesman Dmitry Peskov said "there was no intervention".

"It's very difficult to accuse a government, and that's not my role, but the methodology is Russian," Zurbishvili told AFP, adding that it was "difficult to deal with" Russia, which she called "threatening".

A group of Georgia's leading election monitors told a news conference Monday that they had uncovered evidence of complex, large-scale fraud that altered the election outcome in favour of the ruling party.

They called for a swift investigation and demanded the annulment of at least 15 percent of all the votes cast in the elections, claiming to have documented evidence of election rigging at dozens of polling stations.

Defying the EU's concerns over the vote, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban - current holder of the bloc's rotating presidency and the Kremlin's closest EU associate - arrived Monday for a two-day visit to Tbilisi.

## UN Chief Warns of Deepened Suffering as Israel Bans Main Gaza Aid Agency



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Israel's parliament approved a bill banning the main UN aid agency in the war-devastated Gaza Strip, sparking international outcry as the government said it was mulling proposed talks with Hamas on a hostage release deal. Despite objections from the United States and warnings from the UN Security Council, Israeli lawmakers overwhelmingly passed the bill banning the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, from working in Israel and occupied east Jerusalem.

UNRWA has provided essential aid, schooling, healthcare and assistance across the Palestinian territories and to Palestinian refugees elsewhere for more than seven decades.

"There is a deep connection between the terrorist organization (Hamas) and UNRWA and Israel cannot put up with it," Yuli Edelstein, one of the lawmakers who sponsored the bill, said in parliament as he presented the proposal.

Palestinian militant group Hamas, locked in conflict with Israel in Gaza, called the bill an act of "Zionist aggression" towards Palestinians, while its ally Islamic Jihad described the ban as "an escalation in the genocide".

Even several of Israel's staunch Western allies voiced disquiet at the ban, with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer saying Britain was "gravely concerned".

Germany - which has made Israel's security among its reasons of state - warned it would "effectively make UNRWA's work in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem impossible... jeopardising vital humanitarian aid for millions of people".

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini called the ban part of "an ongoing campaign to discredit the agency" that "will only deepen the suffering of Palestinians".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on social media that Israel was "ready" to continue providing aid to Gaza "in a way that does not threaten Israel's security".

The ban comes as fighting rages in Gaza and Lebanon, where a second full-scale war front opened last month.

Earlier, Netanyahu's office said Mossad intelligence chief David Barnea had met US and Qatari mediators in Doha, where they agreed they should talk to Hamas about a deal to free Israelis seized in last year's October 7 attack by Palestinian militants.

"In the coming days, discussions will continue between the mediators and Hamas to assess the feasibility of talks and to further efforts to promote a deal," Netanyahu's office said.

The statement came two days after Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi proposed a two-day truce and limited hostage-prisoner exchange that he said could lead to a permanent ceasefire.

But Netanyahu later said he had not received the Egyptian proposal.

Asked about the possibility of a Gaza ceasefire, US President Joe Biden said: "We need a ceasefire. We should end this war. It should end, it should end, it should end."

After the October 7 attack, the bloodiest in Israel's history, the military launched a massive offensive in Gaza to root out Hamas.

Israel has killed the Islamist group's top leadership, but the war has left tens of thousands of Palestinians dead and driven almost all Gazans from their homes, reducing much of the territory's infrastructure to rubble.

## No New Limits on Ukraine's Use of U.S. Arms If North Korea Joins Russia's Fight



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. will not impose new limits on Ukraine's use of American weapons if North Korea joins Russia's war, the Pentagon said on Monday, as NATO said North Korean military units had been deployed to the Kursk region in Russia.

The North Korea deployment is fanning Western concerns that the 2-1/2-year conflict in Ukraine could widen, even as attention shifts to the Middle East.

It could signal how Russia hopes to offset mounting battlefield losses and continue making slow, steady gains in eastern Ukraine.

"The deepening military cooperation between Russia and North Korea is a threat to both Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic security," NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte told reporters after talks with a South Korean delegation about the North Korean deployments.

U.S. President Joe Biden said the development was "very dangerous."

The Pentagon estimated 10,000 North Korean troops had been deployed to eastern Russia for training, up from an estimate of 3,000 troops last Wednesday.

## S. Africa Files 750-Page Report as Evidence of Israel's Genocidal Campaign in Gaza

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - South Africa has filed "evidence" of a "genocide" committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip with the International Court of Justice, the office of President Cyril Ramaphosa said.

The document "contains evidence which shows how the government of Israel has violated the genocide convention by promoting the destruction of Palestinians living in Gaza", the presidency said in a statement, amid claims vehemently denied by Israel.

An official for the Hague-based court on Monday confirmed it had received the document, but declined to give further detail.

"The evidence will show that undergirding Israel's genocidal acts is the special intent to commit genocide, a failure by Israel to prevent incitement to genocide, to prevent genocide itself and its failure to punish those inciting and committing acts of genocide," said the presidency.



The "memorial" - the name of the document detailing South Africa's case against Israel before the ICJ - cannot be made public but laid out evidence in "over 750 pages of text, supported by exhibits and annexes of over 4,000 pages", it added.

South Africa in December brought a case before the ICJ, arguing the war in Gaza breached the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, an accusation Israel has strongly denied.

Several nations have added their weight to South Africa's proceedings against Israel, including Spain, Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Turkey, Chile and Libya.

While ICJ rulings are legally binding, the court has no concrete means to enforce them.

Israel's Gaza campaign has killed at least 43,020 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-ruled territory's health ministry, which the UN considers reliable.

The offensive was prompted by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack which resulted in the deaths of 1,206 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures that include hostages killed in captivity.

Out of 251 hostages seized by during the attack, 97 are still held in Gaza, including 34 whom the Israeli military says are dead.

## Meloni Secures Tight Win in Liguria Regional Election

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her right-wing coalition pulled off another regional election win on Monday, near final results from Liguria in the northwest showed on Monday, in a mid-term boost for the prime minister.

With counting done in more than 92% of polling stations, conservative Marco Bucci, the mayor of regional capital Genoa, was leading with 48.6% versus 47.5% for his centre-left rival and former minister, Andrea Orlando.

"Congratulations to Marco #Bucci for his victory," Meloni wrote on X.

Monday's is the latest in a series of regional election wins for Meloni, coming days after she celebrated her first two years in office with a solid lead in national opinion polls. Two more regional contests will be held next month.

The result is also a bitter blow for Italy's divided opposition, as it was hoping a victory could help cement a fractious alliance built around the centre-left Democratic Party (PD)



and the left-leaning Five Star Movement.

The Liguria vote, which took place on Sunday and Monday, was triggered by the resignation in July of conservative regional president Giovanni Toti, who quit after being arrested on charges of corruption.

Toti denied wrongdoing but struck a plea bargain to end the case against him. Under Italian law, plea bargaining is not an admission of guilt but is subject to approval by a pre-trial judge.

Despite the defeat, PD came out as the single most popular party in Liguria with about 28.5% of the vote, while Meloni's Brothers of Italy garnered around 15%, ahead of its rightwing allies the League and Forza Italia.

Turnout was just under 46%, down from 53.4% in the last regional vote in 2020.

Meloni's bloc currently controls 14 out of 20 Italian regions and has secured a number of wins since she took office, losing to the centre-left opposition only a tight race in the island of Sardinia in February.





## Rodri Crowned 2024's Best Football Player at Ballon d'Or

PARIS (Dispatches) - Spanish midfielders Rodri and Aitana Bonmati won the men's and women's Ballon d'Or award on Monday as the world's best soccer players, while Real Madrid snubbed the star-studded ceremony in Paris in apparent protest.

The 28-year-old Rodri won the prestigious award for the first time after helping Manchester City win the Premier League and being a key player in Spain's European Championship triumph.

He succeeded eight-time winner Lionel Messi of Argentina and beat Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior into second place, a result which greatly displeased the Spanish club. Madrid and its players stayed away from the ceremony, then vented their feelings on social media.

Rodri showed his emotion when his name was read out by former winner George Weah, putting his hands over his face.

"Incredible night for me," said Rodri, who is out for the season after injuring his ACL last month and arrived on crutches to the ceremony. "One of my key things is I always try to improve every game."

Known as a hard-working and unselfish player despite his abilities, Rodri was quick to deflect praise onto others.

"I just want to say thank you again to the people who recognise my value in the game," he said. "When I was a kid I never thought of winning the Ballon d'Or, but in the last years I've been playing the highest level."

The 26-year-old Bonmati retained her award after helping Barcelona win the Spanish league, the Spanish cup and the Champions League. Bonmati joined Barca teammate Alexia Putellas in winning two titles since the women's trophy was first awarded in 2018. She beat her teammates Caroline Graham Hansen of Norway and Salma Parulluelo of Spain as Barcelona completed a 1-2-3.

"It's a pleasure to be here again," said Bonmati, who received the award from Oscar winner Natalie Portman. "Thanks to my teammates and the clubs who make me a better football player every year."

Even though attacking midfielder Jude Bellingham was third and Dani Carvajal finished fourth in the voting, and coach Carlo Ancelotti won the coach of the year award, no one from Madrid attended the gala in central Paris.

Ancelotti posted a message on X instead as did Vinicius, who was considered by many to be the favorite for the award, even though Rodri also had an outstanding season.

"I'll do it 10x if needed," Vinicius wrote in Portuguese. "They are not ready."

Madrid midfielder Eduardo Camavinga made it clear what he thought of the vote, calling it "football politics."

"My brother you are the best player in the world and no award can say otherwise," the France international wrote on X along with a photo of him and Vinicius celebrating together. "Love you my bro."

## Man United Sack Manager Ten Hag After Woeful Start to the Season



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United have sacked manager Erik ten Hag after their latest defeat at the weekend as they languish 14th in the Premier League table and stand winless in Europe this season without any signs of progress under the Dutchman.

United assistant coach and ex-striker Ruud van Nistelrooy will take over on an interim basis while they search for a new manager, the Old Trafford club said in a statement, following a unanimous decision to end Ten Hag's reign after 2-1/2 years.

British media reported later on Monday that United had approached Sporting about hiring 39-year-old Ruben Amorim, who is odds-on favourite for the job ahead of Van Nistelrooy, former Barcelona boss Xavi and ex-England manager Gareth Southgate.

Appointed in April 2022, Ten Hag led United to two domestic trophies - the League Cup in 2023 and the FA Cup in 2024.

But the 54-year-old's job was the subject of speculation most of last season as United suffered a worst-ever eighth place Premier League finish and exited the Champions League at the group stage and the Dutchman was again in the hot seat.

"I don't think anyone will be truly shocked," former United defender pundit Gary Neville told Sky Sports, with the club having had eight managers since Alex Ferguson retired in 2013.

Their terrible start to this season has come despite more than 600 million pounds (\$779.28 million) being spent on new players since Ten Hag took charge ahead of the 2022-23 campaign.

United have won four of their 14 games in all competitions so far this term and endured damaging 3-0 losses against Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur at Old Trafford.

They have achieved 11 points from nine matches in the Premier League, which the club said was far off target to achieve their goal of a fourth-place finish.

"Erik ten Hag has left his role as Manchester United men's first-team manager," United said in a statement.

"Ruud van Nistelrooy will take charge of the team as interim head coach, supported by the current coaching team, whilst a permanent head coach is recruited."

## Irving Scores 23 Points to Lead Mavericks Past Jazz 110-102

DALLAS (Dispatches) - Kyrie Irving scored 23 points and Klay Thompson added 18 to lift the Dallas Mavericks over the Utah Jazz 110-102 on Monday night.

Jazz forward Taylor Hendricks was wheeled off on a stretcher with a broken leg midway through the third quarter after he fell to the floor without any contact near the baseline beneath Utah's basket. The team said he had a fractured right fibula and dislocated ankle.

Luke Doncic had 15 points, nine rebounds and eight assists on an off shooting night.

Irving was scoreless until hitting two 3-pointers in the final 40 seconds of the first quarter for the defending Western Conference champions, who have won two of their first three games.

Collin Sexton scored 23 points and Lauri Markkanen and Keonte George added 17 each to lead the Jazz, who have lost their first three games for the first time since the 2015-16 season.

Doncic was 5 of 22 from the floor and hit his only 3-pointer in nine tries with 2:34 remaining.

Meanwhile Nikola Jokic scored seven of his 40 points in overtime, and the Denver Nuggets overcame a 15-point deficit to beat the Toronto Raptors 127-125 on Monday night.

Canadian star Jamal Murray sent the game to overtime by making a reverse layup for the Nuggets with less than a second remaining in regulation.



Jokic also grabbed 10 rebounds. Aaron Gordon had 16 points and 11 boards for Denver.

Toronto's RJ Barrett missed a 3 in the final seconds of OT, and Ochai Agbaji and Jakob Poeltl were unable to tip in Barrett's miss.

Murray and Christian Braun each scored 17 as the Nuggets won for the first time in three games this season.

Raptors forward Scottie Barnes had 21 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists, but he was knocked out of the game in the final minute of the fourth quarter after he was elbowed in the right eye.

Barrett scored 20 points in his season debut after missing the first three games because of a sprained right shoulder. Poeltl had 16 points and a career-high 19 rebounds.

Gordon finished with eight assists and Murray had seven.

Barnes went down and stumbled to the bench in pain after he was elbowed with 24 seconds remaining in the fourth. After being treated briefly, Barnes was helped to the locker room.

Jaylen Brown also scored 30 points, Payton Pritchard came off the bench and hit eight 3-pointers en route to 28 points, and the Boston Celtics beat the Milwaukee Bucks 119-108 on Monday night.

## Genoa Signs Italian Striker Balotelli for Last Chance on Big Stage



ROME (Dispatches) - Injury-hit Italian Serie A side Genoa announced the signing of former Italy striker Mario Balotelli.

Genoa have seven players out injured including forwards Junior Messias, Vitinha and Caleb Ekuban and have decided to take a gamble on free agent Balotelli, who last played in Serie A for Brescia four years ago and last season was at Adana Demirspor in Turkey.

"Balotelli is a new player for Genoa, welcome Super Mario" confirmed the club down in 18th after Sunday's 3-0 loss to Lazio.

Balotelli has signed until the end of the season, Italian media reported.

Born in Palermo to Ghanaian parents, he was once one of the young stars of Italian football and considered a world-class striker, playing for Inter Milan, Manchester City, AC Milan and Liverpool.

But a succession of smaller clubs followed and, at the age of 34, this move to Genoa represents a last chance on the big stage for Balotelli after a rocky career in which uncomfortable off-field headlines have been as common as goals and trophies.

A career high point came at Euro 2012, when he starred up front for losing finalists Italy, having just helped City win their first English league title since 1968.

He had previously had a hand in three Serie A crowns for Inter Milan and the 2010 Champions League triumph under Jose Mourinho, the last time an Italian team became kings of Europe.

Balotelli has also been a frequent target for racist abuse in his native Italy, with Verona, Roma and Juventus fans among those who have targeted him.

He is likely to make his first appearance against Fiorentina on Thursday for Genoa, who sit third from bottom in Italy's top flight after a seven-match winless run in which they have lost five times.

## Commanders Sink Bears on Last-Second Hail Mary

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jayden Daniels threw a 52-yard Hail Mary pass to Noah Brown on the final play of the game and the Washington Commanders beat the Chicago Bears 18-15 in Landover, Md.

Roschon Johnson had scored on the ground from 1 yard out with 25 seconds left in regulation, and the Bears (4-3) made good on the ensuing two-point conversion to take a 15-12 lead after trailing 12-0 earlier in the contest.

That left just enough time for the Commanders (6-2) to return the kickoff to their own 24 and complete two short passes to set up the game-winning heave, which deflected off a crowd of players and went into Brown's hands in the end zone as time expired.

The game matched rookie quarterbacks Caleb Williams of Chicago, selected first overall out of Southern California in this year's draft, and Daniels, taken No. 2 out of LSU.

Daniels was 21-of-38 passing for 326 yards and the score. He also ran eight times for 52 yards. Williams completed 10 of 24 passes for 131 yards. D'Andre Swift ran for 129 yards and a touchdown on 18 carries for Chicago.

Kalif Raymond returned a punt 90 yards for a touchdown and added a receiving score as Detroit Lions overwhelmed visiting Tennessee Titans 52-14.

David Montgomery ran for a touchdown and threw for another in the first half for the Lions (6-1). Jared Goff tossed three scoring passes and Jahmyr Gibbs had a 70-yard scoring run as Detroit surpassed the 50-point mark for the first time since scoring 55 points in 1997. Gibbs finished with 127 rushing yards.

Tennessee's Mason Rudolph passed for a touchdown and ran for another but was also intercepted twice. Calvin Ridley caught 10 passes for 143 yards for the Titans (1-6).



49ers 30, Cowboys 24

Brook Purdy passed for 260 yards and one touchdown and also rushed for a score as San Francisco 49ers beat Dallas Cowboys 30-24 in Santa Clara, Calif.

George Kittle had six receptions for 128 yards and one touchdown as the 49ers (4-4) beat the Cowboys for the fourth consecutive time, with two of those wins coming in the playoffs. Kittle also became the fifth player in 49ers history with 500 or more career receptions.

Dak Prescott completed 25 of 38 passes for 243 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions for the Cowboys (3-4). CeeDee Lamb matched his career high of 13 receptions to go with 146 yards and two scores for Dallas, which lost its second straight game.

Rhamondre Stevenson rushed for a go-ahead 1-yard touchdown with 22 seconds remaining to lift New England Patriots 25-22 over New York Jets in Foxborough, Mass.

Stevenson then hauled in a two-point conversion pass from backup quarterback Jacoby Brissett as the Patriots (2-6) ended a six-game skid. The Jets (2-6) had gone up 22-17 when Braelon Allen ran for a 2-yard score with 2:57 left.

Brissett was under center because rookie quarterback Drake Maye, the No. 3 overall pick in this year's draft, sustained a concussion late in the first quarter. Brissett ended up completing 15 of 24 passes for 132 yards. Aaron Rodgers had 233 yards and two TDs on 17-of-28 passing for the Jets.

C.J. Stroud threw for 285 yards and a touchdown as Houston Texans took a commanding 23-20 lead in the AFC South with a win over visiting Indianapolis Colts.