

Iran Has been Elected the Chair of the Asia-Pacific Group Within the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), as the Asia-Pacific Group Is the Largest Group on the Human Rights Council

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva Ali Bahreini Warned Against the Threats Caused by Nuclear Weapons, and Said That Nuclear Disarmament Is the Only Way to Achieve world peace

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Leader Emphasizes Economic Focus on Eastern Partnerships

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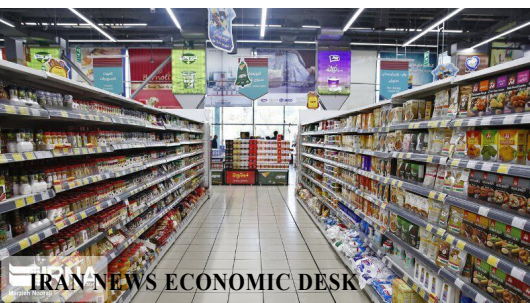
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Quad FM's Meet in Washington in Signal of Trump's China Focus

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Annual Inflation in January Decreases



TEHRAN - While the 12-month inflation rate for January this year showed a decrease compared to the same period in December, the monthly inflation rate for January rose by 2.9% compared to December.

According to a report, the Iranian Statistical Center announced the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for January 2025 on Wednesday. The data shows that in January 2025, the annual inflation rate for households across the country reached 32.0%, marking a 0.5 percentage point decrease from the same period the previous year.

In January 2025, the consumer price index for Iranian households reached 293.4, showing a 2.9% increase compared to the previous month. Compared to the same month in the previous year, the CPI increased by 31.8%, and in the 12-month period ending in January, it grew by 32.0%.

Point-to-point inflation refers to the percentage change in the CPI compared to the same month in the previous year.

In January 2025, the point-to-point inflation for Iranian households was 31.8%, meaning that, on average, households spent 31.8% more in January 2025 to purchase the same "basket of goods and services" as they did in January 2024.

This point-to-point inflation showed an increase of 0.4 percentage points compared to the previous month.

Monthly inflation refers to the percentage change in the CPI compared to the previous month.

In January 2025, the monthly inflation rate for Iranian households was 2.9%. Monthly inflation for major groups showed that food, beverages, and tobacco items experienced a 3.2% increase, while non-food items and services saw a 2.8% increase.

The annual inflation rate represents the percentage change in the average CPI over a 12-month period compared to the same period in the previous year.

In January 2025, the annual inflation rate for Iranian households was 32.0%, marking a 0.5 percentage point decrease from the previous month.

The annual inflation rate in January 2025 was 32.0%, with variations ranging from 29.7% for the lowest income decile to 32.4% for the ninth decile. The inflation gap between income deciles was 2.7 percentage points, showing a decrease of 0.2 percentage points compared to the previous month's gap of 2.9 percentage points.

Supreme Leader Calls for Enhanced Media Efforts to Highlight Iran's Progress

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a meeting with private sector leaders and producers, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei expressed concerns that Iran has fallen short in demonstrating its progress and realizing its aspirations. He emphasized the need for a robust media campaign to better communicate the country's advancements, both domestically and abroad.

The meeting, part of the "Pioneers of Progress" event on Wednesday, brought together representatives from various sectors of the private industry. During the event, the Supreme Leader visited an exhibition showcasing the achievements of the private sector, highlighting the significant strides made despite ongoing external challenges.

Speaking to the attendees, Ayatollah Khamenei called for urgent action in spreading the word about Iran's potential for progress, particularly to the younger generation. "Do our youth and students know about these progress reports? Do they understand that it's possible to start small in a small town and scale up over time?" he asked. The Supreme Leader stressed that many individuals and groups are unaware of the country's accomplishments and the opportunities available for growth.

Ayatollah Khamenei also noted that the country is failing to properly showcase its progress. "We are falling short in showing our progress and realizing our dreams," he said, adding that a targeted media campaign is necessary to rectify this shortcoming. He emphasized that this issue required dedicated attention and should not be overlooked.

The Supreme Leader acknowledged the resilience of the private sector, which has managed to achieve significant progress despite facing sanctions, external pressures, and the looming threat of additional restrictions. He pointed out that the private sector's efforts were an essential part of Iran's economic landscape, though he also expressed concern about obstacles posed by state agencies.

"Unfortunately, some state and regulatory bodies are acting as roadblocks," Khamenei remarked, citing the example of factories struggling with high import costs that outpace their production costs. This, he said, created unfair competition for Iranian workers and investors, further hindering the sector's growth.

In his speech, Ayatollah Khamenei called on the government to remove barriers that hinder private sector growth, particularly addressing laws and regulations that obstruct progress. He emphasized that while careful monitoring of the private sector is necessary to prevent abuse, such as the misuse of subsidized currency, it is crucial that the government provides more support and less hindrance to private enterprises.

He also stressed the importance of implementing the principles of economic privatization, as outlined in Article 44 of Iran's Constitution. According to the Supreme Leader, failure to fully implement these policies over the past decade has contributed to the country's economic downturn. Ayatollah Khamenei also urged government officials to follow through on expert proposals aimed at achieving an 8% economic growth rate, highlighting that the country's potential for growth lies in tapping into its own capacities rather than relying on uncertain foreign investments.

Finally, he addressed the issue of Iran's dependency on the dollar, which remains a key challenge for the nation's economic stability. The Supreme Leader pointed to the BRICS financial system and its plans for currency exchanges as a potential solution to reduce reliance on the dollar, helping to stabilize Iran's economy.

Ayatollah Khamenei's remarks underscored the need for a united effort to empower the private sector, remove systemic barriers, and effectively communicate Iran's achievements in order to pave the way for sustainable economic growth.

President Urges Bolstering Azerbaijan Relations



TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has placed a premium on improving bilateral cooperation with Azerbaijan, saying the Islamic Republic's principled policy is to pursue the development and strengthening of relations with its neighbors.

Pezeshkian made the remarks during a meeting with Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev in the capital Tehran on Tuesday.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran holds a principled policy of developing relations and interactions with neighboring and Muslim countries, and in this regard, relations with Azerbaijan are of particular importance to us."

"We seek to expand relations in all fields between the two countries," Pezeshkian said.

He went on to say that continuing and strengthening the level of cooperation will turn Iran and Azerbaijan into strategic partners. The president cited the agreements reached and joint projects currently underway between the two countries in the trade, energy, and transportation sectors.

Mustafayev, for his part, said, "Over the past decades, the Republic of Azerbaijan has spared no effort to expand relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran."

"Moreover, the important changes that we have witnessed during this short period of your presidency promise a bright future in the relations between the two countries and the situation in our region," he added.

Mustafayev further appreciated the influential role of Iran in "establishing peace and stability in the region," saying Baku believes that "solving the problems of our region will be possible only by the countries of this region."

"The presence of foreign countries will not help us in this regard."

Mustafayev also provided Pezeshkian with a detailed report on the latest state of relations between the two countries, especially in the trade and economic sectors, as well as ongoing joint projects in the rail and road transportation and energy exchange sectors.

"The high-ranking Azerbaijani economic delegation, during the visit to Tehran, is seeking to draw a roadmap for further expanding economic and trade relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and we want to establish strategic cooperation between the two countries," he said.

People Are the Key to the Victory and Continuation of the Islamic Revolution

TEHRAN - In a gathering of the Fajr Decade Committees, Majlis Speaker, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, emphasized the central role of the people in the success and continuation of the Islamic Revolution. He stated that the presence of the people is the key to both the victory and ongoing survival of the revolution, and without their active participation, it would be impossible to maintain the system and the values of the revolution.

Qalibaf, speaking this morning at the event, highlighted that the participation of the people in various aspects of public life is irreplaceable. He argued that without the involvement of the people, neither the revolution nor the Islamic system can advance or sustain its core values.

Referring to the teachings of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Qalibaf underlined that belief in and reliance on the people, as well as people-centered governance, are fundamental pillars of the Islamic Revolution, deeply rooted in religious teachings. He recalled how Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, always emphasized the importance of people's democracy, which he derived directly from Islamic principles, rather than importing it from elsewhere.

He also criticized those who create a false dichotomy between the "Islamic" and "Republican" aspects of the system. He stressed that the Islamic Republic is a single, unified entity where the republican and Islamic values are inseparable. The people's participation in realizing the goals of the revolution, Qalibaf noted, is an essential teaching of both Imam Khomeini and the current Supreme Leader.

Qalibaf continued by saying that the victory of the Islamic Revolution depended on the unity and comprehensive participation of the people, and its continuation remains tied to their involvement. He stressed that to preserve the revolution, attention must be given to a vibrant and diverse presence of the people across all spheres of life. Without this participation, the survival of the revolution is unattainable.

He also emphasized that when speaking of the people, this includes everyone, without discrimination or exclusion of any group. He warned that actions which cause division or alienate certain segments of the population contradict both the religious and political foundations of the Islamic Republic, as well as the revolution's ideals and the directives of the Supreme Leader.

Recalling the unique role of Imam Khomeini in guiding the nation and fostering national

unity, Qalibaf explained that Imam Khomeini's wise leadership empowered the people, bringing them together as one nation based on the Quranic and Ahl al-Bayt (AS) principles. This, he said, was the source of national confidence that led to the revolution's success.

Qalibaf noted that Imam Khomeini's belief in God, himself, and the people formed the three critical elements that gave rise to the Islamic Revolution. He argued that anyone who does not understand Islam in this way is not aligned with the revolutionary or Islamic principles.

He also highlighted the importance of people's participation in national and religious ceremonies as opportunities to preserve the revolution. These gatherings, Qalibaf said, protect the revolution from enemy conspiracies.

Referring to Imam Khomeini's role in championing the Palestinian cause, Qalibaf recalled that Imam Khomeini introduced the Palestinian issue as a central concern for the Muslim world, declaring Quds Day as a symbol of the global struggle against oppression. This broader perspective showed the depth of Imam Khomeini's vision in defending the rights of Muslims and opposing imperialism.

Qalibaf called on the organizers of the Fajr Decade committees to work towards facilitating the wide participation of the people in national and religious events and to prevent any sense of indifference among the public toward these ceremonies.

Reflecting on the role of the people in the country's progress, Qalibaf noted that the people are the solution to the nation's problems, not the problem itself. He criticized those who mistakenly view the public as a challenge and highlighted that without their involvement, no political, economic, cultural, or security issues can be resolved.

Qalibaf concluded by stressing the necessity of national unity, warning against efforts to divide the people through incorrect conceptualizations, tribalism, and class divisions. Such actions, he said, not only contradict both religious and rational principles but also undermine divine support.

The Speaker reaffirmed that the foundation of the Islamic Revolution is the participation of the people. He called for the elimination of any tendencies toward monopoly or opportunism and insisted that adherence to these principles would ensure national security and the country's welfare both domestically and internationally, helping Iran overcome any challenges.

Iran Not Afraid of Trump, Prepared for Any Scenario



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance says the country is not afraid of a potential new round of "maximum pressure" under US President Donald Trump, saying plans are in place to cope with any eventualities.

In a long interview with Iran's state TV late on Monday, Abdonnasser Hemmati said that Iran once experienced tough economic conditions and learned how to deal with it when Trump was US president for a first term from 2016 to 2020.

"For a period in 2020, our oil revenues fell to \$7-8 billion and the coronavirus complicated the problems ... but we managed to run the country and the Americans failed to achieve what they had promised," said Hemmati, who served as Iran's top banker between 2018 and 2021.

"After the maximum pressure campaign (was implemented) in Trump's first administration, the next US administration admitted that the maximum pressure had been defeated. This is their own admission," he said.

The comments came hours after Trump was sworn in as US president more than two months after winning one of the most divisive presidential elections in US history.

Trump has not indicated that he is going to repeat his previous policies on Iran. However, he has picked figures as aides or future ministers who are known for their hawkish anti-Iran stances.

Iran's New Satellite to Launch Into Space



TEHRAN - In an announcement made on the sidelines of a private sector exhibition, Hossein Sharabi, CEO of Omid Space Company, revealed that the advanced version of the Kosar satellite, named "Kosar 1.5," will be launched in the first half of next year.

Kosar 1.5, developed by Iranian experts, is an upgraded version of the previous Kosar and Hodhod satellites, which were launched into space on November 6 of this year. The two satellites are playing crucial roles in advancing precision agriculture, with Kosar focused on remote sensing and Hodhod on Internet of Things (IoT) applications.

Sharabi proudly highlighted that over 85% of the components for these satellites are domestically produced. Even if all components had been imported, the design and construction were entirely managed by Iranian engineers, making the project fully indigenous.

Despite the challenges posed by sanctions, Sharabi emphasized the successful navigation of these barriers, turning threats into opportunities. He shared that the new Kosar 1.5, a combination of the missions of Kosar and Hodhod, will be launched next year, and the company is working to design and produce a constellation of these satellites with the help of investment.

Sharabi stressed the importance of government support for the growth of this sector. He called for guarantees in the market for space services and for the government to pre-purchase these services. Additionally, he urged for the reduction of technological risks in knowledge-based industries and for the removal of irrational regulatory barriers.

He also pointed out that the lack of understanding among regulatory bodies about the space industry has led to a hesitation among government managers to undertake large projects, creating significant challenges for the industry.

This announcement comes as Iran continues to invest in and expand its capabilities in space exploration, an area of growing importance for the nation's technological development.

IRAN NEWS



Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade to Visit Oman

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Seyed Mohammad Atabak, Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade, will travel to Oman today (Thursday), leading a delegation of government officials, traders, and private sector manufacturers. The visit is aimed at attending the 21st Joint Commission Meeting on Iran-Oman Cooperation.

On the sidelines of the joint commission, the minister will meet with several Omani cabinet officials to discuss preparations for agreements between Tehran and Muscat. Atabak's agenda in Muscat also includes meetings with traders and investors from both countries, where he will outline the development initiatives of Iran's 14th government in various economic and trade sectors.

Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia to Establish a Powerful Electric Grid



TEHRAN - The Minister of Energy and the Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan have agreed on developing electric connectivity routes and practical implementation methods. Abbas Aliabadi, Iran's Minister of Energy, along with senior ministry officials, met with Shahin Mustafayev, Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister, and his delegation on Tuesday, January 23, 2025. The discussions centered around various technical and engineering topics in the water and electricity sectors, including the electrical interconnection between Iran and Azerbaijan, the construction and completion of the Giz Galasi Hydropower Plant, and environmental studies for joint engineering projects.

Aliabadi emphasized the need to accelerate the completion of the Giz Galasi Hydropower Plant, highlighting the sufficient water resources from the Aras River. He stated that the project presents a valuable opportunity to generate electricity at the Iran-Azerbaijan border and should be expedited.

He further expressed Iran's readiness to cooperate with Azerbaijan's Ministry of Energy and environmental organizations for the construction and operation of the Ordubad and Marazad dams. He stressed the importance of conducting environmental studies to ensure sustainable project execution.

Addressing electrical connectivity, Aliabadi noted Azerbaijan's strategic position in linking Iran's electricity network with Russia. He highlighted that with Russia's willingness to connect, Azerbaijan could play a pivotal role in establishing a robust regional power grid connecting the three countries.

Additionally, Aliabadi mentioned Azerbaijan's electricity challenges in supplying power to the Nakhchivan region. He stated that Iran is prepared to import electricity via Azerbaijan and deliver it to Nakhchivan at the zero border point to help alleviate power shortages in the region.

Shahin Mustafayev welcomed the proposal for an electrical connection between Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia. He emphasized that the successful implementation of this initiative would require thorough technical and engineering studies and expressed optimism that the three countries could achieve results in the shortest possible time through mutual cooperation.

Joining FATF: A Key Step to End Economic Isolation and Reduce Trade Costs



TEHRAN - The Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture of Karaj has emphasized the importance of Iran joining the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), stating that membership in this global financial watchdog could be a crucial step toward improving the country's economic conditions. However, it acknowledges that the path will not be without challenges. The Chamber asserts that if Iran seeks to exit its current economic situation and enhance its presence on the global stage, joining FATF is an undeniable necessity.

Parham Rezaei, a representative from the Chamber, highlighted that membership in FATF could significantly reduce financial and banking restrictions and sanctions. He noted that this move would allow Iran to conduct financial transactions with other countries more easily and efficiently.

Rezaei further emphasized the importance of FATF membership for Iranian businesses and traders. Currently, due to sanctions and financial restrictions, international trade is costly for Iran. Joining FATF could lower the expenses associated with global transactions and help Iranian companies conduct their business with other countries more smoothly and at a lower cost.

He pointed out that one of the major challenges facing Iran's economy is financial transactions. As long as Iran remains on FATF's watchlist, global financial institutions refrain from cooperating with the country due to concerns about potential penalties. Membership in this international body could resolve these issues and pave the way for smoother financial exchanges.

Addressing potential concerns about joining FATF, Rezaei acknowledged that some economic and political stakeholders in Iran might view this move as external pressure. However, he stressed that if Iran wishes to break free from economic isolation and establish itself as a credible trade partner on the global stage, this step is inevitable.

In conclusion, Rezaei underscored that joining FATF could ultimately help Iran reintegrate into the global economy. He stated that many countries currently face serious challenges in financial dealings with Iran due to existing restrictions. Membership in FATF could enable Iran to re-enter global markets, creating new opportunities for trade expansion and attracting foreign investment.



Leader Emphasizes Economic Focus on Eastern Partnerships

TEHRAN - The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran has urged economic stakeholders, including the private sector and the Iran Chamber of Commerce, to adopt an "East-oriented" approach based on national interests.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei visited the "Pioneers of Progress" exhibition on Tuesday, a national event showcasing the capabilities and achievements of Iran's private sector. The visit, which lasted two and a half hours, provided an overview of key sectors such as communications and information technology, satellite equipment manufacturing, artificial intelligence, aviation tools and equipment, mining and geology, oil, gas, and petrochemicals, steel and aluminum industries, home appliances, maritime industries, carpet industry, water and electricity sector, textiles, medical and hospital equipment, pharmaceuticals, Royan Research Institute, agriculture, livestock farming, handicrafts, and tourism.

During his visit to the exhibition and the booth of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Ayatollah Khamenei engaged in discussions with Samad Hassanzadeh, the head of the chamber. The Supreme Leader offered guidance to the private sector and the chamber regarding economic strategies and initiatives.

Hassanzadeh stated that the chamber expressed its readiness to cooperate with government programs and contribute to achieving an 8% economic growth target set in the seventh development plan.

Hassanzadeh reported that a preliminary report on the drafting of Iran's "Vision 1430" plan, conducted in collaboration with the Expediency Council

and the Iran Chamber of Commerce, was presented to the Supreme Leader. Ayatollah Khamenei welcomed the joint effort and provided recommendations for further enhancing cooperation with the Expediency Council.

One of the key topics highlighted by the Supreme Leader was the need to leverage the national and international potential of the Iran Chamber of Commerce. He emphasized the importance of expanding relationships with chambers of commerce in neighboring and regional countries.

Hassanzadeh further noted that Ayatollah Khamenei specifically called for an economic approach focused on Eastern partnerships, stressing the alignment of such strategies with Iran's national interests.

The Iran Chamber of Commerce also briefed the Supreme Leader on the activities of the "Government-Private Sector Dialogue Council," which aims to address challenges and inefficiencies in economic policymaking. Ayatollah Khamenei acknowledged the council's efforts and emphasized its role in resolving economic issues effectively.

During the visit, the chamber highlighted its extensive network across all provinces of Iran, its joint chambers with other countries, specialized commissions, and the research capabilities of its policy center.

Hassanzadeh concluded by expressing optimism about the collective efforts of economic stakeholders in achieving the targeted 8% economic growth, reaffirming the chamber's commitment to enhanced participation in national economic development plans.

20% Growth in Trade Between Iran and Azerbaijan in 2024



TEHRAN - The head of the International Affairs Center of Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development announced at the 16th Joint Economic Commission meeting between Iran and Azerbaijan that trade between the two countries reached \$580 million in 2024, reflecting a 20% increase from \$480 million in 2023.

Amin Tarfa made this statement on Tuesday at the opening of the 16th Joint Economic Commission meeting between Iran and Azerbaijan, held at the Espinas Palace Hotel in Tehran. He highlighted extensive cooperation opportunities in the fields of transportation and infrastructure, which have strengthened economic ties between the two nations.

He pointed to joint infrastructure and transportation projects, including the opening and operation of the Astara border bridge. He added that the construction of the new Aghband bridge is nearing completion, and work on the Aras corridor, aimed at connecting Azerbaijan to Iran via road and rail, is currently underway.

The head of the International Affairs Center noted that cross-border traffic between Iran and Azerbaijan, as well as with the Nakhchivan region, remains extensive.

Tarfa also discussed opportunities for cooperation in the energy sector, stating that various topics related to electricity, oil and gas, and banking affairs will be reviewed in expert group meetings during the summit to achieve mutual solutions.

He emphasized that on the first day of the two-day summit, which is being hosted in Tehran after a three-year hiatus, technical and expert groups will discuss and exchange views on economic,

trade, cultural, transportation, tourism, energy, and other related fields.

Tarfa added that on Wednesday afternoon (January 24), the Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, and Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister, Shahin Mustafayev, will conclude the summit by signing a memorandum of understanding. He expressed hope that the summit would yield valuable outcomes for the development of bilateral relations.

Highlighting key transportation projects under discussion, Tarfa stated that the completion of the Aras corridor, which will link Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan through Iran by rail and road, will be thoroughly reviewed alongside plans for new border bridges and terminals.

Tarfa underlined the significance of Iran-Azerbaijan border crossings in the North-South corridor and their importance for regional trade. He expressed optimism that potential challenges would be resolved during the summit, paving the way for enhanced transport cooperation.

According to IRNA, prior to the summit, Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, Abdolnaser Hemmati, met with Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister. During their meeting, they discussed the role of the monetary and banking systems in expanding trade between Tehran and Baku. The Azerbaijani side pledged to follow up on these issues, and it was agreed that after engaging with the Ministry of Economy, further coordination with Iran's insurance and banking sectors would take place to boost trade volume between the two countries.

Participation in Permanent Exhibitions in Pakistan Essential for Market Share



TEHRAN - Kerman Chamber of Commerce Export Development Commission Chairman has stressed that securing dedicated booths for Kerman's products at Pakistan's permanent exhibitions would greatly benefit local traders.

During a meeting focused on introducing Pakistan's export markets and Kerman's position in them, the Chairman highlighted the successful participation of an 11-company trade delegation from Kerman in the Karachi exhibition in 2022. He noted the positive reception and the signing of favorable contracts, emphasizing that Pakistan presents a promising market for Kerman's products.

"Every product manufactured in Kerman has the potential to be sold in the Pakistani market," he said, adding that existing challenges must be addressed through negotiations.

He identified export tariffs as one of the key challenges and suggested that the Kerman Chamber could facilitate the creation of a pavilion at Pakistan's exhibitions and support the participation of smaller companies. He also encouraged larger companies to secure booths and establish their presence.

The Deputy Governor for Economic Coordination in Kerman underlined the importance of trade with Pakistan and called for collaboration among various entities, including the Kerman Chamber, the Industry, Mine, and Trade Organization, and the government to enhance business relations.

He suggested preparing a proposal to formalize trade discussions and advocated for the establishment of a Kerman representative office within the Iran-Pakistan Joint Chamber. He also emphasized the importance of Kerman's strong presence at the upcoming Karachi exhibition by setting up a dedicated pavilion.

"Entering the Pakistani market is easier compared to other markets, given the geographical proximity and the existence of official border crossings," he remarked.

The Market Development Manager at the Kerman Chamber reported on Pakistan's export market, describing it as a highly consumer-driven economy with a negative trade balance. He pointed out that Pakistan relies heavily on imports, with Iran ranking 11th among its suppliers. Since 2021, trade between Iran and Pakistan has been on an upward trend.

Tehran and Baku to Establish Joint Energy Cooperation Task Force



TEHRAN - The Oil Minister has emphasized the expansion of energy cooperation between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, announcing the formation of a joint task force to oversee strategic and technical collaborations.

Mohsen Paknejad, during a meeting on Tuesday, January 23, 2025, with Shahin Mustafayev and his accompanying delegation, stated that such meetings play a significant role in strengthening bilateral relations in various sectors. He highlighted that neighboring countries hold a special priority in Iran's foreign policy, with Azerbaijan having a unique position among them.

Shahin Mustafayev, Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, noted during the meeting that this was his second encounter with the Iranian Oil Minister in the past three months. He stressed the importance of reciprocal visits and meetings in gaining a deeper understanding of each other's capacities and infrastructure.

He further emphasized that the relations between Iran and Azerbaijan are built on shared religious, cultural, and fraternal ties. Mustafayev added that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev places great importance on these relations, believing they are based on the mutual interests of both nations.

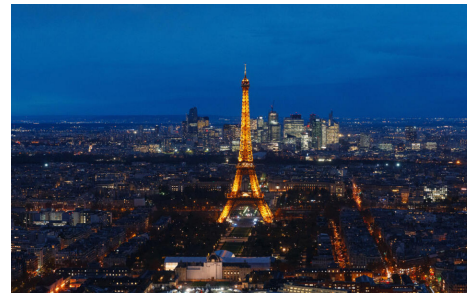
In a related meeting, Masoud Pezeshkian, during his talks with Shahin Mustafayev, who led a delegation to Tehran to participate in the 16th Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, described the relations between the two countries as brotherly, friendly, and rooted in religious and familial bonds. Pezeshkian affirmed that the cordial ties between the people and governments of Iran and Azerbaijan transcend geographical boundaries and will continue to strengthen over time.

France Again Tops List as World's Favorite Tourist Destination

PARIS (Dispatches) - Olympic host France retained its spot as the world's top tourist destination in 2024 with 100 million visitors, holding off stiff competition from countries including Spain, the tourism ministry said on Tuesday. As world tourism returned to pre-pandemic levels with 1.4 billion people taking a trip abroad, according to the UN, both France and Spain announced record visitor numbers.

"While France is still the world leader in this sector, we are facing fierce competition, particularly from Spain," said French Tourism Minister Nathalie Delattre in an interview on Tuesday with the daily Le Figaro.

Spain said last week that a record 94 million foreign tourists flocked to the Iberian nation in 2024, a 10 percent increase from the previous year.



Zelenskiy Says Security Guarantee Would Need at Least 200,000 Peacekeepers



DAVOS (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who is seeking a meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump, said that at least 200,000 European peacekeepers would be needed to prevent a new Russian attack after any ceasefire deal.

The Ukrainian leader, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland a day after Trump returned to power following months of promises to end the war in Ukraine quickly, also urged European leaders to do more to defend the continent.

The prospect of a rapid settlement has focused minds in Kyiv and Europe on the urgent need for security guarantees to prevent any future Russian attack, with the idea of peacekeeping force circulating.

"From all the Europeans? 200,000, it's a minimum. It's a minimum, otherwise it's nothing," Zelenskiy said when asked about the idea of a peacekeeping contingent on an interview panel after delivering his speech.

That number is around the size of the entire French armed forces, estimated at just over 200,000 by France's defense ministry in 2020. Zelenskiy said at least that number would be needed as a security guarantee if Russia's armed forces totalled 1.5 million personnel and Ukraine had only half that number.

Zelenskiy said such a force would only be part of the security guarantees that Ukraine needed.

The Ukrainian leader said Kyiv was working to set up a meeting between himself and Trump.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy addresses the 55th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, January 21, 2025. REUTERS/Yves Herman Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tab

"The teams have been working on a meeting, they are currently in the process," Zelenskiy said about those efforts.

Trump, who returned to office on Monday, has said he would stop the war in Ukraine swiftly, without saying how.

Trump Orders U.S. Exit From World Health Organization



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United States will leave the World Health Organization, President Donald Trump said on Monday, saying the global health agency had mishandled the COVID-19 pandemic and other international health crises.

Trump said the WHO had failed to act independently from the "inappropriate political influence of WHO member states" and required "unfairly onerous payments" from the U.S. that were disproportionate to the sums provided by other, larger countries, such as China.

"World Health ripped us off, everybody rips off the United States. It's not going to happen anymore," Trump said at the signing of an executive order on the withdrawal, shortly after his inauguration to a second term.

The WHO said on Tuesday that it regretted the move from its top donor country.

"We hope that the United States will reconsider, and we really hope that there will be constructive dialogue for the benefit of everyone, for Americans but also for people around the world," WHO spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic told reporters in Geneva.

The move sets a 12-month notice period for the U.S. to leave the United Nations health agency and stop all financial contributions to its work. The United States is by far the WHO's biggest financial backer, contributing around 18% of its overall funding. WHO's most recent two-year budget, for 2024-2025, was \$6.8 billion.



Quad FMs Meet in Washington in Signal of Trump's China Focus

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States, Australia, India and Japan recommitted to working together on Tuesday, after the first meeting of the China-focused "Quad" grouping's top diplomats since President Donald Trump returned to the White House.

In a joint statement after the talks in Washington, hosted by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on his first day in the job, the four nations said officials would meet regularly to prepare for an upcoming leaders' summit in India, expected this year.

The four countries share concerns about China's growing power and analysts said the meeting was designed to signal that countering Beijing is a top priority for Trump, who began his second term in office on Monday.

Rubio earlier said he said would stress the importance of working with allies "on the things that are important to America and Americans" during the meeting.

He posed with Australia's Penny Wong, India's Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Japan's Takeshi Iwaya in front of the flags of their countries before the meeting at the State Department, but did not respond to questions from reporters.

"Significant that the Quad (foreign ministers' meeting) took place within hours of the inauguration of the Trump Administration," Jaishankar said on X after the meeting.

"This underlines the priority it has in the foreign policy of its member states." The four nations restated their "shared commitment to strengthening a Free and Open Indo-Pacific where the rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are upheld and defended," the joint statement said.

"We also strongly oppose any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion," it said, an apparent reference to the threat that China will act on its claim to sovereignty over democratically governed Taiwan.

That includes in the East China Sea, where Japan is locked in a territorial dispute with China, and in the contested South China Sea, Japan's government said in a later statement.

Iwaya also raised concerns about North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile development at the gathering and asked for help to resolve a dispute with Pyongyang over the past abductions of Japanese by North Korea, it said.

In separate bilateral meeting Iwaya told Rubio and Trump's national security adviser, Mike Waltz, that Japan had no choice but to continue strengthening its defense capabilities given the security situation in East Asia, Japanese Foreign Ministry Press Secretary Toshihiro Kitamura told a news conference.

Japan is undertaking its biggest military buildup since World War Two with a plan to doubled defence spending by 2027. The

return of Trump has prompted expectations Washington may put more pressure on allies to further step up defense spending.

Iwaya also asked Rubio to create an environment where Japanese businesses can invest without concerns, he added.

Former U.S. President Joe Biden this month blocked Nippon Steel's proposed \$14.9 billion purchase of U.S. Steel, citing national security concerns, prompting concern from Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and other officials who said it was regrettable and raised concerns about future investment in the U.S.

Japan hopes to arrange a face-to-face meeting between Trump and Ishiba some time in February or March, Kitamura said. Rubio also met separately with Wong and Jaishankar.

A key aim for Australia was to secure assurances from Washington about the massive AUKUS defense project, designed to allow Australia to acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines and other advanced weapons such as hypersonic missiles, which Trump has not commented on publicly.

Australia's Foreign Minister Wong told a news conference in Washington she had a "very positive discussion" with Rubio on AUKUS.

Wong and Rubio discussed efforts to continue bilateral defence cooperation, AUKUS, as well as critical minerals and global supply chain security, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement after the meeting.

"The Secretary and the Foreign Minister hailed the longstanding U.S.-Australia Alliance as foundational to international security and prosperity, and to a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region free from coercion," she said.

Wong added that there was "a great deal of optimism and confidence about the opportunities ahead".

China has denounced the Quad as a Cold War construct and says the AUKUS alliance would intensify a regional arms race. Trump officials were working on scheduling another gathering of the foreign ministers at the White House as well, a person involved in planning meetings said.

The Quad grouping met many times during the administration of former President Joe Biden, with a focus on Beijing's military and economic activities in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea where U.S. allies have pushed back against Beijing's territorial claims.

The grouping has also pledged to advance cooperation in cybersecurity to protect supply chains and critical infrastructure, including undersea cables.

Panama Complains to UN Over Trump Canal Threat, Starts Audit

PANAMA CITY (Dispatches) - Panama has complained to the United Nations over US President Donald Trump's "worrying" threat to seize the Panama Canal, even as it launched an audit of the Hong Kong-linked operator of two ports on the interoceanic waterway.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the government in Panama City referred to an article of the UN Charter precluding any member from "the threat or use of force" against the territorial integrity or political independence of another.

The missive distributed to reporters yesterday, urges Guterres to refer the matter to the UN Security Council, without asking for a meeting to be convened.

Trump, in his inaugural address Monday, repeated his complaint that China was effectively "operating" the Panama Canal through its growing presence around the waterway, which the United States handed over at the end of 1999.

"We didn't give it to China, we gave it to Panama. And we're taking it back," Trump said.

The Panamanian comptroller's office that oversees public entities then announced "an exhaustive audit" would be launched "aimed at ensuring the efficient and transparent use of public resources" at the Panama Ports Company.



The company, part of Hutchison Ports, a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based conglomerate CK Hutchison Holdings, operates the ports of Balboa and Cristobal on either end of the canal.

The comptroller's office said the aim was to determine whether the company was complying with its concession agreements, including adequate reporting of income, payments and contributions to the state.

Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino has denied that any other nation was interfering in the canal, which he said was operated on a principle of neutrality.

"The canal is and will remain Panama's," Mulino said in response to Trump's threats.

The Republican has been raising pressure for weeks over the canal — through which 40 percent of US container traffic travels — and has refused to rule out using military force to reclaim it.

The Panama Ports Company's concession agreement was extended by 25 years in 2021.

The United States is the canal's main user, followed by China. Since 2000, the waterway has contributed more than \$30 billion to Panama's state coffers, including nearly \$2.5 billion in the last fiscal year.

Turkish Ski Resort Fire Kills 76, Guests Forced to Jump From Windows

KARTALKAYA (Dispatches) - A fire at a ski resort hotel in Turkey's Bolu mountains killed 76 people and injured dozens on Tuesday, forcing panicked guests to jump out of windows in the middle of the night.

"It was like the apocalypse. The flames engulfed the hotel immediately, like in half an hour," said Mevlut Ozer, who witnessed the incident at the Kartalkaya ski resort in northwest Turkey.

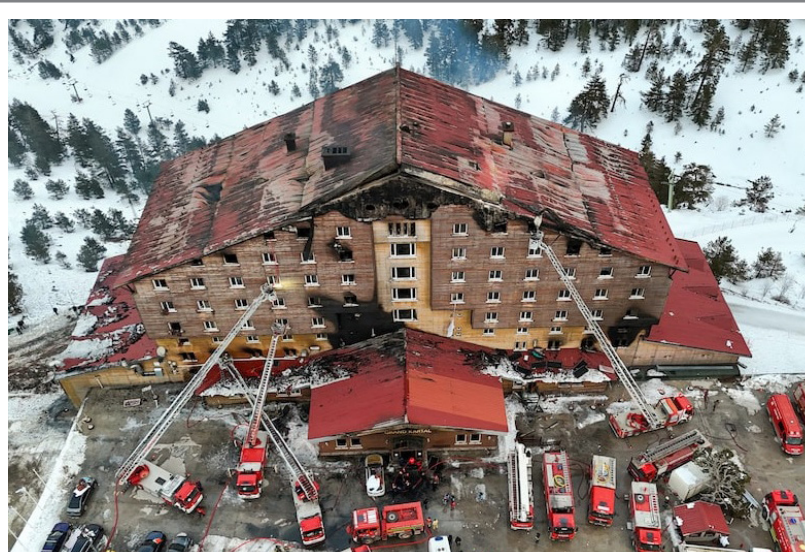
The fire began around 3:30 a.m. (0030 GMT) on the restaurant floor of the 12-storey Grand Kartal Hotel, authorities said.

Several fire engines and ambulances later surrounded the charred, wood-fronted building, where white bed sheets tied together dangled from at least three upper-floor windows, showing how people tried to flee.

President Tayyip Erdogan declared Wednesday a day of national mourning after the incident.

"People all started to jump with panic. One friend jumped from the 11th floor - may God have mercy on him," said Omer Sakrak, another witness and employee of a neighbouring hotel.

"They tried to climb down using bedsheets. The bedsheets ripped as one friend tried ... and he unfortunately fell on his head," he told Reuters. "One



father was yelling about his one year-old child: 'I will throw my child or he will burn'."

Hotel guests told TV broadcasters they fled through smoke-filled corridors and heard no alarms.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said there had been 238 guests staying at the hotel, situated at the base of several ski slopes, which smouldered until the afternoon.

"Our pain is impossible to describe," he said, speaking from the resort and offering condolences. Yerlikaya said the fire was out and that search efforts at the hotel had finished.

Authorities are conducting DNA tests to identify some of the bodies recovered from the scene of the fire, he added.

An investigation was underway into the fire, which happened during school holidays when many families from nearby Istanbul and Ankara head to the Bolu mountains to ski.

Police detained nine people as part of the investigation, Yerlikaya said, adding that prosecutors will shed light on the cause of the fire and people responsible will be brought to justice.



Liverpool Make It to Last-16, Barcelona Beat Benfica

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool beat Lille 2-1 on Tuesday to maintain their perfect record in this season's Champions League and clinch qualification for the last 16, while Barcelona produced a stunning comeback to beat Benfica 5-4 in a classic to secure their own place.

The Anfield side are the only team with a maximum 21 points from seven matches in this new, expanded Champions League and they now know they will skip next month's play-offs and head straight to the last 16 in March.

Mohamed Salah ran clear to give Liverpool the lead at home to a Lille team who have also impressed this season, and the visitors appeared in trouble when they had Aissa Mandi sent off just before the hour mark.

Jonathan David swept in an equaliser for Lille, but Harvey Elliott's shot took a wicked deflection on its way in to give Liverpool the points.

"We're happy that we are top eight. That's the only thing that tells me something, because this league table doesn't tell you anything," said Slot when asked about being through to the last 16.

The biggest drama on the night, however, came in the rain in Lisbon, where Barcelona trailed 4-2 with 12 minutes of the 90 remaining, but somehow recovered to win 5-4.

Greek striker Vangelis Pavlidis scored a hat-trick in the first half-hour for Benfica, including a penalty, while Robert Lewandowski netted from the spot for Barca, who were 3-1 down at the interval.

Raphinha pulled it back to 3-2 when a clearance by the goalkeeper ricocheted back off the Brazilian's head and in, but a Ronald Araujo own goal midway through the second half appeared to have secured the win for the Portuguese side.

However, another Lewandowski penalty on 78 minutes gave Barcelona renewed hope, and Eric Garcia headed in the equalizer on 86 minutes, before Raphinha ran away to settle an incredible game.

"The mentality of the team, they always believe in themselves and this was unbelievable to see," said Barcelona coach Hansi Flick.

The Catalans are second with six wins out of seven, and will finish in the top eight to go straight to the last 16. Benfica, with 10 points, must still sweat to reach the play-off round.

Elsewhere, Atletico Madrid are third on 15 points and certain to at least be in the play-offs after a Julian Alvarez brace secured a 2-1 home victory over Bayer Leverkusen in a game both teams finished with 10 men.

Atletico had Pablo Barrios sent off midway through the first half, and Piero Hincapie then put Leverkusen ahead just before the break.

Argentina star Alvarez levelled seven minutes into the second half, and Hincapie was sent off for the Germans before another Alvarez goal won it for the home side in the last minute as they climbed above Leverkusen.

Last season's Europa League winners Atalanta are also guaranteed at least a play-off place after crushing Sturm Graz of Austria 5-0.

Mateo Retegui, Mario Pasalic, Charles De Ketelaere, Ademola Lookman and Marco Bresciani all scored for the Italians.

Monaco got back to winning ways after some disappointing results had seen their campaign stall, as Wilfried Singo's early goal proved enough for them to beat Aston Villa 1-0.

Both teams are set to progress to the knockout phase and both could still finish in the top eight.

Last season's runners-up Borussia Dortmund should also be fine despite a 2-1 defeat away to Bologna, as substitutes Thijs Dallinga and Samuel Iling-Junior scored a minute apart in the second half after Serhou Guirassy's early penalty had put the Germans in front.

Club Brugge held Juventus to a 0-0 draw in Belgium as that duo both look set to go through to the play-offs at least, while PSV Eindhoven are poised to advance following a 3-2 win at Red Star Belgrade.

Pavon Back to Defend Historic Farmers Win



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Matthieu Pavon knocked in an 8-foot birdie putt on the 72nd hole of the Farmers Insurance Open last January and made PGA Tour history for his native France.

Pavon became the first Frenchman to win an official tour event and returns to San Diego this week to defend his title, with the tournament teeing off Wednesday at Torrey Pines Golf Course.

The Farmers Insurance Open utilizes both courses at Torrey Pines in the neighborhood of La Jolla. Every player in the field will play a round at both the North Course and the South Course; after the 36-hole cut, the famed South Course will be the setting for the weekend rounds.

The PGA Tour is also keeping the tournament as a Wednesday through Saturday affair to aim for some Saturday primetime fireworks for the final round -- while avoiding a matchup against the AFC and NFC championship games on Sunday.

Pavon, 32, shot a 13-under-par 275 here last year, beating Denmark's Nicolai Hojgaard by a single shot.

"No offense to easier golf course, but I'm not like a huge fan when a course gets between 20 and 30 under," Pavon said Tuesday. "I think it relates too much to the putter. Here it's really a ball-striking golf course and I like to see how intense and well-committed to the shots you have to be if you want to play great. I think this is why I kind of fell in love with Torrey the first time I played it."

Pavon had played mostly on the DP World Tour before earning a card in the States for the first time. After his maiden victory, he was in contention the very next week at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am and finished third in a rain-shortened event. He added a fifth-place finish at the U.S. Open.

"I think the second year is always kind of the confirmation year," Pavon said. "That was a great rookie one, but now it's time to confirm, it's time to show up again and try to win tournaments."

"It's a pretty big year for me because it's also a Ryder Cup year. This is one of my goals I've been chasing since I'm a kid."

He'll be up against a field this week that features five top-20 players, led by World No. 4 and FedEx Cup leader Hideki Matsuyama of Japan. Other big names outside that top 20 include Tony Finau, Ireland's Shane Lowry, Australia's Jason Day and Max Homa.

A California native, Homa won the Farmers in 2023 but is coming off an underwhelming 2024 season. Day, meanwhile, captured this tournament in 2015 and 2018 during the prime of his career.

Vintage Djokovic Quells Alcaraz Challenge to Reach Australian Open Semis

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic beat young rival Carlos Alcaraz 4-6 6-4 6-3 6-4 in a gladiatorial battle worthy of a title clash to charge into the Australian Open semi-finals and remain in the hunt for a record 25th Grand Slam title.

In the latest chapter of a generational rivalry that has played out on the biggest stages, including last year's Olympic final in Paris which Djokovic won, it was the 37-year-old who maintained his hardcourt dominance over Alcaraz.

Defeat was a blow for the 21-year-old Spaniard as the French Open and Wimbledon champion's bid to become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam went up in flames, and he was left to digest his third loss to Djokovic on the surface.

"I wish this match today was the final," said Djokovic, who next takes on German second seed Alexander Zverev in what would be a men's record 50th major singles semi-final for the Serb.

"It's just one of the most epic matches that I've played on this court, on any court, really. So thank you all for staying at 1 a.m. to watch us and support the players."

Some loose shots at the start of the match put Alcaraz on the back foot but he fired a magnificent backhand winner to pull back a break and was rock solid from there, vaulting to a 5-4 lead in a physical opening set after Djokovic made an error.

Having dropped his serve for a second time, Djokovic took an off-court medical timeout and returned with his left thigh taped up, but



the seventh-seeded Serb could not prevent Alcaraz from holding to love with a big ace at the end to clinch the set.

"Since I'm still in the tournament, I don't want to reveal too much, obviously," Djokovic said.

"The medication started to kick in, and they helped. No doubt, I had to take another dose. I mean, this sounds awful. Me taking another dose. If I lost that second set, I don't know if I would continue playing, but I felt better and better."

Djokovic was far more aggressive in the second set and made several forays towards the net to reel off the first three games before producing a spectacular backhand overhead smash assisted by the net cord at one point, but Alcaraz pulled level at 3-3.

The momentum shifted again as Djokovic heaped the pressure on the third-seeded Spaniard with heavy ball-striking to claim the

second set and drew massive cheers from the Rod Laver Arena crowd when he broke for a 4-2 and then 5-3 lead in the third.

Playing like a much younger version of himself, 10-times Melbourne Park champion Djokovic showed surgical precision to claim the set before breaking early in the next one to tighten his grip on the match.

Alcaraz won an incredible 33-shot rally to rescue a break point while down 4-2 in the fourth set and smiled as he gasped for air but Djokovic used all his experience to seal the win in the early hours of Wednesday morning.

"God knows when we're going to go to sleep," said Djokovic.

"I guess the key is recovery for me. To be honest, that's all I'm thinking about. The extra day with no match comes at the perfect time for me."

"Let's see if it's going to be good enough on Friday, hopefully I can come out and feel my best because Sasha (Zverev) is playing some of the best tennis he has played."

"We have an agreement, as long as I play he's going to let me win Grand Slam matches," Djokovic said with a smile.

Meanwhile Alexander Zverev said he believes he can reach the Australian Open final for the first time and is primed for a "very intense and high-level" clash to get there -- with Novak Djokovic or Carlos Alcaraz standing in his way.

Brunson Heats Up Late, Lifts Knicks Over Nets

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jalen Brunson was held to 17 points but delivered the go-ahead basket with 2:18 remaining for the visiting New York Knicks, struggled on offense for most of the fourth quarter before making enough plays down the stretch in a 99-95 victory over the Brooklyn Nets.

Brunson missed 10 of his first 14 shots before hitting three baskets and scoring eight points in the last 2:18 to give New York a ninth straight win over the Nets.

His first clutch hoop was a 13-footer from near the baseline that gave the Nets a 91-90 lead off a feed from Karl Anthony-Towns. Brunson added a layup through traffic off a pass from Josh Hart for a 93-90 edge with 1:56 remaining.

After Brooklyn's Keon Johnson hit two free throws, Brunson sank a jumper from near the foul line to make it 95-92 with 1:25 left. Following a dunk by New York's OG Anunoby, D'Angelo Russell hit a 3-pointer to bring Brooklyn within 97-95 with 52 seconds left.

Brunson had a chance to clinch it but missed a runner in the lane with 32.3 seconds to go. After Brooklyn took its final timeout with 23 seconds remaining, the Nets' Cameron Johnson missed a deep 3-point attempt from the top of the key with 15.3 seconds left.



Brunson sank two free throws with seven seconds remaining to ice it.

Towns amassed 25 points, 16 rebounds, and six assists. Anunoby added 20 points for the Knicks, who earned the win despite scoring only 15 points in the fourth.

Russell led the Nets with 23 and 10 assists but shot 6-for-17 from the floor. Cameron Johnson added 13 points but was 6-for-20 from the field. Brooklyn shot 37.2 percent, lost its eighth straight home game and fell for the ninth time in 10 games overall.

The game marked the return of Mikal Bridges to Brooklyn after the Nets dealt him to the Knicks for five first-round picks last summer. Bridges was held to 10 points on 3-of-12 shooting.

Towns finished off a three-point play with 4.7 seconds left in the second quarter to give the Knicks a 59-51 halftime lead. The Knicks opened a 76-64 advantage on Hart's layup with 4:46 left in the third quarter before taking an 84-75 lead into the fourth.

ITF Name Sinner, Swiatek as World Champions for 2024



MELBOURNE(Dispatches) - The International Tennis Federation (ITF) named Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek as its world champions of 2024 in recognition of their performances at the Grand Slams and other top events last season.

World number one Sinner, who has a potential ban of up to two years hanging over his head after failing two drugs test last year, won his first Grand Slam title at the Australian Open and followed that up with another at the U.S. Open.

He also lifted the ATP Finals title, finishing the season with a 73-6 win-loss record, and guided Italy to their second successive Davis Cup triumph in Malaga.

Sinner failed two drug tests in March but was cleared of wrongdoing year by a doping tribunal after it accepted his explanation that a banned substance had entered his system from his former physio through massages.

The World Anti-Doping Agency has appealed that decision and the 23-year-old faces a hearing at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in April.

Swiatek edged out world number one Aryna Sabalenka to take the women's prize for the second time after the 23-year-old Pole won her fourth French Open title, four WTA 1000 trophies and also collected a bronze medal at the Paris Olympics.

However, she also fell foul of doping rules and served a one-month ban after a tribunal accepted that her failed test for trimetazidine had been the result of a contaminated batch of sleeping drug melatonin.

The ITF also named Marcelo Arevalo of El Salvador and Mate Pavic of Croatia, and the Italian pair of Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini as doubles world champions.

The winners were chosen based on results from the season, with special emphasis on Grand Slam tournaments, the Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup, as well as the Olympic Games.