

Iran's Ambassador to Riyadh Reza Enayati and CEO of Saudi Arabia's Libraries Commission Abdulrahman Al-Asim Attended the Talks on Cultural Relations Between the Two Countries

# IRAN NEWS

Iran Foreign Ministry Official Has Said That the Recent Resolution of the European Parliament Against the Islamic Republic Has No Legal Basis and Indicates the Politicized and Interfering Approach of the Body

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## 2 DOMESTIC

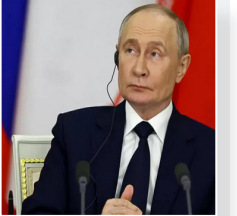


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### Iran Protests Negative Moves by Some Parties in Azerbaijan



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The director-general of the Eurasian Department at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the assistant to the foreign minister has expressed Tehran's objection to some negative actions taken by various parties and individuals in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mojtaba Damirchilou met and held talks with the Azeri ambassador to Iran, Ali Alizada, in Tehran, the capital of Iran, on Friday.

During their meeting, they discussed the current state of bilateral relations and the potential for further development across various fields.

Emphasizing the positive developments in relations between their two countries, Damirchilou underscored the need for both sides to diligently implement existing agreements and protect their relationship.

Highlighting the efforts of senior officials from both countries to foster relations grounded in mutual interests, he characterized the negative actions taken by some groups or individuals in the Republic of Azerbaijan (including the recent immoral act against some Iranian students studying in the Republic of Azerbaijan) as harmful to the relations between the two nations.

While protesting the immoral actions against Iranian students in the Azerbaijan Republic, he called for holding accountable the organizers and perpetrators of such negative behaviors.

He also emphasized the high dignity and status of clergy and religious scholars in both countries, highlighting the necessity for vigilance and decisive action against any rude behavior and divisive actions.

Alizada, for his part, expressed regret for some unpleasant statements and actions, vowing to address the issue with his country's authorities.

During the meeting, both sides acknowledged the positive growth in their bilateral relations, particularly noting the exchange of high-level delegations and the recent meeting of the Joint Economic Commission after a three-year hiatus.

They also discussed ways to enhance coordination and expedite the implementation of programs outlined in their agenda for cooperation between the two countries.

### Iran Rejects Baseless Israeli Accusation of Smuggling Arms to Lebanon



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to the UN has dismissed Israel's allegation that Tehran has smuggled weapons to Lebanon, saying the claim is an excuse to justify the regime's blatant disregard for a ceasefire deal with Beirut.

"This claim is nothing more than an excuse to justify the Israeli regime's repeated violations of Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) and its blatant disregard for the ceasefire arrangement with Lebanon," Amir Saeid Iravani said Friday.

"The regime has no intention of adhering to its commitments to withdraw from southern Lebanon after the 60-day ceasefire period, according to the established requirements. Instead, the Israeli regime raises such baseless accusations to legitimize its ongoing illegal occupation of Lebanese lands," he added.

His reaction came in letters to UN chief General Antonio Guterres and rotating President of the Security Council Amar Bendjama, responding to Israeli ambassador to the UN Danny Danon's accusations on January 13.

The letter by the Israeli envoy "baselessly and erroneously accuses Iran of smuggling advanced weapons systems to Lebanon", Iravani said.

Iravani said the Security Council must compel the Israeli regime to fully implement its obligations under the ceasefire arrangement, immediately cease its violations against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, and withdraw its forces from southern Lebanon without delay.

"Failure to take decisive action will only embolden the regime to commit further violations and endanger peace and security in the West Asia region," he added.

## UN Official's Reports Do Not Reflect Iran's Human Rights Reality



TEHRAN - Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, Kazem Gharibabadi, has criticized reports from the UN Special Rapporteur, asserting that they fail to accurately reflect the realities of human rights in Iran. He emphasized that Iran remains committed to fulfilling its international human rights obligations.

Speaking at the 48th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group in Geneva, where Iran's fourth national report was under review, Gharibabadi stressed the significance of this mechanism in fostering constructive and meaningful dialogue on human rights issues. He highlighted Iran's dedication to engaging with the global community to enhance human rights protections and address challenges through credible information rather than political or confrontational approaches.

Iran's national report presents various initiatives undertaken since the last review, focusing on civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Gharibabadi noted that Iran has made considerable progress in these areas while facing numerous challenges, including politically motivated scrutiny by certain countries.

Regarding the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Iran, Gharibabadi reiterated Iran's longstanding position that such country-specific mandates are politically driven and part of a broader campaign against the Islamic Republic. He argued that these appointments are primarily influenced by a small group of Human Rights Council members with political agendas.

A thorough examination of the Special Rapporteurs' performance and reports since 2011, according to Gharibabadi, reveals significant shortcomings. He asserted that the reports rely on inaccurate data from unreliable sources and are influenced by biased political perspectives. Despite this, Iran has continued its cooperation with the Special Rapporteurs through various means, including meetings, written responses, and official correspondence.

Gharibabadi urged the Special Rapporteurs to adhere to their professional codes of conduct and respect Iran's political and legal frameworks. He argued that genuine engagement and trust-building are crucial to ensuring the credibility of their work and addressing concerns effectively.

The Deputy Foreign Minister pointed out that the Fact-Finding Mission on Iran was established due to lobbying and political maneuvering by Western states. He claimed that the mission's reports have been consistently biased, lacking a solid legal foundation, and failing to recognize Iran's

efforts to address human rights concerns.

In response to allegations surrounding the 2022 unrest in Iran, Gharibabadi highlighted the extensive efforts undertaken by the Iranian government. He noted that Iran had prepared over 50 well-documented reports addressing the unrest, providing evidence to counter claims made by the Fact-Finding Mission. Despite these efforts, the mission allegedly ignored Iran's reports and instead relied on data from sources hostile to Iran.

Gharibabadi criticized the Fact-Finding Mission for neglecting to report on the destruction caused by rioters, the loss of life among law enforcement personnel, and the discovery of weapons and terrorist elements during the unrest. He argued that these omissions highlight the mission's lack of impartiality and reinforce its politically motivated nature.

Iran, he emphasized, has taken significant accountability measures, including the formation of a special committee to investigate the causes of the 2022 unrest. The committee's comprehensive report, submitted to the President in March 2023, addressed damages to both public and private property, civilian casualties, and law enforcement efforts. Based on the committee's findings, compensation and judicial measures were implemented to ensure justice and remediation.

Some of the key accountability measures highlighted by Gharibabadi include the pardon of nearly all individuals involved in the unrest, compensation for victims, and judicial proceedings against those who violated legal frameworks during the crisis. He underscored that these efforts demonstrate Iran's commitment to addressing the situation transparently and effectively.

Furthermore, Gharibabadi criticized the international community's double standards regarding human rights. He pointed out the silence of human rights mechanisms in the face of crimes committed by Israel, arguing that the focus on Iran is disproportionate and politically motivated. He highlighted that while Iran has made significant progress in establishing democratic institutions and protecting human rights, it continues to face systematic violations through unlawful sanctions and support for terrorism by certain Western countries.

In conclusion, Gharibabadi called for an end to politically motivated mechanisms such as the Fact-Finding Mission, emphasizing the need for a more balanced and fair approach to human rights evaluations. He reaffirmed Iran's commitment to continuing its efforts to promote human rights domestically and internationally, despite ongoing challenges and political pressures.

### Significant Increase in Kazakhstan's Grain Exports to Iran



TEHRAN - Amir Abedi, the head of the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber of Commerce, announced a significant increase in grain imports from Kazakhstan to Iran.

Speaking to ILNA, he stated that in the fall of 2024, Kazakhstan transported 3.7 million tons of freshly harvested grain via railways. This figure represents a 45% increase compared to the same period in 2023, highlighting the growth in Kazakhstan's grain exports. Additionally, during this period, grain exports from the port of Aktau to Iran surged from 14,000 tons in 2023 to 435,000 tons in 2024.

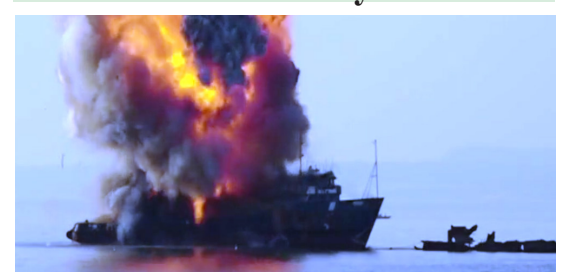
He further added that a total of 10.6 million tons of grain were transported via Kazakhstan's railway networks in 2024, with 8.1 million tons of this amount designated for export. These figures reflect Kazakhstan's substantial grain production and export capacity. The country's grain exports to China in 2024 exceeded 1.5 million tons.

Regarding the United Arab Emirates' decision to establish a multi-purpose grain terminal in Kazakhstan, Abedi explained that while specific details are not yet available, the initiative could reflect the UAE's ambition to become a regional grain supply hub. If such an intention exists, Kazakhstan is a suitable choice, given its substantial grain volume and high quality. For instance, its wheat has high gluten content, making it desirable for export to CIS countries and European markets. As mentioned, Iran has also seen increased imports from Kazakhstan.

Abedi emphasized that the transit of Kazakh grain to Persian Gulf countries, with access to the Sea of Oman and international waters via Iran, presents a significant advantage for Iran as a north-south corridor. This opportunity has encouraged Kazakhstan to invest in Bandar Abbas and Chabahar ports. Preliminary agreements have been reached for the establishment of a grain terminal in Bandar Abbas.

The head of the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber noted that in 2024, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan also increased their grain imports from Kazakhstan compared to 2023. Afghanistan is considered a promising market for Kazakh grain imports, and negotiations with Pakistan are ongoing. Kazakhstan is also eyeing export opportunities to Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. The country has even been regarded as Russia's grain storage hub, underscoring its status as a reliable grain supplier for the region and beyond. With 16.5 million hectares of land under grain cultivation, Kazakhstan plans to export between 10 to 12 million tons of grain in the first half of 2025.

### IRGC Warns Extra-Regional Payers as Naval Drills Get Underway



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The naval forces of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) have launched extensive exercises spanning the southern Iranian provinces of Bushehr and Khuzestan's littoral waters.

Code-named "Great Prophet Authority 19", the drills went underway on Friday across the northern and central part of the strategic Persian Gulf waters, with the Navy's Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri in attendance.

According to the commander, "conveying the message of peace and friendship" to neighboring countries and establishing security in international waterways were the main objectives of the exercises.

"We are capable of ensuring the security of the sensitive Persian Gulf region alongside our neighboring countries and will stand firm against any threat," he added.

This videogram shows moment when IRGC helicopters fire missiles at targets during the "Great Prophet Authority 19" military drills in southern Iranian waters on January 24, 2025.

"Another message of these drills is directed at extra-regional countries, letting them know that their presence in this region disrupts security and they cannot establish lasting security in this sensitive area," Tangsiri noted.

He pointed out that new technologies would be unveiled during the drills, stating, "Every year, new vessels and technologies are incorporated into the exercise, and this year, we are deploying vessels that are capable of sailing at speeds of 75 and 90 knots (nautical miles) as well as firing missiles and mines."

Tangsiri asserted, "The hostile countries and enemies of the noble Iranian nation should know that we will stand up to their bullying with strength and courage, and we will foil their sinister plans with a strong fist."

The Islamic Republic's Armed Forces, including the Army and the IRGC, have been continuously enhancing their military hardware and combat readiness in line with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's directives.

## First India-Afghanistan Transit Train to Pass Through Iran Within a Month



TEHRAN - Jabbar Ali Zakari, CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, announced that the first Indian freight train bound for Afghanistan via Iran will begin operations within the next month. Speaking to ILNA's economic correspondent, he stated that the Khaf-Herat transit railway line, currently active towards Turkey, is consistently handling freight traffic, with trains running from Herat and Rozanak to Turkey.

Additionally, the fifth freight train from China has recently arrived at Bandar Abbas for further transportation to Afghanistan.

Zakari confirmed that preparations are underway for the launch of the Mumbai-Bandar Abbas-Herat rail corridor, with the first Indian freight train expected to pass through Iran next month. He highlighted that both India and Afghanistan have welcomed this route, and efforts to activate the corridor are in full swing.

The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development noted that despite the significant volume of cargo exchanged between India and Afghanistan, road transportation remains the preferred option due to its shorter distance. However, Afghanistan's railway authorities are keen to expand rail connectivity due to its distinct advantages. Iran is actively supporting the development of this rail corridor and has been in continuous discussions with Afghan counterparts to expedite its implementation.

Discussing the capacity of the Khaf-Herat transit line, Zakari likened freight transport to flowing water, stating that once a route is established, cargo movement continues

uninterrupted. He pointed out that initial expectations for the Iran-Turkey-Afghanistan route were surpassed, with trains now running regularly, carrying full loads in both directions each week.

He emphasized that the Sanghan-Shamti-Rozanak route currently has no capacity limitations, and while it currently handles around 200,000 tons of cargo, it has the potential to increase to 2 million tons.

Zakari further highlighted Afghanistan's keen interest in using Iran's rail network, revealing that in a joint meeting held three months ago, Afghan officials expressed strong enthusiasm for the railway route. He also noted that European-donated aid cargo to Afghanistan will be transported via this rail link.

Regarding future rail expansion plans, Zakari mentioned that Afghanistan is looking to establish rail connections through the Zabol and Milak border crossings. Although railway infrastructure is not yet in place in these areas, Afghan authorities are eager to attract Iranian investment by offering mining concessions in exchange for railway construction. This barter arrangement would allow Iranian companies to benefit from Afghanistan's iron ore resources.

Finally, Zakari clarified that there are no uncertainties regarding the Iranian railway consortium operating in Afghanistan, affirming that it is actively handling transit operations between Afghanistan, Iran, and third-party countries, while also undertaking new railway projects within Afghanistan.

# IRAN NEWS



## 18% Growth in Non-Oil Exports

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance announced that according to the latest customs statistics for the first 10 months of this year, non-oil exports have reached \$47.8 billion, reflecting an 18% increase compared to the same period last year.

Abdulreza Hemmati wrote on his personal page that imports, amounting to \$56 billion (including \$6.3 billion in gold), have only increased by 3%. However, excluding gold, imports have decreased by 10% compared to the same period last year.

He further stated that based on the latest customs data, the non-oil trade deficit, excluding gold imports, has reduced from \$12.5 billion to \$2 billion over the past two years.

The Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance also highlighted that with more than \$30 billion in oil exports during this period, the total trade surplus (including both oil and non-oil exports) has exceeded \$28 billion.

## 80% Decline in Handwoven Carpet Export Market



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Iran's National Union of Handwoven Carpet Producers has announced a significant decline in carpet exports, stating that the industry now accounts for only 20% of its former export volume, with an 80% loss in market share.

Abdollah Bahrami, the CEO of the National Union of Handwoven Carpet Producers, highlighted Iran's leading position in the traditional carpet industry globally. However, he noted that due to various challenges, the number of carpet weavers has dropped from 2 million to 1 million, production has fallen from 6 million square meters to 2 million square meters, and exports, which once amounted to \$2 billion in the 1990s, have now plummeted to just \$50 million.

Bahrami attributed part of the decline to a lack of support for master weavers, which has allowed neighboring countries such as Turkey to capitalize on the market by investing and diversifying their carpet production.

He further mentioned that Iran currently has 15,000 senior experts in the handwoven carpet sector. However, given the nature of carpets as an artistic commodity that requires cross-border sales processes, the number of exporters has dwindled to fewer than ten.

Bahrami warned that this valuable Iranian art is on the verge of extinction, despite the country producing 60 million tons of wool annually—of which less than 1% is processed for carpet production.

As a key member of the Tehran Chamber of Cooperatives, he emphasized the need for media support in promoting production, economic growth, and job creation. He also pointed out the lack of advocacy for the carpet industry, contrasting it with neighboring countries that have established ministries to support even less significant industries.

Bahrami concluded by reiterating that Iran's carpet exports have shrunk to 20% of their former levels, with 80% of the market lost.

He also cited the absence of insurance coverage as one of the major challenges facing carpet weavers. Rising raw material costs have made carpet production financially unviable for artisans, who receive no governmental support. Bahrami stressed that the carpet industry aligns with all principles of a resilient economy and deserves greater attention and investment.

## Iran Prepares to Attract Investments From Persian Gulf, Eurasian Countries



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Organization for Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance has announced the formation of special committees aimed at facilitating investment from Gulf, Eurasian, and neighboring countries.

Abolfazl Koudei, Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, stated during a specialized workshop in Urmia that the top priority for foreign investment is the implementation of projects and efforts to attract foreign capital.

Koudei emphasized that the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance is committed to attracting foreign investments through targeted programs. He further explained that the newly established committees will focus on easing the process of investment from Gulf and Eurasian countries, as well as other neighboring states.

He highlighted the importance of face-to-face meetings between foreign investors and Iranian project owners to foster collaboration and investment opportunities.

Among the key initiatives of the investment organization are resolving challenges faced by investment projects, expediting the issuance of permits, and enhancing the capabilities of human resources to provide efficient and professional services to foreign investors.

During his visit to West Azerbaijan province, the Deputy Minister reviewed two foreign investment projects related to the production of security doors and the food and agriculture industries.

During the visit, the implementation status of these projects was assessed, and efforts were made to address obstacles with the help of relevant authorities. It was decided that unresolved issues will be pursued through appropriate channels to remove any remaining barriers.

The mentioned foreign investment projects are expected to meet a significant portion of the domestic market demand while also exporting products to foreign markets.



## Potential for 10-Fold Increase in Trade Volume Between Iran and Uzbekistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - An online conference aimed at enhancing trade cooperation between Alborz province and Uzbekistan was recently held with the participation of the Iranian ambassador to Uzbekistan and Alborz's economic officials.

According to the Alborz Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, the webinar was organized in coordination with Iran's diplomatic mission in Uzbekistan. Discussions focused on exchanging economic and trade-related information and exploring ways to increase bilateral trade.

Parham Rezaei, President of the Alborz Chamber of Commerce, stated that the current annual trade volume between Iran and Uzbekistan stands at approximately \$500 million. He highlighted Alborz's industrial and manufacturing capabilities, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises, which could create unique opportunities for exports to Uzbekistan.

Rezaei emphasized the significance of sending and receiving trade delegations between the two regions. Plans are underway to host an Uzbekistani trade delegation in Alborz soon. This delegation will include representatives from the pharmaceutical, food, cosmetic, and hygiene industries, providing an opportunity to establish mutually beneficial business relations. The delegation will also visit various factories in Alborz.

Highlighting Alborz's strong commitment to enhancing trade relations, Rezaei noted that negotiations with Uzbek officials could significantly boost exports and economic growth in the region.

Iran's Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Mohammad Ali Eskandari, elaborated on Uzbekistan's industrial and manufacturing potential in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, food production, detergents, and cosmetics. He also pointed out opportunities in tourism, engineering services, and automotive parts manufacturing. Given Alborz's strengths in these areas, he sees great potential for economic collaboration.

Eskandari underscored that Alborz could serve as a complementary economic partner for Uzbekistan, facilitating trade without affecting existing production capacities.

Since 2017, Uzbekistan has implemented economic and political reforms, positioning itself as a leading economy within Central Asia. Eskandari stated that given the industrial capabilities of both countries, the annual trade volume could potentially reach \$5 billion.

The ambassador also highlighted Alborz's strategic proximity to Tehran as an economic advantage that could bolster industrial activities and attract investment.

Eskandari noted that Uzbekistan currently produces only 20% of its pharmaceutical needs, presenting a significant opportunity for Iranian pharmaceutical companies to supply the market. He suggested forming a consortium to facilitate the registration of Iranian pharmaceuticals in Uzbekistan, which could reduce costs for Iranian manufacturers.

Additionally, he assured Iranian entrepreneurs that there are no obstacles to establishing businesses or opening bank accounts in Uzbekistan, encouraging seamless trade activities.

Ezzatollah Afzali, Deputy Governor of Alborz for Economic Affairs, highlighted the province's readiness to collaborate with Uzbek companies in various sectors. He emphasized the importance of participating in trade exhibitions to showcase Alborz's industrial capabilities.

Mohammad Ansari, Director General of Industry, Mines, and Trade in Alborz, suggested that in exchange for exporting pharmaceuticals, food products, and agricultural goods, Alborz could import essential raw materials for the province's textile and clothing industries, such as cotton from Uzbekistan.

Farzin Behnamfar, Director General of Economic and Financial Affairs in Alborz, mentioned that the province has attracted \$20 million in foreign investment over the past six months despite economic sanctions. He emphasized the province's commitment to introducing investment opportunities to Uzbekistani companies and investors.

Nader Zeinali, Director General of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism in Alborz, expressed interest in developing tourism initiatives between the two countries. Given the cultural similarities, he proposed organizing pilgrimage and leisure tours.

Mohammad Ali Mokhtari, President of the Alborz Cooperative Chamber, highlighted the potential of the Payam Special Economic Zone and International Airport as a key advantage for economic collaboration. The special economic zone offers lower production costs, making it an attractive option for joint Iranian-Uzbek production initiatives.

Seyed Reza Seyed Aghazadeh, Deputy of International Affairs at the Alborz Chamber of Commerce, emphasized the importance of fostering long-term business relationships. He expressed optimism that the webinar would contribute to boosting exports and economic development in Alborz.

Aghazadeh stressed the need to establish a strong network of economic partnerships to facilitate Alborz's growth and expansion into international markets.

## Global Production Efficiency Per Cubic Meter of Water Is Four Times Higher Than Iran

TEHRAN - The spokesperson for Iran's water industry announced that the global average economic productivity of water is approximately \$1.22 per cubic meter, while in Iran, this figure stands at about \$5 per cubic meter.

Issa Bozorgzadeh, spokesperson for the water industry, stated at the 20th International Exhibition of Water and Wastewater Industry in Iran that the global average GDP generated per cubic meter of water is four times that of Iran. This highlights the need to focus on water productivity and achieving relative self-sufficiency in this sector.

Bozorgzadeh emphasized that relying on taxes and oil revenues alone is not sufficient to implement water projects. He revealed that there are currently 564 water and wastewater projects in progress, requiring an estimated 1,500 trillion rials for completion based on last year's assessments. However, budget allocations for these projects have been significantly inadequate.

He further added that settling government debts to consultants, contractors, and suppliers cannot be achieved through public financial resources alone, and fundamental changes in funding methods are necessary.

Discussing the need for relative self-sufficiency, Bozorgzadeh suggested defining mechanisms that, while considering the economic conditions of low-income groups, would also improve the country's water resources. He proposed encouraging private and non-governmental investments aimed at water conservation. In return, tradable water-saving certificates could be issued, which new water consumers or inefficient users could purchase. The



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

primary goal of this mechanism is to incentivize agricultural, urban, and industrial consumers to optimize water usage.

Bozorgzadeh stressed that those who exceed designated water consumption limits should bear additional costs. He highlighted the Ministry of Energy's focus on ensuring that such mechanisms do not result in increased water consumption or resource depletion but rather establish a concrete water-saving model without harming the ecosystem.

He also pointed to the importance of installing modern water-efficient systems in homes and industries, emphasizing that collaboration

between the government and private sector is essential for the success of such initiatives. While the government should maintain its regulatory and supervisory role, it must delegate operational responsibilities to the private sector.

Bozorgzadeh noted that existing regulations allow water conservation projects to be introduced to the stock market, providing a potential financing opportunity. He emphasized the importance of learning from other sectors, such as energy and gas, to avoid repeating similar challenges.

Despite existing challenges, he expressed optimism that cooperation among experts and precise model designs could enhance water productivity and resource utilization. He reiterated that global water productivity averages \$1.22 per cubic meter, whereas Iran's productivity level is around \$5 per cubic meter.

Bozorgzadeh called for the formation of specialized task forces to enhance and strengthen this new efficiency framework, stressing the need for meticulous efforts to improve productivity across various products.

## Many Tourists From Around the World Express Interest in Traveling to Iran



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - During the 45th FITUR International Tourism Exhibition in Spain, Iran's Deputy Minister of Tourism announced that visitors to the exhibition have shown interest in traveling to Iran. He emphasized that participating in international exhibitions helps present a clear and accurate image of Iran's attractions and unique characteristics to the world.

Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpei, during his visit to the FITUR exhibition in Madrid, stated that Iran has provided an opportunity for the private sector to participate in the event through the Iran Touring & Tourism Organization, with 31 booths representing the country.

He highlighted that Iran's presence at FITUR allowed international visitors to gain a better understanding of the country's rich culture and civilization. Many visitors to Iran's booths expressed their interest in traveling to Iran to explore its unique attractions firsthand.

The Deputy Minister also mentioned meetings held with key tourism officials, including Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization, and Spain's Minister of Tourism. These meetings focused on strengthening bilateral cooperation, enhancing tourism exchanges, and facilitating visa processes between the two countries.

Bandpei further emphasized that international exhibitions not only foster diplomatic relations but also contribute to the development and diversification of tourism products.

In his concluding remarks, he thanked the Iran Touring & Automobile Club and the private sector for their efforts in showcasing a "miniature Iran" at the 31 booths, attracting global attention.

Additionally, he highlighted the upcoming Tehran International Tourism Exhibition, scheduled from February 12 to 15, where all 31 Iranian provinces will have the opportunity to present their capabilities and potential. This event aims to further strengthen the tourism sector and contribute to the national economy and culture.

## Iran's Kiwi Exports Continue



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Maryam Jalili Moghadam, head of the Iranian Plant Protection Organization, spoke about the outcomes of a recent trip to Turkey by Iran's Minister of Agriculture and a delegation of officials and private sector representatives. She discussed the significance of strengthening agricultural ties between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey.

During the visit, which focused on agricultural cooperation, the Iranian delegation met with key Turkish officials, including the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and the head of Turkey's Plant Protection Organization. The discussions highlighted the need for regional collaboration in managing plant pests and diseases, emphasizing that these issues transcend political and geographical borders. Many pests and diseases affect both countries, and joint efforts between Iran's veterinary and plant protection organizations could significantly improve pest and disease management.

Jalili Moghadam also praised Turkey's progress in water management, noting that the country has responded to climate change similarly to Iran, implementing programs aimed at adapting agriculture to the challenges of climate change and water scarcity.

Representatives from both sides also engaged in discussions about cooperation in various agricultural sectors, including fisheries, forestry, veterinary medicine, and crop production. An 11-page document outlining mutual cooperation was signed, and plans for further interaction in plant protection were discussed. Webinars and expert visits are expected to play a central role in fostering these efforts.

The trade of agricultural goods between the two countries is already well-established, with Iranian fresh vegetables and fruits being exported to Turkey. Additionally, Turkey serves as a key transit route for Iranian agricultural products en route to Europe, with the port of Mersin being one of the primary hubs for this trade.

Addressing concerns about locust infestations, Jalili Moghadam reassured the public that the native locust populations in Iran are under control. Although rising temperatures and lower-than-average rainfall in certain regions may lead to an increase in locust numbers next spring, preventive measures are already being prepared. Regarding the threat of desert locusts, she emphasized that the risk is minimal due to favorable weather patterns in North Africa and the Indian Ocean, with a locust invasion deemed almost impossible.

## Guatemala Receives Migrants Expelled by U.S.

GUATEMALA CITY (Dispatches) - Two U.S. military planes carrying dozens of expelled migrants arrived in Guatemala yesterday, authorities said, without specifying whether they were part of the deportation operation launched by President Donald Trump. A total of 79 Guatemalans — 48 men and 31 women — were on a first flight that landed at around midnight, the Central American country's migration institute said.

The second, with an unspecified number of migrants on board, arrived yesterday morning. The White House announced late Thursday that "538 illegal immigrant criminals" had been arrested and hundreds deported by military aircraft, saying that "the largest massive deportation operation in history is well underway." The Guatemalan government did not confirm whether any of those migrants were among the deportees that arrived yesterday.



## Israeli Troop Withdrawal From Lebanon Will Extend Beyond Ceasefire Deadline



TEL AVIV (Dispatches) - The Israeli army will not complete its withdrawal from southern Lebanon by a Monday deadline, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said on Friday, saying Lebanon has not yet fully enforced the ceasefire agreement.

The deal, brokered by France and the US, ended more than a year of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. The fighting peaked with a major Israeli offensive that displaced more than 1.2 million people in Lebanon and left the Iran-backed Lebanese Shiite group severely weakened.

Under the agreement, which was signed on November 27, Hezbollah weapons and fighters must be removed from areas south of the Litani river. Israeli troops should withdraw as the Lebanese army deploys into the region, all within a 60-day timeframe due to conclude on Monday at 4am local time.

The deal also stipulates that the Lebanese army is to deploy alongside UN peacekeepers in the south as the Israeli army withdraws over the 60-day period.

In its statement issued Friday, Netanyahu's office said the Israeli military's withdrawal process was "contingent on the Lebanese army deploying in southern Lebanon, and fully and effectively enforcing the agreement, while Hezbollah withdraws beyond the Litani".

The statement added that, "since the ceasefire agreement has not yet been fully enforced by the Lebanese state, the gradual withdrawal process will continue, in full coordination with the United States".

Hezbollah said in a statement that there had been leaks talking about Israel postponing its withdrawal beyond the 60-day period, and that any breach of the agreement would be unacceptable.

The statement said that possibility required everyone, especially Lebanese political powers, to pile pressure on the states which sponsored the deal to ensure "the implementation of the full (Israeli) withdrawal and the deployment of the Lebanese army to the last inch of Lebanese territory and the return of the people to their villages quickly".

## Trump Reinstates Global Anti-Abortion Policies



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump took aim at abortion access in the United States and overseas Friday, after promising activists rallying in Washington that he would protect the "historic gains" of the anti-abortion movement.

Trump revoked two executive orders signed by Joe Biden protecting abortion access, which the former president put in place after the Supreme Court's seismic decision to overturn the constitutional right to the procedure in 2022.

Biden had moved to protect access to abortion pills and women's ability to travel to states where the procedure is not banned for care, among other things.

But Trump—who has been enthusiastically backed by the self-described "pro-life" movement—undid those protections with his own order Friday.

He also cut off US funding to foreign civil society groups that provide abortion services, and put the United States back into an international statement opposing abortion rights.

A White House memo issued Friday reinstated the so-called Mexico City Policy—known by critics as the "global gag rule"—which bars foreign NGOs from using American aid to support abortion services or advocacy.

The policy, first instituted by Ronald Reagan in 1984, has been implemented by every Republican administration since, and rescinded by every Democrat in the White House.

Separately, the Trump administration announced it would rejoin the "Geneva Consensus Declaration", a 2020 statement of countries saying they hope to "protect life at all stages."



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A day after U.S. President Donald Trump said he wanted to meet his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin said he was ready for talks on the Ukraine conflict, fuelling expectations of contact between the two world leaders.

"As for the issue of negotiations... we have always said, and I want to emphasise this once again, that we are ready for these negotiations on Ukrainian issues," Putin told a reporter from Russian state TV.

But Putin added that the question of negotiating with Ukraine was complicated by the fact that its president, Volodymyr Zelensky, had signed a decree preventing him from conducting talks with the Russian president.

Putin described Trump, who this week threatened to hit Russia with new sanctions and tariffs if it did not negotiate an end to the war, as "smart and pragmatic". He said he did not expect Trump to make decisions on sanctions that would rebound on the US economy.

"Therefore, most likely, it would be better for us to meet, based on the realities of today, to talk calmly on all those areas that are of interest to both the United States and Russia. We are ready. But, I repeat, this, primarily, of course, depends on the decisions and choices of the current American administration," he said.

Shortly after Putin's comments, Kyiv warned against negotiations on the war in Ukraine between the US and Russia without including it and Europe.

"He (Putin) wants to negotiate the fate of Europe – without Europe. And he wants to talk about Ukraine without Ukraine," the head of Ukraine's presidential office Andriy Yermak said on Telegram.

"This is not going to happen. Putin needs to come back to reality, or he will be brought back. This is not how it works in the modern world."

In his daily evening address on social media Friday, Zelensky warned that Putin wanted to "manipulate" Trump. "He wants to manipulate the desire of the President of the United States of America to achieve peace," Zelensky said. "I am confident that no Russian manipulations will succeed anymore."

He said Putin, who launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, was ready to continue the war and "manipulate the leaders of the world".

Trump on Thursday said he wanted to meet Putin to secure an end to the war with Ukraine and expressed his desire to work towards cutting nuclear arms, something the Kremlin said Putin had made clear he wanted, too.

Earlier Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia wanted to resume nuclear disarmament talks with the US, responding to Trump's statement on Thursday that he wanted the world to "denuclearise".

Negotiations between the world's two largest nuclear powers have been left at an impasse amid tensions over the Ukraine conflict. Moscow pulled out of the last remaining arms control agreement with Washington, called "New START", in 2023 amid a sharp

deterioration in relations between the two countries. Both have indicated they will unilaterally adhere to the warhead limits outlined in the treaty until 2026 but they are yet to agree on a replacement and talks have stalled for months.

"We are interested in starting this negotiation process as soon as possible," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday. "The ball is in the Americans' court, who have stopped all substantive contacts," he added.

The Ukraine conflict has plunged relations between the two nuclear powers to their lowest levels since the Cold War, with Trump repeatedly promising to end the fighting with a "deal".

Trump has threatened Russia with tougher economic sanctions if it does not agree to end its nearly three-year offensive. "If they don't settle this war soon, like almost immediately, I'm going to put massive tariffs on Russia, and massive taxes, and also big sanctions," the Republican said during a Fox News interview on Thursday.

The Kremlin rejected Trump's claim that the conflict in Ukraine could be ended by lowering the price of oil used to fund Moscow's budget, saying: "This conflict does not depend on oil prices."

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Thursday, Trump had said that he would ask Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ to lower oil prices, saying: "If the price came down, the Russia-Ukraine war would end immediately."

Peskov said the conflict was instead based on "threats to Russia's national security", "threats to Russians" living in Ukraine and "the lack of desire and complete refusal of Americans and Europeans to listen to Russia's concerns".

Russia and Ukraine have not shown any signs of de-escalating hostilities since Trump's inauguration on Monday.

Russian aerial attacks near Kyiv killed three people and wounded several others, Ukrainian officials said Friday, while Ukraine fired 120 drones at at least 12 Russian regions, including the capital Moscow.

The Kremlin has launched drone or missile attacks at Kyiv almost every day since sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022, ostensibly targeting military and energy facilities.

"Three people were killed in an enemy attack in the Kyiv region," the emergency services said in a statement on social media.

It said fragments of a drone had struck a 10-storey residential building after the head of the region said a private home had also been hit.

Black smoke billowed from a residential building damaged in the strike as rescue workers hauled out the bodies of the victims, official images from the scene showed.

In Russia, the Ukrainian military said it launched an overnight drone attack striking an oil refinery, power station facilities and an electronics plant.

## Hamas Names Four Israeli Women Soldiers to Be Freed in Next Swap With Israel

GAZA (Dispatches) - Hamas named on Friday four Israeli "women soldiers" held hostage since October 7 whom it plans to release from captivity in a second exchange under a ceasefire deal that has halted the Gaza war.

Israel confirmed it had received the list of names.

If all goes according to plan, after Hamas releases the four hostages today, Israel should free a group of Palestinian prisoners, though neither side has specified how many they will be.

The exchange is part of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza war, which took effect last Sunday and saw three women hostages and 90 Palestinian prisoners freed.

The fragile truce is intended to pave the way to a permanent end to the war in Gaza, which began with Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel.

Abu Obeida, the spokesman for the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's armed wing, said on Telegram that "as part of the prisoners' exchange deal, the Qassam brigades decided to release tomorrow four women soldiers".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office confirmed it had received the names through mediators.

Bassem Naim, a member of Hamas's political bureau based in Qatar on Friday told AFP that Palestinians displaced by the war to southern Gaza should be able to begin returning to the north of the devastated territory following the releases.



"An Egyptian-Qatari committee will oversee the implementation of this part of the agreement on the ground," he said.

While displaced Gazans longed to return home after more than a year of war, many found only rubble where houses once stood.

"Even if we thought about returning, there is no place for us to put our tents because of the destruction," Theqra Qasem, a displaced woman, told AFP.

The ceasefire agreement, brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States after months of fruitless negotiations, should be implemented in three phases.

US President Donald Trump, who has claimed credit for the agreement, said Thursday he believed that "the deal should hold".

During the first, 42-day phase, 33 hostages Israel believes are still alive should be returned in exchange for around 1,900 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

The next phase should see negotiations for a more permanent end to the war, while the last phase should see the reconstruction of Gaza and the return of the bodies of dead hostages.

The first swap on Sunday saw the release of Israeli hostages Emily Damari, Romi Gonen and Doron Steinbrecher.

Hours later, 90 Palestinian prisoners were freed from Israeli jails, most of them women and minors.

In Israel, families of hostages held for more than 15 months in Gaza fear that the ceasefire could collapse.

"The worry and fear that the deal will not be implemented to the end is eating away at all of us," said Vicky Cohen, the mother of hostage Nimrod Cohen.

"Even these days, there are elements in the government who are doing everything in their power to torpedo the second phase."

Some far-right members of Netanyahu's governing coalition opposed the deal, with firebrand Itamar Ben Gvir pulling his party out of the coalition in protest.

During their 2023 attack on Israel, Hamas militants took 251 hostages, 91 of whom remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military has confirmed are dead.

## U.S. Freezes Foreign Aid Except for Israel, Egypt and Emergency Food

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States, the world's biggest donor, froze virtually all foreign aid on Friday, making exceptions only for emergency food, and military funding for Israel and Egypt.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio sent an internal memo days after President Donald Trump took office vowing an "America First" policy of tightly restricting assistance overseas.

"No new funds shall be obligated for new awards or extensions of existing awards until each proposed new award or extension has been reviewed and approved," said the memo to staff seen by AFP.

The sweeping order appears to affect everything from development assistance to military aid—including to Ukraine, which received billions of dollars in weapons under Trump's predecessor Joe Biden as it tries to repel a Russian invasion.

The directive also means a pause of at least several months of US funding for PEPFAR, the anti-HIV/AIDS initiative that buys anti-retroviral drugs to treat the disease in developing countries, largely in Africa.

Launched under president George W. Bush in 2003, PEPFAR is credited with saving



some 26 million lives and until recently enjoyed broad popular support along partisan lines in Washington.

But the memo explicitly made exceptions for military assistance to Israel—whose longstanding major arms packages from the United States have expanded further since the Gaza war—and Egypt, which has received generous US defense funding since it signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979.

Rubio also made an exception for US contributions to emergency food assistance, which the United States has been contributing following crises around the world including in Sudan and Syria.

Lawmakers from the rival Democratic Party said that more than 20 million people relied on medication through PEPFAR and 63 million people on US-funded anti-malaria efforts including nets.

"For years, Republicans in Congress have decried what they see as a lack of U.S. credibility vis-a-vis countries like China, Russia, and Iran," said Representative Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Relations Committee, and Representative Lois Frankel.



## Simons, Blazers Pull Away for Win Over Hornets

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Anfernee Simons poured in 12 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter and the visiting Portland Trail Blazers overcame early rough stretches to beat the short-handed Charlotte Hornets 102-97 on Friday.

Jerami Grant cranked out 22 points, Deni Avdija had 18 points, reserve Shaedon Sharpe added 13 points and Toumani Camara posted 11 points as the Trail Blazers shook off some ragged shooting and a 13-point second-quarter deficit.

Portland finished at 40.5 percent from the field, including 11-for-38 (28.9 percent) on 3-point attempts en route to its fourth consecutive win.

Nick Smith Jr.'s 17 points and Josh Okogie's 16 points and 10 rebounds led the Hornets. Mark Williams provided 15 points and nine rebounds, Josh Green had 14 points, and Vasilije Micic notched 12 points.

Two of Charlotte's most productive recent players didn't suit up. LaMelo Ball was out with a wrist sprain, and Miles Bridges was sidelined due to back spasms. Guard Seth Curry, who occasionally fills in as a starter, sat out with an ankle injury.

The Trail Blazers, who shot only 27 of 39 from the free-throw line, finally broke away when Simons scored the first six points of a 8-0 spurt that put Portland up 88-81.

Simons and Grant both sank four 3-pointers, while Avdija was 11-for-14 on foul shots. Portland rookie center Donovan Clingan, back from a five-game absence caused by an ankle injury, hauled in 13 rebounds and logged four points, four blocked shots and four assists in 18 minutes as a starter.

The Hornets, who have lost two games in a row following a season-high three-game winning streak, shot 37.6 percent from the floor and 9 of 31 (29 percent) from 3-point range.

It was only the fourth time this season that a Portland opponent failed to score at least 100 points -- two of those coming the past two nights. The Trail Blazers won 101-79 against the host Orlando Magic on Thursday.

The Hornets were held to 43 second-half points.

After Charlotte held a 37-24 lead early in the second quarter, the game gradually got closer and was tied at 50-all before the Hornets scored the last four points of the half in the last minute.

Meanwhile Paul George scored 30 points and Tyrese Maxey added 29 as the Philadelphia 76ers snapped a seven-game losing streak with a 132-129 win over the visiting Cleveland Cavaliers on Friday.

In a game that featured 18 ties and 30 lead changes, Philadelphia placed all five starters in double figures, as well as rookie Justin Edwards (15 points) off the bench. Kelly Oubre Jr. (22 points), Eric Gordon (15) and Guerschon Yabusele (12 points, 13 rebounds) also made key contributions for the Sixers.

Ty Jerome scored a career-high 33 points on 8-of-8 3-point shooting for Cleveland, which has lost back-to-back games for just the second time this season. Donovan Mitchell led the Cavaliers with 37 points, while Darius Garland pitched in with 26 points and seven assists.

Jerome made back-to-back 3-pointers to give Cleveland a 116-110 lead with just over six minutes left before Philadelphia responded with 13 straight points. Gordon and George made 3-pointers in the midst of that run before Gordon punctuated the burst with a long 3-pointer with 3:19 to go.

The Sixers held the Cavaliers without a field goal for about five minutes down the stretch. Garland's 3-pointer got the visitors within 127-122 with 1:14 remaining and then Jerome's triple with 12.2 seconds left made it a one-point game.

## Walker Completes Loan Move to AC Milan



MILAN (Dispatches) - England right-back Kyle Walker has completed a loan move to AC Milan from Manchester City, the clubs announced.

The 34-year-old Walker will join Milan for the remainder of the season in a deal that could become permanent in the summer.

Walker endured a difficult campaign as City captain and had not started a game since their derby loss to Manchester United on December 15.

He ends his long association with City, whom he joined from Tottenham in 2017, after winning six Premier League titles and the 2023 Champions League under Pep Guardiola.

"Manchester City... where do I start? Signing for this incredible club in 2017 was a dream come true," Walker wrote on social media.

"Seven years later, winning 17 trophies, including the Champions League and the famous treble is something I could only have dreamt as a child."

Milan are a distant eighth in Serie A but are on course for automatic qualification for the Champions League last 16 after five straight wins in Europe.

In a separate social media post, Walker—who will be reunited with other England internationals Fikayo Tomori, Tammy Abraham and Ruben Loftus-Cheek at the San Siro—spoke of his excitement in joining the Italian giants.

"I'm delighted and proud to sign for AC Milan!" he said. "A club with such rich history, one I've followed since I was a kid. It's an honour to join and I can't wait to pull on the Rossoneri shirt and get started."

He added: "A huge thank you to everyone who has supported me along the way, both on and off the pitch. See you soon! Forza Milan."

His signing helps compensate for the loss of Emerson Royal, who picked up an injury midweek that could rule out the Brazilian right-back for up to two months.

Walker's exit from the Etihad Stadium comes as part of a City rebuild, with Guardiola's side currently 12 points adrift of Premier League leaders Liverpool following an unprecedented run of four successive English titles.

Egypt forward Omar Marmoush joined City from Eintracht Frankfurt on Thursday on a four-and-a-half-year contract for an initial fee of £59 million (\$72.6 million) with add-ons worth a potential £4 million.

He is City's third signing of the January transfer window following the arrivals of defenders Abdoukodie Khusanov and Vitor Reis.

## Zverev and Sinner Book Title Clash

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic retired injured after losing the opening set of his clash with Alexander Zverev on Friday, sending the German to a first Australian Open final where he will take on defending champion Jannik Sinner for a maiden Grand Slam title.

Sinner later overcame cramp to book an intriguing battle for the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup by beating American Ben Shelton 7-6(2) 6-2 6-2 to reach his second successive final in Melbourne and third at hardcourt majors after his U.S. Open triumph.

"I'm just happy to put myself in this position again, to play for a big trophy again," Sinner told reporters.

"At the end of the day, Grand Slams are the most important tournaments we have in our sport ... Finals are a bit different, but very exciting days."

"When you arrive on Sunday, it doesn't really matter how big the tournament is, but when you play there's a nice feeling. Two men standing. You just try to play the best tennis possible."

While the Italian guns for a third Grand Slam title of his sparkling career, Djokovic will stay locked with Margaret Court on 24 major trophies until at least the French Open, as he quit against Zverev after losing the first set 7-6(5).

There were doubts about Djokovic's left thigh following his taxing quarter-final victory over Carlos Alcaraz when he took a lengthy



medical timeout after a high-octane opening set against the Spaniard.

The 37-year-old Serb skipped a training session on the eve of the semi-final and entered Rod Laver Arena for the afternoon match with the thigh strapped.

But there was little indication that he was struggling until late in the set when he began trudging slowly between points and muttering in frustration at his players' box.

He gave up the set by hammering a regulation forehand volley into the net and promptly walked to Zverev's side to shake hands and embrace the German, leaving the crowd gasping.

With a rueful expression, Djokovic held two thumbs up and clapped at the terraces but there was a round of boos as the 10-times

champion made his exit.

Djokovic later said he had been trying to nurse a torn muscle and he was in increasing pain as the set wore on.

"I knew even if I won the first set, that it's going to be a huge uphill battle for me to stay physically fit enough to stay with him in the rallies, you know, for another God knows what, two, three, four hours," the Serb told reporters.

"I don't think I had that, unfortunately, today in the tank."

Zverev said he was also surprised by Djokovic's retirement but noted the Serb's movement had fallen away in the tiebreak.

"I thought it was a high level first set," he added. "Of course there are some difficulties ... in the tiebreak he was not moving. I did see him struggle a bit more."

Zverev also admonished sections of the crowd for jeering Djokovic, who has dominated the year's opening Grand Slam since winning his first trophy at Melbourne Park in 2008.

"The very first thing I want to say is, please guys, don't boo a player when he goes out with injury," Zverev said.

"I know everyone paid for tickets and everyone wants to see hopefully a great five-set match."

## Djokovic Still Targeting Grand Slam Wins After Australia Setback

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic pledged to continue his hunt for a record 25th Grand Slam title as he processed the disappointment of retiring from Friday's Australian Open semi-final due to a muscle injury.

Djokovic retired injured after losing the first set 7-6(5) to Alexander Zverev and the 10-times champion made a pained exit from Rod Laver Arena amid booing from sections of the crowd.

It was his second injury setback at the Grand Slams in a year, having pulled out of the French Open with a knee problem before his quarter-final against Casper Ruud.

Four months before his 38th birthday, time may be catching up on the Serbian great but he remained adamant he had more to give in the twilight of an extraordinary career.

"It's not like I'm worrying approaching every Grand Slam now whether I'm going to get injured or not, but statistics are against me in a way in the last couple of years," he told reporters.

"So it is true that (I am) getting injured quite a bit the last few years."

"I don't know what exactly is the reason for that. Maybe several different factors."

"But I'll keep going. You know, I'll keep striving to win more Slams. And as long as I feel that I want to put up with all of this, I'll



be around."

Djokovic came into the match under a cloud after a draining but brilliant quarter-final win over Carlos Alcaraz in which he took a lengthy medical timeout after the first set.

He had his left thigh taped when he took the court against Zverev but there were few signs of the strain until quite late in the set.

Having battled through a hamstring injury during his title run two years ago, and an abdominal muscle tear during his 2021 championship at Melbourne Park, Djokovic's retirement stunned the crowd and also surprised Zverev.

The Serb said he might have continued to battle on if he had won the set but questioned whether it would have been worth it.

Though "upset and disappointed", Djokovic was ultimately philosophical, saying he would cheer for Zverev as the German bids for his first Grand Slam title after defeats in two finals.

"I actually thought I played really well, as well as I played the last 12 months, to be honest," Djokovic said.

"I liked my chances today ... A lot of positives to take in terms of how I played semi-finals."

## Hamilton Joined Ferrari on Gut Feeling



LONDON (Dispatches) - A gut feeling drove Lewis Hamilton to sign for Ferrari, Formula One's most successful driver told LinkedIn on Thursday, at the start of his bid to return the sport's most successful team to former glories.

Hamilton made his track debut for Ferrari on Wednesday, almost a year after announcing his shock decision to leave Mercedes, where he won six of his seven world championships.

"Ultimately, every new opportunity is a total leap of faith. None of us can predict the future so changing jobs, or in my case teams, is always going to come with some level of risk," Hamilton said in an interview for LinkedIn's "Get Hired" newsletter on Thursday.

"But I believe there's more of a risk in staying somewhere you're comfortable and in getting complacent."

The 40-year-old Briton completed his first test drive for the Italian team, who have not won a world driver's title since 2007, at their home base in Maranello.

"Call it instinct or a gut feeling, but I knew that signing with Ferrari was the right move for me and that that would give me the challenge I needed," Hamilton said.

"There are so many incredible people in the team that I can't wait to work with, and I have total faith that we'll achieve great things together."

The Formula One season begins with the Australian Grand Prix from March 14-16.