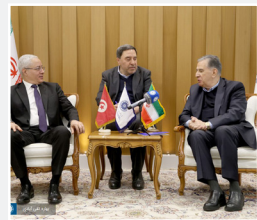


Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei Has Said That Iran Will Closely Monitor the Effects of Benjamin Netanyahu's Trip to Washington on Regional Developments

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In a Meeting with Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Alibek Bakayev, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi Highlighted the Importance of Using the Existing Capacities of Both Countries to Enhance Economic Cooperation

2 DOMESTIC

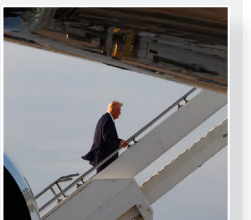


Iran and Tunisia Aim to Strengthen Trade Ties With Direct Flights

> SEE PAGE 2

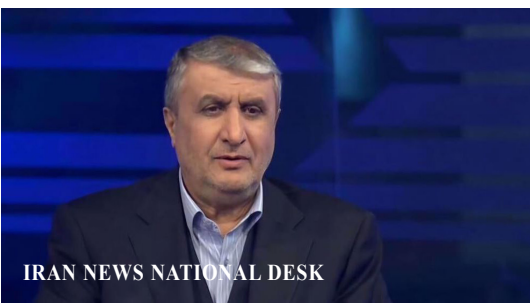
3 INTERNATIONAL

Trump Says Americans Could Feel Pain in Trade War with Mexico, Canada, China



> SEE PAGE 3

Iran's Nuclear Program Completely Transparent



TEHRAN - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says the Islamic Republic's nuclear program is completely transparent and peaceful.

Mohammad Eslami made the remarks in an interview on Sunday where he explained the latest achievements and developments in the country's nuclear industry.

"We have now reached a stage in the nuclear industry where we can exploit this technology," Eslami said.

He said that advanced technologies have become a decisive area at the international level.

Eslami clarified that Iran has broken the monopoly and is standing on its own feet with endogenous research.

He stated, "Accessing technology is prohibited from the point of view of regional arrogance, and we do our work independently."

"The next point is that this technology benefits the people. When you create the capability, you can get the results. We are now on this path and we can use nuclear technology to advance and influence various issues," he stated.

Eslami stated that costs are not an issue in developing the nuclear program.

He said that nuclear technology is a platform for development in other sciences.

Talking about the weapons nature of Iran's program is an excuse for the West, he said.

The required enrichment percentages vary from country to country, he said.

He stated that Iran has accepted inspections to clarify its nuclear program.

Regarding the Iranian nuclear file and sanctions against Iran, Eslami said: "In order for us to get a real picture, let's take a look at the Davos meeting."

"There is an opportunity to show the orientations and see what points countries are focusing on. One of the most important axes was new technology, which is in the fierce competition between developed countries," he said.

Prisoner Swap Exposes Israel's Defeat, Gazans' Victory



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Iranian Army says the prisoner exchange between Israel and the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has laid bare the full extent of Israel's defeat and the Palestinian people's victory in the Gaza Strip.

Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi was speaking at a Sunday meeting with Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami.

During the Israeli regime's 15 months of genocidal war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, Mousavi said, the enemies did their utmost to annihilate a nation, but the positive events in the besieged enclave brought joy to Muslims.

As part of the agreement between Hamas and Israel, 183 Palestinians were freed from Israeli jails on Saturday. Many appeared frail and exhausted as they arrived at the European Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza.

The Palestinian Prisoner's Society (PPS) described the mistreatment suffered by detainees, saying that their bodies reflect "the level of crimes committed against them", particularly after 7 October 2023.

Israel has released a list of more than 700 Palestinians who are to be released under the deal. More than 230 are serving life sentences and will be permanently sent to exile upon release.

President Emphasizes Avoiding Actions That Anger the People

TEHRAN - In a joint meeting of the heads of government branches and officials from all three branches of power, President Masoud Pezeshkian stressed the importance of patience and tolerance in public service, stating that officials must serve the people without discrimination.

The meeting, held on Monday, February 5, 2025, at the Presidential Office, focused on the responsibilities of government officials in addressing public concerns. Pezeshkian emphasized that the primary benchmark for all officials should be the well-being of the people and finding solutions to their problems.

President Pezeshkian warned that adversaries seek to create division and discord within the country, aiming to destabilize the nation. He urged all officials to foster unity and cohesion to prevent these external threats from succeeding.

He also called for a shift in perspective, advocating for a more patient and understanding approach toward the people. Referring to Islamic teachings, he noted that those who have dedicated their lives to the revolution should not be permanently sidelined for a single mistake.

Highlighting the recent elections, Pezeshkian acknowledged that while 50% of the electorate participated, the other half did not. He questioned whether non-voters should be excluded from government services and urged officials to reflect on why many citizens are dissatisfied.

The president referenced the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) conquest of Mecca, emphasizing the importance of equality and fairness. He insisted that the government must act with broad-mindedness and serve all citizens with justice, avoiding discrimination.

Pezeshkian also addressed economic challenges, stating that international analysts claim Iran is in a weakened state, making it vulnerable to external threats. He cautioned that such weaknesses begin with internal divisions and public protests, which foreign actors might exploit. He stressed the need to engage with the people, acknowledge their grievances, and, when necessary, apologize for governmental shortcomings.

Regarding economic concerns, the president criticized harsh crackdowns on protesters, especially those demanding their rights. He insisted that the government must solve people's problems rather than resorting to suppression. However, he also cautioned citizens against falling prey to foreign interference.

Pezeshkian acknowledged the rising cost of living and economic hardships, describing the current situation as unacceptable. While some issues are beyond government control, he assured the public that measures are being taken to improve economic conditions before the upcoming New Year celebrations.

He reaffirmed the government's commitment to ensuring food security and economic stability, promising a new approach in the coming year to ease financial pressures on households.

The president emphasized the importance of industrialists, producers, and entrepreneurs in strengthening the country. He stressed that national stability and economic growth depend on the success of business leaders, adding that the government must support, not hinder, their efforts.



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He also highlighted the need for a secure investment environment, reassuring Iranian and foreign investors that the judiciary and security agencies are their allies, not obstacles. Pezeshkian criticized arbitrary detentions of business figures, arguing that such actions discourage investment and economic growth.

Regarding foreign policy, the president underscored the importance of strong ties with neighboring countries. He stressed that Iran does not harbor territorial ambitions and called for mutual respect among regional nations.

He reaffirmed the Islamic principle that no ethnicity or group is superior to another, urging the government to eliminate discrimination and foster national unity.

Concluding his remarks, Pezeshkian called on all officials to avoid actions that cause public discontent. He stated that governance should be based on justice and fairness for all citizens, not just those who support the government.

He also stressed that unity among the three branches of power is essential for national stability, citing the Quran's emphasis on avoiding division and adhering to the principles of righteousness and solidarity among Muslims.

Meanwhile Majlis Speaker Baqer Qalibaf in the meeting emphasized the importance of the country's Seventh Development Plan as the nation's primary guiding document after the completion of the 20-year Vision Plan in 2025.

He suggested prioritizing key initiatives outlined in the Seventh Plan to address pressing national issues, particularly economic challenges.

"In 2025, the Vision Plan will conclude, and from then on, our main reference will be the Seventh Development Plan. We must use it as the foundation for our work and focus on addressing priority issues accordingly," he stated.

During the meeting, which was attended by top government and judiciary officials, he reiterated the significance of unity and collaboration among the three branches of power, emphasizing that the success of the Islamic Revolution was built on unity, and its continuation depends on maintaining that cohesion.

"The revolution triumphed through unity, and its sustainability relies on the same principle. The judiciary, executive, and legislative branches must work together, ensuring that their synergy ultimately benefits the people, particularly the underprivileged who bear the brunt of economic hardships," he said.

He also stressed that discussions should move beyond mere advice and result in concrete actions. "We all have responsibilities here. Unity and cooperation must be systemic and institutionalized, backed by clear indicators within the framework of the law."

Addressing concerns about government accountability, he reassured that the Parliament's oversight role is not aimed at "catching mistakes" but rather at offering support and solutions.

Enemy's Tactic: Creating False Dichotomies in Society

TEHRAN - The Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, has warned that the enemy employs tactics such as spreading lies, rumors, and creating divisions within society to sow discord. Speaking at the 23rd Educational and Organizational Course of the Jihad Akbar event, hosted by the Union of Independent Islamic Student Associations in Mashhad, he emphasized the need to avoid falling into the enemy's strategic trap.

During his speech, Ahmadian elaborated on the concept of resistance from the perspective of the Islamic Republic, stressing its historical and religious foundations. He stated that the philosophy of resistance extends beyond recent conflicts in Lebanon and Palestine, asserting that it is a deeply rooted historical movement.

Ahmadian cited Quranic principles to highlight that patience and piety are crucial elements in maintaining resistance. He rejected the notion that negotiation contradicts resistance, stating, "Dialogue and negotiation have their place, even with adversaries, as long as they are conducted based on the principles of resistance."

The security chief accused foreign adversaries of attempting to undermine Iran's resistance by creating artificial divides in society. "They fabricate debates, forcing us into binary choices—should we negotiate or not? Should we take military action or not? This is a deliberate tactic to weaken our unity," he explained. He warned against internal divisions, particularly in issues such as the FATF (Financial Action Task Force), asserting that these disputes are often fueled by external influences.

Ahmadian emphasized that religious and political leaders throughout history have avoided such false dichotomies. "The art of true believers is to evade these traps. Falling into them is a



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mistake," he added.

Clarifying the difference between resistance and war, Ahmadian argued that enemies attempt to conflate the two in order to misrepresent Iran's position. "They claim that Iran has been in a 45-year war with the Zionist regime, but the truth is, we have been building a front of resistance, not engaging in direct warfare," he explained.

He criticized attempts to portray the recent Gaza conflict as a failure for resistance movements, calling such narratives "psychological tactics" aimed at demoralizing supporters of resistance. Ahmadian reaffirmed Iran's long-term strategy, quoting Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's statement that the Zionist regime will not exist in 25 years.

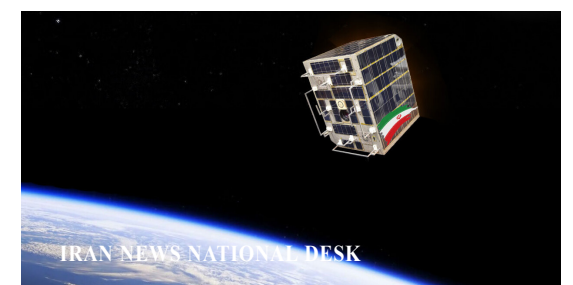
Ahmadian also referenced the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's vision for exporting the Islamic Revolution, rejecting militant approaches to achieving this goal. "The revolution spreads like a fragrance—you cannot stop its influence. Establishing armed groups in other countries was never the path of our leaders," he said.

He stressed that Iran's resistance strategy does not necessarily aim for immediate military confrontation but rather seeks to weaken adversaries over time through steadfastness and ideological influence. "The goal of resistance is endurance, not just victory. While war has an end, resistance continues indefinitely," he remarked.

Ahmadian concluded by reaffirming Iran's commitment to resistance as a central pillar of its revolutionary ideology. He urged students and political activists to remain vigilant against psychological warfare and internal divisions.

The event ended with a Q&A session, after which Ahmadian was presented with a commemorative award for his participation in the 23rd Jihad Akbar event.

Iran Unveils New Space Achievements



TEHRAN - On National Space Technology Day, Iran unveiled three new satellites—Navak-1, Pars-2, and an upgraded version of the Pars-1 satellite—in a ceremony attended by President Masoud Pezeshkian and Minister of Information and Communications Technology Seyed Sattar Hashemi.

During the event, held at the Shahid Ghandi Hall of the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, officials provided updates on the progress of these projects and upcoming space initiatives.

Navak-1 is a telecommunications satellite developed using a platform designed for satellites weighing between 20 to 50 kilograms. The primary goal of Navak-1 is to test the performance of the optimized Simorgh launch vehicle, which will place it in an elongated elliptical orbit.

Weighing approximately 34 kg and measuring 40 x 40 x 60 cm, Navak-1 carries a dosimeter payload to measure space radiation. It will communicate with ground stations via the S-band frequency and is equipped with a magnetometer sensor for measuring Earth's magnetic field, as well as torque actuators for orientation control.

One of its key missions includes measuring space radiation levels while passing through the Van Allen Belt and validating technology modules developed by the Iranian Space Research Institute. Other objectives include testing high-altitude communication links, evaluating enhanced GPS positioning systems at altitudes above 1,000 km, and verifying power, processing, and attitude control subsystems.

Pars-2, a remote sensing satellite weighing 150 kg, features two imaging payloads—one with a 3-meter resolution for color images and another with a 4-meter resolution for black-and-white images and 8-meter resolution for multispectral imaging. Through software enhancements, it can achieve a resolution of 2.5 meters.

Developed entirely in Iran, Pars-2 is equipped with a propulsion system that allows for orbital adjustments to optimize imaging conditions. The satellite is designed for various applications, including environmental monitoring, forestry, disaster management, and urban planning.

Top Security Official Warns of Enemies' Plots to Disrupt Ties With Azerbaijan



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Akbar Ahmadian warns of attempts by the enemies to disrupt the relations between Iran and Azerbaijan.

In a meeting with Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev in Tehran on Sunday, Ahmadian said the two countries are duty-bound to improve mutual relations and remove obstacles in this regard.

He urged the two countries' authorities not to allow enemies to harm Tehran-Baku cordial ties.

Iran's top security official reiterated Tehran's commitment to implement the agreements previously signed between the two countries.

Hajiyev, for his part, said Azerbaijan regards itself as a friend of Iran and hailed the two countries developing relations.

He added that Baku remains committed to strengthening ties with Tehran, emphasizing that no foreign country can disrupt mutual relations.

Also on Sunday, the Iranian foreign minister and the Azerbaijani presidential assistant discussed ways to improve mutual relations. Abbas Araghchi and Hajiyev held a meeting in Tehran.

In a meeting on Saturday, Hajiyev and Political Advisor to Iran's President Mahdi Sanaei emphasized the importance of increasing economic exchanges between the two countries.

In a post on his social media account, Sanaei said in his lengthy meeting with the Azerbaijani official, the sides discussed various topics concerning mutual relations.

Both sides emphasized the friendship and brotherhood between the two countries, the movement towards resolving some misunderstandings, the expansion of comprehensive political relations, and the increase of economic and people-to-people exchanges, Sanaei added.

Azerbaijan's relations with Iran were strained in January 2023 following an attack on the country's embassy in Tehran, which prompted Baku to close the mission and evacuate staff over what it called a "terrorist act."

IRAN NEWS



Lifting Iran's Oil Sanctions Now More Economically Crucial Than Ever

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, Abdolnaser Hemmati, has emphasized that lifting oil sanctions on Iran is now more economically significant than ever. In a post on the social media platform X, Hemmati linked the weakening of the U.S. dollar to Washington's policy of imposing sanctions on various countries.

Hemmati pointed out that the share of the U.S. dollar in global reserves has dropped from 65% in 2016 to 58%. He also recalled that former U.S. President Donald Trump had previously attributed the dollar's decline to America's misguided sanctions policy. He further noted that the U.S. government's focus on trade tariffs is another indication of the failure of sanctions policies and the ineffectiveness of its "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran.

Iran Increases High-Quality Gasoline Production by 10m Liters



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has increased its high-quality gasoline production by 10 million liters as part of efforts to enhance the country's refining capacity and optimize fuel distribution, according to Mohammad Sadegh Azimifar, CEO of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC).

Speaking at a signing ceremony for a cooperation agreement on the smart management of the country's fuel supply chain, Azimifar revealed that Iran produces 100 billion liters of petroleum products annually, valued at \$55 billion.

Azimifar noted that since the Islamic Revolution, gasoline production has increased six to seven times, while diesel production has grown four to five times. He highlighted key projects such as the Persian Gulf Star Refinery and Bandar Abbas Refinery, which have significantly expanded the country's refining capacity.

However, he acknowledged that the subsidy-driven fuel distribution system has led to supply-demand imbalances, putting pressure on the oil industry. The Iranian government is now focusing on shifting from a subsidized fuel supply model to better consumption management.

Azimifar admitted that part of the country's increasing fuel consumption is due to smuggling, stating that Iran's vehicle fuel consumption is twice the global average. He emphasized that the government does not deny the existence of fuel smuggling but is actively working to reduce it.

To address this issue, the Iranian government is implementing real-time monitoring and digitalization of the fuel supply chain. The newly signed agreement aims to track every drop of fuel produced using advanced data analytics and artificial intelligence, minimizing human intervention and preventing losses due to smuggling and inefficiencies.

Azimifar explained that the project will incorporate the Internet of Things (IoT) for data collection and AI-powered analysis to enhance decision-making. Three leading Iranian institutions are collaborating to accelerate the implementation of this initiative.

He stressed that tackling fuel and energy imbalances requires a shift from simply increasing production to improving efficiency and reducing waste. The government is also pursuing new refinery projects focused on increasing capacity and improving product quality.



Iran and Tunisia Aim to Strengthen Trade Ties With Direct Flights

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TEHRAN - The President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) has called for the revival of the Iran-Tunisia Joint Business Council, emphasizing that the current trade volume between the two countries does not reflect their economic potential.

During a meeting with the Tunisian Ambassador to Iran, Samad Hassanzadeh highlighted the lack of sufficient information among traders about each other's economic opportunities as a key barrier to expanding trade. He urged the Tunisian Embassy in Iran to provide updated information on Tunisia's major economic needs and areas where Iran could fulfill these requirements. According to Hassanzadeh, such information would significantly contribute to fostering private sector collaboration between the two nations.

Hassanzadeh pointed out that the ICCIMA, with its extensive network of chambers across Iran's 34 provinces, 20 specialized economic commissions, 49 joint chambers, and 250 economic organizations, is committed to enhancing foreign trade. He underscored that strengthening Iran's international commercial relationships remains a priority for the chamber.

He also detailed the broad capabilities of Iranian private sector firms in various industries, including food processing, petrochemicals, steel, machinery, construction materials, engineering services, railway and tunnel construction, refinery projects, medical services, and agricultural equipment. He particularly stressed the potential for cooperation in greenhouse agriculture, health tourism, and university-level educational services.

Additionally, Hassanzadeh proposed joint production and investment ventures in heavy machinery and tractor manufacturing in Tunisia as a key area for collaboration. He reaffirmed ICCIMA's commitment to facilitating trade delegations, promoting tourism, and developing economic cooperation to boost the bilateral trade volume.

Tunisian Ambassador to Iran, Imed Al-Rahmouni, echoed the sentiments of enhancing economic relations. He acknowledged that while political ties between Tunisia and Iran are strong, trade relations have yet to reach the same level. Strengthening commercial ties remains a top priority for the Tunisian

Embassy in Iran.

The ambassador highlighted the recent visa exemption agreement between Iran and Tunisia, which could lead to increased tourism and business visits. However, he stressed that establishing a direct flight route between Tehran and Tunis is crucial for further enhancing bilateral trade and travel.

Al-Rahmouni also called for the reactivation of the Iran-Tunisia Joint Business Council, which has remained dormant for several years. He stated that efforts are underway to relaunch the council alongside the upcoming Iran-Tunisia Joint Economic Commission meeting. The primary goal is to create a more conducive environment for private sector engagement and investment.

The Tunisian envoy recognized Iran's advanced capabilities in medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. He announced plans to bring a delegation of Tunisian businesspeople in these sectors to Iran to explore potential partnerships. The ambassador also emphasized the importance of joint investment in producing medications for cancer and cardiovascular diseases, noting that Iranian industries offer high-quality products at competitive prices.

Moreover, Al-Rahmouni noted that numerous trade agreements exist between Iran and Tunisia, but many have not been effectively implemented. He urged both governments to take necessary steps to activate these agreements and facilitate smoother trade transactions.

The ambassador also pointed out that Tunisia has free trade agreements with several African countries, presenting a significant opportunity for Iranian businesses to expand their market reach across the continent. By leveraging Tunisia's trade networks, Iranian companies could gain a strategic advantage in entering African markets.

Both sides expressed optimism about the future of economic cooperation and committed to taking concrete steps to strengthen trade and investment between Iran and Tunisia. The meeting concluded with a mutual agreement to prioritize the establishment of direct flights and the revival of the business council to accelerate commercial activities.

Official in India Calls for Diversification of Export Basket



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Commercial Counselor of the Islamic Republic of Iran in India has emphasized the necessity of diversifying Iran's export basket beyond its current focus on petrochemical products, agricultural goods, apples, kiwis, dried fruits, and dates.

Hussein Bamiri, Iran's trade representative in India, highlighted efforts to expand commercial ties between the two nations. He noted that Iran currently trades with four Indian states and stressed the importance of exploring new market opportunities.

"In our meetings with Indian economic officials, we have prioritized facilitating trade to develop commercial relations. Our goal is to unlock new trade potential in sectors that have not yet been fully explored," Bamiri said.

He also announced that both countries have agreed to hold the fourth round of the Iran-India Business Council, chaired by the deputy ministers of commerce from both sides. "The council, which has been held three times before, has yielded positive trade outcomes. Its revival will enhance the role of chambers of commerce, promote business interactions, and facilitate participation in trade exhibitions," he explained.

Bamiri stressed the importance of identifying new markets, particularly in southern India. He revealed that Iran has initiated business connections with the Chamber of Commerce in Gujarat, marking a new milestone in bilateral trade relations. As part of this initiative, a delegation from Sistan and Baluchestan province visited Gujarat for the first time, engaging in 30 B2B meetings between Iranian and Indian traders.

Highlighting new trade opportunities, Bamiri announced that Iran has begun exporting medical equipment and pharmaceuticals to India. "Currently, our trade in medical equipment is limited, despite Iran's strong capabilities in supplying hospital beds, operating room equipment, and other medical tools at competitive prices," he said.

Bamiri acknowledged that Iran-India trade has traditionally been centered on specific products but insisted that expanding to new Indian states will provide fresh opportunities. He urged Iranian exporters to move beyond their traditional markets and introduce confectionery, chocolates, and beverages to the Indian market.

With Iran already engaged in trade with four Indian states, Bamiri emphasized that now is the time to diversify exports and tap into new sectors, ensuring long-term and sustainable growth in commercial relations between the two countries.

Chinese Investment in Isfahan High-Speed Rail Project Underway



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Isfahan Chamber of Commerce has announced that the Isfahan high-speed rail project, one of the province's key infrastructure developments, is progressing with significant investment from China. If the full investment of 11 billion yuan is realized, the remaining costs will be covered by the private sector.

During the 25th meeting of the Isfahan Chamber of Commerce board, President Amir Keshani emphasized the importance of the project for the region. He stated that the necessary infrastructure is in place and that the chamber is actively pursuing the project's implementation. Keshani reiterated that if the Chinese investors fully commit to their share, private enterprises will finance the rest of the project.

The meeting also addressed legal and financial aspects, with calls for thorough reviews of all contracts by advisors and auditors. Additionally, discussions highlighted the need for an airline service to enhance Isfahan's connectivity and economic prospects. Vice President Mohammad Yaser Tayebnia stressed that the goal of establishing an airline is to boost the province's economy rather than generate profit, as many businesses are relocating from Isfahan to Tehran.

Other topics covered in the meeting included the approval of the 2025 budget framework, financial reallocations, and legal matters related to social security contributions. A committee was formed to finalize budget proposals, and efforts to amend insurance laws concerning bonus payments were placed on the agenda.

The Isfahan Chamber of Commerce continues to advocate for private sector interests, aiming to drive economic growth and improve infrastructure in the region.

ICCIMA Calls for Swift Resolution of FATF Issue

TEHRAN - The President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Samad Hassanzadeh, has urged for a prompt resolution to the country's Financial Action Task Force (FATF) compliance issues. Speaking at a meeting with the Gorgan Chamber of Commerce representatives on Sunday night, he emphasized that the current economic conditions do not reflect the dignity of the Iranian people.

Hassanzadeh noted that inefficiencies and shortages have led to the migration of skilled professionals and academics. However, he expressed hope that with the commitment of the 14th government administration, a reverse migration of experts back to the country could be achieved.

During his address, Hassanzadeh highlighted that despite the economic hardships caused by both domestic inefficiencies and external pressures, the Iranian people have continued striving for progress. He acknowledged the country's industrial advancements since the Islamic Revolution and stressed the need for a structured long-term and short-term approach to address existing economic deficiencies.

He also pointed out that in the past year, foreign investors have begun returning to Iran, and Iranian businesses have been actively investing in major projects in neighboring countries, contributing to wealth creation.

Referring to President Ebrahim Raisi's recent meeting with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on the occasion of Mab'ath (Prophet Muhammad's appointment to prophethood), Hassanzadeh stated that the government is committed to strengthening international relations. He expressed confidence that foreign economic challenges would be resolved in the near future.

Addressing the FATF issue, Hassanzadeh stressed its urgency, stating, "There are opportunists who oppose necessary reforms for their own benefit. However, as the Vice President for Legal Affairs recently mentioned, six million Iranians abroad are unable to open bank accounts due to FATF restrictions. It is unacceptable for Iranian traders and businessmen to travel without access to credit cards. We expect this issue to be resolved quickly."

Amir Yousefi, President of the Gorgan Chamber of Commerce, highlighted Golestan Province's economic potential in agriculture, industry, and tourism but lamented its below-average per capita income.



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He pointed out that the province produces essential goods subject to government price controls, making production costs unsustainable.

Yousefi also criticized the lack of major government-backed investments in the province and noted that revenues generated by large institutions in Golestan are funneled to Tehran, providing little local benefit.

He further stated that apart from sanctions, unscientific decision-making has significantly contributed to the economic difficulties in production and trade. He suggested that each province should be assigned to address a specific national economic issue to improve efficiency and reduce redundant efforts.

The importance of trade corridors was also a key topic of discussion. The development of the Incheh Borun trade corridor was highlighted as a crucial step in strengthening Iran's economic relations. Yousefi emphasized the need for infrastructure investments, particularly in water desalination projects for the Caspian Sea, which could help address water shortages in northern Iran.

Ali-Mohammad Chopani, Vice President of the Gorgan Chamber of Commerce, criticized the government's dual approach to pricing, stating that while state-controlled sectors operate through market pricing, private enterprises are subjected to government-imposed price caps. He called for a revision of bankruptcy laws to ensure fairness in the business environment.

Several chamber representatives called for a stronger voice for the private sector in economic policymaking. Amir Abedi, a board member of the Gorgan Chamber, suggested appointing a spokesperson for the Iran Chamber of Commerce to ensure swift and unified responses to key issues like FATF and sanctions.

Mohammad Mortezaei stressed the importance of successful diplomatic negotiations to ease trade restrictions. He warned that flaws in Iran's Seventh Development Plan, particularly in housing and tourism policies, could lead to wasted resources and economic inefficiencies.

The meeting concluded with chamber members calling for greater involvement of Iran's Chamber of Commerce in global economic dialogue and an active role in shaping economic policies that benefit the private sector.

65% of Iran's Mines Shut Down Amid Economic Challenges



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Mining and Mineral Industries Commission of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce has revealed that 65% of the country's mines are currently inactive, citing unregulated increases in government royalties as one of the key reasons behind the closures.

In a press conference, Mohammad Reza Bahraman, a board member of the Chamber of Commerce, emphasized that while Iran has significant geological potential, unlocking its full potential requires substantial investment. He noted that achieving a 13% growth in the mining sector, as planned in the Seventh Development Plan, would require €65 billion in investments, which should come from private sector funding rather than government revenues.

Bahraman also stated that private sector involvement in mining has evolved significantly over the last 20 years and argued that if the government transfers mining projects to private firms, the desired success could be achieved. He stressed that the state should act as a regulator rather than an operator, as is common in other countries.

Bahraman pointed out that Iran has failed to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in the mining sector, even though global mining investments grew by 11% last year. He compared Iran's situation to Saudi Arabia, which has actively expanded its mining sector, aiming for a \$2.5 trillion boost in investments through international partnerships.

Ghadir Ghiyafah, another board member of the Chamber of Commerce, echoed concerns over the lack of financial security in Iran's mining sector. He cited Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's past remarks on reducing dependency on oil by focusing on mining but pointed out that the lack of financial support across the entire mining value chain is preventing this vision from becoming a reality.

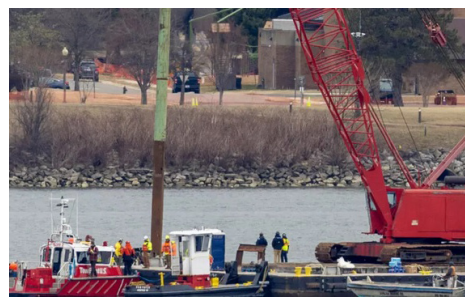
Bahraman Shakhouri, chairman of the Mining and Mineral Industries Commission, highlighted that the Iranian mining sector is now fighting for survival rather than growth. He warned that despite the country's vast mineral reserves, the industry is struggling due to energy shortages, import restrictions on mining equipment, and complex currency regulations.

Rescuers Identify 55 Victims in Fatal Washington Air Crash

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Operations to salvage the wreckage from a deadly collision between a U.S. Army helicopter and a passenger jet continued Sunday as rescuers said 55 victims had so far been identified.

Dozens of victims have been pulled from the icy Potomac River, and rescuers voiced confidence that those remaining would be retrieved in the massive operation to recover the plane that collided in midair with a Black Hawk military helicopter. Washington fire chief John Donnelly said human remains of some of the 67 people killed in the crash had been found as efforts were made to lift the fuselage of the plane, adding that they were taken to the medical examiner.

"Tomorrow there'll be some lifting operations on the wreckage that's in the water," he told a briefing Sunday.



U.S. Top Diplomat Warns Panama to Reduce Chinese Business Interests in Canal



PANAMA CITY (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday threatened action against Panama without immediate changes to reduce Chinese influence on the canal, but the country's leader insisted he was not afraid of a U.S. invasion and offered talks.

Rubio, paying his first visit overseas as the top U.S. diplomat, told Panama that President Donald Trump had determined that the country had violated terms of the treaty that handed back the crucial waterway in 1999.

He pointed to the "influence and control" of China over the canal, the vital link between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through which some 40 percent of U.S. container traffic passes.

Meeting President Jose Raul Mulino, Rubio "made clear that this status quo is unacceptable and that absent immediate changes, it would require the United States to take measures necessary to protect its rights under the treaty," State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said.

Mulino painted a less dire portrait of the meeting. He welcomed Rubio at his official residence in the tropical capital's old quarter, with an honor guard outside the whitewashed walls.

"I don't feel that there is any real threat at this time against the treaty, its validity, or much less of the use of military force to seize the canal," Mulino told reporters afterward, referring to the treaty that handed over the canal at the end of 1999.

"Sovereignty over the canal is not in question," Mulino said.

He proposed technical-level talks with the United States to clear up concerns. Rubio did not spell out what measures the United States may take. Trump in recent days has imposed hefty tariffs on the three biggest trading partners of the United States -- Canada, China and Mexico.

Rubio and Trump say that China has gained so much power around surrounding infrastructure that it could shut it down in a potential conflict, with catastrophic consequences for the United States.

Small but intense protests broke out in Panama ahead of Rubio's visit, with police firing tear gas.

Trump Says Americans Could Feel Pain in Trade War with Mexico, Canada, China

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump said on Sunday the sweeping tariffs that he has imposed on Mexico, Canada and China may cause "short term" pain for Americans as global markets reflected concerns the levies could undermine growth and reignite inflation.

Trump said he would talk on Monday with the leaders of Canada and Mexico, which have announced retaliatory tariffs of their own, but downplayed expectations that they would change his mind.

"I don't expect anything dramatic," Trump told reporters as he returned to Washington from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. "They owe us a lot of money, and I'm sure they're going to pay."

He also said tariffs would "definitely happen" with the European Union, but did not say when.

Critics say the Republican president's plan to impose 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico and 10% tariffs on China will slow global growth and drive prices higher for Americans.

Trump says they are needed to curb immigration and narcotics trafficking and spur domestic industries.

"We may have short term some little pain, and people understand that. But long term, the United States has been ripped off by virtually every country in the world," he said.

Financial market reaction, was not positive. U.S. stock futures slumped in early Asian trading, with Nasdaq futures NQCL, down 2.35%, S&P 500 futures ESv1, 1.8% lower. U.S. oil prices jumped more than \$2, while gasoline futures jumped more than 3%.

North American companies braced for new duties which could upend industries from autos to consumer goods to energy.

Trump's tariffs will cover almost half of all U.S. imports and would require the United States to more than double its own manufacturing output to cover the gap - an unfeasible task in the near term, ING analysts wrote.

"Economically speaking, escalating trade tensions are a lose-lose situation for all countries involved," the analysts wrote in a note on Sunday.

Other analysts said the tariffs could throw Canada and Mexico into recession and usher in "stagflation" - high inflation, stagnant economic growth and elevated unemployment - at home.

The Trump tariffs, outlined in three executive orders, are due to take effect 12:01 a.m. ET (0501 GMT) on Tuesday.

Some analysts said there was some hope for negotiations, especially with Canada and China.

Goldman Sachs economists said the levies are likely to be temporary but the outlook is unclear because the White House set very general conditions for their removal.

A White House fact sheet gave no details on what the three countries would need to do to win a reprieve. Trump vowed to keep them in place until what he described as a national emergency over fentanyl, a deadly opioid, and illegal immigration to the United States ends.

China has said it will challenge the tariffs at the World Trade Organization and take other countermeasures, but also left the door open for talks with the United States.

Its sharpest pushback was over fentanyl.

"Fentanyl is America's problem," China's foreign ministry said, adding that China has taken extensive measures to combat the problem.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, raising her fist in the air in a speech outside the capital, vowed resilience. She accused the United States of failing to tackle its fentanyl problem and said it would not be solved by tariffs.

Sheinbaum said she would provide more details on Monday of the retaliatory tariffs she ordered this weekend. Canada said on Sunday it will take legal action under the relevant international bodies to challenge the tariffs.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also encouraged Canadians on Sunday to boycott their longtime ally after ordering retaliatory tariffs against \$155 billion of U.S. goods, from peanut butter, beer and wine to lumber and appliances.

Canadian officials said they were preparing measures to help business who might be hurt by the trade war.

Trump has heaped derision on Canada in particular, with calls for the country to become the 51st U.S. state. On Sunday, he said Canada "ceases to exist as a viable country" without its "massive subsidy."

The tariff announcement made good on Trump's repeated 2024 campaign threat, defying warnings from economists that a trade war would erode growth and raise prices for consumers and companies.

Trump declared a national emergency under two laws, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and the National Emergencies Act, which give the president sweeping powers to impose sanctions to address crises.

Tens of Thousands Protest in Berlin Against Proposed Immigration Crackdown



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Thousands of people protested in Berlin against plans to limit immigration proposed by opposition conservatives and supported by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Friedrich Merz, the conservatives' leader who is tipped to become Germany's next chancellor after a national election set for Feb. 23, sponsored a draft bill with AfD support, breaking a taboo against cooperating with the far-right party.

Around 160,000 gathered at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, next to the Bundestag lower house, according to the Berlin police. The protesters held banners reading "We are the firewall, no cooperation with the AfD" and "Merz, go home, shame on you!"

Merz, the CDU/CSU's candidate for chancellor, on Friday tried to push the immigration bill in the lower house but failed to secure a majority as some of the deputies from his own party refused to support it.

Their failure to endorse his draft dealt a blow to the authority of Merz, who had pushed for the law despite warnings from party colleagues that he risked being tarnished with the charge of voting alongside the far-right.

Mainstream German parties had previously joined forces to prevent the AfD, which is under surveillance by Germany's security services, from achieving legislative power, something they call a firewall against the far-right.

Syria's New Leader al-Sharaa Meets Saudi Crown Prince

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria's interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa arrived in Saudi Arabia on Sunday for his first international visit since the toppling of Bashar al-Assad, state media reported.

Live TV footage showed Sharaa shaking hands with the crown prince in the Saudi capital before sitting down for talks.

The Saudi crown prince is the second Persian Gulf leader to meet Sharaa since the latter was declared president for a transitional phase last week.

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani met Sharaa in Damascus on Thursday, becoming the first head of state to visit the Syrian capital since Bashar al-Assad was ousted in December.

Sharaa, an Islamist who was once an affiliate of al-Qaeda, has been trying to gain support from Arab and Western leaders since Assad was toppled.

Sharaa was accompanied on his visit by Syria's foreign minister, Asaad Hassan al-Shibani.

The Syrian presidency had earlier posted a picture on X of Sharaa and Shibani aboard what appeared to be a private jet on their way to Saudi Arabia, calling it a "first official visit".

Sharaa, whose Islamist group led the overthrow of Assad in December, was named interim president on Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman and his son Prince Mohammed were among the first to congratulate him on his official appointment.

The Syrian authorities are counting on wealthy Gulf countries to finance the reconstruction of their war-ravaged nation and revive its economy.

In late December, Sharaa stated in an interview with the Saudi channel



Al-Arabiya that the kingdom would "certainly play an important role" in Syria's future, highlighting a "great opportunity for investment".

He told the channel he was born in Saudi Arabia, where his father worked, and that he had spent the first seven years of his life there.

Rabha Seif Allam, a regional expert at the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo, said Riyadh was "playing a key role in reintegrating the new Syria into the Arab world and onto the international stage".

She said that Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's largest economy, would "directly benefit" from the stabilisation of Syria.

"Iran is now excluded from the Syrian landscape, weakening its regional influence, and drug trafficking from Syria to the Gulf countries, which had been a destabilising factor, is now a thing of the past."

Distancing Damascus from Tehran was a "strategic service" to Riyadh, she added.

Though Saudi Arabia and Iran ended a seven-year diplomatic freeze in 2023, the regional heavyweights remain at odds over multiple geopolitical issues, including the civil war in Syria, where they backed opposing sides.

Syria is also pressing for international sanctions that have dragged down its economy to be lifted.

The sanctions date back to 1979, when the United States labelled Syria a "state sponsor of terrorism", but they were ramped up significantly by Washington and other Western powers when Assad cracked down on anti-government protests in 2011 and sparked the civil war.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister visited Damascus last month and promised to help secure an end to the restrictions.

Prince Faisal bin Farhan said during his visit that Riyadh was engaged in "active dialogue with all relevant countries, whether the United States or the European Union, and we are hearing positive messages".

The new Syrian authorities have received a steady stream of diplomatic visitors since toppling Assad in December.

On Thursday, Damascus received Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, who "stressed the urgent need to form a government representing all spectrums" of Syrian society in order "to consolidate stability and move forward with reconstruction, development and prosperity projects".

Israeli Military Kills Dozens of Palestinians in Weeks-Long West Bank Operation

GAZA (Dispatches) - The Israeli military claimed that it had killed at least 50 militants during more than two weeks of operations in the occupied West Bank, earlier levelling buildings in Jenin refugee camp in the territory.

"As part of the operation to thwart terrorism... the IDF (military) recently destroyed several buildings in Jenin," the military said in a statement, adding that they "were used as terrorist infrastructure".

The army later said it destroyed 23 buildings in the operation.

An AFP journalist reported thick columns of smoke billowed over the surrounding area following the blasts.

Palestinian official news agency Wafa said Israeli forces "simultaneously detonated about 20 buildings" in the eastern part of Jenin refugee camp, adding that the "explosions were heard throughout Jenin city and parts of the neighbouring towns".

The Palestinian foreign ministry in a statement condemned the Israeli action "to blow up large neighbourhoods", describing the result as a "brutal scene".

The Israeli military launched a major offensive in the West Bank on January 21 aimed at rooting out Palestinian armed groups from the Jenin area, which has long been a hotbed of militancy.

The military said it had "eliminated over 35 terrorists and apprehended more than 100 wanted individuals", referring to action during the operation dubbed "Iron Wall".

"In an advance operation, over 15 terrorists were eliminated in aerial strikes," it added.



A military spokesman told AFP that the operation was launched on January 14.

The Palestinian health ministry meanwhile said that the Israeli military killed two individuals in separate incidents in the West Bank on Sunday.

The ministry said that a 73-year-old man was killed by Israeli gunfire in the Jenin refugee camp, adjacent to the city.

A 27-year-old was killed also by the Israeli army gunfire in Al-Aroub camp, in the southern West Bank, the health ministry and Palestinian Red Crescent said, confirming his name as Mohammed Amjad Hadoush.

Witnesses reported a "large" deployment of Israeli forces in the morning around the towns of Tubas and Tamun, southeast of Jenin.

An AFP journalist said the army was blocking the exits of the nearby Faraa refugee camp and entering homes, evicting residents. Drones were also visible in the sky.

The army said early on Sunday that a "tactical group" had begun operations around Tamun and uncovered weapons.

It added it was "extending the counterterrorism operation... to five villages".

The leaflets warned residents not to approach Israeli forces.

On Saturday, Israel conducted two air strikes in Jenin, and "struck and eliminated a terrorist cell on its way to carry out an imminent terrorist attack" in Qabatiya, the military said, adding that "two terrorists" were killed.

Arsenal Thrash Man City to Boost Title Challenge



LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal beat Manchester City 5-1 to keep their Premier League title hopes alive yesterday, while Manchester United slumped to another meek 2-0 home defeat to Crystal Palace.

In the battle between the top two for the past two seasons, the Gunners prevailed to move within six points of leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand.

"It is a great day for us, especially with the necessity that we had to win the game," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta.

Arsenal were gifted the perfect start inside two minutes as Manuel Akanji lost possession and Kai Havertz squared for Martin Odegaard to open the scoring.

Erling Haaland headed in his 250th career club goal early in the second half to bring City level.

But the defending champions are a pale shadow of their former selves this season and conceded within 105 seconds of the restart when Thomas Partey's shot deflected in off John Stones.

"It's happened all season, we are giving away too many things," said City manager Pep Guardiola.

"You cannot lose the control, it's 95 minutes. You cannot finish in the way we played."

Myles Lewis-Skelly would have been suspended if his controversial red card in a 1-0 win at Wolves last weekend had not been overturned.

The 18-year-old made the most of that reprieve by curling in Arsenal's third for his first goal for the club. Havertz fired low and hard into the far corner with City cut open at will by the Arsenal counter-attack on 76 minutes.

And another Arsenal teenager rounded off the rout when Ethan Nwaneri curled home in stoppage time.

Defeat leaves City still in fourth but now 15 points off the top and realistically dethroned after four consecutive seasons as champions.

Jean Philippe-Mateta was Palace's hero with both goals in the second half as United suffered a fifth defeat

in their last six home league games.

Victory takes the Eagles above the Red Devils in the table as Oliver Glasner's side climb to 12th.

Three consecutive wins for United had lifted the mood around Old Trafford but it was back to square one for Ruben Amorim after another home display lacking in creativity and riddled with defensive lapses.

Kobbie Mainoo, who started as a makeshift centre-forward, hit the post with United's best effort of a bright opening before their attacking threat fizzled out.

Mateta opened the scoring on 64 minutes after Maxence Lacroix's header came back off the bar.

Worse was to follow for United as Lisandro Martinez had to be stretchered off with what appeared a serious knee injury.

"I think it's a serious situation," said Amorim. "Licha is really important for us, not just as a football player but the character he has, especially in this hard moment."

Palace showed no mercy to secure the three points when Daniel Munoz charged through the middle of the home side's defence and unselfishly squared for Mateta to knock in his sixth goal in five games.

Tottenham eased the pressure on under-fire manager Ange Postecoglou and fears they could be dragged into a relegation battle with a 2-0 win at Brentford.

The Bees were left to rue a number of missed chances against an injury-ravaged Tottenham defence.

Brentford also lent the visitors a helping hand with the opening goal as Vitaly Janelt headed Son Heung-min's corner into his own net on 29 minutes.

Yoane Wissa's header came off the bar as Brentford pushed for an equaliser.

But Spurs picked them off on the counter-attack when Pape Sarr prodded through Valdimarsson's legs from Son's pass.

Victory lifts Tottenham to 14th and 10 points clear of the relegation zone.

Abhishek's Century Leads India to 4-1 T20 Series Win Over England



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Abhishek Sharma's magnificent century powered India to a 150-run win over England in the fifth and final T20 international at Wankhede Stadium on Sunday, resulting in a 4-1 series triumph.

Chasing a mammoth target of 248, England opener Phil Salt (55 off 23) started well but had little support as wickets tumbled around him. Indian spinners took early wickets, leaving the visitors stumbling at 68-4.

England collapsed spectacularly to 97 all out in 10.3 overs with Mohammed Shami claiming three wickets and Varun Chakravarty, Shivam Dube, and Abhishek taking two apiece.

"This is the best I've bowled, but a lot of scope to improve, there were a few (bad) balls, I should not have bowled them," Player of the Series Chakravarty said.

"It was just the matter of bowling the right ball at the right time, that's what I was working on."

Put into bat, Abhishek's onslaught propelled India to their highest powerplay score of 95 studded with 16 boundaries.

Abhishek played a quickfire innings of 135 off 54 - the second fastest T20I hundred for the home side. The opener smashed 13 sixes and seven fours in the process and later took two wickets for three runs in his solitary over.

"It's a special one, coming for the country, always a great feeling. When I see it's my day, I always try to go from the first ball," Player of the Match Abhishek said.

"When the opponents are bowling 140, 150-plus, you have to be ready a little earlier. Just react to the ball and play my shots."

Celtics Fight Back From 26 Down, Top 76ers

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jayson Tatum delivered 35 points and 11 assists as the visiting Boston Celtics rallied from a 26-point, second-half deficit to defeat the Philadelphia 76ers 118-110 on Sunday.

Boston outscored Philadelphia 54-20 over the final 14-plus minutes to take control of a game that was initially dominated by Philadelphia. In doing so, the Celtics avenged a home loss to the Sixers on Christmas Day and improved to 2-0 on their three-game road trip.

Jaylen Brown had 21 points, 10 rebounds and six assists for Boston, while Kristaps Porzingis notched 18 points, seven rebounds and five blocks. The Celtics made 21 3-pointers, including 14 on 22 attempts in the second half.

Tyrese Maxey led the Sixers with 34 points, while Guerschon Yabusele chipped in with 21 points against his former team. Kelly Oubre Jr. contributed 18 points and 13 boards for Philadelphia, which continued to play without Joel Embiid (knee) and Paul George (finger).

Cavaliers 144, Mavericks 101: Sam Merrill came off the bench to hit nine 3-pointers for a career-high-tying 27 points as host Cleveland coasted to an easy victory over Dallas.

It was a brutal start to a new era for Dallas, which sent shock waves



through the sports world about 15 hours before tipoff by sending Luka Doncic to the Los Angeles Lakers in exchange for fellow star Anthony Davis as part of a blockbuster trade. Davis was not active on Sunday due to the pending trade and an abdominal muscle strain. Max Christie, also acquired, was similarly not available.

The Cavaliers wasted little time turning the contest into a blowout, going 9-for-11 from 3-point range in the first quarter to build a 50-19 lead by the end of the frame. It marked the most points that Cleveland has scored in any quarter all season.

Pistons 127, Bulls 119: Cade Cunningham led seven Detroit scorers in double figures with 22 points to go along with 15 assists as the host Pistons downed Chicago.

Jalen Duren supplied 21 points, 13 rebounds and four assists for Detroit, while Malik Beasley had 19 points, five assists and three steals. Chicago had won 18 of its previous 20 meetings with Detroit.

Coby White led the Bulls with 22 points. Nikola Vucevic recorded a triple-double with 20 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists, while Josh Giddey had 20 points and 10 rebounds.

Raptors 115, Clippers 108: RJ Barrett had 20 points and seven assists and Toronto used an explosive third quarter to defeat visiting Los Angeles.

The Raptors broke open a halftime tie with a 31-16 third quarter spurred by 19 fastbreak points to gain a split of the season series with the Clippers. Grady Dick scored 18 points and Scottie Barnes added 15 points and seven rebounds for Toronto.

James Harden had 25 points for the Clippers, who finished a 2-2 road trip. Ivica Zubac added 18 points and former Raptor Kawhi Leonard scored 14.

Aston Villa Sign Rashford on Loan From Man Utd



LONDON (Dispatches) - Aston Villa signed Marcus Rashford on loan from Manchester United for the rest of the season to end the England international's exile under Ruben Amorim at Old Trafford.

Once a hero for the United fans, Rashford has not featured for his boyhood club since December 12 and admitted earlier this season he was ready for a "new challenge".

The 27-year-old had been linked with a move to AC Milan and Barcelona, but the European giants were put off by his reported £300,000-a-week wages.

According to Sky Sports, Villa will pick up at least 75 per cent of that pay packet for the coming months, rising to 90 per cent depending on performance-related bonuses and have an option to make the deal permanent at the end of the season for £40 million.

"I was lucky to have a few clubs approach me but Aston Villa was an easy decision - I really admire the way that Aston Villa has been playing this season, and the manager's ambitions," said Rashford in a Villa statement.

"I just want to play football and am excited to get started. I wish everyone at Manchester United all the best for the rest of the season."

Villa moved to bolster their attacking options after selling Colombia striker Jhon Duran to Saudi Pro League club Al Nassr on Friday for a reported £64 million.

Unai Emery's men have qualified for the last 16 of the Champions League and still have aspirations to qualify for that tournament again next season.

Villa sit eighth in the Premier League, eight points above 13th-placed United.

Rashford scored 138 goals in 426 appearances since coming through the ranks at Old Trafford and has lifted the Europa League, two FA Cups and two League Cups as a United player.

However, his attitude and work ethic in training has been questioned by Amorim, since he took charge in November.

After last weekend's 1-0 win at Fulham, the Portuguese coach sensationally claimed he would rather put the club's 63-year-old goalkeeping coach, Jorge Vital, in the squad than Rashford.

"Our team should be so much better with Rashford, but he has to change," Amorim said last week.

"If he does change, we are more than welcome to put a talent like Rashford in, and we need it.

"But in this moment I think it's really clear that we have to set some standards. That's all."

A temporary switch to Villa allows Rashford a fresh start to rehabilitate his tarnished reputation after his astonishing fall from grace.

Belgium Granted Controversial Win in Davis Cup

LONDON (Dispatches) - Belgium claimed a bizarre victory over Chile in the Davis Cup, while France and Spain also came through the first qualifying round.

Chile and Belgium were tied after the singles rubbers, and Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen's doubles win over Tomas Barrios Vera and Nicolas Jarry put the Belgians 2-1 up.

In the next singles match, Chile's Cristian Garin and Zizou Bergs split the opening two sets to take the contest into a decider, which ended in unusual and controversial circumstances.

With the final set deadlocked at 5-5, Bergs broke serve and as he celebrated gaining the advantage, he bumped into Garin at the net while changing ends and bundled the Chilean to the ground.

Garin received medical attention but after being cleared fit to continue, he failed to return to the court and Chile received three consecutive time violations resulting in a game penalty, giving Berg 6-3 4-6 7-5 win. That handed Belgium an unbeatable 3-1 lead.

"This was a rare, unfortunate and very delicate situation and everyone involved, including the independent doctor, conducted due diligence based on rules and procedures," International Tennis Federation (ITF) said in a statement.

"We understand the emotions attached to this unusual incident, but the final decision was made after consideration of all the facts and unique circumstances around it."

Belgium will face Australia in the second round.

The French held a 2-0 lead over Brazil following Saturday's singles action, and after losing the opening set, Benjamin Bonzi and Pierre-



Hughes Herbert overcame Rafael Matos and Marcelo Melo 4-6 6-3 6-4 to seal the tie.

France, who won the last of their 10 Davis Cup titles in 2017, will face Croatia, who beat them to the trophy in 2018, in the second round.

Spain also came into Sunday's doubles tie with a 2-0 lead over Switzerland, and childhood friends Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar's 6-4 7-5 win over Marc-Andrea Huesler and Dominic Stricker gave the Spanish an unassailable 3-0 lead.

"We grew up together since we were living in Barcelona 12 years ago," Martinez said.

"To share this moment with him is something very special."

Spain will meet Denmark in the next round.

Canada came into the action 2-0 down to Hungary, but the 2022 champions pulled level with a win in the doubles and Gabriel Diallo's

6-1 6-3 defeat of Fabian Marozsan to take the tie to the final rubber.

Marton Fucsovics outfought Alexis Galarneau 7-6(8) 6-4, and the Hungarians were the final nation to make it through to the second round where they will meet Austria.

The first round of the Davis Cup had 26 teams playing for a place in September's second round of qualifiers.

Last year's runners-up, the Netherlands, will join the competition in the second round which will consist of seven ties in a battle to make November's Final 8 alongside hosts Italy.

Meanwhile no. 4 seed Ekaterina Alexandrova captured her fifth career title with a 6-2, 3-6, 7-5 win over fifth-seeded Dayana Yastremska of Ukraine in the final of the Upper Austria Ladies Linz.

Alexandrova, of Russia, had two aces and benefited from eight double faults to dispatch Yastremska in 2 hours, 11 minutes.

The victory especially was sweet for Alexandrova, who settled for two runner-up finishes at the tournament in the previous six years.

Yastremska has not won a tournament since defeating Caroline Garcia in Strasbourg, France, in 2019.

Second seed Elise Mertens of Belgium also claimed her ninth career singles title with a 6-1, 6-4 win over Ann Li in the final of the tournament.

Mertens, 29, fired four aces and won 75 percent (39 of 52) of her first serves to topple Li in 1 hour, 22 minutes.

The singles tournament win was Mertens' first since she captured the Monastir title in October 2023.