

Ali Shamkhani, Political Advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Has Stressed That Iran Will Use All Its Power to Defend Its peaceful Nuclear Program

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Iran Full Combat Readiness Will Change Enemy Calculations



TEHRAN - Commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, Major General Gholam-Ali Rashid, has stated that the Iranian Armed Forces must demonstrate their will to exercise power, making the cost of enemy miscalculations clear. He emphasized that with full combat readiness, Iran is capable of altering enemy calculations and achieving deterrence.

Speaking at a gathering of army commanders at the Kosar Hall of the Army's Ideological-Political Organization, General Rashid marked the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution and highlighted its transformative impact on the Iranian military. He noted that under the leadership of Imam Khomeini, the Iranian Army underwent a major transformation, aligning itself with the people's revolution and playing a decisive role in the downfall of the Pahlavi regime. According to Rashid, the army's conscious and strategic choice prevented a prolonged civil war and led to a swift, bloodless victory.

The general criticized Western media, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, for attempting to weaken Iran's military strength even after the fall of the Shah. He accused the West of inciting Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist regime of Iraq to act against Iran. He stated that U.S. intelligence misled Saddam into believing he could achieve a swift victory against Iran, despite the presence of a loyal and battle-ready Iranian Army.

Rashid pointed out that Iraq's invasion of Iran, supported by both Western and Eastern powers, was a test of Iran's military resilience. Contrary to the expectations of many, he argued that the combination of the Iranian Army and public resistance led to Iraq's eventual defeat. He emphasized that the military transformation in Iran was deeply rooted in religious and revolutionary beliefs, along with mass mobilization through organizations like the Basij and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). This, he asserted, proved to regional and global powers why Saddam's calculations had been flawed.

Homegrown Multi-Purpose Drone Carrier to Join IRGC Naval Fleet



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy says the force will take delivery of a new domestically designed and manufactured drone carrier, capable of performing different roles in combat.

"We are in possession of drone carriers and vessels that can carry helicopters and drones. With God's help, this multi-purpose drone carrier will soon join the IRGC Navy fleet," Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri told reporters in the capital, Tehran, on Monday on the sidelines of the 14th edition of Malek Ashtar festival.

He said four military ships from the IRGC and the Iranian Navy will depart for the United Arab Emirates for a get-together with the Arab nation's naval force.

Tangsiri stated that the naval visit to the Persian Gulf country is the first of its kind.

Iran has declared time and again that regional countries can ensure the security of the West Asia region without the presence of outsiders, the IRGC Navy commander pointed out.

He also highlighted that maritime drills with neighboring countries, including Iraq, are on the agenda, stating that Iranian naval forces have already staged joint military exercises with Oman.



Iranian Nuclear Experts Achieve 160 New Technological Milestones

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian nuclear experts have achieved 160 significant technological advancements, which will be officially unveiled during the Fajr Decade celebrations, according to the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), Mohammad Eslami.

During a press conference at the "Role of Guilds and Merchants in the Victory of the Islamic Revolution" event in Varamin, Eslami emphasized that Iran's nuclear industry is a product of the Islamic Revolution. He noted that despite international opposition, Iran has managed to position itself alongside leading global nations in nuclear technology, producing world-class innovations.

Eslami stated that Iran annually announces its nuclear development programs on April 9, which marks National Nuclear Technology Day. However, this year, several major achievements will be introduced earlier during the Fajr (Ten-Day Dawn) celebrations, marking the Islamic Revolution victory anniversary.

He highlighted the continuous progress in nuclear advancements, revealing that, on average, one new achievement has been registered every 1.5 working days over the past three years. This year alone, Iran has developed approximately 160 nuclear-related breakthroughs, with the most prominent ones to be officially disclosed.

Among the latest advancements, Eslami highlighted cold plasma technology, which is currently being used in the medical field for wound treatment. A specialized wound care clinic in Varamin's Moflah Hospital has been implementing this technology, providing innovative treatment options for patients.

Another notable nuclear-based innovation is the production of neonatal screening kits, which play a crucial role in diagnosing metabolic disorders. These kits help detect diseases at birth, significantly reducing healthcare costs and preventing long-term

medical expenses for families.

Eslami emphasized that such nuclear applications not only contribute to public health but also ensure the well-being of future generations by enabling early disease detection and treatment.

Beyond healthcare, nuclear technology is also making strides in agriculture. Eslami pointed out that Iranian pistachio farmers can now utilize advanced nuclear-based methods to improve crop yields. Additionally, the AEOI is ready to implement gamma radiation technology to enhance agricultural production in Varamin and beyond.

In a broader economic context, he stressed the importance of leveraging nuclear technology to create value-added products instead of exporting raw materials. By utilizing nuclear advancements, Iran aims to shift from resource-based exports to the production of high-value goods, fostering economic growth, job creation, and reduced dependence on natural resources.

Eslami underscored the role of private sector participation in expanding nuclear technology applications. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting private investors willing to contribute to the development of nuclear-based industries. The collaboration between the state and private entities is expected to accelerate technological progress and ensure that nuclear innovations benefit the broader society.

As part of the broader technological expansion, Eslami announced plans to enhance Varamin's healthcare infrastructure. Advanced hospitals and laboratories will be established with the support of private investors and philanthropists. These efforts aim to provide high-quality medical services to the region's residents, ensuring that cutting-edge healthcare solutions are accessible to all.

Any Geopolitical Change to Regional Borders Unacceptable



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Masoud Pezeshkian says the country will never accept any geopolitical change to borders in the region.

In a meeting with Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev in Tehran on Monday, Pezeshkian said preserving regional countries' territorial integrity is among the fundamental principles of Tehran's foreign policy.

"Any change to the borders in the region is absolutely unacceptable. Certain movements by extra-regional powers make it essential to foster unity and cohesion among regional countries and to avoid conflict in any form."

He said Iran seeks to expand relations among Muslim countries and to boost the Muslim world's power.

"In addition to establishing consensus and empathy inside the country, we seek to develop relations with neighboring and Muslim countries." "We believe any form of discord among Muslims will persuade enemies to intervene and sow discord."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Pezeshkian pointed to brotherly ties between Iran and Azerbaijan based on good neighborliness and expressed Tehran's keenness to promote ties with Baku in various political, economic, cultural, defense and security areas.

He underscored the importance of the rapid removal of obstacles in the trade and transportation sectors, and said Tehran welcomes the exchange of expertise with Baku.

Pezeshkian expressed hope that Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev would travel to Tehran.

Hajiyev, for his part, said Azerbaijan attaches special significance to ties with Iran and seeks further promotion of mutual relations.

Iran, Iraq Resolved to Continue Support for Resistance Front



TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says Iran and Iraq are determined to continue their support for the Resistance Front.

Qalibaf made the remark on Monday in a joint press conference with Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, who is in Tehran on his first foreign visit since taking office late in October 2024.

"We are looking to enhance political and economic relations, which will be instrumental in establishing regional peace and stability among Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries."

The Iranian official said the two nations, parliaments and governments are working closely to improve regional and international cooperation.

The top Iranian parliamentarian hailed his country's "very deep" relations with Iraq in religious, cultural, social, political, economic, security and defense sectors.

Qalibaf noted that both Tehran and Baghdad placed a premium on increasing parliamentary relations with the purpose of boosting economic cooperation.

He urged the Iranian and Iraqi parliaments to prepare the ground for implementing the agreements signed during President Abdul Latif Rashid's visit to Tehran in May.

Mashhadani said he discussed a variety of issues with his Iranian counterpart in border, water, roads, security and border areas as well as armed terrorist groups.

Pointing to the latest developments in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, the Iraqi parliament speaker said his country believes that no one should be allowed to disrupt regional security and stability.

The entire region needs security and stability, the Iraqi official stated. Baghdad hopes to witness the continuous flourishing of its relations with Tehran, he added.

The Iraqi official said Iran and Iraq have a common and clear stance on regional developments, including the issue of Palestine.

Iran Key AI Player in Persian Gulf Region, Ready for Cooperation

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iranian minister of information and communications technology says Iran is a major player in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Persian Gulf, stressing the country is ready to start cooperation with regional states on this matter.

Speaking at the Iran Corridor 2025 conference held in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on Monday, Sattar Hashemi emphasized that Iran, as a major stakeholder in the regional digital landscape, brings invaluable assets to the table.

He stated that the country's mobile phone operators as well as its thriving digital service platforms such as Snapp! and Digikala, each serving more than 30 million users, provide an abundance of multifaceted data — an essential ingredient for AI development.

Hashemi noted that Iran, despite facing economic sanctions, has successfully developed a resilient fintech ecosystem that continues to thrive and innovate.

"Moreover, our country's academic and research capabilities have propelled us to the forefront of AI advancements. In 2023, Iran ranked second in the region in terms of the number and quality of scientific papers in AI, demonstrating our commitment to cutting-edge research and development."

"Furthermore, Iran holds the second position in the region for AI developers, highlighting the depth of our skilled workforce, and stands fourth in the region in terms of the number of AI firms, showcasing our dynamic and rapidly growing ecosystem," the Iranian minister continued.

He underlined that Iranian human capital, available at competitive costs, is a strategic advantage that positions Iran as a valuable partner in regional AI

initiatives.

"This combination of talent, data, and innovation makes Iran a key player in the regional AI value chain, capable of driving meaningful cooperation and development. Looking ahead, Iran is committed to fostering regional cooperation and building a future where AI drives prosperity and unity."

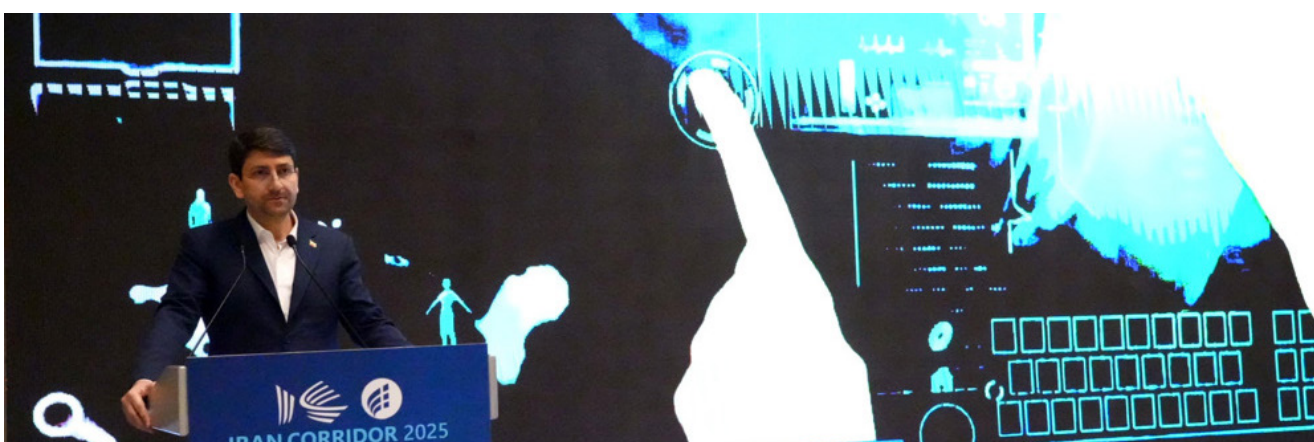
"We propose a strategic framework for collaboration that leverages our collective strengths, combining Iran's skilled human capital and its infrastructure with the investment capabilities and infrastructure of our neighboring countries. By establishing AI acceleration hubs, facilitating joint investment in free zones, and enhancing academic collaboration and elite exchange programs, we can unlock new opportunities for innovation and economic growth," Hashemi said.

He said the Persian Gulf region has a pivotal role in evolving the Artificial Intelligence (AI) ecosystem, stressing, "This region possesses unique strengths that position us to harness AI's potential and become a global digital leader."

Hashemi stated that regional countries lay the cornerstone for innovation-driven economies that shape the future, as they increasingly invest in AI infrastructure.

"The Persian Gulf region offers an unparalleled opportunity to foster AI initiatives that cater to our collective aspirations."

"By cultivating environments that encourage collaboration and investment, we can transform our region into a powerhouse of AI excellence, attracting global tech giants while strengthening intraregional partnerships for shared prosperity," the Iranian minister noted.



IRAN NEWS



Lufthansa Set to Resume Flights to Iran

TEHRAN - The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and Acting Head of Iran's Airports and Air Navigation Company has announced an increase in overflights through Iranian airspace. He also confirmed that Lufthansa Group flights will soon resume operations in the country. According to a report from Iran's Airports and Air Navigation Company, Mohammad Amirani stated on Monday that the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) had issued an advisory on November 29, 2024, following tensions and conflicts in the Middle East, including Israeli attacks on Iranian territory. He explained that in this advisory, EASA had recommended foreign airlines conduct security assessments before flying through Iranian airspace. However, he emphasized that Iran's airspace remained completely secure during this period, with over 700 overflights recorded daily. Amirani further noted that following the expiration of the advisory on February 1, 2025, foreign airlines expressed their readiness to resume flights and use Iran's airspace again. He added that international aviation authorities now consider Iranian airspace free of security threats and conflict risks. Lufthansa Group is expected to finalize discussions with Iran's Air Traffic Control Department within the next 24 hours, paving the way for the imminent resumption of its flights.

Iran's Trade Balance with Venezuela Turns Positive

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - Iran's trade balance with Venezuela has been positive in recent years, according to the Director-General for Europe and the Americas at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran. Efforts are currently underway to revive and implement a long-dormant free trade agreement between the two nations.

Speaking on Monday, Ahmad Firoozi described Venezuela as a key destination for Iran's non-oil exports to Latin America. He noted that while Iran signed a trade agreement with Venezuela in 2004, it has yet to be fully implemented due to various reasons.

Firoozi emphasized that trade exchanges between the two countries have been at an acceptable level over the past decade. He stated that activating the free trade agreement would facilitate market access for Iranian traders in Venezuela and other Latin American nations while reducing entry costs.

"The agreement will diversify Iran's export portfolio and establish a more stable presence in Venezuela's market," he said. "It will also lower export costs and enhance the competitiveness of Iranian goods and services against rivals such as China and Turkey."

A major component of the agreement is the list of goods eligible for tariff reductions and exemptions. Firoozi explained that while the free trade deal had been inactive for over 17 years, efforts to revive it began under the previous administration and have continued with determination under the current government.

"We have exchanged product lists and held over 20 virtual meetings and three rounds of in-person negotiations with Venezuelan officials to determine which goods will benefit from tariff reductions," he added.

Both Iran and Venezuela are keen to protect their export portfolios, which has made the final agreement process time-consuming. However, Firoozi stated that negotiations are now in their final stage, with expectations for the agreement's implementation within the next three months. If completed as planned, Iranian businesses will begin benefiting from the deal in the coming year. Discussions are currently focused on agricultural, pharmaceutical, and industrial sectors.

When asked about the volume of Iran-Venezuela trade, Firoozi reported that Iran's trade balance with Venezuela has remained positive due to a higher volume of exports. Over the past nine months, Iran has exported \$40 million worth of goods to Venezuela, while no imports from Venezuela have been registered in Iranian customs.

He also pointed out that some trade transactions are conducted through third countries, meaning that official customs statistics may not fully reflect the true volume of trade between Iran and Venezuela.



Judiciary Chief Warns Against Capital Flight, Emphasizes Economic Stability

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Judiciary Chief has stressed the importance of attracting foreign investment while warning against capital flight. He stated that if foreign capital is not entering the country, at the very least, domestic capital should not be leaving. He noted that in recent years, a significant amount of wealth has exited the country, and even individuals who have made substantial profits within Iran are hesitant to reinvest domestically.

Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei made these remarks on Monday, February 5, during a meeting of the Supreme Judiciary Council. Congratulating the nation on the Islamic occasions of Sha'ban and the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, he highlighted the persistent hostility of Iran's adversaries. "The enemies, having suffered repeated setbacks against our revolution and system, harbor resentment and seek to strike at the foundation of our nation," he warned, adding that their tactics are ever-evolving and must be countered effectively.

Mohseni-Ejei emphasized that one of the main challenges facing the country today is the livelihood of its people. He urged greater efforts toward economic progress, industrial production, and supporting legitimate economic actors while removing obstacles to business growth.

However, he made it clear that this support does not extend to hoarders, corrupt individuals, or fraudsters within the economy. "We must firmly and legally confront those who engage in economic corruption. But for those who genuinely seek to contribute to production and economic development, we must remove barriers and provide them with the necessary support," he stated.

The judiciary chief highlighted that foreign investors, when entering a market, prioritize securing their assets and ensuring profitability. He emphasized the need for a structured and reliable framework to ensure that domestic investors do not fear losing their capital. "Some individuals, despite accumulating significant wealth in Iran, hesitate to reinvest locally due to concerns about security and stability. We must establish a robust system that reassures investors and encourages them to invest domestically with confidence," he said.

Mohseni-Ejei called for a more active role for the private sector in economic development, urging the government to act as a facilitator rather than a direct competitor. He underscored Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's strong support for private sector involvement, noting that all branches of government are obligated to implement this directive. "The Supreme Leader's recent remarks to producers and economic players contain valuable insights that we must all adhere to," he stated.

Reflecting on the judiciary's contributions over the past 46 years, Mohseni-Ejei highlighted its role in ensuring national security, reclaiming public assets from corrupt officials, and protecting public rights. He stressed the importance of documenting and communicating these achievements, especially to younger generations, through historical records and oral testimonies.

At the end of the session, he extended special congratulations on the birth anniversary of Hazrat Abbas and the national Day of Veterans, emphasizing the importance of addressing the needs of war veterans and recognizing their invaluable contributions to Iran.

Iran, Oman, and Pioneers Sign Agreement to Boost Data Transit Corridor

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



TEHRAN - A trilateral agreement aimed at developing data transit between Iran and Oman was signed today in the presence of Seyed Sattar Hashemi, Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology.

The agreement was formalized on the sidelines of the international event Iran Corridor 2025, with the participation of executives from Iran's Infrastructure Communications Company, Pishgaman (an Iranian telecom company), and Omantel (Oman's telecommunications company).

The primary goal of this agreement is to strengthen data transit corridors along the northern and southern routes, a crucial step toward positioning Iran as a regional data transit hub.

Under this cooperation, Iran's data transit capacity toward Oman will increase to 4.5 terabits per second, extending from Iran's northern borders to Europe and internal routes toward Oman and the Persian Gulf. The project will establish a secure and high-speed network connecting northern Iran (toward Europe) to southern routes (toward Oman and the Persian Gulf).

By optimizing existing infrastructure, this initiative will reduce the time and cost of data transfers between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, offering an efficient alternative to longer maritime routes.

Collaboration with Omantel, one of the Gulf region's leading operators, will enhance Iran's access to international networks through the southern corridor, ensuring more stable connections to global data centers. Additionally, leveraging Iran's northern routes will increase security and diversity in data transmission to Europe.

Beyond solidifying Iran's role on the global digital transit map, this agreement presents an opportunity for investment in the information technology sector and the creation of jobs in the country's telecommunications infrastructure.

This trilateral cooperation is expected to serve as a model for similar partnerships with other regional nations in the near future.

Iran Ready to Strengthen Regional Digital Cooperation

TEHRAN - Iran has reaffirmed its pivotal role in enhancing regional digital connectivity and strengthening the digital ecosystem of the Persian Gulf. According to Behnaz Akbari, Deputy Minister of Communications and CEO of the Telecommunication Infrastructure Company of Iran, internet traffic consumption in the Middle East is projected to increase by approximately 30% by 2030, reaching over 600 terabits per second.

Speaking at the international event Iran Corridor 2025, currently taking place in Dubai, UAE, Akbari highlighted Iran's advanced infrastructure and proposed joint cooperation initiatives in data transmission, submarine cable expansion, and data center development.

In his opening remarks, Akbari emphasized Iran's historical significance as a center of trade and cultural exchanges, asserting that the country is now prepared to assume a similar role in the digital era. "The future of the region's digital economy relies on strong, stable, and secure digital infrastructures," he stated.

Akbari reaffirmed Iran's commitment to sharing its infrastructure and resources to empower the regional digital ecosystem. He emphasized that the Iran Corridor 2025 event has been organized precisely with this goal in mind.

Discussing the challenges faced by the region, the deputy minister pointed out that a significant portion of the Middle East's internet traffic currently originates from outside the region, particularly from Europe. Less than 10% of the internet traffic consumed is locally served.

Akbari noted that by 2030, the Middle East's internet traffic consumption is expected to grow at a

compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 30%, surpassing 600 terabits per second. To meet this demand, regional countries must increase local internet traffic handling by expanding and interconnecting their telecommunication infrastructures.

Referring to the rapid advancements in digital technologies and artificial intelligence, Akbari stressed the importance of regional cooperation in keeping pace with these developments. "A well-connected and collaborative digital ecosystem can drive economic growth, technological advancements, and job creation," he stated.

He reiterated Iran's readiness to leverage its strategic advantages to facilitate this transformation.

The CEO of the Telecommunication Infrastructure Company introduced three key Iranian initiatives aimed at enhancing regional digital connectivity: High-Capacity Data Transmission: Iran possesses an advanced fiber optic and optical transmission network that covers all national borders. Akbari proposed offering 100-gigabit-per-second circuits across Iran's borders, serving as a crucial data transit bridge between Asia, Europe, and beyond; Expansion of Submarine Fiber Optic Connections: Iran is prepared to collaborate with neighboring countries to develop fiber optic submarine cables in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. These connections can be established through bilateral agreements or as part of a broader regional consortium. This initiative will enhance direct connectivity between regional countries, Asia, and Europe, ensuring faster and more reliable data exchange; and establishment of Efficient Data Centers: Akbari outlined Iran's plan to develop data centers in five strategic locations, leveraging the



Iran's Railway: India's Best Route to Central Asia and Afghanistan

TEHRAN - The CEO of Iran's Railways, in a meeting with the Indian Ambassador to Tehran, emphasized the need for enhanced cooperation between the two countries to boost rail transit.

According to the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI), Jabbar-Ali Zakeri met with the Indian envoy on Monday, stressing the historical ties and friendly relations between the two nations. He called for the expansion of railway collaboration between their respective railway systems.

Highlighting regional developments, Zakeri urged India to utilize the North-South Corridor as a secure route to access CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries. He also underscored the strategic importance of Chabahar Port and its role in boosting trade relations. Announcing that the Chabahar railway project would be completed this year, he encouraged Indian businesses to take advantage of its transit potential. Zakeri further pointed out the Chabahar railway's role in facilitating cargo transport to Afghanistan and Central Asia, proposing a joint agreement between Iran and India's railway authorities to enhance cooperation in this sector. Expressing optimism about the ongoing plans, the railway chief hoped for increased freight transit from Mumbai to CIS countries and Afghanistan. During the meeting, it was also decided that an Indian expert delegation would visit key transit routes, including Chabahar, Bandar Abbas, and the Shatigh border crossing, to assess potential collaboration.

18% Increase in Non-Oil Exports from Iran



TEHRAN - Iran's non-oil exports reached approximately \$48 billion in the first 10 months of the current year, marking an 18% increase compared to the same period last year.

According to a report by the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, the country's total foreign trade during this period amounted to 158.18 million tons, valued at \$103.85 billion.

Out of this total, 127.4 million tons, worth \$47.75 billion, were allocated to exports. This reflects a 12% rise in weight and an 18% growth in value.

China was the largest importer of Iranian non-oil goods, purchasing \$12.3 billion worth of products. Iraq followed with \$10 billion, the United Arab Emirates with \$5.9 billion, and Turkey with \$5.5 billion.

Meanwhile, imports into Iran during this period totaled 30.78 million tons, valued at \$56 billion. This represented a 3% decrease in weight but a 3% increase in value. Key export commodities included natural gas, liquefied propane, methanol, liquefied butane, and bitumen.

Among the major imported goods were \$6.3 billion worth of gold bullion, \$2.3 billion of livestock corn, \$1.8 billion of smartphones, and \$1.6 billion of soybean meal.

The main sources of Iran's imports were the UAE (\$17 billion), China (\$14.4 billion), Turkey (\$9.9 billion), and Germany (\$1.9 billion).

Additionally, by the end of January, Iran had imported 41,297 vehicles worth \$877 million, reflecting a staggering 709% increase in quantity and a 744% surge in value compared to the previous year.

Arab Nations Oppose Removing Palestinians From Gaza

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Five Arab foreign ministers and a senior Palestinian official sent a joint letter to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio opposing plans to displace Palestinians from Gaza, as suggested by President Donald Trump in late January.

The letter was sent on Monday and signed by the foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, as well as Palestinian presidential adviser Hussein al-Sheikh. It was reported first by Axios, which said the top diplomats met in Cairo over the weekend.

Trump first floated the suggestion of Jordan and Egypt taking in Palestinians from Gaza on Jan. 25. When asked if he was suggesting that as a long-term or short-term solution, the president said: "Could be either."



Ukrainian Drone Strikes Trigger Fires at Major Oil and Gas Facilities in Russia



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Ukraine struck energy facilities in southern Russia with dozens of drones launched on Monday, triggering fires at a major oil refinery and gas processing plant and disrupting flights from the Volga to the Caucasus Mountains, Russian and Ukrainian officials said.

Russia's defense ministry said that its air defense units intercepted and destroyed 70 Ukrainian drones over Russian territory overnight, including 25 over the Volgograd region, 27 over the Rostov region and seven over the Astrakhan region.

"The air defense forces of the defense ministry repelled a massive attack by aircraft-type drones on the territory of the Volgograd region," Volgograd Governor Andrei Bocharov said.

Falling drone debris sparked several fires at an oil refinery, he said, though he did not say which refinery was on fire.

Since Russia sent thousands of troops into Ukraine in 2022, Kyiv has tried to fight back against its much bigger neighbour by striking deep into Russia with drones and missiles, and even killing a senior military commander in Moscow.

Russia says the attacks amount to terrorism, are an escalation of the war and that the West aids the attacks with weapons and targeting information.

Ukrainian officials say they have a right to hit back at Russia, as Russia's energy, transport and military infrastructure is key to Moscow's war effort.

Baza, a Russian news Telegram channel that is close to Russia's security services, said a series of explosions were heard in the area around a refinery operated by Russia's second-largest oil producer Lukoil in Volgograd.

The 300,000 barrel-per-day refinery is the largest in southern Russia. In 2023, it processed 13.508 million metric tons of oil, or 4.9% of the total refining volume at Russian refineries.

EU Leaders Agree to Step Up Defense Efforts



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union leaders agreed on Monday to do more to bolster their defenses against Russia and other threats by hiking spending and filling gaps in their military capabilities.

"A lot has been done already but we need to do more. We need to do it better, stronger, faster - and we need to do it together," Antonio Costa, the president of the European Council of EU leaders, said after a summit on defense in Brussels.

However, the leaders left largely unanswered the question of how their planned surge in defense spending would be paid for.

European countries have already ramped up defense spending in recent years, in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and a growing view that they cannot rely so much on the United States to protect the continent in years to come.

Their efforts have been fuelled by questions about U.S. President Donald Trump's commitment to the NATO security alliance and by his demands for European nations to spend more on the continent's defenses.

The start of the EU summit was overshadowed by Trump declaring at the weekend that he will soon impose tariffs on imports from the EU, having ordered similar measures on goods from Canada and Mexico - which were paused on Monday - and from China.

The EU leaders agreed to focus on filling critical gaps in their defenses such as air and missile defense, missiles, ammunition and military transport, Costa told reporters.

Dozens Killed as Fierce Fighting Rages in South and West Sudan

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Fierce fighting in south and west Sudan killed at least 65 people and wounded more than 130 Monday, medics said, as the devastating war between the army and paramilitary forces rages on.

In South Kordofan, artillery fire on the state capital Kadugli killed at least 40 people and wounded 70, according to two medical sources.

The city, controlled by the Sudanese army, was targeted in an attack that Governor Mohamed Ibrahim blamed on a faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), led by Abdel Aziz al-Hilu, which also maintains a foothold in the state.

"Hilu's attack on civilians in Kadugli aims to destabilise" the area, Ibrahim said in a statement to AFP, vowing to "clear the mountains around Kadugli" of rebel forces.

The governor said that the shelling targeted a local market.

SPLM-N has clashed with both the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in different parts of South Kordofan throughout their war.

Sudan has been mired in conflict since April 2023, with battles between the regular army and RSF escalating in recent weeks.

In the vast western region of Darfur, a military air strike on South Darfur's capital, Nyala, killed 25 people and wounded 63 on Monday, a medical source told AFP.

The attack hit "the Cinema District in Nyala", an area under RSF control, the source told AFP, on condition of anonymity over safety concerns.

In a statement on Monday, the RSF accused the army of using "barrel bombs" against civilians in several neighbourhoods in Nyala.

The RSF holds sway over much of Darfur, including Nyala, which lies 195 kilometres (121 miles) from El-Fasher, the besieged capital of North Darfur which is the only state in the region still under army control.



El-Fasher is home to some two million people who have been under RSF siege since May.

The city has seen some of the worst fighting of the war as the army battles to keep its last foothold in the region.

The UN's migration agency said on Monday that more than 600,000 people have been displaced from North Darfur only between April 2024 and January 2025.

The International Organisation for Migration reported 95 incidents across North Darfur, more than half occurring in El-Fasher, during this period.

"These incidents displaced an estimated 605,257 individuals (121,179 households)," the IOM report said.

Monday's attacks in South Kordofan and Darfur also come amid intensified fighting between the army and the RSF in Khartoum, where the army has made advances against the paramilitaries.

Last week, the army broke a siege of its headquarters in the capital and the Signal Corps in Khartoum North, which had both been encircled by the RSF since the war began.

On Saturday, at least 60 people were killed and more than 150 injured when the RSF shelled a busy market in army-controlled Omdurman, part of greater Khartoum.

Across the Nile in the capital itself, an air strike on an RSF-controlled area left two civilians dead and dozens wounded, rescuers said.

Both warring sides have been repeatedly accused of targeting civilians and indiscriminately shelling residential areas.

The war has killed tens of thousands of people, uprooted more than 12 million and devastated Sudan's fragile infrastructure, forcing most health facilities out of service.

Trump Pauses Mexico, Canada Tariffs for One Month After Last-Ditch Talks

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump backed away from his threat to impose steep tariffs on Mexico and Canada on Monday, leaders of those countries said, but U.S. tariffs on China were still due to take effect within hours.

Both Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said they had agreed to bolster border enforcement efforts in response to Trump's demand to crack down on immigration and drug smuggling. That would pause 25% tariffs due to take effect on Tuesday for 30 days, both leaders said.

Trudeau said Canada would deploy new technology and personnel along its border with the United States to stop the flow of fentanyl. There was no immediate confirmation from the White House, but Trump told reporters that a phone call with Trudeau went "very well."

Mexico agreed to reinforce its northern border with 10,000 National Guard members to stem the flow of illegal migration and drugs.

The agreement also includes a U.S. commitment to prevent trafficking of high-powered weapons to Mexico, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said on X.

The two leaders spoke by phone on Monday, just hours before US tariffs on Mexico, China and Canada were set to take effect. Economists say the steep levies would cause widespread economic harm, including increased prices for US businesses and consumers.

The U.S. and Mexico will use the month-long suspension to engage in further negotiations, Trump said on social media.

"I look forward to participating in those negotiations, with President Sheinbaum, as we attempt to achieve a 'deal' between our two Countries," he wrote on Truth Social.

"We have this month to work and convince each other that this is the best way forward," Sheinbaum said at a press conference.

The agreement came less than 48 hours after Trump announced sweeping tariffs on goods from the top three U.S. trading partners, accounting for \$2.1 trillion of annual commerce. The about-face was emblematic of the often chaotic nature of the early days of his second presidency.

Trump warned on Monday he might increase tariffs on Beijing beyond the 10% he



imposed and that he would discuss the matter with the Chinese government's leadership in the next day or so.

"China hopefully is going to stop sending us fentanyl, and if they're not, the tariffs are going to go substantially higher," he said.

The tariffs on China remain poised to begin at 12:01 am on Tuesday (0501 GMT Wednesday).

The latest twist in the saga sent the Canadian dollar soaring after slumping to its lowest in more than two decades. The news also gave US stock index futures a lift after a day of losses on Wall Street.

Trump suggested on Sunday the 27-nation European Union would be his next target, but did not say when.

"They don't take our cars, they don't take our farm products. They take almost nothing and we take everything from them," he told reporters.

EU leaders at an informal summit in Brussels on Monday said Europe would be prepared to fight back if the US imposes tariffs, but also called for reason and negotiation. The US is the EU's largest trade and investment partner.

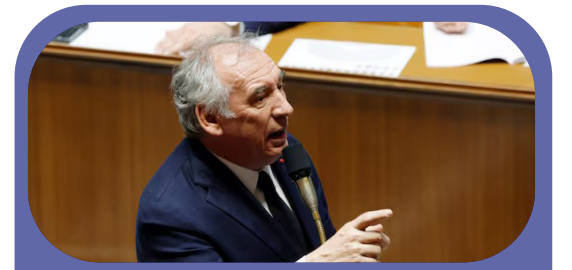
Trump hinted that Britain, which left the EU in 2020, might be spared tariffs, saying: "I think that one can be worked out".

Trump, who acknowledged over the weekend that the tariffs could cause some short-term pain for US consumers, nevertheless has argued the tariffs are needed to curb immigration and narcotics trafficking and spur domestic industries.

Trump's tariffs would cover almost half of all US 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.

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

China called fentanyl America's problem and said it would challenge the tariffs at the World Trade Organization and take other countermeasures, but also left the door open for talks.



French PM Uses Special Constitutional Powers to Force 2025 Budget Through Parliament

PARIS (Dispatches) - Prime Minister Francois Bayrou on Monday moved to force through France's budget without a vote but looked certain to keep his job - for now - thanks to support from the Socialists in the bitterly divided parliament.

Bayrou, a veteran centrist named by President Emmanuel Macron in December to end months of political crisis following last summer's inconclusive legislative elections, is nowhere near having a parliamentary majority.

Bayrou rammed through the budget legislation on Monday using article 49.3 of the constitution, which allows the government to pass laws without a vote. The step immediately prompted a no-confidence motion from the left in the divided parliament.

But even if the far-right National Rally (RN) party decides to back the vote this week, Bayrou appears certain to keep his job for now, after the Socialist Party decided against backing the motion, giving the prime minister a much-needed boost.

"No country can live without a budget," Bayrou told the National Assembly lower house.

"We have spared no effort to break this deadlock", he added, thanking his ministers.

The government is under pressure from the European Commission to bring the country's sprawling deficits and growing debt under control.

A sustainable budget plan for this year is the priority for Bayrou, after the austerity budget plan of his predecessor, Michel Barnier, was jettisoned along with his government in December.

The adoption of the budget will make it possible to limit the deficit to 5.4 percent of GDP, Bayrou said, still one of the widest in the eurozone.

On Monday, he resorted to the tactic twice, to force through the budget as well as the social security budget, and may need to do this again later this week.

The use of article 49.3, while convenient for a minority government, means the opposition has the right to put forward a no-confidence motion to bring the prime minister and his government down.

Saudi Arabia, UAE Seen as Possible Venues for Trump-Putin Summit

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are seen by Russia as possible venues for a summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, two Russian sources with knowledge of the discussions told Reuters.

Trump has said he will end the war in Ukraine as soon as possible and said he is ready to meet with Putin. Putin congratulated Trump on his election and stated he is ready to meet Trump to discuss Ukraine and energy.

Russian officials have repeatedly denied any direct contacts with the U.S. about preparations for a phone call between Trump and Putin, which would precede an eventual meeting later this year.

However, senior Russian officials have visited both Saudi Arabia and the UAE in recent weeks, according to the Russian sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation.

One source said there was still some opposition to the idea in Russia as some diplomats and intelligence officials were pointing to the close military and security links that both the Kingdom and the UAE have with the United States.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE did not respond to requests for comment. The Kremlin declined comment.

But both Trump and Putin have developed friendly relations with rulers of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Trump said on Sunday that his administration had "meetings and talks scheduled with various parties, including Ukraine and Russia." When asked about those remarks, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov



said that contacts were "apparently planned".

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was the first foreign head of state Trump called after taking office. He described the Crown Prince as "a fantastic guy" during his speech via video link to an audience at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Putin, who visited Saudi Arabia and the UAE in 2023, said last September that he was grateful to Mohammed bin Salman for helping to organize the biggest U.S.-Russian prisoner swap since the Cold

War.

Putin and Mohammed bin Salman, also known as MbS, have fostered a close personal relationship since 2015 when the prince visited Russia for the first time.

The relationship has helped the leaders of the world's two biggest oil exporters conclude and maintain the OPEC+ energy deal. Trump called on Saudi Arabia and OPEC to lower oil prices, a potential bargaining chip for Russia in the talks.

Both Mohammed bin Salman and UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan have maintained neutrality throughout the Ukraine war, refraining from joining the West in criticizing and sanctioning Russia.

Both leaders have also maintained regular contacts with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited Russia several times during the war, saying during his last visit in October 2024 that he was ready to support efforts to find peace in Ukraine. The UAE also successfully mediated prisoner exchanges.

Neither country is a member of the International Criminal Court, which issued an arrest warrant for Putin, preventing his visits to a number of countries, including Brazil and South Africa.

At the current stage, the Russian sources dismissed Turkey, a NATO member that hosted failed peace talks between Russia and Ukraine in March 2022, as a possible venue.



Kings Stave off Timberwolves in Close Second Half

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - DeMar DeRozan scored 33 points on 14-for-25 shooting, and the Sacramento Kings held on for a 116-114 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves in Minneapolis.

Malik Monk added 26 points and eight rebounds for Sacramento, which won for only the second time in the past six games. Keegan Murray scored 19 points, and Domantas Sabonis notched a double-double with 14 points and 11 rebounds.

Naz Reid scored 30 points on 12-for-19 shooting to lead Minnesota. Jaden McDaniels scored 22, and Rudy Gobert recorded a double-double with 19 points and 13 boards.

Timberwolves All-Star guard Anthony Edwards struggled in his return from a one-game absence due to an illness. He finished with 21 points but shot 7 of 21 from the field and 3 of 10 from beyond the arc.

Monk made a pair of free throws to put the Kings on top 112-108 with 17.2 seconds left. On the next possession, Mike Conley drained a 3-pointer to pull Minnesota within 112-111 with 9.1 seconds to go.

Monk delivered again with two free throws to make it 114-111 with 6.1 seconds left. Sabonis added two more free throws to increase the lead to five points with 5.0 seconds remaining.

Edwards hit a 3-pointer just before the buzzer but it was too little, too late. Minnesota trailed by as many as 10 points in the third quarter. The Timberwolves rallied to even the score at 77-all after Edwards sank a shot with 5:12 left in the session.

Sacramento led 67-59 at the half.

The Kings increased their lead with a 9-0 run late in the first half. Sabonis started the run with back-to-back shots, Keon Ellis added a basket, DeRozan made a technical free throw and Monk hit a floating jump shot to cap it off.

Gobert made the final basket of the first half to cut the deficit to eight.

Sacramento played its first game since sending eight-year veteran De'Aaron Fox to the San Antonio Spurs in a three-team trade. The Kings received a package of players and picks including Zach LaVine from the Chicago Bulls, but LaVine did not play Monday.

Meanwhile Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 34 points to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 125-96 home win over the Milwaukee Bucks in a battle of short-handed teams.

Playing on the second night of a back-to-back, the Bucks were without Giannis Antetokounmpo, Damian Lillard, Khris Middleton, Brook Lopez and Bobby Portis.

The Thunder were without Jalen Williams, Cason Wallace and Alex Caruso.

The absences took a bit of the shine off the rematch of December's NBA Cup final, which Milwaukee won in Las Vegas.

But Oklahoma City has largely rolled through its schedule even with key players out, and they wasted no time jumping out to a big lead thanks to Gilgeous-Alexander.

In that Dec. 17 loss, which doesn't count in the regular-season standings, Gilgeous-Alexander was just 8 of 24 from the field for 21 points - only three points more than his fewest total of the season.

On Monday, the Thunder star went 9 of 11 shooting in the first quarter to get 21 points. Oklahoma City jumped ahead by as much as 20 in the period.

By halftime, Gilgeous-Alexander had 30 as the Thunder's lead ballooned to 34.

By late in the third quarter, Gilgeous-Alexander was on the bench, his night completed as Oklahoma City had the game well in hand.

Gilgeous-Alexander finished 15 of 19 from the field with six assists in less than 23 minutes, his fewest of the season by more than five minutes.

Philadelphia Eagles' and Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl Playoff History and Wins



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Kansas City Chiefs are chasing an unprecedented third consecutive Super Bowl crown, while the Philadelphia Eagles are eyeing a second title overall in the NFL's championship game on Feb. 9 in New Orleans.

The clash will be a rematch of Super Bowl LVIII in 2023 when the Chiefs defeated the Eagles 38-35.

The Eagles have played 54 playoff games (28-26) since being founded 91 years ago, winning their only Super Bowl in 2018 when they beat the New England Patriots.

The Chiefs have played 47 playoff games (26-21) since their formation in 1959, winning four Super Bowls - the third highest in the league's history alongside the New York Giants and Green Bay Packers.

The Eagles' latest Super Bowl appearance came in 2023 when they let a 10-point halftime lead slip through their fingers as the Chiefs triumphed 38-35 at Super Bowl 57.

The Chiefs will make their fifth trip to the NFL title decider in six years and could become the first team to hoist the Vince Lombardi Trophy three years in a row if they beat the Eagles, having beaten the San Francisco 49ers last year.

The Eagles have played in four Super Bowls in their history, losing three.

The Chiefs hold a commanding 4-2 record in six Super Bowls.

In 2018, the Eagles delivered an inspiring script by upsetting the then defending champions the Patriots with a 41-33 victory to clinch their only Super Bowl title, completing a remarkable turnaround after finishing last in their division in the 2016-17 season.

Shiffrin and Vonn Seek Records in Saalbach



SAALBACH-HINTERGLEMM (Dispatches) - U.S. team mates Mikaela Shiffrin and Lindsey Vonn, the two most successful female World Cup Alpine skiers of all time, can add to their records at the world championships starting in Saalbach today.

Shiffrin, with an unmatched 99 World Cup wins to her credit, will become the most decorated world championship skier if she can add two more to her tally of 14 which includes a record seven golds.

Germany's Christl Kranz won 15 medals between 1934-39 when championships were held annually.

Shiffrin is already the most decorated American world championship skier and has won gold at the last six championships, the sport's biggest event outside of the Winter Olympics.

The 29-year-old is coming back from injury, however, and finished 10th in a night slalom last week after a two-month absence caused by a crash in a giant slalom race in Killington, Vermont. She has sounded uncertain about her form.

"It's very much a step-by-step process, and this return to competition is part of the recovery," she said after that race in Courchevel.

"It actually doesn't even mean I'm recovered or I'm back to 100%. It means that we've gotten far enough in the recovery now that I'm strong enough physically, and I've had enough turns of slalom, to feel comfortable to push out of the start gate."

Another slalom gold would be record fifth in the discipline for the American.

Vonn, coming out of retirement at the age of 40 with an eye on next year's Milan-Cortina Olympics, is already the oldest female skier to medal at a world championships - a 2019 downhill bronze at age 34 that took her tally to eight.

The 82 times World Cup race winner finished fourth in a Super-G race in St. Anton, Austria, last month and sixth in a downhill in the same resort.

She and Shiffrin could feature together in the new team combined event on Feb. 11 but both Americans face strong opponents who are on form and fancy their chances.

Croatia's Zrinka Lusic has won three of the last four World Cup slaloms and is a former world junior champion in the discipline.

Italy's Federica Brignone and Sofia Goggia, the 2018 Olympic downhill champion, will be leading contenders in the speed disciplines.

Swiss all-rounder Marco Odermatt is the standout skier on the men's side and is bidding to defend his downhill and giant slalom titles from 2023.

Chelsea Stun West Ham With Late Comeback to Spoil Potter's Stamford Bridge Return

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea staged a stirring fightback to ruin Graham Potter's return to Stamford Bridge and climb to fourth place in the Premier League with a 2-1 win against West Ham.

Hammers boss Potter was hoping for a victory over the club that sacked him in 2023 after just seven months in charge.

Jarrod Bowen gave West Ham the lead in the first half on his return to action after fracturing his foot in late December.

But Chelsea recovered from a listless start to equalise through Pedro Neto after the interval before Aaron Wan-Bissaka's late own goal shattered Potter's revenge mission.

Chelsea moved two points above Manchester City and Newcastle in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top-four finish.

It was the first time they had taken three points in a home league game after trailing at half-time since 2013.

Chelsea's second win in eight league matches was a welcome boost for Enzo Maresca after the Blues boss complained that the transfer window was distracting his players.

Joao Felix had been linked with AC Milan and Axel Disasi drew interest from Aston Villa, while Ben Chilwell emerged as a Crystal Palace target and Borussia Dortmund eyed Carney Chukwuemeka.

Maresca will have been relieved to see Chelsea finally ignore the speculation on the day the January window closed. Potter insisted being axed by Chelsea after winning just 12 of his 31 games could be "the best thing that happens to me".

The 49-year-old returned to management last month at West Ham and almost two years on from his Chelsea

dismissal, he made his first return to the Bridge.

But there was no happy ending for Potter as Maresca beat his former West Brom team-mate.

West Ham have won once in five games in all competitions since Potter took charge, but sit 10 points clear of the relegation zone.

Potter was tasked with driving Maresca to training every day during their time together in the 1990s and once again he was played second fiddle to the Italian.

Maresca had dropped Robert Sanchez and brought in Filip Jorgensen after the Spanish goalkeeper's latest costly error in the defeat at Manchester City last weekend.

The 22-year-old settled any nerves with a good save from Bowen's low drive.

Mohammed Kudus was impactful for West Ham, the Ghana winger breaking clear for a powerful effort that forced a save from Jorgensen.

It was a warning Chelsea failed to heed as the Hammers snatched the lead in the 42nd minute.



Alcaraz Hails Sinner's Performance

MADRID (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz said he has no doubt that top-ranked Jannik Sinner is the best player in the world on current form as the two young players continue to lay the foundations for an epic rivalry.

Alcaraz, the 21-year-old world number three, won the French Open and Wimbledon titles last year, splitting the four Grand Slam tournaments with 23-year-old Sinner.

The Spaniard also improved his head-to-head record with the Italian to 6-4, beating Sinner three times in as many meetings.

Sinner, meanwhile, won 73 of his 79 matches last year including the U.S. Open and the Australian Open, which he successfully defended at Melbourne Park last month.

"Jannik is the best right now," Alcaraz told reporters in Rotterdam on Sunday.

"He has lost only four or five matches in the past year, so it's crazy. I know people say who's better out of us. They say Jannik is better or some say me. It's all discussion.

"But for me, I think for a tennis player, we have to face Jannik and he's winning everything. He's focused every time, so I think he's the best. Every tournament he plays, he makes the final or lifts the trophy."

Alcaraz returns to action in Rotterdam after his quarter-final loss to 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic at the

Australian Open ended his bid to become the youngest player to capture all four major titles.

"I don't feel that it was a missed opportunity against Novak," added Alcaraz, who won the U.S. Open in 2022.

"I really wanted to win the tournament and felt I was able to, but Novak played an unbelievable match. Facing Novak in the quarter-finals at a Grand Slam is the worst thing.

"It was a pretty good match. I've tried to take the good things about that match and will look ahead now."



Top seed Alcaraz begins his Rotterdam campaign against Dutch wild card Botic van de Zandschulp, who beat him in the second round at the U.S. Open in August.

Meanwhile Veronika Kudermetova saved a match point before completing a rally to take down Russian countrywoman and fifth seed Liudmila Samsonova 5-7, 6-1, 7-6 (5) in nearly three hours in the first round of the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open.

Kudermetova saved 11 of 16 break points while converting 6 of 9 chances to break Samsonova's serve. Down 5-4 in the third set, Kudermetova stayed alive by saving a match point and going on to win the 10th game, which flipped momentum in her favor. She won the first four points of the tiebreaker en route to victory.

The other four matches Monday did not involve seeded players. New Zealand's Lulu Sun breezed past France's Caroline Garcia 6-1, 6-3, while Wakana Sonobe of Japan beat Yue Yuan of China 6-4, 6-3.

A pair of Americans also advanced in three sets. Ashlyn Krueger defeated countrywoman McCartney Kessler 6-3, 6-7 (4), 6-3, while Katie Volynets topped Great Britain's Sonay Kartal 3-6, 6-4, 6-4.