

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei Has Authorized the Full Or Partial Pardoning of Over 3,000 Convicts on the 46th Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution

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Trump Has Realized Real Power of Iran



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has reacted to US President Donald Trump's remarks about Iran, saying they show he has discerned the country's real power.

Speaking alongside Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Oval Office on Wednesday, Trump took exception to the idea that Iran is currently weak. "They are not weak. They're very strong right now," he said.

Speaking to reporters in Bandar Abbas Thursday, IRGC chief Major General Hossein Salami said, "This is one of Trump's most accurate observations, because he has looked at the arena realistically."

"In a wrestling match, the opposite side understands power better. When two wrestlers come to grips, each can better understand the other's power," he added.

Salami said Trump's judgment is in fact based on his realization of Iran's might during his first term in office, when the Islamic Republic responded to the US assassination of Gen. Qassem Soleimani with a massive missile attack on American troops in Iraq.

"He has made an absolutely correct assessment. Iran has not weakened; rather, it has become much stronger than before, which everyone can clearly see," Salami said.

Commenting on Trump's restoration of the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign, the IRGC chief commander said such anti-Iran pressures also existed during his first tenure of Trump aimed at choking off the Islamic Republic economic lifelines, the result of which was "further prosperity of our national economy."

The IRGC chief commander hailed Iran's scientific and technological advances. "The youth and the Iranian nation, under the great leadership of the Islamic establishment, have realized that they must strengthen themselves to neutralize the sanctions," he said.

He also touched on Iran's countless indigenous capabilities, saying the country's strategy in the face of the "maximum pressure" campaign is maximum production, endeavors, determination, and resistance.

Iran, Gen. Salami said, is a great country that never surrenders to foreign pressure, adding it will continue to strengthen its defense and economic power and stand firm against any threat.

New Drone Carrier Shahid Bagheri Joins IRGC Fleet in Persian Gulf



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's new homegrown drone carrier has joined the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' (IRGC) naval fleet in the Persian Gulf.

The IRIS Shahid Bagheri named after Bahman Bagheri, an IRGC commander martyred in the 1980s war with Iraq, joined the force's naval fleet during a ceremony in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas on Thursday.

Equipped with a 180-meter-long runway, the Shahid Bagheri serves as a mobile naval platform for drone and helicopter missions in the oceans.

It is capable of carrying several squadrons of unmanned aircraft, using various types of patrol and combat drones, launching and retrieving light and fast combat vessels, and carrying different kinds of combat and support choppers.

Speaking at the event, Commander of the IRGC Navy Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said it took two years to convert a commercial ship to the drone carrier.

An operational range of 22,000 nautical miles enables the carrier to conduct missions for a whole year in distant waters without the need to refuel, he added.

Tangsiri also noted that the carrier can engage with various types of small aircraft and air defense missiles as it is equipped with short- and medium-range air defense systems, as well as intelligence equipment and a flight control tower.

In addition to detecting electronic signals, the carrier can further carry and employ guided subsurface vessels, along with long-range surface-to-surface cannons and cruise missiles.



Negotiations With U.S. Have No Effect on Solving Problems

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says experience has shown that negotiations with the U.S. have no effect on solving Iran's problems.

His remarks in a meeting with Air Force personnel in Tehran on Friday came hours after the U.S. imposed its first sanctions in the wake of President Donald Trump's signing of an order to reimpose his "maximum pressure" on Iran.

"Negotiations with the U.S. have no effect on solving the country's problems, we must get this right," Ayatollah Khamenei said, citing the withdrawal from a nuclear deal with Iran by the Americans.

"They should not pretend to us that if we sit at the negotiating table with that government, the problems will be solved. No; negotiating with the US will not solve any problems. The reason? Experience!"

In 2015, Iran and six other countries, including the U.S., signed the now-dormant Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) after two years of negotiations, only to be discarded by President Trump.

Ayatollah Khamenei recalled the grueling back and forth, which included a 15-minute stroll by then-U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Mohammad Javad Zarif in downtown Geneva and along the Rhone River which landed the former Iranian foreign minister in hot water.

"Our government at the time sat down and negotiated - they continued to come and go, they sat down and stood up and negotiated, they talked, laughed, shook hands, made friends, everyone worked, and a treaty was formed.

"In this treaty, the Iranian side was very generous, giving many concessions to the other side. But the Americans did not implement the same treaty," the Leader said.

"The same person who is in office now tore up the treaty. He said he would tear it down and he did; they didn't act upon" the agreement, he said, referring to Trump.

Neither did the successors of the Trump administration implement the agreement, Ayatollah Khamenei added.

"The treaty was meant to lift U.S. sanctions, but they were not lifted. Adding insult to injury, they had the UN to have a constant threat hanging over Iran. This treaty was the product of negotiations that lasted about two years."

Iran is currently in the midst of celebrations marking the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution which sealed the fate of the U.S.-backed Pahlavi regime in 1979.

Every year on February 8, Iranian Air Force personnel meet the Leader to relive the historic allegiance of Air Force officers with the late founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini in 1979. The event is viewed as a turning point which led to the victory of the Islamic Revolution three days later.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the Americans are busy working "on paper to change the map of the world", with Iran also being the subject of their plans.

"Of course, it's only on paper, it has no reality. They also talk about us, make comments, and threaten us," the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei said, "If they threaten us, we will threaten them. If they put their threat into practice, we will do the same. If they attack the security of our nation, we will attack their security without hesitation."

"This is a lesson taken from the Qur'an and the teachings of Islam, and it is our duty to act as such. We hope that God Almighty will make us successful in carrying out our duties," he added.

President Affirms Nuclear Weapons Have No Place in National Doctrine

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has reaffirmed that the Islamic Republic does not seek nuclear weapons, emphasizing that such an approach is against the principles of the country's leadership and doctrine. Speaking at the "Salam, Ambassadors" event on Thursday, attended by over 100 ambassadors and representatives of international organizations in Tehran, Pezeshkian underscored Iran's commitment to peace, justice, and security in the region.

Addressing the gathering in honor of the 46th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Pezeshkian highlighted that the revolution was founded on eliminating discrimination and injustice. He stressed that the Islamic Republic upholds equality, rejecting any form of bias based on ethnicity, gender, or societal status.

"From the very beginning, the Islamic Revolution has been a victim of terrorism. Those who opposed our independence targeted our political, religious, and cultural figures, assassinating presidents, parliament members, and clerics. Ironically, the same entities that supported terrorists labeled us as terrorists," Pezeshkian stated.

The Iranian president asserted that the revolution was not aimed at war or conflict but at ensuring the nation's freedom and progress based on merit and ability. He recalled how, shortly after the revolution, Iran faced an imposed war, with many global powers backing its adversaries. However, he praised the resilience of the Iranian people, who defended their country despite limited resources.

He condemned the assassination of senior Palestinian leader Ismail Haniyeh on the night of his presidential inauguration, emphasizing that Iran has always promoted friendship, brotherhood, and mutual assistance. Pezeshkian criticized global media for unfairly portraying Iran as a source of regional instability, despite Iran's consistent humanitarian stance.

"The same powers that claim to uphold human rights have remained silent as nearly 14,000 Palestinian children have been killed in Gaza. They talk of justice, yet allow hospitals to be destroyed and civilians to be massacred. What kind of human rights tolerate such atrocities?" he questioned.

Pezeshkian reiterated Iran's stance on nuclear weapons, stating that the country has no interest in developing them. "War is not in our interest. Possessing nuclear weapons goes against the fatwa (religious decree) of our Supreme Leader. Even those who claim otherwise within Iran cannot push us towards nuclear arms, as the mass killing of innocent people has no place in the doctrine of the Islamic Republic."

The president also criticized Israel, accusing it of aggression against regional countries while



simultaneously raising concerns about Iran's nuclear activities. He reminded the audience that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has had unrestricted access to inspect Iran's nuclear facilities multiple times and is welcome to conduct further inspections.

"Who expelled the Palestinians from their own land? What kind of human rights allow people to be forcibly removed from their homes? Israel has displaced millions of Palestinians, yet when they resist, they are labeled terrorists. Any free-thinking human being would stand up for their rights," he asserted.

Pezeshkian emphasized that global peace and stability can only be achieved through respect for human rights, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. He reaffirmed Iran's commitment to supporting oppressed people, particularly Palestinians, and emphasized that injustice and oppression cannot endure.

"True peace comes from justice, equality, and brotherhood—not from war and bloodshed. Humanity will always rise against oppression. We seek friendship and open communication with all nations to share experiences and collaborate in preserving this planet for future generations."

The president expressed Iran's willingness to maintain friendly and respectful relations with all countries, emphasizing that war and discrimination are against human nature. While acknowledging the presence of inequality within Iran, he pledged to continue working towards eliminating injustice so that all citizens can thrive based on their abilities and efforts.

He called on the international community to engage with Iran in a manner based on mutual respect and dialogue. "We have strategic agreements with Russia and China and are open to similar partnerships with other countries—provided that the relationships are based on equality and mutual respect."

In conclusion, Pezeshkian expressed hope that the presence of ambassadors and international representatives in Iran would lead to stronger diplomatic relations, fostering regional and global peace.

At the event's outset, the Lebanese ambassador congratulated Iran on the anniversary of the revolution on behalf of the diplomatic community. Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi also outlined the government's foreign policy priorities. Following the president's address, ambassadors and international representatives personally extended their congratulations on the occasion of the revolution's anniversary.

Iran Condemns Illegitimate U.S. Sanctions Targeting Oil Exports



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has strongly condemned new sanctions slapped by the administration of US President Donald Trump on the country's oil industry, saying they run contrary to international rules and standards.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei denounced the bans as "completely unjustified" on Friday.

The remarks came a day after the US Treasury Department targeted more than a dozen individuals and companies, as well as vessels, claiming that they are facilitating the shipment of millions of barrels of Iranian oil to China.

The sanctions were the first on Iran after Trump restored his so-called "maximum pressure" campaign on the country.

"The decision of the new US administration to put pressure on the Iranian nation by preventing Iran's legitimate trade with its economic partners is an illegitimate, illegal and wrongful act, whose responsibility lies on the US government," Baghaei added.

"The Islamic Republic holds the US accountable for the consequences of such unilateral and bullying measures."

On Tuesday, Trump signed the presidential memorandum reimposing a tough anti-Iran policy, which he practiced in his first presidential term after unilaterally withdrawing Washington from the historic 2015 nuclear deal.

In an X post, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi called Trump's measure a failed experience.

He said the decision to restore maximum pressure policy will only compel "maximum resistance" on the part of Iran again, adding, "Smart people ought to choose 'Maximum Wisdom' instead."

During his campaign trail for a second term, Trump had stated at an event in New York in September that, if re-elected, he would minimize the use of sanctions. He argued that employing sanctions excessively "kills your dollar and it kills everything the dollar represents."

Iran Seeks Powerful Presence in High Seas to Ensure Security



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's top general says the Islamic Republic plans to continue its powerful presence in high seas in accordance with international regulations to ensure shipping security.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri made the remark during the launching ceremony of a new homegrown drone carrier - dubbed Shahid Bahman Bagheri - which joined the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' (IRGC) naval fleet in the Persian Gulf on Thursday.

"Just like foreign naval ships that operate close to our territorial waters, citing international maritime law, we also reserve the right under international law to have presence in the international waters and right up to the edge of territorial waters of all coasts likewise," he said.

He added that Iran's plan to continue operating in high seas is aimed at ensuring the country's security and preserving full security for Iranian shipping lines.

He emphasized that Iranian vessels like the recently launched Bahman Bagheri can ensure the security of the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman while maintaining sustainable security for shipping routes in a large part of the northern and western halves of the Indian Ocean.

The top Iranian commander hailed the country's remarkable progress over the past 46 years despite all pressures, and reiterated that such capabilities pose no threat to the neighboring and regional countries.

Baqeri said that Iranian scientists and knowledge-based firms are currently capable of producing more than 90 percent of defense and military equipment, adding that the country needs no foreign help in this regard.

He stressed the importance of boosting the country's power in order to safeguard national independence and sovereignty.

The top general said Iran, which enjoys an exceptional geographical position and has a great and brave nation, will certainly be able to "turn into a big power in the region and a prominent power at the global level."

IRAN NEWS



Iran, Qatar Sign Agreement to Expand Aviation Cooperation

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran and Qatar signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on aviation cooperation Thursday, aimed at increasing air transport between the two countries.

The agreement was signed by Hossein Pourfarzaneh, head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization, and Mohammed Faleh Al-Hajri, head of Qatar's Civil Aviation Authority.

The signing ceremony was organized with the efforts of Ali Salehabadi, Iran's ambassador to Qatar, as part of Iran's initiative to strengthen aviation relations and expand its international flight network.

Following the signing, both sides discussed mechanisms to resolve operational challenges for airlines from both countries and explored ways to enhance cooperation in air transportation. They also exchanged views on several issues related to civil aviation.

Pakistan Embassy in Tehran Observe Kashmir Solidarity Day



TEHRAN - To commemorate the Kashmir Solidarity Day, the Embassy of Pakistan in Tehran organized an event today to express unwavering support of the people and Government of Pakistan for the Kashmiri people in their just struggle against the continued Indian illegal occupation of Jammu & Kashmir. Large number of media persons and senior officers of Embassy participated in the event.

On the occasion, the messages of the President of Pakistan, Mr. Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Shehbaz Sharif were readout.

Ambassador of Pakistan in Tehran, H.E. Muhammad Mudassar Tipu, highlighted that Kashmiris have been under illegal occupation since decades, this is really horrifying. Pakistan celebrates the Kashmir solidarity day every year to support the just struggle of Kashmiri brothers. While comparing the Kashmiri struggle with Middle East situation, he added that the timely and justly solving such situations help mitigate the conflicts.

The Ambassador further added that both Iran and Kashmir have ability to speak and express the truth. The efforts of Iran to highlight the Palestine issue and sensitize the entire Muslim Ummah is commendable. H.E., Ambassador reiterated Pakistan's call to the world leaders, international community including the United Nations, and all human rights organizations to urge India to halt the brute use of force against the innocent Kashmiri people and resolve the Kashmir Dispute as per the charter of the United Nations and various UNSC Resolutions and aspirations of the people. The Ambassador thanked the Iranian leadership and civil society for their continued support to the Kashmir cause.

A photo exhibition was also arranged by the Embassy to highlight the atrocities of Indian Army.

Agricultural Exports Witness 35% Growth in Nine Months



TEHRAN - Minister of Agriculture, Gholamreza Nouri Qazalfeh, announced that agricultural exports have increased by more than 35% in the first nine months of the year 1403 (Persian calendar) compared to the same period last year.

Speaking at the National Assembly of the Supreme Council of Provinces on Thursday, Nouri emphasized the significant role of the people in Iran's Islamic Revolution, highlighting that the country's constitution remains one of the most progressive globally. Despite its potential, he noted that Iran has yet to fully utilize the depth of its constitutional capacities.

Nouri revealed that various agricultural projects amounting to over 250 trillion rials, creating 114,000 job opportunities, will be inaugurated during this year's anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. He acknowledged the improvements made since the revolution, particularly in expanding services to underprivileged rural areas. However, he stressed the need for further efforts to enhance the quality of life for the people.

Highlighting his ministry's achievements, Nouri stated that in the last nine months, agricultural exports exceeded the 35% growth mark. He recalled a time when agricultural products were wasted due to a lack of proper planning. Now, with better management, these products are exported, contributing to the country's foreign exchange earnings.

Discussing specific exports, he mentioned that Iran's kiwi, previously under sanctions, has now successfully entered international markets. However, he acknowledged that this led to a price hike in the domestic market, necessitating a review of export policies to ensure affordability for local consumers.

Nouri also addressed concerns over self-imposed restrictions on certain agricultural products, such as pistachios, stating that despite initial fears, pistachio exports have more than doubled. "These successes are the result of strategic planning and did not happen by chance," he added.

The minister emphasized that Iran has significantly reduced its imports of essential commodities like tea and rice. He defended recent pricing policies, including setting higher prices for high-quality rice and raw silk, arguing that these measures support local farmers. He further explained that importers are now required to purchase domestic products before receiving import quotas, ensuring fair market competition and protecting local industries.

Nouri reassured that outstanding payments to farmers for wheat, rapeseed, and soybeans from the past three years have been settled. He also highlighted the establishment of a stable pricing system for saffron through the commodities exchange, ensuring that farmers receive fair prices for their produce.

Addressing food security concerns, he noted that despite fluctuations in international markets and currency exchange rates, the government has successfully stabilized domestic prices. For instance, red meat prices have remained within a $\pm 1.4\%$ range, while chicken prices have fluctuated by only $\pm 3\%$ over the past year, ensuring market stability.

Nouri condemned unfair pricing practices, particularly in the retail sector. He cited examples where fruits like apples and oranges were purchased at wholesale markets for 36,000-30,000 rials per kilogram but were later sold at retail stores for nearly double the price. He called for stricter oversight, stating that it is unfair for farmers, who work tirelessly for a year, to earn only a 30% profit while retailers demand a 120% markup.

Regarding concerns over high rice prices, he dismissed rumors of 200,000 rial per kilogram rice as misinformation. Investigations revealed that some traders attempted to manipulate prices in anticipation of increased demand ahead of the New Year. However, he assured that there was no official confirmation of such high prices in Tehran's major markets.

Nouri warned that while fair trade practices are encouraged, the government will take firm action against those who attempt to manipulate food prices for personal gain. He cited the recent potato price surge as an example, attributing it to middlemen seeking higher profits. While the government has the authority to intervene, outright bans on exports are not permitted by law. Instead, temporary control measures were applied to stabilize the market.

He acknowledged supply issues with butter and potatoes earlier this year, but assured that coordinated efforts with industry stakeholders helped restore market balance. "We must ensure that neither farmers nor consumers are exploited," he said.

Concluding his remarks, the minister emphasized that the Agriculture Ministry is committed to supporting local producers while maintaining food affordability for the public. He vowed to crack down on any market disruptions that threaten economic stability and the livelihoods of Iranian farmers.

Caspian Sea's Economic, Security, and Energy Importance Highlighted in Coordination Meeting



TEHRAN - The Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) emphasized the strategic significance of the Caspian Sea in economic, security, and energy sectors during a coordination meeting for the upcoming Caspian Economic Conference.

The third Caspian Economic Conference will take place in Tehran on February 18-19 with the participation of prime ministers, ministers, and deputy ministers from the Caspian littoral states. The TPO has been assigned the responsibility of organizing the event, structuring its working groups, and managing its panel discussions.

A preparatory meeting for the conference was held at the Persian Gulf Pearl Hall at Tehran's International Exhibitions Center, attended by Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade and Head of the TPO, alongside Akbar Godari, Director General for Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia at the TPO.

Dehghan Dehnavi stated that the two-day conference will be coordinated by the TPO, while the Presidency of Iran will oversee the high-level meeting of prime ministers. He added that the event structure includes seven panel discussions, each led by different governmental organizations, requiring collaboration among multiple institutions.

Emphasizing the importance of rich and substantive content for the conference panels, he called for in-depth discussions on key regional matters.

Godari further highlighted the Caspian Sea's critical role for Iran and neighboring countries in economic, political, security, and energy aspects. He noted that previous editions of the conference were held in Turkmenistan and Russia and that Iran aims to host this year's event with a similar approach.

Iran's Exports to Oman Reach \$1.146b



TEHRAN - Iran exported approximately \$1.146 billion worth of goods to Oman in the first nine months of this year, marking a 15% increase compared to the same period last year, according to the Director General of the West Asia Office at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, Abdolamir Rabihavi.

Rabihavi highlighted the recent Iran-Oman Joint Economic Cooperation Commission and revealed that imports from Oman to Iran stood at \$631 million, reflecting a 9% decline compared to the same period last year.

He pointed to recent discussions between Iran's Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade, Seyed Mohammad Atabak, and Omani officials in Muscat, stating that both countries are working towards setting a new record in trade volume by the end of this year.

On January 23, Minister Atabak led a delegation of government officials, traders, and private sector representatives to Oman for the 21st Iran-Oman Joint Economic Commission meeting. The commission addressed multiple trade and logistics issues, leading to significant agreements that had been under discussion for a year.

One of the key achievements, according to Rabihavi, was greater involvement of the private sector, facilitated by coordination between the Iran Chamber of Commerce and the Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce.

The bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the commission included visits to industrial and investment sites in Oman, providing Iranian businesses with a clearer picture of investment opportunities and market conditions in the country.

Discussions focused on trade volume expansion, customs and visa facilitation for traders, maritime transit, and using Iran as a logistics hub for Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) exports to Oman.

Furthermore, Iran and Oman signed a cooperation agreement, following separate meetings between Atabak and Oman's Minister of Transport, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and the Chairman of Oman's Investment Authority.

Rabihavi also revealed that negotiations on a preferential trade agreement are ongoing, with efforts to finalize the agreement, which could lower customs tariffs and facilitate trade between the two nations. A follow-up visit is scheduled within the next two weeks to finalize the deal.

He emphasized that if these agreements are fully implemented, trade between Iran and Oman could see significant growth. Additionally, Oman's free trade agreements with Gulf countries could allow Iranian goods to be re-exported through Oman, maximizing trade potential.

Iran's Stock Market Must Expand Beyond \$100b

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) has emphasized that the country's stock market, currently valued at around \$100 billion, does not reflect the true potential of Iran's economy. Speaking at the seasonal conference of the Brokers Association, Hajjatollah Seydi outlined the need for rapid expansion through the inclusion of major state-owned companies.

Seydi stated that entities such as the National Iranian Oil Company and South Pars Gas Company have the potential to enter the capital market in the shortest possible time. He stressed that the participation of large enterprises would be instrumental in expanding the stock market and enhancing economic growth.

He also highlighted the role of brokerage firms, describing them as the oldest financial institutions in the country. Acknowledging the challenges they face, he asserted that these firms must become stronger and more efficient. To support their growth, he called for sustainable and sufficient revenue streams, particularly through fair pricing mechanisms.

"The main challenge for all businesses is pricing. Fees must be set in a way that neither discourages clients nor undermines the profitability of brokerage firms," he noted. To address this issue, he appointed a special committee to examine brokerage commissions and revenue structures.

Seydi also expressed strong support for asset tokenization, a process that digitizes ownership rights using blockchain technology. He stated that relevant departments within the SEO are actively evaluating this initiative.

"We need to set a timeline for launching the first asset-backed digital fund. There are no significant obstacles in this regard, and the sooner we implement this, the better," he remarked. He suggested that digital assets could play a crucial role in enhancing market liquidity and attracting more investors.

A key theme of Seydi's speech was the need to grow Iran's stock market to a valuation between \$300 billion and \$400 billion. He



emphasized that this expansion is achievable through increasing the number of listed companies and introducing new financial instruments.

"There are many companies in Iran's economy whose shareholders, including the government and major stakeholders, are willing to take them public. If both large state-owned assets and private sector holdings enter the stock exchange, the number of listed companies will rise, financial tools will diversify, trading volumes will grow, and investment risks will decrease," he explained.

Seydi emphasized that bringing large companies to the stock market would improve their performance, ensure accurate valuation, and introduce innovative investment tools. Ultimately, the goal is to align the market's total value with Iran's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

On the international front, he revealed that Iranian officials are making progress in resolving key global financial concerns. Specifically, he noted advancements in addressing the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regulations and negotiations aimed at lifting economic sanctions.

"Authorities have reached significant conclusions regarding international financial issues. The discussions on resolving FATF-related matters and lifting sanctions have become more serious. I firmly believe that our economic success is tied to the expansion of the capital market," he stated.

He reiterated that a \$100 billion stock market is insufficient for Iran's economic stature. "We have major companies such as the National Iranian Oil Company and South Pars Gas Company, which represent vast wealth resources. They can and should enter the capital market," he concluded.

The call for an expanded capital market reflects Iran's broader strategy to strengthen its financial sector, attract investment, and mitigate economic uncertainties. With significant policy shifts on the horizon, the country's stock market may be poised for substantial growth in the coming years.

Unilateral Sanctions Destabilizing Global Oil Markets



TEHRAN - Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad has warned that unilateral sanctions against major oil producers are causing instability in global oil markets and harming consumers worldwide.

Speaking in Tehran during a meeting with OPEC Secretary-General Haitham Al-Ghais and his delegation, Paknejad emphasized the need to depoliticize the oil market, calling it a critical factor for energy security. He stated that placing pressure on OPEC and its members through sanctions disrupts energy markets and creates economic uncertainty.

According to Iran's Ministry of Oil, Paknejad highlighted the historical role of OPEC+ in stabilizing oil markets and supporting global economic growth. He praised the organization's efforts in fostering cooperation between oil producers and engaging constructively with energy consumers worldwide.

"The OPEC and non-OPEC cooperation agreement was built on fundamental principles of stability and has created exemplary relations among oil-producing nations," he added.

As the designated president of the OPEC Conference in 2025, Paknejad reaffirmed Iran's commitment to strengthening ties within OPEC and enhancing cooperation with non-OPEC allies.

He also pointed to investment challenges in both upstream and downstream sectors of the oil industry, warning that political restrictions and regulatory barriers are hindering new investments, which could pose risks to future energy security.

"Iran, as a founding member of OPEC, has always supported the organization's decisions to maintain market stability," Paknejad stated, reiterating Tehran's commitment to reinforcing OPEC unity and ensuring the long-term interests of oil-producing nations.

Greece Declares State of Emergency on Santorini Following Quakes

ATHENS (Dispatches) - Greece has declared a state of emergency on Santorini after a series of earthquakes shook the popular tourist island this week and prompted more than 10,000 residents and workers to evacuate.

Since Sunday, hundreds of near-constant tremors have been recorded in the sea between Santorini and the island of Amorgos, the strongest measuring a magnitude of 5.2 on Wednesday night.

Authorities on Wednesday warned of a high landslide risk on parts of the island. They have shut schools, dispatched rescuers and advised residents to avoid ports and indoor gatherings.

Army, fire service and police units have been deployed to the island.



U.S. seizes Venezuelan Gov't Plane in Dominican Republic



SANTO DOMINGO (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday oversaw the seizure of a Venezuelan government plane in the Dominican Republic.

U.S. authorities had "determined that there is a basis to file a civil forfeiture action to recover the aircraft, based on violations of U.S. sanctions, export controls, and money laundering," the State Department said in a statement.

It is the second Venezuelan plane that the United States has seized in the Dominican Republic in recent months.

On Thursday, Rubio - on the last stop of his Latin American tour this week - watched as a U.S. Department of Homeland Security official affixed a warrant to the plane, formally seizing it. The plane had been undergoing maintenance at a Santo Domingo airport.

The State Department said high-ranking members of the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro had used the Dassault Falcon 200 aircraft for travel to Greece, Turkey, Russia, Nicaragua and Cuba.

During his time as a U.S. Senator, Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants, advocated harsh sanctions on the government of Maduro, an ally of the communist-run Cuban government. Rubio has said this week that the U.S. does not recognize Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate leader.

Last month, U.S. President Donald Trump's envoy Richard Grenell met with Maduro for talks and left Caracas with six Americans who had been detained in Venezuela. He was also pushing Venezuela to accept its nationals that the U.S. wants to deport.

Maduro and his government have always rejected sanctions by the U.S. and others, saying they are illegitimate measures that amount to an "economic war" designed to cripple Venezuela.

France, UAE Agree to Develop 1 Gigawatt AI Data Center



PARIS (Dispatches) - France and the United Arab Emirates agreed on Thursday to a framework accord for a 1 gigawatt data center dedicated to artificial intelligence that represents investments of between \$30-\$50 billion, the French presidency said.

President Emmanuel Macron hosted his Emirati counterpart Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan on Thursday evening ahead of a summit on artificial intelligence in Paris next week that will gather around 100 countries to focus on AI's potential.

The February 10-11 summit also aims to put France and Europe on the AI map as they try to rival the U.S. and China, which have taken a lead on the energy-intensive technology.

"The two leaders expressed their desire to create a strategic partnership in the field of AI and committed to exploring collaborations on projects and investments supporting the development of the AI value chain," a joint Franco-Emirati statement said.

They said the investments would be in both French and Emirati AI, the acquisition of cutting-edge chips, data centres, talent development, as well as the establishment of virtual data embassies to enable the establishment of sovereign AI and cloud infrastructures in both countries.



PANAMA CITY (Dispatches) - Panama rejected the United States' claim of securing free passage for its government vessels through the Panama Canal, while bowing to US pressure to quit a key Chinese project.

Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino told reporters the US assertion about the waterway was "intolerable," adding that he rejected "bilateral relations based on lies and falsehoods."

Since winning the US election in November, President Donald Trump has refused to rule out the use of force to seize the canal built by Washington over a century ago and later handed over to Panama.

Around 40 percent of US container traffic passes through the narrow body of water linking the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean.

The new row between Panama and Washington erupted after the US State Department claimed that Panama had agreed to let American government vessels through the canal for free after talks last weekend between Mulino and Trump's Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

In a post on the social media platform X, the State Department claimed the decision would save the US government "millions of dollars a year."

Speaking yesterday in the Dominican Republic, Rubio argued that it was "absurd" for US naval vessels to have to pay "to transit a zone we are obligated to protect in time of conflict."

He stopped short however of claiming that an agreement had been reached.

The Panama Canal Authority (PCA), an independent body that runs the waterway, said it had "not made any adjustments" to its tariffs but that it was open to dialogue on the matter.

US government vessels—primarily from the navy—make up a small portion of the ships that pass through the canal.

Trump has loudly complained that US vessels are being overcharged to use the shipping route.

Mulino said that US government vessels, including navy vessels, paid "\$6-7 million a year" for the right of passage.

Panama Rejects U.S. Free Passage Claim Over Canal

"It's not as if the canal toll is breaking the economy of the United States," he remarked.

Beyond the tolls, Washington has appeared chiefly concerned about Chinese investment in the 50-mile (80-kilometer) long canal, which handles five percent of global maritime trade.

CK Hutchison Holdings—owned by Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing—has a concession to manage two of the canal's five ports.

Trump, who is scheduled to hold telephone talks on Friday with Mulino, has claimed that Beijing could close the canal to the United States in a crisis—a claim Panama strenuously denies.

But in a key concession to Washington, Mulino yesterday confirmed that Panama had pulled out of China's massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure program.

Mulino said that the Panamanian Embassy in Beijing had given China the required 90-day notice of its decision not to renew its involvement in the program, which it joined in 2017.

Panama is the first Latin American country to announce its withdrawal from President Xi Jinping's signature, trillion-dollar program, which operates in over 100 countries.

On Wednesday, China's Foreign Affairs spokesman, Lin Jian, had argued that the partnership was yielding "fruitful results" and urged Panama to "resist external interferences."

The latest controversy over the Panama Canal comes at the end of Rubio's week-long visit to Central America, his first as the US top diplomat.

He had threatened action against Panama unless it made immediate changes to reduce Chinese influence on the canal but later appeared more conciliatory, hailing Mulino's pledge to quit China's infrastructure program as a "great step forward" for bilateral relations.

Hamas Calls for Urgent Arab Summit, Rejects Trump's Occupation Plan for Gaza

DOHA (Dispatches) - Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem warned that U.S. President Donald Trump's plan to take over Gaza and displace its people was a "declaration of intent to occupy" the Palestinian territory.

The Palestinian militant group also called for "an urgent Arab summit to confront the displacement" of Palestinians from Gaza, Qassem said in a statement.

Trump, meanwhile, doubled down on the shock plan he first announced on Tuesday and on his proposal to resettle two million Palestinians elsewhere in the Middle East.

"The Gaza Strip would be turned over to the United States by Israel at the conclusion of fighting," Trump said on his Truth Social network.



"No soldiers by the US would be needed! Stability for the region would reign!!!"

Hamas's spokesman condemned Trump's statements as "absolutely unacceptable".

"Gaza is for its people and they will not leave," Qassem said.

"We call for the convening of an emergency Arab summit to confront the displacement project," he added.

"Trump's remarks about Washington taking control of Gaza amount to an open declaration of intent to occupy the territory."

"We do not need any country to run the Gaza Strip and we do not accept replacing one occupation with another."

"We call on the Arab peoples and international organisations to take strong action to reject the Trump project."

Ukraine Offers Humanitarian Corridor for Russian Civilians

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said it was ready to open a humanitarian corridor to let hundreds of Russian civilians living in border areas seized by its army return to Russian-controlled territory, if Moscow requests one.

More than 1,500 civilians are still living in areas of Russia's western Kursk region that Ukraine's army seized in a shock cross-border offensive launched in August.

Rare anger at the Russian authorities has since been growing among those who have lost contact with family members believed to be trapped without communication on the other side of the front line.

"We are ready to open a humanitarian corridor from Kursk region to the depths of Russia in response to an official request of the Russian Federation," the office of President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a statement to AFP.

"Apparently, the Russians do not want such a humanitarian corridor, because we have not received a corresponding request from them," the presidency said, accusing Moscow of "indifference" to the fate of its own citizens.

The offer to help facilitate their return comes as Russia said Ukrainian forces had attempted a fresh offensive in Kursk, with Zelensky praising his fighters who have controlled swathes of Russian territory for the last six months.

Russia has been clawing back ground, but Ukraine still occupies dozens of border settlements around the regional hub of Sudzha.

The Kremlin had said earlier Thursday that it was doing "everything" it could, but refused to comment publicly on the idea of a humanitarian corridor.

"This question depends on contacts which are conducted by our militaries. They, of course, cannot be carried out publicly," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"The authorities are doing everything they can to provide help to our citizens, who have found themselves in such a difficult situation due to the aggressive actions of the Kyiv regime," he added.

Peskov was responding to a question about calls from Russian citizens to open some kind of corridor to allow their relatives to return from areas taken under Ukraine's



control.

Kyiv's attack into Russia's Kursk region in August reshaped the nearly three-year war and was the first time a foreign army had taken control of Russian territory since World War II.

In a meeting with the region's governor on Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged the situation was "very difficult" but did not address the growing anger over the fate of missing people.

Zelensky has hailed the operation as an important bargaining chip in future peace talks and said the capture of Russian soldiers there had helped Kyiv secure the return of its

own prisoners of war.

Russia's defence ministry said Thursday that its troops had "foiled" a new "counter-offensive" launched by Ukraine about 10 kilometres (six miles) from the border, to the southeast of the Ukrainian-controlled town of Sudzha.

Russia said Ukraine had deployed two mechanised battalions, tanks and armoured vehicles in the attempted attack.

There has been no comment on the fresh offensive from officials in Kyiv and AFP could not verify Russia's statements or the extent of any fighting.

Zelensky on Thursday praised his troops for the Kursk offensive and issued several army units with state honours.

"The occupier can and should be beaten on its territory," he said in a social media post.

"The Kursk operation clearly explains the meaning of the principle of 'peace through strength'," he said, referring to a message he has been promoting to secure ongoing military support from Ukraine's Western partners.

Ukraine's military said earlier Thursday it had taken 909 Russian soldiers captive during the operation, replenishing what Kyiv calls the "exchange fund" of POWs it can swap for captured Ukrainians.

Thursday marked six months since the start of the offensive.

Ukraine has facilitated the return of a handful of Russians, including children, who lived in villages and towns it captured, though there has been no mechanism for their mass return.

The spokesman for Ukraine's army operating in Kursk, Oleksiy Dmytrashkivsky, told AFP on Thursday that a little over 1,500 Russians were still living in areas under Kyiv's control.

Around six million Ukrainians, including 1.5 million children, live in areas of the country under Russia's control, officials in Kyiv said last year.

Millions more were forced to flee their homes in the east and south when Russia invaded in February 2022.

Liverpool Thrash Spurs 4-0 to Reach League Cup Final



LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool overturned a first leg deficit to reach the League Cup final with a 4-0 win over Tottenham, ramping up the pressure on Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou. Cody Gakpo, Mohamed Salah, Dominik Szoboszlai and Virgil van Dijk were on target for the Reds, who will face Newcastle at Wembley on March 16 for the first silverware of the English season. Liverpool remain on course for a quadruple in a dream debut season for Arne Slot. They enjoy a six-point lead at the top of the Premier League, have cruised into the last 16 of the Champions League and visit Championship strugglers Plymouth in the FA cup fourth round on Sunday. "To reach a final should always be special," said Slot. "It was a very good performance from our side." Spurs' trophy drought on the other hand goes on. Tottenham last lifted silverware in 2008 and Postecoglou now has one less opportunity to fulfil his promise of winning a trophy in his second season. There is speculation the Australian could be shown the door if another goes awry away to Aston Villa in the FA Cup at the weekend with Spurs languishing 14th in the Premier League. "We have given up a good opportunity tonight and we cannot shy away from that," said Postecoglou. "They were by far better team. They were too good for us." Despite having more glamorous titles to win, Slot showed his desire to make the League Cup his first trophy as Liverpool boss by naming his strongest available team bar the usual rotation in goal for cup competitions as Caoimhin Kelleher replaced Alisson Becker. New signing Kevin Danso was forced straight in to Tottenham's injury-ravaged defence, while Mathys Tel also made an early debut off the bench after Richarlison hobbled off injured. Liverpool had scored four in each of the previous two meetings between the sides at Anfield and repeated that feat to make light of their 1-0 first leg defeat in north London last month.

The home side had taken the first quarter to find their stride but the pressure built after Szoboszlai ran offside before sweeping home Salah's pass. From the Egyptian's next delivery into the box, Spurs did not escape as Gakpo drilled in first time to move clear as the top scorer in this season's competition with five goals. Antonin Kinsky kept Salah waiting for his goal with a fine save moments later, but at the other end of the field Richarlison lay prone to leave Postecoglou's team further depleted. Already without record signing Dominic Solanke, Brennan Johnson, James Maddison, Timo Werner and Wilson Odobert in attacking areas, Tottenham never looked capable of mounting the threat they needed to survive the Liverpool onslaught. The decisive blow came five minutes into the second half when Kinsky rushed off his line but was beaten to the ball by Darwin Nunez and caught the Uruguayan. Salah ruthlessly dispatched the resulting penalty into the top corner for his 26th goal of the season. Gakpo and Ryan Gravenberch fired off the post as Liverpool put their foot down to kill the tie off. The killer third goal came 15 minutes from time when Connor Bradley, who excelled in the absence of the injured Trent Alexander-Arnold, played in Szoboszlai to slot home. Van Dijk then exposed Spurs' struggles defending set-pieces by heading in the fourth from a corner to rub salt in the visitors' wounds. Newcastle are eyeing an end to their own 56-year wait for a major trophy after an impressive 4-0 humbling of Arsenal on aggregate in the other semi-final. But the Magpies have the unenviable task of stopping Slot's juggernaut if they are to do so.

India Beat England in first ODI



NAGPUR (Dispatches) - Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer and Axar Patel smashed half-centuries as India defeated England by four wickets in the opening one-day international and took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series that is a warmup for the Champions Trophy. Chasing 249 for victory after Jos Buttler had scored 52 and Jacob Bethell contributed 51 to boost England's total following a wobble midway through the innings, India reached their target with 68 balls to spare. Gill overcame cramp to make 87 and take India close to the finish line on a two-paced, turning wicket at Nagpur's Vidarba Cricket Association Stadium after Patel scored 52 in a 108-run stand for the fourth wicket. Yashasvi Jaiswal came into the eleven after Virat Kohli was ruled out due to a sore right knee but was out for 15 following a probing early spell by Jofra Archer while out-of-form captain Rohit Sharma fell for two to Saqib Mahmood. Iyer blasted two consecutive sixes off Archer in the seventh over en route to an entertaining fifty and after he departed for 59, Gill played a controlled knock with exquisite shots on both sides but holed out to Mahmood while looking to accelerate. Ravindra Jadeja (12 not out) and Hardik Pandya (nine not out) then took the hosts home. "We're pretty happy because we knew we were coming back after a long time to this format," Rohit said of his team's first match in 50-over cricket since August. "We wanted to quickly regroup and understand what is to be done. We didn't start well with their openers putting pressure on us, but the way we came back was superb."

Jokic, Nuggets Manhandle Magic



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokic contributed 28 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds and Michael Porter Jr. finished with 30 points as the host Denver Nuggets beat the Orlando Magic 112-90. Jokic's triple-double was his NBA-leading 24th of the season, while Porter has hit 30 points in three straight games. Christian Braun scored 16 points and Aaron Gordon contributed 11 for Denver, which improved to 10-1 on the second night of back-to-back games. The Nuggets have won five straight games. Wendall Carter Jr. scored 19 points, Paolo Banchero added 18 and Franz Wagner had 14 points for the Magic, who finished 1-5 on their road trip. The Nuggets were without three rotation players -- Russell Westbrook (hamstring), Peyton Watson (right knee sprain) and Jamal Murray (left knee inflammation). Westbrook has missed the last four games, Watson is expected to miss at least three more weeks, and Murray is considered day to day. Gary Harris (left hamstring) and Jalen Suggs (left quad contusion) didn't play for Orlando. The Magic led by six in the first quarter, but Denver surged in the second quarter behind Porter's 16 points. With the game tied at 32, Porter hit a step-back 13-footer. Then he dunked off a pass from Gordon and drained a 26-footer, and the Nuggets went on to lead 59-50 at halftime. Denver scored six straight points to open the third quarter and increased its lead to 65-50. The Magic cut the deficit to 70-58 before

the Nuggets put it away. Gordon converted a three-point play, Julian Strawther hit his first bucket of the game and Jokic sank a hook shot to stretch the lead to 78-60 midway through the third. After Carter made two free throws, Porter drained two 3-pointers and made 2 of 3 free throws, and Braun turned two Jokic passes into dunks to give Denver a 90-62 lead. Jokic completed his 154th career triple-double when he rebounded Banchero's missed free throw with less than a second left in the quarter. The Nuggets led by 33 at one point in the fourth. Meanwhile Anthony Edwards scored 41 points, grabbed seven rebounds and dished six assists, and the Minnesota Timberwolves rallied for a 127-114 win over the Houston Rockets in Minneapolis. Edwards was coming off a 49-point night on Wednesday, and

Minnesota has won back-to-back contests. Rookie Jaylen Clark scored a career-high 17 points off the bench, and Naz Reid (15 points, 11 rebounds) and Rudy Gobert (13 points, 10 rebounds) each finished with a double-double. Jalen Green scored 28 points to lead the Rockets, who lost their season-worst fifth straight game. Alperen Sengun collected 16 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists, and Amen Thompson and Cam Whitmore also tallied 16 points apiece.

The Timberwolves outscored the Rockets 35-16 in the fourth quarter to seize the victory. Minnesota trailed 98-92 at the end of the third quarter. Whitmore came off the bench to score 11 points in the period, including a three-point play to increase the Rockets' lead to six points with 0.1 seconds to go. The Timberwolves opened the fourth quarter with six straight points to pull even at 98-all with 8:56 remaining. Gobert had back-to-back dunks and Jaden McDaniels made a basket to erase the deficit for Minnesota. Later, Sengun's driving dunk put Houston on top 106-105 with 6:16 left, but the Timberwolves closed the game on a 22-8 run. They scored eight points in a row on a basket by McDaniels, a three-point play by Edwards and a 3-pointer by Edwards to grab a 113-106 advantage with 3:47 to go. Mike Conley and Reid added layups in the final two minutes to put the Timberwolves on top 125-112 with 1:12 remaining.

Torres Treble Powers Barca Past Valencia Into Copa del Rey Semis



VALENCIA (Dispatches) - Ferran Torres hit a hat-trick as Barcelona routed Valencia 5-0 to cruise into the Copa del Rey semi-finals. Fermin Lopez and Lamine Yamal were also on target for the record 31-time Spanish Cup winners as they swaggered to victory at an upset Mestalla stadium. Earlier Real Sociedad progressed with a comfortable 2-0 win over 10-man Osasuna, joining Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid in a strong final four. Former Valencia forward Torres took the plaudits with his treble inside 30 minutes, taking full advantage of Barca coach Hansi Flick's decision to rest striker Robert Lewandowski. "We thought that it would be a very difficult game, because here at Mestalla is always a hard ground to play," Torres told TVE. "We had the luck that we scored goals early and in the end that sunk them."

The Spaniard netted in the third minute, running onto a fine Alejandro Balde through ball and finishing clinically against his former side. Torres netted the second after 17 minutes when teenage winger Yamal's shot bounced off the post back into his path. Lopez put Barcelona three up midway through the first half with a well-timed run expertly found by Pedri Gonzalez, rounding goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski and tucking home. Torres completed his hat-trick after half-an-hour with an accurate low finish after Raphinha teed him up on the edge of the box. The former Manchester City winger's bright display offered food for thought, with Barcelona scoring at least five goals in the last four games where veteran Polish striker Lewandowski has not started. Some Valencia fans started leaving the Mestalla stadium in anger, a constant theme around the club with owner Peter Lim criticised by supporters with chants and banners. This was Valencia's second thrashing at Barca's hands in the space of two weeks, after the Catalans triumphed 7-1 at home in La Liga. Valencia had a rare moment of cheer at the start of the second half when Umar Sadiq found the net but the goal was ruled out for offside. The gangly Nigerian striker then won a penalty but that too was scrapped after he was shown to be offside again in the build-up. At the other end Yamal struck the post again but this time the ball flew out and to safety for Valencia. The 17-year-old Spain star got his goal eventually with a low effort which took a small deflection and beat Dimitrievski, who could still have kept it out.

Alcaraz Cruises in Rotterdam



ROTTERDAM (Dispatches) - Top seed Carlos Alcaraz overpowered Italian qualifier Andrea Vavassori 6-2, 6-1 in just over an hour in the second round of the ABN AMRO Open at Rotterdam, Netherlands. The Spaniard, No. 3 in the ATP rankings, won 85 percent (22 of 26) of his first-serve points and saved his only break point while converting 5 of 8. Alcaraz advances to the quarterfinals against Spain's Pedro Martinez, who knocked off fifth-seeded Holger Rune of Denmark, 6-4, 6-1. Martinez was 4 of 8 on break-point opportunities to 1 of 2 for Rune. Third-seeded Alex de Minaur of Australia overcame 12 aces by the Czech Republic's Jakub Mensik -- who also double-faulted five times -- to win 6-4, 6-4. Fourth-seeded Andrey Rublev of Russia won a battle with Hungary's Fabian Marozsan 7-6 (2), 7-6 (7). Sixth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece advanced, but seventh-seeded Arthur Fils of France fell to Germany's Daniel Altmaier in three sets. Third-seeded Tommy Paul needed three sets to oust qualifier Ethan Quinn 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 in two hours, 13 minutes in the second round. In a matchup of Americans, Paul converted three of six break-point opportunities while failing to save two. He won 76 percent of his first serves (41 of 54) and 57 percent of his second serves (20 of 35). Quinn put up similar percentages (72 and 62) and matched Paul with

nine aces. Second-seeded Casper Ruud of Norway had a much easier day, downing qualifier Michael Mmoh of the U.S. 6-1, 6-4. Sixth-seeded Tomas Machac of the Czech Republic and eighth-seeded Matteo Arnaldi of Italy also moved on, as did wild card Reilly Opelka of the U.S. However, Spain's Jaume Munar knocked off fourth-seeded American Ben Shelton, 6-2, 7-6 (3), and Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka downed fifth-seeded Frances Tiafoe of the U.S. 3-6, 6-4, 6-3. Top seed Taylor Fritz faced Canada's Denis Shapovalov in a late match. Meanwhile No. 1 seed Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan survived an upset bid from Tunisia's Ons Jabeur and prevailed 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (4) in

the quarterfinals of the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open. Jabeur saved two consecutive match points in the 12th game of the third set to force a tiebreaker. There, Jabeur ran out to a 4-2 lead before Rybakina took over by winning the final five points. Rybakina is the last seeded player standing after American Ashlyn Krueger ousted Canadian eighth seed Leylah Fernandez 7-5, 4-6, 6-2. Krueger, the 20-year-old with one previous WTA singles title, out-aced Fernandez 8-1, saved 5 of 11 break points and broke Fernandez's serve eight times. In the semifinals, Krueger will face the Czech Republic's Linda Noskova, a 6-4, 6-3 winner over Poland's Magda Linette. Rybakina will battle Switzerland's Belinda Bencic, who beat 2023 Wimbledon champ Marketa Vondrousova of the Czech Republic 7-5, 6-3. Italy's Lucia Bronzetti eliminated American third seed Peyton Stearns 6-2, 7-6 (1) in a Round of 16 match in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Bronzetti fired eight aces without a double fault and moved on to face seventh seed and fellow Italian Elisabetta Cocciaretto, a 6-3, 6-0 winner in 69 minutes over Romania's Ana Bogdan. No. 1 seed Anastasia Potapova of Russia got past Switzerland's Viktorija Golubic 6-4, 7-5. Czech fifth seed Katerina Siniakova battled past American Caroline Dolehide 2-6, 6-1, 6-4, and Germany's Ella Seidel beat Russia's Anna Blinkova 6-2, 7-6 (5).