Iran Has Launched 10 Homegrown Coastguard and Guide Vessels During a Visit by President Masoud Pezeshkian to the Persian Gulf Port city of Bushehr



Foreign Ministry Released a Fact Sheet Featuring the U.S. Long List of **Historically Hostile Actions Towards the** Islamic Republic, Denouncing Washington's Hypocritical Approach Towards the country

VOL. XXIX, No. 8204 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 15, 2025 BAHMAN 27, 1403

DOMESTIC

Malaysia Showcases Tourism Attractions at Tehran Int'l Tourism Exhibition 2025

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INTERNATIONAL

Trump Offers Top-End Jets, Trade Deal to India



Tehran Rejects Baseless U.S. Claim of Arming, Funding **Yemeni Forces**



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Permanent Mission to the UN has categorically dismissed as "baseless" the United States' accusations about the provision of arms and money to the Yemeni resistance forces, saying the Islamic Republic has always supported peace and stability in the Arabian Peninsula country.

In a letter sent to the UN chief and the president of the Security Council on Thursday, the mission emphasized that Washington cannot hide its complicity in Israel's crimes by pinning the blame on Iran for regional tensions.

"Unlike the United States that provides weapons and extensive financial support to the Israeli regime to continue its aggression against the oppressed people of the region, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been and will keep adhering to the fundamental principles of the international law, the United Nations Charter, and Security Council resolutions," it added.

Tehran has adopted a "unified and stable" position on the Yemen crisis and believes that the conflict must be resolved via a "comprehensive political process" that guarantees the country's independence, national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

The US, UK, and Israel have launched attacks across Yemen over the past months in violation of the country's sovereignty and international law.

The illegal attacks came in response to Yemen's campaign to show solidarity with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amid a genocidal Israeli war.

The Iranian mission said, "Since the beginning of the Yemen crisis, the Islamic Republic of Iran has called for an immediate end to aggression, a ceasefire, the start of meaningful dialogue between Yemeni parties, and the peaceful settlement of the conflict with no foreign interference."

The future of Yemen must be determined by its own people, it noted, stressing that lasting peace is only possible there "through diplomacy, respect for national sovereignty, and adherence to international law, not through military interventions or false accusations."

eaking at a Security Council briefing on Yemen, US Deputy Representative to the UN Dorothy Shea alleged that Iran's materiel and financial support had enabled Yemen's Ansarullah resistance fighters to launch "numerous attacks on civilian infrastructure" and fire at American warships.

Trump Talks Offer Part of Maximum Pressure



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the US contradictory approach towards Iran is part of Washington's so-called maximum pressure policy and fails to reflect its genuine readiness to hold talks with Tehran.

Ali Shamkhani said the U.S. proposes holding dialogue with Iran but at the same time it intensifies sanctions against the

Negotiation should be carried out at the proper time from a position of strength and with the aim of securing national interests, not as a solution to internal problems, he added.

He emphasized that negotiations would be meaningful only if both sides demonstrate the necessary will and capacity to reach a lasting agreement, but "experience provers that the U.S. has not remained committed to its obligations.'

The senior official once again reaffirmed Iran's commitment to the talks to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), despite the U.S.' unilateral withdrawal.

Shamkhani said Iran has not abandoned negotiations; rather, it is the United States and Europe that failed to live up to their commitments and must remove the sanctions imposed on the

He criticized the U.S. policies and its "unreliable" proposal for negotiation, adding that talks hinge on adoption of a logical and respectful approach on the part of the European signatories

Pezeshkian Warns Enemies of Hitting Iran's Nuclear Centers

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TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian says if the enemies strike Iran's nuclear facilities, the country's vouth will be ready to simply rebuild.

"They threaten us by hitting our nuclear centers. But you cannot destroy the brains of our children," Pezeshkian said Thursday during a speech in Bushehr, home to one of Iran's biggest nuclear plants.

"If you hit 100 nuclear centers, our children will build a thousand other ones," he said, addressing Iran's enemies.

U.S. President Donald Trump raised on Monday the possibility of Israel hitting Iran in an interview with Fox News saying he would prefer to make a deal with Iran.

On Thursday, Iran's Air Force chief Gen. Hamid Vahedi said, "We tell all countries, friends and foes alike, that our country's doctrine is defensive, but we will respond with force against any enemy

Pezeshkian visited the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, which is located in southern

Iran, authorizing operations at Units 2 and 3 of the facility, the Islamic Republic's sole nuclear power plant.

He toured various sections of the first Unit of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, including its control room and turbine, where plant managers and experts briefed him on the details of the plant's operations, electricity production, and power transmission to the

He also visited the construction sites of Units 2 and 3 of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant and, at the end of the tour, ordered the installation of the first key equipment component for Unit 2's reactor building to enhance safety standards, along with the excavation of pump house buildings for both units.

The first phase of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, currently operating at a capacity of 1,015 megawatts, has generated 72 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity over 11 years since its commissioning. This has prevented the consumption of 114 million barrels of crude oil. saving over \$8 billion in fossil fuel costs.

Besides recovering an investment equivalent to four times the plant's construction cost,



training of specialized personnel and the expansion of clean and sustainable energy production. Units 2 and 3 of the power plant

each have a nominal production capacity of 1,057 megawatts. According to Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy

Organization of Iran (AEOI), the facility has, over the recent years, made significant advances, leading to the generation of as much as 7.4 billion kilowatts of nuclear electricity

Meanwhile later Pezeshkian warned that enemies are desperately seeking to subjugate the Iranian people through sanctions and threats but all in vain.

"The enemies want us to be humiliated before them with sanctions and threats but we will not

be subjugated and we will solve our problems by relying on the people," Pezeshkian said in a meeting with intellectuals and elites of the southern province of Bushehr

He slammed the United States' contradictory approach to Iran, saying US President Donald Trump claims that he wants to negotiate with Iran but at the same time imposes the toughest sanctions against Tehran.

"We do not want anyone to sanction us," Pezeshkian said, adding, however, "It is not

that if the US imposes sanctions on us, we cannot do anything. We will run the country by reliance on domestic capabilities." He reiterated Iran's policy to interact with all countries in a spirit of peace and fraternity,

emphasizing. "We strive to establish cordial and friendly relations with our neighbors." Pezeshkian expressed Iran's keenness to negotiate and criticized Washington's claims about its willingness to hold talks with Tehran while restricting the access of Iranian

people to essentials, including medicine. The president added that solidarity, interaction and planning play a key role in settling

Iran's Oil Output Up Nearly 13% in 2024



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran raised its oil production by 13% in 2024 despite grappling with increased pressure of US sanctions.

Latest data from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) show that Iran's oil production rose significantly in 2024 despite US efforts to ramp pressure on the country's energy sector through imposing back-to-back sanctions on its oil

OPEC data, cited in a report by the Fars news agency, showed that Iran's oil production had reached an average of 3.257 million barrels per day (bpd) last year, an increase of 12.93% from 2023

The figures showed that Iran had ended 2024 with an average monthly production of 3.293 million bpd in December and continued to pump 3.28 million bpd in January

That comes as total oil production by OPEC, a bloc that is made up of 12 countries, fell by 1.52% from 27.804 million bpd in 2023 to 26.672 million bpd last year. A similar decline was reported for OPEC+, a broader alliance of oil-producing nations

Iran was OPEC's third largest oil producer in 2024 after Saudi Arabia and Iraq which

both reported drops in production in 2024, the data showed. The increase in Iran's oil production comes despite the fact that the United States

toughened its sanctions on Iran's oil industry last year by issuing penalties on individuals, entities and the tankers involved in the country's oil exports.

They are also the latest sign that US sanctions on Iran, which were enacted in 2018

with the aim of choking off the country's oil revenues, have failed bitterly. Iranian authorities have said that the oil production in the country is expected to reach nearly 4 million bpd in the near future.

Meanwhile Turkmenistan has reportedly reached an agreement with Turkey for

exports of gas via Iran amid growing energy cooperation between regional countries

Lebanese Protest Cancellation of Two **Scheduled Civilian Flights** From Iran to Lebanon



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - A large number of people have taken to the streets around Beirut's International Airport to protest the cancellation of two scheduled civilian flights from Iran to

On Thursday night, protesters blocked the entrance to the airport and the international road leading to it, setting tires alight while chanting anti-American and anti-Israeli slogans.

The demonstrators set fire to tires, creating roadblocks, while tensions rose during clashes with Lebanese military personnel

who attempted to clear the route. The cancellation was ordered by the Lebanese Roads Minister under pressure from the Zionist regime, which claimed that the

plane was transferring funds to the Hezbollah resistance Iran's Mahan Air was reportedly informed that a flight scheduled to arrive in Beirut from Tehran would not receive the

necessary permission to land, resulting in the cancellation of the An official at Beirut's airport told AFP that the Public Works and Transport ministry had asked the facility to inform Mahan

Air that Lebanon could not welcome two of its Beirut-bound The official who requested anonymity to discuss sensitive matters said one flight was scheduled for Thursday and another

Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri has called for immediate measures to bring the stranded Lebanese passengers

A pro-resistance lawmaker condemned the decision, stating that the government must take necessary measures to guarantee Lebanon's sovereignty over all its public facilities, especially the

Iran Slams U.S. Allegations Against Tehran

TEHRAN - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations has strongly rejected the US's accusations against the Islamic Republic of "destabilizing" Syria, calling them "baseless" and a deliberate distortion of reality aimed at misleading the international community.

Addressing a UN Security Council session on Syria, Amir Saeid Iravani condemned Washington's narrative, highlighting its own violations of the Syrian sovereignty under the pretext of counterterrorism.

"The accusations made by the US representative against my country are completely unfounded," he said. "These claims are crafted solely to distort the truth and mislead the international community."

"The reality is that the United States has long

violated Syria's sovereignty, provided safe havens for terrorist groups, and supported Israel's aggression-all in pursuit of its geopolitical ambitions.'

The envoy was responding to remarks made by Deputy US Ambassador to the world body, Dorothy Shea, who had alleged that Iran "continued to back" militant groups inside Syria and was seeking to "reestablish its military presence" in the war-torn country.

Iravani categorically dismissed the claims, emphasizing that Iran remained committed to Syria's sovereignty, stability, and territorial integrity. The high-ranking Iranian diplomat, meanwhile, turned the focus towards the humanitarian and

economic crisis in Syria, criticizing the "unjust and unlawful" sanctions that had been imposed by the United States and the European Union against the Arab country. He stressed that such extraterritorial measures were severely hindering Syria's reconstruction

efforts and disproportionately harming ordinary citizens. "Temporary relief or limited humanitarian exemptions are not a sustainable solution," he said. These illegal measures must be fully lifted to allow the Syrian people to rebuild their country and return to a life of dignity."

The ambassador also argued that the sanctions directly obstructed early recovery projects necessary for Syria's long-term stability, adding that their removal was essential for safe and voluntary return of millions of displaced Syrians

Iravani further raised the issue of the growing threat of terrorism in Syria. He noted that "foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs)" and extremist groups interfering in the Arab country continued to pose a significant danger to both regional and global security.

"The risk of advanced weapons stockpiles falling into the hands of terrorists is real," he warned,

citing UN reports that an estimated 42,500 individuals with suspected ties to the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group -- which was vanquished by Syria and its allies, including Iran and Russia, in 2017 -- remained in detention camps in northeastern Syria.

The official called for a structured and accountable process for repatriating these individuals to their home countries and holding them legally accountable. "Iran remains firmly committed to

combating terrorism and is prepared to cooperate with legitimate international partners to address this critical challenge."

Iravani also lambasted the Israeli regime's ongoing violations of the Syrian sovereignty, denouncing Tel Aviv for systematically targeting the country's military and research infrastructure

"Israel continues to be a serious threat to Syria, repeatedly violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said. "Despite numerous Security Council resolutions, the regime refuses to withdraw from the occupied Golan Heights and instead expands its occupation.'

OUNCIL

Iravani, therefore, urged the Security Council to take decisive action against the Israeli aggression and to hold the regime accountable for its attacks on the Syrian territory.

Reaffirming Iran's stance on Syria's future, Iravani stressed that only the Syrian people had to determine their country's path, free from external interference. He reiterated the Islamic Republic's support for formation of an inclusive government in Syria

based on national dialog and proportional representation, with UN Resolution 2254 -- which called for a ceasefire and political settlement in Syria in 2015 -- providing the necessary framework for constitutional reform. "The future of Syria must be determined solely by its people," he asserted. "Iran fully supports

the formation of a government through free elections, ensuring a fair process that reflects the will In conclusion, the Iranian ambassador reaffirmed the country's role as a constructive partner in

efforts to achieve lasting peace in Syria. He expressed full support for the UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen's efforts and called for a greater international commitment to Syria's reconstruction and stabilization.

Iran remains dedicated to working in coordination with the United Nations and regional partners

to achieve lasting peace and stability in Syria, Iravani stated.





Iran Surpasses 6m Tourist Mark in 2023

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts announced that the country has successfully surpassed the 6 million mark in tourist arrivals for this year.

During a press conference following a cabinet meeting, Minister Seyed Reza Salehi Amiri highlighted the need for continuous growth in the tourism sector, stating that the country must annually increase its tourism capacity by 1.5 million to reach the targeted goal of 15 million tourists set for the seventh development plan.

Speaking to reporters, Salehi Amiri expressed his optimism about the current tourism momentum, stating, "As I speak with you now, we have fortunately crossed the threshold of 6 million tourists, and we expect to exceed 7 million by year's end."

Kazakhstan Trade Delegation to Visit Iran



TEHRAN - A 59-member trade delegation from the Republic of Kazakhstan is scheduled to visit Iran from February 15th to February 17th, according to the Deputy for International Affairs and Trade Development of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce.

Hassamuddin Hallaj stated that the Tehran Chamber, in cooperation with the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber, the International Office and specialized organizations of the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Trade Development Organization of Iran, will host the delegation

The delegation's visit, organized by the Kazakhstan Trade Policy Development Center, will be led by the Minister of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan, Hallaj noted, according to the Public Relations Department of the Tehran Chamber.

The Kazakh trade delegation includes economic actors from companies in the food and agriculture sectors, including producers of agricultural products, vegetables, oils and oilseeds, water, beverages, dairy products, tea, rice, grains, legumes, red meat, Norwegian trout farming, honey, macaroni and pasta, seasonings and flavorings, chips and snacks, meal and animal feed, as well as consumer goods, polymer products such as polyethylene, paints and resins, metals, chemical products and lubricants, medical equipment such as clean rooms, medical furniture, disposable medical products, construction materials such as stone, gypsum, cement and cable, transportation and logistics, textiles, and vehicles including ambulances.

Hallaj added that the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, along with the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber of Commerce and the International Office and specialized organizations of the Ministry of Agriculture, will hold a business forum and business matchmaking sessions to expand trade interactions, create export opportunities, establish bilateral trade cooperation, and bilateral negotiation meetings. This event will take place at 9:00 AM on Saturday, February 17th, 2024, in the Kooh-e-Noor Hall of the Parsian Evin Hotel. Interested economic actors can attend and meet with members of the delegation.

Iran Halts Import-for-Export Policy Amid 80% Surge in Pistachio Exports



TEHRAN - The government has halted its import-forexport policy for agricultural goods, despite an unprecedented 80% increase in pistachio exports this year, according to Mohammad Reza Farshchian, head of the Iranian Dried Fruit Exporters' Union.

Speaking to ILNA, Farshchian stated that pistachio exports surged by 70-80% compared to the previous year, exceeding expectations. He attributed this growth to a policy introduced by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) that allowed exporters to either import goods in exchange for their foreign currency earnings or transfer the import rights to others. This system facilitated the import of items such as automotive parts and mobile phones, enabling exporters to sell their foreign exchange at negotiated rates.

Farshchian noted that this policy had previously been in place in 2019 and 2020, leading to stronger export growth and stabilizing exchange rates by aligning export earnings with the open market rates. Additionally, it helped phase out one-time-use trade licenses, which were often used for speculative activities.

However, the CBI abruptly discontinued this system in early February, requiring dried fruit exporters to sell their foreign currency earnings at an official exchange center alongside petrochemical and other industrial exports. The mandated exchange rate is approximately 67,000 tomans per U.S. dollar, affecting exports of not only pistachios but also raisins and dates.

Farshchian warned that the policy shift could hurt agricultural exporters, who have long argued for exemption from currency repatriation rules. Iran's annual agricultural exports are valued at \$6 billion, supporting between 12 to 15m jobs. Many of these exports—such as pistachios, saffron, and dates—are cultivated in arid regions. Without export incentives, farmland could turn into desert, leading to environmental damage and rural depopulation.

While exporters acknowledge the economic challenges, they have expressed willingness to repatriate foreign exchange earnings under CBI oversight, provided that policies remain stable and predictable.

Farshchian also dismissed claims that the government's currency unification efforts—such as the introduction of the NIMA exchange platform—would successfully eliminate exchange rate discrepancies, stating that similar attempts in the past had failed to achieve the desired results.

Malaysia Showcases Tourism Attractions at Tehran Int'l Tourism Exhibition 2025

TEHRAN - Malaysia is making a strong presence at the Tehran International Tourism Exhibition (TITE) 2025, reinforcing its commitment to expanding its tourism market n West Asia. The Malaysian delegation, led by Mr. Libra Haniff, Senior Deputy Director of the Malaysia International Tourism Promotion Division (Asia/Africa), ntroduced the country's latest tourism offerings at a press conference held at the Espinas International Hotel in Tehran.

Farhad Jafari, the marketing manager of the Ministry of Tourism of Malaysia in Tehran, in the press conference highlighted major goals behind the press conference and a gathering for introducing the Langkawi Tourism Project.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Haniff mphasized Malaysia's dedication to howcasing its diverse attractions to the ranian market. "We are delighted to participate

n TITE 2025. This exhibition has played a key role in strengthening Malaysia's position in the tourism industry and promoting our country's diverse and vibrant attractions," he said.

This year, 17 representatives from eight Malaysian tourism organizations, including state tourism boards, hotels, travel agencies, and tourism service providers, are participating in the exhibition. Their goal is to highlight Malaysia's uxury experiences, shopping destinations, family vacations, honeymoon getaways, and adventure tourism, all of which are particularly appealing to travelers from West Asia.

Among the newest attractions presented to Iranian travelers were:

Eagle's Nest Skywalk in Langkawi – a breathtaking new adventure tourism spot. The Exchange TRX – Kuala Lumpur's latest premium shopping and lifestyle hub. Merdeka 118 Tower – now officially recognized as the world's second-tallest uilding.

"We are confident that these new attractions, alongside Malaysia's renowned peaches, stunning mountains, and lush rainforests, will create unforgettable experiences for our visitors," Mr. Hanif added.

Malaysia set an ambitious tourism target for 2024, aiming to attract 27.3 million nternational visitors and generate MYR 102.7 billion in tourism revenue. By September 2024, Malaysia had already welcomed 19,618 tourists from Iran, marking a 45.3% increase compared to the previous year.

Looking ahead to Visit Malaysia Year 2026, the country is setting an even higher benchmark, aiming for 35.6 million international tourist arrivals and MYR 147.1 billion in tourism revenue.

"To support this goal, Malaysia is enhancing its air connectivity by working closely with Middle Eastern airlines to increase flights from Iran," Mr. Hanif stated. 'These collaborations are crucial in boosting tourism numbers and strengthening Malaysia's economic ties with the region."

During the press conference, Mr. Hanif highlighted Malaysia's unique travel experiences that continue to attract visitors worldwide:

Cultural Diversity: A rich mix of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous raditions, offering visitors an immersive cultural experience through festivals, cuisine, and historical sites.

Natural Beauty: From the twin peaks of Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur to the pristine beaches of Langkawi, Malaysia boasts breathtaking landscapes and diverse wildlife experiences, including orangutan sanctuaries.

Idyllic Islands: Popular destinations like Langkawi, Penang, and Sabah provide serene beaches and crystal-clear waters, ideal for relaxation and adventure. Shopping & Entertainment: Kuala Lumpur is a top shopping destination, offering

verything from high-end malls to vibrant night markets. Historical & Heritage Sites: Malacca (Melaka), a UNESCO World Heritage Site,

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Amir Pouyan Rafiei Shad (L), Libra Haniff (2nd L), Mohd Faharuddin Hatmin (2nd R) and Farhad Jafar (R) answer the questions during a press conference on Wednesday, February 12, at Espinas Hotel of Tehran

is a must-visit for history lovers, featuring colonial-era landmarks and museums.

Warm Hospitality: Malaysians are known for their friendly and welcoming nature, making every visit a memorable one.

Malaysia is also introducing new incentives to enhance its tourism industry. The Grant for Strategic Promotion of Charter and Scheduled International Air Services (GSPC) is a financial support initiative for airlines and charter operators looking to establish or increase routes to Malaysia.

"The GSPC program plays a crucial role in improving Malaysia's accessibility, especially from underserved markets like Iran. Through strategic partnerships with airlines, we are making Malaysia an even more attractive and accessible destination for international travelers," Mr. Hanif explained.

Concluding the press conference, Mr.
Hanif expressed gratitude to the Iranian

media for their continuous support in promoting Malaysia as a top travel destination. "With your cooperation, we are confident that we can further boost tourism between our two nations," he stated.

With exciting new attractions, enhanced flight connectivity, and a wide range of travel experiences, Malaysia is set to strengthen its position as a top destination for Iranian travelers in the coming years.

Then Mr. Mohd Fahauddin Hatmin, Tourism Malaysia Director of Middle East, highlighted some interesting programs and attraction which can attract more Iranian tourists to Malaysia, like seasonal shopping festivals.

Meanwhile Amir Pouyan Rafiei Shad, Chairman of Tehran Travel Agencies Association, who was in the press conference, pointed to the significance of Malaysia as a tourist destination for Iranians. He pointed to the security which is the major factor for tourists that Malaysia enjoys it and also hospitality of Malaysian people. He admitted the cost of travelling to Malaysia is the most important hurdle in way of more visits from Iranians to Malaysia, reiterating that Iran is also an attractive country for tourists which can host Malaysian tourists.

He expressed hope that the cooperation between the two countries would enhance which can boost tourism activities.

After the press conference, the gathering for presenting new tourist attractions in Malaysia focused on Langkawi Tourism Development Project.

Addressing the participants, Haslina Abdul Hamid, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the project briefed them with new tourist attractions in Langkawi which can attract more tourists.

The event was held in collaboration between Tourism Malaysia Office in Tehran ad Salam Air.

The Langkawi Tourism Development Project is a Malaysian government initiative aimed at transforming Langkawi into a world-class tourist destination. Key aspects include:

Master Plan: First introduced in 1987 under the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA).

Infrastructure: Development of roads, airports, marinas, and resorts to enhance accessibility.

Eco-Tourism: Focus on preserving Langkawi's natural beauty, including UNESCO-listed Geoparks.

Luxury & Leisure: Expansion of high-end hotels, golf courses, and duty-free

shopping.
Sustainable Tourism: Encouraging green initiatives and community-based

tourism.

Recent Upgrades: Continuous improvements, including smart tourism

technologies and new attractions.

3rd Caspian Economic Conference to Be Held in Tehran



TEHRAN - The third Caspian Economic Conference is set to take place in Tehran, with the participation of prime ministers and ministers from Russia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. The event is scheduled for February 18-19, 2024, under the auspices of the First Vice President of Iran.

According to the Iranian Trade Development Organization, Akbar Godari, the Director General for Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia, announced on Wednesday that the conference aims to showcase achievements and the current state of economic, trade, scientific, technological, health, energy, financial, tourism, investment in free trade zones, and logistics issues pertinent to the Caspian Sea littoral states.

Godari emphasized that the Iranian Trade Development Organization has organized seven specialized panels for the first day of the conference. Topics to be discussed include "Development of cooperation in trade, industry, and agriculture," facilitated by the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade; "Economic, customs, banking, and investment cooperation," led by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance; "Transport and transit cooperation and engineering services," handled by the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development; "Environmental, health, and tourism collaboration," overseen by the Department of the Environment; "Energy cooperation (oil, gas, electricity, and renewable energy)," coordinated by the Ministry of Oil and Energy; "Scientific and technological cooperation," managed by the Vice President for Science and Technology; and "Collaboration among the chamber of commerce presidents," organized by the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and

On the second day of the conference, the prime ministers of the five countries will sign a final declaration regarding strategies to enhance cooperation and will discuss periodic follow-ups of agreements among relevant ministers.

Godari noted that the first commercial and economic cooperation agreement among the Caspian states was signed in August 2018 in Kazakhstan, and this agreement was ratified by the Iranian Parliament in January 2023.

Russian Business Delegation Meets With Iranian Chamber President and East Azerbaijan Governor

TEHRAN - Representatives from 19 Russian companies involved in various sectors including chemicals, electronics, machinery, IT products, fruits, industrial equipment, and rail transport met with Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, and Bahram Sarmast, Governor of East Azerbaijan, according to Iran Chamber Online.



of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, and Bahram Barmast, Governor of East Azerbaijan, according to Iran Chamber Online.

The meeting took place at the East Azerbaijan Governor's Sarmast pointed and Russian representatives outlined the potential and Russia have gr

Office, where the Russian representatives outlined the potential for collaboration between the two countries and discussed efforts undertaken to promote Iran's economic and trade capabilities across various Russian cities.

Samad Hassanzadeh described the gathering as a significant step in achieving economic diplomacy, expressing readiness to assist in developing bilateral relations. He emphasized that Iran possesses considerable capacities for collaboration with Russia, with East Azerbaijan having distinct advantages for enhancing economic ties with all Russian provinces.

He stated, "Today, our officials prioritize fostering bilateral relations with Russia across all areas, and there is a strong readiness to achieve this goal in our country."

Hassanzadeh further noted that East Azerbaijan is a vital industrial hub in Iran, possessing significant capabilities in food production, machinery manufacturing, and petrochemicals, which can meet part of the needs of the extensive Russian market.

Governor Bahram Sarmast highlighted that the province, leveraging its rich historical trade relations with Russia and the presence of major merchants in Tabriz, can play a prominent role in the national framework for developing and deepening Iran-Russia relations.

Sarmast added that despite the recent Iranian president's visit to

Russia and his meetings there, the bilateral relations have yet to reach their full potential, both politically and geographically.

He asserted that ongoing regional developments necessitate an increasing expansion of bilateral cooperation, stating, "We must remember that economic relations are the driving force behind political and diplomatic relations."

Sarmast pointed out that commercial exchanges between Iran and Russia have grown significantly in recent years, yet have not yet reached a satisfactory level. He proposed that economic diplomacy focused on border provinces could be instrumental in this regard.

He mentioned that the Tabriz Chamber of Commerce, one of the oldest in Iran, could facilitate the deepening of bilateral relations with Russia.

Sarmast emphasized that a key advantage of East Azerbaijan is the substantial contribution of the private sector, which accounts for over 94% of economic activities. He noted that the private sector could act as a driving force in expanding trade relations.

Sarmast elaborated that East Azerbaijan offers 57 industrial estates with diverse activity areas and renowned manufacturing brands, providing a suitable environment for expanding economic relations with different Russian regions.

He reinforced that East Azerbaijan is a steel hub in the country and has extensive capacities in dried fruits, horticulture, and mining; highlighting the potential for exporting fruits and vegetables to Russia with plans to establish cargo services to bolster this endeavor.

He cited the significance of the Tabriz International Exhibition as a crucial step in this direction, noting it is the largest and oldest exhibition complex in the country after Tehran.

Iran-Turkmenistan Oil Cooperation Expands



TEHRAN - In a meeting between Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad and Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov, both sides emphasized the importance of deepening cooperation in the oil and gas sectors. They discussed various avenues for expanding collaboration between the two countries.

Minister Paknejad expressed his hope for a fruitful partnership, noting that during the 14th government led by President Masoud Pezeshkian, strengthening economic ties, particularly in oil and gas, has been a top priority. He highlighted that this topic was also a key point of discussion in President Pezeshkian's visit to Ashgabat last summer and during recent phone conversations between top officials from both nations.

Meredov noted that Iran has been the second-largest gas producer for Turkmenistan since the country gained independence, underlining the long-standing good relations between the two nations throughout history. He pointed out that recent collaborations have taken on a new form, with both countries interested in expanding cooperation across various sectors.

Meredov referenced recent discussions with Iranian officials, indicating that a wide range of issues related to energy cooperation—including electricity, gas, and transportation—were addressed. He emphasized that these dialogues could significantly enhance the collaboration between the two countries.

He claimed that the ongoing meetings with Iran's oil ministry are successful and constructive. Since the late 1990s, Iran and Turkmenistan have engaged in gas cooperation, with Iran having imported approximately 107 billion cubic meters of gas from Turkmenistan over the years, which illustrates the depth of their relationship.

The Turkmen Foreign Minister firmly believes that based on their positive experiences, more decisive steps should be taken to further strengthen ties in this important sector.

The discussions reflect a commitment from both governments to enhance their cooperative efforts and share mutual benefits from their energy resources.

Indian, Pakistani Troops Trade Fire Across Kashmir Border

SRINAGAR (Dispatches) - Indian and Pakistani troops have exchanged fire across the heavily militarized Kashmir frontier that divides the two archrivals, with at least four casualties reported by the Pakistani side.

Kashmir has been divided between the neighbours since they were carved out of the Asian subcontinent at the end of British colonial rule in 1947.

Both nations claim it in full and have fought two wars and numerous smaller battles over control of the Himalayan territory. Pakistan state broadcaster PTV, citing unnamed security sources, said Wednesday's incident injured two soldiers and two civilians, all from that country.



Macron Says Peace That Is a Capitulation in Ukraine Would Be **Bad News for All**



PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron said only Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky could negotiate on behalf of his country with Russia to end the war, warning a "peace that is a capitulation" would be "bad news for everyone", including the US, the Financial Times reported on Thursday.

"The only question at this stage is whether President Putin is genuinely, sustainably, and credibly willing to agree to a ceasefire on this basis. After that, it's up to the Ukrainians to negotiate with Russia," Macron said in an interview with the newspaper at the Elvsee Palace.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday separately discussed the war with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Zelensky and told US officials to begin talks on ending the nearly three-year-long conflict.

The phone calls came shortly after US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth told Ukraine's military allies in Brussels that a return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders - before Russia annexed Crimea - was unrealistic and that the US does not see NATO membership for Kyiv as part of a solution.

Ukrainians on Thursday worried that Trump was preparing to sell out their country following his phone call Putin.

Trump, speaking to reporters at the White House on Thursday, said Ukraine would have a seat at the table during any peace negotiations with Russia over ending the war. Macron told the Financial Times that Trump had created a "window of opportunity" for a negotiated solution, where "everyone has to play their role", adding that it is now up to Zelensky to discuss territorial and sovereignty issues.

He said "It is up to the international community, with a specific role for the Europeans, to discuss security guarantees and, more broadly, the security framework for the entire region. That is where we have a role to play."

Humanitarian **Catastrophe Looms in** East Congo as Rebels Push South



PARIS (Dispatches) - The advance of Rwanda-backed M23 rebels into Democratic Republic of Congo's South Kivu province threatens to rigger a humanitarian catastrophe in an area already housing thousands of displaced people, the provincial governor said.

The Tutsi-led rebels have been inching south since they seized eastern Congo's largest city of Goma at the end of last month, gaining more ground despite mediation efforts.

About 3,000 people were killed in days of violence that preceded the capture of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, according to United Nations figures.

Hospitals were overwhelmed with casualties and humanitarian operations in the city were hindered as non-essential aid workers had to be evacuated and warehouses were looted.

Provincial governor Jean-Jacques Purusi Sadiki told Reuters in an interview that there had since been an influx of people fleeing Goma into South Kivu "creating huge humanitarian needs that we are trying to face". The region was severely under-resourced, he said.

Traffic was suspended between South and North Kivu, creating shortages of goods, he said.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump yesterday offered to sell state-of-the-art fighter jets to India as he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed to ramp up trade, rekindling a bond that defies the new U.S. administration's punitive approach to much of the world.

Modi, only the fourth world leader to visit the White House since Trump's return, described the fellow nationalist as a friend and told him he was adopting a take on his "Make America Great Again" slogan.

Trump said that he found a "special bond" with Modi and India and, in an uncharacteristic if ironic show of humility, complimented Modi as being a "much tougher negotiator" than he is.

Successive U.S. administrations have seen India as a key partner with like-minded interests in the face of a rising China, and

Trump announced that the new administration was ready to sell one of the top U.S. military prizes — F-35s. "Starting this year, we'll be increasing military sales to India by many billions of dollars," Trump told a joint news conference

with Modi. "We're also paving the way to ultimately provide India with the F-35 stealth fighters," Trump said.

Trump, who has previously complained about Indian tariffs, agreed with Modi that the two countries would work together

"In order to ensure India's energy security, we will focus on trade in oil and gas," Modi said, expecting a "mutually beneficial trade agreement" would come "very soon."

Joining Trump's meeting with Modi was SpaceX and Tesla tycoon Elon Musk, who has launched an aggressive effort as Trump's right-hand man to overhaul the US bureaucracy.

Musk also held a one-on-one meeting with Modi earlier yesterday, in an encounter that drew questions over whether the

world's richest man was meeting the Indian premier in an official or a business capacity. The Indian premier posted pictures of himself shaking hands with the beaming Musk, with several children on Musk's side of the room, and Indian officials on the other.

Modi said later that he has known Musk since before he became prime minister.

Trump had earlier put the leader of the world's most populous nation on notice over possible tariffs.

The meeting came hours after the US president announced reciprocal tariffs on all countries, including India — but New Delhi is hoping to avoid further levies that Trump says are needed to counter the US trade deficit.

"India, traditionally, is the highest, just about the highest tariff country. They charge more tariffs than any other country. And I mean, we'll be talking about that," Trump earlier told reporters.

"India is a very hard place to do business because of the tariffs."

U.S. officials said there had been "early body language" from India but there was a "lot more work to do."

Modi offered quick tariff concessions ahead of his visit, with New Delhi slashing duties on high-end motorcycles — a boost to Harley-Davidson, the iconic US manufacturer whose struggles in India have irked Trump

India has already accepted a U.S. military flight carrying 100 shackled migrants last week as part of Trump's immigration overhaul, and New Delhi has vowed its own "strong crackdown" on illegal migration.

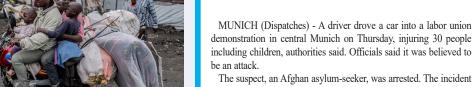
The Indian prime minister assiduously courted Trump during his first term.

The two share much in common, with both campaigning on promises to promote majority communities over minorities and both doggedly quashing dissent.

In 2020, Modi invited Trump before a cheering crowd of more than 100,000 people to inaugurate the world's largest cricket stadium in his home state of Gujarat.

Trump could visit India later this year for a summit of the Quad — a four-way grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the

Dozens Injured After Car Drives Into Crowd in Munich in Suspected Attack



demonstration in central Munich on Thursday, injuring 30 people including children, authorities said. Officials said it was believed to The suspect, an Afghan asylum-seeker, was arrested. The incident

follows a series of attacks involving immigrants in recent months that have pushed migration to the forefront of the campaign for Germany's Feb. 23 election. Participants in a demonstration by the service workers' union ver.

di were walking along a street at about 10:30 a.m. when the suspect's Mini Cooper overtook a police vehicle following the gathering, accelerated and plowed into the back of the group, police said. Officers arrested the suspect after firing a shot at the car, deputy

police chief Christian Huber said. Some of the victims sustained serious injuries. The car, with a battered front and a shattered windshield, was lifted onto a tow truck late Thursday afternoon after investigators inspected it among debris including shoes. The suspect was a 24-year-old Afghan asylum-seeker, police said.

Bayaria's state interior minister, Joachim Herrmann, said said officials believe the protest was likely targeted at random. The state's justice minister, Georg Eisenreich, said a prosecutors' department

that investigates extremism and terror was looking into the case. Police said the man, who they added lived in Munich and had a valid

residence permit, was known to authorities from investigations in which he had been a witness because of a former job as a store detective.

"We feel with the victims, we are praying for the victims — we hope very much that they all make it," Bavarian governor Markus Söder told reporters at



"It is suspected to be an attack — a lot points to that," Söder added. Mayor Dieter Reiter said that children were among those injured.

The Munich incident comes three weeks after a 2-year-old boy and a man were killed in a knife attack in Aschaffenburg, also in Bavaria. An Afghan whose asylum application was rejected was the suspect in that attack, which propelled migration to the center of the German election campaign.

The Aschaffenburg attack followed knife attacks in Mannheim and Solingen last year in which the suspects were immigrants from Afghanistan and Syria, respectively - in the latter case, also a rejected asylum-seeker who was supposed to have left the country.

In the December Christmas market car ramming in Magdeburg, the suspect was a Saudi doctor who previously had come to various regional authorities' attention.

Germany's main opposition conservative bloc, in which Söder is a prominent figure, has demanded a tougher approach to irregular migration, calling for many more people to be turned back at the border and for an increase in deportations. Curbing migration is also a core issue for the far-right Alternative for Germany, which polls put in second place behind the conservatives.

Watch more' AfD becoming strong in German Parliament: Increasingly difficult to form coalitions excluding them'

"This is more evidence that we can't go from attack to attack and show dismay, thank police for their deployment," Söder said. "This is not the first such act ... We are determined that something must change in Germany, and quickly."

Alternative for Germany's co-leader, Alice Weidel, posted on social network X: "Is this supposed to carry on forever? Migration turnaround

Center-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government said it already has done a lot to reduce irregular migration, and that the opposition's plans are incompatible with German and European Union law.

Scholz described the latest incident as "a terrible attack."

"Anyone who commits crimes in Germany will not just be punished severely and have to go to prison, but must expect that he cannot continue his stay in Germany — and that also goes for countries that it is very difficult to send people back to," he said.

Hamas Willing to Move Ahead With Gaza Ceasefire

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Hamas signalled that a crisis threatening to unravel an already fragile ceasefire in Gaza could be avoided even after trading accusations with Israel this week of ceasefire breaches.

The 42-day ceasefire has appeared close to failure since Hamas on Monday unexpectedly announced it would stop releasing hostages, leading Israel to respond with a threat to return to war.

Hamas said it did not want the deal to collapse, though it rejected what it called the "language of threats and intimidation" from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump. They have said the ceasefire should be cancelled if the hostages are not released.

"Accordingly, Hamas reaffirms its commitment to implementing the agreement as signed, including the exchange of prisoners according to the specified timeline," Hamas said in a statement. Hamas, whose Gaza chief leader Khalil Al-Hayya is visiting Cairo for talks with

Egyptian security officials, also said both Egyptian and Qatari mediators would press on with efforts "to remove obstacles and close gaps". Israeli government spokesman David Mencer later told reporters that three hostages

must be released alive by Hamas on Saturday for the ceasefire to continue.

Hamas accused Israel this week of failing to respect stipulations calling for a massive increase in aid deliveries and said it would not hand over the three hostages due to be released on Saturday until the issue was resolved.

Israel has also accused Hamas of breaching the agreement, including on Thursday evening when the military said Hamas had fired a rocket from Gaza that landed in the enclave.

The military subsequently struck the launcher, it said.



A source in the Hamas-run police said the rocket was an unexploded Israeli ordinance that had ignited and fired into the air while it was being moved away from a residential

Reuters could not independently verify the claims. After Hamas announced it would stop releasing hostages, Netanyahu ordered reserves

to be called up and threatened to resume combat operations that have been paused for almost a month unless the hostages were returned. Avi Dichter, a member of Netanyahu's security cabinet, told Israeli public radio on

Thursday that he did not believe Hamas would be able to get out of the agreement.

"There's a deal, they won't be able to give anything less than what is in the deal," he said. "I don't believe that Hamas can behave otherwise."

Egyptian security sources told Reuters they expected heavy construction equipment to enter on Thursday and if that happened then Hamas would release hostages on Saturday.

The standoff between Israel and Hamas has threatened to reignite their conflict, which has devastated Gaza and taken the Middle East to the brink of a wider regional war. The talks in Cairo have focused on issues such as Israel's allowing the entry of mobile

homes, tents, medical and fuel supplies, and heavy machinery needed for the removal of Salama Marouf, head of the Hamas-run government media office in Gaza, told Reuters

only 73,000 of the required 200,000 tents had arrived in the enclave, while no mobile homes had been permitted so far.

COGAT, the Israeli military agency overseeing aid deliveries into Gaza, said 400,000 tents had so far been allowed in, while countries meant to supply mobile homes had not yet sent them.

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St.Marzdaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of IranDistributed by: Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute

Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

SPORTS SATURDAY FEBRUARY 15, 2025



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Norman Powell scored a season-high 41 points and came up big in overtime while lifting the Los Angeles Clippers to a 120-116 victory over the Utah Jazz in Salt Lake City.

Powell scored nine of the Clippers' 12 OT points as Los Angeles entered the All-Star break on a three-

James Harden added 32 points, 10 rebounds, seven assists, three steals and two blocks in the come-frombehind win. The Clippers overcame a 20-point deficit and outscored Utah 22-13 in the fourth quarter.

Jazz rookie Kyle Filipowski scored a career-high 20 points and grabbed 10 rebounds. Lauri Markkanen also logged 20 points, John Collins added 17 and rookie Isaiah Collier contributed 16 points, eight assists and four steals but committed seven turnovers

Both teams played for the second consecutive night.

Ben Simmons made his Clippers debut, days after the Brooklyn Nets bought out his contract and he signed with Los Angeles. He totaled 12 points, seven rebounds, six assists and three steals in a reserve role. Powell put the Clippers up 115-110 in overtime by sinking two free throws, but the Jazz quickly pulled back within one after a Collier bucket and a steal and slam by Svi Mykhailiuk.

Powell answered with two baskets, giving the Clippers a five-point lead with under a minute to go. Los Angeles opened the fourth quarter on a 14-4 run, and Powell's tip-in gave the Clippers a 100-99 lead with 6:28 to go. Simmons ignited the charge with the first four points.

Harden then pushed the lead to 103-100 with a 3-pointer.

Markkanen scored two consecutive baskets for a 106-105 Jazz lead.

Harden tied it with a free throw and rebounded his own missed foul shot, leading to Simmons' go-ahead layup.

Collier knotted the score at 108-108 by hitting two free throws with 45.3 seconds left. Neither team could convert on late 3-point attempts, setting up the extra session.

The Jazz hit 9 of 14 shots from beyond the arc in the first quarter to go ahead 33-26.

Utah built its lead to 50-30 before Harden scored seven in a row as the Clippers erased much of the deficit to go into the break down 60-54.

Meanwhile Naz Reid collected 27 points, 14 rebounds and seven assists, and the Minnesota Timberwolves pulled away for a 116-101 win over the Oklahoma City Thunder in Minneapolis.

Anthony Edwards added 23 points, seven rebounds and seven assists for Minnesota, which snapped a two-game skid. Jaden McDaniels scored 21 points.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 24 points, grabbed eight rebounds and dished nine assists to lead Oklahoma City (44-10). The Thunder never led in the game -- the first time that happened all season. Jalen Williams scored 20 points, and Chet Holmgren and Isaiah Hartenstein notched double-doubles. The

former had 11 points and 12 rebounds, while the latter put up 10 and 12, respectively. Minnesota shot 42.4 percent overall and 26.1 percent (12 of 46) from 3-point range. Oklahoma City hit 42 percent from the field and 24.1 percent (7 of 29) from deep.

The Timberwolves (31-25) played without Rudy Gobert, who was a late addition to the injury report because of back spasms. Teammates Mike Conley (finger), Julius Randle (groin) and Donte DiVincenzo (toe) remained sidelined in the final game before the All-Star break.

A 10-0 run early in the fourth quarter helped Minnesota put the game away. Backup big man Luka Garza made a tip shot to conclude the run and put the Timberwolves on top 107-89 with eight minutes remaining. Minnesota led 97-87 at the end of the third quarter.

Aaron Wiggins made a 3-pointer to pull Oklahoma City within 84-80 with 4:39 remaining in the third. Minnesota responded with an 8-0 run to pull ahead 92-80 with 2:48 left in the third quarter. McDaniels drove toward the rim for a floating jump shot and Nickeil Alexander-Walker and Edwards knocked down 3-pointers during the run.

Roma Held at Porto, Galatasaray Thrashed 4-1 at Alkmaar



PORTO (Dispatches) - Francisco Moura's second-half strike earned hosts Porto a 1-1 draw against 10-man AS Roma in the first leg of their Europa League knockout round playoff on Thursday as Turkish champions Galatasaray lost 4-1 at AZ

Zeki Celik put Roma ahead in the dying seconds of the first half when he tapped in a loose ball in the six yard box before Moura equalised when his shot deflected off a defender past goalkeeper Mile Svilar in the 67th minute.

Claudio Ranieri's Roma were dealt a further blow five minutes later when they were left with 10 men as Bryan Cristante was handed a second yellow card.

The visitors, who had already lost forward Paulo Dybala through injury before halftime, withstood Porto's late pressure, as the Portuguese tried to capitalise on their man advantage but saw Goncalo Borges and Danny Namaso missing the target.

Two-time Europa League finalists Roma will be looking to beat Porto for the first time in four European ties. Winners will face either Athletic Bilbao or Roma's arch-rivals Lazio.

Ten-man Galatasaray suffered a 4-1 defeat at Dutch side Alkmaar, who are playing their first European knockout tie in

Alkmaar opened the scoring after 12 minutes as Sven Mijnans netted a stunning free kick into the left top corner before Galatasaray equalised eight minutes later through Roland Sallai's rocket from the edge of the box.

Troy Parrott restored the hosts' lead from the spot in the 37th minute before the visitors were reduced to 10 men shortly after the break when Kaan Ayhan saw a second yellow card.

Medvedev Moves on in Marseille

PARIS (Dispatches) - No. 1 seed Daniil Medvedev of Russia had little trouble defeating French qualifier Pierre-Hugues Herbert 6-2, 6-4 in the Round of 16 at the Open 13 Provence in Marseille, France.

Medvedev had an automatic bye into the second round and played his first match of the week Thursday. He won 39 of his 49 service points, including an overwhelming 26 of 29 on his first serve (89.7 percent), and saved the only break point he faced against Herbert.

Medvedev's quarterfinal opponent will be Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff, who outlasted French qualifier Hugo Grenier 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.

A pair of seeded players also fell Thursday, as China's Zhizhen Zhang beat No. 4 seed Hubert Hurkacz of Poland 6-4, 6-7 (1), 6-3, and Belgium's Zizou Bergs took down No. 8 seed Nuno Borges of Portugal 6-2, 6-7 (5), 6-2. Bergs had 13 aces and saved both break points he faced.

Meanwhile the home fans in Buenos Aires said goodbye to one of their favorites, as Spaniard Pedro Martinez beat Argentina's Diego Schwartzman 6-2, 6-2 in the second round, marking the final match of Schwartzman's professional career.

Schwartzman, 32, planned to make his hometown tournament his final event before retiring. The former World No. 8 upset seventh seed Nicolas Jarry of Chile on Wednesday to extend his run. He



saved one match point late in the day before falling to Martinez.

The crowd did get to cheer on another Argentine to an upset win, as Mariano Navone beat second-seeded Holger Rune of Denmark 6-1, 7-6 (2). Third-seeded Lorenzo Musetti of Italy eliminated France's Corentin Moutet 6-2, 6-3, and Brazil's Joao Fonseca rallied past Argentine lucky loser Federico Coria 2-6, 6-4, 6-2.

No. 6 seed Brandon Nakashima also rallied past fellow American Reilly Opelka 3-6, 7-5, 6-2 to reach the quarterfinals in Florida.

Opelka had 17 aces to Nakashima's 14, but Nakashima's serve only got better as the match wore on. He won 16 of 17 total service points in the third set, while Opelka only went 14-for-28.

In other second-round action, No. 8 seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain pulled away from American wild-card entrant Mackenzie McDonald for a 6-2, 5-7,

No. 4 seed Matteo Arnaldi of Italy squeezed past American wild card Learner Tien 7-6 (4), 4-6, 7-6 (1). In the last match of the night, top seed Taylor Fritz of the United States was set to oppose China's Yunchaokete

Meanwhile three-times defending champion Iga Swiatek will face Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko in the Qatar Open semi-finals after the Pole overcame Elena Rybakina 6-2 7-5.

Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova, who defeated American sixth seed Jessica Pegula, will face another American Amanda Anisimova in the other semi-final

In a repeat of last year's final, second seed Swiatek swept through the opening set, breaking Kazakhstan fifth seed Ryabkina's first service game to lead 2-0 and again to wrap up the set.

Rybakina, who discovered on Wednesday that the WTA had decided to uphold a ban against her former coach Stefano Vukov following an investigation into a potential breach of its code of conduct, recovered to break in the opening game of the second set.

Brignone Wins Women's Giant Slalom World Gold



SAALBACH (Dispatches) - Italy's Federica Brignone put in a dominant display to win gold in the women's giant slalom at the Alpine World Ski Championships in Saalbach.

Brignone, second in the super-G a week ago, led after the first run, and again put in the fastest time on her second to win by 0.90 of a second over New Zealand's Alice Robinson, who took silver and her first world championship medal.

America's Paula Moltzan battled to claim the bronze medal, overcoming Norway's Thea Louise Stjernesund by one

Brignone had finished second behind Mikaela Shiffrin in this event in 2023, and took the silver medal at the 2022 Olympics. The Italian also has a giant slalom silver medal from her first world championships in 2011.

"Gold in the giant slalom is something I dreamed of throughout my career, I managed to stay calm after the first run, I knew I had a good lead," Brignone, who won a second world championship gold after her alpine combined victory in 2023,

Brignone, fourth out of the gates, set a blistering pace on the first run for the rest to follow, and Robinson was the only rival to get within one second of the Italian, 0.67 seconds behind.

Her dominance, especially in the second half of her run, left just six racers less than two seconds behind Brignone, including her expected rivals Moltzan, Lara Gut-Behrami and

Before the big guns came out for the second run, Albania's Italian-born 18-year-old Lara Colturi was the surprise leader in her first world championships appearance, but was finally overtaken by Stjernesund.

With the top five still to come, Stjernesund had a nervous wait to see if her time would earn a medal, and neither Hector nor Gut-Behrami could overtake the Norwegian.

Moltzan then took over at the top by the slimmest of margins, before Robinson set the fastest time of the second run to pile the pressure on Brignone.

Yet the 34-year-old Italian seems to get better with age, and in a superb season where she leads the overall world cup

standings, Brignone finished the job in style. "At the World Championships we know it's all or nothing, I

had the opportunity to go full throttle, today I was fine, I was focused on skiing," Brignone said.

"So much so that in the second run for a moment I was falling asleep and I said to myself 'move'. I'm out of breath but I was fine, I arrived at this event relaxed and at my best. I have to enjoy it as soon as it sinks in."

Bayern Sink Celticas Benfica, Feyenoord and Club Brugge Also Win

PARIS (Dispatches) - Harry Kane was on target as Bayern Munich beat Celtic 2-1 in Glasgow in the first leg of their Champions League play-off yesterday, while there were also wins for Benfica, Feyenoord and Club Brugge.

Bayern are hoping to go all the way to this season's final, which will be played at their own Allianz Arena in Munich

They threatened to run riot against the Scottish champions at Celtic Park as they dominated the first half and took the lead just before the interval thanks to a superb Michael Olise strike.

Bayern's second goal came just four minutes after halftime, with the unmarked Kane scoring with a cushioned finish at the back post following a corner.

It was Kane's seventh goal in this season's Champions League, and his 29th in 29 games in all competitions.

However, the Bundesliga leaders took their foot off the pedal after that, allowing Celtic -- who had a first-minute Nicolas Kuehn goal disallowed for offside -- to come back into the game.

Brendan Rodgers' team pulled one back as Daizen Maeda scored following a corner with 11 minutes left, but they could not find an equaliser.

"It's cliche to say, but it's the first half of the game. Overall, it's a



really great result," said Bayern coach Vincent Kompany, according

Celtic's first home defeat since December 2023 leaves them facing a huge task to try to turn the tie around in Germany next Tuesday, with the winners going through to face either Bayer Leverkusen or Atletico

"It's only a one goal difference. It's a big challenge, we know that but it's still a possibility," insisted Rodgers.

Elsewhere, Vangelis Pavlidis scored the only goal as Benfica won

1-0 away to Monaco, as the home side were forced to play much of the second half with 10 men.

Benfica had won 3-2 in Monaco in the league phase in November and they came out on top again at the Stade Louis II thanks to a Pavlidis strike just after half-time.

It was the Greek international's sixth goal in his team's last five Champions League outings, a run which includes a hat-trick in the dramatic 5-4 loss to Barcelona last Monaco had Libyan midfielder Moatasem Al-Musrati

sent off in the 52nd minute, when the recent signing from Besiktas gestured to the referee calling for a yellow card after his teammate Breel Embolo had been fouled, only to be handed a second caution himself.

Benfica will hope to finish off the tie in next week's return, with the winners facing either Liverpool or Barcelona in the last 16. In Rotterdam, Feyenoord shook off the sacking of coach Brian

1-0 and gain the upper hand to take to San Siro for the return. The Dutch side were helped by a clanger from Milan goalkeeper

Priske on Monday to beat seven-time European champions AC Milan

Mike Maignan, who allowed Igor Paixao's speculative third-minute shot to ricochet off his body and into the net.