

Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Pourdastan, Head of the Strategic Studies Center of Iran's Army Said the Armed Forces Are Committed to Developing Defense Capabilities in Keeping With Emerging Threats Against the Country

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, Addressing the 8th Indian Ocean Conference Which Is Underway in Muscat, Has Said that the "Lost Paradise" of Makran Must Transform Into the Future Economic Hub of Iran and the Region

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Iran, Lebanon FM's Ready to Solve Cancellation of Flights Through "Goodwill"



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The foreign ministers of Iran and Lebanon say they are ready to address issues surrounding the cancellation of two scheduled civilian flights from Tehran to Beirut amid the Israeli regime's threats.

In a phone conversation on Saturday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and his Lebanese counterpart Youssef Rajji discussed ways to settle the issue.

The cancellation was ordered by the Lebanese Roads Minister under pressure from the Israeli regime, which claimed that the plane was transferring funds to the Hezbollah resistance movement.

In a statement on Friday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said the Israeli regime's threat against the passenger plane transporting Lebanese citizens is a blatant violation of principles and rules of international law and Lebanon's sovereignty.

He emphasized that the Israeli regime's threat has "disrupted normal flights to Beirut Airport."

The Lebanese government's decision to prevent the Iranian planes from landing at Beirut's International Airport sparked protests along the airport road.

The top Iranian and Lebanese diplomats also exchanged views about mutual relations and the latest developments in the region.

Araqchi extended his facilitation to Rajji over his appointment as the Lebanese foreign minister and wished success for him and the new government in the Arab country.

The two ministers stressed the importance of improving bilateral relations in various political, economic, commercial, and cultural fields based on mutual respect to serve common interests.

Iran's Ambassador to Beirut Mojtaba Amani said on Friday that Tehran would certainly agree to the Lebanese government's offer of alternative flights for Iranian planes only if Beirut "does not create obstacles for Iranian airliners."

Hezbollah Rejects American, Israeli Control Over Lebanon



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has identified Iran as a brotherly nation, denouncing Lebanese authorities' preventing an Iranian plane from landing in Beirut under Israeli threats and pressure.

"Iran is a friendly state," Mahmoud Qamati, Deputy Head of Hezbollah's Political Council, said in the Lebanese capital on Saturday, addressing a protest held by the Lebanese people against the Israeli regime's interference in Lebanon, and its deadly violations of the country's sovereignty.

He emphasized the historical and strategic ties between Iran and Lebanon, describing the Islamic Republic as a country that had consistently supported Lebanon without imposing conditions.

"If you, politicians, choose to submit, the resistance people reject American and Israeli humiliation and will never accept it," the official warned.

"We refuse to be under American occupation. We are patient, but our patience has limits," Qamati declared, condemning a subsequent ban that was imposed on Iranian flights as an "insult to the Lebanese state" and proof of "American dictates" being imposed on the country.

The decision to block Iranian flights, Qamati argued, reflected Lebanon's submission to external pressures. "We do not accept that our homeland be under American and Israeli control," he reiterated.

Iran Set to Launch Navak Satellite and Drive 5G Development

TEHRAN - The Minister of Communications and Information Technology announced the upcoming launch of the "Navak" satellite and outlined priorities for the ministry, including the expansion of the 5G communication network and the potential for technological diplomacy.

The Minister of Communications and Information Technology announced that the Navak satellite will be launched in the coming days. This satellite is a 40 kg micro-satellite designed to boost Iran's communication capabilities. The launch aims to improve the country's access to the geostationary orbit.

The Minister of Communications highlighted the need for reforms in the communication regulatory framework, stating a shift towards a "national" approach. He also emphasized the importance of improving the quality of the communications network and increasing transparency in regulations. He stated that efforts are underway to expedite the development of 5G through the auction of 3600 MHz frequency resources.

The Minister also discussed the importance of smart industry. He highlighted how a plan was developed in cooperation with the Ministries of Energy and Oil to address energy imbalances.

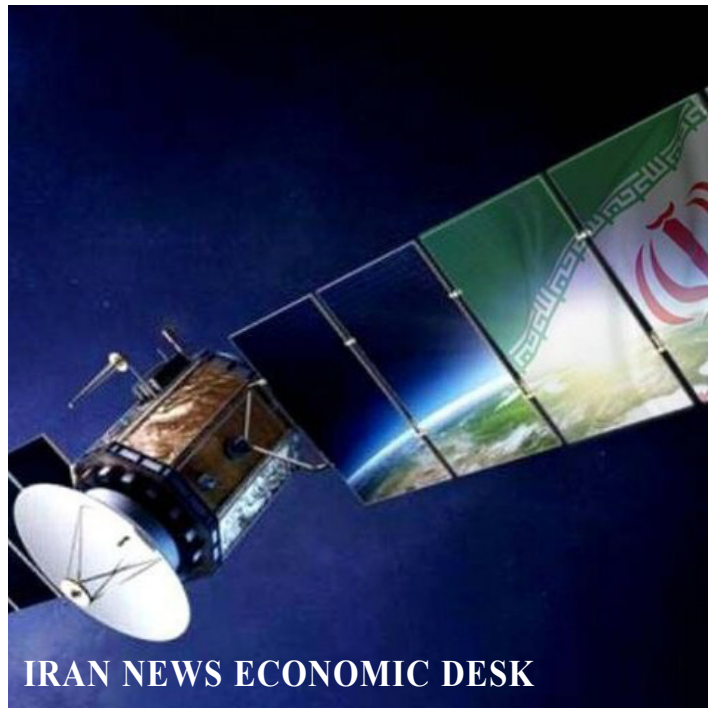
He also discussed the accomplishments of the ministry in the field of technological diplomacy, specifically mentioning: "Diplomacy in technology" as a priority in the government's agenda; Achievements of international trips, despite the continuation and intensification of sanctions; The Iran-Corridor 2025 conference, attended by the 15 best regional operators; Settlement of debts for the "Infrastructure" company and agreements on the use of subsea fiber optic cable.

The Minister said that the goal is for the digital economy to account for 10% of the gross domestic product. He also noted efforts to make the government more digital.

The Minister of Communications and Information Technology highlighted the key advancements in the field of satellite technology and the growth of the 5G network and the importance of smart industry.

Meanwhile the First Vice President has emphasized the crucial role of the digital economy for the national unity government, urging efforts to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Addressing a meeting of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), the Vice President highlighted the importance of high-speed internet access for all citizens, regardless of location.

The meeting honored the memory of ministry martyrs, including the esteemed martyr Ghandi, whose pioneering work in the sector is a source of inspiration. The Vice President shared a personal



anecdote about working alongside Ghandi, illustrating his courageous approach of pursuing what was right despite bureaucratic hurdles and potential consequences. This, he said, is a lesson in prioritizing national interests and the public good over fear of legal repercussions.

The Vice President also highlighted the strides Iran has made in telecommunications. He recalled how, in 1980, facing poor infrastructure and a lack of foreign expertise after the revolution, Iranian engineers were able to dramatically expand telephone access to villages. Initially, plans envisioned connecting 313 villages, but through dedicated efforts, over 500 were connected by 1981. He pointed to this as an example of the potential of self-reliance.

He stressed two key roles for the MCIT: job creation and increasing its share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). He noted that although the law mandates 20% of new jobs to be in the ICT sector, there is potential for even greater growth in the digital economy. The goal is to increase the MCIT's contribution to the GDP from the current 10% to 15%.

The Vice President also underscored the importance of cooperation with the private sector, encouraging the delegation of tasks to competent private companies to increase revenue generation.

Emphasizing the importance of international collaborations, he highlighted the country's skilled workforce and its leading position in the region. He expressed the significance of regional cooperation, particularly with neighboring countries within organizations like ECO, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, and Eurasia. Iran should also actively participate in international scientific and influential organizations.

He urged for "ICT diplomacy" as an essential component of the country's diplomatic efforts, particularly in Africa.

Furthermore, the Vice President stressed the need for cybersecurity, urging for collaboration with universities and relevant ministries to promote research and development in this area. He also highlighted the importance of raising public awareness on security and encryption. The First Vice President concluded by stressing the national priority of establishing a National Information Network.

Spanish Ambassador Says Iran's President Committed to Regional and Global Stability

TEHRAN - The Spanish ambassador to Iran emphasized: I believe that the Iranian president is committed to regional and global stability and the deepening of relations between the two countries, and we should use this opportunity to expand interactions.

Antonio Sanchez Benedicto Gaspar, the Spanish ambassador to Iran, said on Sunday while meeting with the Governor of Isfahan in the Hall of Ashraf in Isfahan, "I believe that the Iranian president is committed to the stability of the region and the world and the deepening of relations between the two countries. The two countries should expand their interactions."

He added: The interactions between the two countries are not limited to the discussion of cultural heritage and the economic dynamism of cities like Isfahan can be the basis for deepening relations.

He said that in Spain, everyone knows the importance and position of Isfahan in Iran, adding: The sisterhood of Barcelona, which is the economic engine of Spain, with Isfahan can help develop trade relations.

The Spanish ambassador to Iran noted: Tourism is the foundation of Spain's economic development, and last year, the country hosted more than 90 million tourists and was the second-most popular tourist destination in the world after France.

Benedicto Gaspar emphasized: We are ready to exchange experiences in this field with Iran, and Spain, due to the lack of fossil fuel resources, is a prominent country in the field of using new energies and can have constructive cooperation with Isfahan in this field.

The Governor of Isfahan added in this meeting: The 400-year friendly relationship between Iran and Spain can pave the way for deepening relations between the two countries.

Mehdi Jamalinejad added: "The historical and cultural commonalities and the existing political space require that cultural, economic, scientific, sports, and social relations be expanded more than ever between the two countries, and Isfahan Province has complete readiness to deepen relations in all areas of interest between the two countries."

The governor of Isfahan, adding that Isfahan province is known as the capital of Iran in terms of



industry, art, and culture, said: "Isfahan was introduced in 2006 after the holy city of Mecca as the cultural capital of the Islamic world, which shows its cultural and historical capacities."

The Governor of Isfahan stated: Isfahan province is not limited to the city of Isfahan, but it has 114 historical and valuable cities and more than 1,300 villages, most of which have a rich cultural and historical background and numerous tourism and economic capacities.

Jamalinejad noted: In previous years, good relations were established between the cities of Isfahan and Barcelona, and joint cultural programs and events, such as the exhibition of Isfahan's artworks in Spain and the dispatch of Isfahan's artists to this country, were held.

The Governor of Isfahan emphasized: Today, we are ready to implement other articles of the sisterhood agreement between Isfahan and Barcelona.

He added: "We are ready to establish a sisterhood between other large and historical cities of the province such as Kashan, Najafabad, and Golpayegan with other cities in Spain and once again hold an exhibition of Isfahan handicrafts in Spain."

Referring to the various fields of tourism in the province, the governor of Isfahan said: "Isfahan can welcome Spanish tourists in the fields of health, historical, cultural, and nature tourism, and we are ready to invite Spanish tour operators to introduce the province's tourist attractions."

Jamalinejad emphasized: Isfahan has large and prominent universities such as Isfahan, Industrial and Art, which can cooperate with Spanish universities in scientific exchanges and student acceptance.

Referring to the three axes of development of the province, the governor of Isfahan said: "Tourism is the main axis of development of this region, and in addition to it, artificial intelligence and new energies can be the basis for the development of bilateral economic and cultural relations."

Antonio Sanchez Benedicto Gaspar, the Spanish ambassador to Iran, this morning, in addition to meeting with the governor, visited some historical places in Isfahan and planted a friendship flower between the two countries in the garden of peace of the governorate of Isfahan.

Iran Reports Substantial Increase in Trade With Neighbors



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says its trade with neighbors rose by nearly 20% in value terms in the 10 months to late January.

Iran's trade with its neighboring countries rose significantly in the 10 months to late January compared to the same period last year.

Figures released on Saturday by a subsidiary of Iran's ministry of trade (MIMT) showed that trade between the country and its 15 neighbors, including states with which Iran shares maritime borders, had increased by 19.2% year on year in April-January to reach \$59.7 billion.

The figures showed that Iran's trade with its neighbors had increased by 16.2% in volume terms to reach 93.5 million metric tons in the 10 months to late January.

Trade with neighbors accounted for nearly 60% of Iran's total trade in April-January, according to the data.

Iran's exports to neighbors rose by 28% to \$29.7 billion in the 10 months to late January, said the MIMT department.

It said that Iraq had been the largest buyer of Iranian goods and commodities over the period with some \$10.175 billion worth of purchases, followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at \$5.961 billion and Turkey at \$5.535 billion.

Exports to Iraq, the UAE, and Turkey rose by 31%, 12%, and 43%, respectively, in April-January, the trade figures showed.

The data showed that Iran's imports from neighbors had reached a total of \$29.875 billion in the 10 months to late December, up 11.5% compared to the same previous period.

The UAE, which is the main re-exporting hub in the Persian Gulf, was the largest exporter to Iran in April-January with some \$16.9 billion worth of shipments while imports from Turkey and Russia reached \$9.9 billion and \$1.2 billion, respectively, over the same period, according to the figures.

Qalibaf Praises President Pezeshkian for Adherence to Unity Principles



TEHRAN - Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, praised President Masoud Pezeshkian's stance on negotiations with the United States, highlighting his commitment to unity and adherence to the Supreme Leader's guidance.

Speaking in a public session of the Majlis (Parliament) on Sunday, Qalibaf expressed appreciation for Pezeshkian's position, stating that it "disappointed the enemy" who sought to create a divide over the issue of negotiations.

Qalibaf emphasized that Pezeshkian, "by adhering to the principles of unity, declared the wise guidance of the Supreme Leader as the decisive word." This, Qalibaf argued, undermined the enemy's efforts to polarize the debate surrounding negotiations.

He emphasized the importance of a unified voice among the country's officials, echoing the Supreme Leader's policies, noting that this unity has "corrected the enemy's calculations" in dealing with the Iranian people. Qalibaf added that the Supreme Leader recognized this unified stance as a complement to the Iranian people's massive participation in the February 11th rally.

Qalibaf also highlighted the enthusiastic participation of the people in the celebrations of the birth anniversary of Imam Mahdi.

He also commemorated the anniversary of the 1978 uprising in Tabriz, calling it a historic event that changed the course of history. He praised the people of Tabriz for their role in spreading the message of the revolution.

On February 11th Rally, Qalibaf expressed gratitude to the Iranian people for their enthusiastic participation in the February 11th rally, which he said demonstrated their unity, solidarity, and love for their country. He stressed the responsibility of officials to work tirelessly to solve economic problems.

IRAN NEWS



FM Travels to Oman to Attend Indian Ocean Conference

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi departed for Oman at the head of a delegation to attend the eighth Indian Ocean Conference (IOC). Araqchi headed for Oman on Saturday evening. In addition to attending the Indian Ocean Conference, the top Iranian diplomat will hold bilateral meetings with his counterparts of the participating countries and other officials in attendance. The conference is set to be held in Muscat on Sunday and Monday, Oman's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Sheikh Khalifa Alharthy said at a news conference on Wednesday. Under the theme "A Voyage Towards New Horizons of Maritime Partnership," the conference will bring together ministers and officials representing 60 countries and international organizations from across the Indian Ocean region, he said.

Domestic Appliance Production Grows 10%



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Despite facing numerous challenges, Iran's domestic appliance industry experienced a 10% growth in production during the period from the beginning of the year to the end of January, according to reports.

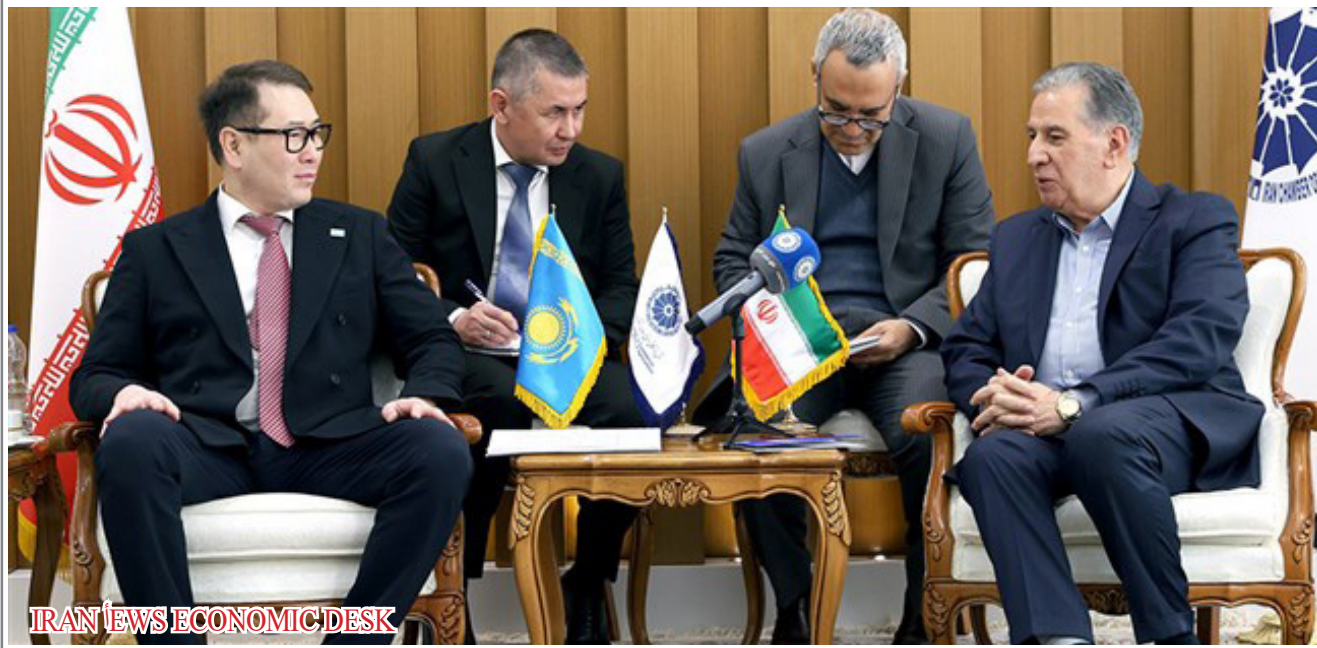
Industry analysts say that despite ongoing economic hardships, including energy shortages and smuggling, Iran's domestic appliance sector is showing positive signs of growth. While producers grapple with challenges such as frequent power and gas outages, complicated import regulations for raw materials, and the lengthy process of currency allocation, production has seen a 10% increase compared to the same period last year.

According to the report, manufacturers are battling problems such as energy imbalances, with frequent gas and electricity cutoffs, as well as numerous systems in the registration of orders for raw materials. These problems are compounded by the lengthy process of currency allocation, which makes obtaining raw materials difficult. Producers are also affected by rising operating costs and the prevalence of smuggled goods.

The government has implemented a ban on the import of foreign appliances to support local production, but smuggled foreign appliances are still present in many stores. Smuggled goods benefit from reduced costs, including customs duties, insurance, taxes, and other fees, making them cheaper than high-quality Iranian products. This creates an unfair competitive landscape that harms domestic manufacturers.

Ebrahim Sheikh, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade, stated at a press conference that the ministry's policy is to make Iranian goods more competitive on the international stage, and that the ban on imports does not make sense in this context. He noted that while most of the parts for appliances are imported, technology is also being imported into the country.

Iran, Kazakhstan Aim for \$3b Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In a joint meeting between the President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce and Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade, officials emphasized the necessity of resolving banking and transportation issues as key prerequisites for achieving the targeted \$3 billion trade volume between the two nations.

The President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, Samad Hassanzadeh, highlighted the geographical and cultural ties between Iran and Kazakhstan, stressing that these factors should facilitate stronger trade relations. However, he noted that the current trade volume does not reflect the full industrial and commercial potential of the two countries.

Hassanzadeh pointed out Iran's imports of agricultural products and semi-assembled engines from Kazakhstan and emphasized that Iran's diverse production capabilities could lead to an expansion of exports to the Central Asian country.

He stated that Iran has significant capacities in various industries, including food processing, petrochemicals, engineering services, infrastructure construction (roads, bridges, tunnels, and dams), refinery development, pump and electromotor manufacturing, medical equipment, handicrafts, handmade carpets, building materials, mining projects, home appliances, textiles, and power plant construction. Each of these sectors, he noted, could serve as a foundation for bilateral cooperation.

Despite multiple cooperation agreements between Iran and Kazakhstan, Hassan-Zadeh expressed concern that many of these agreements have not been effectively implemented.

Additionally, he called for better planning to boost tourism and trade delegations between the two nations, given the recent visa waiver. He also suggested increasing student exchanges, including Iranian students studying in Kazakhstan and scholarship programs for Kazakh students in Iran, to enhance scientific and educational collaborations.

He stressed that resolving transportation challenges and easing banking relations would be critical to elevating the trade volume beyond \$3 billion.

Amir Abedi, President of the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber of Commerce, identified financial transactions as the primary obstacle to trade growth. He

called for the establishment of executive committees by both governments to address banking issues and facilitate smooth business operations for Iranian traders in Kazakhstan.

Amir Yousefi, President of the Gorgan Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the presence of over 7,000 ethnic Kazakhs in Iran's Golestan province, suggesting that the Incheh-Borun Free Trade Zone could be an attractive investment opportunity for Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade and Integration, Arman Shakkaliyev, reaffirmed his country's commitment to expanding trade ties to reach the \$3 billion target. He noted that over 50 major Kazakh companies from 14 provinces participated in the recent trade meeting.

Discussions with Iran's ministers of agriculture and industry explored practical solutions for achieving the trade goal. Shakkaliyev highlighted opportunities in the construction materials sector (such as ceramics), medical equipment, machinery, and food industries, projecting that trade in technical and engineering services alone could reach \$500 million annually.

He also pointed out that with over 75,000 members in Iran's Chamber of Commerce, the potential for private-sector collaboration is immense. However, without resolving banking challenges, trade growth would remain constrained. He proposed solutions to address these issues and expressed optimism about reaching favorable agreements.

Additionally, he identified transportation as another major hurdle and stressed the importance of utilizing the North-South Corridor for improved logistics.

Shakkaliyev concluded by advocating for the definition of 10 major joint industrial projects, which should be finalized in the Iran-Kazakhstan Economic Commission meeting scheduled for April.

Both Iran and Kazakhstan recognize the untapped potential in their trade relations. However, addressing banking and transportation issues remains crucial for reaching their ambitious \$3 billion trade target. With strategic cooperation in various industries and infrastructure projects, both nations aim to strengthen their economic partnership in the coming years.

Estimated \$50b in Household Foreign Currency Holdings in Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - According to Mohammad Reza Pour-Ebrahimi, a former member of parliament, an estimated \$40 to \$50 billion in foreign currency is held by Iranian households. He stated that if these funds were directed into production sectors, they could significantly address Iran's financial needs.

Speaking about the country's economic conditions and persistent inflation, Pour-Ebrahimi noted that many Iranians have turned to investments in foreign currency and gold to protect their assets from inflation. He explained that these assets, similar to real estate, have values that fluctuate in line with inflation, making them a preferred store of wealth.

He attributed this trend to the high inflation rates in the country and criticized previous administrations for failing to channel these assets into productive economic activities. He recalled that during previous governments, banks had introduced foreign currency deposits, allowing people to earn interest on their foreign currency holdings and settle loans based on the currency value.

However, he criticized a policy change in which depositors were later forced to withdraw their foreign currency holdings in Iranian rials at fixed rates, a move that he described as legally and economically unjustified. This, he argued, led people to keep their savings in cash or move them into informal markets, further limiting capital available for productive investment.

Pour-Ebrahimi emphasized that if even a portion of these household savings were reinvested into production, it could help boost Iran's economic growth. He stressed that economic growth depends on reinvesting assets into productive sectors, increasing GDP, and creating new wealth. Without investment, he warned, Iran's economy would shrink, leading to lower incomes and reduced consumption.

He concluded by urging authorities to take measures that encourage people to reintegrate these assets into the formal economy, thereby strengthening Iran's financial system and supporting sustainable economic development.

Turning West Azerbaijan Province Into a Hub for Trade With Turkey



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Governor of West Azerbaijan province has emphasized the importance of boosting trade with neighboring countries.

In a meeting with members of the Urmia Chamber of Commerce, Reza Rahmani, Governor of West Azerbaijan, stressed the importance of strengthening trade ties. "The creation of a joint Iran-Turkey Chamber of Commerce branch in Urmia will facilitate trade, attract investment, and facilitate economic relations between the two countries," said the governor.

The Governor of West Azerbaijan also announced the formation of strategic headquarters to promote the growth and development of the province. He added that these include the Border Development Headquarters, the Economic Development Headquarters focused on trade and industry, and the revival of Lake Urmia, all with the goal of protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development.

"The province is bordering with Turkey, Iraq, and Azerbaijan," said the Governor. "The optimal use of this resource is a critical factor in the region's economic growth."

The Governor of West Azerbaijan stressed the necessity of changing approaches to complete the commercial and economic infrastructure. He demanded the establishment of logistical centers and export terminals in the province to speed up and consolidate the process of foreign trade.

Rahmani pointed to the prominent position of West Azerbaijan in the field of arts and crafts. He added that the creation of a specialized terminal for exporting them is a necessary action. "Improving export infrastructure in this sector, while increasing employment, will help better promote the art and culture of the province at an international level," he added.

Finally, he emphasized the need for the government and the private sector to interact. He highlighted the critical role of the Urmia Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture.

The Urmia Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture's president, Ghasem Karimi, has emphasized the role of the people as the main actors in the economy. He praised the developmental programs of the office and viewed the establishment of the border development headquarters as an effective step in promoting border trade and creating sustainable development.

Iran-Kazakhstan Economic Gates to Open Wider With Eurasian Agreement

TEHRAN - The Minister of Industry, Mining, and Trade announced that Tehran and Astana have agreed to boost economic and trade exchanges up to \$3 billion, aligning with the interests of both nations' leaders. He also highlighted the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) trade agreement as a key facilitator in resolving banking transaction issues between businesses in the two countries.

Seyed Mohammad Atabak made these remarks during a meeting with Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade and Integration, the Kazakh ambassador to Tehran, and a delegation of economic and trade officials. He pointed out that despite longstanding economic and commercial ties, the trade volume between Iran and Kazakhstan does not yet reflect the full potential of their relationship.

Atabak emphasized that top officials from both nations are committed to increasing trade volume in line with their industrial and economic capabilities. He stated that the projected \$3 billion trade target is achievable.

He identified banking obstacles as the primary challenge in bilateral trade, noting that the EAEU agreement would help remove these barriers.

Discussing Iran's mining sector, Atabak assured the Kazakh trade minister that Iran could supply all types of metallic and non-metallic minerals needed by Kazakhstan. He also expressed readiness for barter trade based on mutual requirements.

Furthermore, he highlighted Iran's expertise in other fields, including the export of technical and engineering services and the exchange of experience between the two nations. He stated that expanding such cooperation is part of their bilateral agenda.

Logistics and railway transportation were also discussed as key areas of mutual interest. Atabak noted that enhancing these sectors could significantly impact trade volume between Tehran and Astana.

The Iranian minister also welcomed the idea of mutual food exports, stressing the importance of adhering to agreed standards.

In conclusion, Atabak announced the formation of a working group to operationalize bilateral cooperation, assigning Iran's Ministry of



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

Industry, Mining, and Trade's specialized departments to oversee various aspects of Iran-Kazakhstan collaboration.

Earlier Minister of Agriculture, Gholamreza Nouri Ghezalje, announced that Iran is ready to provide facilities to Kazakhstan as part of the North-South Corridor project, allowing the country to invest in Iranian ports for exporting goods to other countries.

In a meeting with Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade and Integration, Arman Shakkaliyev, Nouri Ghezalje emphasized the strong commitment of both countries' high-ranking officials to enhancing bilateral relations. However, he noted that despite significant potential, the current level of trade cooperation remains modest. "We aim to achieve the \$3 billion trade target as soon as possible," he stated.

Highlighting the geographical advantages of both nations, the Iranian minister underscored their complementary roles in ensuring food security. "Iran can supply Kazakhstan with fruits, vegetables, and tropical products, while Kazakhstan can export grains to Iran," he explained. He also pointed out that trade volume between the two countries increased by 13% last year, surpassing \$300 million, but stressed that this figure does not reflect the full potential of bilateral cooperation.

Nouri Ghezalje further stated that Iran could import up to 2 million tons of wheat and barley from Kazakhstan annually without tariffs. He also highlighted Iran's strategic position in facilitating Kazakhstan's exports to regional markets, calling for enhanced efforts in this area.

The discussions also covered cooperation in agricultural development, animal quarantine, trade facilitation, and customs modernization. Additionally, Kazakhstan committed to supplying Iran with essential goods such as grains, oil, and meat when needed.

The two sides also explored Kazakhstan's potential investment in Iranian ports, further integrating both countries into the North-South trade corridor.

60% Increase in Exports From Mahiroud Border to Afghanistan



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The governor of South Khorasan has announced that exports from the Mahiroud border crossing to Afghanistan have surged by 60%, reaching over \$750 million this year.

According to a report by the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Mohammad Reza Hashemi, Governor of South Khorasan, made this statement during a meeting focused on economic and trade relations with Afghanistan. The meeting was attended by the Iranian ambassador to Kabul and the Iranian consul general in Herat.

Hashemi highlighted the 331-kilometer shared border between South Khorasan and Afghanistan as a key opportunity for economic growth. He emphasized the province's strong agricultural, mining, and tourism potential, particularly its role as the world's leading producer of barberries and saffron.

The governor also noted that surplus livestock and poultry from the province are exported to several other Iranian provinces, demonstrating South Khorasan's agricultural capabilities.

Hashemi stressed the importance of completing infrastructure projects, particularly the Mahiroud-Farah road, which he described as essential for enhancing trade and transportation between the two nations. A special committee has been formed to oversee the project, and he called for urgent support from Iran's Foreign Ministry to expedite its completion.

Additionally, he expressed South Khorasan's readiness to expand educational and cultural cooperation with Afghanistan, mentioning that 700 Afghan students are currently studying in the province.

Iran's ambassador to Kabul, Ali Beikdeli, stated that efforts are underway to reopen South Khorasan's border markets, which would provide economic opportunities for local residents, particularly those living near the border.

Beikdeli also acknowledged Iran's efforts in constructing and completing the Mahiroud-Farah trade route, which is now 85% finished. He emphasized the need for continued cooperation to finalize the project, adding that the development of transit and transportation facilities at the Mahiroud border terminal is also being prioritized.

One Person Killed and Four Wounded in Knife Attack in Austria

VIENNA (Dispatches) - A teenage boy has been killed and four more people wounded in a knife attack in southern Austria Saturday, police said.

A 14-year-old boy died and four other people were injured in a knife attack in southern Austria on Saturday, police said, adding they have arrested a 23-year-old Syrian asylum seeker.

"A man randomly attacked passers-by with a knife," police spokesman Rainer Dionisio told AFP of the incident in the city of Villach.

"One victim, a 14-year-old boy, died," he added.

Two other men suffered serious injuries, while another two men were lightly injured, Dionisio added.



Thousands Rally in Serbia as Anger Over Corruption Swells



KRAGUJEVAC (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of students marched into the central Serbian city of Kragujevac on Saturday, demanding justice after a deadly railway disaster, in one of the biggest shows of anger against the government.

In the three months since 15 people were killed when a roof collapsed at a newly-renovated train station in Serbia's second-biggest city of Novi Sad, mass demonstrations have grown into the biggest threat yet to President Aleksandar Vucic's decade-long grip on power.

Joined by teachers, farmers and other workers, the students have drawn support from the wider public as many Serbians have blamed the tragedy on corruption within the government.

On Saturday, students braved near-freezing temperatures to travel to Kragujevac from across Serbia, by bus and even on foot from the capital Belgrade, some 140 kilometres (87 miles) away, beating drums, blowing whistles and waving the country's flag. Locals greeted them with cheers.

The protesters planned to blockade one of the city's main boulevards for 15 hours and 15 minutes in a symbolic tribute to the 15 victims. They also held 15 minutes of silence.

"We are here to fight for a better tomorrow, against corruption," said 20-year-old Jovan, who drove from Belgrade with friends.

By noon, all roads leading to Kragujevac were jammed with traffic. As the numbers swelled, locals brought the protesters homemade pies and hot tea.

Verica, a 52-year-old professor from the city, joined the protest with her teenage daughter.

"I have not been so happy and proud for a long time," she said.

Vucic's government has said it will launch an anti-corruption campaign, and has also denied allegations of corruption.

Vucic on Saturday assembled supporters from the Republika Srpska in neighbouring Bosnia, as well as from Serbia, at a rally in the town of Sremska Mitrovica, in the country's northwest.

Lavrov, Rubio Discuss Removal of Barriers Set by Previous U.S. Administration



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio discussed the situation in Ukraine on Saturday, as well as the removal of "unilateral barriers" set by the previous U.S. administration, Moscow said.

U.S. and Russian officials are to start talks in the coming days on ending Moscow's war in Ukraine after U.S. President Donald Trump shocked European allies by calling Russian President Vladimir Putin and declaring an immediate start to the talks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday that his country was not invited to the talks in Saudi Arabia and that Kyiv would not engage with Russia before consulting with strategic partners.

Lavrov and Rubio, in a call initiated by the U.S., agreed to maintain contacts to resolve problems in bilateral relations, "in the interests of removing the unilateral barriers to mutually beneficial trade, economic and investment cooperation inherited from the previous administration," Russia's foreign ministry said in a statement.

It was not immediately clear what barriers were discussed.

Hamas, Israel Complete Sixth Hostage-Prisoner Swap After Tense Week



GAZA (Dispatches) - Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad released three Israelis held in captivity since October 7, 2023 in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Hamas last week threatened to delay the planned swap, accusing Israel of having violated the ceasefire.

Palestinian militants released three Israeli hostages on Saturday in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian inmates freed by Israel, completing the latest swap despite fears the Gaza truce deal was near collapse.

An AFP journalist saw masked Hamas gunmen parade the hostages on a stage in Gaza's southern city of Khan Yunis.

Israeli-American Sagui Dekel-Chen, Israeli-Russian Sasha Trupanov and Israeli-Argentine Yair Horn were made to make statements into a microphone before being handed over to the Red Cross and taken back home to Israeli territory, after being held for more than 16 months.

Clutching gift bags given by their captors, the three men, flanked by fighters, called for the completion of further hostage exchanges under the ceasefire deal.

Not long after, a busload of Palestinian prisoners departed Israel's Ofer Prison and were greeted by a cheering crowd in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, an AFP journalist reported.

More buses took inmates from an Israeli prison in the Negev desert to the Gaza Strip.

Saturday's swap, the sixth since the truce took effect on January 19, came after Hamas had threatened to pause hostage releases over alleged Israeli violations, while Israel had threatened to resume the war if it did.

Out of 251 hostages seized during Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the war, 70 remain in Gaza, including 35 the Israeli military says are dead.

The latest release led to tears of joy among friends and family members.

"Finally, Sasha can be surrounded by his loved ones and begin a new path," Trupanov's family said in a statement.

Dekel-Chen's wife, Avital, said in a call to her sister aired by Israel's Kan public broadcaster: "My breath has returned. He looks so handsome."

Dekel-Chen finally learned the name of his youngest daughter, born two months after his capture.

Later in the day, hundreds of Palestinians freed by Israel reached Khan Yunis, southern Gaza, where they made victory signs and waved to a jubilant crowd.

In the West Bank, one freed inmate, Amir Abu Radaha, said: "I've returned to my family and I've returned anew, born again."

Charged with intentionally causing death and being a member of an illegal organisation, according to Israeli justice ministry records, Abu Radaha had spent almost 32 years in jail.

According to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group, those to be freed included 36 serving life sentences, 24 of whom were due for deportation under the terms of the truce deal.

The deportees, with shaven heads, later arrived by bus on the Egyptian side of the border, an AFP correspondent reported.

Images broadcast on Israeli media showed Palestinian prisoners ahead of their release wearing sweatshirts featuring the prison service logo, a Star of David, and the slogan: "We will not forget and we will not forgive."

The prisoners tore them off as soon as they reached Gaza and piled them up on a bonfire at the reception point in Khan Yunis.

Negotiations on a second phase of the ceasefire, meant to lay out steps towards a more permanent end to the war, are expected to begin next week.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, whose country is Israel's top backer and one of the truce mediators, arrived in Israel late Saturday ahead of expected talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the truce.

Netanyahu thanked US President Donald Trump Saturday for his "full support" in this week's standoff with Hamas.

Trump had warned that "all hell" would break loose if every Israeli hostage was not released from Gaza by noon on Saturday.

"President Trump's firm stance led to the release of three of our hostages today, despite Hamas previously refusing to release them," Netanyahu's office said.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the United States "must compel" Israel to adhere to the truce deal "if it truly cares about the prisoners' (hostages) lives".

An Israeli campaign group, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, warned against the deal's "collapse".

Zelensky Warns U.S. Not to Strike Peace Deal With Russia Behind Our Backs

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned the United States not to strike a deal with Russia "behind our backs", as he urged Europe to stand up and make its voice heard.

Speaking at a gathering of top policymakers in Munich, the Ukrainian leader issued a rallying cry for Europe to take responsibility for its own security – including by eventually forming a continental army.

The plea from Zelensky came a day after he met US Vice President JD Vance as Kyiv scrambles to ensure it is not sidelined in Washington's push to wrap up the three-year war.

"Ukraine will never accept deals made behind our backs without our involvement," Zelensky said in a keynote speech.

"No decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine. No decisions about Europe without Europe."

U.S. President Donald Trump stunned allies and upended the status quo of U.S. support for Ukraine this week when he announced he would likely soon meet Russian leader Vladimir Putin to start truce talks.

Zelensky cautioned Putin would seek to use Trump as a "prop in his own performance" – possibly by trying to get him to Moscow for Russia's WWII victory parade in May.

Kyiv has urged Washington to come up with a "common plan" to confront Russia but Zelensky suggested there was not yet a joint stance after his meeting with Vance.

Zelensky is pushing for "security guarantees" from both the United States and Europe to ensure that any peace deal does not allow Moscow just to restart the



war later.

"Putin cannot offer real security guarantees, not just because he is a liar but because Russia in its current state needs war to hold power together," he said.

The Ukrainian leader said forceful sanctions on Russia and building up Ukraine's military could help secure peace, and said he was "open" to eventually having European peacekeepers.

European leaders backed up Zelensky's call to action – and for their continent to play a key role.

"There will only be peace if Ukraine's sovereignty is secured," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told the Munich Security Conference.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk pressed Europe to establish its own stances on Ukraine and security as the United States sows doubts about its

commitment to Europe.

"Europe urgently needs its own plan of action concerning Ukraine and our security, or else other global players will decide about our future," Tusk said.

"This plan must be prepared now. There's no time to lose."

Ukraine could "drive out" Putin if US armed Ukraine "to the teeth", allowed attacks deep into Russia

NATO boss Mark Rutte said that leaders in Europe were "now getting into the concrete planning phase" of possible security guarantees.

U.S. officials have said that Ukraine will not be left in the cold after three years of battling Russia's invasion.

Vance said after his sit-down with Zelensky that Washington was looking for a "durable, lasting peace" that would not lead to further bloodshed in coming years.

But U.S. officials have sent mixed messages over Washington's strategy after Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth appeared to rule out Ukraine joining NATO or retaking all of its territory.

That has sparked major worries in Kyiv and Europe that Ukraine could be forced into a bad deal that leaves the continent facing an emboldened Putin.

In a bid to keep Washington close, Kyiv has held talks over granting access to its rare earths mineral deposits in return for future US security support.

Zelensky said the negotiations were ongoing after his meeting with Vance.

Scholz Rebukes Vance, Defends Europe's Stance on Hate Speech and Far Right

MUNICH (Dispatches) - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivered a strong rebuke on Saturday to U.S. Vice President JD Vance's attack on Europe's stance toward hate speech and the far right, saying it was not right for others to tell Germany and Europe what to do.

Vance lambasted European leaders on Friday, the first day of the Munich Security Conference, accusing them of censoring free speech and criticizing German mainstream parties' "firewall" against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

"That is not appropriate, especially not among friends and allies. We firmly reject that," Scholz told the conference on Saturday, adding there were "good reasons" not to work with the AfD.

The anti-immigration party, currently polling at around 20% ahead of Germany's February 23 national election, has pariah status among other major German parties in a country with a taboo about ultranationalist politics because of its Nazi past.

"Never again fascism, never again racism, never again aggressive war. That is why an overwhelming majority in our country opposes anyone who glorifies or justifies criminal National Socialism," Scholz said, referring to the ideology of Adolf Hitler's 1933-45 Nazi regime.



Vance met on Friday with the leader of AfD, after endorsing the party as a political partner – a stance Berlin dismissed as unwelcome election interference.

Referring more broadly to Vance's criticism of Europe's curtailing of hate speech, which he has likened to censorship, Scholz said: "Today's democracies in Germany and Europe are founded on the historic awareness and realisation that democracies can be destroyed by radical anti-democrats.

"And this is why we've created institutions that ensure that our democracies can defend themselves against their enemies, and rules that do not restrict or limit our freedom but protect it."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot added his voice to the defence of Europe's stance on hate speech.

"No one is required to adopt our model but no one can impose theirs on us," Barrot said on X from Munich. "Freedom of speech is guaranteed in Europe."

The prospect of talks to end the Ukraine-Russia war had been expected to dominate the annual Munich conference after a phone call between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian leader Vladimir Putin this week, but Vance barely mentioned Russia or Ukraine in his speech to the gathering on Friday.



Merino Keeps Arsenal in Title Hunt

LEICESTER (Dispatches) - Arsenal made light of the absence of any specialist strikers as midfielder Mikel Merino scored both goals in a 2-0 win at Leicester City that kept the north London club's Premier League title challenge very much on track.

Merino's brace allowed second-placed Arsenal to cut Liverpool's advantage to four points although the leaders will be confident of restoring their seven-point gap against Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday. Champions Manchester City's title hopes may have long since vanished but they looked much more recognisable as recent signing Omar Marmoush bagged a hat-trick in 13 first-half minutes in a 4-0 rout of Newcastle United.

The win allowed City to climb into fourth place with 44 points, three points behind Nottingham Forest whose top-four ambitions suffered a dent in a 2-1 defeat at Fulham.

Bournemouth's challenge for the top four shows no sign of petering out as they won 3-1 at bottom club Southampton to move above Chelsea and Newcastle into fifth place.

Everton's revival since Davis Moyes returned to take charge last month continued as they won 2-1 at Crystal Palace to move up to 13th place, 13 points above the relegation zone.

When German forward Kai Havertz was ruled out for the season this week, joining Gabriel Jesus and Bukayo Sako on the injured list, Arsenal fans must have feared the worst.

Mikel Arteta gave Raheem Sterling a place in his starting line-up at Leicester but the former Chelsea man had a torrid afternoon and was replaced by Merino after 69 minutes.

The Spaniard's impact was decisive as he broke the deadlock in the 81st minute from an assist by impressive teenager Ethan Nwaneri and he wrapped up the points in the 87th minute after good work by Leandro Trossard.

"I think the game started to suit (Merino) more because they started to defend much deeper, and we had more momentum, more sequences, more set-pieces as well in that period," Arsenal manager Arteta told reporters. "We believed that he could impact the game. We were lucky that he did it."

While Arsenal stayed on Liverpool's heels, Leicester's plight is precarious. They are 19th with 17 points after losing nine of their last 10 league matches.

Egyptian Marmoush had not scored for City since his 59 million pounds (\$74.25 million) move from Eintracht Frankfurt last month but he opened his account in explosive fashion against Newcastle.

The 26-year-old Marmoush gave City the lead in the 19th minute with a lob after Newcastle defender Kieran Trippier misjudged goalkeeper Ederson's long delivery.

Five minutes later he latched on to a pass from Ilkay Gundogan to fire home and then completed his hat-trick with a thumping shot after good work by Savinho.

"We knew sooner or later he would score goals, he is a good finisher. Of course he has to improve, but now we see how he handles the compliments," manager Pep Guardiola said.

The only blemish for City was Erling Haaland being forced off with an injury.

"I have not spoken to the doctor, but I was scared when he went down. Maybe it's not as bad as it could be," Guardiola said.

Chris Wood scored his 18th league goal of the season for Forest but it could not prevent his side slipping to defeat at Fulham for whom Emile Smith Rowe opened the scoring and Calvin Bassey headed the winner.

Bournemouth moved to fifth with 43 points, just one behind Manchester City, as goals by Dango Ouattara, Ryan Christie and Marcus Tavernier sealed the points in the south coast derby.

Relegation battlers Ipswich Town secured a well-earned point in a 1-1 draw at Aston Villa despite playing the entire second half with 10 men after Axel Tuanzebe was dismissed.

Ipswich still went ahead after the break when Liam Delap steered in Omari Hutchinson's low cross but Ollie Watkins equalised for Villa who dropped to ninth.

Ipswich are in 18th place with 17 points, two behind 17th placed Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Carlos Alcaraz scored Everton's winner on his first Premier League start after Palace's Jean-Philippe Mateta had cancelled out Beto's opener at Selhurst Park.

Everton have now won four and drawn one of their last five league games after losing their first match under Moyes.

Eleventh-placed Brentford beat West Ham United 1-0 away thanks to an early goal by Kevin Schade. They have now won three successive away games in the top flight for the first time ever.

Medjedovic Earns Milestone Victory in Marseille



PARIS (Dispatches) - Serbian Hamad Medjedovic had little trouble handling No. 1-seed Daniil Medvedev of Russia, capturing a 6-3, 6-2 upset in the semifinals of the Open 13 Provence in Marseille, France.

Medjedovic had zero wins against top-10 opponents before downing Medvedev, who sits at eighth in the world rankings. It took only 72 minutes for the 21-year-old to pull off the stunning victory, in which he collected seven aces and saved 3 of 5 break points.

France's Ugo Humbert, the No. 2 seed, will collide with Medjedovic in the final.

Humbert put together a straight-set win of his own, taking 29 of 35 first-serve points en route to a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Zizou Bergs of Belgium.

Backed by a supportive home crowd, fifth-seeded Argentine Francisco Cerundolo coasted to a 6-2, 6-4 win over Spaniard Pedro Martinez in a semifinal battle in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Cerundolo had eight aces while Martinez had zero, with the former also saving all seven break points he faced.

Joao Fonseca of Brazil is also headed to the final after prevailing 7-6 (3), 5-7, 6-1 against Serbia's Laslo Djere. It was tied 1-1 in the third set before Djere completely collapsed.

No. 7-seed Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia wasn't bothered by a hostile environment and came away with a 7-6 (3), 6-3 upset of third-seeded American Alex Michelsen in semifinal action in Delray Beach, Fla.

Kecmanovic was down 5-4 in the first set but managed to rally back. He then raced out to a 3-0 lead in the second set to put Michelsen to bed.

Napoli Held Late at Lazio as Serie A Champions Inter Lurk



MILAN (Dispatches) - Napoli were held to a 2-2 draw at Lazio on yesterday after Boulaye Dia scored late on as the Italian Serie A leaders thought they were set to move four points clear of Inter Milan.

Senegal attacker Dia rolled home a smart low finish in the 87th minute in Rome to deny Napoli victory and give Inter a chance to move top of the pile with a win at Juventus.

Champions Inter are two points behind Napoli, who have drawn three matches in a row and have failed to beat Lazio in three matches this season, ahead of that clash between fierce rivals in Turin.

"Lazio are our bogey team... we should be proud of what we're doing and make sure that we always come off the field with our jerseys soaked in sweat," said Napoli coach Antonio Conte.

Conte had to deal with the absence of three left-sided players with David Neres, Leonardo Spinazzola, and Mathias Olivera all injured, and switched Napoli to a three-man defence with Pasquale Mazzocchi coming in as a makeshift wing-back.

And his injury problems got worse when Alessandro Buongiorno, who played for the first time in 2025 after recovering from a back injury, had to be replaced by Matteo Politano near the hour mark, and Mazzocchi asked to be substituted with five minutes remaining.

"When Mazzocchi asked to be taken off, it caused us a big problem because I had to put (central defender) Rafa Marin at full-back," added Conte.

"But I can't ask any more from these boys because what they are doing is extraordinary."

Napoli looked to be collecting a big three points when Adam Marusic scored a bizarre own goal in the 64th minute, the defender sticking out his left foot to block Giacomo Raspadori's deflected drive only to somehow chip it past goalkeeper Ivan Provedel and into his own net.

It was Raspadori who drilled Napoli level in the 13th minute following a neat exchange of passes with Romelu Lukaku, cancelling out Gustav Isaksen's thumping early opener for Lazio.

Hosts Lazio briefly thought they had levelled the scores moments later through a sensational Mattia Zaccagni bicycle kick before the Italy international was ruled offside as he flashed in his exceptional finish.

Sinner Accepts Three-Month Doping Ban

ROME (Dispatches) - World number one Jannik Sinner has accepted an immediate three-month doping ban after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said they had reached a settlement on his period of ineligibility, allowing him to return before the French Open in May.

WADA had appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against an independent tribunal's decision in August to clear Sinner of wrongdoing after the three-times major winner failed drug tests.

Sinner, who successfully defended his Australian Open crown last month, had tested positive for anabolic agent clostebol which the 23-year-old said had entered his system from a member of his support team through massages and sports therapy.

Sinner's ban began on February 9 and will end on May 4 while he can return to training on April 13. The French Open is scheduled to begin on May 25.

"WADA confirms that it has entered into a case resolution agreement in the case of Italian tennis player Jannik Sinner, with the player accepting a three-month period of ineligibility for an anti-doping rule violation," WADA said in a statement on Saturday.

"WADA accepts that Mr Sinner did not intend to cheat and that his exposure to clostebol did not provide any performance-enhancing benefit and took place without his knowledge as the result of negligence of members of his entourage.

"However, under the Code and by virtue of CAS precedent, an



athlete bears responsibility for the entourage's negligence."

The case was set to be heard by CAS in April and Sinner was in danger of being banned for up to two years.

Sinner will miss Masters tournaments at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and Madrid.

WADA has formally withdrawn its appeal to CAS after they reached a settlement while they did not seek disqualification of his results.

"This case had been hanging over me now for nearly a year and the process still had a long time to run with a decision maybe only at the end of the year," Sinner said in a statement.

"I have always accepted that I am responsible for my team and realise WADA's strict rules are an important protection for the sport I love.

"On that basis I have accepted WADA's offer to resolve these proceedings on the basis of a 3 month sanction."

The ATP said it acknowledged the resolution of Sinner's case following his agreement with WADA.

"This case is an important reminder of players' responsibility to carefully manage the products and treatments they or their entourages use," it said.

Sinner is the second high-ranked player to accept a doping ban in recent months after world number two Iga Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension in November having tested positive for banned substance trimetazidine (TMZ).

Swiatek had been provisionally suspended from September 12 until October 4, missing three tournaments as a result while she also forfeited prize money from the Cincinnati Open, the tournament directly following the test.

Sinner's lawyer Jamie Singer said WADA had confirmed the facts determined by the independent tribunal.

"It is clear that Jannik had no intent, no knowledge, and gained no competitive advantage. Regrettably, errors made by members of his team led to this situation," Singer said.

However, the decision did not go down well with the Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA), an organisation established by Novak Djokovic.

"The 'system' is not a system. It's a club. Supposed case-by-case discretion is, in fact, merely cover for tailored deals, unfair treatment, and inconsistent rulings," the PTPA said.

Rast Wins Slalom Gold as Shiffrin Misses Out

SAALBACH (Dispatches) - Camille Rast won slalom gold in a Swiss one-two with Wendy Holdener as American Mikaela Shiffrin missed out on a record 16th career medal at the Alpine Skiing World Championships.

Austria's Katharina Liensberger took the bronze on home snow in the last women's race of the 13-day championships in Saalbach.

Shiffrin had been third after the first run but dropped back to finish fifth overall behind U.S. teammate Paula Moltzan in fourth.

"Both runs were really different and really challenging and I just tried to have fun," said Rast, who was fastest from Liensberger after the first leg with Holdener fourth, after winning by 0.46 of a second.

Holdener was fastest of all down the second run, with Moltzan next on the timesheets, to move into the medal positions.

"I was tired, especially after the first two long weeks and after the giant slalom, so I took a rest day yesterday to somehow find



the joy and the motivation to give full gas today and I'm happy it worked out," said Holdener.

Shiffrin, who took a record-equalling 15th medal when she and downhill champion Breezy Johnson won the new women's team combined event on Tuesday, was only the 12th quickest in the deciding run.

Saturday was the first time the world's most successful skier had failed to medal in slalom in seven championships. She won four

golds in a row between 2013-19, silver in 2023 and bronze in 2021.

Despite the miss, she said her race had been a "really good step forward" in her return to the piste from a puncture wound in her left abdomen suffered in a giant slalom crash in Killington, Vermont.

"I think there are some obvious challenges that I face to keep improving in my skiing and maybe to get to the point where I can be fighting for podiums for the end of the season," she told Eurosport.

"It's a step-by-step process and it's going to continue to take work.

"Eight weeks ago I had surgery and six weeks ago I was still in bed with a drainage tube. It's a funny place to be, to be recovering and returning to ski racing... in the end I'm really grateful to be here."

Shiffrin said the course setting had been great and the conditions amazing.