

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), During a Ceremony Attended by its Commander-in-Chief Major General Hossein Salami, Received Two Types of Homegrown Tactical Vehicles named Khatam 270 and Khatam 450

# IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, in a Meeting With Secretary General of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi, Said the Muslim World Should Take a United and Firm Stance in Support of the Rights of the Palestinian People

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## G7 Accusations "Baseless, Irresponsible"



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has categorically rejected the latest accusations raised against Tehran by foreign ministers of the Group of Seven, describing them as "baseless and irresponsible."

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Sunday accusing Iran of destabilizing actions in the region was ridiculous, when G7 members, including the US, Canada and three European countries, are main supporters of Israel's genocide.

Esmacel Baghaei underlined Iran's legitimate right to defend its people and sovereignty against any threat and aggression.

He said in addition to Iran's national security, the Islamic Republic's defense capabilities are also meant to protect peace and security in West Asia.

Baghaei also touched on Iran's peaceful nuclear program, saying it is being implemented according to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Safeguards Agreement.

He said Israel is the only obstacle to a nuclear-weapons-free West Asia region.

Baghaei stressed that the regime is threatening international peace and security by developing weapons of mass destruction with the complete support of G7 members.

Baghaei condemned the unwavering support of G7 countries for the regime at a time when it is engaged in genocide in Gaza and aggression against regional nations.

He warned that these actions pose a grave threat to international peace and security.

## Enemy Trying to Sow Discord and Doubt

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has said efforts by the Iranian nation's enemies to shake the people's resolve and sow discord among them by waging soft threats against them have failed to produce result.

"The massive march of the nation on February 22nd showed that the enemy's software threats have been ineffective against this country and this nation," Ayatollah Khamenei said in the capital Tehran on Monday.

The Leader was pointing to the nation's monumental turnout in the marches and celebrations that marked the 45th anniversary of Iran's historic 1979 Islamic Revolution, which overthrew the country's former United States-backed tyrannical Pahlavi regime.

"Software threats mean manipulating the public opinion; it means creating division; it means creating doubt in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution; it means creating doubt about steadfastness against the enemy. They are doing this," Ayatollah Khamenei stated.

"By God's grace [however], they have not succeeded until today; until today, the enemy's temptations have not been able to shake the hearts of our people or deter our youths from their resolve and moving [forward]," the Leader added.

Ayatollah Khamenei again cited the case of the extensive commemoration events that took place during the anniversary of the Revolution's victory this year.

"Where else in the world does such a thing exist? After forty-some years since the victory of the Revolution, on the anniversary of the Revolution's victory, the entire nation, not the Armed Forces, not the officials, but the masses of the people, honor the day in such a way and enter the field with such a massive turnout, despite all the problems that exist."

Monday marked the anniversary of a historic and influential uprising by the people of East Azerbaijan's capital Tabriz on February 18, 1978, which played a pivotal role in the success of the Revolution a year later.

Elsewhere during the speech, the Leader acknowledged that the Iranian people had some



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legitimate problems and expectations.

The predicaments, though, do not prevent the people from defending their Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei underlined.

"World's arrogant powers, colonialists outraged by Iranian steadfastness"

Ayatollah Khamenei, meanwhile, identified "the reason for the anger of the [world's] arrogant powers and colonialists towards the Islamic Republic" as "the steadfastness and resistance of the Iranian people."

The Leader was pointing to the nation's unflinching march towards the country's betterment and welfare in the face of illegal economic sanctions and mounting political pressure by the US and its allies.

The Leader also hailed the Islamic Revolution for having managed to maintain and preserve itself as an

"independent identity" and a "vast and hopeful base for the peoples of the region and even beyond the region."

Ayatollah Khamenei advised the people functioning within the country's media industry, including broadcast apparatuses, authors, knowledgeable figures, cyberspace specialists, and authorities serving the education, science, and arts sectors across the nation as well as the country's youths to "focus their efforts on confronting the enemy's software threats."

"What does this mean? It means that the enemy's software threats have not been effective in this country and on this nation until today," the Leader stated.

Ayatollah Khamenei commended the country's sufficient capability to fend off the enemies' "hardware threats," noting, "Today, we have no concerns or issues regarding hard defense and the enemy's hardware threats."

"Our ability to counter hard threats is at an excellent level, and the people feel secure in this regard."

## Iran, Iraq Urge Efforts to Boost All-Out Relations, Foil U.S.-Israel Plots



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi and the Acting Speaker of Iraq's Council of Representatives, Mohsen al-Mandalawi, have called for the expansion of comprehensive relations through dialogue.

In a meeting in Baghdad on Sunday, Takht Ravanchi and Mandalawi discussed leading regional and international developments as well as ways to improve mutual ties in various fields, particularly in the trade and economic sectors.

They called for the exchange of official parliamentary and governmental delegations to review the necessary mechanisms for activating the Iran-Iraq joint friendship committee and exchanging experiences between the two countries' parliaments.

The Iraqi acting Council of Representatives' speaker also condemned the Israeli regime's repeated acts of violation against the Lebanese and Palestinian people despite a ceasefire.

Mandalawi said the Israeli regime's disregard for laws, charters, and international agreements would not have been possible without the support of certain Western countries.

He expressed the Iraqi parliament's opposition to the US-Israeli plan to forcibly relocate the people of the Gaza Strip and called on the Arab and Muslim countries to take a firm stance in this regard.

He warned that if the Arab and Muslim countries refuse to heed the issue and counter it, other countries would also suffer harm.

## Iran "Real Victim" of Terrorism; Enemies Main Supporters of Terrorists

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has decried the hypocrisy of the Islamic Republic's adversaries, who accuse Iran of "supporting terrorism" despite its struggle against the evil phenomenon.

"The enemies claim to defend human rights and call Iran a 'terrorist state,' but in reality, Iran is the true victim of terrorism," the chief executive stated in a speech in the capital Tehran.

It is the accusers, who are backing the real perpetrators of violence, he added.

Pezeshkian's remarks highlighted the double standards of the United States and its Western allies and their support for terrorist entities such as the anti-Iran Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) that has the blood of thousands of Iranian civilians and officials on its hands, and the Israeli regime, which has killed tens of thousands of people across the region.

Addressing the ongoing atrocities committed by the regime against the defenseless people of the Gaza Strip, Pezeshkian condemned the so-called defenders of human rights for their silence and complicity in the crimes.

"In front of the eyes of the entire world, they bury women, children, and the elderly under rubble and then preach about human rights," he said, adding that the hypocrisy of those who lecture others on human rights while supporting such crimes was evident to all.

Pezeshkian, who was addressing the closing ceremony of the Tabriz Cultural Week in Tehran, which pays tributes to the northwestern Iranian city of Tabriz's cultural heritage, reminded that from the very beginning of the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic's enemies had continuously plotted against it.

He cited the case of the US's Operation Eagle Claw of April 24-25, 1980, which was launched by the American Armed Forces under the direct order of then-president Jimmy Carter, in an attempt to release its 52 embassy staff held in the Iranian capital after the Revolution's victory.

The operation failed as a sandstorm crippled the US forces and their helicopters in Iran's Tabas Desert.

"Pezeshkian noted how the operation ended in humiliation for the attackers, besides citing the subsequent eight-year Western-backed imposed war against the Islamic Republic by Iraq's former dictator Saddam Hussein, during which the Iranian people lost many young and dedicated individuals.

"If those young men had been with us today, the situation in the country would be entirely different," he remarked.

The president highlighted the painful sacrifices that had been made by such youths, many of whom served the nation selflessly and without expectation of any reward.

He noted that the enemies' conspiracies, alongside a terror campaign that was launched by the



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firm for their country," he said.

Pezeshkian, meanwhile, expressed his belief that despite facing numerous challenges, Iran would overcome all predicaments with integrity, strength, and esteem.

"We are on a path that presents us with many difficulties, but I firmly believe that, with God's grace and through unity, we will be able to overcome the crises created for us."

Pezeshkian emphasized the importance of steadfastness and leadership to the country's efforts to emerge victorious from various situations.

"I remain committed to my promises, and with the guidance of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, we will move forward with strength," he stated.

He assured that Iran's commitment to serving its people remained unchanged, despite the adversities orchestrated by foreign powers aimed at destabilizing the country.

"They try to create discontent among our people by blocking all avenues for the country, but their plans will fail. As long as we have the support of our noble people, we will foil all their efforts and bring peace and security to our land."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Pezeshkian noted that Iran's foreign policy had always been centered on domestic unity and constructive engagement with neighboring countries.

He underlined the country's unwavering commitment to peace and cooperation with various other Islamic nations, saying, "We believe that all Muslims are brothers and should stand together against oppression, injustice, and inequality."

"Iran has always sought peace, brotherhood, and unity, which are rooted in Islamic principles, the president reaffirmed.

"We have never disrupted the peace in the region. We have always followed the teachings of the [Holy] Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in our pursuit of peace and harmony," he affirmed.

Acknowledging the importance of peace for growth and development, Pezeshkian declared, "We understand that growth is only possible in a peaceful and stable environment. In war and conflict, there can be no progress."

## Iran's "Lost Paradise" of Makran Must Become Future Economic Hub of Region



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi highlighted the significance of the Makran coast along the Sea of Oman, saying the "lost paradise" must be transformed into the economic hub of Iran and the region.

He made the remarks in an address to the 8th Indian Ocean Conference in the Omani capital of Muscat on Sunday.

"The Makran coast holds a special place," said Araqchi during his speech. "These shores, whose natural and economic potential had been overlooked for centuries, have now become a national development priority.

"The lost paradise of Makran must transform into the future economic hub of Iran and the region," he added.

The foreign minister further said the Islamic Republic believes that its coasts are not merely natural borders but gateways connecting the country to the global economy.

Iran has placed a "maritime-oriented" policy at the forefront of its strategic development, he said, adding that the government has devised a plan for the development of ports, maritime transportation, and the establishment of a regional supply chain.

"A country with over 5,800 kilometers of coastline - 4,900 kilometers of which stretch across the south along this vast ocean - cannot remain indifferent to its future. Developing a maritime-based economy is not just an option for Iran; it is an imperative," he said.

As a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Iran emphasizes its commitment to multilateralism, as well as economic and security cooperation in the region.

In his speech, Araqchi also underlined the importance of ensuring maritime security through cooperation between the countries in the region, saying the issue should not be used as leverage by outside powers.

## Trump's Stance on Palestine "Extremely Dangerous"



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The secretary general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has denounced as "extremely dangerous" US President Donald Trump's plan for the Gaza Strip, saying it is aimed at eliminating Palestine and its people.

Sheikh Naim Qassem made the remarks in a televised speech on Sunday, after Trump reiterated his controversial plan to forcibly relocate Palestinians from Gaza and take over the blockaded territory.

He went on to say that Trump's stance represents a "political genocide" after Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the US failed to achieve their objectives during the 15-month-long brutal war on Gaza.

"Trump is trying to control the world, not just Palestine," the Hezbollah chief said, adding that "everything Israel does is managed and is supported by the US."

He further called on all Arab and Muslim countries to stand against the forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza, warning that the US project poses a danger to all nations in the region.

Sheikh Qassem also said that the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah is ready to help prevent Gaza's displacement plan.

Earlier this month, Trump declared unexpectedly that the US would take over Gaza and relocate its over two million population to neighboring countries.

Trump had insisted that neighboring countries, namely Egypt and Jordan would accept displaced Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, despite their opposition to any forced displacement of Palestinians.

His remarks sparked widespread condemnations from Palestine, the UN and the Arab world as a potentially fatal blow to the so-called two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



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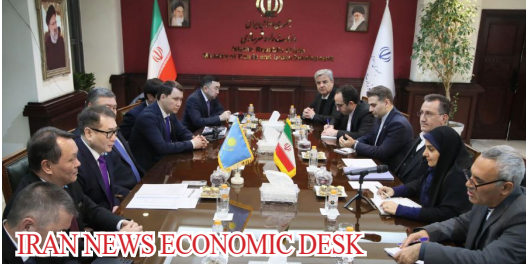


## Iranian, Saudi Finance Ministers Discuss Economic Cooperation

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, Abdo Naser Hemmati, met with Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Abdullah Al-Jadaan on the sidelines of the annual conference on challenges and opportunities for emerging economies in Saudi Arabia.

The two officials discussed strengthening trade and customs cooperation, avoiding double taxation, and expanding bilateral investment. A key focus of the meeting was streamlining financial processes for Hajj pilgrims. Both ministers emphasized the importance of facilitating financial transactions to ensure a smoother experience for pilgrims traveling to Saudi Arabia for the annual Islamic pilgrimage. This meeting marks a step toward improving economic ties between the two nations while addressing financial concerns related to religious tourism.

## Iran and Kazakhstan Reach Agreement to Resolve Visa Issues for Iranian Truck Drivers



TEHRAN - The Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran has announced that Iran and Kazakhstan have agreed to expand cooperation in rail, road, air, and port transportation. As part of this agreement, the visa issues faced by Iranian truck drivers traveling to Kazakhstan will be resolved.

Farzaneh Sadegh, following a meeting with Arman Shakkaliyev, Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade and Integration, made this announcement.

A major focus of the discussions was the expansion and development of transportation networks, including air, road, rail, and port sectors. Other key topics included facilitating cargo transfer, commercializing the eastern branch of the North-South Corridor, and enhancing cooperation in logistics.

Sadegh stated that issues related to rail and road transportation, as well as agreements concerning Chabahar Port and Shahid Rajaei Port, were discussed. The challenges faced by Iranian truck drivers traveling to and transiting through Kazakhstan were also raised, with both sides agreeing to resolve them soon.

The Iranian minister emphasized the importance of strengthening transit and trade links, as well as implementing roadmaps based on previous agreements with Kazakhstan.

Another key point of discussion was the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) initiative, with Iran extending an invitation to Kazakhstan's Minister of Transport to serve as the Secretary-General of TRACECA. Sadegh expressed hope that such exchanges would boost transit cooperation and contribute to the economic development of both nations.

The meeting was attended by senior Iranian officials, including Saeed Rasouli, Deputy Minister of Transport; Jabbari Zakeri, CEO of Iran Railways; Reza Akbari, Head of the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization; and Amin Taraf, Head of the International Affairs Center at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development.

## Iran Plans to Boost Polymer Exports to \$1b, Targets \$300m African Market



TEHRAN - Iran's polymer industry is setting ambitious export goals, aiming to increase overseas sales to \$1 billion, with a specific focus on securing a \$300 million share in the African market.

According to Omid Koushki, a board member of Iran's Polymer Association, capturing just 10% of Africa's polymer market could generate significant foreign exchange revenue. "If we succeed in this goal, we can bring in approximately \$300 million," he stated.

Speaking to ILNA, Koushki highlighted energy imbalances as a key obstacle for the industry. He called for support from the power sector to ensure reliable energy supply for small industrial units.

"We realized years ago that domestic demand alone cannot sustain our polymer industry," he said. "With increasing competition, our only viable option is to expand into export markets."

Koushki, who also chairs the Iranian Association of Masterbatch and Polymer Compound Manufacturers, emphasized the need to look beyond neighboring markets. "Africa is an untapped market that we are actively working to enter," he noted.

Currently, Africa imports over \$3 billion worth of polymer compounds, mainly from China, India, and Turkey. Koushki believes Iran has a competitive edge in pricing and could secure a substantial share of the market.

Iran's Central Bank's strict financial policies and rising costs have increased the industry's need for working capital. Additionally, challenges in importing machinery due to regulatory hurdles have complicated production expansion.

The industry is also making strides in environmental sustainability. "We have developed technology to recycle plastic materials efficiently, allowing us to produce high-quality PET bottles from recycled materials," Koushki explained.

Power outages have severely impacted exports. "For three consecutive years, we secured clients but lost business opportunities due to electricity shortages, making it impossible to sign long-term contracts," Koushki said.

Despite these setbacks, Iran's polymer industry has managed to maintain \$700 million in exports. "If we can successfully penetrate the African market,

we can push this figure to \$1 billion," he added.

Currently, Iran exports polymer compounds to Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Turkey. About 50% of these exports go to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan, while the rest is distributed among the other target markets.

Mehdi Khorasani, head of the Trade Commission of the Masterbatch and Polymer Compound Association, pointed out that the industry faces high production costs and financial constraints. "With a production capacity of 5 million tons and domestic demand at just 1 million tons, exports remain crucial," he stated.

However, production levels have dropped by 30-40% due to ongoing challenges. Khorasani warned that if these issues persist, the industry will struggle to maintain growth.

Despite increasing exports over the past four years, energy shortages continue to pose risks. "If the energy imbalance remains unresolved, the industry's export growth could reverse," Khorasani cautioned.

To mitigate risks, the focus is shifting toward high-value products rather than high-volume exports. "We need to enhance the industry's added value so that even if export volumes decline, we can compensate with premium products," he said.

Khorasani also emphasized the impact of Iran's lack of membership in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on trade. "Many countries require direct bank transfers, but we don't have this option. As a result, we must use foreign accounts, increasing costs and reducing competitiveness."

He urged authorities to address this issue, stating that FATF membership could significantly boost Iran's polymer exports.

Despite regulatory, financial, and energy-related challenges, Iran's polymer industry remains determined to expand its global footprint. With a strong push into African markets and a shift toward high-value exports, industry leaders are optimistic about achieving their \$1 billion export target.

## Iranian Eggs Reach Kazakhstan Amid Rising Transportation Costs



TEHRAN - The Iranian poultry industry has successfully expanded its egg exports to Kazakhstan, while transportation costs have surged by 25%, adding pressure on production expenses.

Hussein Mahdizad, head of the Poultry and Aquatic Products Committee at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, stated that exports to traditional markets such as Iraq and Afghanistan remain stable, with shipments to Russia continuing. Iran has now secured the necessary approvals for exporting eggs to Kazakhstan and is working on entering the Pakistani market. However, poultry meat exports remain limited to traditional destinations, with little success in penetrating new markets.

Despite international demand and the high quality of Iranian poultry, Mahdizad noted that domestic challenges have hindered significant growth in chicken exports. He emphasized the need for further negotiations to boost global sales.

Mahdizad reported that the egg industry has experienced stability, with exports peaking in the past month. Supportive purchases from layer poultry farmers have helped maintain calm in the sector, despite ongoing energy shortages.

Meanwhile, live chicken prices have seen a slight increase in recent weeks, allowing broiler producers to break even. However, profitability remains elusive, raising concerns about potential declines in production. The latest official price for poultry meat stands at 78,500 toman per kilogram, though bulk sales continue at around 70,000 toman. Live chickens are currently being sold at slaughterhouses for 58,000 to 60,000 toman per kilogram, up from 50,000-52,000 toman a month ago.

Although rising costs have fueled public concerns ahead of Ramadan and Nowruz, Mahdizad reassured consumers that egg and chicken supplies remain stable.

On the issue of feed imports, he noted that the government still provides subsidized exchange rates for essential feed items like corn and soybeans. However, key micronutrients such as phosphate, lysine, and methionine, which make up half of poultry diets, have seen a 30% price increase due to the removal of preferential exchange rates. This change is expected to impact poultry prices in the coming months.

In addition to rising feed costs, Mahdizad highlighted the sharp increase in transportation expenses. Over the past four days, freight costs have risen by 25%, with the price of transporting a truckload of corn from Bandar Imam surging from 27 million toman to 42 million toman. Furthermore, packaging costs have doubled in just ten days, adding further strain to the industry.

## Iran to Increase Flights to Qatar



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization has announced plans to increase flights to Qatar, following recent coordination efforts between the two countries.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Hossein Pourfarzaneh responded to inquiry about expanding cooperation with Qatar, stating that flights from Iran to Qatar had decreased in recent months due to issues in Iran's support for Qatar Airways, the flag carrier of Qatar.

However, he emphasized that during a recent visit and a signed agreement between the two nations, the situation was restored to its previous state and even strengthened. As a result, flights between Iran and Qatar are set to increase.

According to Pourfarzaneh, the agreement stipulates at least 36 flights between Iran and Qatar, including departures from Tehran as well as new routes from Isfahan, Tabriz, and Mashhad.

On February 7, Iran and Qatar's civil aviation authorities signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance aviation relations and expand international flight networks.

Following the agreement, both parties discussed operational challenges faced by airlines from both countries and explored ways to strengthen cooperation in air transport. They also exchanged views on various aviation-related matters.

Regarding flights to Paris and the European Union, Pourfarzaneh noted that France continues to insist on what he called an unfounded claim regarding the ownership of Iran Airtour by Iran Air. However, he reiterated that this claim is incorrect.

## Eurasia Exhibition: A Key Marketing Platform for Export Growth



TEHRAN - The CEO of Iran's International Exhibitions Company has emphasized that holding the Eurasia Trade Exhibition is one of the best marketing strategies for showcasing export capabilities.

Sadif Beikzadeh stated on Sunday that the Eurasia Trade Exhibition, scheduled from February 22 to 25, provides a significant opportunity for Iranian companies to expand their presence in Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states, including Russia.

He highlighted that the free trade cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia has paved the way for Iranian businesses to operate in EAEU markets. He added that the exhibition is an ideal marketing tool for introducing Iran's export potential while also allowing Iranian companies to familiarize themselves with the capacities of EAEU member states.

Beikzadeh further noted that Russian companies and financial institutions facilitating trade transactions, including money transfers, will be present at the event to discuss financial solutions and mechanisms for cross-border payments.

He emphasized the importance of financial and banking relations in expanding trade, stating that Iranian and Russian banks are working to enhance financial cooperation, which will significantly impact trade volumes.

Pointing to the notable growth in the number of participating companies this year, Beikzadeh expressed optimism that economic diplomacy between Iran, Russia, and other EAEU members will further increase the exhibition's scale and impact.

In addition to company participation, the exhibition will feature: Business delegations from foreign countries; Workshops on trade development strategies; B2B meetings; and Discussions on market expansion and export growth.

Beikzadeh also stressed the importance of tariff reductions and free trade agreements between Iran and EAEU nations as a key factor in enhancing trade relations. He emphasized that reaching mutual agreements on tariff rates and trade standards is crucial for creating economic incentives for exporters. Lower tariffs will reduce export costs and increase competitiveness for Iranian products in EAEU markets.

The Eurasia Trade Exhibition will be held at Tehran's Permanent Fairground from February 22 to 25. Invitations have been officially sent to the Deputy Ministers of Trade and Industry of EAEU countries through their respective embassies.

## Iran Announces Details of Industrial Modernization; China and Russia as Key Partners

TEHRAN - The Deputy for Industrial Modernization and Project Implementation at the Iranian Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) has revealed details of Iran's industrial modernization efforts, highlighting China and Russia as primary partners in industrial cooperation.

Saeed Jafari, speaking to ILNA, stated that Iranian companies are increasingly turning to Chinese and Russian firms to navigate sanctions-related restrictions with fewer obstacles. He noted that almost every major multinational company with advanced technological capabilities now has a presence in either China or Russia, allowing Iranian industries to access global technologies through these countries.

Jafari explained that IDRO has invited all Iranian industries interested in renovation and modernization to submit requests. Currently, around 1,900 companies have expressed interest, and evaluations are underway to determine their specific modernization needs. Some of these companies have already been referred to banks for financial support, with the government providing necessary funds to banks for subsidized loans aimed at facilitating the renovation process.

Looking ahead to Iran's 1404 fiscal year (March 2025-March 2026), Jafari noted that a significant budget allocation has been designated for industrial modernization. Nearly one trillion toman from government resources will be allocated, with banks leveraging this amount to provide double the funding. Additionally, companies themselves will contribute 30% of the total costs, resulting in a projected investment of 3 to 3.5 trillion toman for modernization. This investment will primarily target small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within industrial zones, though large companies



may not be included in the initiative.

Jafari also discussed the revitalization of Iran's maritime sector, emphasizing that as part of the country's "marine-based economic development" strategy, efforts are being made to consolidate and coordinate naval fleet requirements. Iranian shipbuilding companies have been identified, evaluated, and ranked to distribute construction projects based on their capabilities. Agreements have been reached to construct: Five vessels for the National Iranian Tanker Company; Four vessels for the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines; and Twenty-four vessels for the Ports and Maritime Organization.

These projects have been assigned to domestic shipbuilders. However, Jafari acknowledged that Iran's domestic shipbuilding capacity may be insufficient, necessitating collaboration with foreign manufacturers under technology transfer agreements.

Regarding foreign industrial cooperation amid ongoing sanctions, Jafari highlighted that Iranian companies are prioritizing business partnerships with regions unaffected by these restrictions. He noted that while private sector companies are more active in modernization efforts due to fewer regulatory obstacles than state-owned enterprises, challenges in financial transactions persist.

Nevertheless, China and Russia remain Iran's key industrial partners, providing access to cutting-edge global technologies despite sanctions. With many top-tier multinational corporations maintaining operations in these two countries, Iranian industries can indirectly benefit from their advanced technological expertise.



## U.S. Says It Killed Senior al-Qaeda Affiliate official in Syria

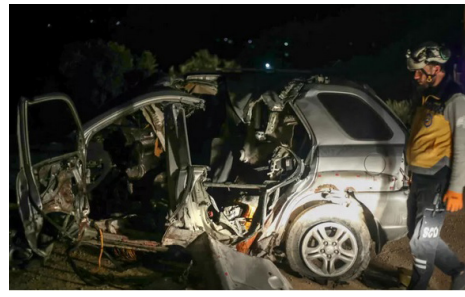
WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. military said Sunday it killed a member of an Al-Qaeda affiliate organization in a precision airstrike in Syria.

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said it conducted the strike Saturday "in Northwest Syria targeting and killing a senior finance and logistics official in the terrorist organization Hurras al-Din (HaD), an Al-Qaeda affiliate," according to a statement on X.

The strike was conducted "to disrupt and degrade efforts by terrorists to plan, organize, and conduct attacks against civilians and military personnel" from the United States and allies, the statement continued.

On January 30, CENTCOM killed another senior operative in Hurras al-Din, Muhammad Salah al-Zabir, in an air strike.

The U.S.-based SITE Intelligence Group said Hurras al-Din was founded in February 2018.



## Five Iraqi Banks to Be Banned From U.S. Dollar Transactions



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq's central bank will ban five more local banks from engaging in U.S. dollar transactions, a move that comes after meetings with U.S. Treasury officials in efforts to combat money laundering, dollar smuggling and other violations, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters on Sunday.

The move comes after meetings in Dubai last week between officials from the Central Bank of Iraq - which last year already banned eight banks from U.S. dollar transactions - and U.S. Treasury and Federal Reserve officials, one of the sources said.

A rare ally of both the United States and Iran with more than \$100 billion in reserves held in the U.S., Iraq relies heavily on Washington's goodwill to ensure that its access to oil revenues and finances are not blocked.

But OPEC's second-largest producer may find itself in the crosshairs after U.S. President Donald Trump said this month he would restore his "maximum pressure" policy towards Iran.

Iran views its neighbour and ally Iraq as an economic "lung" and wields considerable military, political and economic influence there through the powerful Shi'ite militias and political parties it backs. It also sources hard currency from Iraq through exports and avoids U.S. sanctions via its banking system.

Reuters revealed in December a sophisticated fuel oil smuggling network, that generates at least \$1 billion a year for Iran and its proxies, had flourished in Iraq since Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani took office in 2022.

Banks banned from dollar transactions are allowed to continue operating and are allowed to engage in transactions in other currencies, the central bank says.

But the move restricts the banks' ability to conduct transactions in dollars, hampering most operations conducted outside of Iraq.

The current Iraqi government came to power with the support of powerful, Iran-backed parties and armed groups with interests in Iraq's highly informal economy, including the financial sector long seen as a money-laundering hot spot.

Western officials had lauded cooperation with Prime Minister Sudani towards carrying out economic and financial reforms meant to curb the ability of Iran and its allies to access U.S. dollars, but pressure is expected to pile on with Trump's administration.

## Overnight Russia Strikes Hit Ukraine Power Plant



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian drone strikes have damaged a thermal power plant in Mykolaiv in southern Ukraine overnight, leaving at least 100,000 people without heating as temperatures plunge below freezing, top Ukrainian officials said on Sunday.

"This has nothing to do with the fighting and the situation at the front, but it proves once again that the Russians are fighting against our people and against life in Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messenger.

"And they are fighting meanly, without relieving pressure. This is not what those who really want peace to be restored and are preparing for negotiations do."

Earlier, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said the attack on the power plant was "done deliberately to leave people without heat in sub-zero temperatures and create a humanitarian catastrophe."

Russia attacked Ukraine with 143 drones overnight but Ukrainian military said it had shot down 95 of them while 46 did not reach their targets, likely thanks to the use of electromagnetic countermeasures that disrupt drone attacks.

At least one person was injured in the overnight attacks which also damaged houses in the Kyiv region, Ukrainian officials said. The temperature in Mykolaiv is expected to fall to minus 7 degrees Celsius (19.4 Fahrenheit) on Sunday night.



## Ukraine, Europe Will Be Part of Real Peace Talks

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday said Ukraine and Europe would be part of any "real negotiations" to end Moscow's war, signaling that U.S. talks with Russia this week were a chance to see how serious Russian President Vladimir Putin is about peace.

America's top diplomat played down European concerns of being cut out of the initial talks between Russia and the United States set to take place in Saudi Arabia in the coming days. In an interview with CBS, Rubio said a negotiation process had not yet begun in earnest, and if talks advanced, the Ukrainians and other Europeans would be brought into the fold.

Earlier on Sunday, Reuters reported that U.S. officials had handed European officials a questionnaire asking, among other things, how many troops they could contribute to enforcing a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia.

"President Trump spoke to Vladimir Putin last week, and in it, Vladimir Putin expressed his interest in peace, and the president expressed his desire to see an end to this conflict in a way that was enduring and that protected Ukrainian sovereignty," Rubio said on CBS's "Meet the Press."

"Now, obviously it has to be followed up by action, so the next few weeks and days will determine whether it's serious or not. Ultimately, one phone call does not make peace."

U.S. Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff and national security adviser Mike Waltz were due to leave for Saudi Arabia on Sunday evening, Witkoff said in a Fox News interview.

Rubio noted he was due to be in Saudi Arabia anyway due to previously arranged official travel. The composition of the Russian delegation had not yet been finalized, he said.

The planned talks in Saudi Arabia coincide with a U.S. bid to cut a deal with Kyiv to open up Ukraine's natural resources wealth to U.S. investment. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in an NBC interview broadcast on Sunday, questioned if minerals in areas held by Russia would be given to Putin.

Trump, who held a call with Putin on Wednesday and said the Russian leader wants peace, said Sunday he was confident Putin would not want to try and take control of the entirety of Ukraine.

Rubio and Witkoff rejected concerns that Ukraine and other European leaders would have no place at peace negotiations, despite Trump's Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, suggesting precisely that at this weekend's Munich Security Conference.

Witkoff noted in an interview on Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures" that Ukrainian officials had met several U.S. officials in recent days at the conference, while Trump had talked with Zelenskyy last week.

Rubio, for his part, said that Ukrainians and other Europeans would be included in any meaningful negotiations.

"Ultimately, it will reach a point - if it's real negotiations, and we're not there yet - but if that were to happen, Ukraine will have to be involved because they're the ones that were invaded, and the Europeans will have to be involved because they have sanctions on Putin and Russia as well," Rubio said.

"We're just not there yet."

French President Emmanuel Macron will host European leaders on Monday for an emergency summit on the Ukraine war, Macron's office said, in the wake of Kellogg's remarks.

European officials have been left shocked and flat-footed by the Trump administration's moves on Ukraine, Russia and European defense in recent days.

Chief among their fears is that they can no longer count on U.S. military protection and that Trump will attempt to ink a Ukraine peace deal with Putin that undermines Kyiv and broader European continental security.

Asked if he had discussed lifting sanctions on Russia during a Saturday phone call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Rubio declined to provide confirmation, saying only that they "did not go into any details."

After the call, Moscow said that the two had discussed the removal of "unilateral barriers" set by the previous U.S. administration in relations with Russia.

Rubio said he did address the "difficult" operating conditions of the U.S. embassy in Moscow with Lavrov. If there was to be progress in Ukraine peacemaking, both Russia and the U.S. would need properly functioning embassies in the other country, he added.

## UK PM Says Ready to Deploy Troops to Ukraine

PARIS (Dispatches) - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he was prepared to deploy troops to Ukraine if needed, hours before European leaders meet in Paris to address Washington's shock policy shift on the war.

The French presidency has warned that European countries should do more for their collective security, as talks between the United States and Russia loom.

With fears that Europe could be sidelined in negotiations to end the three-year war, Starmer said he was willing to put "our own troops on the ground if necessary".

"Any role in helping to guarantee Ukraine's security is helping to guarantee the security of our continent, and the security of this country," Starmer wrote in the Daily Telegraph late Sunday.

The UK premier is due to join leaders from Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark at the Paris meeting, which falls ahead of the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24.

Antonio Costa, who heads the European Council representing the European Union's 27 nations, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen, and Nato secretary general Mark Rutte will also be present.

The French presidency said the meeting would address "the situation in Ukraine" and "security in Europe".

"Because of the acceleration of the Ukrainian issue, and as a result of what US leaders are saying, there is a need for Europeans to do more, better and in a coherent way, for our collective security," an adviser from President Emmanuel Macron's office said.

US President Donald Trump blindsided Ukraine and its European backers by starting discussions on the war in a call with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

On Sunday, Trump said he could meet Putin "very soon".

Speaking from West Palm Beach, Florida, he added that he believed his Russian counterpart genuinely wanted to stop fighting in Ukraine.



US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has appeared to rule out Ukraine joining Nato or retaking all of its territory lost since 2014.

The new US administration has also warned its Nato allies that Europe will no longer be its top security priority and that it may shift forces too as it switches focus to China.

The Kremlin has pushed for negotiations — set to kick off in Saudi Arabia in the coming days — to discuss not just the Ukraine war but also broader European security.

That has sparked fears among European nations that Putin could revive demands he floated prior to the 2022 invasion aimed at limiting NATO forces in eastern Europe and US involvement on the continent.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio played down expectations Sunday of any breakthrough at upcoming talks with Russian officials on ending the war in Ukraine.

"A process towards peace is not a one-meeting thing," he told the CBS network as the Munich Security Conference wrapped up.

"Nothing's been finalized yet," he said, adding that the aim was to seek an opening for a broader conversation that "would include Ukraine and would involve the end of the war".

Rubio was heading to Saudi Arabia on Monday, as part of a Middle East tour he started this weekend in Israel.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday he was in the United Arab Emirates for a visit with a "large humanitarian programme". He said on Friday that he had no plans to meet with Russian or US officials there.

Trump last week also said he would "love" to have Russia back in the G7, from which it was suspended in 2014 after Moscow annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said it was "unimaginable" for Russia to be welcomed back into the G7, which includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

"The G7 is the group of the most advanced great democracies," he said. Yet Russia "behaves less and less like a democracy and unabashedly attacks other G7 members".

Zelenskyy had on Saturday called for the creation of a European army, arguing the continent could no longer count on Washington.

Trump's special envoy to Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, on Saturday said Europe would not be directly involved in talks on Ukraine, though it would still have an "input".

For Zelenskyy, there should be "no decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine" or "about Europe without Europe".

Finnish President Alexander Stubb, whose country shares a 1,300-kilometre border with Russia, said on Sunday that talks between the United States and Russia over the Ukraine war must not rewrite European security.

"There's no way in which we should open the door for this Russian fantasy of a new, indivisible security order," he said.

## Zelenskyy Wants to Discuss With U.S. Fate of Minerals in Areas Held by Russia

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine and the United States need to discuss the fate of mineral deposits in areas captured by Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, as Washington negotiates with Kyiv to open up Ukraine's natural wealth to U.S. investment.

The talks on a minerals deal, presented to Kyiv on Wednesday by U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, coincide with a bid by President Donald Trump to kick-start negotiations to end Russia's nearly three-year war in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy in an NBC interview broadcast on Sunday questioned if minerals in areas occupied by Russia would be given to Russian President Vladimir Putin and his partners Iran, North Korea and China.

"It seems to me important to understand what we will do with those rare earths that now cost billions, hundreds of billions, that Putin occupied," Zelenskyy said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "Is it to give to him? ... This is what I want to discuss."

The United States has so far provided tens of billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine since Russia invaded three years ago and Trump has said a minerals deal could ensure "that we're going to in some form get this money back."

Trump has said that he backs Ukraine but has not committed to continuing vital



military assistance.

Three sources told Reuters on Saturday that the United States had proposed taking ownership of 50% of Ukraine's critical minerals. Zelenskyy said on Friday, after meeting with U.S. Vice President JD Vance, that talks were continuing on a possible deal.

Zelenskyy has said that the draft deal does not yet contain the security provisions that Kyiv needed. Zelenskyy elaborated on that during the "Meet the Press" interview, which was filmed on Friday and broadcast on Sunday.

"Help us defend this, and we will make money on this together. And here it's very important that in this document shall be a term to protect it. And that is the security guarantees," Zelenskyy said.

"If we are not given the security guarantees from the United States, I believe that the economic treaty will not work. It must all be fair. The second part that is not discussed yet but it must be, that is what Putin captured," he said.

The minerals in Ukraine include rare earth varieties as well as titanium, uranium and lithium, among others.





## Spurs Down Man Utd to Fuel Amorim's Pain

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham won the battle of the Premier League's underachievers 1-0 on Sunday to inflict another dismal result on Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim. James Maddison scored the only goal on 13 minutes as Spurs moved above United in the table into 12th thanks to a third win over the Red Devils this season. Victory eased the pressure on under-fire Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou after exiting both domestic cup competitions this month to go with their lowly league position. United now find themselves down in 15th, but do enjoy a 12-point cushion over the bottom three. "The place in the table is my worry, I am not worried about me," said Amorim, who has won just four of 14 Premier League games since taking charge in November. "I hate to lose. That feeling is the worst. The rest I am not thinking about. "I understand my situation, my job, I am confident in my work and I just want to win games." Tottenham's first home league win since November came amid a spirit of revolt among their support. Before kick-off and after the match Spurs fans again vented their frustration towards owners ENIC and chairman Daniel Levy. A huge banner read "24 years, 16 managers, 1 trophy - Time for change" as a sizeable contingent of the home crowd joined a protest calling for Levy to go. However, the mood for Postecoglou was lifted even before kick-off as he was able to welcome back a host of first-team regulars who have been sidelined by injury. Goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario made his first appearance since November. Maddison returned to the starting line-up, while Destiny Udogie, Brennan Johnson and Wilson Odobert were on the bench. "They are quality players. We've had it pretty tough the last two-and-a-half months," said Postecoglou. "It was important for us to win and gain some traction. "I certainly feel there is still a massive opportunity for us in this back half of the season and hopefully today is the start of that." United have their own injury troubles with Amad Diallo joining Lisandro Martinez on the sidelines for

the rest of the season and Kobbie Mainoo ruled out for a month. Amorim had to name eight teenagers among his nine substitutes, forcing Rasmus Hojlund and Joshua Zirkzee to start together up front after both were overlooked for United's last league game - a 2-0 defeat to Crystal Palace. Hojlund had the first chance when he fired too close to Vicario before the Italian flew to his left to deny Alejandro Garnacho. Earlier Liverpool had moved seven points clear at the top of the Premier League as Luis Diaz ended his goal drought to spark a tense 2-1 win against struggling Wolves. Arne Slot's side got back on track after an unexpectedly poor week thanks to Diaz's first goal in 2025 and yet another Mohamed Salah strike. Diaz opened the scoring early in the first half at Anfield as the Colombian forward finally scored for the 13th time this term after 10 games without a goal. While Diaz has struggled to find the net, Salah is in red-hot form and his penalty before the interval took the Egypt star to 28 goals in all competitions this season. Matheus Cunha netted in the second half for fourth-bottom Wolves, but although Liverpool looked tired in a disjointed, nervous, climax, they held on for a valuable victory. Liverpool had gone two games without a win: an embarrassing FA Cup fourth round loss at second tier Plymouth last weekend and the stormy 2-2 draw at Everton on Wednesday. Arsenal's 2-0 win at Leicester on Saturday had applied a little more pressure on Liverpool. The Reds responded to Arsenal's challenge as they moved a step closer to a record-equalling 20th English title. Liverpool, who last won the Premier League in 2020, will be within touching distance of the crown if they take maximum points from trips to Aston Villa and Manchester City before hosting Newcastle over the course of the next 10 days.

## Peerless Thingnes Boe Claims Pursuit Gold for Norway



LENZERHEIDE (Dispatches) - Norway's Johannes Thingnes Boe held off the challenge of American Campbell Wright to win gold in a thrilling men's 12.5km pursuit at the International Biathlon Union (IBU) World Championships on Sunday. Thingnes Boe, who won the sprint gold on Saturday, completed the course in 32 minutes 26.9 seconds to claim a record-extending 22nd individual world gold, 8.6 seconds ahead of Wright. Eric Perrot of France, who like the American hit 19 of his 20 shots, took the bronze medal. The 31-year-old Norwegian winner, who has said he will retire at the end of the season, had two misses in the shooting but managed to stay ahead of Wright, despite seeming to slow down considerably over the final 800 metres. It was Thingnes Boe's third pursuit gold in a row at the World Championships, while New-Zealand-born Wright, who switched to competing for the U.S. in 2023, picked up his second silver medal in two days after another fine performance in the sprint. Earlier in the afternoon, Franziska Preuss displayed nerves of steel to gold for Germany in the women's 10km pursuit at the International Biathlon Union World Championships, with Sweden's Elvira Oeberg taking silver and Justine Braisaz-Bouchet of France bronze. Preuss hit all 20 shots to win in a time of 26 minutes 58.9 seconds, 39.1 seconds ahead of Oeberg, who passed Braisaz-Bouchet late on the final lap to snatch silver by 1.9 seconds after a frenetic sprint to the line. Preuss, runner-up to Braisaz-Bouchet in the sprint, opened up a big lead before the final shoot and calmly rattled off her last five standing shots to turn the final two kilometres into a victory lap as she claimed her first individual world gold.

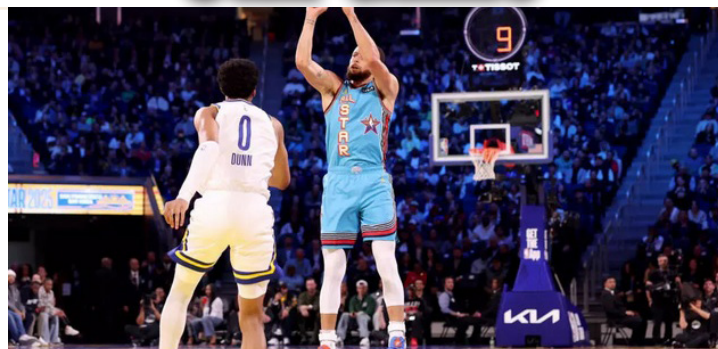
## New Zealand Beat Pakistan to Win Tri-Nation Title



LONDON (Dispatches) - New Zealand clinched the tri-nation title by beating hosts Pakistan by five wickets in the final in Karachi to give them a major boost ahead of next week's Champions Trophy. Seamer Will O'Rourke (4-43) led New Zealand's tidy bowling as they bundled out the hosts for 242 with three deliveries still left in their innings. Daryl Mitchell (57) and Tom Latham (56) struck fifties as New Zealand romped home with 28 balls to spare, finishing unbeaten in the tournament that also involved South Africa. Electing to bat, Pakistan kept losing wickets every time a partnership promised to bloom. Skipper Mohammad Rizwan (46) and Salman Agha (45) forged an 88-run partnership for the fourth wicket but boundaries were not easy to come by. Tayyab Tahir (38) and Faheem Ashraf (22) contributed useful runs down the order but Pakistan lost their last five wickets for 47 runs to settle for a below-par total. New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner conceded 20 runs in his 10 tidy overs, claiming two wickets. Pakistan fast bowler Naseem Shah removed opener Will Latham in the second over but New Zealand's frontline batters, aided by Pakistan's sloppy catching and woeful use of the review option, produced useful cameos to keep their chase on track. Pakistan dragged themselves back into the contest after removing Devon Conway (48) and Kane Williamson (34) but could not drive home their advantage. They wasted a review in their desperation to get Williamson lbw and did not use the option when Latham was given not out despite being trapped plumb in front. Latham got two more reprieves as Shaheen Afridi spilled a return catch while Saud Shakeel floored a sitter at square leg. Abrar Ahmed held on to a return catch to remove Mitchell but Latham punished Pakistan for their sloppiness and went on to complete his fifty. Latham's luck finally ran out when Abrar took a catch in the deep - spraining his neck in the process -- but it came too late for the hosts as New Zealand were on the cusp of victory.

## Curry shines as Team Shaq Wins Revamped NBA All-Star Game

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Stephen Curry and Jayson Tatum combined for 27 points as Shaquille O'Neal's "Team Shaq" cruised to victory in the new-look NBA All-Star game in San Francisco on Sunday. Curry, playing on his home court at Golden State's Chase Center, reeled off a string of trademark three-pointers to help his star-studded line-up coast to a 41-25 victory over Charles Barkley's "Team Chuck." Boston Celtics star Tatum finished with 15 points after delivering a dominant performance in a starting line-up that also included Kevin Durant, Damian Lillard and James Harden. Team Shaq's preparations for the game had been dealt a blow shortly before tip-off when Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James withdrew from the line-up, citing a nagging foot and ankle injury. But even without the 40-year-old James, the veteran line-up was always in control against opponents spearheaded by Nikola Jokic, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Donovan Mitchell. Curry was named Most Valuable Player of the All-Star Game, the



second time he has achieved the accolade after winning the honor in 2022. "It's a celebration of a lot of great things -- to be able to play with these guys for as long as we have," Curry said after being handed his MVP award. "It's our responsibility to come out and put on a show and I thank them for helping me do that," Curry added, gesturing to his

teammates. The NBA opted to shake up the format for this year's All-Star game after mounting criticism of the annual mid-season celebration as being a meaningless exhibition game lacking in competitive edge. The old Eastern Conference v Western Conference format was scrapped in favor of a four-team mini-tournament, with each team managed by basketball greats O'Neal, Barkley, Kenny Smith and Candace Parker. Each game was played on a first-to-40 basis rather than in the conventional four-quarter format. But this year's new format failed to impress everyone. Curry's Golden State teammate Draymond Green -- working as a television analyst for the event -- lambasted the competition during Sunday's broadcast. "You work all year to be an All-Star and you get to play up to 40 and then you're done. C'mon what are we doing? This is ridiculous," Green said. "This sucks. It ain't basketball." However, Milwaukee star Lillard voiced approval for the format after helping O'Neal's team complete victory in Sunday's final.

## Fonseca, 18, Wins Maiden Title in Buenos Aires

LONDON (Dispatches) - Brazilian 18-year-old Joao Fonseca defeated Argentine fifth seed Francisco Cerundolo 6-4, 7-6 (1) to win his first ATP Tour title at the IEB+ Argentina Open in Buenos Aires. Fonseca is the youngest South American player to win a tournament in the ATP Tour era, according to the tour's website. He saved two match points in the quarterfinals against another Argentine, Mariano Navone, and polished off the final Sunday in an hour and 45 minutes. Fonseca won 35 of 48 first-service points (72.9 percent) to make up for losing three of four break points. He finished with a 26-16 edge in total winners. French second seed Ugo Humbert successfully defended his title in Marseille by beating Serbia's Hamad Medjedovic 7-6 (4), 6-4 in the final. Humbert smashed 13 aces without committing a double fault and won an overwhelming 27 of his 33 first-service points (81.8 percent). The 26-year-old, who now has seven career ATP titles, also capitalized when Medjedovic went to his second serve, winning 17 of 28 second-return points (60.7 percent). Serbian No. 7 seed Miomir Kecmanovic saved two championship points and rallied to beat No. 8 seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain 3-6, 6-1, 7-5 to win the trophy in Florida. Meanwhile former world number one Daniil Medvedev said he hopes other players can also reach settlements with the World Anti-



(anti-doping rule violation), you get two years.' And you say, 'Well, no, I want one month', Medvedev told reporters. "So I hope that it will create a precedent where everyone will have the opportunity to defend themselves better than before. Otherwise, if it's not going to be possible, it's going to be bizarre." Medvedev said Sinner was probably able to reach a settlement as he had a good team of lawyers, a luxury most players on the tour do not have.

Doping Agency (WADA) after Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner accepted an immediate three-month doping ban on Saturday. Sinner reached a settlement with WADA, who had appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against an independent tribunal's decision to clear the Italian of wrongdoing after the three-times Grand Slam winner failed drug tests. Rather than face the prospect of a lengthy ban, with a decision expected by the end of the year, Sinner accepted the three-month suspension which will allow him to return before the French Open. WADA withdrew its appeal after the settlement. "I hope that the next few times, the players will be able to do that. WADA will say, 'We've found that (anti-doping rule violation), you get two years.' And you say, 'Well, no, I want one month', Medvedev told reporters. "So I hope that it will create a precedent where everyone will have the opportunity to defend themselves better than before. Otherwise, if it's not going to be possible, it's going to be bizarre." Medvedev said Sinner was probably able to reach a settlement as he had a good team of lawyers, a luxury most players on the tour do not have.