

The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) Said in a Report Published on Monday That the Jobless Rate in the Country Had Reached 7.2% in the December Quarter, Down 0.4% From the Same Previous Quarter

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, at a Meeting with Wolfgang Amadeus Bruehlhart, the Swiss Special Envoy for the Middle East and North Africa, Said the Islamic Republic Does Not Condone Threats, Stressing That the U.S.'s "Maximum Pressure" Campaign Will Certainly Fail

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### FM Repeats Iran's Stance of Refusing to Negotiate Under Duress



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has reiterated Iran's refusal to engage in negotiations with the United States under pressure, dismissing the notion that the country could be coerced into talks.

"What matters is not beautiful words and interviews, but what has been signed," the top diplomat stressed in an interview with Iran's al-Alam television network, referring to a memorandum signed by US President Donald Trump earlier in February.

The document restored Washington's "maximum pressure" policy towards the Islamic Republic that was initiated during Trump's first tenure. Under the approach, the US left a multi-party and United Nations-endorsed nuclear agreement between Iran and others. It then restored the sanctions that the deal had lifted, and mounted even more illegal economic restrictions against the Islamic Republic.

"The instructions given to various U.S. ministries to exert 'maximum pressure' on the Islamic Republic of Iran are crystal clear. This is what has been documented, signed, and will be the benchmark for their (the Americans') actions," the Iranian official noted.

Araqchi pointed out that Iran had never bowed to threats or responded to pressure with concessions.

"The 'maximum pressure' has never worked when it comes to Iran... The resolutions and sanctions against Iran have not been effective," the foreign minister asserted.

Iran has been responding to the U.S.'s pressure tactics by further diversifying its economic and trade partnerships, finding more ways to bypass the sanctions, reinvigorating domestic production, and further reinforcing its cooperation with its key allies, including Russia and China.

Araqchi criticized the U.S. for its merely verbalizing empty rhetoric, apparently referring to Washington's alleging an interest in negotiating with Tehran or its threats of taking military action against the Islamic Republic.

He warned that Tehran would not be fooled by mere words, saying, "So far, we have not seen anything except some hollow threats of military attacks, which even they, themselves, know have no basis. We have not seen anything else except the signed document, which clearly outlines their policy."

## Gov't Spokesperson: No Negotiations With the U.S.

TEHRAN - Government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani has reiterated that negotiations with the United States are meaningless under the current circumstances of maximum pressure. However, she emphasized that Iranians are naturally inclined toward dialogue, stating, "The door for negotiations has always been open from Iran's side; it is the other party that closes it."

During a press conference in Assaluyeh, Mohajerani addressed the recent killing of a university student in Tehran. She assured that, following directives from the President and the Minister of Science, student safety would be enhanced. She announced plans to increase police presence and security booths around university areas. She also noted that the Science Minister's apology and the resignation of dormitory officials were responses to public concerns, even though there may not have been direct wrongdoing.

Highlighting Iran's commitment to economic resilience, Mohajerani pointed to the engineering feats in Assaluyeh as exemplary models. "What we see here is a testament to the capabilities of Iranian engineers and serves as a national symbol of economic resistance," she stated.

She also praised the tourism exhibition as an effective initiative, emphasizing the government's strong commitment to developing the tourism sector. Additionally, she underscored the role of non-governmental organizations in the country's development, stating that whenever the government has enlisted public participation, significant successes have been achieved.

Another focal point of Mohajerani's remarks was the increasing involvement of women in managerial positions. She referenced the recent International Day of Women in Science and Technology, extending her congratulations to female scientists and innovators. She expressed hope that more women, following the example of figures like Maryam Mirzakhani, would contribute to Iran's scientific progress. "There are excellent platforms for nurturing talent and increasing women's participation in science and technology, and we look forward to seeing greater engagement," she said.

Mohajerani announced that structured programs are being developed for the implementation of Iran's Seventh Development Plan, with the First Vice President playing a key role in overseeing this process. She also highlighted the recent visit of the President to Kerman, which resulted in valuable economic outcomes for the region.

Regarding Iran's export strategy, she revealed that the government is focusing on increasing exports of engineering and technical services. "We have special plans in place to expand Iran's presence in international markets," she stated.



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Addressing the ongoing debate over the national university entrance exam (Konkur) and the role of high school GPA in admissions, Mohajerani acknowledged the concerns of students. "For many, this is the most decisive test of their lives, and it is natural for them to be anxious. But can someone's entire future be determined in a single four-hour exam? This is a critique of our education system," she remarked.

She noted that a recent Supreme Council of Education meeting did not reach a consensus on the matter, as both supporters and opponents of GPA influence remain divided. However, a final decision is expected to be made by the Education Council on Saturday.

Mohajerani also stated that an inter-agency plan to counteract economic sanctions will soon be announced. "Everyone is prepared for this," she declared.

On rising prices, she emphasized that the government does not endorse inflation but is committed to ensuring that sufficient supplies of essential goods such as fruits and dates are stocked for the New Year and Ramadan. "There is no need for concern; we have adequate reserves," she reassured.

She acknowledged the government's preference for keeping prices at a minimum but pointed out that market mechanisms of supply and demand play a crucial role. "When demand increases, supply must follow. If not, we will witness imbalances in pricing," she explained.

A special task force has been established to regulate the market and curb the rising costs of essential food items. "Although we do not defend price increases, we are determined to minimize their impact on the public," Mohajerani stressed.

Regarding rumors of the Central Bank governor's dismissal, Mohajerani dismissed such speculation, stating that no such decision has been made. "There are no plans to replace the head of the Central Bank. However, we are optimistic that through improved coordination within the government's economic team, we can navigate the current challenges while minimizing public hardships," she concluded.

Mohajerani's remarks reinforced the Iranian government's stance on negotiations with the U.S., economic resilience, and strategic policymaking. While addressing domestic concerns such as student security, economic development, and inflation control, she also underscored Iran's determination to strengthen its international economic presence. Additionally, the government remains committed to increasing women's participation in key sectors and ensuring educational reforms that better serve students' futures.

### Nuclear Industry as a Driver of National Development



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A group of managers and artists from the General Directorate of Radio Performing Arts met with the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization (AEOL).

According to the IRIB News Agency, a special event was held to unveil 50 radio plays celebrating the 50th anniversary of Iran's nuclear industry. The gathering included officials and artists from Radio Performing Arts and Radio Namayesh, along with the AEOL's president.

Mohammad Eslami, Vice President of Iran and head of the AEOL, outlined key initiatives in nuclear technology, including radiation processing of agricultural and food products, nuclear power development, radio-pharmaceutical production and export, and the importance of cultural programs to familiarize the public with nuclear advancements.

He emphasized the role of artists in raising awareness about the true achievements and benefits of nuclear technology, which are often overlooked. "The nuclear industry is a driving force for national development, and every aspect of this sector contributes to the country's power," he stated.

Eslami highlighted the significant progress made in Iran's nuclear sector, particularly in converting ideas into practical solutions that impact people's lives. He stressed that nuclear energy should be considered a national asset, contributing to the country's economic and social prosperity.

With the support of Iran's Supreme Leader and the dedication of young specialists, the country has achieved remarkable advancements in nuclear technology, which now benefits various energy and non-energy sectors, as well as healthcare.

"In the past three years, through the 'Open Doors, Open Innovation' policy, we have welcomed around 600 groups to the AEOL," Eslami added, underscoring efforts to increase transparency and public engagement.

The AEOL chief called for greater artistic involvement in showcasing nuclear technology's contributions to everyday life. He asserted that creative works could counter hostile narratives and highlight the undeniable role of nuclear science in various fields.

### Iran Urges Establishment of Stability, Sovereignty in Sudan



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says the Islamic Republic puts a premium on the need to establish stability and sovereignty in Sudan.

In a meeting with Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Youssef Ahmed al-Sharif in Tehran on Monday, Qalibaf warned against new adversarial plots and urged the country to make necessary plans to thwart the conspiracies.

"Iran believes that in order to counter these conspiracies, we must first understand that the Israeli regime is the enemy of Muslim countries and the countries in the region," the top Iranian parliamentarian said.

He expressed Iran's willingness to expand political, economic and commercial relations with Sudan and noted that the current visit by the top Sudanese diplomat to Tehran would be a positive step in this regard.

Qalibaf added that the Iranian Parliament is ready to establish parliamentary ties with Sudan after its formation.

The Sudanese foreign minister, for his part, said his country has been in a difficult situation over the past two years and is facing an international plot which aims to divide the country and plunder its resources.

Sharif hailed Iran's support for Sudan's stability and integrity and said some two million displaced Sudanese are living in neighboring countries and tens of thousands of people, including women, men, and children, have been killed.

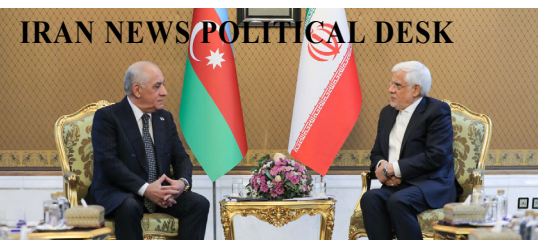
He added that Sudan has devised a plan for its post-war period which would lead to the establishment of Sudanese-Sudanese dialogue to outline the future of the country.

After its formation, the Sudanese parliament would establish effective ties with Iran, he noted.

"After the war, we wish for Iran to be one of the countries that plays a role in the reconstruction of our country. In this regard,"

He called on Iran to play a role in Sudan's reconstruction after the end of war and said it is necessary that various economic, technical and engineering Iranian delegations travel to Sudan.

### Iran Prioritizes Strengthening Ties with Neighboring Countries



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - First Vice President emphasized the deep historical and cultural ties between Iran and Azerbaijan, stating that Azerbaijan holds a special place in Iran's foreign policy beyond just sharing a physical border.

Mohammad Reza Aref made these remarks during a meeting with Azerbaijani Prime Minister Ali Asadov at the Sa'dabad Cultural-Historical Complex in Tehran. The Azerbaijani delegation traveled to Iran to participate in the third Caspian Economic Forum. Aref welcomed Asadov and his team, highlighting that the visit would not only enhance regional cooperation among Caspian Sea countries but also significantly strengthen bilateral relations.

Aref reiterated Iran's commitment to fostering friendly ties with Azerbaijan and other neighboring nations, emphasizing that expanding relations in various fields is a key strategy of the Iranian government. He noted that efforts to enhance cooperation with Azerbaijan have intensified under President Pezeshkian's administration, reaffirming Iran's determination to maintain strong and amicable relations between the two countries.

He further stressed the potential for economic collaboration, urging the joint commission heads to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to boost trade and economic exchanges. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of engaging the private sector in both countries to expand economic cooperation.

## Iranian Military Updates Readiness for Potential Action

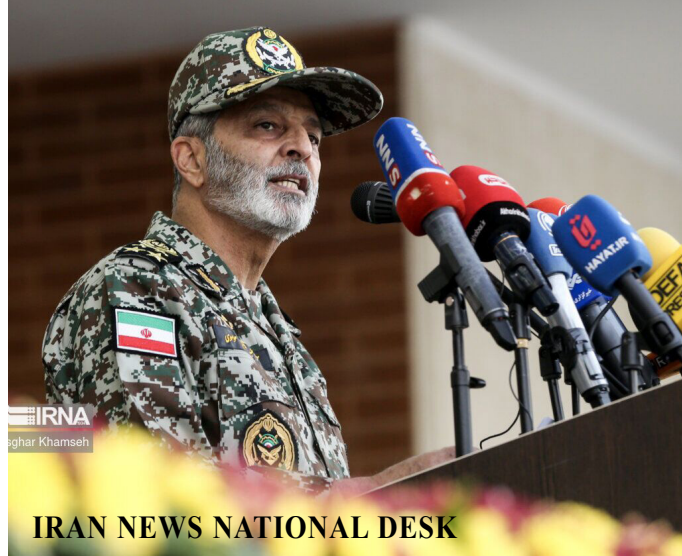
TEHRAN - The Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Army, Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, has announced that the military has updated its operational plans in response to a directive from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Speaking at the Fourth International Conference on Mahdism and Security in Tehran, General Mousavi stated, "Eleven days ago, the Supreme Leader made it clear that if the United States threatens our nation's security, we will respond in kind. This was a direct command for us. On the afternoon of February 8, military commanders updated their plans accordingly, and we are now fully prepared to take action."

General Mousavi emphasized that the Iranian Army, operating under the direct command of the Supreme Leader, has actively implemented policies in alignment with the "Second Step of the Revolution" doctrine—a roadmap outlined by Ayatollah Khamenei for advancing the Islamic Republic's long-term objectives.

He outlined the army's commitment to enhancing its strategic readiness, stating, "Our military must be spiritually and operationally prepared, fostering strong ideological ties to confront global oppressors." He also reiterated that Iran's military doctrine is deeply tied to the broader mission of the Islamic Revolution, which includes the preparation for the prophesied emergence of the Mahdi, a central figure in Shiite eschatology.

Addressing regional conflicts, General Mousavi praised resistance movements in Palestine,



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Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq, calling them exemplary figures of revolutionary steadfastness. "Hezbollah, Ansarullah, and Hashd al-Shaabi are not only heroes of their nations but also guiding lights for truth-seekers around the world," he declared.

Regarding Iran's strategic posture, he warned adversaries against underestimating the country's resolve. "Some mistakenly believe that they can pressure us into submission, offering us the false choice between signing agreements or facing military strikes. They do not understand that we are followers of Imam Hussein, and surrender is not an option," he said, referencing the Shiite principle of resistance.

In light of recent tensions with the United States, General Mousavi reiterated that Iran remains vigilant and prepared for any escalation. "If they act on their threats, we will respond decisively. Our forces have updated their tactical plans and are fully prepared to execute the necessary measures," he warned.

The event also featured remarks from Seyyed Hashem al-Haidari, Secretary-General of Iraq's Ahadullah Movement, who highlighted Iran's military advancements and the need for a stronger "jihad of explanation" to counter what he described as psychological warfare against the Islamic Republic.

The conference underscored Iran's ongoing efforts to align its military and ideological strategies, reinforcing its commitment to regional resistance movements and national defense against perceived foreign threats.



## Iran, Russia Emphasize Expansion of Oil Cooperation Through Joint Projects

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company and Russia's Deputy Minister of Energy have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening oil sector cooperation between the two countries through joint projects.

Hamid Bord, the CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company, met with Roman Marshavin, Russia's Deputy Minister of Energy, on Monday, February 18. During their meeting, both officials emphasized the importance of expanding Iran-Russia collaboration in the energy sector, particularly in the development of oil and gas fields.

Bord highlighted the significance of deepening relations with Russia and establishing long-term partnerships. He noted that given Iran's vast oil industry, the two countries could engage in extensive cooperation across different sectors and create a solid foundation for sustained collaboration through joint projects.

## Iran Sets Focus on Central Asia and the Caucasus for Nowruz Tourism



TEHRAN - Iran has set its sights on attracting tourists from 13 countries, particularly in Central Asia and the Caucasus, as part of its Nowruz tourism strategy, according to Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyed Reza Salehi Amiri.

In an interview with IRNA, Salehi Amiri stated that the goal is to revitalize tourism, promote cultural exchanges, and strengthen ties between Iran and the Nowruz-celebrating nations. To this end, he has recently traveled to Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia.

The minister emphasized that Iran does not limit its tourism initiatives to specific geographic regions. "Out of the 29 recognized forms of tourism worldwide, Iran has significant potential in various sectors, including historical and heritage tourism, academic tourism due to its vast educational institutions, agricultural tourism featuring picturesque gardens, and marine tourism spanning from Chabahar to Khorramshahr and beyond," he explained.

He also highlighted Iran's diverse tourism offerings, such as desert tourism in Maranjab, culinary tourism, and rural tourism, with over 3,500 eco-lodges available across the country. The recent 18th International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition in Tehran was aimed at showcasing these attractions to both domestic and international audiences.

During the exhibition, Iran signed an agreement with Tajikistan to increase tourism exchanges from 8,600 to 100,000 visitors. This agreement had previously been signed in Dushanbe in the presence of the Tajik President.

Salehi Amiri also dismissed concerns that sanctions and external pressures would hinder Iran's tourism sector. However, he acknowledged that misleading portrayals of Iran in Western media have created a distorted global image of the country. "If international tourists visit Iran and experience its beauty firsthand, these false narratives will be debunked," he asserted.

## Proposal for a Joint Technology Park Among Caspian Sea Countries

TEHRAN - The Iranian Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade has proposed the establishment of a joint technology park among the Caspian Sea littoral states to facilitate knowledge sharing in the industrial sector.

Seyed Mohammad Atabak made this proposal on Monday during the economic session of the Caspian Sea Summit, held at the Parsian Azadi Hotel in Tehran. The meeting was attended by representatives from Iran, Turkmenistan, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan.

Atabak emphasized the need to consolidate efforts to establish a regional technology park where member countries could collaborate on advancements in pharmaceuticals, industrial innovations, and artificial intelligence.

"This initiative will allow us to share industrial knowledge, leading to technological advancements among Caspian Sea nations," he stated.

Regarding financial transactions, Atabak highlighted that Iran and Russia have already established trade mechanisms using their national currencies. He noted that both countries can now conduct transactions in their local currencies, with banking operations, including card payments, being seamlessly executed.

The minister also proposed a barter trade system with other Caspian states to further facilitate industrial, commercial, and technological exchanges. He stressed that such mechanisms would enhance trade and cooperation among member nations.

Atabak pointed out the region's significant industrial potential and called for the formation of specialized working groups to harness and expand these capabilities. "By establishing these groups, we can enhance industrial technology and increase economic exchanges among member states," he said.

He further underscored the need for boosting trade among Caspian Sea nations, stating that the current trade volume is relatively low compared to the region's potential. He suggested organizing business meetings among entrepreneurs from these countries, with their findings being presented to their respective governments.

"This approach will maximize the commercial exchange capacity of tradable goods among our countries through private sector involvement," Atabak concluded.

Meanwhile at the meeting on the economic, customs, banking, and investment outlook for Caspian Sea littoral states, participants emphasized the importance of the Caspian Sea and the opportunities for joint trade cooperation.



During the meeting, Iran's Deputy Minister and Head of the Organization for Investment, Economic, and Technical Assistance highlighted the Caspian Sea's economic significance. He stated that the Caspian Sea, a valuable water border among the five participating countries with a history spanning over two million years, possesses unique characteristics that necessitate a shared strategic approach by all neighboring states.

Abolfazl Koudei emphasized the necessity of cooperation among the Caspian littoral states to maximize the benefits of this shared resource. He stressed the importance of collaboration in customs, banking, investment, free trade zones, and leveraging private sector capacities. These issues were key topics at the third Caspian Economic Forum.

He also underscored the need for harmonizing customs regulations through standardized procedures, reducing trade barriers, implementing simplified trade agreements, and establishing joint trade corridors and logistics centers using modern customs technology.

Reza Masroor, Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Trade Zones, highlighted the readiness of Iran's free trade zones to enhance commercial cooperation with the Caspian littoral states, particularly Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, which share land borders with Iran.

He pointed out that these shared free zones could play a significant role in advancing the digital economy and new technologies. Additionally, he stressed the necessity of forming a Caspian Sea Cooperation Council to expand regional trade ties.

Ali Akbar Shamani, Acting Head of Iran's Customs Affairs, discussed the importance of customs agreements and the digitalization of all customs processes to ensure the swiftest possible transactions. He highlighted that these advancements could be expanded to facilitate regional trade.

Dr. Asgari, a representative from Iran's Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the region's vast trade potential. He emphasized that reducing tariff barriers, facilitating trade, and developing shared infrastructure are essential measures to maximize these opportunities.

He proposed establishing a union of banking institutions and insurance companies among the Caspian Sea littoral states with participation from both private and public sectors.

These discussions reflect the growing need for increased economic convergence and cooperation among Caspian Sea nations to capitalize on shared resources and opportunities.

## Omani Investor Commits \$90m to Kerman, Highlighting Iran's Investment Security

TEHRAN - In a significant boost to Iran's investment climate, an Omani investor has committed \$90 million to a project in Kerman, according to Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce. Speaking at a seminar on arbitration and dispute resolution in contracts, Hassanzadeh announced that both phases of the project are now operational, underscoring the security of investments in Iran.

During the seminar, Hassanzadeh also highlighted the role of the Iran Chamber of Commerce's Arbitration Center, which was established in 2001 by parliamentary legislation. The center provides arbitration services for resolving domestic and international commercial disputes, offering businesses an alternative to lengthy court proceedings.

"Arbitration is a more efficient and cost-effective method for resolving commercial disputes compared to traditional judicial processes," Hassanzadeh stated. He emphasized that arbitration offers speed, specialized expertise, and lower costs, making it an attractive option for economic stakeholders.

Hassanzadeh stressed the need to expand the Iran Chamber of Commerce's Arbitration Center to all commercial chambers across the country. He argued that the center should serve as a primary dispute resolution hub, even for non-member businesses. "To strengthen the arbitration framework, it is crucial to establish branches in all provincial chambers of commerce," he added. "This will make arbitration services more accessible to businesses outside major urban centers and encourage more companies to utilize the center's expertise."

The President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce also pointed out a lack of awareness among business owners regarding

arbitration's benefits. He called for structured training programs to educate economic actors about arbitration procedures and advantages.

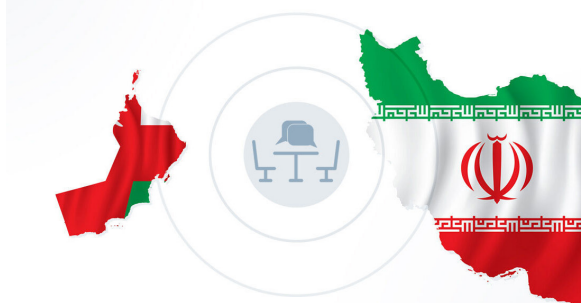
Additionally, Hassanzadeh underscored the importance of expanding arbitration services internationally, particularly in countries with significant trade relations with Iran, such as Iraq, China, Russia, Turkey, and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. He proposed formal agreements with joint chambers of commerce in these nations to facilitate arbitration services for

cross-border trade disputes.

Hassanzadeh also called for increased cooperation between the Arbitration Center and Iran's Supreme Technical Council within the country's Budget and Planning Organization. He noted that while the council currently handles disputes between government contractors and agencies, its rigid structure slows down dispute resolution.

"To enhance efficiency in handling specialized disputes, arbitration responsibilities should be delegated to the Iran Chamber of Commerce's Arbitration Center," he suggested, arguing that this move would streamline commercial dispute resolution.

Hassanzadeh expressed optimism about the future of arbitration services in Iran, emphasizing that with strategic expansion and international cooperation, the Iran Chamber of Commerce's Arbitration Center can become a reliable hub for commercial dispute resolution. He reiterated the need for comprehensive planning to ensure that arbitration services are accessible and beneficial for businesses across the country.



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## 10,000 Iranian Students Studying in Russia, Says Presidential Advisor



TEHRAN - The Deputy for Political Affairs at the President's Office has announced that approximately 10,000 Iranian students are currently studying in Russia, with a significant majority enrolled in medical and dental programs.

During the opening ceremony of the Seventh Summit of Top-Tier Iranian and Russian University Presidents, Mehdi Sanaei, Political Advisor to the President and Deputy for Political Affairs in the Fourteenth Administration, highlighted the importance of strengthening academic ties between Iran and Russia.

Sanaei emphasized that modern diplomacy extends beyond traditional political negotiations, stating:

"Scientific, cultural, and technological diplomacy now play a crucial role alongside political discussions. The establishment of the Union for Cooperation among Leading Iranian and Russian Universities can significantly enhance bilateral relations, foster mutual understanding, and bring the two nations closer together."

However, he pointed out that Iran-Russia relations have been predominantly political and governmental, with limited people-to-people and academic exchanges. He stressed the necessity of increasing scholarly collaboration, research partnerships, and cultural engagement.

Sanaei noted that while numerous agreements have been signed between Iranian and Russian universities, their practical implementation remains insufficient.

"Although over 50 agreements have been signed between universities in both countries, the level of actual cooperation does not match these commitments. We hope that academic institutions will work toward realizing these agreements in practice."

During a recent meeting between Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Russian President Vladimir Putin, an agreement was signed in the Kremlin reinforcing educational collaboration. Despite the large number of Iranian students in Russia, Sanaei acknowledged that participation in non-medical fields, such as humanities and social sciences, remains low. Additionally, the number of Russian students studying in Iran is minimal.

The Deputy for Political Affairs expressed optimism about increasing student exchanges and joint research projects. He urged universities in both nations to expand their collaboration, enhance student mobility, and develop joint scientific initiatives.

Sanaei also recognized the contributions of key figures in fostering academic relations, including Surena Sattari, former Vice President for Science and Technology, and Sadovnichy, a prominent Russian academic leader.

## One Million Students Drop Out Due to Financial Hardships



TEHRAN - The head of the Tehran Union of Stationery and Engineering Supplies Sellers has reported a significant increase in school dropouts due to financial difficulties.

In an interview with ILNA, Mohsen Golestani, the president of the union, discussed the challenges faced by the stationery industry over the past year. He emphasized that their sector caters to nearly 20 million students, making it a crucial part of the market. However, he noted that the industry has suffered significantly due to currency fluctuations and inflation.

Golestani stated that the rising prices of imported goods, combined with increasing production costs—mainly due to dependence on foreign raw materials—have led to severe inflation in the final pricing of stationery items.

He further explained that the declining purchasing power of consumers has forced producers, importers, and sellers to lower their profit margins and sell products at the minimum possible price. Despite these efforts, demand has sharply decreased.

Golestani clarified that internal challenges, rather than external sanctions, have had the greatest impact on the industry. Apart from bureaucratic delays in order registration, businesses also face prolonged waits for foreign currency allocations at the Central Bank, creating severe difficulties for union members.

The summer season, usually a peak time for production, was severely disrupted by frequent power outages. This significantly affected manufacturers, increasing production waste and reducing overall output. Despite stable operational costs, the industry suffered major financial losses.

## Iran's Hidden Energy Subsidies Reach \$127 Billion Annually



TEHRAN - The Deputy Parliamentary Affairs Minister of Iran has revealed that the country's hidden energy subsidies amount to a staggering \$127 billion annually. He emphasized that the disparity between energy prices in Iran and global markets is unjustifiable.

Speaking at the "National Production, National Pride" festival on Monday, Shahram Dabiri stated that Iran has failed to bring energy costs in line with international standards. He attributed this shortcoming to policymakers, including government officials and parliament members, who have not implemented effective policies.

"We are now facing serious issues, and it is unrealistic to expect that we can resolve these challenges in a short period," Dabiri warned.

Addressing energy supply for industries, he mentioned that President Masoud Pezeshkian personally emphasized the importance of this issue. The president held discussions with investors interested in developing a 15,000-megawatt solar power plant and referred the matter to the Central Bank Governor and the Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade to remove obstacles.

Dabiri also highlighted the government's efforts to address energy imbalances, aiming to reduce these issues in the coming year. He assured that both short-term and long-term plans are being executed to tackle the energy crisis.

He stressed that the president has consistently instructed the government to avoid power cuts for industries, suggesting instead that household electricity consumption should be regulated through planned restrictions.

The deputy minister further stated that the government is committed to reducing its direct involvement in the economy, focusing instead on policymaking and oversight. However, he acknowledged the inefficiency of state-owned enterprises and reiterated the government's plan to privatize them.

He reaffirmed the government's strong support for the private sector, ensuring that necessary legal amendments would be made to assist producers. Additionally, he underscored the need to enhance product quality, eliminate monopolies, and impose restrictions on imports to support domestic manufacturing.

Dabiri also announced efforts to streamline administrative processes for issuing business permits. He pointed out that while many countries have lenient licensing processes with strict oversight, Iran follows an opposite approach—issuing permits with difficulty but lacking proper monitoring afterward.

## Presidential Election in Abkhazia Will Go to Second Round

TBILISI (Dispatches) - A presidential election held in the breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia produced no clear winner, setting up a second round between the top two candidates, state news agency Apsnypress said.

Citing Abkhazia's electoral commission, the agency reported that acting President Badra Gunba had taken 46% of the vote, while opposition leader Adgur Ardzinba won almost 37%.

Gunba, who was previously vice president, took over as Abkhazia's leader in November after his predecessor was driven from office by protests against an investment agreement with Russia.

It was the third time since 2014 that an Abkhazian leader had been driven from office by mass protests.



## Argentine President Denies Role in Cryptogate



BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentine President Javier Milei denied promoting a cryptocurrency that crashed, losing investors billions of dollars and prompting a flood of complaints, as prosecutors reportedly prepare an investigation into the scandal.

"I did not promote it, I spread it," Milei told broadcaster TN, adding that it "is a problem between private parties because the State does not play a role here."

"I acted in good faith," he said.

Argentina's federal prosecutor's office will examine whether Milei engaged in fraud or criminal association or was in breach of his duties when he praised the \$LIBRA cryptocurrency on social media Friday evening, according to news reports.

The currency's value soared then crashed, and Milei deleted his blessing hours later, saying he had made a mistake.

Argentine economists, crypto specialists and opposition political figures criticized the self-declared "anarcho-capitalist" president, an economist by training, and said the digital asset could be a fraud or a Ponzi scheme.

Industry observers said the operation was likely a "rug pull" — a scam where developers unveil a crypto token, attract investors, then quickly cash out.

Rights NGO Observatory for the Right to the City, one of several complainants, alleges Milei formed part of a "criminal organization that organized a fraud with the \$LIBRA cryptocurrency that simultaneously affected more than 40,000 people with losses of more than US\$4 billion."

The Kobeissi Letter, a publication that provides analysis on global capital markets, said on X Friday that within minutes of its launch, "multiple large holders began liquidating MILLIONS of USD worth of \$LIBRA."

"This included gains of +\$4 million or more as \$LIBRA rose to \$4.6 billion in market (capitalisation)," it reported.

On Monday, Milei said he had "nothing to hide" from an investigation.

He said that those who carried out the transactions, including "a lot of bots," were people who "knew very well what the risk was."

## Europe Talks Up More Defense Spending as Ukraine Peacekeeper Plan Divides



PARIS (Dispatches) - European leaders meeting in Paris for emergency talks on Monday called for higher spending to ramp up the continent's defense capabilities but remained split on the idea of deploying peacekeepers to Ukraine to back up any peace deal.

The leaders also agreed it would be dangerous to conclude a Ukraine ceasefire without a peace agreement at the same time, and that they were ready to provide security guarantees to Ukraine "depending on the level of American support," a European official said.

"We agree with President Trump on a 'peace through strength' approach," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Paris meeting was called by French President Emmanuel Macron after U.S. President Donald Trump arranged bilateral peace talks with Russia, excluding European allies and Ukraine from negotiations to end the war that are scheduled to begin in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

Macron spoke with Trump ahead of the meetings, officials from both countries said on Monday. A White House official called it "a friendly call" in which they talked about the Paris meeting and the talks in Saudi Arabia.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also said he had a "long" call with Macron on security guarantees.

"We share a common vision: security guarantees must be robust and reliable," Zelenskyy said on X, adding: "Any other decision without such guarantees — such as a fragile ceasefire — would only serve as another deception by Russia and a prelude to a new Russian war against Ukraine or other European nations."

Trump stunned Ukraine and European allies last week when he announced he had called Russian President Vladimir Putin, long ostracized by the West, to discuss ending the war without consulting them, and they must now confront the reality of a future with less U.S. protection.

The U.S. decision has sparked a realization among European nations that they will have to do more to ensure Ukraine's security.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who before the meeting said he was willing to send peacekeeping troops to Ukraine,

said on Monday there must be a U.S. security commitment for European countries to put boots on the ground. He said it was too early to say how many British troops he would be willing to deploy.

A peacekeeping force would not only raise the risk of a direct confrontation with Russia, which launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but also stretch European armies, whose arsenals have been depleted by supplying Ukraine and decades of relative peace.

There are also difficult questions about how some European nations, whose public finances are groaning, will pay for such expanded military commitments.

Keith Kellogg, Trump's Ukraine envoy, said he would visit Ukraine from Wednesday and was asked if the U.S. would provide a security guarantee for any European peacekeepers.

"I've been with President Trump, and the policy has always been: You take no options off the table," he said.

Starmer's push for peacekeepers appeared to draw a dividing line between participants in Paris, who included German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and Giorgia Meloni, Donald Tusk and Pedro Sanchez, the prime ministers of Italy, Poland and Spain.

Scholz said there could be no peace deal without Ukraine's consent, but said talk of a German peacekeeping mission in Ukraine was "highly inappropriate" without a peace deal in hand.

Both he and Tusk though said stringent EU fiscal rules should be loosened to allow more spending on defense without countries falling foul of the EU's deficit rules.

Meloni also questioned the peacekeeping plan, according to sources in her office.

"It was useful to discuss today the various hypotheses on the table. The one that foresees the deployment of European soldiers in Ukraine seems to me to be the most complex and perhaps the least effective, and on this too I voiced Italy's doubts," she said, according to the sources.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said she was open to discussing troop deployments and that Europe must boost its support for Ukraine while ramping up domestic defence spending.

"Russia is threatening all of Europe now, unfortunately," he told reporters.

## Taiwan Considering Multi-Billion Dollar Arms Purchase From U.S.



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Taiwan is exploring buying arms worth billions of dollars from the United States, sources briefed on the matter said, hoping to win support from the new Trump administration as China continues to apply military pressure on the island.

Three sources familiar with the situation, speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the situation, told Reuters that Taiwan is in talks with Washington.

The package is meant to demonstrate to the United States that Taiwan is committed to its defense, one of the sources said.

A second source said the package would include coastal defense cruise missiles and HIMARS rockets.

"I would be very surprised if it was less than \$8 billion. Somewhere between \$7 billion to \$10 billion," the source added.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. However, U.S. national security adviser Mike Waltz has said he wants to speed delivery of weapons to Taiwan.

Taiwan's defense ministry declined to comment on specific purchases but said it is focused on building its defenses.

"Any weaponry and equipment that can achieve those goals for building the military are listed as targets for tender," it said.

## Israeli Military Begins Lebanon Withdrawal

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanese official said Israeli troops had started withdrawing Monday from some border villages, after Israel's military said it would remain in five "strategic points" hours before a ceasefire deadline to pull out.

Earlier, Lebanon's president voiced concern that Israel would miss the Tuesday deadline under the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, and urged countries to pressure it to honour the cut-off.

"Israeli forces are beginning to withdraw from border villages, including Mais al-Jabal and Blida, as the Lebanese army advances," the security official told AFP, requesting anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Israeli military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani earlier said that "based on the current situation, we will leave small amounts of troops deployed temporarily in five strategic points along the border in Lebanon".

He said the decision came "so we can continue to defend our residents and to make sure there's no immediate threat".

Israel had been due to finalize its withdrawal by February 18, after it missed a January deadline.

"We are afraid that a complete withdrawal will not be achieved tomorrow," President Joseph Aoun said ahead of the Israeli military's announcement.

The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire took effect on November 27, after more than a year of hostilities that saw Israel launch a ground offensive into Lebanon.

Under the ceasefire, Lebanon's military was to deploy in the south alongside United Nations peacekeepers as the Israeli army withdrew over an initial 60-day



period that was later extended to February 18.

Hezbollah was to pull back north of the Litani River in southern Lebanon and dismantle its military infrastructure in the south.

Aoun said the army was ready to deploy "in towns and villages that the Israelis will withdraw from" and to "protect the border".

Lebanon was working "diplomatically to achieve the full Israeli withdrawal", he said.

Since the ceasefire began, Israel has continued to carry out strikes on Lebanon, with the military saying Monday it killed a Hamas commander in the south.

Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem on Sunday said it was the government's responsibility to ensure the Israeli army fully withdraws by Tuesday's deadline.

During a joint address with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday, top US diplomat Marco Rubio said that "in the case of Lebanon, our goals are aligned... A strong Lebanese state that can take on and disarm Hezbollah".

Netanyahu said that "Hezbollah must be disarmed. And Israel would prefer that the Lebanese army do that job, but no one should doubt that Israel will do what it has to do to enforce the understandings of the ceasefire and defend our security."

Aoun said Monday that "the important thing is to achieve the Israeli withdrawal, and Hezbollah's weapons come as part of solutions the Lebanese agree on."

Lebanon's government said the state should be the sole bearer of arms and vowed to liberate "all Lebanese territory".

Hezbollah was the only Lebanese armed group that refused to surrender its weapons to the state following the 1975-1990 civil war.

In spite of the truce, more than 100,000 people remain internally displaced in Lebanon, according to the UN's migration agency, and Lebanese authorities have said reconstruction could cost up to US\$11 billion (RM49 billion).

Ramzi Kaiss from Human Rights Watch said Monday that "Israel's deliberate demolition of civilian homes and infrastructure" was making it "impossible for many residents to return".

## Rubio, Saudi Crown Prince Discuss Gaza's Future, Regional Security

RIYADH (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Monday, during talks with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, that any deal on the future of war-torn Gaza must boost regional security, the US State Department said.

Rubio, who arrived from Israel accompanied by National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and special Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, met the de facto ruler ahead of talks expected on Tuesday with a Russian delegation in the Saudi capital.

But the 500-day-old Israel-Hamas war dominated discussions, according to a State Department statement.

Rubio and the crown prince "reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the ceasefire in Gaza and ensuring that Hamas releases all hostages, including American citizens", the statement said.

"The secretary underscored the importance of an arrangement for Gaza that contributes to regional security," it added.

The two "discussed ways to advance shared interests in Syria, Lebanon, and across the region, to include Red Sea security and freedom of navigation", said the statement, which made no reference to President Donald Trump's widely criticized plan for the United States to take over the Gaza Strip and move away the Palestinian population.



A Saudi statement said only that Rubio and the crown prince "discussed regional and international developments" and "efforts to assure security and stability in the region".

Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations have strongly opposed the U.S. plan for Gaza, and State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce made no mention of the proposal in the statement.

Rubio also met Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan but neither commented to reporters afterwards.

The State Department, however, said that in the talks with the crown prince, Rubio highlighted "the strength of the US-Saudi relationship" and "looked forward to increased economic and defense cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia".

Trump, in his first term as president, launched efforts to establish diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel. The Gaza war has hardened Arab attitudes towards normalisation, however.

In Jerusalem, the U.S. secretary of state gave strong support to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his uncompromising military campaign in Gaza since the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel.



## Alcaraz Beats Cilic in Doha

DOHA (Dispatches) - After Carlos Alcaraz dispatched Martin Cilic in the opening round of the Qatar Open he lingered on court to play a few balls with a spectator — NBA star Jimmy Butler. Alcaraz took his time to find his rhythm on a windy night but eventually overcame veteran Croatian 6-4, 6-4, then took on Butler. The 35-year-old guard, recently traded to the Golden State Warriors, opted not to stay by the Bay while it hosted Sunday's National Basketball Association All-Star Game. Instead he flew to the Gulf and was in the crowd to see Alcaraz win. Butler then came on court. Both men donned microphones as they put on a short show for fans. Butler even attempted to return an Alcaraz lob with a between-the-legs shot - but missed. Against the 36-year-old Cilic, Alcaraz was stronger at the pivotal moments. The first set turned on an 18-minute seventh game which ended with Alcaraz gaining the service break he needed. In the second set, Alcaraz fell 0-40 behind on serve in the eighth game. He responded by taking 15 of the next 19 points to win the match in one hour, 38 minutes. "I'm really pleased about saving that game," said Alcaraz on court. "Marin puts a lot of pressure when you're serving, he's a great returner. I'm really happy to stay calm in that moment, do my routine and make good shots. I'm really happy to win in two sets." He will face Zhang Zhizhen or Luca Nardi in the second round. Cilic was competing in his first event since knee surgery in November. Jiri Lehecka beat seventh seed Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov 6-4, 6-4. It was the Czech's 11th victory in 2025, tied for the ATP Tour lead with Alex de Minaur and Miomir Kecmanovic. Meanwhile Amanda Anisimova claimed her first WTA 1000 title when she beat Jelena Ostapenko 6-4 6-3

in the final of the Qatar Open which will see the American break into the top 20 for the first time in her career. Ranked 41 in the world, Anisimova also became the lowest-ranked player to win the tournament as she beat six top-40 opponents en route to her third singles title. The American was ranked as low as 359 in 2023 when she took a break from the game due to burnout as it took a toll on her mental health but the 23-year-old has been on the rise since her comeback and is set to move up to 18th in the rankings. Anisimova is only the second American to win the title, following in the footsteps of Monica Seles in 2002, while Ostapenko has now finished runner-up in Doha for a second time having also lost in the 2016 final. "There's been a lot of hard work, a lot of tears and a lot of good moments," Anisimova said. "With tennis you kind of experience it all but that's also why I love it. There have been a lot of challenges the last few weeks. I'm very proud of myself and happy with how I've dealt with them." After a spot of rain briefly paused play in the opening set, Anisimova broke first to lead 3-2 but that only fired up Ostapenko as she won nine straight points to go 4-3 up. But Anisimova regained her advantage, using her backhand to good effect and broke Ostapenko again before she served out the set as the Latvian dropped a set for the first time in the tournament. Ostapenko had the opportunity to go 2-0 up in the second but failed to convert break points and as she took out her frustrations at her team, Anisimova duly broke early to take a 2-1 lead and leave her opponent fuming during the changeover.

## Djokovic Calls for Overhaul of Unfair Anti-Doping System



DOHA (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic yesterday urged tennis authorities to overhaul the sport's anti-doping system, pointing to "inconsistencies" in cases involving top stars Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek and those of lower-ranked players. World number one Sinner agreed to a three-month ban on Saturday, admitting "partial responsibility" for mistakes by his team which led to him twice testing positive for traces of clostebol in March last year. Sinner was facing a potential ban of two years after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against his initial exoneration by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA), announced in August. In a surprising move, WADA withdrew its appeal and came to an agreement with Sinner to accept a three-month ban. In another high-profile case last year, five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek accepted a one-month ban after testing positive for the banned heart drug trimetazidine. "There's a majority of the players that I've talked to in the locker room, not just in the last few days, but also last few months, that are not happy with the way this whole process has been handled," said Djokovic. "A majority of the players don't feel that it's fair. A majority of the players feel like there is favoritism happening. It seems like, it appears that you can almost affect the outcome if you are a top player, if you have access to the top lawyers." In contrast, the recently retired Simona Halep, a former world number one, was handed a four-year ban by the ITIA in 2022 after testing positive for the blood-boosting drug roxadustat. She argued it was the result of a tainted supplement and successfully appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which reduced her suspension to nine months. "Simona Halep and (Britain's) Tara Moore and some other players that are maybe less known that have been struggling to resolve their cases for years, or have gotten the ban for years," said Djokovic. "There is so much inconsistencies between the cases." Djokovic, who is returning to action this week at the Qatar Open for the first time since retiring injured from last month's Australian Open semi-finals, believes a change is needed. "Right now it's a ripe time for us to really address the system, because the system and the structure obviously doesn't work (for) anti-doping, it's obvious," he said.

## Bellingham Ready to Make Amends as Madrid Eye City Scalp

MADRID (Dispatches) - Jude Bellingham edged Real Madrid ahead in their Champions League play-off against Manchester City, but then his week swiftly took a turn for the worse. The England international was sent off in the first half as Los Blancos dropped two points in the Spanish title race on Saturday at Osasuna. The midfielder will at least be fresh for the second leg clash with City at the Santiago Bernabeu tomorrow, with Madrid holding a 3-2 lead in the tie after their victory at the Etihad Stadium last week. Bellingham felt he had let his side down with his dismissal for dissent, despite insisting the referee misunderstood him, and he apologised to his team-mates. All will be forgiven if he helps pull Madrid past Pep Guardiola's City and into the last 16. "Enough said about the misunderstanding, just wanted to apologise again for leaving my team-mates in such a tough position and thank the fans for their support and understanding," wrote Bellingham on social media. "We'll see each other on Wednesday, (playing) at home." It was his second red card for arguing with referees since arriving in Spain from Borussia Dortmund in 2023.



Despite his occasional frustration with officials, Bellingham has mostly been able to enjoy himself in Spain. His goals were crucial as Madrid won La Liga last season, and he helped his side claim their record-extending 15th Champions League trophy at Wembley, against his former side Dortmund. Bellingham was previously linked with City but on arrival at Madrid said once the Spanish giants came in for him he got "goosebumps" and that his heart nearly stopped. "I'd always been aware of the interest from England so that was pretty normal," he said after joining. "Money is not a thing for me. I don't think about money at all when I make these kind of decisions. I never have and will -- I play the

game purely out of love... "It wasn't a case of other teams are bad or they weren't good but, for me, Madrid is the greatest." In his fairytale first season Bellingham scored 23 goals in 43 games across all competitions, as well as converting a penalty in the Champions League quarter-final shootout Madrid won against City. Bellingham has often shone in Madrid's key matches. The 21-year-old scored vital goals in both league Clasicos last season, and in both games against Girona, who for most of the season were Madrid's main title contenders. In the Champions League he set up Vinicius for a goal in the final against Dortmund, as well as scoring four times in the group stage. This season, operating in a slightly more withdrawn role following the arrival of French superstar Kylian Mbappe, he initially found it harder to find his spark in attack. Bellingham failed to find the net in his first 12 games, having netted double figures by the same time last season. However coach Carlo Ancelotti backed the midfielder to come good and praised his hard work in a defensive capacity. Eventually Bellingham's nose for goal returned and he has scored 10 times in his last 20 games, as well as providing six assists.

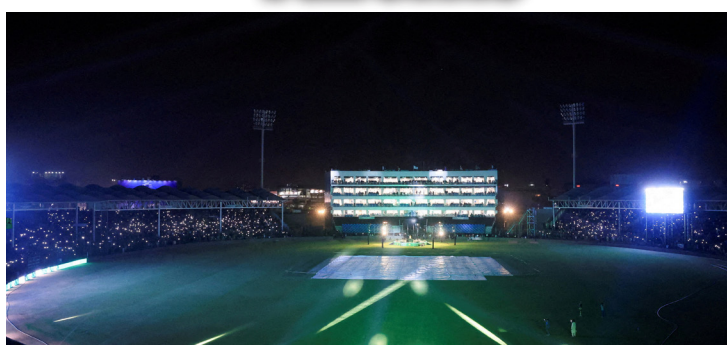
## Lewandowski on Target as Barcelona Grind Out Win to Go Top



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Robert Lewandowski scored from the penalty spot as Barcelona scraped out a 1-0 home win over Rayo Vallecano to climb top of the Spanish Liga. Barcelona were seven points off first place three weeks ago but the two big Madrid clubs have suffered dips in form. Both drew their games 1-1 on Saturday playing with 10 men. Barcelona took advantage last night by eking out a victory over a third Madrid team, Rayo, thanks to their star striker. "We can't win every game 3-0, we had to work," Barcelona fullback Alex Balde told broadcaster Movistar. Lewandowski scored his 20th goal of the season with a 28th-minute penalty that went in off the post. Rayo goalkeeper Pep Chavarría repeatedly frustrated Barcelona. At the other end, Jorge de Frutos had a strike disallowed and missed with a headed chance in added time. "It was hard work for the players and at the end we are happy," said Barcelona coach Hansi Flick. "Everyone is happy about our new position. I think we played very well, although I think we can do better." Barcelona remained unbeaten in 12 matches in 2025 while ending the 10-match unbeaten run that had lifted Rayo to a surprising sixth place.

## Revived Champions Trophy Up for Grabs With No Clear Favorite

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The sprinkling of stardust over the Champions Trophy may appear somewhat thin on its return to the calendar after eight years but fans can expect a wide open one-day international tournament in the absence of an overwhelming favourite. The tournament featuring the top eight teams in the ODI format was discontinued by the International Cricket Committee (ICC) after the eighth edition in 2017, when Sarfaraz Ahmed's Pakistan beat India in the final. Pakistan are therefore holders as well as hosts as they stage a first global tournament since the 1996 World Cup, even if political tensions mean India will play all their matches, including the March 9 final should they make it, in Dubai. Reigning ODI world champions Australia are among several countries sending weakened contingents with Steve Smith standing in as captain of a squad featuring a second-string pace attack. Regular skipper Pat Cummins, fellow quick Josh Hazlewood and all-rounder Mitchell Marsh were all ruled out by injury, while left-arm quick Mitchell Starc withdrew for personal reasons and all-rounder Marcus Stoinis has quit ODIs altogether. Sri Lanka did not make the cut for the Champions Trophy but



nevertheless handed the Australians a humbling reality check in the run-up to the tournament with a 2-0 series drubbing. Reigning Twenty20 world champions India have made the finals of the last three ICC events and Rohit Sharma's team signalled their fine form by winning seven of eight limited-overs matches against England. Runners-up in the 2023 ODI World Cup on home soil, India boast one of the world's most destructive batting lineups but will be without pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who has been laid low by a back

injury. Seamer Mohammed Shami's impressive return to action in the home series against England was a big relief for Rohit, who will also expect vital contributions from spin all-rounders Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja. New Zealand will also fancy their chances of claiming the title having won the tri-nation trophy in Pakistan, beating the hosts in the final of a warm-up tournament also featuring 1998 champions South Africa. Mitchell Santner's Black Caps side went through the tournament unbeaten and now have a fair idea of the kind of conditions they will face in the Champions Trophy. "If you look at the track record of New Zealand in ICC events, they are always there or thereabouts," former New Zealand pace spearhead Tim Southee told the ICC. "In a tournament like the Champions Trophy, if you get on a bit of a roll, anything can happen. I'd love to see the Black Caps there and hopefully lifting the trophy at the end." England were unable to defend the T20 or ODI World Cup under Jos Buttler and are now licking their wounds after a tour of India where they were blanked 3-0 in the 50-overs matches.