

In a Statement Marking the Month of Ramadan, President Masoud Pezeshkian Conveyed His Congratulations to the Leaders and Citizens of Islamic Nations, Underscoring the Importance of Working Towards Easing the Plight of the People in the Gaza Strip

IRAN NEWS

Majlis Speaker Meeting With the Heads of the Chamber of Commerce, the Guilds Chamber, and the Cooperative Chamber, Emphasized the Government's Withdrawal From Business Ownership and Announced Readiness of the Majlis to Promote the Development of the Private Sector in the Country's Economy.

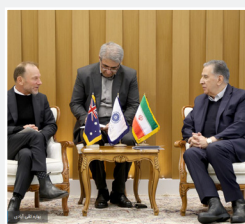
VOL. XXIX, No. 8219 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

TUESDAY MARCH 04, 2025 ESFAND 14, 1403

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Zarif Confirms Resignation Amid Pressure



TEHRAN - Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's Strategic Deputy to the President, has confirmed his resignation from his post, expressing hope that his departure would remove obstacles hindering the government's efforts to fulfill the people's will. The announcement follows reports of his meeting with the head of Iran's judiciary, as detailed in a statement Zarif posted on X, reported by the Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA).

In his tweet, Zarif wrote: "Greetings to my esteemed compatriots. I thank Almighty God for granting me, His humble servant, the opportunity over the past nine months to dedicate all I could to realizing the nation's will and serving its people." He reflected on a challenging tenure, noting, "Though the past six months brought the vilest insults, slanders, and threats against me and my family—and even within the government, I endured the bitterest phase of my 40-year career—I stood firm in the hope of serving."

Zarif emphasized his resilience, stating, "I have never shied away from hardship in serving this land. Over more than four decades, I have borne countless insults and falsehoods for my modest role in advancing national interests—from ending the imposed war to resolving the nuclear issue—remaining silent against a flood of lies and distortions to safeguard the country's interests."

He then revealed the circumstances of his resignation: "Yesterday, at the invitation of the honorable head of the judiciary, I met with him. During our discussion, he pointed to the country's conditions and advised that, to spare the government further pressure, I should return to academia. I accepted without hesitation."

Zarif's confirmation of his resignation marks the end of a tumultuous chapter, with the former official expressing hope that his exit would ease tensions and pave the way for the government's success.

Iran and Azerbaijan Seek Stronger Ties



TEHRAN - Ali Alizadeh, Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Iran, met with Sedif Badri, head of the Iran-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Friendship Group, in Tehran to explore ways to enhance bilateral relations. Reported by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), the discussion spotlighted the strengthening ties between the two nations while addressing pressing challenges.

Sedif Badri, a representative of Ardabil in Iran's parliament, opened the meeting by praising the flourishing relationship between Iran and Azerbaijan. "Rooted in shared history, religion, culture, and kinship, Azerbaijan occupies a unique position in Iran's foreign policy," he said. He cited the recent visit by Iran's Parliament Speaker to Azerbaijan, where meetings with government and parliamentary leaders underscored the critical role of legislative diplomacy in advancing shared objectives.

Badri reaffirmed Iran's dedication to deepening parliamentary cooperation with Azerbaijan's National Assembly, pledging support for expanding these ties. However, he voiced concerns over border restrictions, expressing hope that crossings could soon reopen to ease travel for citizens of both nations.

The Iranian lawmaker also drew attention to difficulties faced by Iranian students in Azerbaijan and truck drivers, calling for swift action. "Despite our prisoner transfer agreement, we urge Azerbaijan's authorities to prioritize these issues," Badri stressed. "We cannot let such challenges sour public sentiment between our peoples."

Supreme Leader Highlights the Miracle of Quran Recitation in Ramadan Gathering

TEHRAN - On the first day of the holy month of Ramadan, Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, addressed a gathering of distinguished national and international Quran reciters and professors during a Quranic assembly titled "In the Company of the Quran." In his remarks on Sunday evening, the Leader emphasized the individual, social, and national need for the healing teachings of the Quran, urging the Quranic community to ensure that the spiritual springs of the holy book flow into the hearts, minds, and ultimately the actions of all people.

According to the official website of the Supreme Leader's office, Ayatollah Khamenei, who spent over two and a half hours listening to recitations by top-tier reciters, collective recitations, and performances by domestic and foreign Quranic groups, congratulated the believers on the arrival of Ramadan, describing it as a "true and great celebration for the faithful." He expressed gratitude to God for the continuous increase in the number of skilled reciters across the country, noting that society's need for the Quran's inexhaustible wisdom to address various challenges is both urgent and real.

Explaining the individual need for the divine book, the Leader stated, "The cure for all spiritual and moral ailments afflicting humanity—such as envy, stinginess, suspicion, laziness, selfishness, hedonism, and prioritizing personal gain over collective welfare—lies within the Quran." He further elaborated on its relevance to societal issues, saying, "To remedy social problems, including social justice—which, after monotheism, is the most important principle in Islam—we must turn to the Quran."

Ayatollah Khamenei also described the Quran as a clear and precise guide in dealings with other nations. "The Iranian nation has no issue with other peoples, but today it faces a broad front of infidel or hypocritical power-holders. The Quran outlines how to interact with them at every stage—when to negotiate, when to cooperate, when to strike them with a fist, and when to draw the sword," he explained.

The Leader underscored that proper recitation and attentive listening to the Quran can eliminate these ailments, adding that a well-recited Quran inspires righteousness and salvation in the listener. Citing a Quranic verse, he outlined the Prophet's mission—purification of the soul, teaching the comprehensive framework of individual and social life, and imparting wisdom about the realities of existence—stating, "Recitation is a prophetic act, and reciters are essentially carrying out the Prophet's work."

He highlighted that effective recitation transforms Quranic concepts into widely accepted ideas among people, urging reciters to perform in a way that embeds thousands of Quranic themes into



public consciousness as a basis for action. "Good recitation also enhances Quranic literacy," he noted, emphasizing that when done with proper etiquette, recitation works miracles across all dimensions.

Ayatollah Khamenei identified the most critical aspect of Quranic recitation as a heartfelt sense of being in God's presence. "The Quran must be recited with attention to its meaning and in the form of tartil (measured recitation) to be impactful," he said. Defining tartil as a spiritual practice involving understanding, reflection, and pause, he praised the current practice of tartil in Iran as valuable and encouraged its wider adoption.

The Leader advised reciters to prioritize personal enrichment from the divine words, followed by impacting their audience. "If this goal is observed, using beautiful vocal techniques and melodies is permissible," he said, commending Iranian reciters for their original and effective styles that evoke humility and remembrance of God in listeners.

Stressing the importance of understanding Quranic meanings, Ayatollah Khamenei noted significant progress since the Islamic Revolution but called for broader public comprehension of the verses. He tasked institutions like the Ministry of Education, the Islamic Propagation Organization, and other Quranic bodies with devising methods to achieve this.

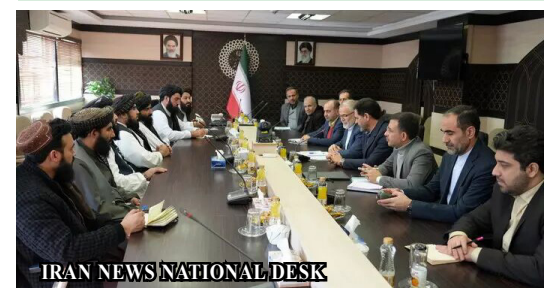
He also touched on the appearance of reciters, saying, "Besides inner virtue, a reciter's outward appearance should reflect righteousness and spirituality." Praising Iranian reciters' international performances, he encouraged wearing traditional Iranian attire at overseas Quranic events and cautioned against using forbidden melodies in recitation.

The Leader acknowledged the efforts of various entities—including the Ministry of Culture, the Islamic Propagation Organization, the Endowments Organization, state media, and grassroots groups—in promoting Quranic activities. He urged these bodies to collaborate under the guidance of the Supreme Quranic Council and called on state media to support high-quality Quranic productions.

"Compared to the pre-revolution era, when the Quran was sidelined and reciters were few, today we see remarkable progress. Even small towns and some villages now boast talented reciters," he said, expressing hope that adherence to these principles would allow the Quran's spiritual spring to permeate hearts, minds, and deeds.

The ceremony featured recitations of Quranic verses by several reciters, alongside collective performances and supplications by various groups.

Iran Calls for Greater Cooperation with Afghanistan in Fight Against Narcotics



TEHRAN - Deputy Interior Minister has urged Afghanistan to enhance bilateral cooperation in combating drug trafficking during a meeting with an Afghan delegation. The official praised Afghanistan's ban on the cultivation, purchase, and sale of narcotics, calling it a significant step that could yield even greater results with a unified strategy from the Afghan government.

The joint meeting took place at the ministry's headquarters in Tehran. It brought together Iran's Deputy Interior Minister for Security and Law Enforcement, Ali Akbar Pourjamshtian, and Afghanistan's Deputy Interior Minister for Counter-Narcotics.

During the talks, Pourjamshtian emphasized the need for stronger collaboration in the fight against drugs. Highlighting the presence of Afghan migrants in Iran, he noted, "Iran has hosted over 4.5 million Afghan migrants and about 2 million undocumented ones, underscoring Iran's commitment to fostering better relations and resolving mutual challenges with Afghanistan."

The deputy minister also touched on longstanding issues between the two nations, particularly Iran's water rights dispute. "Fortunately, both sides are highly motivated to cooperate and address this issue," he said. "Water rights are a legal and religious entitlement of our people, and resolving this matter could pave the way for improved outcomes in other economic and security areas."

Reflecting on a recent trip to Afghanistan alongside Iran's Foreign Minister, Pourjamshtian observed notable improvements in order and discipline in the country, attributing much of this progress to the withdrawal of U.S. forces. He described the stability, development, and prosperity of Iran and Afghanistan as interconnected, adding that the fight against narcotics remains a key area of cooperation. "The ban on planting, buying, and selling drugs in Afghanistan was an excellent move," he said. "With a cohesive strategy from the Afghan government, it could lead to even more substantial results."

Yemen Warns Israel, U.S.



SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement has issued a stern warning against further United States-backed Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip, pledging the Arab Peninsula country's readiness to escalate actions against U.S. interests in the region.

Hazem al-Asad, a member of Ansarullah's Political Bureau, asserted that the movement was "prepared to engage in a comprehensive war targeting US interests in the region" if the aggression persisted.

He cautioned the United States against supporting or protecting the regime in its assaults on Gaza or any aggression towards Yemen.

Echoing the stance, Nasr al-Din Amir, another high-ranking Ansarullah official, has said, "Eyes are watching Gaza, and fingers are on the trigger."

He emphasized that the Yemeni Armed Forces' missiles, drones, and all military units were in full readiness, asserting, "We have proven ourselves in previous tests." Amir was referring to unrelenting strikes by the forces against sensitive Israeli and American targets across the West Asia region as well as Israeli ships or the vessels taking supplies to the occupied Palestinian territories following the onset of the Israeli regime's war of genocide against Gaza in October 2023.

Responding to the operations, the US, the UK, and the regime have brought Yemen, including its lifeline western port city of al-Hudaydah as well as its civilian and defensive infrastructure elsewhere, under deadly attacks.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has affirmed that his regime would continue to attack Yemen, citing the threat it poses to Tel Aviv's maritime supply sources.

He has also emphasized cooperation with the United States, assuring that the regime would act with "strength, determination, and sophistication" against the already impoverished nation.

Iran's Nuclear Program Complies With Int'l Frameworks

TEHRAN - During his weekly press conference, Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baghaei reaffirmed that Iran's nuclear program operates fully within international frameworks, responding to recent anti-Iranian remarks by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi. Baghaei emphasized that Iran's nuclear activities have repeatedly been proven to align with the Safeguards Agreement and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Speaking to reporters, Baghaei addressed a range of foreign policy developments, beginning with greetings for the upcoming holy month of Ramadan. He highlighted Iran's active role in pursuing national interests, noting the recent massive funeral procession for Lebanese resistance leaders as a significant regional event. Iran sent a high-ranking delegation to the ceremony, during which productive meetings took place between Iran's Speaker of Parliament and Lebanese officials.

Baghaei also outlined recent diplomatic engagements, including Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's trip to Geneva for international events, where he met with counterparts, the UN Secretary-General, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Additionally, foreign ministers from Russia, Malaysia, and Sudan visited Tehran in recent days.

Commenting on U.S. President Donald Trump's talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Baghaei stated that security is an internal matter for nations. He urged regional countries to rely on themselves for stability rather than depending on external powers, a principle he described as Iran's consistent policy. He warned of a potential regression in international politics to 19th-century power dynamics, stressing the need to curb the use of force and uphold legal frameworks—a lesson derived from the devastating consequences of the two World Wars.

Addressing President Masoud Pezeshkian's remarks on Iran's blocked financial assets abroad, Baghaei called the restrictions a result of unjust U.S. actions. He noted that the Foreign Ministry is working diligently through dialogue with various countries to resolve these issues, though the circumstances differ depending on the nation involved. The matter remains a fixed priority on Iran's diplomatic agenda.

Reacting to critical statements from Turkey's Foreign Minister, Baghaei underscored Iran's high regard for its relationship with Turkey, acknowledging shared interests alongside longstanding differences. He praised the ability of both sides to manage disputes constructively without harming bilateral ties but labeled the recent Turkish remarks as unhelpful, warranting



a firm Iranian response. Baghaei urged Turkey to reflect on the consequences of regional developments and work toward a secure environment benefiting all.

On claims by Lebanese officials against Iran, Baghaei described Iran-Lebanon ties as long-standing and based on mutual respect. He affirmed Iran's strong connections with Lebanon's resistance movement, viewing it as an integral part of supporting the Lebanese government. Despite occasional rhetoric, both sides maintain open dialogue, as evidenced by productive meetings with senior Lebanese officials during a recent visit.

When asked about former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's resignation, Baghaei declined to comment on external interpretations, stating that Zarif had expressed his own views on the matter.

Regarding a decision by the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, Baghaei argued that renouncing territories cannot alter the historical reality of the West Bank and Gaza as parts of Palestine. He accused American policymakers of complicity in what he called a genocide against Palestinians—an outcome he insisted would not succeed.

Baghaei addressed reports of a Taliban official's visit to Tehran, calling it unremarkable given Afghanistan's diverse society. He clarified that, to his knowledge, the visit was for medical purposes.

Responding to nuclear-related claims, Baghaei reiterated Iran's steadfast commitment to diplomacy, dismissing confrontational approaches. He expressed confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, a stance Iran has maintained throughout negotiations.

Ahead of an Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) ministerial meeting in Jeddah, Baghaei told Tasnim News that the summit would address proposals to displace Palestinians—ideas he equated with ethnic cleansing and genocide. He stressed that the Islamic community would unite to reject such plans, with the Jeddah meeting providing a platform to solidify this stance.

In response to Grossi's statements, Baghaei called on the IAEA head to adhere to his mandate and avoid speculation, which he said neither aligns with Grossi's role nor aids resolution. He reiterated that Iran's nuclear program complies with international norms, with the IAEA possessing full monitoring capabilities. Baghaei suggested that such remarks stem from political pressures by certain Western nations, adding that Iran would assess the upcoming IAEA Board of Governors meeting before responding further.

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Iranian Short Animation Wins Oscar

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian short animation 'In the Shadow of the Cypress' won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film at the 97th Oscars.

The 97th Academy Awards announced its winners, with In the Shadow of the Cypress, directed by Shirin Sohani and Hossein Molayemi, securing the Oscar for Best Animated Short Film. The Iranian production stood out in a category often dominated by Western studios. In the Best Animated Feature category, the Latvian film Flow, directed by Gints Zilbalodis, took home the Oscar. The dialogue-free film follows the journey of a black cat and triumphed over Hollywood contenders such as Inside Out 2 and The Wild Robot. Flow was created using Blender, an open-source animation software, and previously won the Golden Globe for Best Animation. It also became the highest-grossing film in Latvian cinemas and premiered at the Cannes Film Festival.

Breaking the Taboo of Iranophobia, Aiming for 15m Foreign Tourists



TEHRAN - In a meeting of the Nowruz 1404 Travel Services Committee in Rasht, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, highlighted the rich civilizational and cultural heritage of Gilan province. According to a report by the Arya Heritage correspondent, Salehi-Amiri emphasized that Gilan's people, with their ancient history and civilization, have consistently worked to preserve and enhance their cultural identity, resulting in a diverse and appealing array of tourist attractions in the province.

Salehi-Amiri underscored that the three key elements of tourism development— attractiveness, security, and infrastructure—are crucial, noting that Gilan possesses all the components of a tourism ecosystem, from natural wonders to cultural treasures. He stated, "Gilan can easily establish itself as one of Iran's primary tourism hubs." He also praised the province's rural tourism, highlighting that Gilan's villages stand out not only for their natural beauty but also for their unique cultural and social characteristics.

The minister emphasized Gilan's vast potential in maritime and agricultural tourism, pointing to its expansive water bodies and rice paddies. "These features make Gilan an unrivaled hub for maritime and agricultural tourism," he remarked.

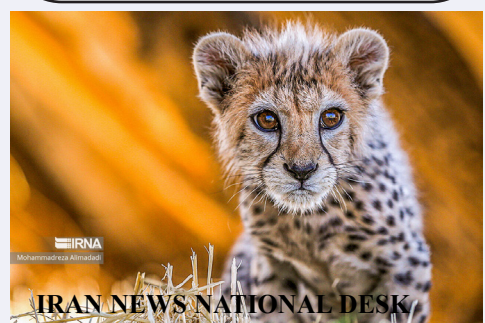
Stressing the need for increased archaeological efforts, Salehi-Amiri said, "Gilan still holds many undiscovered historical secrets, and further excavations are essential to uncover its ancient relics and civilizational heritage."

The minister highlighted Gilan's identification of 300 local dishes, adding, "Gilan boasts an unparalleled position in culinary diversity on a global scale, a potential that must be leveraged to promote tourism."

Salehi-Amiri also pointed to Gilan's significant capacity for health tourism, stating, "With strengthened infrastructure and diverse services, health tourism could become a cornerstone of the province's tourism development."

Addressing national goals, the minister announced Iran's readiness to attract 15 million foreign tourists, emphasizing efforts to break the taboo of "Iranophobia" among international visitors. "Introducing Iran as a safe and appealing destination is a top priority in our tourism strategy," he said.

Iran Seeks Traffic Police Collaboration to Protect Environment



TEHRAN - In a critical update on wildlife conservation, Iran's Vice President and Head of the Environmental Protection Organization, Sheena Ansari, revealed that only 17 Asiatic cheetahs remain in the world, all residing in Iran.

Speaking at a ceremony marking the signing of a cooperation agreement between the Environmental Protection Organization and Iran's Traffic Police (Rahvar) on Sunday, Ansari emphasized the urgent need for inter-agency collaboration, particularly with the traffic police, to safeguard these endangered animals by controlling vehicle speeds in their habitats.

Ansari highlighted the Touran region, a key cheetah habitat intersected by the Abbasabad-Mashhad road, where cheetah fatalities due to vehicle collisions have been a recurring tragedy. She noted that the traffic police have already worked with the environmental agency to reduce speed limits along this route, expressing hope that continued efforts would protect the cheetahs and other wildlife. "This collaboration is vital to preserving this valuable species and all creatures in nature," she said.

Beyond wildlife, Ansari underscored the broader environmental challenges facing Iran, calling education and cultural awareness critical tools. Citing Article 50 of Iran's Constitution, which deems environmental protection a collective duty, she urged every Iranian to become an "environmental ally" to tackle escalating ecological issues. While acknowledging that such efforts are time-intensive, she remained optimistic about success through multi-agency cooperation.

The signed memorandum with the traffic police aims to leverage their authority to protect cheetah habitats and address other environmental concerns, such as illegal waste dumping, sewage disposal in natural areas, and vehicle-related pollution. Ansari suggested that the police could also assist in identifying offenders, enforcing vehicle emission standards, and curbing noise pollution.

Hadi Kiadali, Deputy for Education and Public Participation at the Environmental Protection Organization, echoed Ansari's sentiments, praising the traffic police's environmental responsibility. He stressed that protecting nature is both an ethical obligation and a public health priority, proposing the concept of "covert environmental police" to enhance enforcement. Kiadali also referenced the success of "green rulings" as deterrents, hoping the agreement would yield practical solutions.

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Iran and Australia Seek to Boost Non-Sanctioned Trade Cooperation

TEHRAN - In a meeting between Iranian and Australian officials, both sides expressed optimism about enhancing commercial ties despite the challenges posed by international sanctions. Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA), emphasized that while sanctions hinder the full development of trade relations between Iran and Australia, alternative solutions exist to overcome these barriers.

Speaking during a meeting with Ian McConville, Australia's Ambassador to Iran, Hassanzadeh suggested that alternative financial mechanisms could be utilized, provided both nations reach a mutual understanding. He highlighted the pivotal role the Australian Embassy could play in facilitating this process. "Continuous engagement between the ambassador, the trade attaché, and the Iran Chamber is crucial," he noted, adding that Iran's diverse capabilities offer significant opportunities for bilateral trade.

Hassanzadeh pointed to Iran's competitive export products—such as food industries, construction materials, medical supplies, and dried fruits—as ideal for the Australian market due to their high quality and affordability. He also underscored Iran's strengths in sectors like casting and automotive parts, textile and industrial machinery, engineering services (including power plants, dams, bridges, refineries, and petrochemicals), as well as handicrafts and carpets.

Tourism was another area of potential collaboration, with Hassanzadeh inviting Australian representatives to visit key Iranian provinces such as Shiraz, Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashhad, Kerman, and Yazd to explore opportunities firsthand.

"We hope the Australian Embassy will take steps to ease trade relations between our two countries," he said.

Ian McConville, Australia's Ambassador to Iran, echoed the call for deeper ties, expressing Australia's keen interest in strengthening cooperation, particularly through the Iran Chamber and the joint chamber of commerce. Having visited cities like Shiraz, Yazd, Isfahan, and Khashan, he remarked, "Iranian carpets have always left a strong impression on us."

McConville, who recently met with the head of the Shiraz Chamber of Commerce, expressed his desire to connect with other chamber leaders across Iran. He acknowledged that a reasonable level of bilateral trade already exists, citing significant Australian meat exports to Iran and the import of non-sanctioned Iranian goods into Australia. However, he stressed the need to expand cooperation in non-sanctioned sectors.

The ambassador identified banking sanctions as the primary hurdle to advancing trade relations. "These restrictions impede progress, but I hope through ongoing dialogue we can overcome them," he said.

In closing, Hassanzadeh emphasized Iran's belief that no nation can thrive in isolation or under restrictions. "Our country's leadership is committed to fostering international relations with all nations in an atmosphere of peace and security," he said. "We expect other countries to resist unfair discrimination and pressures, contributing to greater global interaction."

The discussions signal a mutual intent to navigate the complexities of sanctions and unlock the untapped potential of Iran-Australia trade relations.

Iran's Railway Engineering Company Pursues Expansion into Neighboring Countries

TEHRAN - The CEO of Iran's Railway Technical and Engineering Services Company (Travers), Mostafa Moeini, announced that the company is actively seeking to expand the construction of railway lines and related services into neighboring countries. Speaking at a press conference on Sunday, Moeini emphasized Travers' capability to execute railway projects with speeds of up to 160 kilometers per hour, positioning it as a key player in regional infrastructure development.

Moeini revealed that Travers has received proposals to export products and provide services in neighboring nations, particularly Iraq and Afghanistan. "These countries have sought our assistance, especially in railway construction, specialized machinery, and supplying railway sleepers," he said. In Afghanistan, specific requests have been made to complete railway lines from Herat toward the west and northwest of the country, while in Iraq, negotiations are underway for several projects involving the construction and modernization of railway lines.

Moeini highlighted that Iran's railway standards comply with the International Union of Railways (UIC), enabling Travers to operate in countries such as Turkey, Turkmenistan, and members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). He also noted that Iran's Seventh Development Plan mandates the electrification of certain railway lines and the deployment of high-speed trains, areas in which Travers has expertise, particularly in maintenance and repair.

"We possess state-of-the-art machinery and, with government support, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, and the Railway Company of Iran, we can procure railway equipment from abroad. This strengthens our position to compete in exporting services and products," Moeini stated. However, he acknowledged the need to adopt cutting-edge technologies, modern engineering studies, and global advancements, revealing plans to implement AI-based initiatives in the coming year.

Travers employs 5,200 personnel across Iran, engaged in constructing, modernizing, maintaining, and repairing railway lines and networks. The company is responsible for over 70% of the maintenance of Iran's 14,000-kilometer rail network. Moeini noted that more than 10,000 kilometers of railway lines have been built since the Islamic Revolution, with Travers contributing to 80% of that development.

Among its notable projects, Travers has constructed the second Tehran-Mashhad railway line, Lines 1 and 2 of the Bafq-Bandar Abbas route, as well as railways connecting Qazvin-Rasht, Maragheh-



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Urmia, Isfahan-Shiraz, and Kerman-Zahedan. The company is also involved in metro projects, including Line 1 of the Isfahan Metro, Lines 1 and 2 of the Mashhad Metro, Lines 5 and 7 of the Tehran Metro, Line 2 of the Karaj Metro, and the Karaj-Hashgtgerd Metro line. Additionally, Travers is building a significant portion of the Islamshahr urban tunnel project.

Last year, Travers completed a 150-kilometer section of the 700-kilometer Zahedan-Chabahar railway, from Zahedan to Khash, in collaboration with the Khatam al-Anbia Construction Headquarters. The company is also supplying equipment for the Shalamcheh-Basra railway linking Iran and Iraq.

Travers operates four active factories in Karaj, Andimeshk, Qazvin, and Shiraz, producing concrete products and railway equipment for both rail and other civil projects. Moeini underscored the company's efforts to diversify its offerings in 2024—designated as the year of "Production Leap with People's Participation"—while addressing labor issues despite national economic challenges.

To optimize its fleet, Travers tackled the overhaul of specialized machinery such as loaders, bulldozers, excavators, rollers, and graders, many of which had been idle due to financial constraints. Through a "lease-with-repair" model, 55 machines were transferred to 14 capable private entities, generating employment for 155 operators and service workers, boosting project activity, and creating revenue through rentals.

Refuting claims of bankruptcy, Moeini clarified that Travers was last evaluated in 2014 after its transfer to the government, with its current value estimated at over 4 trillion tomans (approximately \$95 million USD at current rates). "We are not bankrupt under Article 141 of the Commercial Code," he asserted, adding that an ongoing asset revaluation will help eliminate accumulated losses.

Despite tax, insurance, and banking debts, Travers has kept all four factories operational and avoided layoffs. Moeini confirmed that workers' salaries are up to date, social security benefits have been modernized, and additional support, such as holiday bonuses, has been provided.

Looking ahead, Moeini expressed optimism that with continued cooperation from tax, banking, and insurance authorities, Travers will resolve its financial challenges by next year, further solidifying its role in Iran's infrastructure and regional expansion.

Mashhad and Samarkand Chambers of Commerce Sign Two Cooperation Agreements



TEHRAN - In a significant step toward enhancing trade ties and economic diplomacy between Iran and Uzbekistan, a 100-member delegation of private-sector business leaders and traders from Iran's Khorasan Razavi province traveled to Uzbekistan.

The delegation, led by Khorasan Razavi Governor Gholamhossein Mozaffari and Mohammadreza Tavakolizadeh, president of the Mashhad Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, aimed to bolster economic relations, explore joint investment opportunities, and expand private-sector interactions between the two nations.

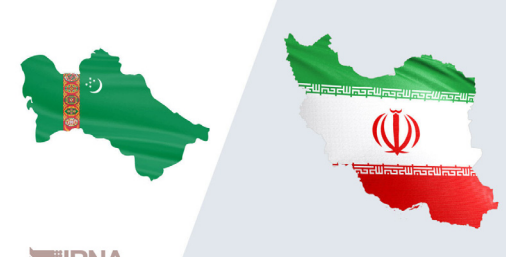
The visit, which kicked off in Samarkand, included a packed agenda of business negotiations, B2B meetings, and strategic discussions with economic officials and stakeholders in Samarkand and Bukhara. A key highlight of the trip was the signing of two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between the governors of Khorasan Razavi and Samarkand, as well as the presidents of the chambers of commerce of both provinces.

The MoUs, formalized during a joint trade forum, focus on boosting trade volumes and promoting joint investments in industries such as agriculture, mining, tourism, and transportation. They also outline plans for infrastructure and logistics projects to streamline trade, explore export and co-production opportunities in industrial and agricultural goods, and establish joint working groups to oversee the agreements' implementation. These agreements mark the beginning of a new chapter in economic collaboration between the two regions.

Tavakolizadeh emphasized the pivotal role of the private sector in deepening Iran-Uzbekistan trade ties. "We believe cooperation between Khorasan Razavi and Samarkand must be practical and results-driven," he said. He highlighted the province's strengths in agriculture, mineral industries, energy, and IT, paired with its strategic location, as key assets for fostering effective partnerships with Uzbekistan. Samarkand's historical and economic significance along the Silk Road further positions it as a vital long-term investment partner.

Iran, Turkmenistan Target 10m Tons of Rail Freight by 2027

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TEHRAN - In a significant step toward enhancing regional rail transit, the CEOs of Iran and Turkmenistan's railway authorities convened on Thursday, December 2, 1403 (Iranian calendar), equivalent to February 20, 2025, to set an ambitious goal of increasing freight transport between the two nations to 10 million tons by the end of 2027. The meeting, held in Ashgabat, followed an inspection by Jabbarali Zakeri, CEO of Iran's Railway Company, of the joint Serakhs rail border, where he assessed capacities and identified bottlenecks.

According to a report from the Iran Railway Company's public relations office, Zakeri emphasized the logistical potential of Turkmenistan's Serakhs border and stressed the need to boost wagon transport at this crossing. He highlighted rail diplomacy and the development of rail-based transit as top priorities for Iran's railway sector, pledging unwavering efforts to expand international rail transport with regional countries.

Zakeri identified the primary challenge in delays of freight transit between Iran and Turkmenistan as the underdeveloped exchange station infrastructure. He proposed holding specialized expert-level meetings with representatives from both nations to address this issue. Additionally, he referenced a recent decision by Iran's Railway Company board to activate the Lotfabad border, noting that this move would include transportation tariff discounts.

The discussions also covered broader initiatives, including expert-level talks to enhance rail transit, strengthen neighborhood relations, and develop rail diplomacy. Proposals included dispatching freight trains from Russia to Pakistan via this corridor, scheduling biannual bilateral CEO meetings, and sending IT experts to streamline operations. Zakeri underscored the need to reduce wagon stoppage times at Serakhs and suggested a quadrilateral meeting with Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Russia.

On the Turkmen side, Azat Atamyradov, CEO of Turkmenistan Railways, announced plans to construct two new standard-gauge lines at Serakhs in the near future to bolster capacity. He emphasized increasing wagon exchanges at the border, minimizing documentation errors during transfers, and modernizing bilateral agreements. Atamyradov also called for deploying experts to establish electronic data exchange systems and enhancing communication between border station supervisors.

Pope Francis Stable But Complex

ROME (Dispatches) - Pope Francis is in a "stable" condition in hospital but the clinical picture remains complex, the Vatican said Sunday, as the 88-year-old issued a statement thanking well-wishers for their support.

The head of the Catholic Church was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on February 14 with bronchitis, which later developed into pneumonia in both lungs.

After appearing to recover slightly during the week, the Argentine pope suffered a breathing crisis on Friday, causing widespread concern, but he passed a quieter weekend.

"The clinical conditions of the Holy Father remained stable today," the Vatican said on Sunday in its regular early evening medical update.



Syria Forms Committee to Draft Transitional Constitutional Charter



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa announced on Sunday the formation of a committee to draft a constitutional declaration for the country's transition after the overthrow of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad.

The new authorities are focused on rebuilding Syria and its institutions after Assad's removal on December 8, ending more than half a century of his family's iron-fisted rule and 13 years of devastating war.

The presidency announced "the formation of a committee of experts", including one woman, tasked with drafting "the constitutional declaration that regulates the transitional phase" in Syria.

The seven-member committee would "submit its proposals to the president", it said in a statement, without specifying a timeframe.

In late January, Sharaa, leader of Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) which spearheaded Assad's overthrow, was appointed interim president for an unspecified period.

Syria's new authorities have repealed the Assad-era constitution, and Sharaa has said rewriting it could take up to three years.

In late January, Sharaa promised a "constitutional declaration" to serve as a "legal reference" during the country's transitional period.

Sunday's announcement came "based on the Syrian people's aspirations in building their state based on the rule of law, and building on the outcomes of the Syrian national dialogue conference", said the presidency.

It also came "with the aim of preparing the legal framework regulating the transitional phase", it added.

A national dialogue conference held this week in Damascus set out a path for the new Syria.

The committee includes Abdul Hamid al-Awak, who holds a doctorate in constitutional law and lectures at a university in Turkey, and Yasser al-Huwaish, who was appointed this year as dean of Damascus university's law faculty.

UK, European Leaders Join Forces to Draft Ukraine Peace Plan to Take to U.S.

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said European leaders had agreed to draw up a Ukraine peace plan to present to the United States, a vital step for Washington to be able to offer security guarantees that Kyiv says are essential to deter Russia.

At a summit in London just two days after Volodymyr Zelenskiy clashed with U.S. President Donald Trump and cut short a visit to Washington, European leaders offered a strong show of support to the Ukrainian president and promised to do more to help his nation.

European leaders agreed they must spend more on defense to show Trump the continent can protect itself, and the European Commission chief suggested the bloc could ease rules that limit debt levels.

Starmer, who welcomed a visibly shaken Zelenskiy on Saturday with a warm hug, said Britain, Ukraine, France and some other nations would form a "coalition of the willing" and draw up a peace plan to take to Trump.



"The format of what happened, I don't think it brought something positive or additional to us as partners," he said.

Europe is scrambling to ensure that Kyiv is not squeezed out of any talks after the Oval Office clash raised fears that the U.S. could pull support for Ukraine and impose a peace plan negotiated with Russia.

Several European leaders said they must increase defense spending - something that could help bring Trump on side to offer a U.S. security guarantee in the event of peace.

"After a long time of underinvestment, it is now of utmost importance to step up the defence investment for a prolonged period of time," Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, the EU's executive body, told reporters.

Europe needs to turn "Ukraine into a steel porcupine that is indigestible for potential invaders," she said.

Europe, which lacks the weaponry and depth of ammunition stocks of the U.S., hopes to convince Trump that it can defend itself but that Russia will only adhere to a peace deal if it comes with the backing of the United States.

Talks with the U.S. have centered on Washington providing a so-called backstop for a European peacekeeping role, possibly in the form of air cover, intelligence and surveillance

and a greater but unspecified threat if Russian President Vladimir Putin again sought to take more territory.

Crucial to getting any agreement from Trump is for European nations to increase defense spending and signal they would take part in any peacekeeping role - something Starmer acknowledged was difficult to get unanimity on.

Starmer increased the UK's defence spending before his visit to Washington last week, and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said some European leaders had privately set out new plans on defense spending at the meeting but he declined to give details.

Trump has upended U.S. policy on the three-year-old war since he returned to the White House in January, casting doubt on U.S. military and political support for Ukraine - and Europe - and ending the isolation of Moscow.

"We should spend less time worrying about Putin, and more time worrying about migrant rape gangs, drug lords, murderers, and people from mental institutions entering our Country - So that we don't end up like Europe!" Trump said in a post on his Truth Social network late on Sunday.

Trump had blindsided Europe by calling Putin without warning and sending a delegation to Saudi Arabia for talks with Russia without including Ukraine or Europe. Trump has falsely suggested that Kyiv was responsible for starting the war, and on Friday, he criticised Zelenskiy for not being grateful for U.S. aid.

China Targets U.S. Agricultural Products Over Trump Tariff Threat



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China is preparing countermeasures against fresh U.S. import tariffs set to take effect on Tuesday, China's state-backed Global Times reported, with American agricultural exports likely in Beijing's cross hairs.

U.S. President Donald Trump last week threatened China with the extra 10% duty, resulting in a cumulative 20% tariff, while accusing Beijing of not having done enough to halt the flow of fentanyl into America, which China said was tantamount to "blackmail."

"China is studying and formulating relevant countermeasures in response to the U.S. threat of imposing an additional 10% tariff on Chinese products under the pretext of fentanyl," Global Times reported on Monday, citing an anonymous source.

"The countermeasures will likely include both tariffs and a series of non-tariff measures, and U.S. agricultural and food products will most likely be listed," the report added.

The U.S. has long been vulnerable to China using its agricultural exports as a punching bag in times of trade tensions.

China remains the biggest market for U.S. agriculture products despite a decline in imports since 2018 after Beijing slapped tariffs of up to 25% on soybeans, beef, pork, wheat, corn and sorghum in retaliation for duties on Chinese goods imposed by Trump.

The world's top agricultural importer and second-largest economy brought in \$29.25 billion worth of U.S. agriculture products in 2024, a 14% drop from a year earlier, extending a 20% decline seen in 2023.

Global Times, which is owned by the newspaper of the governing Communist Party, People's Daily, was first to report the steps China planned to take in response to the European Union slapping tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles last year.

"Anora" Wins Best Picture at 97th Academy Awards

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - "Anora," a strip club Cinderella story without the fairy tale ending, was crowned best picture at the 97th Academy Awards on Sunday, handing Sean Baker's gritty, Brooklyn-set screwball farce Hollywood's top prize.

In a stubbornly fluctuating Oscar season, "Anora," the Palme d'Or-winner at the Cannes Film Festival, emerged as the unlikely frontrunner. Baker's tale of an erotic dancer who elopes with the son of a Russian oligarch - unusually explicit for a best-picture winner - was made for just \$6 million.

But Oscar voters, eschewing blockbuster contenders like "Wicked" and "Dune: Part Two," instead added "Anora" to a string of recent indie best picture winners, including "Everything Everywhere All at Once," "CODA" and "Nomadland."



Mikey Madison won best actress for her breakthrough performance in "Anora," a victory that came over the category favorite, Demi Moore ("The Substance").

Sean Baker, the filmmaker of "Anora," won best director, best original screenplay and best editing. Baker used his acceptance speech for best director to preach passionately for the theatrical experience.

"Where did we fall in love with the movies? At the movie theater," said Baker. "Filmmakers, keep making films for the big screen."

"I want to thank the sex worker community," said Baker, echoing comments he made when "Anora" won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. "They have shared their stories. They have shared life experiences with me over the years. My deepest respect. Thank you. I share this with you."

The Oscars otherwise spread the love around, dishing out awards to "Anora," "Conclave," "Wicked" and "The Substance." Eight of the 10 movies nominated for best picture came away with at least one award at the Dolby Theatre on Sunday. That included the beleaguered Netflix contender "Emilia Pérez," which, despite a backlash to old offensive tweets by star Karla Sofia Gascón, won best supporting actress for Zoe Saldaña.

For a film industry that's been transformed by streaming and humbled by economic turmoil, Baker and "Anora" epitomized a kind of cinematic purity. On the campaign trail, Baker called for the return to the 90-day exclusive theatrical release.

"Where did we fall in love with the movies? At the movie theater," Baker said Sunday. "Filmmakers, keep making films for the big screen."

In personally winning four Oscars on Sunday, Baker tied the mark held by Walt Disney, who won for four different films in 1954. That Baker and Disney share the record is ironic; his "The Florida Project" took place in a Florida low-budget motel in the shadow of Disneyland.

"Long live independent film!" shouted Baker from the Dolby Theatre stage.

Twenty-two years after winning best actor for "The Pianist," Adrien Brody won the same Oscar again for his performance as another Holocaust survivor in Brady Corbet's "The Brutalist."

Brody's win came over Timothée Chalamet ("A Complete Unknown"), who had the chance of becoming the youngest best actor ever, a record owned by Brody - just short of 30 when he won for "The Pianist."

The night's first award, presented by Robert Downey Jr., went to Kieran Culkin for best supporting actor. Culkin has cruised through the season, picking up award after award, for his performance alongside Jesse Eisenberg in "A Real Pain."

"I have no idea how I got here," said Culkin, "I've just been acting my whole life."

Israel Blocks Aid To Gaza as Ceasefire Standoff Escalates

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israel blocked the entry of aid trucks into Gaza on Sunday as a standoff over the truce that has halted fighting for the past six weeks escalated, with Hamas calling on Egyptian and Qatari mediators to intervene.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said earlier that it had adopted a proposal by U.S. President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, for a temporary ceasefire in Gaza for the Ramadan and Passover periods, hours after the first phase of the previously agreed ceasefire expired.

If agreed, the truce would halt fighting until the end of the Ramadan fasting period around March 31 and the Jewish Passover holiday around April 20.

The truce would be conditional on Hamas releasing half of the living and dead hostages on the first day, with the remainder released at the



conclusion, if an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire.

Hamas says it is committed to the originally agreed ceasefire that had been scheduled to move into a second phase, with negotiations aimed at a permanent end to the war, and it has rejected the idea of a temporary extension to the 42-day truce.

A senior Hamas official, Mahmoud Mardawi, told Al Jazeera the group would only release the remaining Israeli hostages under the terms of the already agreed-upon phased deal.

Reflecting the fragility of the ceasefire deal, local health officials said Israeli gunfire had killed four Palestinians in separate attacks in the northern and southern Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military said that "suspects" were identified close to its troops in northern Gaza and that they had planted a bomb. It added that an airstrike was carried out to "eliminate the threat."

Quickley Helps Raptors Edge Past Magic



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Immanuel Quickley scored a team-high 24 points, helping the visiting Toronto Raptors post a 104-102 victory over the Orlando Magic.

RJ Barrett added 22 points, while Jakob Poeltl had 16 points and 11 rebounds, as the Raptors snapped a three-game losing streak. Jamal Sheard chipped in 12 points off the bench, and Scottie Barnes scored 10.

Franz Wagner's 25 points led Orlando, followed by Paolo Banchero's 23 and Wendell Carter Jr.'s 14. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 12 points for the Magic, who dropped their third in a row.

Orlando trailed 104-92 with less than three minutes left but scored the next 10 points and pulled within two with four seconds remaining. Wagner missed a potential game-tying layup on the final possession, as Toronto escaped with the win.

After leading by a point at halftime, Toronto's cushion grew to 61-56 on Jonathan Mogbo's dunk midway through the third quarter. Caldwell-Pope's five straight points knotted the score at 61, before Sheard's three-point play gave the Raptors a 64-61 lead.

Jonathan Isaac's free throws with less than three minutes remaining in the third quarter gave Orlando its first lead since the first, but Toronto finished the quarter on a 12-1 run -- including Quickley's nine points -- as the Raptors took an 81-72 lead into the final quarter.

Toronto continued its momentum and grew its lead to 92-74 after Quickley's jumper stamped a 9-0 run with 9:26 left.

Cory Joseph's triple pulled the Magic within 15 at the 6:47 mark, but neither team connected on a field goal until Wagner's layup more than three minutes later that cut the Raptors' lead to 102-89. Banchero followed with a 3-pointer, but Barnes' layup pushed Toronto's advantage to 104-92.

Orlando shot just 25 percent (5-for-20) from the field and trailed the Raptors 27-19 after the first quarter. Poeltl's layup gave Toronto a 36-26 advantage before Wagner's four straight points and Banchero's mid-range jumper pulled Orlando within four at the 7:13 mark of the second quarter. After Barrett's free throw pushed the Raptors' lead to 48-45 with 42 seconds left, Wagner's layup cut the Magic's halftime deficit to one.

Meanwhile Jalen Williams poured in a career-high 41 points to go with seven assists and six rebounds as the visiting Oklahoma City Thunder dominated the second half in beating the San Antonio Spurs 146-132.

The Thunder trailed by as many as nine points late in the second quarter and by five at halftime before outscoring San Antonio 36-23 in the third period.

Oklahoma City padded its cushion to 22 points while cruising to its third straight win and fifth in its past six games.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander added 31 points and eight assists for Oklahoma City. Cason Wallace had 19 points, Aaron Wiggins 17 and Alex Caruso and Isaiah Hartenstein 10 each. Hartenstein also took a game-high 11 rebounds.

Stephon Castle led the Spurs with 32 points on 12-of-21 shooting off the bench. De'Aaron Fox added 20 points followed by Jeremy Sochan (17), Devin Vassell (15) and Harrison Barnes (14).

San Antonio, which was playing the second contest of a road-home back to back, has lost five of its past six games.

The Thunder led by as many as eight points in the opening quarter before San Antonio rallied to within a point on Castle's 3-pointer with 12.9 seconds remaining. Williams finished the period with a dunk to put Oklahoma City ahead 41-38.

The second period featured six ties and five lead changes. Vassell's trey put the Spurs ahead 75-66 with 44.6 seconds left.

Williams and Gilgeous-Alexander poured in 22 points each to lead all scorers in the half.

Castle had 18 at the break for the Spurs while Barnes had 11 and Sochan scored 10. San Antonio shot 61.7 percent from the floor and made 16 of its 25 treys before halftime.

A melee erupted with three minutes left in the third quarter and the Thunder ahead 100-96. The Spurs' Julian Champagnie and the Thunder's Kenrich Williams squared off after a shoving match near midcourt. Both players were ejected. The Thunder's Luguentz Dort was also kicked out for participating.

Man United Crash out of FA Cup After Dramatic Penalty Shoot-Out



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United's dismal season hit a new low as the FA Cup holders crashed out after a 4-3 penalty shoot-out defeat against Fulham in the fifth round.

Ruben Amorim's side trailed to Calvin Bassey's first-half opener at Old Trafford before Bruno Fernandes equalised to force a 1-1 draw after extra time.

Fulham keeper Bernd Leno was the hero in the shoot-out as he saved from Victor Lindelof and Joshua Zirkzee, with the visitors converting all four of their kicks.

Booted off at half-time, it was another wretched result for United in a season that sees them languishing in 14th place in the Premier League.

The 13-time FA Cup winners had reached the final for the last two seasons and beat Manchester City to lift the trophy last year.

But there will be no trip to Wembley this season for United, who have only the Europa League left as a silverware chance.

"It's hard. We had the best chances in the game but in the end the penalties can go both ways and today it was not our day," Amorim said.

"I know that we are losing games and losing trophies during this season but the goal is to win the Premier League.

"I don't know how long it's going to take. But if you think like that, we can suffer a little bit in these defeats."

It has been another testing week at Old Trafford, with 200 job cuts announced and United struggling to draw with Everton and barely beat lowly Ipswich.

Amorim admitted that life is "hard" just now for United and this was the latest hammer blow to the under-fire Portuguese coach, who only arrived in November to replace the sacked Erik ten Hag.

Barcelona Reclaim Top Spot in La Liga



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona secured a comfortable 4-0 win over Real Sociedad to move back top of La Liga.

Aritz Elustondo's early red card gave Hansi Flick's side a comfortable afternoon with Gerard Martin, Marc Casado, Ronald Araujo and Robert Lewandowski on the scoresheet.

Atletico Madrid beat Athletic Bilbao on Saturday to temporarily knock the Catalans from their perch, while Real Madrid, third, lost at Real Betis.

Flick was able to rotate his side a little ahead of the Champions League last 16 visit to face Benfica on Wednesday and still move one point above Atletico.

"There were a lot of things that helped us a lot today, the red card but also how we played, we were dominant after the red card," Flick told reporters.

The German coach said before the game Barca would fight hard to win all of the three major competitions they are in, and reiterated it afterwards.

"Today we are happy with the three points and there's a long way to go in La Liga, the Copa del Rey and the Champions League," he continued.

"We will fight for every title and when we started the season no-one (expected) this.

"We're in this situation, that we can fight (for the trophies), and that's what we want until the end of the season."

Real Sociedad, ninth, threatened in the opening stages but fell foul of Barcelona's offside trap, with Sergio Gomez's strike ruled out.

At the other end Barcelona playmaker Pedri Gonzalez came close when he pressed La Real goalkeeper Alex Remiro and deflected his attempted clearance just over and onto the roof of the net.

The game swung Barcelona's way when Elustondo was sent off in the 17th minute for pulling down Dani Olmo, who was running through on goal.

The hosts took the lead after 25 minutes when Olmo chipped the ball across for Martin to fire home the first goal of his career.

Four minutes later, Barca had their second, with Olmo involved again, this time his wayward shot deflected home by team-mate Casado.

India Beat New Zealand to Face Australia in Champions Trophy Semi



DUBAI (Dispatches) - Spinner Varun Chakravarthy returned figures of 5-42 as India beat New Zealand by 44 runs to set up a semifinal clash with Australia in cricket's Champions Trophy.

India won all three of their group matches to top Group A and will play the first semifinal of the 50-over tournament in Dubai on Tuesday. The match is a rerun of the 2023 Cricket World Cup final, which the Australians won in Ahmedabad.

New Zealand will take on Group B winners South Africa in Lahore on Wednesday.

India are playing all their matches at the Dubai International Stadium after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan due to security reasons.

Australia and South Africa had to travel to Dubai from Pakistan despite not knowing if they would be playing there, as India were told ahead of the tournament they would play the first semifinal if they qualified no matter where they finished in the group.

South Africa will now have to fly back to Pakistan ahead of their meeting with New Zealand.

Shreyas Iyer's 79 and a late 45 by Hardik Pandya steered India to 249-9 after being invited to bat first on Sunday.

New Zealand pace bowler Matt Henry stood out with figures of 5-42 from his eight overs.

Chakravarthy took his first ODI five-wicket haul in just his second

match as India bowled out New Zealand for 205 in 45.3 overs despite a valiant 81 by Kane Williamson.

Williamson survived two dropped catches on 17 and 68 in his 120-ball knock before he finally fell, stumped off Axar Patel.

New Zealand lost Rachin Ravindra early as Patel took a superb catch to dismiss the opener for six.

Chakravarthy cut short Will Young's innings on 22 when he bowled him with a googly.

Williamson stood firm but could not find a long-term partner as Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham were dismissed for 17 and 14 respectively.

India's spinners dominated in helpful conditions, as Kuldeep Yadav sent back Mitchell and Ravindra Jadeja trapped Latham lbw.

In between the two wickets, Williamson hit Jadeja for a boundary to raise his 47th ODI half-century, but India kept taking wickets.

Earlier, India were in trouble at 30-3 when Virat Kohli, playing in his 300th one-day international, fell victim to a stunning one-handed catch from Glenn Phillips.

An airborne Phillips clung on to a fast-travelling ball at backward point to dismiss Kohli for 11 off Henry.

Kohli was left standing in disbelief before trudging off the ground to stunned silence.

Iyer and Patel, who made 42, put on 98 for the fourth wicket to rebuild the innings against a disciplined New Zealand attack.

Another stunning catch -- this time by Williamson, who flung himself to his left at backward point to make a one-handed grab close to the ground -- dismissed Jadeja for 16 off Henry.

Pandya struck four fours and two sixes in his run-a-ball innings to give India a total that proved to be enough.

Machac Wins His Maiden ATP Title at Mexican Open

ACAPULCO (Dispatches) - Czech Republic's Tomas Machac won his first title on the ATP tour, beating Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 7-6(6) 6-2 in the final of the Mexican Open.

Eighth seed Machac, who won gold in mixed doubles at the Paris Olympics, became the third player from his country to win an ATP 500 title, following Tomas Berdych and Radek Stepanek.

"It feels amazing," Machac said after lifting the silver gourd-shaped trophy.

Machac, ranked 25th in the world, was the superior player on the serve, landing seven aces through a tightly contested first set where neither player could get a break.

Spain's Davidovich Fokina was on the verge of winning the set when he led 6-5 in the tiebreaker, but Machac held his nerve



to win the next three points and claim the set.

The 24-year-old stepped up in the second set, getting the first break of the match to go up 3-2. Davidovich Fokina struggled to keep up as Machac won every subsequent game to seal the victory.

Machac, who beat Novak Djokovic in last year's Geneva Open to reach his first tour final, where he lost to Casper Ruud, fell to his back after securing the championship point in Acapulco as Davidovich Fokina's return got stuck in the net.

"Congratulations for your first title," Davidovich Fokina told Machac at the presentation ceremony. "I don't know how you feel right now. I never won a title. But for sure it feels amazing."

The Spaniard has now lost three finals on the tour, including at the Delray Beach Open earlier this month.

Machac thanked his coach Daniel Vacek for helping him stay calm through the tense contest.