

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baghaei Iran Welcomes the Presidential Signing of a State Border Agreement by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Following Decades-Long Negotiations

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The Guardian Council Spokesman Says In the Continued Review of the Tables Section of the Next Year (2025) Budget Bill, All Ambiguities and Objections Raised by the Council Regarding This Legislation Have Been Resolved

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Iran's Oil Sanctions Pose No Threat



TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian asserted that as long as Iran relies on its internal capabilities and human capital, enemies cannot create problems for the country through oil sanctions. Speaking at a gathering of artists and handicraft activists in southeast Tehran province, he emphasized the resilience provided by the nation's scientists, experts, artists, and producers.

Pezeshkian stated, "As long as we have the wealth of our specialists, elites, producers, artisans, and artists, we won't be troubled by oil sanctions." He argued that Iran only faces difficulties when it loses sight of its own resources, warning that nations overly dependent on material wealth are doomed to fail. "If we focus on our human capital—producers, artists, traders, and scientists—and remove barriers to their work, no threat or sanction can stop us," he added.

The president criticized Iran's historical reliance on oil and gas, noting, "The U.S. pressures us because we've tied ourselves to these resources. If they cut off our access, we struggle. But if we create through art and production, no power can hold us back." He pledged unconditional government support for artists, stressing the need to provide them with a platform to thrive.

Pezeshkian also reflected on Iran's identity, asking, "We claim to be Muslim and Shia, but what sets us apart? It's through our actions, art, and performance that we must prove ourselves." Quoting the Quran, he highlighted humanity's God-given capacity for innovation: "God taught us knowledge and skill. We can create divinely inspired works and improve anything. If we believe we can solve problems with our hands, minds, and strength, no force can bring us down."

Trump Administration Mulls Travel Ban on 41 Nations, Including Iran



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Trump administration is considering issuing travel restrictions for the citizens of 41 countries as part of an immigration crackdown launched at the start of the US president's second term.

An internal memo seen by Reuters revealed that the countries are listed in three separate groups. The first group of 10 countries, including Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Cuba, and North Korea, would face a full visa suspension.

In the second group, Eritrea, Haiti, Laos, Myanmar, and South Sudan would face partial suspensions impacting tourist and student visas, as well as other immigrant visas, with some exceptions.

The third group includes 26 countries, including Pakistan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan, among others. The memo said these countries would face a partial suspension of US visa issuance if their governments "do not make efforts to address deficiencies within 60 days."

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, stated that there could be changes to the list and that it had not yet been approved by Trump's administration, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Earlier in January, Trump issued an executive order requiring intensified security vetting of any foreigners seeking admission to the US under the pretext of detecting national security threats.

The order obliged several cabinet members to submit, by March 21, a list of countries from which travel should be partially or fully suspended due to "vetting and screening information being so deficient."

FM Champions Unity and Peace at Global Nowruz Festivities in Tehran

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, delivered an inspiring speech at the opening of the "Global Nowruz Celebration" in Tehran's iconic Azadi Square on Friday, March 14, 2025. The event kicked off celebrations for Nowruz, the Persian New Year, a tradition embraced across a vast expanse from South Asia to the Balkans.

Addressing a distinguished gathering of ambassadors, heads of international organizations, and a vibrant crowd, Araghchi highlighted Nowruz's profound cultural and unifying power. Beginning with the invocation, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful," he warmly welcomed representatives of nations that hold Nowruz dear as a shared cultural legacy.

"Nowruz is far more than a national festivity," Araghchi declared. "It symbolizes cultural ties, friendship between peoples, and reverence for nature and time." He portrayed the ancient ritual as a timeless beacon of hope, renewal, and unity, spanning centuries and regions from Central Asia to the Caucasus and beyond. "It echoes a deep wisdom from history, delivering messages of peace, rebirth, and harmonious coexistence," he said.

In Iran, Araghchi explained, Nowruz transcends the calendar. "It's a moment to reflect on our past, evaluate our present, and aspire to a brighter future. It brings people together, preserves cherished traditions, and nurtures values like kindness, empathy, and generosity within our society."

Turning to global challenges, the Foreign Minister emphasized Nowruz's modern-day significance. "In today's turbulent world, the call for dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration rings louder than ever," he asserted. "Nowruz embodies friendship and engagement, proving that nations can unite around universal human values—beyond borders or politics—to forge a world of enduring peace and camaraderie."

Araghchi reaffirmed Iran's role as a historic steward of Nowruz, advocating for its potential to deepen ties among celebrating nations. "As a birthplace of this timeless tradition, Iran has always stressed the value of cultural dialogue and cooperation. We see this heritage as a springboard for broader regional and global partnerships in culture, economics, and social progress," he noted.

In his closing remarks, Araghchi offered warm Nowruz blessings to Iranians and allied nations alike, expressing hope that the new year would usher in "peace, joy, and prosperity for all." He cast Nowruz as a guiding light toward a future of hope, unity, and advancement.

The Foreign Minister also praised the event's organizers, thanking Dr. Salehi, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance; Dr. Salehi Amiri, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism; and Dr. Ayubi, Secretary of the National Committee for the Global Nowruz Celebration. "I am grateful to my esteemed colleagues for orchestrating this splendid and meaningful occasion,"



he said, wishing attendees a triumphant Nowruz and a season of renewal. Held at Azadi Square, the Global Nowruz Celebration sets the stage for a series of events leading up to the Persian New Year on March 20, 2025, coinciding with the spring equinox. Meanwhile on Friday and on the eve of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, the opening ceremony of the "Global Nowruz Celebration" took place on Friday, March 14, 2025, at Tehran's Azadi Square. Hosted by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the event, which ran from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., drew a diverse crowd including ambassadors from various countries, cultural and artistic figures, and members of the public.

The ceremony featured prominent attendees such as Seyed Abbas Salehi, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance; Salehi Amiri, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism; Abbas Araghchi, Foreign Minister; Ahmad Midari, Minister of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare; Yumiko Ishikawa-Takashima, the United Nations representative in Tehran, foreign ministry ambassadors; literary scholar Mir Jalaluddin Kazzazi; Mahdokht Moeini; Abdolmehdi Mostafak, UNESCO's cultural deputy in Iran; and numerous cultural and artistic directors.

The event showcased a rich array of performances, including the recitation of Imam Hassan poetry by artists from Khuzestan Province, Nowruz recitations featuring performers from 10 provinces, and a musical ensemble of over 200 artists from Kurdistan and Kermanshah playing the *daf* and *tanbur*. A highlight was the "Nowruz Fire" ceremony, a traditional ritual rooted in the Lak people's customs, involving the lighting of a fire followed by celebrations and dancing. Historically, this ritual is performed at the start of winter on the night of *Yalda* (the winter solstice).

The ceremony opened with remarks from Kazzazi, a renowned scholar of the *Shahnameh* and Persian literature. "Iran, the eternal land, is a realm of splendor, radiance, and wisdom," he said. "The wise of the world have always praised Iran. Nowruz is Iran's banner. Wherever this banner is raised across the globe, that place becomes a part of Iran's vast cultural expanse."

Speeches were also delivered by the Ministers of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism, and Foreign Affairs, emphasizing the significance of Nowruz as a unifying cultural tradition.

Hojatollah Ayubi, appointed by the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance as the secretary of the executive committee for honoring Nowruz and Eid al-Fitr in cultural and artistic contexts, served as the event's coordinator.

The "Global Nowruz Celebration" at Azadi Square marks the beginning of festivities leading up to the official start of the Persian New Year on March 20, 2025, coinciding with the spring equinox.

Iranian Women Resolute in Shaping a Fairer Future, UN Deputy Representative Affirms

TEHRAN - During the 69th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Zahra Ershadi, Iran's Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, highlighted the unwavering commitment of Iranian women to crafting a more just future for themselves and their communities.

Addressing the assembly in New York on Friday, Ershadi pointed out that despite facing severe challenges from unilateral sanctions and the ineffective "maximum pressure" strategy, Iranian women have persisted in driving societal progress and reinforcing family structures.

"The resilience and resolute spirit of Iranian women have been vital in propelling advancements across every aspect of their lives," Ershadi stated. "Even as certain foreign powers attempt to suppress their rights, Iranian women stand firm in their pursuit of a more equitable tomorrow."

The event, held on March 14, 2025, commemorated the 69th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women. Below is an overview of Ershadi's complete statement:

Full Remarks by Zahra Ershadi, Iran's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN: Thirty years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were adopted, we must confront the reality that their full implementation remains incomplete. Progress has been stymied by ongoing issues such as poverty, economic turmoil, maximum pressure tactics, unilateral coercive actions, foreign occupation, terrorism, and genocide. These barriers have not only postponed the Declaration's goals but have also inflicted disproportionate harm on vulnerable groups—particularly women—halting development across many parts of the globe.

In our region, the actions of the Zionist apartheid regime in Gaza constitute a merciless campaign of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The mass killing of innocent civilians—including women, children, and the elderly—alongside the intentional destruction of essential infrastructure and the brutal displacement of entire populations, stands as a profound violation of basic human rights. Far from isolated events, these acts form a deliberate attempt to eradicate the Palestinian people and strip them of their identity and dignity. The unrelenting violence in Gaza deprives Palestinian women and girls of their most fundamental rights, extinguishing any hope of empowerment. The global community must acknowledge these atrocities and act swiftly and decisively to ensure accountability for those responsible.



The Islamic Republic of Iran acknowledges the essential contributions of women to social, cultural, political, and economic progress. Significant achievements have been made in fostering inclusive growth and safeguarding women's rights in various domains, including:

Women account for 33% of university faculty, 40% of medical science professionals, and over 50% of the healthcare workforce, with women comprising 40% of specialized doctors and 30% of super-specialized physicians.

Women represent 45% of public sector employees and 74% of the private sector workforce, owning 32,000 businesses. Each year, 300,000 rural and nomadic women undergo entrepreneurial training, and women have secured 41% of newly created jobs.

Since the establishment of the National Unity Government in 2024, there has been a concerted focus on elevating women's roles in policymaking, leading to the appointment of more than 190 women to leadership positions nationwide. Key milestones include:

Four women appointed to the 14th Cabinet, including Iran's first female government spokesperson and the Minister of Roads and Urban Development. 14 women named heads of government bodies by presidential order. 13 women serving as deputy ministers, 17 as ministerial advisors or assistants, 110 as directors-general, 17 as governors, and 16 as district governors.

A presidential mandate to increase women's representation in governorships, municipalities, and critical government roles. In closing, despite the crippling effects of unilateral sanctions and the flawed maximum pressure approach, Iranian women have continued to break new ground, fortifying their families and society. Their endurance and fierce determination have been instrumental in advancing every dimension of their lives. While some foreign entities strive to curtail their rights, Iranian women remain unwavering in their mission to build a fairer future for themselves and their communities.

Ershadi's speech emphasized Iran's dedication to empowering women despite external pressures, while also decrying global injustices—particularly in Gaza—as impediments to achieving gender equality worldwide.

Iran Slams Israel's Futile Attempt to Justify Atrocities



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, has condemned Israel's bids to justify its crimes, atrocities, and apartheid policies by falsely associating Islam with terrorism.

Speaking at the High-Level Meeting to Commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on Friday, Iravani also pointed to the daily aggressions faced by Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

"The world continues to witness daily aggressions against Palestinians whose homeland is under occupation," Iravani stated. He noted that Israel, as an occupying regime, in cooperation with its allies, maintains a futile attempt to excuse its atrocities, crimes, and apartheid practices by fabricating a direct link between Islam and terrorism.

Iravani also raised concerns over the growing Islamophobia in several Western countries, particularly instances of violence, defamation, and the desecration of Islamic values, shrines, and the Holy Quran under the pretext of freedom of expression. He urged nations to criminalize and prohibit violence and hatred against religious symbols and holy books through their national laws and to take collective action against Islamophobia.

Reaffirming Iran's stance, Iravani emphasized the Islamic Republic's unwavering support for efforts to combat Islamophobia and religious extremism. "The Islamic Republic of Iran expresses its profound concern regarding the extensive network of anti-Muslim campaigns, which includes the utilization of media outlets and social media platforms," he said.

Iravani warned that these campaigns have "detrimental effects" on Muslims worldwide, particularly for those under foreign occupation or in minority communities. He also referenced UN General Assembly Resolution 76/254, adopted three years ago, which he said reflects a shared global commitment to tackling Islamophobia.

He noted that last year's resolution on "measures to combat Islamophobia" further reinforced the urgent need for legislative and policy actions to eliminate Islamophobia in all its forms.

Iran Reaffirms Commitment to Lebanon at ILO Meeting



TEHRAN - Iran's representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Mehdi Aliabadi, voiced strong support for Lebanon during the 353rd meeting of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Governing Body in Geneva. The session focused on Lebanon's escalating humanitarian and economic crises, worsened by ongoing conflict and ceasefire violations. Aliabadi praised the ILO's emergency response efforts while urging greater international action to deliver humanitarian aid, bolster Lebanon's economy, and rebuild its crumbling infrastructure.

Lebanon has faced severe challenges in recent years, with its economy already fragile before the latest wave of instability. The Lebanese pound has lost over 90% of its value since 2019, plunging millions into poverty, while political gridlock and the 2020 Beirut port explosion further crippled the nation. The current crisis, marked by repeated ceasefire breaches—likely tied to regional tensions involving Israel, Hezbollah, and other actors—has deepened the suffering. Aliabadi highlighted the war's toll, noting that approximately 689,000 Lebanese have lost jobs or face imminent unemployment. Key industries like agriculture, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and tourism have been devastated, with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up 90% of Lebanon's businesses, hit hardest.

The ILO, a UN agency founded in 1919 to promote workers' rights and social justice, has stepped in with targeted initiatives. These include emergency cash assistance, job preservation programs, and support for vulnerable populations. The organization is also aiding recovery by rebuilding public infrastructure, installing solar panels to address chronic power shortages, and assisting farmers and SMEs to revive local economies. Iran, a long-standing ally of Lebanon and supporter of Hezbollah, has consistently positioned itself as an advocate for the country amid its struggles.

IRAN NEWS



Belarusian Ambassador to Tehran Lauds Strong Ties With Iran

SHIRAZ (IRNA) - Dmitry Koltsov, the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to Iran, has praised the strong relations between Tehran and Minsk.

Speaking in a meeting with the Governor of Fars Province, Hossein-Ali Amiri, Koltsov said the Belarusian government values the development of cooperation with Iran in the fields of sports, tourism, and education.

He said that he had discussed export of electric buses to Shiraz and the presence of Iranian companies in Belarus.

In response, Amiri emphasized that the Iranian government prioritizes regional cooperation. He also highlighted the importance of strengthening ties between Shiraz and Minsk and proposed establishing student exchange programs between universities in the two cities. Amiri expressed Shiraz's readiness to export agricultural products to Belarus.

India, China Main Sources of Pesticide Imports to Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The acting head of the Pesticides Office at Iran's Plant Protection Organization revealed that India and China account for 90 to 95 percent of the country's pesticide imports due to international sanctions, with only 5 percent sourced indirectly from European nations.

Hamid Yedaei, acting head of the Pesticides Office, stated that over 85 percent of the pesticides required for the current agricultural year—approximately 45,000 tons—have been secured through imports and domestic production. He assured that there are no shortages for combating widespread pests this season. Preparations for pesticide supplies typically begin before the end of the previous agricultural year, he added.

Addressing expired pesticides, Yedaei explained that these products undergo a one-time evaluation. If lab results confirm their usability, they receive approval for an additional year of use. However, pesticides past their expiration date are collected by authorized companies under the supervision of the Environmental Protection Organization and disposed of as chemical waste. In 2021, over 24 tons of expired pesticides were gathered from various provinces and destroyed.

Yedaei noted that such waste collection occurs every few years. He also shared outcomes from a recent nationwide inspection exercise conducted by the Plant Protection Organization. Over 950 teams inspected 54 percent of 7,900 plant protection pharmacies and stores, issuing nearly 1,800 rulings related to unlicensed operations, absence of technical experts, and the discovery of unusable or smuggled pesticides.

On pesticide quality, Yedaei reiterated that sanctions have limited imports primarily to India and China. He urged adherence to the organization's guidelines, warning that improper use reduces effectiveness, as pests may not receive adequate doses and could develop resistance over time. Factors like poor farm density, insufficient fertilizer or seed quality, and the use of substandard sprayers further diminish pesticide impact, he cautioned.

Nowruz a Strategic Asset for Global Engagement



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, hailed Nowruz, the Persian New Year, as a strategic asset for fostering social cohesion and international dialogue, emphasizing its role in promoting global solidarity, cultural unity, and a peace-oriented discourse.

Speaking at the Global Nowruz Celebration for 1404 (2025) on Friday, at Tehran's Azadi Cultural Complex, attended by ambassadors from Nowruz-celebrating countries, Salehi-Amiri described the occasion as more than a calendar event. As reported by IRNA via the government's news portal, he portrayed Nowruz as an enduring Iranian narrative capable of driving global peace and cultural harmony. The event showcased Iran's rich traditions, aligning with the minister's vision of Nowruz as a unifying force.

Highlighting this year's rare overlap of Nowruz with Ramadan, Salehi-Amiri praised the adaptability of Iranian civilization, noting that the convergence exemplifies its flexibility. "Nowruz holds a distinguished place in Iranian cultural life and serves as a platform for civilizational dialogue, offering a model for peaceful coexistence in today's world," he said. Recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2016, Nowruz is celebrated across a vast region spanning Central Asia, the Caucasus, and parts of South Asia, with roots tracing back over 3,000 years to ancient Persia.

The minister described Nowruz as a mirror reflecting Iranian identity—encompassing the Persian language, traditions, and cultural practices. "It's a persistent Iranian discourse that unites all Iranians around a shared identity, transcending ethnic and religious differences," he said. Amid global identity crises and conflicts, he argued, Nowruz offers a framework for enhancing social unity and cross-cultural interaction.

Salehi-Amiri emphasized Nowruz's adaptability across diverse ethnicities,

nations, and cultures, likening it to a thread connecting humanity beyond race, religion, or nationality. "It's not just a day or ritual—it's a way of life and philosophy deeply rooted in Iranian culture," he added, underscoring its historical significance as a celebration of renewal and harmony.

Rejecting the notion of Nowruz as geographically confined, the minister called it a manifestation of wisdom, dignity, humanity, and ethics. "In an era needing unity and empathy more than ever, Nowruz's core philosophy of togetherness is vital," he said. Far from an abstract concept, he argued, it's a practical social act that steers societies toward cultural synergy and sustainable interaction.

The ceremony featured vibrant cultural displays, including Kurdish def drumming, performances by Nowruz singers from various Iranian ethnic groups, artistic video mappings, and a fireworks display. These elements highlighted Iran's cultural richness while fostering solidarity and showcasing its diverse heritage.

With festivities planned to extend into the next year, the Global Nowruz Celebration offers a unique opportunity to elevate this ancient tradition internationally. Beyond preserving Nowruz as a shared human heritage, the initiative aims to introduce Iran's cultures, rituals, and biodiversity to the world.

Historically tied to the Zoroastrian vernal equinox, Nowruz has evolved into a secular celebration embraced by over 300 million people across more than 12 countries, including Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. For Iran, it's not merely a tradition but a symbolic tool for cultural diplomacy, strengthening international ties and advancing peace, solidarity, and sustainable global development, as Salehi-Amiri envisions.

Iran Boosts Home Appliance Production to 20m Units



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The secretary of Iran's National Economic Association of Home Appliance Industries announced that home appliance production reached 20 million units in 2024, a significant increase reflecting improved quality and quantity of domestic products following the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA and the exit of foreign companies from Iran's market.

Nasrin Owjaghi stated that production figures align with the Seventh Development Plan, showing an 8 to 10 percent growth in 2024. She noted that annual production previously ranged between 6 and 7 million units, underscoring the remarkable progress made this year.

Despite this surge, Owjaghi highlighted a market slowdown driven by reduced consumer purchasing power amid economic challenges. She expressed hope that planned measures would revive demand in the coming year. "This year, due to rising exchange rates and declining affordability, all TV and outdoor advertising shifted to installment sales for home appliance brands," she said, pointing to a demand crisis and intensifying competition among domestic manufacturers. While the market remains heavily tied to household livelihoods, producers have managed to cater to diverse tastes and budgets despite constraints.

Owjaghi also addressed energy challenges in industrial zones, noting that power and gas outages have left many production units operating at half capacity. Another pressing issue, she said, is smuggling, with approximately 30 percent of home appliances entering Iran illegally, evading customs duties, insurance, taxes, and operational costs. She called for legal reforms to ensure fairer competition for local producers.

On the export front, Owjaghi revealed that Iran exports home appliances to neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Iraq, Russia, and Kazakhstan. However, high transportation costs and sanctions-related restrictions pose significant hurdles to expanding this trade.

She identified currency allocation as the foremost challenge for manufacturers, explaining that it takes about four months from order registration to currency approval. Additionally, liquidity shortages, limited working capital, and financing difficulties remain key demands from producers, who hope for government intervention to ease these burdens. The growth in production showcases resilience in Iran's home appliance sector, though addressing market stagnation and structural challenges will be critical for sustained progress.

Iran Oil Exported With High Quality, NIOC Responds to Claims



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has issued a statement refuting recent media claims about the production of low-quality oil, emphasizing its commitment to maintaining high standards for both domestic and export markets.

NIOC addressed concerns about oil quality, stating that fluctuations in water and salt content within crude oil are a natural part of the production process in the oil industry. The company noted that such variations have occurred across all periods and administrations, with documented evidence available in its records. A recent increase in water and salt levels in crude oil, while not unprecedented, is being addressed through measures implemented in recent weeks, with a resolution expected soon.

NIOC underscored its dedication to preserving its brand reputation and meeting customer expectations, particularly for refineries—its primary domestic clients—and export destinations. The company emphasized that substandard oil quality would halt export operations entirely, as no loading or shipment would proceed under such conditions.

Amid what it described as an economic war, NIOC criticized certain individuals for spreading false and biased information about Iran's crude oil exports on social media, calling it contrary to national interests. The company urged media outlets, regardless of political leanings, to prioritize national welfare and avoid providing adversaries with opportunities to exploit such narratives.

NIOC clarified that fluctuations in water and salt content typically occur when production capacity is maximized or when policies aim to boost output. However, these changes are manageable and do not affect the global pricing of Iranian crude, as low-quality oil is never loaded for export. Per standard procedures, excess water and salt are separated from crude oil in storage tanks on Kharg Island, tested in certified laboratories, and only then approved for export.

The statement comes amid recent successes by Iran's Ministry of Petroleum in increasing oil, gas, and petroleum product output, including a record-breaking crude oil export level over the past decade. These achievements, which helped the country navigate a prolonged cold season, led to U.S. sanctions on Iran's Oil Minister, recognized for his expertise in oil and petroleum exports. NIOC called on critics to refrain from aligning with adversaries and undermining these gains.

Iran-Pakistan Railway Link: A Step Toward Stronger Trade Ties

TEHRAN - The president of the Khorasan Razavi Chamber of Commerce has emphasized the significance of connecting Iran's railway network to Pakistan as a vital step toward enhancing commercial ties with the neighboring country.

Mohammadreza Tavakolizadeh, president of the Khorasan Razavi Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, spoke at a joint meeting with the director general of Khorasan Railways and the head of the province's Management and Planning Organization. He highlighted that linking Iran's rail network to Pakistan via the Mirjaveh border holds immense potential for boosting trade. Under the proposed plan, only 500 meters of railway would need to extend into Pakistani territory to facilitate the loading and unloading of cargo wagons. This connection could significantly increase the transport capacity for goods like sulfur, fostering stronger regional economic cooperation.

Tavakolizadeh noted that involving key stakeholders, such as the steel industry, in constructing railway lines could prove beneficial. However, he stressed that the economic viability for private-sector participation remains a critical concern due to the long payback period of such projects.

He underscored the need for coordination among the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the Ministry of Petroleum, the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade, and private investors to ensure the project's success. The Budget and Planning Organization, as a guiding body, could play a pivotal role in driving the initiative forward.

Tavakolizadeh also pointed to investment in rail fleets as a promising opportunity for the private sector. While some Iranian companies have purchased wagons, few have comprehensively ventured into supplying freight trains. He suggested that models like investing in locomotives and establishing independent fleets could yield substantial profits for private investors.

Seyyed Jamaluddin Hosseini, head of Khorasan Razavi's Management and Planning Organization, stated during the meeting that accelerating the construction of the second railway line on the Sangan-Torbat Heydarieh-Bafq axis, along with developing complementary routes, could enhance national transport efficiency, reduce logistics costs, and promote sustainable economic growth.

Hosseini estimated the cost of the first phase of the Sangan-Torbat Heydarieh-Bafq second line at approximately 5 trillion



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

IRR (Iranian Rials), with construction set to begin at five key points. He added that the government could offset part of the investment under Article 12 of the Law on Removing Barriers to Production.

Referring to the Sangan route, Hosseini noted that four critical segments, spanning 110 kilometers, have been prioritized to boost capacity by up to 15%. The estimated cost for this section is 6.5 trillion IRR, and with adequate funding, the project could be completed within a year.

Hosseini proposed forming a provincial consortium involving investors, private-sector entities, and steel companies to advance rail transport development in Sangan. In this model, steel firms—major beneficiaries of the route—would collaborate with local investors. While previous memoranda of understanding between the railway authority and steel companies failed to materialize into operational contracts, Hosseini attributed delays to the project's multi-sectoral nature, requiring alignment among the Ministries of Petroleum, Roads, and Industry. He also cited the affordability and availability of road transport as a factor reducing rail usage.

As the coordinating body, the Budget and Planning Organization has taken on the responsibility of managing this multifaceted project, holding numerous meetings to finalize funding and resource allocation decisions. Hosseini emphasized that both the government and private sector stand to benefit from its implementation.

Mostafa Nasiri, director general of Khorasan Railways, reported that in 2023, approximately 10.5 million tons of cargo were transported from Sangan to various destinations. Of this, 5 million tons could have been moved by rail but were shifted to roads due to capacity constraints. This reliance on road transport has increased costs, fuel consumption, and road wear.

Nasiri stressed that alongside building new lines, optimizing rail traffic management could enhance capacity. He cited the use of virtual block systems on busy routes like Tehran-Mashhad, where dividing 20-kilometer blocks into 4-kilometer segments has enabled more frequent train passages—a method that could also improve freight route efficiency.

The proposed rail link with Pakistan and the Sangan upgrades reflect Iran's broader strategy to bolster its transport infrastructure, reduce logistics costs, and strengthen regional trade ties, particularly with Pakistan. If realized, these projects could mark a significant leap forward in the country's economic connectivity.

Regional Countries Crave Iran's Handicraft Products



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Minister of Handicrafts at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Maryam Jalali, emphasized the cultural diversity and potential of Iran's handicrafts to address economic, social, and cultural barriers, noting that countries in the region are eager for these products.

Speaking during a meeting between President Masoud Pezeshkian and handicraft artists and workers in the southeastern counties of Tehran Province, Jalali highlighted the vital role of the handicraft sector. "This vast family of artisans not only generates wealth and entrepreneurship but also fosters love, emotion, and cultural identity," she said. "It nurtures generations of proud, patriotic Iranians while promoting ethics and law."

President Pezeshkian visited the counties of Varamin, Qarchak, Pakdasht, and Pishva on Thursday as part of a tour of Tehran Province to engage directly with local issues. His agenda included discussions with handicraft artists, meetings with regional managers, interactions with martyrs' families, and the virtual inauguration of several projects.

Jalali stressed the need for collaboration among institutions like the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, and Cultural Heritage to leverage handicrafts for social and economic cohesion. She relayed greetings and appreciation from Tourism Minister Salehi-Amiri, who was unable to attend. Reiterating the sector's potential, Jalali lamented its neglect in development and trade discussions despite high regional demand. "Countries in the region are thirsty for Iran's handicraft products, yet we've been overlooked in the language of progress and commerce," she said. Iran's handicrafts—ranging from Persian carpets to intricate metalwork—enjoy a rich heritage, historically prized across the Middle East and Central Asia, though modern export challenges persist due to sanctions and logistical hurdles.

Duterte Skips ICC Hearing in Drug War Case, Appears Via Video Link

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - Former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte failed to attend in person an initial hearing at the International Criminal Court, as he faces crimes against humanity charges over his deadly crackdown on narcotics.

The 79-year-old, the first ex-Asian head of state charged by the ICC, followed by videolink during a short hearing to inform him of the crimes he is alleged to have committed, as well as his rights as a defendant.

Sounding frail and wearing a blue suit and tie, he spoke briefly to confirm his name and date of birth. Presiding Judge Iulia Motoc allowed him to follow proceedings in absentia due to his long flight to The Hague.

His lawyer Salvador Medialdea told the court that his client had been "abducted from his country".



Israel Rejects Hamas Offer to Free Israeli-American Hostage



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Hamas said on Friday it had agreed to free an American-Israeli dual national if Israel begins the next phase of ceasefire talks towards a permanent end to the war, an offer Israel dismissed as "psychological warfare".

Hamas said it had made the offer to release New Jersey native Edan Alexander, a 21-year-old soldier in the Israeli army, after receiving a proposal from mediators for negotiations on the second phase of a ceasefire deal, which has halted major fighting since January 19 but has been in limbo for two weeks.

The group said its exiled Gaza chief, Khalil Al-Hayya, was due to arrive in Cairo later on Friday for further ceasefire talks with Egyptian mediators.

Since a temporary first phase of the ceasefire expired on March 2, Israel has rejected opening the second phase of talks, which would require it to negotiate over a permanent end to the war, the main demand of Hamas.

Israel says it wants to extend the ceasefire's temporary first phase, a proposal backed by U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff. Hamas says it will resume freeing hostages only under the second phase.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office called the offer to release Alexander "manipulation and psychological warfare".

"While Israel has accepted the Witkoff proposal, Hamas stands by its refusal and has not budged a millimeter," his office added. It said he would convene with his cabinet on Saturday night to discuss the hostage situation and decide on the next steps.

Israel has imposed a total blockade of Gaza since the first phase of the ceasefire expired without an agreement to begin the second phase on March 2.

U.S. Senate Passes Spending Bill Hours Before Deadline



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States averted a government shutdown with hours to spare Friday as lawmakers already reeling from President Donald Trump's radical federal spending cuts voted to keep the lights on through September.

Facing a midnight deadline to fund the government or allow it to start winding down, Democrats dropped plans for a blockade on a Trump-backed bill passed earlier this week by the House -- clearing its path for approval by the Republican-led Senate.

"In their typical fashion, Senate Democrats engaged in political theater to delay the inevitable and cause instability," said Ted Cruz, chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee.

"Americans voted for change under President Trump and Republican leadership after four years of chaos. The government is funded, let's get back to work."

Democrats had been under immense pressure from their own grassroots to defy Trump and reject a text they said was full of harmful spending cuts.

But Chuck Schumer, their leader in the upper chamber, shocked his rank-and-file ahead of the crunch vote by announcing he would back the Republican-drafted proposal.

Canada's New PM Carney Rejects Trump's Annexation Threats

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney launched his term in office with a whole-hearted rejection of US President Donald Trump's repeated threats to annex his northern neighbor.

Shortly after he was sworn in as Canada's 24th prime minister, replacing Justin Trudeau who has been in office since 2015, Carney said confronting Trump's tariffs would be a top priority.

Canada "will never, ever, in any way, shape or form, be part of the United States," he added, while voicing hope his government could one-day work together with Washington to advance both countries' interests.

Officials said they were looking to set up a call between Trump and Carney in the coming days.

Ottawa has been rattled by collapsing cross-border relations since Trump returned to power in January, launching a trade war and demanding that Canada surrender its independence to become the 51st US state.

Ottawa has retaliated against Trump's tariffs, while Canadian public opinion has been outraged as the US president insists the border separating the countries should be erased.

Carney has characterized the Trump administration as the greatest challenge Canada has faced in a generation, and US tariffs on Canadian goods unjustified.

He became prime minister after overwhelmingly winning a Liberal Party vote to replace Trudeau as leader.

But the former central banker, who turns 60 on Sunday, is a political novice who has never won an elected public office.

Carney's campaign skills may be tested soon with government sources telling AFP that Canada is headed for a general election in weeks.

He said he will fly to Paris and London next week, part of an effort to reinforce Canada's alliances overseas as ties with the United States unravel. Those talks will include trade and security.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen—who said Canada-EU relations were now "more crucial than ever"—as well as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky were among the first foreign



leaders to congratulate Carney on Friday.

Carney was an investment banker at Goldman Sachs before serving as governor of the Bank of Canada during the 2008-2009 financial crisis and also led the Bank of England through the turmoil surrounding the Brexit vote.

He has sought to present himself as purpose-built to lead a country through a trade war with the United States, once Canada's closest ally but now a country that Carney says Canada can "no longer trust."

But he may not be prime minister for long.

Pols ahead of the upcoming vote show a tight race against the opposition Conservatives, who have sought to portray Carney as an elitist and out of touch with the struggles of ordinary Canadians.

He has countered that his global experience, including in the private sector, has equipped him to drive the Canadian economy forward as it faces a rupture with its most important trading partner.

"Carney is arriving at a good time. He has emerged as a figure people seem to trust to take on Donald Trump," University of Winnipeg politics professor Felix Mathieu told AFP.

On the week Trump's sweeping 25 percent tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports came into force, Carney visited a steel plant in Hamilton, an industrial city near the US border in the province of

Ontario.

Wearing a hard hat and goggles, Carney said he was ready to work out a trade deal with Trump.

But he insisted there must be "respect for Canadian sovereignty" in any negotiation.

Carney has also made clear efforts to distance himself from Trudeau with moves aimed at attracting more centrist voters.

He has said addressing climate change will be a top priority but his first action on Friday was to sign an order scrapping Trudeau's "divisive" carbon tax on individuals and families while pledging to advance market-led solutions.

The cabinet sworn in alongside Carney keeps much of Trudeau's team in place, including those working most closely on trade talks with the United States.

Putin Urges Ukrainian Troops to Surrender as Trump Pushes for Ceasefire Deal

KYIV (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin called on for beleaguered Ukrainian troops in the Russian region of Kursk to "surrender" as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky accused the Russian leader of seeking to sabotage a ceasefire initiative.

US President Donald Trump urged Putin to spare the lives of the Ukrainian troops as he said his envoy had held "productive" talks with Russia's leader on a proposed 30-day ceasefire.

Russia has mounted a rapid counteroffensive in the western border region of Kursk over the past week, recapturing much of the territory Ukraine seized in a shock incursion last August.

Defeat in Kursk would be a major blow to Ukraine's plans to use its hold on the region as a bargaining chip in peace talks for the three-year-old war.

"We are sympathetic to President Trump's call," Putin said in remarks broadcast on Russian television.

"If they lay down their arms and surrender, they will be guaranteed life and dignified treatment," Putin said.

Trump said "thousands" of Ukrainian troops were "completely surrounded by the Russian military, and in a very bad and vulnerable position."

"I have strongly requested to President Putin that their lives be spared. This would be a horrible massacre, one not seen since World War II," Trump said.

Ukraine's military leadership denied the claims. "There is no threat of our units being encircled," Ukraine's General Staff posted on social media.

Zelensky gave a more sober assessment in comments to reporters in Kyiv. "The situation in the Kursk region is obviously very difficult," he said, while insisting the campaign still had value.

Russia, he said, had been forced to pull troops from other areas on the front line, easing pressure on Ukrainian forces fighting to keep control of the eastern logistics hub of Pokrovsk.



Trump's latest comments came as he gave an update on a meeting Thursday between his envoy Steve Witkoff and Putin on a US-Ukrainian proposal for a 30-day pause in hostilities.

"We had very good and productive discussions with President Vladimir Putin of Russia yesterday, and there is a very good chance that this horrible, bloody war can finally come to an end," Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

Putin said Thursday that he had "serious questions" about the proposal and that events in Kursk would influence the next moves towards a ceasefire.

Zelensky accused the Russian leader of seeking to undermine the

ceasefire initiative.

"He is now doing everything he can to sabotage diplomacy by setting extremely difficult and unacceptable conditions right from the start even before a ceasefire," Zelensky posted on X.

The Kremlin said Friday that it was "cautiously optimistic" a deal could be reached, but that Trump and Putin had to speak directly before talks could progress.

US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz said in a Fox News interview that the United States had "some cautious optimism" after Witkoff's visit.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said at a meeting of the Group of Seven western powers in Canada that both sides would have to make "concessions".

G7 foreign ministers warned Russia of new sanctions unless it accepted a ceasefire "on equal terms", saying sanctions could include "caps on oil prices, as well as additional support for Ukraine, and other means".

France and Germany accused Russia of seeking to block a ceasefire, and support for Ukraine was to be discussed again in a video conference of some European leaders with Zelensky on Saturday.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Friday said Russia's "complete disregard for President Trump's ceasefire proposal only serves to demonstrate that Putin is not serious about peace".

Diplomatic sources said EU foreign affairs chief Kaja Kallas would propose that the 27-country bloc supply up to 40 billion euros (\$43.5 billion) in new military aid to Ukraine.

Ukraine hoped its hold on Kursk would be a bargaining chip in talks with Russia and was eyeing a potential land swap with Moscow, which has occupied around a fifth of Ukraine since it took Crimea in 2014 and launched its military offensive in February 2022.

Merz Wins Support for Surge in Spending, Proclaiming Germany Is Back

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Chancellor-in-waiting Friedrich Merz said on Friday he had secured the crucial backing of the Greens for a massive increase in state borrowing, clearing the way for the outgoing parliament to approve the historic deal next week.

Merz's conservatives and the Social Democrats, who are in negotiations to form a government after an election last month, had proposed a 500 billion euro (\$544 billion) fund for infrastructure and sweeping changes to borrowing rules to bolster defence and revive growth in Europe's largest economy.

With the Greens, they now likely have the two thirds majority necessary to pass constitutional amendments that upend decades of German fiscal conservatism.

A vote on the proposals is scheduled for Tuesday.

Merz has justified the urgent need to push the package through the outgoing parliament with recent shifts in U.S. policy under President Donald Trump, warning that a hostile Russia and an unreliable U.S. could leave the continent exposed.

"It is a clear message to our partners... but also to the enemies of our freedom: We are capable of defending ourselves," Merz, whose conservatives won the election, told a news conference.

"Germany is back. Germany is making a significant contribution to the defence of freedom and peace in Europe," he added.



Merz's measures cleared another major hurdle on Friday, with the constitutional court throwing out complaints against them.

News of the deal lifted euro zone government bond yields, shares and the euro on expectation the borrowing plan would boost the wider European economy. Germany's benchmark DAX stock index was up 1.6%, while the mid-and small-cap indexes rose over 2.6% and 3.2% respectively. The euro rose 0.3% - taking its gains so far this month to nearly 5%.

Merz wants to secure the funds before a new parliament convenes on March 25, where they risk being blocked by an expanded contingent of far-right and far-left lawmakers.

The compromise reached with the Greens includes the allocation of 100 billion euros for the climate and economic transformation fund from the 500 billion euros earmarked for infrastructure.

All the money must be spent on new programs, not to plug holes in the budget, over a 12 year period, the Greens, SPD and conservatives agreed.

They also agreed on a broader definition of the defence spending to be exempt from the constitutional spending cap above 1% of economic output.

Spending on civil defence, IT security and "aid to states attacked in violation of international law" - a clear reference to Ukraine - will also count as defence spending, meaning in theory Germany can borrow unlimited sums to finance them.

Raptors Take Down Jazz for 3rd Straight Win



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Scottie Barnes and Immanuel Quickley each scored 20 points and the Toronto Raptors picked up their third consecutive win by beating the Utah Jazz 126-118 Friday night in Salt Lake City.

A.J. Lawson chipped in 18 points, RJ Barrett added 17, and Orlando Robinson totaled 14 points, 10 rebounds and five assists as the Raptors beat the Jazz for the second consecutive time in a week. Barnes also grabbed 10 boards.

Jordan Clarkson topped Utah with 19 points and Kyle Filipowski contributed 18 points and 11 rebounds, but the Jazz's losing streak extended to eight games.

Lauri Markkanen scored 16 points in the first half but didn't play in the second half for Utah. Isaiah Collier put up 16 points and eight assists, Johnny Juzang had 14 points and Brice Sensabaugh scored 13. Toronto surged midway through the second half to pick up the win to begin a four-game road trip.

Collin Sexton, who only hit 3 of 13 shots for eight points, gave Utah a one-point lead with a three-point play late in the third quarter before the Raptors seized control for good.

Toronto scored the final four points of the third quarter, and then continued to surge into the fourth quarter by scoring the first 12 points to go up 103-89. During that stretch, Utah went scoreless on 11 consecutive possessions.

Utah couldn't get closer than six after that. Markkanen hit three 3-pointers in the first 4 1/2 minutes, and the Jazz took a 21-15 lead.

Orlando Robinson scored four points in a 10-0 run that helped Toronto finish the first quarter up 33-26. Utah made a move in the second quarter after the Raptors took an 11-point lead on a Lawson 3.

Juzang had a pair of old-fashioned three-point plays in a 9-3 Utah run, and then Markkanen helped the Jazz catch and pass the Raptors by halftime for a 58-56 lead.

Utah lost despite hitting 16 of 38 3-pointers, including four from Markkanen and three apiece by

Filipowski and Sensabaugh.

John Collins didn't play for the Jazz and will be out for at least two weeks with a sprained ankle.

Meanwhile Devin Booker recorded 22 points and 13 assists and Kevin Durant had 22 points and six helpers as the Phoenix Suns produced a solid 122-106 victory over the visiting Sacramento Kings on Friday night.

Phoenix's Tyus Jones added 20 points off the bench and was 6-for-6 from 3-point range. Jones tied his career-best for 3-point makes on a night in which the Suns sank a season-high 24 treys (on 43 attempts).

Ryan Dunn scored 16 points, Bradley Beal added 15 and Oso Ighodaro had 11 for Phoenix (31-36), which moved within 1 1/2 games of the Dallas Mavericks (33-35) in the battle for the final Western Conference play-in berth.

The victory was just the sixth in the past 20 games for the Suns, who scored 38 points off 19 Sacramento turnovers.

DeMar DeRozan scored 23 points and Zach LaVine added 21 for the Kings (33-33), who lost their fourth consecutive contest and are just 2 1/2 games ahead of Phoenix.

Domantas Sabonis returned from a six-game absence caused by a hamstring injury to record his ninth triple-double of the season. Sabonis had 12 points, 12 assists, 11 rebounds and three steals.

Malik Monk added 18 points, eight rebounds and five assists for the Kings but missed all eight of his 3-point attempts. Keegan Murray had 14 points and eight boards for Sacramento.

Phoenix shot 51.9 percent overall and a scorching 55.8 percent from behind the arc. Beal, Booker and Durant each made four treys.

Sacramento shot 49.4 percent from the field and was 8 of 32 (25 percent) from 3-point range.

Durant drained a 3-pointer for the final points of the first half, and he followed two treys from Beal with one of his own early in the third quarter to give the Suns a 76-63 lead.

Guardiola Hits Back at Capello Over Arrogant Jibe



LONDON (dispatches) - Pep Guardiola has slammed Fabio Capello's claim that he is "arrogant" by insisting Manchester City's success in his reign has raised standards in the Premier League.

Capello, a former England, AC Milan and Real Madrid boss, said in an interview with Spanish newspaper El Mundo this week that Guardiola's "arrogance has cost him several Champions League titles".

The 78-year-old Italian also said Guardiola was "way too arrogant and presumptuous" because he wanted to prove his tactics were the reason for City's remarkable success.

Capello claimed the City boss, who previously managed Barcelona and Bayern Munich, had "ruined" Italian football because too many managers tried to copy his fluid, possession-based style without having good enough players to do so.

Guardiola, however, is proud of his record, having guided City to six Premier League titles and a first Champions League crown since his arrival in 2016.

The Spaniard believes the strength of the Premier League has improved in his time in Manchester, with City now facing a challenge from several teams, including Saturday's opponents Brighton, just to secure a top-four place this season.

City have endured a difficult campaign after winning the previous four Premier League titles and currently sit fifth in the table.

"Naming one of the big managers, one of the exceptional managers, in Fabio Capello - it doesn't look like it's arrogant, I would say, but we helped to raise the bar in the Premier League," Guardiola said.

"The teams had to go to the transfer markets, right? People want to do good, people are well organised, have good structures, make good decisions, have good players everywhere.

"I went to Bournemouth in the beginning, and now it's different. I went in the beginning to Brighton, and now it's different. And I went to Fulham in the beginning, and now it's different.

"I've been here, I'm an old guy, I'm the oldest manager here, nine years. I know the evolution of the Premier League has been massive.

"It's incredible how they've changed and it's good, really good, for the Premier League."

Capello argued that because Guardiola "always wanted to be the protagonist" he had made unnecessary selection or tactical calls in certain big games that had backfired.

It is not the first time the pair have not seen eye to eye.

Their differing footballing philosophies clashed when Guardiola played under the pragmatic Capello at Roma more than two decades ago.

Capello could not find an effective role for the Spaniard and repeatedly left him out of his side.

Asked specifically about the Italian's comments Guardiola had just a short answer.

"I listen to everything that people say about me, everything, so be careful!" he said.

Tuchel Wants to Earn Right to Sing National Anthem



LONDON (Dispatches) - England manager Thomas Tuchel said he must "earn" the right to sing the national anthem after the German revealed he will not join in during his opening matches in charge.

The prickly issue of the anthem was raised when Tuchel named his first England squad for this month's World Cup qualifiers with Albania and Latvia on Friday.

The 51-year-old German explained his approach to the issue ahead of his England debut against Albania at Wembley on March 21.

"I think, first of all, you have a very powerful, emotional and meaningful national anthem and I could not be more proud to be on the sidelines and be in charge of the English national team," he said.

"It means everything. It means a lot to me, I can assure you, but I can feel because it is that meaningful and it is that emotional and it is so powerful, the national anthem, that I have to earn my right to sing it."

Tuchel, only the third non-British manager of England, confirmed he does know the words to "God Save the King", but for now he won't be singing them.

Lee Carsley, who represented Ireland in his playing career, made headlines during his interim spell in charge of England last year when he declined to sing the national anthem.

"I feel that it is not just a given. You cannot just sing it. That's why I decided that I will not sing it in my first matches," said Tuchel.

Griekspoor Eliminated From Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches) - In-form Tallon Griekspoor has been eliminated from Indian Wells after losing in three sets to Danish star Holger Rune.

Griekspoor impressed at the ATP 1000 tournament after eliminating the top seed, Alexander Zverev. Thursday's quarter-final was the Dutchman's first at an ATP 1000 Masters tournament, and the ATP's 43rd-ranked player faced Danish star Holger Rune to reach his first semi-finals.

Rune eliminated two top-20 players in the forms of Ugo Humbert and Stefanos Tsitsipas before meeting Griekspoor in California - a player he'd only met twice throughout his career and hadn't beaten yet.

The two would jump out the gates fighting as Rune took an early 2-0 lead before losing four straight games to a raging Griekspoor. A re-break would even things out again before the Dutchman struck yet another blow by taking a 6-5 lead on his third break of the set.

A nerve-racking twelfth game would ensue, and it was the Dane who'd rally to a 40-0 lead in Griekspoor's service game. Three breakpoints would pass before the Netherlands' highest-ranked player would tie the game at 40-40 but would soon face Rune's fifteenth break point of the set. Griekspoor managed to erase one for the seventh time and would clinch the set with a neat slice.

Rune - who was fighting to reach his sixth career ATP Masters 1000 semi-final - dealt with Griekspoor in the second set's first game and would go on to absolutely dominate his Dutch counterpart throughout the set, winning a staggering 21 of the final 24 points en route to forcing a deciding third set.



Griekspoor's implosion amounted to 15 unforced errors in 31 total points in the second set, just one winner as opposed to Rune's seven, and just two won service points.

The Dutchman continued his struggles in the third set, grabbing his first service game before dropping three consecutive games with an aggressive net game, which earned Griekspoor just three net points out of a possible ten.

Rune fought to break Griekspoor for a second time, but the Dutchman survived on breakpoint in order to prevent Rune from serving for the match. The two would exchange love games before Rune got the opportunity to serve for the win - one the Dane would take with both hands and clinch with an ace.

Rune booked a spot in his sixth semi-final at a Masters tournament,

setting up a meeting with Arthur Fils or Daniil Medvedev. Griekspoor, who won a career-best four matches at this year's 'fifth Grand Slam', will enter the top 40 of the ATP Rankings next Monday for the first time since October 2024.

Meanwhile Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva beat defending champion Iga Swiatek 7-6(1) 1-6 6-3 on Friday to reach the Indian Wells final where she will face top seed Aryna Sabalenka, who avenged her Australian Open final loss to Madison Keys with a 6-0 6-1 rout.

Andreeva, 17, has shown enormous potential this season and now has her sights set on back-to-back WTA 1000 titles following her triumph in Dubai last month.

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"Really tough match, tough conditions," she told reporters.

"I tried to really hang in there. It was not easy, but I'm super happy with the win today and I can't wait to play finals on Sunday."

After a tight first set, Andreeva was flawless in the tiebreak, leaning over and letting out a roar when she enticed a forehand error from Swiatek on set point.

The Polish second seed stormed back in the second set, breaking in the first game and levelling the contest when Andreeva's backhand went wide.

Andreeva, who was studying handwritten notes during the changeovers, grabbed the momentum back by breaking to open the third set as temperatures in the California desert plummeted and the wind picked up.

Brignone Has One Hand on Overall Globe After Super-G Win

LONDON (Dispatches) - Italy's Federica Brignone had a second career Alpine skiing World Cup overall crystal globe within her grasp after winning a super-G by the smallest possible margin on home snow in La Thuile on Friday.

The 34-year-old beat compatriot Sofia Goggia by 0.01 of a second to take the lead in the super-G standings from Switzerland's Lara Gut-Behrami, now five points behind with 100 remaining to be won.

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Goggia is out of contention, 104 points behind Brignone.

In the overall standings, Brignone is 382 clear of sole rival Gut-Behrami with a maximum 400 still up for grabs from four races at the World Cup finals in Sun Valley, Idaho, from March 20-27.

Brignone and Gut-Behrami, who was fourth-equal with compatriot Corinne Suter in Friday's race, do not normally compete in slalom, one of the four remaining disciplines.



The victory was Brignone's 10th of a season in which she has also won world championship gold in giant slalom, and 37th of her career.

The Italian could end the campaign with four of the five crystal globes since she leads the downhill standings and is only 20 points behind New Zealand's Alice Robinson in giant slalom.

Brignone won the overall World Cup in 2020 after American defending champion Mikaela Shiffrin took time out following the death of her father in February of that year.

"This is an amazing day. Winning in front of my people is something that I really wanted this year. It was one of my biggest dreams, to win here in La Thuile," said Brignone, who started with bib number six.

"I couldn't finish my career without it," added the Italian, who has next year's Milan-Cortina Olympics on home snow also to look forward to.