

Majlis Lawmakers Approved the General Outlines and Specific Provisions of a Bill Allowing an Increase in the Country's Capital Share in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Consumption of Jet Fuel Rose by More Than 6% in the Year to Late March Compared to the Previous Calendar Year, a Sign of Increased Activity in the Country's Aviation Sector Despite Sanctions

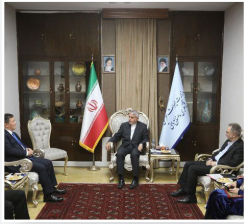
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## President Criticizes "False Polarizations," Calls for Unity and Equal Dialogue



TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has strongly criticized what he described as "false and artificial polarizations" in the country, emphasizing that serving the people should not be politicized. Speaking during a Nowruz (New Year) gathering with citizens, officials, and members of parliament, the President stressed the need for national unity and collective efforts to address economic challenges.

"Some have politicized everything, even public service," said Pezeshkian. "Helping the people is not a political act. If someone builds a school or creates jobs, opposing them due to political differences is unacceptable. We must all stand behind the leadership and work together to solve the people's problems."

He announced that the government has developed special programs to address the nation's economic hardships, particularly food insecurity. "We are creating a structure in cooperation with charities and public participation to ensure that no one in Iran goes hungry," he stated. The President proposed mosque-based and neighborhood-based approaches to streamline welfare services.

Addressing officials from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, Pezeshkian acknowledged the difficult living conditions faced by many Iranians. "The economic condition of the people is not good. We must prioritize productivity and the activation of underutilized resources this year," he said, adding that the country has the capacity to overcome problems through a shift in mindset and strategic thinking.

The President also invoked the spirit of Ramadan, referencing the prayers and Quranic surahs traditionally recited during the holy month. "These texts focus on social responsibilities like helping others and self-purification," he noted. "Our mindset must change to bring positive transformation into people's lives."

## Yemeni Forces Conducts Fresh Retaliatory Operation Against U.S. Warships



SANAA (Dispatches) - The Yemeni Armed Forces have launched an attack on the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier and its escorts in the northern Red Sea in retaliation for the continued U.S. aggression and the destruction of its vital infrastructure.

Brigadier General Yahya Saree, spokesperson for Yemen's military, stated on Sunday morning that the hours-long operation involved coordinated strikes by naval, drone, and missile units.

He added that the attack was in response to "the US aggression" on Yemen, noting it was the last of its kind for the fourth consecutive week, using cruise missiles and combat drones.

Saree emphasized that Yemeni naval forces targeted a US Navy supply ship and the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier with a homegrown anti-ship missile.

He stated that Yemen's leadership, people, and armed forces are committed to defending the Palestinian nation as a religious, moral, and humanitarian duty.

Saree said the Yemeni Armed Forces' operations against the Israeli enemy, by preventing its navigation in the Red and Arabian Seas and targeting its military and vital facilities, will not stop until the aggression against Gaza stops and the blockade is lifted completely.

The new operation came after Yemeni forces targeted an Israeli military site in Tel Aviv using a Yafa-type drone.

In a statement, the operation was described as a victory for the oppressed Palestinian people and a response to the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

## FM Signals Readiness for Nuclear Talks in Exchange for Sanctions Relief

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi announced Iran's willingness to engage in renewed negotiations over its nuclear program—provided that the international community takes concrete steps to lift what he termed "unjust sanctions" against the country.

Speaking at a Nowruz reception on Saturday evening, hosted by the Iranian Foreign Ministry in Tehran, Araqchi addressed a large audience of foreign ambassadors, heads of diplomatic missions, and their spouses. The event, celebrating the Persian New Year 1404 and Eid al-Fitr, also drew several senior Iranian officials, including ministers and high-ranking representatives from the Foreign Ministry and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

During his speech, Araqchi reiterated Iran's continued commitment to a foreign policy grounded in responsibility and principle, despite a turbulent 1403 (2024-2025) marked by regional conflict and diplomatic challenges. He emphasized that Iran remains open to diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving misunderstandings and disputes—especially with regard to its nuclear program—if matched by goodwill from other parties.

The central message of Araqchi's remarks was a clear offer: Iran is prepared to resume discussions about its nuclear program, but only in exchange for the lifting of sanctions that he described as "oppressive." He pointed to the country's past cooperation under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), saying Iran had previously implemented voluntary transparency measures to reassure the international community about the peaceful nature of its nuclear activities.

However, he reminded attendees that it was the United States that unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA, undermining years of negotiation. "Based on that experience," he said, "we are ready to engage again, this time grounded firmly in the logic of trust-building—if and when those unjust sanctions are lifted."

Touching on recent diplomatic overtures, Araqchi noted that Iran has responded to a letter from the U.S. President "in proportion to its tone and content." He highlighted that while direct talks with a party that repeatedly threatens force—contrary to the UN Charter—may be impractical, Iran remains committed to diplomacy and is open to pursuing indirect negotiations.



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"It makes little sense to hold direct dialogue with a counterpart whose senior officials express contradictory positions and threaten military action," Araqchi said. "Nevertheless, we are open to exploring indirect diplomatic channels, as we have always valued diplomacy."

Araqchi also addressed the worsening humanitarian situation in the region, particularly in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. He condemned the Israeli military's actions in these areas, labeling them "crimes and aggression," and criticized the United States for what he called "illegal attacks" on Yemen.

He called for increased solidarity among nations to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and to stop what he described as Israeli aggressions in Lebanon and Syria. "The time has come for collective action to bring an end to the suffering in the region," he said.

In a measured but firm tone, Araqchi underscored Iran's preparedness for any eventuality. While reaffirming Tehran's commitment to peaceful negotiations and constructive engagement, he stressed that the country would remain vigilant in defending its sovereignty and national interests. "Iran is serious both in its pursuit of diplomatic solutions and in its resolve to protect its sovereignty," he stated.

Concluding his remarks, Araqchi expressed hope for the expansion of Iran's relations with its neighbors and the international community in the political, economic, and cultural spheres during the new year.

Earlier in the event, Croatia's ambassador to Tehran, Drago Štambuk—serving as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps—delivered brief remarks celebrating the arrival of spring and the New Year. He urged global attention to the message of Nowruz, which he described as one of "human solidarity, peace, and coexistence."

The evening also featured performances of traditional music by Kurdish and Khorassani artists, providing a cultural highlight for guests from around the world.

This latest signal from Tehran reflects a cautious but clear opening for renewed nuclear diplomacy, as geopolitical tensions continue to grip the region. The ball, as Araqchi implied, may now be in the court of the international community—particularly Washington.

## Iran Will Not Start a War, But Is Ready for Any Conflict

TEHRAN - Major General Hossein Salami, Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), stated that Iran will never initiate a war but is fully prepared for any confrontation. "We have learned the formulas to overcome our enemies and will not retreat even a single step," he declared during a meeting with senior IRGC commanders and staff on Saturday.

Reflecting on the previous year, Salami described it as a time of intense and unprecedented challenges. "The global front of disbelief mobilized all its resources against the Islamic front," he said. Highlighting recent high-profile assassinations, including the deaths of Iranian commanders in the Israeli airstrike on Iran's consulate in Damascus, he revealed that Iran had prepared for a direct confrontation that could have marked the largest Islamic military engagement in modern history.

Salami emphasized that Iran's decision to respond to aggression was made despite global threats and diplomatic pressure. "We received messages at all hours, sometimes even begging us not to respond. But our resolve, inspired by our leader's trust in divine guidance, remained firm," he said, referencing prayers offered by Iran's Supreme Leader beside the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad.

The IRGC chief said that the retaliatory operation known as "True Promise" was only the beginning. He acknowledged the loss of Iran's president and foreign minister in a helicopter crash as a painful national tragedy, yet praised the system's stability and the smooth transition through elections that followed.

Salami likened Iran's path to the biblical story of Moses parting the Red Sea. "Just as Pharaoh's armies were drowned, today we see divine intervention in the resistance of Muslims against arrogant powers," he said, adding that the current resistance is the greatest confrontation between Islam and its enemies since the early days of the faith.

Commenting on the broader regional conflict, Salami noted the simultaneous pressures faced in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. He referenced the assassination of senior Hamas figure Ismail Haniyeh and the deaths of Hezbollah commanders, including the symbolic loss of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (note: this claim has not been independently verified). "The enemy saw these acts as a death blow to the resistance, but it only steered our resolve," he said.

He characterized the global alignment as stark: "On one side stands the U.S., Europe,



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and their allies, and on the other, the Muslim resistance. This is the most unequal war since the battle of Karbala, but they cannot destroy us."

Turning to Gaza, Salami praised the resilience of its people under siege. "Without food or water, they recite the Quran under bombs, maintaining their faith and dignity. This is a war between pure belief and the full arsenal of modern warfare," he said. He added that other fronts — Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and resistance forces in Iraq — are also standing strong, despite the imbalance of power.

He warned against underestimating the damage inflicted by the enemy, but argued that such losses are a natural part of war. "Still, the enemy is frustrated. They cannot defeat a people armed with faith. Israel has no psychological or political peace. If U.S. arms shipments stopped, they would collapse like autumn leaves."

Describing the "True Promise" operation as a "real war," Salami said it exposed the limitations of Israel's layered air defense. "Despite Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow and Aegis systems — the densest defense network in history — 185 of our missiles struck their targets," he claimed.

Salami rejected enemy propaganda portraying Iran as vulnerable, stating that their own systems are more porous. "The enemy failed to deter us. They could not stop Hezbollah, couldn't sustain a campaign in Gaza, and even the U.S. admits Yemen remains defiant." He dismissed efforts to portray developments in Syria as an Iranian failure, stating, "We helped eliminate the ISIS threat, but Syria's internal challenges are not our responsibility."

The IRGC chief criticized Western miscalculations and warned that Iran would never accept imposed conditions. "We are born for jihad. We are students of Ashura. This is our identity," he said, reiterating that Iran will never start a war, "but we are prepared for all-out conflict."

Salami concluded with a stern warning: "If the enemy forces our hand, they will witness the true scope of our power. We are ready — spiritually, materially, and strategically. We fear nothing, and we long to meet God by defeating our enemies."

He also echoed a recent directive from the Supreme Leader for the armed forces to double their efforts. "We work day and night. We are in the field, unshaken, and eager to fulfill our divine mission," he said.

## Iran Maintains Global Steel Ranking Despite Sharp Drop in Production



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TEHRAN - According to the latest report from the World Steel Association, Iran has retained its position as the 10th largest steel producer globally, despite a significant decline in production. In February 2025 (January 31–March 1), Iran's crude steel output fell by 21.8% year-on-year, reaching 1.7 million tonnes.

The World Steel Association's recent global report highlights a continued downward trend in crude steel production worldwide. In February, total global steel production dropped to 144.7 million tonnes — a 3.4% decrease compared to the same month in 2024, and a 4.4% decline from January 2025. Cumulative global production for the first two months of 2025 reached 302 million tonnes, marking a 2.2% decline year-on-year.

While Iran had already reported a 24.1% drop in January production (2.2 million tonnes), the February numbers show a slight deceleration in this downward trend. However, challenges remain, particularly due to domestic energy shortages and reduced demand in export markets, which the report cites as the primary factors behind the country's production decline.

Among major producers, China continued to lead the global market but saw its February output drop 3.3% to 78.9 million tonnes. This decrease is attributed largely to reduced demand in the country's real estate sector and new U.S. tariffs on Chinese steel exports. Despite this, China's average daily steel production in January and February showed a slight 0.7% increase, and overall exports from the country rose 6.7% during the same period, indicating success in finding new markets.

India, in contrast, posted a strong performance, solidifying its second-place global ranking with a 6.3% year-on-year production increase in February. Its average daily production over the first two months of 2025 also rose by 6.8%. South Korea was another bright spot, registering a modest 0.7% increase, reaching 5.2 million tonnes in February.

In total, eight of the top ten steel-producing countries recorded year-on-year declines in February, including the United States, where production fell by 7% to 6 million tonnes. This drop is partly due to new tariffs introduced in March, adding a 25% duty on imported steel and aluminum, along with weakened domestic demand.

## Solving People's Problems Requires Coordination Between Branches of Power



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker emphasized that resolving the country's challenges requires close coordination among the three branches of government and the full, precise implementation of the Seventh Development Plan.

In a Nowruz meeting held on Saturday, attended by members of the Cabinet, ministers, executive officials, provincial governors, and current and former members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said: "The key to success and accelerated progress in the country lies in adhering to the Seventh Development Plan and fostering coordination and unity among the government's branches and institutions."

Highlighting the Supreme Leader's Nowruz message that emphasized "investment in production," Qalibaf added that ministries must not only attract large-scale investments but also find ways to mobilize public capital to generate employment and entrepreneurship, which would invigorate the national economy.

He also stressed the need for the comprehensive and full implementation of the law on electronic coupon distribution (kalabarg) aimed at supporting vulnerable groups, noting that such measures are essential for achieving social justice and welfare.

Addressing the country's economic management, Qalibaf urged government economic officials to devise practical plans to stabilize markets, manage the cost of living, and prevent the economic pressures that worry the public.

Turning to agricultural issues, he highlighted the importance of supporting farmers, promoting knowledge-based agriculture, and achieving self-sufficiency in strategic crops as top priorities for the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad.

# IRAN NEWS



## Iran to Resume Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Iran will hopefully resume offshore oil and gas exploration activities in the Persian Gulf for the first time in five years, says a senior official at the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). Mohyeddin Jafari, head of Exploration Directorate at the NIOC, said Saturday that exploration operations at sea had been halted since 2019 due to a shortage of offshore rigs, according to a report by the Oil Ministry. However, he added, following a new tender, a contractor with a marine rig has been selected, paving the way for operations to restart in 2025 in shared border areas with neighboring countries.

## JMMC Plays Great Role in Maintaining Oil Market Stability, Balance



TEHRAN (Shana) - The oil minister expressed confidence that the OPEC+ Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) will assist member countries in playing an active, precise, and cautious role in the oil market by leveraging its experience in accurately assessing market developments.

Speaking via videoconference at the 59th JMMC meeting on Saturday, the minister congratulated attendees on the arrival of spring and Eid al-Fitr.

He thanked OPEC+ members—particularly the committee's chair and vice-chair—for their efforts to maintain unity and strengthen cooperation amid the current sensitive oil market conditions.

He also emphasized the committee's critical role in ensuring market stability and balance.

On the sidelines of the meeting, Mohsen Paknejad told Shana about the current state of the oil market: "as we all know, the world today faces multiple uncertainties, including the impact of trade tariffs on the global economy, supply chain shifts, and geopolitical tensions. However, there are also reasons for optimism."

Citing OPEC's latest monthly oil market report, he noted that global economic growth is projected at 3.1% in 2025 and 3.2% in 2026, with oil demand expected to rise by 1.4 million barrels per day in both years. "I am confident the JMMC will guide member countries in taking measured and proactive steps in the oil market, drawing on its expertise in evaluating market trends," he added.

The minister stressed: "I am certain the discussions and exchanges in these meetings will play a key role in effectively monitoring OPEC+ decisions and adherence to agreed production levels—a vital issue for producers, consumers, and the global economy in these sensitive times."

## ICCIMA President Stresses Need for Joint Investment With Foreign Countries



TEHRAN - Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, outlined key strategies and priorities for investment in the country's production sector.

According to Hassanzadeh, the Supreme Leader has for several years emphasized economic growth and development by selecting annual mottos based on scientific knowledge and national economic needs.

He stressed that investment in production is the country's most crucial economic issue, a point rightly highlighted by the Supreme Leader. "Iran has significant capacity in terms of resources and the capabilities of its managers and economic actors," Hassanzadeh said. "If this capacity is fully recognized and utilized, it can lead to growth and expansion in both investment and production."

Highlighting the need for infrastructure development to attract investment, Hassanzadeh pointed out that ensuring capital security, encouraging investors, and maintaining economic stability are essential. He noted that investors must be able to market their products globally after production.

He acknowledged that Iran's economy faces significant challenges due to both external sanctions and internal issues. "Statistics show we need to triple our production capacity, yet the infrastructure, economic roadmap, and industrial sector directions remain unclear to many economic stakeholders," he said. "Despite the passage of over 20 years since the enactment of Article 44 of the Constitution on privatization, only 30% of economic assets have been transferred to the private sector, with more than 70% still under government control."

Hassanzadeh warned that unfair competition between the government and the private sector erodes investor confidence in production, urging the state to resolve these problems to channel capital into productive avenues.

He concluded by emphasizing the need for decisive action to support liquidity, encourage investment, and provide guarantees for investors in line with the year's national economic slogan. "Each year, slogans are announced to promote economic development, but unfortunately, they often remain limited to billboards and official letterheads. What we need is a solid action plan—especially to promote production and joint investment with foreign and neighboring countries that can bring significant added value."

## Iran, Kazakhstan Strengthen Cultural and Tourism Ties



TEHRAN - In a strategic move to bolster bilateral relations and enhance tourism between Iran and Kazakhstan, the Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts announced plans to extend visa-free travel between the two countries from 14 days to one month, along with increasing the number of direct flights.

During a meeting in Tehran with Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Iran, Ventalap Onalbaiyev, Minister Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri emphasized the importance of expanding cooperation in the areas of culture, tourism, and handicrafts. Highlighting Kazakhstan's rich cultural heritage and shared historical ties with Iran, the minister underlined the potential for deepening bilateral collaboration through what he called "cultural diplomacy."

"The development of strategic memoranda of understanding can open new horizons for cultural cooperation between our nations," Salehi Amiri stated.

The minister pointed out that introducing longer visa waivers and establishing more direct flights between cities in both countries could be game changers in increasing people-to-people interactions. He proposed targeted investment packages aimed at building five-star hotels and inviting prominent cultural figures from Kazakhstan to visit Iran, to stimulate mutual understanding and cultural exchange.

Salehi Amiri also reiterated Iran's readiness to host joint cultural and artistic exhibitions, describing them as valuable tools for fostering deeper connections between the two nations and enriching mutual cultural discourse.

Referring to the two countries' shared celebration of Nowruz, which was successfully registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity thanks to regional collaboration, Salehi Amiri praised Kazakhstan's efforts and support. He also expressed hope for increased cooperation in identifying and registering other joint heritage sites with UNESCO.

"Exchange of expertise in the fields of historical restoration, archaeology, and specialized training is essential for maintaining long-term cooperation in heritage preservation," he added.

Looking ahead, the minister revealed plans for a joint meeting between senior

officials from Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts within the next two weeks. The session aims to operationalize the proposals discussed and lay out a comprehensive roadmap for future cooperation.

Kazakhstan's Ambassador Onalbaiyev echoed the sentiment of strengthened collaboration, lauding Iran's cultural and natural attractions. He emphasized Kazakhstan's commitment to fostering robust relations with Iran across multiple sectors.

"Our President has extended an official invitation to the Iranian President to visit Astana," Onalbaiyev noted, confirming Kazakhstan's readiness to expand cooperation in cultural heritage, tourism, and the handicrafts sector.

The ambassador proposed practical initiatives such as identifying and promoting shared historical landmarks, co-producing cultural documentaries, and setting up expert working groups in relevant fields. He also affirmed Kazakhstan's full willingness to implement these plans.

Iran and Kazakhstan share centuries of historical and cultural ties, stemming from their geographic proximity and mutual influence through the Silk Road. Both countries celebrate Nowruz, a traditional New Year festivity that underscores their common cultural roots.

In recent years, Iran has sought to boost tourism and cultural diplomacy as part of its broader international engagement strategy. Kazakhstan, with its growing interest in diversifying economic partnerships and promoting cultural soft power, has proven to be a valuable regional partner.

Efforts to ease travel and increase air connectivity reflect a larger trend in Central Asia and the Middle East, where regional governments are leveraging tourism and cultural cooperation to foster diplomatic goodwill and economic development.

If implemented, the initiatives announced during the meeting could significantly improve tourism flows and promote sustainable cultural partnerships. By enhancing infrastructure, easing travel restrictions, and supporting cultural initiatives, both Iran and Kazakhstan aim to move beyond traditional diplomatic exchanges and build enduring people-centered relations.

## "Investment for Production" and "Countering Sanctions" Programs Unveiled

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization announced the launch of two comprehensive national programs titled "Investment for Production" and "Countering Sanctions," aimed at supporting the country's development and addressing current economic challenges.

Speaking on Saturday during the organization's annual Nowruz (New Year) gathering, Seyed Hamid Pourmohammadi, Vice President and head of the Planning and Budget Organization, provided a detailed report on the organization's performance over the past year and outlined its main priorities for the new year.

"Spring is the smile of God upon nature," Pourmohammadi said, adding that he sees signs of divine blessings in the new year and expressed hope for making the most of this opportunity to serve and reduce poverty and shortcomings in the country.

Pourmohammadi described working within the Planning and Budget Organization as a rare and valuable opportunity granted by God, emphasizing the organization's key role in national development. "Whenever the country has needed development, this organization has been its messenger," he said.

He highlighted that the collective goal among staff is to support national development, solve public issues, and oversee the performance of various sectors. He further stressed the organization's responsibility to create a calm and secure environment for expert analysis and policy development.

The Vice President also revealed plans to transform the organization's library into a center for intellectual exchange and open discussion.

"A key aspect of expert work is the ability to present research findings and analyses in a stress-free environment for discussion and review," he said. The library has been repurposed to serve this

function, and the organization's document archives have also been reorganized.

Pourmohammadi announced the establishment of deeper collaborations with universities across Iran to help address national issues through research and expert dialogue. A series of expert meetings and academic exchanges are scheduled as part of this effort.

Pourmohammadi reflected on earlier concerns about budget deficits at the start of the current administration, noting that thanks to the support of the Supreme Leader, heads of government branches, and executive agencies, the country managed to pass the fiscal year 1403 (2024–2025) without major financial issues.

He officially announced the development of two major initiatives: "Investment for Production", which aligns with the national slogan of the year and focuses on strengthening domestic production; "Countering Sanctions", a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the effects of international restrictions.

He also reported the successful drafting of bylaws and implementation guidelines related to the Seventh Development Plan, which took effect in 1403.

Pourmohammadi emphasized that the views and recommendations of the Planning and Budget Organization are now being seriously considered by the country's governing bodies. He expressed hope that this recognition would be translated into tangible progress in infrastructure and national development.

In closing, he thanked all staff members across the central organization, provincial branches, and affiliated agencies for their efforts, which have led to greater satisfaction among executive departments.

## Iran Reports \$57.8b in Non-Oil Exports



TEHRAN - Iran's non-oil exports reached \$57.8 billion in the past year, according to the Deputy Head of Planning and International Affairs at Iran Customs Administration. Meanwhile, the country imported over \$8 billion worth of raw gold bars, contributing to total imports of \$72.4 billion and pushing the trade balance into the negative.

Abolfazl Akbarpour shared the 12-month non-oil foreign trade statistics for the Iranian calendar year 1403 (March 2024–March 2025). He stated that Iran exported more than 152 million tons of non-oil goods, worth \$57.8 billion. This marked a 10% increase in volume and a 15.62% rise in dollar value compared to the previous year.

Regarding imports, Akbarpour said Iran brought in 39.3 million tons of goods valued at \$72.4 billion. While the import volume decreased by 0.77%, the value rose by 8.22% compared to 1402.

Akbarpour highlighted the main non-oil export commodities for 1403, including natural gas, liquefied propane, liquefied butane, methanol, petroleum gases and other gaseous hydrocarbons, and gas condensates. He noted that natural gas was the top export item, with an average customs value of \$314 per ton.

Other significant exports included petroleum bitumen, urea, non-alloy iron and steel billets, iron and steel bars, and polyethylene.

## Iran Moves to Facilitate Return and Investment of Iranians Abroad



TEHRAN - The government is taking steps to remove obstacles faced by Iranians living abroad who wish to return or invest in their home country, according to the Deputy Minister of Tourism at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.

Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey told IRNA that the Secretariat of the High Council for Iranians Abroad is currently reviewing a proposal aimed at addressing various legal, political, and bureaucratic barriers that have discouraged many expatriates from visiting or investing in Iran. Once passed, the plan is expected to resolve many of the core concerns of the Iranian diaspora.

"We need to address the concerns of our fellow Iranians abroad from within the country," Bandpey said. "This proposal aims to clear hurdles related to investment opportunities, legal matters, judicial and political issues, and even military service obligations for their children. We hope its approval will encourage many to return permanently or prioritize visiting Iran for tourism and reconnecting with their homeland."

Responding to a question about the noticeable drop in visits by expatriate Iranians, Bandpey noted that while many Iranians abroad remain deeply attached to their country, multiple factors have contributed to their reduced presence in Iran in recent years.

"Iranians living abroad are often financially capable and well-integrated into their host societies. Many still hold a strong emotional connection to Iran and love every part of this beautiful and culturally rich land," he said. "However, third- and fourth-generation Iranians have been influenced by widespread anti-Iran narratives pushed by foreign media and opponents of the Islamic Republic, which has shaped their perception negatively."

Bandpey stressed the importance of re-engaging these younger generations by building trust and offering a more accurate and welcoming portrayal of Iran.

The Deputy Minister emphasized that participation in international tourism and cultural exhibitions can help counteract the negative image of Iran projected abroad. Events like FITUR in Spain, ITB Berlin in Germany, and EMITT in Turkey are key platforms to showcase Iran's true image and rich heritage.

"These exhibitions serve as an antidote to Iranophobia," he explained. "By promoting our historical and cultural treasures, we can challenge the false perceptions and rebuild trust."

Bandpey underlined that Iranians abroad represent a valuable and untapped target market for Iran's tourism sector. Their financial stability means they are not necessarily looking for discounted travel but are more interested in safety, comfort, and a positive experience.

## Congo, M23 Rebels Hold First Talks

DOHA (Dispatches) - Congo's government and M23 rebels last week held private talks in Qatar for the first time since the rebels conducted a lightning offensive in the country's east, a source briefed on the discussions told Reuters. The talks, which will continue next week in Doha, offer the greatest hope of a halt to hostilities since M23 seized eastern Congo's two largest cities, a rapid advance that since January has resulted in thousands of deaths and forced hundreds of thousands more from their homes. The fighting has raised fears of a wider regional war, as Congo's neighbours Uganda and Burundi also have troops in the region.



# IRAN NEWS

## Panama Wants Respectful Ties With U.S. Amid Canal Threats



PANAMA CITY (Dispatches) - Panama hopes to maintain a "respectful" relationship with the United States, even as President Donald Trump has repeated threats to retake the Panama Canal, Foreign Minister Javier Martinez-Acha said. His comments came ahead of a visit next week by U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, a trip made more urgent against the backdrop of Trump's threats and his allegations of Chinese interference in the canal.

"We discussed illegal migration, organized crime, drug trafficking and (other issues)," Martinez-Acha wrote on X of a call Friday with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau. "It was a cordial and constructive exchange."

"I reiterated that all cooperation from Panama will take place under the framework of our constitution, our laws, and the Canal Neutrality Treaty," he wrote. "Relations with the U.S. must remain respectful, transparent and mutually beneficial."

The U.S. State Department said Landau had "expressed gratitude for Panama's cooperation in halting illegal immigration and working with the United States to secure a nearly 98 percent decrease in illegal immigration through the Darien jungle," an arduous path northward followed by many migrants.

The two officials also discussed the sale last month by the Hong Kong company CK Hutchison to giant U.S. asset manager BlackRock of its concession in ports at either end of the Panama Canal, Martinez-Acha added.

Panama's comptroller has been conducting an audit of Hutchison since January. Landau "recognized Panama's actions in curbing malign Chinese Communist Party influence," the State Department said.

## Hundreds Gather Across Europe to Protest Against Trump and Musk



PARIS (Dispatches) - Hundreds of people protested in European cities on Saturday against US President Donald Trump and his adviser Elon Musk, following a bruising week for financial markets after Trump unveiled sweeping global tariffs.

In the French capital of Paris, about 200 people, mostly American, gathered on the Place de la République to protest against Trump. Some gave speeches to denounce the president, with protesters waving banners ranging from "Resist Tyrant", "Rule of Law" "Feminists for Freedom not fascism" and "Save Democracy". One sang and played the Bob Dylan song Masters of War.

In the German city of Frankfurt, the "Hands Off!" demonstration was organised by Democrats Abroad, the official organisation of the Democratic Party for US citizens living overseas.

In Berlin, protesting in front of a Tesla showroom, demonstrators held placards calling on fellow Americans living in Germany to protest for "an end to the chaos" at home.

One of your browser extensions seems to be blocking the video player from loading. To watch this Gathering at Frankfurt's Opernplatz, members of the overseas Democrats group demanded the resignation of the US president, with placard slogans reading "Restore Democracy", "Hands off our personal data" and "The world is tired of your bullshit Donald, be gone!"

In Berlin, slogans directed at Musk read "Shut up Elon, no one voted for you", and a dog wore a sign that said "Dogs against DOGE," referring to the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) run by senior adviser Musk, an initiative of the second Trump administration to reduce federal spending waste, fraud and abuse.

Protests against Trump and Musk were also held in other European cities, including London and Lisbon. In the British capital, a few hundred people gathered in Trafalgar Square, holding signs saying "Proud American Ashamed" and "WTAF America?" The crowd chanted "Hands off Canada", "Hands off Greenland" and "Hands off Ukraine" while listening to speeches criticising Trump.

## India, UAE to Develop Sri Lanka Energy Hub



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - India and the United Arab Emirates agreed to develop an energy hub in Sri Lanka, India's foreign ministry said on Saturday, as New Delhi's competition with China grows in the Indian Ocean island nation.

The three nations signed the pact for the hub during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka, the first by a global leader since Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake took office in September.

New Delhi and Colombo have worked to deepen ties as India's southern neighbour recovers from a severe financial crisis triggered in 2022, during which India provided \$4 billion in financial assistance.

Saturday's agreement boosts New Delhi's competition with China, whose state energy firm Sinopec has signed a deal to build a \$3.2-billion oil refinery in Sri Lanka's southern port city of Hambantota.

The energy hub in the strategically important city of Trincomalee, a natural harbour in the Sri Lanka's east, will involve construction of a multi-product pipeline and may include using a World War Two tank farm partly held by the Sri Lankan subsidiary of Indian Oil Corp, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told reporters in Colombo.

## Israeli Troops Accused of Firing on Emergency Vehicles

CAIRO (Dispatches) - A Palestinian paramedic who was present at an incident in which 15 of his colleagues were killed in southern Gaza last month said he saw Israeli troops firing on emergency vehicles that he later saw stained with blood.

After several days of uncertainty about the whereabouts of the paramedics, Red Crescent and U.N. officials found the bodies of the 15 emergency and aid workers buried in a mass grave in southern Gaza, accusing Israeli forces of killing them. Another worker is still missing.

Munther Abed, a volunteer for the Palestinian Red Crescent, said he was responding to a call with two colleagues near Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip on March 23 when he was detained by the Israeli soldiers shortly before they opened fire on other emergency vehicles.

He said he had not been able to see exactly what happened when the soldiers opened fire. But his account corresponds with assertions by officials from the Palestinian Red Crescent and the United Nations that the emergency workers from the Red Cross, Red Crescent, U.N. and Palestinian Civil Emergency service were targeted by Israeli troops.

The Israeli military has opened an investigation into the incident, which by its account occurred when unmarked vehicles approached an Israeli position in the dark without lights or special markings and without previous coordination, factors it said had made the vehicles' advance appear suspicious.

The military said the soldiers who opened fire had killed a number of Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants who were travelling in vehicles marked with the Palestinian Red Crescent signs.

The Palestinian Red Crescent describes Abed as "the lone survivor" of the incident, with the fate of the missing paramedic still unclear.



Abed said he and colleagues had received a call to go out to help wounded people at around dawn following an air strike in the Al-Hashashen area in Rafah, close to the border with Egypt.

"We moved right away, it was me and two other colleagues. As soon as we arrived there, we came under fire and they detained us," he told Reuters by phone from his house in Khan Younis, referring to shooting by Israeli soldiers.

After he was detained, he said he lost sight of his two colleagues. As he was standing near the soldiers, he said he saw other emergency

vehicles approaching the Israeli soldiers' position.

"I could see the vehicle of the Civil Emergency. The soldiers began shooting at the vehicles, they fired heavily," he said. "It was dark and I couldn't see what happened to the people there, but they (the soldiers) fired heavily. They asked me to duck down and they were firing heavily. I felt as if the bullets were hitting me personally."

On Saturday, the Red Crescent issued a video obtained from the cellphone of a paramedic found buried in the mass grave.

Filmed from inside a moving vehicle, it appears to show a clearly marked convoy of ambulances and a fire truck driving at dawn with their red lights flashing. After they stop by a vehicle that had veered off the road, two rescue workers and another man can be seen before a volley of gunshots is heard. Reuters was able to verify the location of the video near the Tal al-Sultan area west of Rafah city in Rafah governorate.

The Israeli military said in response to a request for comment about the video that the event on March 23, 2025, was under thorough examination.

"All claims, including the documentation circulating about the incident, will be thoroughly and deeply examined to understand the sequence of events and the handling of the situation," it said.

It was only after daybreak that Abed, who remained held at the location where he was initially detained, was able to get a clearer picture of what had happened.

"With the first light of the day, things become clearer, I saw the vehicles of the Civil Emergency and the Red Crescent, the doors of all the vehicles were open and there was blood on the vehicles," he said.

He said he saw a bulldozer dig four holes in the sandy ground before crushing the wrecked vehicles and burying them.

## Tens of Thousands March in U.S. Against Trump Devastation, Economic Lunacy

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of protesters flooded the streets of major U.S. cities yesterday to oppose the divisive policies of President Donald Trump, in the largest demonstrations since his return to the White House.

Opponents of the Republican president's policies—from government staffing cuts to trade tariffs and eroding civil liberties—rallied in Washington, New York, Houston, Florida, Colorado and Los Angeles, among other locations.

"I am so angry, I'm so mad, all the time, yes. A bunch of privileged, white alleged rapists are controlling our country. It's not great," said New York painter Shaina Kesner, 43, joining a crowd marching through the heart of Manhattan.

In Washington, thousands of demonstrators—many traveling from across the United States—gathered on the National Mall where dozens of speakers rallied opposition to Trump.

"We have about 100 people who have come down by bus and van from New Hampshire to protest against this outrageous administration (that) is causing us to lose our allies across the world, and causing devastation to people here at home," said Diane Kolifrath, 64, a bike tour guide.

"They're gutting our government."



In Los Angeles, a woman dressed as a character from dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* waved a large flag with the message: "Get out of my uterus," a reference to Trump's anti-abortion policies.

In Denver, Colorado, one man in a large crowd of protesters held up a placard reading "No king for USA."

In the US, a loose coalition of left-leaning groups like MoveOn and Women's March organized "Hands Off" events in more than 1,000 cities and in every congressional district, the groups said.

Trump has angered many Americans by moving aggressively to downsize the government, unilaterally impose conservative values and sharply pressure even friendly countries over borders and trade, causing stock markets to tank.

"We're out here to stop the, honestly, fascism," protester Dominic Santella told AFP in Boston. "We're stopping a leader from... jailing his opponents, stopping him from jailing just random people, immigrants."

Many Democrats are irate that their party, in the minority in both houses of Congress, has seemed so helpless to resist Trump's moves.

