

Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht-e-Ravanchi and Olof Skoog, European Union Deputy Foreign Policy Chief, Discussed Nuclear Issue, Lifting Sanctions Against Iran, and the Prospect of Negotiations

IRAN NEWS

Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi Describes a Trilateral in Moscow Meeting Between Iran, China, and Russia as Productive and Constructive

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IAEA Can Resolve Remaining Issues Through Independent Approach



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Permanent Representative to the United Nations says the Islamic Republic and the UN nuclear agency can resolve their remaining differences over Tehran's nuclear program if the IAEA adopts "an independent, technical, and impartial approach."

"Iran and the Agency have been cooperating for a long time, which enables them to resolve their few remaining differences," Ambassador Amir Saeed Iravani said while addressing the UN Disarmament Commission on Tuesday.

Iravani, however, stated that this is "provided that external political pressures on the Agency cease and the IAEA adopts an independent, technical, impartial, and professional approach." He was referring to a dispute triggered by the Agency's claims of "uranium traces" found at "undeclared nuclear sites" in Iran, allegations Tehran firmly rejects.

In May 2023, the IAEA announced it had closed the file on one of these alleged "undeclared" sites after progress was made in cooperation with Tehran. Iran has consistently stated it is prepared to continue its collaboration with the Agency to resolve any remaining issues.

Iravani underscored Iran's unwavering commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its constructive cooperation with the IAEA, noting that 22% of all IAEA inspections globally have taken place in Iran—an unprecedented level of transparency.

"I would like to underscore that Iran remains committed to the NPT and works constructively with the IAEA to ensure transparency and compliance with safeguards agreements."

"To that end, Iran has allowed extensive IAEA inspections, amounting to 22% of all IAEA inspections. This level of inspection has never been carried out in any country before in history."

Regional Countries Must Stand United: U.S. Cannot Act Alone in the Area



TEHRAN - The Vice President of the Islamic Consultative Assembly emphasized that the United States cannot take a single step in the region on its own, stating that regional countries need to be united and, despite minor disagreements in certain areas, should support one another while prioritizing regional interests.

In a meeting on Wednesday in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, during the 150th Inter-Parliamentary Union conference, Hamidreza Hajibabaei engaged in discussions with Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, the Chairman of the Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs Committee of the UAE Federal National Council.

Hajibabaei noted that during the Inter-Parliamentary Union assembly, the suffering of the Palestinian people received global attention, reinforcing the need for parliamentary coordination among Islamic nations. He remarked, "If they (Islamic countries) do not showcase their strength, unilateralism from a single country will distress all nations. Currently, we see that the U.S. disregards even European countries, with its officials only focusing on their own interests."

The Vice President stated that the U.S. exhibits a bullying tendency in the region, aiming to impose its dominion on the world and the area. He also addressed nuclear negotiations, asserting that Iran is not afraid of negotiations but refrains from direct talks due to the historical unreliability of the U.S.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that the country will not compromise on its nuclear achievements, stating, "We will not trade our nuclear accomplishments." During the National Nuclear Technology Day ceremony on Wednesday, President Pezeshkian paid tribute to the martyrs in the nuclear field and highlighted the role of knowledge and awareness in elevating humanity. He noted that the true power and dignity of a nation comes from education and experience, acknowledging the efforts of countless individuals who have labored in pursuit of this progress.

Pezeshkian remarked on the narratives that portray Iran as a terrorist state, asserting instead that Iran is a victim of terrorism. He referred to the 23,000 researchers and scientists who have lost their lives to targeted assassinations, underscoring that these acts were deliberate attempts to hinder the nation's progress. He stated, "Despite these sacrifices, our pursuit of development will not be stifled; many are willing to sacrifice their lives for our country's success."

The President reiterated that Iran is not seeking to develop nuclear weapons, countering claims about the country's intentions. "No one holds a higher position than the Supreme Leader, who has publicly stated that we do not seek to create nuclear bombs. You can verify this repeatedly, but we will continue to need nuclear science and energy in all aspects, a need that cannot be undermined," he said.

He emphasized that while Iran does not seek confrontations, it will robustly defend itself against any aggression. "The more we are pressured, the stronger we will become," he stated, affirming Iran's commitment to peaceful relations with all Islamic nations based on brotherhood and solidarity.

Turning to international relations, Pezeshkian criticized the Israeli regime for its violent actions against civilians, which he claimed are supported by Western powers. He posed questions regarding the likelihood of obtaining external support in times of vulnerability, predicting that such a scenario would lead to continued injustices against the Iranian people.

Pezeshkian mentioned his regular meetings with the Supreme Leader, expressing that there is no opposition to American investors looking to engage in the Iranian market, provided they respect the nation's sovereignty. He emphasized that Iran should not be a place for conspiracies aimed at subverting its government.

In closing, he affirmed that Iran is open to negotiations, though not in a direct manner, due to a lack of trust stemming from ongoing sanctions against its communication and economic avenues.

This report follows the President's visit to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, where he reviewed the latest advancements in the country's nuclear technology sector, including innovations in fuel cycles, heavy water production, radiopharmaceuticals, and plasma technology.

Americans Know Extent of Iran's Defensive Power; Iran Doesn't Trust U.S.

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign minister says the US is well aware of the formidable nature of the Islamic Republic's defensive capabilities, while underlining the country's sufficient preparedness to defend itself, and noting that the Islamic Republic does not trust Washington, but will nonetheless test it in upcoming indirect negotiations.

"At the very least, the Americans know well how far the Islamic Republic of Iran's defensive power can extend," Abbas Araqchi said during a meeting with Algerian elites and media executives in the African country's capital Algiers on Tuesday.

The top diplomat made it clear that Iran's commitment to peace should not be mistaken for weakness, asserting, "The Islamic Republic of Iran does not seek war, but if necessary, it knows well how to defend itself."

He separately underscored, "We doubt the intentions of the US and are not certain they possess the will for a fair and serious negotiation, but we will test them."

The latter comments concerned the prospect of indirect negotiations that are set to begin between Araqchi and the United States regional envoy Steve Witkoff in the Omani capital Muscat on Saturday with Omani Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi as mediator.

"If their demand is for Iran not to pursue nuclear weapons, that demand can be examined," Araqchi said. "But if they have other objectives in mind, they may not achieve them," he added.

In the same context, the official dismissed the West's claims - as spearheaded by Washington - that the Islamic Republic was pursuing nuclear weapons.

"The claim that Iran seeks nuclear weapons is a baseless accusation," he said. "We are confident in the peaceful nature of our nuclear program and are prepared to address any concern or worry through diplomacy."

The foreign minister reiterated his and other Iranian officials' earlier remarks that direct negotiations with the United States were off the table as long as Washington retained its hostile posture.

"Negotiations must take place from a position of equality, fairness, and dignity, not under 'maximum pressure' and military threats," he said.

"As long as 'maximum pressure' and threats continue, fair conditions for negotiation do not exist, and we will not engage in direct talks," Araqchi stated, referring to the US's way of sustaining and even ramping up its already illegal and unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic, while repeatedly threatening Tehran with military aggression.

Nonetheless, Iran has left the door open for diplomacy, Araqchi noted.

"The path of diplomacy is not closed, and we have announced that we are open to indirect negotiations with the U.S.," he said.



Elsewhere in his remarks, the official warned that the Israeli regime was actively attempting to ignite broader regional conflict, pointing to Tel Aviv's expansionist regional aggression, namely its war of genocide on the Gaza Strip as well as its escalated deadly aggression towards the occupied West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria.

"In recent months, we have had wide-ranging consultations and talks with regional countries," he said. "I believe there is a proper understanding among them of the need to stand up to Israel's warmongering, and I hope this continues."

The top diplomat pointed to his earlier meeting with his Algerian counterpart and the country's president, during which he had highlighted strong bilateral ties and common regional concerns, especially regarding the crisis across the Palestinian territories.

The foreign minister condemned the Israeli regime's October 2023-present genocide in Gaza and intensified deadly aggression across the West Bank, warning of a broader plan to erase the Palestinian identity altogether.

"The Zionist regime seeks to expel people from both Gaza and the West Bank, eliminate Palestinian identity, and fully occupy Palestinian lands," he warned.

Araqchi, however, stressed that despite recent losses among regional civilians and resistance leaders at the hands of the regime, the concept of resistance against Israeli occupation and aggression remained a vital, indestructible force throughout the region.

"There is no doubt that resistance has taken hits in recent months and that its commanders have been martyred, but this does not mean the loss of the existence or concept of resistance," he said.

"Resistance is a cause, a school of thought, and a sacred goal. These things cannot be destroyed by bombs and killings, and essentially cannot be destroyed at all."

Citing the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah's past resilience, including in the face of the regime's assassination of Sayyed Abbas al-Mousawi, one of the group's former leaders, he argued that the resistance had always returned stronger after hardship.

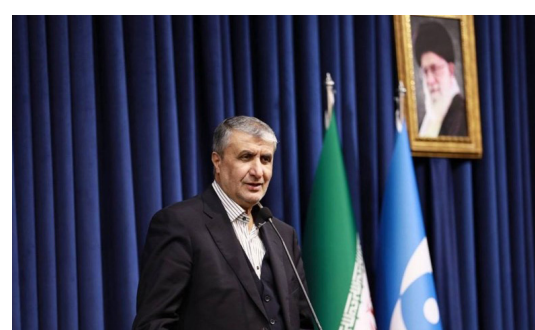
The remarks suggested that neither Hezbollah nor any other regional resistance movement would grow weak as a result of Israeli atrocities such as Tel Aviv's assassination of Hezbollah's former secretary-general Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

In contrast to Western narratives, Araqchi emphasized, resistance movements in Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen were independent actors, not "Iranian proxies."

"What unites various resistance groups is a shared cause and goal, nothing else," he said. "The West tries to portray these resistance groups as Iran's proxies, which is a mistake."

In the meantime, he reiterated Iran's position that it supported any movement, whether Sunni or Shia, which was committed to justice and liberation, regardless of political alignment with Tehran.

IAEO Chief Declares Country's Advancements in Nuclear Reactor Development



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Mohammad Esلمي, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, announced on Wednesday that Iran has entered the third phase of its nuclear power development. He emphasized that the country has now become a builder and operator of indigenous research and power reactors.

Speaking on the occasion of National Nuclear Technology Day, Esلمي highlighted the achievements of Iran's nuclear program over the past three years, stating, "We have achieved approximately 150 scientific, technological, and industrial advancements each year. This demonstrates a strong will. The Atomic Energy Organization has solutions for all issues pertaining to the country, and the results are evident, showcasing that these active efforts have elevated Iran's standing among its people."

Esلمي pointed out the investment aspects of these activities, explaining that Iran has pursued efforts in three main sectors. The first is investment in healthcare, which has significantly supported the medical field. He mentioned that in addition to producing 68 radiopharmaceuticals, Iran has entered clinical trials for 20 new radiopharmaceuticals, aiming to establish itself as a global hub in this area.

The second sector is food security, where efforts are being made to prevent pests from affecting the 130 million tons of annual agricultural production. Over the past two years, Iran has expanded its radiation treatment capacity to handle this volume, which has a noticeable economic impact by preventing losses in up to 40 million tons of produce. In response to these opportunities, discussions on nuclear investments were initiated last March at the Chamber of Commerce, attracting interest from investors.

Esلمي also elaborated on the strategic phases in nuclear industry development, revealing that Iran has successfully passed through two phases, focusing initially on industrial nuclear capacity, particularly enrichment. He celebrated the achievement of a stable enrichment capacity, marking almost 19 years in this endeavor.

Iran Signals Openness to International Investment in Tourism Sector



TEHRAN - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has declared the country's readiness for long-term cooperation with regional and international investors, positioning tourism as a strategic, not just economic, opportunity for global engagement and cultural exchange.

Speaking at the "High-Level International Tourism Roundtable" during the UAE Annual Investment Meeting (AIM), Minister Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri highlighted Iran's vast cultural, historical, and natural assets, emphasizing that the nation is prepared to embrace forward-looking, civilization-based, and smart investment approaches in tourism.

"Iran is not only a land of ancient heritage but a country with a strategic policy to develop tourism in its long-term vision," he stated, noting the sector's potential to boost employment, stimulate underdeveloped regions, and improve the country's international image.

Salehi-Amiri underscored Iran's rich tourism offerings, which include 28 UNESCO World Heritage sites, thousands of nationally registered cultural and natural attractions, and unique potential in religious, health, eco, cultural, and nomadic tourism. He described investment in Iranian tourism as "not only profitable, but strategic and future-oriented."

The minister said the future of global tourism lies at the intersection of technology, identity, and intelligent investment. "Today's successful investor considers more than financial returns - they also weigh the cultural, environmental, social, and civilizational dimensions of their projects. This is the approach we welcome in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

IRAN NEWS



Foreign Transit of 22m Tons of Goods Through Iran in 2024

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The volume of foreign goods transiting through Iran in the Iranian year 1403 (March 2024–March 2025) reached approximately 21.9 million tons, marking a significant increase compared to the previous year. Faroud Asgari, Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance and Head of Iran's Customs Administration, announced that foreign transit of goods through Iran grew by 22.5% compared to the same period last year. Asgari stated that out of the total volume of goods transiting through Iran, around 19.65 million tons were processed through ten major customs checkpoints, including Shahid Rajaei, Parvizkhan, Bashmaq, Sarakhs, Bazargan, Astara, Piranshahr, Bileh Savar, Lotfabad, and Jolfa.

Details of Meeting Between Iranian Minister, Azerbaijani President Announced



TEHRAN - On the first day of her official visit to Baku, Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, met with President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan. The two sides discussed bilateral issues and emphasized the importance of enhancing cooperation between the neighboring nations. A key focus of the talks was the upcoming session of the Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, which is set to be held before the planned visit of the Iranian President to Azerbaijan.

Sadegh, who also chairs the Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, conveyed greetings from Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to President Aliyev, which were warmly received. In turn, President Aliyev requested that his regards be conveyed to the Iranian President.

President Aliyev praised the recent high-level exchanges between the two countries, describing them as valuable opportunities to strengthen bilateral ties and deepen cooperation. He also commended the timing of the Joint Commission session during Minister Sadegh's visit, highlighting that the agenda includes significant projects in the areas of economy, trade, energy, and transportation.

Minister Sadegh reiterated Iran's commitment to expanding relations with Azerbaijan across all sectors. She pointed to the deep historical, cultural, religious, and familial bonds shared between the Iranian and Azerbaijani peoples.

She also stressed the strategic importance of holding the Joint Commission meeting prior to the Iranian President's upcoming visit, to ensure that key bilateral issues are effectively addressed.

The two sides also exchanged views on major regional projects, including the development of the North-South Transport Corridor, the construction of the Aghband-Kelaleh road bridge over the Aras River, and other areas of mutual interest.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Iran, Iraq Explore New Avenues to Boost Bilateral Investment and Trade

TEHRAN - In a high-level meeting held at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, Iranian and Iraqi officials emphasized their shared commitment to strengthening economic cooperation, with a focus on joint industrial ventures and expanding trade relations.

The session, which took place on Tuesday, was led by Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, and Nasir Abdul-Mohsen, Iraq's Ambassador to Tehran. Discussions centered on resolving legal disputes through arbitration, developing border industrial zones, and boosting overall investment and trade flows between the two nations.

Hassanzadeh opened the meeting by highlighting Iran's capabilities in industries such as engineering services, industrial technology, mining, and infrastructure development. He noted that these sectors provide a solid foundation for deepening collaboration with Iraq.

While acknowledging the strong diplomatic and economic ties, Hassanzadeh expressed dissatisfaction with the current \$12 billion annual trade volume, calling it insufficient considering the two countries' potential. He outlined an ambitious plan to raise this figure to \$20 billion through strategic planning and enhanced cooperation.

"Iranian and Iraqi businesses are well-acquainted with each other's markets, and this mutual understanding is a strong asset for sustainable growth," Hassanzadeh said. "Iranian entrepreneurs are eager to invest in Iraq, especially in sectors such as food production, agriculture, and healthcare infrastructure. What we need now is active governmental support to issue the required permits and foster smoother collaboration."

A key proposal brought forward was the creation of joint industrial parks along the Iran-Iraq border. These zones, according to Hassanzadeh, could become export hubs for both countries, supplying goods to neighboring and international markets.

He also stressed the importance of expanding cooperation in tourism—especially medical, social, and religious tourism. Hassanzadeh pointed out that Iran's well-established medical infrastructure could attract more Iraqi health tourists, and he suggested strengthening educational tourism by welcoming more Iraqi students to Iranian universities.

Other significant topics included the completion of the Khorramshahr-Basra railway project and integration of Iran and Iraq's electricity grids. Additionally, Iraqi officials were invited to participate in the upcoming Iran Expo 2025, set to be held in May.

Ambassador Abdul-Mohsen praised the depth of Iran-Iraq relations, describing them as a model for regional cooperation. He cited over 1,480 kilometers of shared borders, the presence of 700,000 Iraqis and 120,000 Iraqi students in Iran, and an annual cross-border traffic of 155 million individuals as evidence of deep-rooted social and cultural links.

He estimated the total trade value, including energy, at approximately \$18 billion, with Iraq ranking first among nations sending tourists to Iran—many of whom come for healthcare services.

While acknowledging the strength of both nations' private sectors, Abdul-Mohsen stressed the need to go beyond dialogue and accelerate business exchanges. "Despite strong air connectivity and short distances between our countries, the frequency of visits by business delegations remains low," he said, calling for more direct interaction between investors.

He noted Iraq's exports to Iran stand at just \$500 million, highlighting an imbalance that favors Iran. The ambassador urged both sides to work toward a more balanced trade relationship and emphasized that joint industrial parks could help shift competitive advantages in favor of Iranian producers in Iraq's crowded market.

On the topic of health tourism, he acknowledged some existing challenges and called for better regulation and monitoring to prevent abuses. "A more organized approach by Iran in managing health tourism could increase trust and visitor numbers significantly," he said.

Yahya Al-e Eshaq, head of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, also attended the meeting and echoed the push for deeper cooperation. He deemed the \$20 billion trade target achievable and highlighted Iraq's vast \$150 billion annual investment potential.

Al-e Eshaq pointed out that Iran offers numerous opportunities, from underutilized production capacity to partnerships in industrial zones. He emphasized that tourism—particularly medical tourism—should be a key area of focus.

However, he also warned that bureaucratic obstacles are stalling progress, despite political support at the highest levels. "We need to streamline regulations on both sides to unlock this potential," he said.

Addressing another significant barrier, Al-e Eshaq stressed the importance of resolving legal disputes, which often hinder commercial activity. He proposed enhancing arbitration mechanisms and even establishing a bilateral trade union to represent the interests of prominent business figures from both countries.

Aqil Mousavi, Commercial Counselor at the Iraqi Embassy in Tehran, underlined the need for more joint forums featuring economic stakeholders from both nations. He also advocated for the formal establishment of a joint Iraq-Iran Chamber of Commerce to institutionalize cooperation and ensure consistent progress.

As Iran and Iraq navigate a critical phase in their economic relationship, this meeting signaled a renewed political will and private sector enthusiasm to push past long-standing barriers. With practical steps, such as launching industrial parks and harmonizing trade regulations, both sides hope to turn vision into action—ultimately reshaping the region's economic dynamics.

Iran, Russia Hold Talks to Accelerate Construction of Rasht-Astara Railway



TEHRAN - Deputy Minister of Transport of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Zverev, met with Kazem Jalali, Iran's ambassador to Russia, to discuss speeding up the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway line.

According to a Wednesday morning report from the Iranian Embassy in Moscow, the two sides reviewed the current status of cooperation in the North-South Transport Corridor, with a particular focus on the Rasht-Astara railway project. They explored practical solutions to expedite its implementation.

Both parties expressed satisfaction with the recent agreements reached between the transport ministers of Iran and Russia. They emphasized the importance of accelerating joint efforts, especially in light of the strong support from high-ranking officials in both countries and the promising outlook for cooperation in the transportation sector.

The meeting also covered new areas of collaboration in transport and the development of various branches of the North-South Corridor.

Earlier, on February 20, 2025, Russia's Transport Minister Roman Vladimirovich Starovoi announced that preliminary studies for the Rasht-Astara railway line—part of the Moscow-Tehran agreement—could begin within the next one to two months. He added that the executive agreement for the project is expected to be signed by the end of March 2025 (Farvardin 1404 in the Iranian calendar).

Starovoi noted that an additional protocol between the two countries was signed on February 18, 2025, allowing Russia to begin technical studies even before Iran completes land acquisition for the railway. He mentioned that while the final construction cost will be determined after the studies are concluded, the estimated figure remains close to the previously announced amount.

On May 17, 2023, Iran and Russia signed a joint agreement for the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway. As part of the deal, Moscow will provide a state loan of €1.3 billion to Tehran. Russian sources estimate the total cost of the railway at €1.6 billion.

Egg Exports to Iraq Drop 30% Amid Surging Surplus and Plunging Prices



TEHRAN - Iran's poultry industry is grappling with a steep fall in egg prices and a significant decline in exports, particularly to neighboring Iraq, according to industry officials.

Hossein Mahdizad, Head of the Poultry, Aquatics, and Beekeeping Committee at Iran's Chamber of Commerce, announced that over the past month, egg prices at the farm level have plummeted by up to 50%. While the government's approved price stands at 57,500 tomans per kilogram, farmers are now selling eggs for just 27,000 to 30,000 tomans per kilogram, incurring heavy losses.

Mahdizad attributed this price crash to an oversupply in the domestic market, caused in part by the Ministry of Agriculture's unregulated issuance of licenses for new poultry farms. "We are facing a severe overproduction problem," he said. "Prices have fallen back to levels seen five years ago, while production costs have risen sharply."

The industry is also struggling with rising input costs. Over the past week, the price of corn has increased by 10%, and soybean meal has surged by 30%. Packaging costs have also soared — with egg cartons rising from 12,000 tomans to 33,000 tomans in just two months, and the cost of egg trays climbing from 1,500 to nearly 4,000 tomans per unit in the past month.

The downward trend in egg prices began on March 15, when prices dropped from 57,000 tomans to 38,000 tomans per kilogram in just 48 hours, eventually reaching as low as 26,000 tomans. Mahdizad noted that the overlap of Nowruz (Iranian New Year) holidays and Ramadan further suppressed domestic demand.

Despite the collapse in farmgate prices, Mahdizad criticized the lack of a corresponding drop for consumers, who are still paying 120,000 tomans per tray — more than double the fair retail price of 55,000 tomans.

Export markets are also tightening. Iran's egg exports to Iraq have fallen by 30% after Iraq ramped up its own domestic production. Similarly, demand in Afghanistan has dropped. Iran typically produces 120,000 tons of eggs annually, with 105,000 tons consumed domestically. However, an additional 50,000 tons have been added to the market due to new farm licenses, creating a surplus with limited export potential.

China Named a Strategic Partner in Iran's Tourism Projects, Says Culture Minister

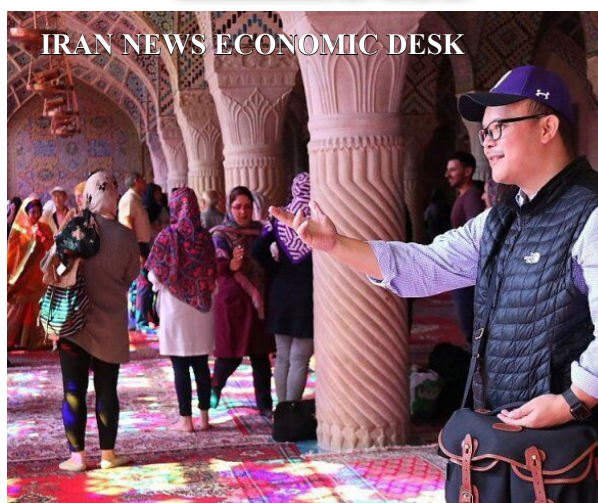
TEHRAN - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has emphasized the importance of non-Western cultural investment and named China as one of Iran's key strategic partners in tourism and heritage projects. In an interview with China's Phoenix TV, Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri highlighted the historical and ongoing collaboration between Iran and China, particularly under the framework of the ancient Silk Road and the contemporary 25-year cooperation plan between the two nations.

Salehi Amiri described the Silk Road as a powerful symbol of civilizational, cultural, and economic ties between the great nations of Asia. He noted that both Iran and China, as long-standing civilizations, have played a pivotal role in cultural exchanges between the East and West throughout history. These ties, he said, are now being revitalized through strategic agreements that aim to create a new chapter of cooperation.

Referring to the vast potential of cultural diplomacy between Tehran and Beijing, the minister pointed to emerging areas of collaboration such as joint language programs, media co-productions, cultural exhibitions, artist exchanges, and the restoration of historical landmarks. These initiatives, he stated, could significantly deepen mutual understanding between the peoples of the two countries.

He also referenced the city of Semnan's inclusion as a founding member of the "International Alliance of Silk Road Tourism Cities" in 2022, describing it as an example of how Iran is redefining its historical role within modern Asian cultural cooperation networks.

On the topic of tourism development, Salehi Amiri highlighted the



growing collaboration between Iran, China, and Central Asian countries in reviving the Silk Road's cultural and tourism legacy. This includes plans for joint tourism routes, infrastructure development in lodging and transportation, and efforts to attract international tourists, especially from China.

He reiterated UNESCO's support for shared Asian heritage projects and called for increased joint investment with a non-Western approach. He identified China, Russia, and Central Asian nations as key potential partners for Iran in both cultural and tourism ventures.

Salehi Amiri also underscored the importance of digital tourism tools such as virtual reality and online tours, calling them smart alternatives to traditional infrastructure-heavy approaches. He urged further cooperation in these innovative areas to enhance tourism experiences without excessive costs.

The minister also revealed upcoming plans for media cooperation with China's CCTV network, including joint promotional content and the presence of Chinese documentary filmmakers in Iran. Additionally, efforts are underway to update Iran's official tourism platform, "Visit Iran," in Chinese to better reach East Asian audiences.

He further emphasized the role of Iranian embassies' social media channels in China, the use of Chinese influencers for cultural marketing, and participation in Asian cultural funds as part of Iran's broader strategy to strengthen cultural ties.

"The new Silk Road is not just a trade route," Salehi Amiri concluded, "but a path for dialogue among civilizations and a revival of shared cultural identity among ancient nations."

Unemployment Rate Drops to 7.8% in Winter



TEHRAN - According to the latest labor force survey conducted by the Statistical Center of Iran, the country's unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 and over stood at 7.8% during the winter of 2024 (December–March). This marks a 0.8% decrease compared to the same period in the previous year (winter 2023).

The report, released on Tuesday, revealed that 40.1% of the population aged 15 and older were considered economically active during this period, meaning they were either employed or actively seeking work. However, the labor force participation rate showed a 0.7% decline from the same season last year.

The total number of employed individuals aged 15 and above reached 24.3 million, indicating an increase of approximately 102,000 compared to winter 2023. In contrast, the economically inactive population — including students, homemakers, retirees, and others not seeking employment — rose by around 913,000, reaching 39.3 million.

A breakdown of employment by sector revealed that the services sector remains the largest employer, accounting for 53.7% of all jobs. The industrial sector followed with 33.5%, while agriculture comprised 12.7% of total employment.

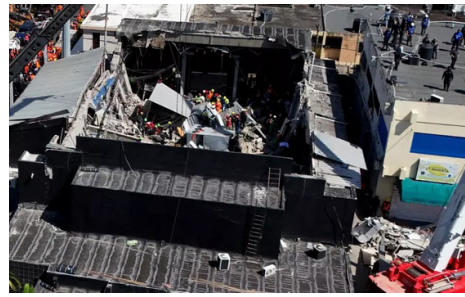
Youth unemployment remains a challenge, with the jobless rate for individuals aged 15 to 24 recorded at 21.0%, although this represents a 1.5% improvement compared to last winter. For the broader age group of 18 to 35, the unemployment rate stood at 14.8%, down 0.9% year-on-year.

The report also sheds light on underemployment: 7.7% of employed individuals worked less than 44 hours per week due to economic constraints such as seasonal inactivity or lack of opportunities for additional hours. Meanwhile, a substantial 37.5% of the workforce reported working more than 49 hours per week.

Iran's economy has faced challenges in recent years, including international sanctions, inflation, and fluctuations in oil revenues. Despite these pressures, the gradual decline in the unemployment rate over recent quarters may signal a modest recovery or shifts in workforce participation trends. However, the high rate of youth unemployment and underemployment suggests that structural issues in the labor market persist.

Dozens Dead After Roof Collapses at Dominican Republic Nightclub

PARIS (Dispatches) - Rescuers raced to find survivors Tuesday among the rubble of a Dominican Republic nightclub where at least 79 people, including a politician and a Major League Baseball star, died in an early-morning roof collapse. Renowned Dominican merengue singer Rubby Perez, who was on stage at the popular Jet Set nightclub when the roof caved in shortly after midnight, was one of those caught up in the calamity. Emergency workers said the 69-year-old was among dozens of people trapped in the rubble, some of whom were heard crying for help. Several Dominican media outlets later reported that Perez had been found dead but Juan Manuel Mendez, director of the Emergency Operations Center, said forensics experts had "not confirmed that they found the body."



Chinese Nationals Captured Fighting for Russia in Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Tuesday that Ukrainian forces had captured two Chinese men fighting for Russia in eastern Ukraine, potentially threatening a fragile peace effort in the three-year-old war. Beijing is a close diplomatic ally of Moscow but is not publicly known to have directly aided in the Kremlin's full-scale invasion, which U.S. President Donald Trump is seeking to swiftly end. Writing on X, where he posted a video of one of the alleged men, Zelenskyy said Kyiv has "information suggesting that there are many more Chinese citizens" fighting. He did not say whether Ukraine believed the men were acting on Beijing's orders. "Russia's involvement of China, along with other countries, whether directly or indirectly, in this war in Europe is a clear signal that Putin intends to do anything but end the war," he wrote, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment on what would be the first publicly announced case of Chinese nationals captured fighting for Russia in Ukraine. Reuters could not independently verify the claims.

Writing on social media, Andriy Kovalenko, a member of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, called the captured fighters mercenaries but offered no other details. Russia has used Iranian drones as well as North Korean missiles and artillery shells since its February 2022 invasion. Kyiv also says Pyongyang's troops have been deployed to fight Ukrainian forces in parts of Russia's western Kursk region, where Ukraine staged a lightning incursion last summer.

North Korea Says Its Status as a Nuclear Weapons State Can Never Be Reversed



SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea's status as a nuclear weapons state can never be reversed, no matter how much the United States and its Asian allies demand it, state media reported on Wednesday, citing the powerful sister of its supreme leader.

The comments, which state news agency KCNA said were issued on Tuesday, were likely a response to a joint statement by the foreign ministers of South Korea, Japan and the United States made on the sidelines of a NATO meeting last week. The Reuters Tariff Watch newsletter is your daily guide to the latest global trade and tariff news. Sign up here. The three foreign ministers reaffirmed the "commitment to the complete denuclearization" of North Korea, according to the joint statement. The position of the North's nuclear weapons state, together with its "substantial and very strong nuclear deterrent" is a result of outside hostile threat and "it does not change no matter how desperately anyone denies," said Kim Yo Jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, according to KCNA.

UN Chief Calls Gaza a "Killing Field", Blames Israeli Aid Blockade

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Tuesday that Gaza had become "a killing field" because Israel has continued to block aid, an accusation an Israeli official quickly denied, saying there was "no shortage" of aid. "More than an entire month has passed without a drop of aid into Gaza. No food. No fuel. No medicine. No commercial supplies. As aid has dried up, the floodgates of horror have re-opened," Guterres said in remarks to journalists. Pointing to the Geneva Conventions governing the treatment of people in war, Guterres emphasized the obligation of the "occupying power" to ensure the provision of food and medical supplies to the population. "None of that is happening today. No humanitarian supplies can enter Gaza," Guterres said. One of your browser extensions seems to be blocking the video player from loading. To watch this content, you may need to disable it on this site. Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Oren Marmorstein rejected the allegations, saying there was "no shortage of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip."

Marmorstein further alleged that Hamas has used recent aid to Gaza to "rebuild its war machine." Guterres also referenced recent Israeli proposals over controlling aid into Gaza, which a UN source told AFP included monitoring calories to prevent misuse by Hamas. "The Israeli authorities newly proposed 'authorisation mechanisms' for aid delivery risk further controlling and callously limiting aid down to the last calorie and grain of flour," he told reporters at UN headquarters in New York. "Let me be clear -- we will not participate in any arrangement that does not fully respect the humanitarian principles -- humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality," Guterres said, demanding guarantees for the unhindered entry of aid to the coastal territory. Guterres also raised the alarm about the situation in the West Bank. "The current path is a dead end -- totally intolerable in the eyes of international law and history," he said. "And the risk of the occupied West Bank transforming into another Gaza makes it even worse. "It is time to end the dehumanisation, protect civilians, release the hostages, ensure lifesaving aid, and renew the ceasefire."

Hezbollah Ready to Discuss Weapons If Israel Withdraws

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - As calls for Lebanon's Hezbollah to disarm gain momentum, a senior Hezbollah official told Reuters the group is ready to hold talks with the Lebanese president about its weapons if Israel withdraws from south Lebanon and stops its strikes.

U.S.-backed President Joseph Aoun, who vowed when he took office in January to establish a state monopoly on the control of arms, intends to open talks with Hezbollah over its arsenal soon, three Lebanese political sources said. Discussion of disarmament has intensified since the power balance was upended by last year's war with Israel and the ousting of Hezbollah's Syrian ally, ex-President Bashar al-Assad.

The senior Hezbollah official said the group was ready to discuss its arms in the context of a national defence strategy but this hinged on Israel pulling out its troops from five hilltops in south Lebanon. "Hezbollah is ready to discuss the matter of its arms if Israel withdraws from the five points, and halts its aggression against Lebanon," the senior official told Reuters.

Hezbollah's position on potential discussions about its arms has not been previously reported. The sources spoke on condition of anonymity due to political sensitivities. Hezbollah's media office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The presidency declined to comment.

Israel, which sent ground troops into south Lebanon during the war, has largely withdrawn but decided in February not to leave the five hilltop positions. It said it intended eventually to hand them over to Lebanese troops once it was sure the security situation allowed. Despite a ceasefire since November, Israeli airstrikes have kept pressure



on the group while Washington has demanded Hezbollah disarm and is preparing for nuclear talks with Hezbollah's Iranian backers. Hezbollah has been the most powerful of the paramilitary groups Iran has backed across the region. Reuters reported on Monday that several Iranian-backed militia groups in Iraq are prepared to disarm for the first time to avert the threat of an escalating conflict with the Trump administration in the U.S. Hezbollah has long rejected calls from its critics in Lebanon to disarm,

describing its weapons as vital to defending the country from Israel. Deep differences over its arsenal spilled into a short civil war in 2008.

The group's critics say the group has unilaterally dragged Lebanon into conflicts and the presence of its large arsenal outside of government control has undermined the state.

A U.S.-brokered ceasefire with Israel requires the Lebanese army to dismantle all unauthorised military facilities and confiscate all arms, starting in areas south of the Litani River, which flows into the Mediterranean some 20 km (12 miles) north of the Israeli border.

Two sources familiar with Hezbollah's thinking said it is weighing handing to the army its most potent weapons north of the Litani, including drones and anti-tank missiles.

Aoun has said Hezbollah's weaponry must be addressed through dialogue because any attempts to disarm the group by force would prompt conflict, the sources said.

Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai, the head of Lebanon's Maronite church, said last week it was time for all weapons to be in state hands but this would need time and diplomacy because "Lebanon cannot bear a new war".

Communication channels with relevant stakeholders are being opened to "begin studying the transfer of weapons" to state control, after the army and security services had extended state authority across Lebanon, a Lebanese official said, saying this was a move to implement Aoun's policy.

The issue was also being discussed with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, an important Hezbollah ally, who plays a key role in narrowing differences, she said.

Economists Excoriate Trump as Tariff Barrage Threatens a Self-Inflicted Global Recession

PARIS (Dispatches) - A wide range of economists are voicing alarm over President Donald Trump's steep tariffs on imports into the United States, sparking a trade war that experts say could tip many countries into recession. Here are comments by some leading economists:

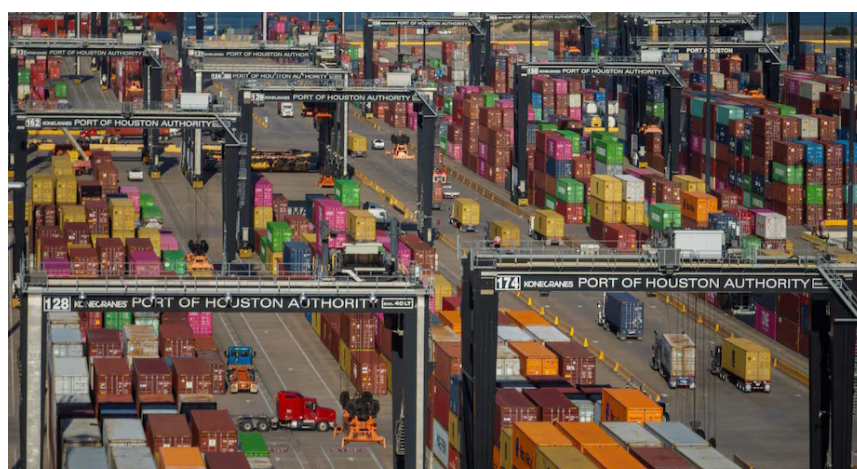
For Thomas Piketty, French author of the best-selling "Capital in the Twenty-First Century", "Trumpism is first of all a reaction to the failure of Reaganism" — the liberalisation of President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

"Republicans realise that economic liberalism and globalisation have not benefited the middle class as they said they would," the left-leaning economist told AFP.

"So now they're using the rest of the world as a scapegoat," he said. "But it's not going to work: the Trump cocktail is simply going to generate more inflation and more inequalities."

In response, "Europe needs to define its own priorities and prepare for the global recession that's coming" with a massive investment plan in "energy and transport infrastructure, education, research and health".

Paul Krugman, the Nobel economics prize laureate, said the United States was essentially the founder of the modern trade system that had led to lower tariffs over the



past decades.

"Donald Trump burned it all down," Krugman wrote on his popular Substack blog before the president's baseline 10 per cent tariffs on imports took effect on Saturday. "Trump isn't really trying to accomplish economic goals. This should all be seen as a dominance display, intended to shock and awe people and make them grovel," he said.

Krugman accused the US administration of "malignant stupidity" at a time when "the fate of the world economy is on the line".

"How can anyone, whether they're businesspeople or foreign governments, trust anything coming out of an administration that behaves like this?"

For Nasser Saidi, a former economy minister of Lebanon, "a major problem is the impact on the least-developed and emerging countries" from Trump's "seismic shock to the global trade landscape".

"Countries like Egypt, Lebanon or Jordan are going to face disruptions in terms of their trade relations" as well as the prospect of cuts to foreign investments.

"When you have tariffs of this type being set up, high levels of tariffs with no economic basis, what you're going to do is severely disrupt supply chains," he added.

Arsenal Stun Real Madrid as Inter Edge Bayern



LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal stormed to a stunning 3-0 win over Champions League holders Real Madrid as Declan Rice's free-kick masterclass left the Gunners within touching distance of a place in the semi-finals.

Rice scored two majestic free-kicks in the second half of the quarter-final first leg at the Emirates Stadium.

Mikel Merino added Arsenal's third goal before Real's Eduardo Camavinga was sent off for kicking the ball away in the closing minutes to leave the Spanish giants in disarray.

The brilliance of Rice's brace cannot be understated, with even Real keeper Thibaut Courtois — usually so inspired on Champions League nights — unable to get anywhere near the England midfielder's thunderbolts.

Incredibly, Rice had never scored a free-kick in his career before the first of his missiles hit the back of the Real net.

It was no more than Arsenal deserved for a mature performance that exposed injury-hit Real in ruthless style.

Mikel Arteta's men will travel to the Bernabeu for the second leg on April 16 as firm favourites to advance to a semi-final tie against Paris Saint-Germain or Aston Villa, who meet in their quarter-final first leg today.

The Gunners have not reached the Champions League semi-finals since 2009, but that target is now within their grasp after an evening that will go down as one of the most memorable in the club's storied history.

Arteta had labelled the clash with Real as the "biggest night" of his career as he urged his players to write their own history by winning Arsenal's first Champions League crown.

They rose to the challenge so successfully that even Arteta might have been surprised.

Arsenal trail Premier League leaders Liverpool by 11 points and look destined to finish as runners-up for a third successive season.

But the Champions League now offers Arteta genuine hope of a first major trophy since the 2020 FA Cup, providing they can finish the job in Madrid next week.

Beaten by Bayern Munich in the quarter-finals last season, Arsenal's only Champions League final appearance ended in defeat against Barcelona in 2006 — a run that included a last 16 victory over Real.

For Real, it was a chastening defeat as the 15-time European champions were punished for the flaws that had already seen them beaten 10 times in all competitions this term as they lag four points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona.

Meanwhile Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany said his side "fully believe" in their chances despite 2-1 home loss to Inter Milan in their Champions League quarter-final first leg.

Bayern were dominant early but fell behind when Lautaro Martinez scored for Inter in the 38th minute.

Bayern veteran Thomas Mueller, subbed on by Kompany with 74 minutes gone, looked to have levelled the match and the tie late on, but Inter scored again on the counter through Davide Fratesi in the 88th minute.

"In the first half, we were very dominant. We had clear chances and should have scored more goals," Kompany told reporters.

"Inter's ahead, but we need to win in Milan. Results aren't always fair, but it's half-time.

"We were confident and it's a shame Inter scored this late goal, but we'll have the chance again in Milan, that's how we feel. We're fully believing in our chances in Milan."

Bayern came into the match missing several injured starters including Jamal Musiala, Manuel Neuer, Alphonso Davies and Dayot Upamecano, but Kompany said his side "were not looking for excuses".

"The result is what it is, but we feel we can go and win in Milan," the Belgian added.

Thunder Top Lakers to Avenge Sunday Loss

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 42 points to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 136-120 home win over the Los Angeles Lakers.

The Thunder (65-14) snapped a two-game losing streak — their first of the season — and set a franchise record for victories in a season. The previous record was set in 1995-96 when the franchise was in Seattle.

Lakers star Luka Doncic was ejected just more than four minutes into the fourth quarter when he picked up his second technical foul of the game.

Doncic appeared to say something to a courtside fan before he was called for the technical foul. Both he and teammate LeBron James argued their case but to no avail and Doncic soon headed for the locker room.

Doncic, who picked up his first technical in the third quarter, finished with 23 points and five assists.

Doncic had just hit a jumper to put the Lakers ahead 108-107. But after the ejection, Los Angeles went more than three minutes without a field goal as Oklahoma City reeled off a 13-4 run that included 3-pointers from Gilgeous-Alexander and Alex Caruso and a three-point play from Jalen Williams.

Gilgeous-Alexander finished with six rebounds, six assists and just one turnover.

After not attempting a free throw in Sunday's 126-99 Thunder loss to the Lakers, Gilgeous-Alexander was 9-of-11 from the line Tuesday.

Williams added 26 points in the victory.



For the second consecutive game, the Lakers (48-31) tied a franchise record for 3-pointers in a half with 15 in the first half against the Thunder.

In Sunday's win, Los Angeles used that hot shooting from outside to jump to a big lead by the second quarter and the Thunder never seriously threatened in the second half.

But Tuesday, Oklahoma City was able to overcome the Lakers' hot outside shooting with strong perimeter shooting of its own and strong defense.

Los Angeles was just 3 of 14 from beyond the arc in the second

half, including missing all four of its fourth-quarter 3-pointers.

James led the Lakers with 28 points while Austin Reaves added 24.

Giannis Antetokounmpo recorded a triple-double with 23 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists, and the Milwaukee Bucks stormed back from a 24-point deficit in the fourth quarter to post a 110-103 win over the visiting Minnesota Timberwolves on Tuesday night.

Meanwhile Kevin Porter Jr. added 21 points off the bench for Milwaukee (45-34), which won its fifth game in a row. Bobby Portis scored 18 points and grabbed 10 rebounds in his return from a 25-game suspension for violating the NBA's anti-drug policy.

Anthony Edwards scored 25 points on 10-for-27 shooting to lead Minnesota (46-33). Donte DiVincenzo scored 24 points off the bench and Naz Reid chipped in 17 off the bench for the Timberwolves, whose five-game winning streak ended.

The Bucks outscored the Timberwolves 40-13 in the fourth quarter. Milwaukee trailed 95-71 after DiVincenzo made a 3-pointer with 10:09 remaining.

Gary Trent Jr. then converted a four-point play with a 3-pointer and a free throw on the next possession to cut the deficit to 20 points. The sequence sparked an incredible 23-0 run for the Bucks, which ended with a driving layup by Porter that brought Milwaukee within 95-94 with 5:07 to play.

McIlroy Willing to Get Heart Broken in Bid for Masters Glory



AUGUSTA (Dispatches) - Rory McIlroy has had his fair share of Masters disappointment over the years but the Northern Irishman said on Tuesday he is ready to risk getting his heart broken again in an attempt to find true love in the form of a Green Jacket.

This year marks McIlroy's 11th shot at completing the career Grand Slam of golf's four majors, and he is ready to put himself out there after ditching the "self-preservation mechanism" he has leaned on to avoid getting hurt again.

"People, I think, instinctively as human beings we hold back sometimes because of the fear of getting hurt, whether that's a conscious decision or subconscious decision, and I think I was doing that on the golf course a little bit for a few years," McIlroy told reporters.

"Once you go through those heartbreaks, as I call them, or disappointments, you get to a place where you remember how it feels and you wake up the next day and you're like, yeah, life goes on, it's not as bad as I thought it was going to be.

"You dust yourself off and you go again. I think that's why I've become a little more comfortable in laying everything out there and being somewhat vulnerable."

With two wins under his belt in 2025, McIlroy has never arrived at the Masters in better form but that success has only ramped up talk about him becoming the sixth player to complete the career Grand Slam.

For his part, McIlroy is doing all he can to avoid letting that narrative distract his Green Jacket dreams, and off the course has been watching the Netflix series "Bridgerton" and reading a John Grisham novel.

"Just trying to block out that noise as much as possible. I need to treat this tournament like all the other tournaments that I play throughout the year," McIlroy said.

"I understand the narrative and the noise, and there's a lot of anticipation and buildup coming into this tournament each and every year, but I just have to keep my head down and focus on my job."

For the 35-year-old McIlroy, however, who has not won a major since collecting his fourth in 2014 despite being a perennial leaderboard fixture, the Masters is far from just any other tournament.

Eggs, Milk and Tractors: Norway's Bryne Embrace Farmer's League Tag



OSLO (Dispatches) - Bryne FK are back in the Norwegian top flight after 22 years and they are gaining even more popularity for sticking to their agricultural roots - be it tractors acting as stands or awarding milk and eggs to the player of the match.

Best known as the home of Manchester City striker Erling Haaland's first club, Bryne has a population of around 13,000 people, surrounded by farmland and situated 30 minutes away from Stavanger, Norway's third-largest city.

With a stadium that holds barely 5,000 fans, the club are fully embracing their heritage.

"Our goal is to forge a farmers' identity and instil pride in both the club and the region," Bryne Marketing Manager Bjorn Hagerup Roeken told Reuters.

"Our supporters' union has always celebrated our agricultural roots in their chants, so honouring our heritage holds deep significance for us."

VIP tickets include a plush sofa hoisted up by tractors and grain silos, used to store winter feed for livestock, which have been rebuilt with platforms for VAR cameras.

One side of the stadium is a large open square where supporters can drive in and park their tractors to watch the game.

While most leagues hand the player of the match a small trophy, goalkeeper Jan De Boer received four trays of locally sourced eggs during their first home match of the season.

Bryne also gave eggs to their opponents, Kristiansund BK, in their first away match.

De Boer used his prize to cook a Dutch omelette for his Norwegian teammates and, in the spirit of the old-school barter system, the remaining eggs were given to a teammate who had lent him his car to pick up his girlfriend from the airport.

Rune Retires in Monte Carlo Match

LONDON (Dispatches) - An ill Holger Rune retired in the first round of the Monte-Carlo Masters in Monaco on Tuesday.

Playing Nuno Borges of Portugal, Rune lost the first set 6-2 and trailed 0-3 in the second when he ended the match.

The 10th-seeded Rune, of Denmark, reportedly had been sick before the start of the tournament and consulted with medical staff between the sets.

This was a home tournament for Rune, 21, who lives and trains in Monaco.

Rune was a finalist in Monaco in 2023, losing to Russian Andrey Rublev in three sets.

"I clearly saw that he wasn't feeling great," Borges said. "I stayed really focused on my game and tried to not give him too much. I thought I did a good job with that."

Meanwhile world number nine Andrey Rublev has added two-time Grand Slam champion Marat Safin to his coaching team ahead of the European claycourt swing but the Russian said he is well aware that his compatriot will only stick around



if he enjoys the job.

Rublev has struggled to keep his emotions in check at times during matches and his outbursts have overshadowed his game, but the 27-year-old said after a run to the Doha title in February that conversations with his idol Safin had helped him.

Having formally hired the former world number one ahead of this week's Monte Carlo Masters, Rublev is hoping for a long and successful partnership with the former Australian Open and U.S. Open champion.

"I hope for really long, but it depends if he will enjoy to work with me or he will suffer," Rublev told reporters.

"Because if he would feel that I'm not doing the things or I'm not listening, I don't think he will waste his time.

"For the moment I'm just trying to listen and to try new things. We'll see how it will work, or what it will bring, or what's going to happen."