

Iran's Transportation Ministry Says the Construction of a Key Railway Linking the Country's Eastern Border Regions to the Sea of Oman, Where Iran's Only Ocean Port Is Located, Will Finish Until Late March 2026

# IRAN NEWS

On the Eve of Talks Between Iran and the U.S., President Masoud Pezeshkian Says Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei Is Not Opposed to U.S. Entities Investing Capital in the Iranian Economy

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### Iran, Armenia to Hold Joint Military Drills to Bolster Border Security, Combat Terrorism



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Armenia are set to launch a joint military exercise in a border region aimed at reinforcing sustainable peace along their shared frontier, enhancing bilateral security cooperation, and combating terrorism.

Brigadier General Vahidollah Ma'dani, deputy commander for operations of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC)'s Ground Forces, confirmed that the joint drill would take place over two days in the Norduz border area, which is located in Iran's northwestern East Azerbaijan Province.

According to the commander, operational units from both the countries would be deployed to the area during the exercises, which would be conducted in a secure environment, with no immediate threats facing the border region.

"This joint exercise is a proactive measure to ensure the combat readiness of our forces, confront terrorism, and contribute to sustainable peace in the region," he stated.

Ma'dani noted that the primary objective of the joint drill was to strengthen the security of the common border. "Given the sensitive geopolitical position of this area, the strategic importance of our border with Armenia cannot be overstated," he said.

The official also pointed out that the exercises fell under the command of the IRGC's Ashura Regional Base, which oversees adherence to defensive imperatives in the region and provides strategic direction and oversight for the exercises.

He commended the 31st Ashura Operational Division, which operates under the base's command, for its disciplined deployment to the Norduz area towards performance of the drills.

### Iran Breaks Germany's Monopoly in Producing Cancer-Treating Rhenium-188



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has become the second country in the world to commercially produce Rhenium-188, a radioactive isotope used in cancer treatment, breaking Germany's monopoly.

President Masoud Pezeshkian on Wednesday attended a National Nuclear Technology Day ceremony where the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) unveiled six major technological achievements.

The accomplishments cover a range of fields, including the nuclear fuel cycle, radiopharmaceutical production, healthcare, and industrial uses of nuclear technology.

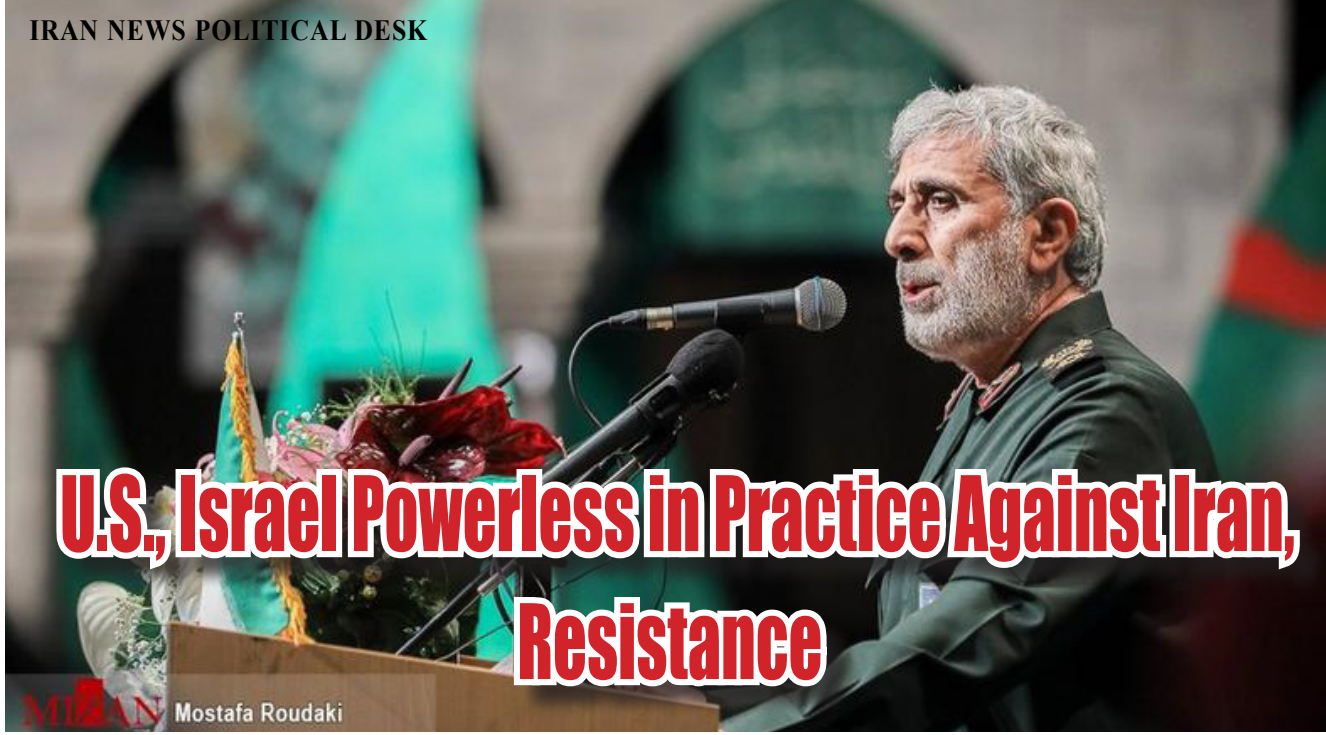
One of the significant achievements in the healthcare section was a new skin cream containing Rhenium-188 (Re-188) that provides an innovative solution for treating common skin cancers.

Rhenium-188 is a high-energy beta-emitting radioisotope with a short physical half-life of 16.9 hours, making it a highly promising option for therapeutic nuclear medicine.

Until now, Germany was recognized as the sole commercial producer of Rhenium-188, but on Wednesday, Iran ended that monopoly, becoming the second country to manufacture the radiopharmaceutical agent.

In the healthcare field, two other groundbreaking radiopharmaceuticals were introduced: Gallium FAPI, designed for the detection of over 30 types of cancer, and Lutetium FAPI, which offers targeted treatment for advanced cancers.

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TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of Iran's Quds Force says the U.S. and Israel, with all their hype and hoopla, are "powerless in practice" against Iran and resistance groups.

"They cannot even comprehend why our missiles accurately hit their targets. This is our strength," Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani said on Thursday.

Last year, Iran hit military and intelligence targets inside the Israeli occupied territories with missile salvos in April and October. Iranian officials have underscored that the country only deployed a fraction of its firepower during the dual reprisal.

While Western military experts have also warned that future attacks could be still more complex and use an even greater number of missiles, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) last week unveiled a new underground missile "megacity".

It was unveiled after US President Donald Trump threatened Iran with bombing if it doesn't submit to American demands. Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Muhammad Bagheri said the pace at which the Islamic Republic is developing its defensive might is far faster than the pace of the enemies' recuperation.

Gen. Qa'ani on Thursday emphasized the importance of self-sufficiency and domestic production.

He gave special plaudits to the resistance groups in the region "for having resisted with the least resources against the enemy's advanced equipment".

"As we saw in Lebanon and Yemen, the resistance has dealt the greatest blows to the enemy with the least resources," he said.

Qa'ani highlighted the unique characteristics of the Resistance Front, saying "the essence of resistance is that anyone who fights it only makes it stronger."

"Yemeni youths who could not even reach the Zionist regime with their weapons at the beginning of the war have increased the range of their missiles by 600 to 700 kilometers in a single year," he said.

"This kind of progress is unprecedented anywhere in the world," General Qa'ani said, adding "the resources available to the Resistance Front today are the result of domestic efforts and innovations".

According to Ahmed Nagi, a senior analyst on Yemen at the International Crisis Group, the US is wrong to believe that airstrikes can compel Yemenis to back down.

"Their logic is shaped by years of war; they see resilience as a form of strength and are driven to prove they are not easily deterred," CNN quoted him as saying.

If anything, they may actually be relishing US strikes, the broadcaster said. Their operations are a "direct answer to their prayers to have a war with the US," Farea al-Muhammadi, a Yemeni research fellow at Chatham House, told CNN.

Since mid-March, Yemeni forces have launched a dozen ballistic missiles at Israel, and barrages of drones and missiles at US navy ships in solidarity with the Palestinians who are subject to daily massacres and other atrocities in Gaza and the West Bank.

Addressing the enemies, Gen. Qa'ani said, "Your crimes will never be forgotten."

"Killing women and children and destroying the homes of defenseless people is neither a display of skill nor strength; it is a sign of your weakness and helplessness."

Qa'ani said the blockaded Gaza Strip still stands firm despite an extensive war for a year and a half, noting that such firm resistance "reflects the resolute will of its people."

Separately on Thursday, head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy Rear Admiral Shahram Irani described the country's maritime power and defense capabilities as stronger than ever before.

"Today, our enemies view the armed forces of the Navy as a superpower," he said in Bandar Abbas during a meeting with the families of the personnel of the 86th Naval Group which traveled the world for 236 days between September 2022 and May 2023.

Irani attributed the success of the mission to a combination of the personnel's expertise and the patience and endurance of the families of the comrades, emphasizing that families play a crucial role in boosting the morale of the personnel during long-term international missions.

Irani said the international community views Iran's Navy on par with the naval forces of a superpower.

"The efforts of my comrades have become evident to everyone in the country, the region, and the world, bringing honor and pride to our dear Iran," he said.

### Iran-U.S. Indirect Talks Proceeding in a Logical Manner

TEHRAN - First Vice President, Mohammad Reza Aref, stated that indirect negotiations between Iran and the United States are progressing in a logical and structured manner. He reaffirmed the Islamic Republic's steadfast policy of advancing peaceful nuclear technology.

Speaking at a Nowruz gathering with political, cultural, and media elites on Thursday, Aref emphasized that the Iranian nation and government have never been intimidated by threats or conspiracies from adversaries. "Iran has always welcomed negotiation and constructive engagement," he said, adding that the opposing side must abandon its policy of sanctions and intimidation.

Referring to the challenges faced by the new "National Unity" government, Aref highlighted efforts made by the President to foster coordination among political and national stakeholders. "By uniting various groups and demonstrating moral leadership and broad capacity, the President not only formed the cabinet after the elections but has also managed the country's affairs effectively," he noted.

The Vice President listed the government's main strategies, which include achieving relative economic stability, resolving fiscal imbalances, boosting foreign relations, increasing trade with neighboring countries and key regional unions, addressing the livelihood issues of vulnerable populations, and implementing the Seventh Development Plan.



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Regarding the government's economic policies, Aref pointed out that structural economic reforms have been pursued over the past six months, with a priority on supporting low-income groups. He noted that these measures helped stabilize the market during the final weeks of the Iranian calendar year and the Nowruz holiday period.

Aref also acknowledged various national imbalances — in energy, economy, and public

welfare — stating that the government has already initiated programs to address these issues, especially in the energy sector.

He underlined the government's recent success in curbing inflation, noting a noticeable decline in the inflation rate compared to the same period last year.

Commenting on the Seventh Development Plan, Aref said while it includes strong legislation and structural reforms, its goals — such as achieving 8% economic growth, resolving the housing crisis, improving living conditions, and bringing inflation to single digits — require financial resources that were not fully considered during the plan's drafting.

He estimated that Iran needs \$150 billion in investment to meet these goals. However, following Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's designation of the current year as the "Year of Investment for Production," the government has created confidence and guarantees for private sector investors, sparking strong domestic investment interest.

Aref also stressed that Iran currently enjoys excellent relations with Central Asian countries, members of the Eurasian Economic Union, and Persian Gulf states. He highlighted Iran's observer membership in the Eurasian Union, active participation in ECO, and engagement in other key regional and international agreements. Over the past six months, the 14th government has expanded regional diplomacy, especially with the Persian Gulf countries, many of which have expressed interest in strengthening bilateral ties during official meetings.

"Today, all countries in the region recognize that regional peace and stability are tied to good relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran," Aref concluded. "Gulf nations have consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining strong, friendly, and reciprocal ties with Iran."

### No Power Can Stop Iranian Nation From Moving Forward



KARAJ (IRNA) - President Masoud Pezeshkian says no power is able to stop the Iranian nation's progress through its conspiracies, dismissing allegations by the United States, Israel and Europe that Iran has been weakened.

"Israel, Europe, and the U.S. assume that Iran has been weakened. They assume that they can cause quarrels and disputes in the country. No power, through its conspiracies, can stop the Iranian people from moving forward and progressing," said the president.

Pezeshkian made the remarks on Thursday in Karaj, the capital of Alborz Province, as he met a group of local managers. The president was in Alborz for a daylong visit as part of his provincial trips aimed at addressing the issues faced by different provinces.

During the meeting, he emphasized the importance of tackling economic and production disparities through public collaboration, saying that the public support and cooperation will also lead to remarkable progress of Iran.

He also highlighted the importance of enhanced public participation to tackle imbalances in the education sector.

He said that schools need to be built in many cities and villages, while they should be equipped and offer high-quality education, a goal he said will be achieved through people's participation.

Pezeshkian also referred to the current subsidy system, which he said is favoring the wealthy, and called for reforms to ensure fairer distribution.

He outlined government plans to redirect subsidies more equitably, stating, "Our goal is to ensure that subsidies reach the needy people directly."

Pezeshkian commended the people's efforts, urging broader cooperation to accelerate the country's advance and eliminate obstacles to production.

### Leader's Aide Warns of Iran's Deterrent Measures Against IAEA



TEHRAN (PresSTV) - A senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has warned that threats against Iran could result in the suspension of Tehran's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and expulsion of its inspectors.

"Continued external threats and putting Iran under the conditions of a military attack could lead to deterrent measures like the expulsion of IAEA inspectors and ceasing cooperation with it," Ali Shamkhani wrote in a post published on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, on Thursday.

"Transferring enriched material to safe and undisclosed locations in Iran could also be on the agenda," he continued.

The remarks come as US President Donald Trump has again warned of military action if Tehran does not agree to a deal with Washington over its civilian nuclear program.

In comments in a meeting with a group of media and cultural activists in Algeria on Tuesday night, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said the only subject to be mooted at the upcoming negotiations with the US in Oman is the nuclear issue and assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's atomic activities.

"The nuclear topic, which means making transparency and giving assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the removal of the cruel sanctions, will be the only topic of the talks," he said, outlining the agenda of the indirect talks on Saturday.

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## 15 Investment Opportunities in Iran's Oil and Gas Sector Unveiled

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has released a list of 15 key investment opportunities to be presented at the upcoming event titled "Transformation in Investment and Development in Iran's Oil and Gas Upstream Sector."

According to a statement from the NIOC, the event is scheduled to take place on April 21 at the Summit Hall in Tehran. The announced investment opportunities, introduced by the Ministry of Petroleum, include: Development of oil and gas fields; Exploration blocks; Flare gas recovery; NGL (Natural Gas Liquids) and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) projects; Storage facilities; Power generation and transmission; Desalination plants; Pipeline infrastructure; Optimization projects; Gas compression enhancement; Intelligent pigging (pipeline inspection); Rapid deployment processing units; and support projects including marine vessels, offshore support, buildings, and roads.

## Nowruz 1404 Ends Without Foreign Tourists



TEHRAN - Nowruz 1404 (March-April 2025), which saw 36.5 million Iranians travel domestically, ended with virtually no foreign tourist arrivals in Iran, highlighting the continued decline in the country's inbound tourism sector.

The lack of accurate and centralized tourism data in Iran continues to challenge the industry, with conflicting figures between government bodies. While government officials highlight growth in domestic tourism, private sector stakeholders argue that foreign tourism has remained stagnant for years.

Mostafa Shafiei Shakib, head of the Iranian Tour Operators Association, confirmed that inbound tourism during Nowruz 1404 was almost nonexistent. "Foreign tour groups have drastically diminished, and this year's Nowruz holiday saw almost no incoming international tours," he said.

He further revealed that, according to data from the Iran Export Development Center, only around 2,700 foreign tourists entered Iran in the entire Persian year 1403 (March 2024 - March 2025).

"In a country of 85 million, this figure essentially means no foreign tourism occurred," Shakib emphasized, noting that the tourism infrastructure, including tour operators, saw no meaningful activity in terms of international arrivals.

Shakib also highlighted past concerns from travel agencies that had discouraged foreign tourists from visiting during Nowruz, citing hotel practices such as doubling room rates and mandating a minimum three-night stay. These practices led many agencies to cancel their Nowruz tour packages for foreign travelers altogether.

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## Iran, Kazakhstan Propose Cultural Consortium to Explore Shared Heritage

TEHRAN - In a recent diplomatic and cultural meeting in Tehran, Iran's Deputy Minister of Handicrafts proposed the establishment of a joint consortium with Kazakhstan aimed at identifying shared cultural roots, enhancing museum exchanges, and promoting traditional crafts.

Maryam Jalali, Deputy for Handicrafts at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, met with a Kazakhstani cultural delegation led by Ontalap Serikbayevich Onalbayeva, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Iran. During the meeting, Jalali emphasized the historical and cultural commonalities between the two nations and proposed the formation of a cultural consortium.

The meeting was also attended by Atousa Momeni, head of Iran's Intangible Cultural Heritage Center; Zhanar Dossayeva, Deputy Head of Kazakhstan's Culture and Information Ministry; Berik Abdigali, Director of the Kazakh National Museum; and Sagila Norlanova, Head of the National Archives. Participants discussed strengthening bilateral cooperation in cultural, artistic, and museum sectors based on their shared heritage.

Jalali pointed to the Timurid era as a historical period linking Iran and Kazakhstan, noting its potential for collaborative projects in cultural heritage. She highlighted how Iran's rich tradition of handicrafts, embodying creative thought in tangible form, could serve as a vehicle for deeper cultural understanding. She invited Kazakh artists to partner with Iranian craftsmen to transform Kazakh identity and symbolism into enduring works using wood, glass, and metal.

One of Jalali's key proposals was the creation of a statue of Persian polymath Omar Khayyam by Iranian woodcarving masters to be installed in the central square of Taraz, Kazakhstan — symbolizing cultural collaboration.

Acknowledging Kazakhstan's advanced felt production technology, she also proposed a sister-city relationship between Shahrekord (recognized as Iran's feltwork capital) and Taraz to strengthen cultural and artistic ties.

Jalali underscored the important role of women in the cultural development of both nations. She cited the shared nomadic lifestyles of Iranian and Kazakh tribes as a foundation for joint projects and emphasized empowering tribal women through handicraft and cultural initiatives.

During the meeting, Jalali extended an invitation to the Kazakh delegation to attend Iran's celebration of World Handicrafts Day on June 10. She also revealed plans for showcasing Iranian artworks during the upcoming visit of the Iranian President to Kazakhstan.

Future cooperative efforts include a joint cultural night, media content co-production with Kazakhstan's Ministry of Information to highlight cultural attractions and crafts, and the establishment of permanent cultural trade centers for Iranian and Kazakh products.

The Kazakh delegation welcomed these initiatives, reaffirming their readiness to deepen cultural relations, explore shared historical roots, and promote Iranian handicrafts in Kazakhstan.

To conclude their visit, the Kazakh representatives toured the Traditional Arts Research Center, exploring various specialized workshops in pottery, tilework, brocade weaving, metal engraving, wood inlay, musical instrument making, miniature painting, and calligraphy. They were introduced firsthand to the creative processes of Iranian artisans.

Meanwhile earlier during a meeting between the Director General of the National Museum of Kazakhstan and the Director General of the National Museum of Iran, both parties emphasized the importance of cultural and inter-museum collaboration. They reached agreements on organizing joint exhibitions and establishing a shared digital database.

Berek Abdigali, Director General of the National Museum of Kazakhstan, met with Jebrael Nokandeh, Director General of the National Museum of Iran.

In this meeting, Jebrael Nokandeh welcomed the guests and, referring to the shared cultural heritage of the two countries and the memorandum of understanding between the two museums, expressed Iran's readiness to expand inter-museum cultural cooperation.

Among his proposals were the organization of joint exhibitions and the launch of a shared digital database to facilitate the exchange of cultural information and artifacts.

Berek Abdigali also emphasized the importance of implementing the provisions of the memorandum of understanding and identified the shared heritage of Iran and Kazakhstan across various historical periods — including the Sycythian era, the Islamic period, and especially the Timurid period — as suitable grounds for further cooperation.

He proposed holding an exhibition of works from the National Museum of Iran in Astana in 2025, and an exhibition from the National Museum of Kazakhstan at the National Museum of Iran in 2026.

Both sides agreed to coordinate and implement the necessary steps for these joint exhibitions soon through official diplomatic channels.

After the meeting, the guests toured the National Museum of Iran and became acquainted with Iran's historical and cultural artifacts.

Attending the meeting were Zhanar Dossayeva, Deputy Head of the Culture Committee of the Ministry of Culture and Information of Kazakhstan; Sagila Nurlanova, Head of the National Archives of Kazakhstan; Beik Murad Haidar, Deputy Ambassador of Kazakhstan; Karam Mezzai, Head of the Department of Archaeology and Islamic Art at the National Museum of Iran; Masoumeh Ahmadi, Head of International Affairs at the National Museum of Iran; and Roshan from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Iran, Qatar Emphasize Expanding Energy Cooperation



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TEHRAN - Oil Minister, Mohsen Paknejad, and the Qatari Ambassador to Tehran, Saad Abdullah Saad Al Mahmoud Al Sharif, reaffirmed the two countries' commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation in the energy sector during a meeting in Tehran.

According to the Oil Ministry, the two officials discussed potential areas for joint ventures and strategic collaboration in oil and gas development.

Following the meeting, Minister Paknejad announced that a summit involving foreign ambassadors will be held next week. He emphasized that Iran welcomes the presence of foreign countries, especially its neighbors, in its oil industry.

Paknejad also stated that an official invitation has been extended to Qatar's Energy Minister to attend the upcoming International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition in Iran. A special session organized by the Ministry's International and Commercial Affairs Department is set to take place next week, with many foreign ambassadors expected to attend.

During that session, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) will present a detailed overview of the exhibition and its key features.

The Iranian minister noted that the objective of the upcoming meetings and exhibition is to attract international investors, particularly from neighboring countries. He specifically invited Qatar to participate in investment and joint ventures, highlighting Iran's openness to Qatari involvement in various projects, especially in the oil sector.

Additionally, Paknejad referred to the upcoming event titled "Transformation in Investment and Upstream Oil and Gas Development", scheduled for Monday, April 21, at the Summit Hall in Tehran. Ambassadors from various countries have been invited to this event, where more than 200 investment packages worth over \$130 billion will be introduced. The event will include expert panels to elaborate on the investment opportunities available.

## Iran Nominates Eight Villages for UN's 2025 Best Tourism Villages Award



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TEHRAN - Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has selected eight villages to represent the country in the United Nations' 2025 "Best Tourism Villages" competition. Chosen from a pool of 130 nationally designated tourist villages, the finalists were evaluated based on criteria established by the UN Tourism Organization.

During a recent webinar attended by provincial officials and village representatives, Seyed Mostafa Fatemi, Director General of Domestic Tourism Development at the Ministry, announced the selected villages: Soheil (Hormozgan), Kandolus (Mazandaran), Palangan (Kurdistan), Moil (Ardabil), Hasanlu (West Azerbaijan), Shafiabad (Kerman), Barghan (Alborz), and Fahraj (Yazd).

Fatemi highlighted that the selection process was a collaborative effort involving provincial tourism departments, rural development agencies, private sector actors, and national organizations such as the Office of Rural and Deprived Area Development under the Presidential Office and the Housing Foundation.

"These villages stood out for their rich cultural, historical, and natural assets, along with their distinct tourism potential," Fatemi said. "Nonetheless, challenges remain—particularly in areas like international networking, online visibility, tourism infrastructure, and sustainable development practices."

The Ministry is currently coordinating with local authorities to finalize each village's submission portfolio. The documentation will cover essential indicators including public health and safety, cultural preservation, and the integration of sustainable tourism practices.

Fatemi noted that each village has included innovative and locally-driven initiatives, such as:

Soheil: Mangrove forest preservation and biosphere conservation; Shafiabad: Community-based tourism with strong women's participation; Kandolus: Herbal and agricultural tourism; Moil: Mountain tourism on Mount Sabalan; Palangan: Preservation of traditional ceremonies; Hasanlu: Wetland-based tourism; Barghan: Culinary tourism; and Fahraj: Accessible tourism infrastructure.

## Iran Urges Action to Bridge Global Technology Gap at UN Science and Technology Forum

TEHRAN - The Iranian Deputy Minister of Communications has emphasized the urgent need to close the global technology divide, identifying unilateral coercive measures and the digital gap as major challenges facing the information society.

Speaking at the 28th Session of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), held in Geneva, Switzerland, Mohammad Mohsen Sadr, Deputy Minister of Communications and Head of Iran's Information Technology Organization, addressed the assembly on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Highlighting the importance of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Sadr described the summit as a crucial initiative to address the growing challenges brought by information and communication technologies (ICTs). He underscored that the summit's primary goal is to establish a shared vision and collective commitment to building an inclusive information society—one where all nations and individuals can benefit from access to information.

Sadr stated that Iran, as part of the global information society, has made significant strides in this area. These include expanding its fiber optic network, enhancing mobile broadband coverage in both rural and urban areas, and advancing electronic services across key sectors such as healthcare, commerce, education, agriculture, and science.

However, he warned that serious obstacles remain in the path toward an inclusive information society. "Unfortunately, international mechanisms designed to provide financial and technological



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assistance have not been effectively implemented, and the technological divide between nations continues to widen," he said.

Sadr also criticized the failure to implement democratic and equitable internet governance as outlined in the Tunis Agenda. "Despite the declaration's emphasis on equal roles for all governments in internet governance, this vision has not been realized," he noted.

A key focus of his speech was the condemnation of unilateral actions by certain countries in the ICT sector. He described such measures—including sanctions and restrictions on the provision of hardware and software—as significant barriers to reducing the digital divide. "These

unilateral sanctions not only deprive developing countries of access to technology but also undermine the competitive and enabling environment necessary for progress," Sadr asserted.

Concluding his address, Sadr referred to Article 70 of the Global Digital Compact and called for practical mechanisms to boost international digital cooperation and eliminate unilateral measures. He stressed the responsibility of multinational digital and AI companies, urging them to respect cultural diversity, multilingualism, and national sovereignty in implementing the compact.

The Deputy Minister's remarks come as the international community prepares to review the 20-year outcomes of the WSIS and chart a path forward for its future.

The session gathered representatives from various countries and ICT experts to assess the progress made in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society.

## Taliban Eyes Karachi as Replacement for Chabahar



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TEHRAN - A senior member of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce has revealed that the Taliban seeks to replace the Iranian port of Chabahar with Pakistan's Karachi amid growing tensions with Islamabad, while Iran's central bank is pushing for the use of the offshore rial in bilateral trade.

Hosseyan Mohammadian, a board member of the joint chamber, told ILNA News Agency that during the first official visit of Iran's 14th government to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan late last year — which included Foreign Minister Araghchi — Afghan officials strongly emphasized the need to boost trade. This insistence stems from the significant trade imbalance between the two countries, he said.

According to Mohammadian, Iran exported \$2 billion worth of goods to Afghanistan over an 11-month period in the Iranian year 1403 (ending March 2025), while imports from Afghanistan did not even reach \$100 million. In light of ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Taliban is looking to reclaim lost market ground by turning to Iran, considering shifting trade routes from Karachi to Chabahar.

He noted that the \$2 billion figure marks an increase from the \$1.68 billion in Iranian exports to Afghanistan during the previous year (1402), suggesting a growth trend. Currently, Afghanistan accounts for 2% of Iran's total non-oil exports, with half of that trade flowing from the northeastern province of Khorasan. Many traders in that region already use the Iranian rial in transactions with Afghanistan, and it is common to see the Iranian currency in daily use in Afghan cities like Herat. Moreover, a significant number of Afghan workers in Iran hold Iranian bank cards.

Mohammadian added that Iran's parliament has also taken up the topic, with the Economic Commission discussing the potential of expanding rial-based exports to Afghanistan. While the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) supports this strategy, operational details are still under debate.

## Turkey and Israel Begin Talks to Avoid Military Clashes in Syria

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish and Israeli officials began talks yesterday aimed at preventing unwanted incidents in Syria, where militaries of the two regional powers are active, Turkish ministry sources said. The sources said the technical talks, in Azerbaijan, marked the beginning of efforts to set up a channel to avoid potential clashes or misunderstandings over military operations in the region. "Efforts will continue to establish this mechanism," one of the sources said, without providing further details on the scope or timeline of the talks. The initiative comes a week after Israel stepped up airstrikes on Syria, which it described as a warning to the newly formed government in Damascus. It has also accused Turkey of attempting to turn Syria into a Turkish protectorate.



## Paramilitaries Shell Displaced Persons' Camp as Famine Grips Sudan's Darfur Region



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Shelling by Sudanese paramilitaries killed at least 15 civilians in a Darfur displaced persons' camp Thursday, a medical source told AFP, as fighting for the only part of the region still under regular army control intensified.

Earlier in the day, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) announced they had captured Um Kadadah, a key town on the road to El-Fasher, the last city in Darfur still in the hands of their regular army foes.

"The Abu Shouk camp was shelled by the RSF with 120mm and 82mm cannons fired inside the camp and the Nifasha market, killing at least 15 people and wounding 25," the camp's volunteer emergency department said in a statement.

The densely populated camps for the displaced around the besieged city of El-Fasher have suffered heavily during nearly two years of fighting between Sudan's warring generals.

The Zamzam camp was the first part of Sudan where famine was declared. The RSF has stepped up its efforts to complete its conquest of Darfur since losing control of the capital Khartoum last month.

On Thursday, it said it had captured Um Kadadah. "Our forces took full control of the strategic town of Um Kadadah," an RSF spokesman said in a statement, adding that hundreds of members of its garrison had been killed.

There was no immediate comment from the regular army. The paramilitaries' advance came after their shelling of besieged El-Fasher killed 12 people on Wednesday, the army and activists said.

The conflict in Sudan has killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted more than 12 million since a struggle for power between rival generals erupted into full-blown war in April 2023.

## Trump Promises Beautiful Result to Trade War as Market Volatility Persists



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Jitters about U.S. tariffs hammered Asian stocks again early Friday as President Donald Trump acknowledged a "cost" to his surging trade offensive against superpower rival China.

The U.S. leader said Thursday that the European Union was "very smart" to back off from imposing retaliatory tariffs because of his tough stance on China even as the bloc's chief warned it could tax U.S. Big Tech.

"(The EU) were ready to announce retaliation. And then they heard about what we did with respect to China... and they said, you know, 'We're going to hold back a little bit,'" Trump said.

Trump acknowledged "a transition cost and transition problems," but dismissed global market turmoil. "In the end it's going to be a beautiful thing."

On Wall Street, the broad-based S&P 500 finished down 3.5 percent on Thursday after soaring 9.5 percent the day before. The Dow Jones shed 2.5 percent and the Nasdaq 4.3 percent.

In early trade in Asia Friday, Japan's Nikkei tumbled over five percent, handing back some of the 9.1-percent gain of the previous day. Seoul and Sydney also fell.

Oil and the dollar slid on fears of a global slowdown while gold hit a new record. Fellow safe haven asset the yen also firmed against the greenback.

In a spectacular climbdown Wednesday, Trump paused for 90 days tariffs of 20 percent on the EU and even higher levies on other trade partners, including 24 percent on Japan.

But levies on China, which has retaliated with tariffs on US goods, were not only maintained but hiked further. The White House on Thursday clarified that tariffs on Chinese imports are now at a staggering total of 145 percent.

This was because the latest hike came on top of a 20 percent tariff already imposed. China has retaliated with levies of 84 percent on US imports.

Researchers from the Budget Lab at Yale University estimate that "consumers face an overall average effective tariff rate of 27 percent, the highest since 1903."

"This is only slightly different from where the effective rate was before the late-April 9 announcement," they added. Even after accounting for consumption shifts, the average tariff rate will be 18.5 percent, the Budget Lab anticipates. This would be the highest since 1933.

Thibault Denamiel, a fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), estimates that the US tariff rate was 2.4 percent in December 2024 -- a figure which now stands north of 20 percent.

Analysts have also pointed out that Trump's actions marked the biggest tariff increase since the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930, which deepened the Great Depression.

Trump says he wants to use tariffs to reorder the world economy by forcing manufacturers to base themselves in the United States and for other countries to decrease barriers to US goods.

Howard Lutnick, his commerce secretary, posted on social media Thursday that "the Golden Age is coming. We are committed to protecting our interests, engaging in global negotiations and exploding our economy."

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The EU welcomed the US president's partial row-back and the 27-nation grouping responded with its own olive branch. It suspended for 90 days tariffs on 20 billion euros' (\$22.4 billion) worth of US goods that had been greenlit in retaliation to duties on steel and aluminum.

But the bloc's chief Ursula von der Leyen told the Financial Times that there remained a "wide range of countermeasures" as the bloc's disposal if negotiations fall short.

"An example is you could put a levy on the advertising revenues of digital services" applying across the bloc, she said. This raised the possibility of the use of a new trade weapon called the anti-coercion instrument, according to the FT.

Dubbed a "bazooka", the weapon has never been used but empowers the EU to target services and could limit American companies' access to public procurement contracts in Europe.

Trump likewise warned that the tariffs could come back after the 90 days.

"If we can't make the deal we want to make... then we'd go back to where we were," he said.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney called Trump's reversal a "welcome reprieve" and said Ottawa would begin negotiations with Washington on a new economic deal after elections on April 28.

Vietnam said it had agreed with the United States to start trade talks, while Pakistan is sending a delegation to Washington. In its latest measure, Beijing announced it would reduce the number of Hollywood films imported, but said it remained ready for dialogue.

"We hope the US will meet China halfway, and, based on the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, properly resolve differences through dialogue and consultation," Commerce Ministry spokeswoman He Yongqian said. Trump brushed off Beijing's clampdown on US films, saying, "I think I've heard of worse things."

## U.S., Russia Describe Talks on Diplomatic Missions as Constructive, Positive



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - The United States and Russia both said on Thursday that they had made progress toward normalising the work of their diplomatic missions, with the United States saying it was still concerned about a Russian policy prohibiting the employment of local staff.

The meeting of the U.S. and Russian delegations in Istanbul followed initial talks in February, after the war in Ukraine triggered the biggest confrontation between Moscow and the West since the depths of the Cold War.

The talks were led by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Russia and Central Europe Sonata Coulter and Russia's new ambassador to Washington, Alexander Darchiev.

The U.S. delegation spent some six hours at the Russian consulate building in central Istanbul for the talks, a Reuters witness said. A State Department spokesperson had said on Tuesday that Ukraine was not on the agenda.

The State Department said Thursday's talks continued "the constructive approach" established in the February 27 meeting.

## Europeans Discuss Ukraine Peace Force But Big Questions Still Open

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Defense ministers from some 30 countries met in Brussels on Thursday to discuss a "reassurance force" for Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire in the war with Russia but key questions about its mission and any U.S. support remained unanswered.

The gathering at NATO headquarters was the latest in a series of meetings of the "coalition of the willing" of mainly European nations, led by Britain and France, on how they could cement peace if the United States brokers a halt to the fighting.

"Together we're stepping up as one, ready to secure Ukraine's future following any peace deal," British Defense Secretary John Healey said at the start of the meeting.

He said the coalition aimed to "put Ukraine in the strongest possible position, to protect its sovereignty and to deter any further Russian aggression".

Officials said some 200 military planners - mainly from Britain and France but also from other nations - had been involved so far. They have focused on the land, air and sea domains, as well as further bolstering Ukraine's armed forces.

"The first guarantee of security is of course support for the Ukrainian army - that means refusing the demilitarisation of Ukraine," French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecomte said.

Many senior European officials assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in halting his invasion but they are



keen to show U.S. President Donald Trump that they are ready to play their part if his outreach to Moscow pays off.

Trump has made clear that he expects Europeans to secure any peace that may result from his administration's talks. Ukraine has said it is ready to accept a ceasefire while Russia has said it needs answers to multiple questions before it can decide.

European officials say they are ready to step up but would likely need assurances that U.S. forces would come to their aid and help with logistics and intelligence to deploy to Ukraine. Trump has so far declined to provide such assurances.

Arriving at the meeting, several ministers said they needed more clarity on issues such as the precise mission of any reassurance force and its rules of engagement before they could decide on the size of the force and whether to commit troops.

"I don't exclude the possibility that Sweden is going to participate, but there's a number of questions that we need to get clarified," Swedish Defence Minister Pal Jonson said.

Dutch Defense Minister Ruben Brekelmans said the coalition needed to discuss how a force would operate in different scenarios, such as any escalation by Russia, and how it might operate with a potential ceasefire monitoring force.

"It's important that there is a clear picture on what such a mission would entail, and then we can also have our national decision-making process," he said.

## New Panama Deal Lets U.S. Deploy Troops Along Canal

PANAMA CITY (Dispatches) - U.S. troops will be able to deploy to a string of bases along the Panama Canal under a joint deal seen by AFP, a major concession to President Donald Trump as he seeks to reestablish influence over the vital waterway.

The agreement, signed by top security officials from both countries, allows U.S. military personnel to deploy to Panama-controlled facilities for training, exercises and "other activities."

The deal stops short of allowing the United States to build its own permanent bases on the isthmus, a move that would be deeply unpopular with Panamanians and legally fraught.

But it gives the United States broad sway to deploy an unspecified number of personnel to bases, some of which Washington built when it occupied the canal zone decades ago.

Trump, since returning to power in January, has repeatedly claimed that China has too much influence over the canal, which handles about 40 per cent of US container traffic and 5 per cent of world trade.

His administration has vowed to "take back" control of the strategic waterway that the United States funded, built and controlled until 1999.

The United States has long participated in military exercises in Panama. However, a longer-term rotational force — such as the one the United States maintains in Darwin, Australia — could prove politically toxic for Panama's



center-right leader Jose Raul Mulino.

Mulino was yesterday in Peru, where he revealed that the United States had asked to have its own bases.

Mulino said he had told visiting Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth that US bases, allowed under an earlier draft, would be "unacceptable."

He warned Hegseth: "Do you want to create a mess, what we've put in place here would set the country on fire."

In the watered-down "Memorandum of Understanding", signed by Hegseth and Panama's security chief Frank Abrego Wednesday, Panama won its own concessions.

The United States recognised Panama's sovereignty — not a given following Trump's refusal to rule out an invasion — and Panama will retain control over any installations.

Panama will also have to agree to any deployments.

But given Trump's willingness to rip up or rewrite trade deals, treaties and agreements, that might offer little comfort to worried Panamanians.

"What we have here is a setback to national sovereignty," Panamanian trade union leader Saul Mendez told AFP.

"What the Panamanian government has done is an act of treason. They are traitors and must be tried."



## Onana Blunders as Man United Stumble

PARIS (Dispatches) - Manchester United conceded in stoppage time to draw 2-2 away to Lyon on a bad night for goalkeeper Andre Onana in the first leg of their Europa League quarter-final, while Tottenham Hotspur drew 1-1 with Eintracht Frankfurt and Rangers held Athletic Bilbao.

The build-up to United's game in France had been dominated by a pre-match spat between Onana and Lyon's Nemanja Matic, who formerly played for the Old Trafford club. Matic described Onana as "one of the worst goalkeepers" in United's history, and the Cameroon international was at fault for both goals his team conceded on the night.

Thiago Almada's free-kick delivery evaded everyone and beat Onana to find the net and put Lyon in front on 26 minutes.

The visitors were level in first-half stoppage time when Manuel Ugarte hooked the ball back into the Lyon box after goalkeeper Lucas Perri punched away a Bruno Fernandes free-kick, and French defender Leny Yoro glanced home his first United goal.

It then looked like Ruben Amorim's side would leave with the victory when a delightful Fernandes assist was headed in by substitute Joshua Zirkzee in the 88th minute, but Lyon struck to make it 2-2 in the fifth minute of injury time.

Onana failed to hold a Georges Mikautadze shot, allowing Rayan Cherki to poke in the rebound and leave the tie firmly in the balance ahead of next week's second leg.

"We have one more game to change everything and that should be our focus," said Amorim, as the United coach admitted his players were gutted at the way the match ended.

"I felt the dressing room was really quiet and that is a good thing. We draw away in Europe, that is always hard. The team is suffering and we need to change that."

Tottenham Hotspur's Brennan Johnson fails to score during the Uefa Europa League quarter-final match with Eintracht Frankfurt at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London April 10, 2025. — AFP pic

Tottenham Hotspur's Brennan Johnson fails to score during the Uefa Europa League quarter-final match with Eintracht Frankfurt at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London April 10, 2025. — AFP pic

In London, Spurs fell behind at home to 2022 Europa League winners Frankfurt as French striker Hugo Ekitike gave the visitors the lead with a precise low strike into the bottom corner of the net just six minutes in.

However, Tottenham were back level before half-time as James Maddison -- who gave possession away in the build-up to Frankfurt's opener -- cut the ball back for Pedro Porro to score with a sublime back-heel flick.

Lucas Bergvall and Rodrigo Bentancur both then hit the woodwork for the Premier League side, but the final result will not do much to ease the pressure on under-fire Spurs manager Ange Postecoglou.

"It was disappointing to concede the way we did. The biggest blow we had was conceding so early. That kind of played into their hands," Postecoglou said.

"But even before that, I thought we were well in control of the game. I thought it would bring fruit in the second half and it did in every aspect but goals. I can't ask any more of the lads."

Athletic Bilbao are desperate to go all the way to this season's Europa League final, which will take place in their own San Mames stadium next month.

They could not take advantage of the fact they played most of yesterday's quarter-final first leg away to Rangers with an extra man, however, as the match in Glasgow ended 0-0.

Rangers were reduced to 10 men after just 13 minutes when defender Robin Proepper was shown a red card following a VAR review for a last-man foul on Inaki Williams on the edge of the box.

The Scottish side nevertheless held firm and goalkeeper Liam Kelly, selected ahead of Jack Butland, saved a late Alex Berenguer penalty, awarded following another VAR intervention, this time for a Dujon Sterling handball.

The winner of that tie will face either Lyon or Manchester United in the semi-finals, while Frankfurt or Tottenham will meet Bodo/Glimt or Lazio in the last four.

Norwegian champions Bodo/Glimt are well placed to reach a first European semi-final after beating Lazio 2-0 at home.

## Rose Storms Into Masters Lead, McIlroy Stumbles Late



AUGUSTA (Dispatches) - Justin Rose used a red-hot putter to grab a three-shot lead over a trio of players that included defending Masters champion Scottie Scheffler at Augusta National, where Grand Slam-seeking Rory McIlroy ran into trouble late.

Rose, twice a runner-up at the year's first major, needed just 22 putts en route to a seven-under-par 65 that equaled the Englishman's best start to a Masters.

It is also the fifth time Rose has had the first-round lead or co-lead at the Masters, surpassing golfing great Jack Nicklaus for most in the tournament's history.

"It was a really good day's golf on a golf course that was a stern test. I think if you look at the overall leaderboard, not many low scores out there," Rose told reporters. "A lot of quality shots, and delighted the way I played."

World number one Scheffler, who this week is looking to become the fourth golfer to retain his Masters crown, was in a share of second place with 2024 runner-up Ludvig Aberg and Canada's Corey Conners.

The 44-year-old Rose, who went out with the late starters, wasted no time making a move as he kicked off his round with three consecutive birdies and added another three in succession around the turn before back-to-back birdies at 15 and 16.

The only blemish on the card for Rose, who with a win here would become the oldest first-time Masters champion since a 41-year-old Mark O'Meara won in 1998, came at the 18th where he made bogey after his tee shot missed the fairway.

Scheffler's round included a huge birdie putt from 62 feet at the par-three fourth and a pair of up-and-down par saves after brilliant chips out of greenside bunkers at both the seventh and 17th holes.

"Anytime you can keep a card clean out here it's a really good thing... I struggled for what felt like two pars today," said Scheffler.

"I had to make two really good up-and-downs. But, other than that, the golf course was in front of me most of the day, kept the ball in play, did a lot of really good things out there."

With that long putt at the 240-yard fourth hole, Scheffler has now made at least one birdie on all 18 holes at Augusta National during his career.

## Pacers Seal Top-4 Spot in East

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Indiana Pacers secured home-court advantage in the first round of the Eastern Conference playoffs with a 114-112 win over the short-handed Cleveland Cavaliers on Thursday in Indianapolis.

With the New York Knicks' loss to the Detroit Pistons on Thursday, the Pacers could still earn the No. 3 seed in the East if they win their final two games while the Knicks lose out.

Tyrese Haliburton led the Pacers with 23 points and dished out 10 assists. He buried 3-pointers on back-to-back possessions to put Indiana ahead 113-107 with 3:08 remaining. The Cavaliers fought back and earned a chance to tie or win the game on the final possession, but Jaylon Tyson's turnaround attempt at the buzzer was no good.

Ty Jerome paced Cleveland with 24 points and De'Andre Hunter added 23 points and 11 rebounds. The Cavaliers, who have already clinched the No. 1 seed, played without Donovan Mitchell, Darius Garland, Evan Mobley and Max Strus.

Hawks 133, Nets 109: Rookie Zaccharie Risacher scored 23 of his career-high 38 points in the first half as Atlanta cruised past Brooklyn in New York.

Two days after turning 20, Risacher made 15 of 20 shots and posted his fourth career 30-point game, the most among rookies. The top overall pick also made six 3-pointers. Trae Young added



24 points and 12 assists for his league-leading 50th points-assists double-double as the Hawks shot 57.1 percent.

Jalen Wilson tied his season high with 20 points as the Nets got 75 points from the bench. Rookie Tosan Evbuomwan contributed 18 and rookie Tyson Etienne finished with 16.

Pistons 115, Knicks 106: Cade Cunningham poured in 36 points and recorded eight assists as host Detroit pulled out a comeback victory over New York in a preview of a potential first-round playoff matchup.

Jalen Duren supplied 18 points and 13 rebounds for the Pistons. Tobias Harris had 17 points and Ron Holland.

Karl-Anthony Towns led the Knicks with 25 points and 10 rebounds but also had seven turnovers. New York was missing OG Anunoby (thumb) and Josh Hart (knee).

Bucks 136, Pelicans 111: Giannis Antetokounmpo collected 28 points and 11 rebounds as host Milwaukee pulled away from New Orleans.

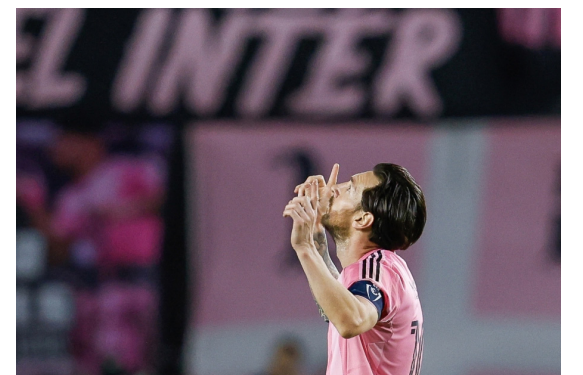
Antetokounmpo fell five assists short of what would have been his fourth straight triple-double, but the Bucks (46-34) still won their sixth consecutive game. Milwaukee's Kevin Porter Jr. scored 20 points.

Lester Quinones scored a career-high 21 while Keion Brooks Jr. and Jamal Cain each set a career best with 20 as the Pelicans lost their fifth game in a row.

Timberwolves 141, Grizzlies 125: Anthony Edwards scored 44 points and Julius Randle added 31 points and 10 rebounds to lead visiting Minnesota to a victory over Memphis.

The Timberwolves used a franchise-record 52-point third quarter to further tighten a Western Conference battle for one of the top six playoff spots. The Grizzlies, Timberwolves and Golden State Warriors are tied for sixth place with two games remaining. Teams finishing seventh through 10th must participate in a play-in tournament.

## Messi Scores Twice in Miami's Frantic Comeback Over LAFC



FORT LAUDERDALE (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi scored twice as Inter Miami fought back from 2-0 down on aggregate to defeat Los Angeles FC 3-1 and clinch a place in the semi-finals of the Concacaf Champions Cup.

The Argentine World Cup-winner yet again proved decisive in what was a frantic, chaotic and entertaining encounter, sealing a 3-2 aggregate victory from the penalty spot with six minutes of normal time remaining.

While there has never been any doubt that the eight-times Ballon d'Or winner still has the technical ability to win games at the age of 37, this was a night when Messi showed he retains the passion and aggression needed for a battle.

In the final minutes of stoppage time, Messi was chasing down opponents and putting in challenges as his team just about hung on for the win.

It was a display which left his coach and former Argentina and Barcelona team-mate Javier Mascherano describing the forward as the "soul" of the team.

"He's a guy who has already done everything in football, he's the greatest in history and he continues to set an example of how to compete," said Mascherano.

"Until the last day he plays on a pitch he's going to want to win and he's going to do the impossible to win. And it's not just about wanting to, you also have to be able to, and he has that ability," he said.

Trailing 1-0 from the first-leg in California, Miami quickly found themselves in big trouble when Aaron Long put LAFC ahead in the ninth minute.

After Miami keeper Oscar Ustari punched a corner out — Mark Delgado knocked the ball into the box and in the scramble Nathan Ordaz laid off to Long and the defender fired home.

## Tabilo Maintains Perfect Record Against Djokovic

MONTE CARLO (Dispatches) - Unseeded Alejandro Tabilo beat twice champion Novak Djokovic 6-3 6-4 in the second round of the Monte Carlo Masters to maintain a remarkable 100% record win record over the 24-times major winner.

Djokovic, who suffered a shock defeat in the Miami Open final last month, had received a bye into the last-32 but came up short against the Chilean who had also beaten him in Rome last year.

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"It has been a tough year, so a little bit of the nerves were there," Tabilo said in an on-court interview.

"I remembered last time what I did well and thankfully I served well today and it helped me a lot. It was an unreal match."

Tabilo has yet to drop a set against Djokovic as the 27-year-old registered back-to-back wins over the Serbian on clay.

Marat Safin and Jiri Vesely are the only other players to have faced Djokovic more than once and not lost, with both having 2-0 records.



Djokovic was chasing his 100th Tour level title while winning the Monte Carlo title would have made the 37-year-old the only player to win each Masters event at least three times.

"I expected myself at least to have put in a decent performance. Not like this, it was horrible," said Djokovic, who made 29 unforced errors.

"I did not have high expectations. I knew I'm going to have a tough opponent and I knew I'm going to probably play pretty bad. But this bad, I didn't expect."

"I was hoping it was not going to happen, but it was quite a high probability I'm going to play this way... A horrible feeling to play this way, just sorry for all the people that have to witness this."

A second victory for Tabilo looked unlikely as the Chilean came into the tournament with a 2-9 win-loss record having lost his first six matches of the year before he turned things around.