

Newly Appointed Iranian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna, Reza Najafi, Held Talks With His Russian Counterpart, Calling for the Continuation of Close Diplomatic Relations Between the Two Countries

# IRAN NEWS

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Says After Consultations, It Was Decided That Muscat (the Capital of Oman) Will Continue to Host the Second Round of Iran-U.S. Talks, Which Will Be Held on Saturday

VOL. XXIX, No. 8242 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY APRIL 16, 2025 FARVARDIN 27, 1404

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### Iranian Diplomat Urges Reinforcement of Multilateralism



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian diplomat has stressed the urgent need to revitalize multilateralism and uphold the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter on the global stage, while denouncing the erosion of international norms due to the rise of unilateral coercive measures.

The deputy for legal and international affairs at Iran's Foreign Ministry, Kazem Gharibabadi, made the remarks at the third meeting of national coordinators of the Group of Friends in Defense of the UN Charter, a UN grouping, which convened in Moscow on Monday with the participation of senior officials and deputy foreign ministers from 20 countries.

Addressing the high-level session, the Iranian official warned that "excessive unilateralism" by certain international actors had severely undermined the UN Charter, pushing multilateral diplomacy to "its most fragile state since the World War II."

He lamented that eight decades after the United Nations foundation, the organization's core mission, namely protecting future generations from the scourge of war and upholding international peace and security, had been compromised by the selective actions of some states.

"Today, the United Nations and its institutions, which were supposed to serve international peace and security, have turned into instruments of pressure in the hands of a few countries to impose their political will on others," Gharibabadi said.

He pointed to the ongoing US-backed Israeli war of genocide on the Gaza Strip as a glaring example of the UN Security Council's failure to act.

He said the collective punishment of Gaza's civilians and the deliberate targeting of vital infrastructure are flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

### Iran Signs Contract to Convert Iraq's Flare Gas Into Petchem Feedstock



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has secured a contract to convert flare gas from Iraqi oilfields into feedstock for petrochemical plants located near its border with the Arab country.

Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs Hayyan Abdul Ghani supervised the signing of the contract on Monday in Baghdad, according to a report by the Iranian Oil Ministry's news service Shana.

The report said that Iran's state-run and private companies will contribute to the flare gas recovery project in the Iraqi oilfields that are located near the Iranian border.

The report quoted Paknejad as saying that Iraq is currently burning a part of the flare gas that is extracted with oil, adding that Iran will capture the gases and transport them to its Natural Gas Liquids (NGL) plants across the border to convert them to feedstock for its petrochemical plants.

He said that the contract will alleviate a shortage of NGL feedstock in western Iran where the country is racing against time to end gas flaring in its own oilfields.

Shana said Paknejad and his delegation, who arrived in Iraq earlier in the day as part of an official visit, signed other contracts with the Iraqi side led by Abdul Ghani to facilitate petroleum sector cooperation between the world's two major oil-producing nations.

## Iran Declares Military Strength and National Security as Red Lines



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a strongly worded statement marking the first anniversary of the strategic military operation "True Promise 1," Iran reaffirmed that its national security and military capabilities are non-negotiable red lines. Brigadier General Ali Mohammad Naeini, spokesperson for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), emphasized that these principles remain beyond the scope of any talks, regardless of the circumstances.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Naeini described True Promise 1 as the largest drone operation in regional history, with an operational range of over 1,000 kilometers. He called the mission a turning point in Iran's strategic defense posture and labeled it the first direct and public military confrontation between the Islamic Republic and Israel.

"This operation marked Iran's asymmetrical offensive capability and initiative in striking the Zionist enemy," Naeini stated.

He clarified that the operation was legal and legitimate, citing Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which permits self-defense against armed attacks. According to Naeini, the mission sent a triple message to observers: the Iranian state's firm resolve to retaliate against aggression, the armed forces' readiness to engage Israel militarily, and the unique military planning frameworks rooted in asymmetrical warfare developed by Iran.

The operation, he added, demonstrated Iran's independence in military decisions, even under overt and covert political pressure from international backers of Israel. The move also highlighted the unity between Iran's political and military leadership, showing cohesive national resolve in response to Israel's attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus.

Naeini explained that the operation was based on a calculated strategy encompassing both

strategic (long-term) and tactical (immediate) goals. These included: Undermining Israel's deterrence capabilities; Exposing security vulnerabilities within Israel; Spreading fear within Israeli society about the potential of a broader conflict; and showcasing the strength and resolve of the Iranian people and its armed forces on the global stage.

He further claimed that the operation exposed the fragility of Israel's security apparatus, despite extensive media portrayals suggesting otherwise. Naeini asserted that Iran's missile and drone power had been conclusively demonstrated to regional and international audiences.

Additionally, Naeini touched on the broader socio-political impact of the operation, noting that it was widely welcomed and praised by Islamic nations and resistance movements. He said it renewed hope among Palestinians and the people of Gaza, and symbolized continued regional support for the eradication of Israel, rooted in the Islamic identity of the Middle East.

In concluding his remarks, Naeini reaffirmed that both True Promise 1 and its successor, True Promise 2, serve as tangible examples of Iran's firm commitment to national defense. He emphasized that these actions enjoy widespread public and popular support, further reinforcing Iran's revolutionary values and patriotic spirit.

"National security and military strength are red lines for the Islamic Republic of Iran," Naeini stated. "Operations like True Promise 1 underscore the Iranian people's support for their armed forces and their unwavering adherence to revolutionary ideals—contrary to the distortions spread by foreign media."

The press conference ended with a reiteration of Iran's stance: any threats to its sovereignty will be met with a decisive and well-supported military response.

### Iranian Official Urges Swift Signing of Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Treaty



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, has emphasized the urgent need for the swift signing of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, calling it a crucial step toward strengthening stability in both countries and the wider region.

According to a report by IRNA citing the Armenian state news agency Armenpress, Takht-Ravanchi made these remarks in an interview with the Region Monitor website. He stated that Iran, which maintains friendly and neighborly relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, is fully prepared to support all efforts aimed at facilitating the signing of the peace treaty.

"We must leave the past behind and focus on the future. The peace agreement text is ready for signature, and the sooner it is signed, the better it will be for all of us," Takht-Ravanchi said.

He reiterated Iran's commitment to assisting in the peace process, highlighting Tehran's balanced diplomatic stance and dedication to the principle of good neighborliness. "The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully ready to offer unwavering support for all efforts aimed at expediting and facilitating the signing of the peace treaty."

Expressing hope for a permanent end to military hostilities between the two South Caucasus neighbors, the Iranian official also addressed concerns over potential future military conflicts raised by analysts. "We are against any changes to internationally recognized borders and the violation of territorial integrity. No country has the right to invade another's territory by relying on military force," he asserted.

Takht-Ravanchi concluded by underscoring the importance of regional cooperation, stating that countries in the region must work together based on mutual respect and international law to build a future of peace, friendship, cooperation, and progress for generations to come.

### Global Support for the Liberation of Quds Grows



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The global movement for the liberation of Quds has transcended religious boundaries and become a universal symbol of justice and peace, declared Brigadier General Gholamreza Soleimani, head of Iran's Basij Organization, at the closing ceremony of the 10th Abu Dhar Media Festival.

Speaking at the Islamic Azad University in Tehran, Soleimani said that while in the past Quds was primarily considered a Muslim cause, today it represents a universal ideal. "Humanity has awakened," he emphasized, "and people across the world are recognizing the need to confront global oppression, particularly the crimes of the Zionist regime in Palestine."

Soleimani condemned centuries of what he described as Western imperialist ambitions toward Palestine, citing events from the Crusades to the present day. He argued that today's suffering of the Palestinian people is a continuation of long-standing injustice perpetrated by dominant Western powers and their allies.

Highlighting the role of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, he asserted that Iran's support for the Palestinian cause has helped elevate it to a global issue. "The late Imam Khomeini placed Palestine at the heart of the Muslim world's priorities," he noted, adding that this stance has since inspired other nations and media platforms to adopt the cause.

Soleimani also criticized the use of scientific and technological advancements by the West during the Renaissance, claiming they were ultimately used to subjugate nations in Africa and Asia. He called on media worldwide to reveal these truths and challenge the historical narratives propagated by colonial powers.

Pointing to growing international solidarity with Palestine, he praised Western academics and intellectuals who have spoken out against Israeli policies. "Palestine has become a global litmus test between justice and oppression," he said, lamenting that awards like the Nobel Peace Prize have sometimes been given to individuals with blood on their hands.

## No Discrimination in Judiciary; Firm Action Against Corruption

TEHRAN - In a high-level provincial meeting focused on legal support for investment and production, Iran's Judiciary Chief, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, emphasized that the judiciary does not discriminate and that firm legal action will be taken against those who disrupt public security—regardless of their status or position.

Speaking in Hamedan, Mohseni-Ejei said, "The law must be applied equally. We cannot ignore one person's actions that disturb public peace while prosecuting another for similar behavior. There will be no double standards in our approach."

He underscored the judiciary's commitment to full and unbiased enforcement of the law and noted that societal security—both physical and psychological—remains a top priority. "Those who spread harmful rumors or baseless allegations that disturb mental peace will face legal consequences," he stated, while also stressing the need for discretion in not prosecuting unnecessarily.

Highlighting the importance of empowering local governance, Mohseni-Ejei said that over the past four years of his tenure, he has been willing to delegate legal authority to provincial judiciary heads to help resolve regional issues effectively.

He also urged national officials to grant more decision-making powers to local leaders, particularly governors, to address regional challenges. "Even delegating five key responsibilities to governors can yield positive outcomes," he advised.

The Judiciary Chief drew a distinction between corrupt individuals and businesspeople who have faltered due to market instability. "We differentiate between a corrupt individual, a negligent actor, and a struggling producer. They cannot be treated the same," he stated. "Those who fell due to economic turbulence should be supported to rise again."

However, he was adamant about strict action against those who intentionally commit corruption. "When a government official is involved in corruption, our response will be even more severe," he added, reaffirming the judiciary's zero-tolerance stance.



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

Addressing the inconsistency in import-export policies, Mohseni-Ejei criticized the abrupt regulatory shifts that negatively impact producers. "Producers plan and even pre-sell products for export, only to face last-minute bans. This disrupts businesses and erodes trust."

He emphasized the need for long-term, credible policy frameworks that don't require constant revision. "Our regulations must be robust and dependable—not subject to change every six months," he said, urging policymakers to keep promises to the public realistic and actionable.

Prior to Mohseni-Ejei's remarks, Hamedan Governor Milad Malanouri highlighted the province's agricultural base and potential in tourism. "With proper planning and investment, we can fully utilize these capacities," he said, noting that Hamedan is already leading in implementing resistance economy policies.

He also stated that the province is working on completing semi-finished industrial projects and reviving inactive economic units.

Ayatollah Sha'bani, the Supreme Leader's representative in Hamedan, praised Mohseni-Ejei's humble and anti-corruption approach, noting that his specialized statements offer hope for the full implementation of the judiciary's transformation roadmap. He emphasized that development must be distributed fairly across the country.

Meanwhile, First Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hamid-Reza Hajji-Babaei, called for greater involvement of the people in economic activities and reaffirmed parliament's commitment to removing barriers to production.

In a unified voice, other provincial representatives—from agriculture, industry, tourism, and dairy sectors—shared their perspectives and concerns. The President of Hamedan's Chamber of Commerce stressed the need for strengthening arbitration and mediation systems, while local producers voiced the challenges they face with warehousing regulations and market access.

The presence of the Judiciary Chief in Hamedan was widely interpreted as a strong signal of the government's intent to support private enterprise and ensure legal safeguards for sustainable economic growth.

# IRAN NEWS



## Iran and Russia to Boost Oil Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian and Russian oil officials have reaffirmed their commitment to expanding bilateral cooperation in the energy sector.

According to the Iranian Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC), a joint meeting was held between PEDEC and the Russian company ZN Vostok (ZNV) to explore strategies for the development of oil fields and enhancement of technical collaboration. The meeting took place on Monday, and was attended by Nasrollah Zarei, PEDEC's CEO, members of the board of directors, and project managers for the development and production enhancement of the Aban and Paydar Gharb oil fields, as well as Cheshmeh Khosh, Dalpari, and Paydar Sharq fields.

## No Barriers to Ties with Eurasian Countries



TEHRAN - First Vice President, Mohammad Reza Aref, announced that the "Free Trade Law" with Eurasian countries has been activated, removing all barriers to cooperation with the region. Formal operations under this framework are set to begin in the coming months.

Speaking on Tuesday during the 10th Meeting of the Strategic Council for the Seventh Development Plan, Aref emphasized that the formation of this council is a novel and innovative step in Iran's development planning. "All council members hold official positions, which signals a serious commitment to implementing the plan and achieving its goals," he said.

The meeting, held at the Vice President's office with the presence of ministers, senior managers, and council representatives, highlighted the importance of oversight in development planning. Aref noted that unlike previous plans, the Seventh Development Plan includes clear mechanisms for monitoring implementation.

He added that over the past six months, the government and executive bodies have made necessary preparations to meet the plan's targets. One major concern, Aref said, is securing the financial resources required to achieve an 8% economic growth rate. "Our key strategies will focus on investment and production," he noted.

Aref clarified that Iran's definition of production extends beyond just physical goods. "Software and digital products are also crucial areas where Iran holds strong advantages. We're leading in advanced technologies, and despite existing challenges, the country's capabilities remain high," he explained.

Highlighting the broader vision, Aref stated, "Our target market is not limited to Iran; it includes all countries within Iran's civilizational sphere. Cooperation with Eurasian countries has been highly successful and is growing stronger."

He emphasized that Iran is in a favorable position to expand regional cooperation, particularly with its memberships in regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and the Eurasian Economic Union.

"We must leverage our competitive advantages to direct production toward activating markets in Iran's extended cultural and economic region," Aref concluded.

The session also featured reports on the development of a National Industrial Advancement Strategy and updates on the deployment of financial oversight mechanisms under Article 118 of the Seventh Development Plan.

## Iran's Power Industry Requires €3b



TEHRAN - Iran's power sector needs an annual investment of €2.5 to €3 billion to keep pace with growing electricity demand, according to Abbas Karimi, Vice Chairman of the Iranian Power Plant Owners Association. With consumption increasing by 4,000 to 5,000 megawatts each year, Iran must significantly expand its power generation capacity.

Speaking to ILNA, Karimi highlighted the importance of international cooperation and the potential impact of successful negotiations in Muscat on attracting foreign investment. He emphasized that despite advancements in power plant technology, the lack of investment in recent years has hampered growth in the sector.

"Due to unattractive investment conditions in the electricity sector, we've seen limited development even though electricity consumption has grown by about 5% annually—and in some years, even more," Karimi explained. "If sanctions ease and restrictions are lifted, we will see increased interest from international investors in Iran's power sector."

Karimi stressed that both thermal and renewable power plants require substantial investment, which cannot be sourced entirely from within the country. "For example, constructing one megawatt of solar or combined-cycle power generation capacity costs roughly €500,000. That means a 1,000 MW plant would require around €500 million. To meet our annual target of 5,000 MW, we need between €2.5 to €3 billion each year."

He noted that alongside revising the pricing structure for purchasing energy from power plants to make investment more economically viable, the government must also facilitate the entry of foreign technology, equipment, and capital.

## Iran and Turkey to Establish Joint Free Trade Zone



TEHRAN - Iran is moving forward with plans to establish joint free trade zones with neighboring countries, with Turkey being the top priority, according to Reza Masroor, Secretary of Iran's Supreme Council of Free and Special Economic Zones. The move is part of a broader strategy to attract investment and boost regional economic integration.

Speaking at a high-level meeting with deputy ministers and managing directors of Iran's Free Trade Zones (FTZs), Masroor announced that detailed studies and follow-up efforts are underway to create joint economic zones with Turkey, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan.

Masroor emphasized the importance of forming a joint free zone with Turkey and called for the establishment of an active Iran-Turkey working group to accelerate the initiative. He revealed that a key meeting with Turkish investors and representatives from Turkey's FTZs is scheduled for July in one of Iran's own free zones.

The idea of cross-border FTZs reflects Iran's strategy to bypass sanctions and create new regional economic lifelines. Turkey, as Iran's western neighbor and a major regional power, plays a strategic role in Iran's trade plans, especially amid growing pressure on Iran's economy due to international sanctions and limited access to global financial systems.

Masroor criticized the sluggish progress of certain free zone projects that have remained incomplete for over a decade, urging decisive and time-bound action. "There are development plans in some zones that have been left unresolved for 10 to 15 years. These issues require specialized task forces, but task forces alone are not enough. Problems must be addressed structurally and at their root," he said.

He called on the heads of each FTZ to be directly involved in these task forces and ensure that tangible outcomes are achieved within six months. He also stressed that the overall investment climate in the free zones must improve significantly, with incentives for investors being approved and implemented without delay.

"Investment zones were created specifically to attract capital," Masroor said. "What has been done in the past must now be followed by a visible leap forward."

A key theme of Masroor's remarks was the importance of investor satisfaction. He noted that new investors often base their decisions on the experiences of others, making responsiveness and results critical to sustained

interest in the zones. He also stressed that the success of FTZs depends on the support of local communities.

"In regions where the local population is more actively present, their satisfaction is crucial. Investment projects must be transparent and clearly communicated to ensure local backing," he said.

The Iranian government, now in its 14th administration, has reportedly placed greater emphasis on public service and community engagement as part of its development strategy. Masroor said that local satisfaction is now one of the key performance indicators for the FTZs.

Masroor reiterated that the FTZs are not meant to cater to domestic markets but are designed to drive export-led production. "These zones were created for production and export. Selling to the domestic market is not their purpose and can create complications," he stated.

He urged zone managers to develop serious plans to attract knowledge-based companies, which he described as the "engine of production." The zones are expected to provide tailored incentives and streamlined licensing processes to facilitate this.

Additionally, Masroor announced that executive guidelines for a new financial agency to support investment in FTZs would soon be issued. These agencies will act as facilitators to attract capital and provide financing solutions for projects within the zones.

Tourism was another focus of the meeting. Mehdi Mazinani, Deputy for Culture, Social Affairs, and Tourism, reported that the Aras Free Zone led the country in tourist attraction during the recent Nowruz holidays compared to the previous year.

Masroor also highlighted the need to improve tourism infrastructure, including addressing issues such as the electric power supply in Kish Free Zone and ensuring health services for visitors.

As Iran navigates complex regional and international dynamics, joint FTZs offer a potentially transformative tool for strengthening ties with neighboring countries, circumventing sanctions, and promoting economic resilience. However, success will depend on swift execution, meaningful investor support, and active engagement with local communities.

With the upcoming meeting with Turkish investors on the horizon, eyes are now on how fast these plans will materialize and whether Iran can deliver on its ambitious vision for economic revitalization through regional collaboration.

## Bushehr and Dayyer Ports Poised to Become Iran's Export Hubs to Arab Countries

TEHRAN - In a move that could significantly boost Iran's trade presence in the Persian Gulf region, a senior member of Iran's Chamber of Commerce announced plans for Bushehr and Dayyer ports to become central export hubs for trade with Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Khurshid Gazdarazi, head of the Bushehr Chamber of Commerce, said the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization has agreed in principle to designate Bushehr Port as Iran's main export gateway to Dammam, Saudi Arabia, mirroring the current role of Dayyer Port as the country's primary export hub to Qatar.

"Bushehr's proximity to the Persian Gulf states provides a strategic opportunity to expand regional trade," Gazdarazi told ILNA. "Given that Bushehr ports are the closest Iranian ports to Dammam, we proposed the province be positioned as Iran's representative in trade with Saudi Arabia—a proposal that received support from national authorities."

Currently, Iranian goods are exported to Saudi Arabia indirectly through Kuwait. Gazdarazi emphasized the need to enhance port infrastructure to align with the province's growing commercial potential. "As trade and economic exchanges grow, so must our port facilities. The Ports and Customs Organization must invest in the necessary upgrades to realize this vision."

Dayyer Port already serves as a transit hub in addition to an export site, but Gazdarazi highlighted the urgent need to upgrade infrastructure



in both ports, especially Bushehr. He called for the dredging of Bushehr Port to a depth of 14 meters to accommodate large cargo vessels with capacities exceeding 50,000 tons, which are expected to arrive in the coming months.

With nearly 700 kilometers of coastline, Bushehr Province hosts 10 active commercial ports, including Kangan, Genaveh, Deylam, Kharg, and Asaluyeh. While Dayyer plays a key role in fruit and vegetable exports to Qatar, mineral exports are mainly handled through Bushehr Port.

Addressing Iran's trade presence in Qatar, Gazdarazi mentioned the Iran Trade Center in Qatar was launched during the current administration. The Iran-Qatar Joint Chamber of Commerce has recommended the center operate under private sector management with government oversight. This approach was welcomed during a recent visit by the head of the Trade Promotion Organization to Bushehr, who agreed that Bushehr Province would represent Iran's Chamber of Commerce at the center. The center is expected to resume operations later this year.

Commenting on the broader trade landscape, Gazdarazi said any easing of U.S.-Iran tensions could positively impact Iranian trade. "Sanctions have raised the cost and risk of international trade for Iranian exporters. When forced to use third-party countries, not only do costs increase, but risks multiply. Easing these pressures would undoubtedly help expand Iran's export markets."

## Iran, U.S. Talks Could Usher in New Chapter for Iran's Trade Relations



TEHRAN - In a recent online meeting between Iranian and Slovak trade officials, Samad Hassanzadeh, President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, expressed optimism that successful negotiations between Iran and the United States could lead to a resolution of Iran's international challenges and mark the beginning of a new era in its global trade relations—including with European countries.

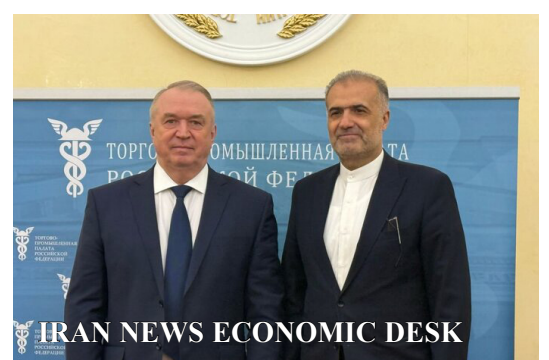
Speaking with Peter Mihók, President of the Slovak Chamber of Commerce, Hassanzadeh emphasized that both Iran's private sector and government are eager to strengthen economic cooperation with countries like Slovakia. "We believe no country can achieve economic development in isolation. Mutual collaboration is essential," he said.

Highlighting the role of chambers of commerce in fostering international ties, Hassanzadeh invited Slovak trade delegations to Iran and pointed to the upcoming Iran Expo 2025, set to begin on April 28, as an ideal opportunity for Slovak companies to explore Iran's industrial and manufacturing capabilities.

Hassanzadeh noted Iran's vast potential in industries such as petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, food processing, steel, auto parts, and tech-based services. He stressed that deeper cooperation between the two chambers could help both countries meet their economic needs more effectively.

He also proposed the formation of a joint trade committee between Iranian and Slovak businesses, saying it would streamline cooperation. With a bilateral tax reduction agreement already in place, Hassanzadeh believes this committee could pave the way for more practical partnerships.

## Iran Invites Russian Businesses to Participate in Iran Expo 2025



TEHRAN - Iranian Ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, met with Sergey Katyrin, President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on Monday, April 14. The meeting centered around strengthening bilateral trade relations, with Jalali extending an official invitation to Russian businesses to actively participate in the upcoming Iran Expo 2025.

According to a statement from the Iranian Embassy in Moscow, both sides emphasized the importance of enhancing trade cooperation and exchanging business delegations. They reaffirmed their commitment to expanding economic ties in light of the Free Trade Agreement signed between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Ambassador Jalali described the current trajectory of trade between Iran and Russia as promising, stressing the need for full implementation of the Free Trade Agreement. Highlighting the upcoming Iran Expo 2025, an exhibition showcasing Iran's export capabilities, Jalali encouraged Russian companies and economic actors to take part in the event.

He also announced that a high-ranking Iranian trade delegation, headed by the President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, will soon visit Moscow.

In response, Katyrin welcomed the upcoming visit and confirmed the Russian Chamber of Commerce's readiness to host the Iranian delegation. While he acknowledged that trade volumes between the two nations are satisfactory, he noted they still fall short of the full potential and should be significantly increased.

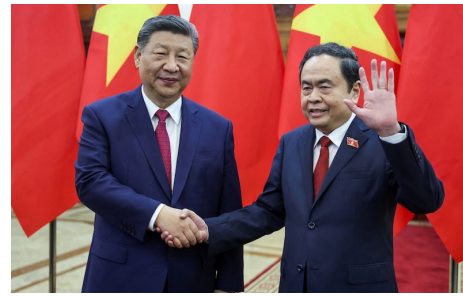
Katyrin advocated for greater mutual participation in each country's specialized trade exhibitions and described the Iran-EAEU Free Trade Agreement as a significant opportunity to transform bilateral trade.

The meeting also included coordination on the timing and details of the upcoming visit by Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, along with a large delegation of Iranian traders and entrepreneurs.

## China, Vietnam Sign Deals as Xi Visits Hanoi

HANOI (Dispatches) - China's President Xi Jinping called on Monday for stronger ties with Vietnam on trade and supply chains amid disruptions caused by U.S. tariffs, as he attended the signing in Hanoi of dozens of cooperation agreements between the two communist-run nations.

The visit, planned for weeks and part of a wider trip in Southeast Asia, comes as Beijing faces 145% U.S. duties, while Vietnam is negotiating a reduction of threatened U.S. tariffs of 46% that would otherwise apply in July after a global moratorium expires. "The two sides should strengthen cooperation in production and supply chains," Xi said in an article in Nhandan, the newspaper of Vietnam's Communist Party, posted ahead of his arrival on Monday. He also urged more trade and stronger ties with Hanoi on artificial intelligence and the green economy.



## China's Economy Likely Grew 5.1% in Q1 on Export Surge



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China is expected to post first-quarter growth of around five percent on Wednesday, buoyed by exporters rushing to stave off higher US tariffs but still weighed by sluggish domestic consumption, analysts say.

Beijing and Washington are locked in a fast-moving, high-stakes game of brinkmanship since US President Donald Trump launched a global tariff assault that has particularly targeted Chinese imports.

Tit-for-tat exchanges have seen US levies imposed on China rise to 145 percent, and Beijing setting a retaliatory 125 percent toll on US imports.

Official data Wednesday will offer a first glimpse into how those trade war fears are affecting the Asian giant's fragile economic recovery, which was already feeling the pressure of persistently low consumption and a property market debt crisis.

Analysts polled by AFP forecast the world's number two economy to have grown 5.1 percent from January to March - down from 5.4 the previous quarter.

Figures released Monday showed Beijing's exports soared more than 12 percent on-year in March, smashing expectations, with analysts attributed it to a "frontloading" of orders ahead of Trump's so-called "Liberation Day" tariffs on April 2.

They also expect that to have boosted economic growth in the first quarter. However, they warned the GDP reading may prove to be a rare bright spot in a year that promises more woe for the world's second-largest economy.

"China's economy is facing pressure on multiple fronts," Sarah Tan, an economist at Moody's Analytics, said.

"The export bright spot is fading as tariff hikes from the US took effect," she added. "Domestic demand remains sluggish amid elevated unemployment and a property market stuck in correction," Tan said.

## Tensions Flare as Algeria Expels 12 French Officials



ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Tensions flared between France and Algeria on Monday after the former French colony ordered 12 French officials to leave in 48 hours.

Algeria's foreign ministry said it had declared the 12 persona non grata after the arrest in France of an Algerian consular official, a "vile act" it blamed on French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau.

It defended the decision as "sovereign" and described the arrest of its official as "the consequence of the negative, distressing and constant attitude of the French minister of the interior toward Algeria".

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot had earlier said the expulsion orders were linked to the arrest of three Algerian nationals in France.

"I am asking Algerian authorities to abandon these expulsion measures," Barrot said, adding: "If the decision to send back our officials is maintained, we will have no other choice but to respond immediately."

The 12 include some members of the French interior ministry, a diplomatic source told AFP.

## Hamas Calls for End to Gaza War and Israeli Withdrawal



CAIRO (Dispatches) - A senior Hamas official said on Monday that the Palestinian group is prepared to release all Israeli hostages in exchange for a "serious prisoner swap" and guarantees that Israel will end the war in Gaza.

Hamas left Cairo on Monday after negotiations with mediators from Egypt and Qatar - two nations working alongside the United States to broker a ceasefire in the besieged territory.

"We are ready to release all Israeli captives in exchange for a serious prisoner swap deal, an end to the war, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the entry of humanitarian aid," Taher al-Nunu, a senior Hamas official, told AFP.

However, he accused Israel of obstructing progress towards a ceasefire.

"The issue is not the number of captives," Nunu said, "but rather that the occupation is reneging on its commitments, blocking the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and continuing the war".

"Hamas has therefore stressed the need for guarantees to compel the occupation (Israel) to uphold the agreement," he added.

Israeli news website Ynet reported on Monday that a new proposal had been put to Hamas.

Under the deal, the group would release 10 living hostages in exchange for US guarantees that Israel would enter negotiations for a second phase of the ceasefire.

The first phase of the ceasefire, which began on January 19 and included multiple hostage-prisoner exchanges, lasted two months before disintegrating.

Efforts towards a new truce have stalled, reportedly over disputes regarding the number of hostages to be released by Hamas, with 58 people still held in the Palestinian territory.

Pointing to those failed negotiations, Israeli campaign group the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said it was against talks aimed at phased hostage releases.

"The phased method wastes valuable time and jeopardises all of the hostages", the group representing relatives of hostages said.

"We demand to choose the necessary, feasible and appropriate solution: ending the war and returning all the hostages together, in one immediate phase."

Meanwhile, Nunu said that Hamas would not disarm, a key condition that Israel has set for ending the war.

"The weapons of the resistance are not up for negotiation," Nunu said.

The war in Gaza broke out after Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel. The attack resulted in the deaths of 1,218 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

Militants also took 251 hostages, 58 of whom are still held in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead.

Meanwhile Israel has reportedly offered a 45-day ceasefire if Hamas releases half of the hostages still held in Gaza, Hamas said on Monday, adding that it had refused Israel's request for the Palestinian militants' disarmament. The UN said that, one month into Israel's blockade on aid entering Gaza, the humanitarian situation is the worst it has been since the war started.

## U.S. Hits China With 145% Tariffs, Trump Vows More

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said there was no reason that the US and Chinese economies had to cleave apart, saying a deal could be done even as the two economic powerhouses trade tariff threats.

"There's a big deal to be done at some point" Bessent said when asked by Bloomberg TV about the possibility that the world's largest economies would decouple.

"There doesn't have to be" decoupling, he said, "but there could be."

Bessent stressed that a deal with China would be more difficult than with other nations because "China is both our biggest economic competitor and our biggest military rival."

The world's two largest economies have been locked in a fast-moving game of brinkmanship since US President Donald Trump launched a global tariff assault that particularly targeted Chinese imports.

Tit-for-tat exchanges have seen US levies imposed on China rise to 145 percent, with Beijing setting a retaliatory 125 percent band on US imports.

The US side has sent mixed messages about what it wants to achieve and whether tariffs that would rock the world economy can be avoided.

The White House had appeared to dial down the



pressure recently, listing tariff exemptions for smartphones, laptops, semiconductors and other electronic products for which China is a major source.

But Trump and some of his top aides said Sunday that the exemptions had been misconstrued and would only be temporary as his team pursued fresh tariffs against many items on the list.

"NOBODY is getting 'off the hook'... especially not China which, by far, treats us the worst!" he posted on his Truth Social platform.

Bessent warned that Trump's tariffs were "not a joke."

"These are big numbers. I think no one who thinks they're sustainable wants them to remain here."

China's Xi Jinping on Monday kicked off a Southeast Asia tour with a visit to Vietnam—where he warned that protectionism "will lead nowhere" and a trade war would "produce no winner."

The White House has said Trump remains optimistic about securing a trade deal with China, although administration officials have made it clear they expect Beijing to reach out first.

The trade war is raising fears of an economic downturn as the dollar tumbles and investors dump US government bonds, normally considered a safe haven investment.

## El Salvador Not to Return Wrongly Deported Ban Back to U.S.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - El Salvador President Nayib Bukele said on Monday he had no plans to return Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a man mistakenly deported from the U.S., suggesting doing so would be like smuggling a "terrorist" into the country, as he met President Donald Trump at the White House.

El Salvador's President Bukele assured Trump on Monday that he would not return a man mistakenly deported from the United States, as the pair bonded over Trump's scheme to send migrants to a notorious prison in the Central American country.

Trump gave a warm welcome in the Oval Office to 43-year-old Bukele, the self-proclaimed "world's coolest dictator" who is now the US president's key ally in his controversial push to deport illegal migrants.

But the pair faced questions over the case of a father who was mistakenly deported to the Salvadoran mega-prison - and whose return a US court has ordered the Trump administration to facilitate.

"Of course, I'm not going to do it," Bukele told reporters when asked if he would send the man, Kilmar Abrego Garcia, back to the United States.

"The question is preposterous.... I don't have the power to return him to the United States."

Trump and Bukele, who wore a dark T-shirt under a suit, spent much of the meeting complimenting each other on their migration and crime policies.



Known for his stylish dress sense and social media savvy, Bukele is broadly popular at home for clamping down on once rampant drug gangs that terrorized El Salvador.

But the Salvadoran leader is accused of overseeing mass human rights violations, epitomized by a huge, brutal prison known as CECOT.

Trump's immigration policies focused on what he says is the threat of a gang-led crime wave in the United States, are meanwhile among his most popular, receiving much higher ratings than on the economy.

"You are helping us out, and we appreciate it," 78-year-old Trump told Bukele.

Trump also reiterated that he was even considering deporting some US citizens who commit violent crimes to El Salvador, saying "I'm all for it" and asking Attorney General Pam Bondi to look into the idea.

Trump and Bukele also share a taste for conservative, strongman-style politics. They spent several minutes criticizing the media and then talking about the issue of transgender athletes in women's sports.

Shortly after Trump's inauguration for a second term, Bukele made the extraordinary offer to take in prisoners from the United States, in exchange for a fee of \$6 million.

Trump took the Salvadoran leader up on his proposal, sending more than 250 migrants there - a majority of them under a rarely used wartime law dating to 1798, which stripped the deportees of due process.



## Wallace Lifts Atlanta Over Orlando 117-105

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Keaton Wallace had a triple-double with 15 points, 15 assists and 11 rebounds to lift host Atlanta over Orlando 117-105. The teams will meet again Tuesday in Orlando in the play-in tournament, with the winner claiming the seventh seed and a first-round match-up against Boston.

It was a day for the reserves to log plenty of minutes as both teams rested their primary players. Wallace is in his fourth year as a pro but spent most of that time in the G League before making his NBA debut in October 2024. Terance Mann led the Hawks with 19 points. Jacob Toppin had a career-high 17 points for Atlanta, including five 3-pointers.

Anthony Black led the Magic with 20 points and Jett Howard had 16 off the bench. Orlando finished the regular season 41-41, Atlanta 40-42. The teams split four regular-season meetings.

Celtics 93, Hornets 86: Payton Pritchard tossed in a game-high 34 points to help Boston defeat visiting Charlotte.

As expected, the playoff-bound Celtics rested most of their top players. Boston received 15 points from Sam Hauser and 11 points and eight rebounds from Luke Kornet.

Charlotte, which trailed by 21 early, tied the game 86-86 on a Moussa Diabate layup with 2:13 to play, but Boston regained control by scoring the game's final seven points. Josh Okogie and Jusuf Nurkic each scored a team-high 14 points for the Hornets.

Pacers 126, Cavaliers 118 (2OT): Indiana rallied from 27 down -- the biggest comeback in team history -- to beat Cleveland in double overtime in a battle of Eastern Conference playoff teams.

Two-way player RayJ Dennis scored seven straight points in the second overtime, and rookie Johnny Furphy added six points in the second extra period for the Pacers, who reached 50 wins for the first time since 2013-14. Quenton Jackson led Indiana with 21 points, and Tony Bradley collected 14 points, 14 rebounds and five blocked shots. The No. 4 Pacers take on No. 5 seed Milwaukee in the opening round.

The Cavaliers rested nine of their top 10 scorers, including injured Donovan Mitchell (ankle) along

with fellow All-Stars Evan Mobley and Darius Garland. No. 1 seed Cleveland will face the No. 8 seed in the East, which won't be determined until the conclusion of the play-in tournament.

Wizards 119, Heat 118: Bub Carrington made a heavily contested floater at the buzzer to lead visiting Washington over short-handed Miami.

Down seven with four minutes remaining, the Heat went on an 11-0 run. They took a 118-114 lead with 8.5 seconds left, but Justin Champagnie cut it to one with a quick 3-pointer. Miami's Josh Christopher then committed a costly turnover in the backcourt to give Washington the ball back with 4.4 seconds left, setting up Carrington's game-winner.

The Heat will visit the Chicago Bulls on Wednesday in the play-in tournament, and if they win, they advance to play on Friday against the loser of Tuesday's matchup between the Atlanta Hawks and Orlando Magic. If the Heat win both games, they will be the No. 8 seed and play a first-round series against the top-seeded Cleveland Cavaliers.

Bulls 122, 76ers 102: Kevin Huerter scored 18 points as visiting Chicago topped Philadelphia in the regular-season finale for both teams.

Talen Horton-Tucker chipped in 17 points and Jalen Smith had 12 points and 10 boards for Chicago. The Bulls came into the day already locked into the No. 9 seed in the Eastern Conference and will host the Miami Heat in the play-in tournament on Wednesday. Chicago sat Josh Giddey (wrist) and limited the minutes of its other key players.

Lonnie Walker IV scored 31 points to pace Philadelphia, which missed the playoffs for the first time since 2016-17. The Sixers were ravaged by injuries to key players and were forced to give significant playing time to players such as Jared Butler (19 points) and Adem Bona (16).

Nuggets 126, Rockets 111: Michael Porter Jr. scored 19 points, Nikola Jokic and Aaron Gordon finished with 18 apiece, and Denver clinched the No. 4 seed in the Western Conference with a win over host Houston.

## Modric Brings Galactico Glamour to Swansea in Surprise Ownership Twist



LONDON (Dispatches) - Ryan Reynolds' Wrexham may have the Hollywood spotlight, but Welsh rivals Swansea City are stealing some star power of their own with Real Madrid maestro Luka Modric poised to make his first move into club ownership with a minority stake.

The 39-year-old Croatia midfielder, whose contract at the Spanish giants runs until mid-2025, will join American investors Andy Coleman, Brett Cravatt, Nigel Morris and Jason Cohen in the ownership structure, Welsh media reported.

"This is an exciting opportunity. Swansea has a strong identity, an incredible fanbase, and the ambition to compete at the highest level," Modric said in a club statement.

"Playing at the highest level, I believe I can provide my experience to the club. My goal is to support the club's growth in a positive way and to help to build an exciting future."

Modric's investment comes as Championship side Swansea navigate challenging financial waters.

They posted a pre-tax loss of 15.2 million pounds (\$20.04 million) in the latest financial year -- a modest improvement from their 17.9 million loss the previous year.

The club reported a turnover of 21.5 million pounds for the year ending June 30, 2024, the BBC reported.

In their financial statement, Swansea referred to the harsh economic realities of England's second tier.

"The board acknowledges that whilst the magnitude of the operational loss is a product of the highly competitive environment within the EFL Championship in which the club currently competes, the club will continue to focus on achieving operational efficiencies," the statement read.

With significant costs associated with maintaining a stadium and two training facilities, and without "any immediate prospect of a redistribution agreement between the EFL and the Premier League," Swansea noted they "will continue to be reliant on the support of their ownership group as the main source of funding."

## Shelton Saves 3 Match Points, Survives in Munich

LONDON (Dispatches) - American No. 2 seed Ben Shelton saved three match points in order to rally past Croatian qualifier Borna Gojo 4-6, 7-6 (6), 7-6 (3) in the first round of the BMW Open on Monday in Munich, Germany.

After Shelton dropped the first set, neither player broke serve until the second-set tiebreaker, where Gojo went up 6-4 before Shelton won four points in a row. Shelton then saved another match point in the 12th game of the third set to force the decisive third-set tiebreaker. He finished 9-for-10 in break points saved.

German top seed Alexander Zverev had an easier time dispatching Frenchman Alexandre Muller 6-4, 6-1. Other winners included German wild card Daniel Altmaier, Belgium's David Goffin, Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands and Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia.

No. 4 seed Andrey Rublev of Russia hit 23 winners in a 6-1, 6-3 victory over Dutch qualifier Jesper De Jong in the first round in Spain.

Rublev needed less than 65 minutes to advance, while sixth seed Holger Rune of Denmark had a similarly simple 7-5, 6-4 win over Spanish wild card Albert Ramos-Vinolas. Rune had four aces and a 27-15 advantage in total winners.

Sebastian Korda of the U.S. rallied past Italian Matteo Arnaldi 3-6,



6-3, 6-2. Also advancing were British lucky loser Jacob Fearnley, Serbian qualifier Hamad Medjedovic and Spain's Pedro Martinez.

Meanwhile France's Fiona Ferro took down No. 4 seed McCartney Kessler 6-7 (8), 6-2, 7-5 in a nearly three-hour opening match at the

Open Capfinances Rouen Metropole in Rouen, France.

After each player saved a set point in the first-set tiebreaker, Kessler came out on top, but it was all Ferro from there. She hit five aces, saved 8 of 12 break points and converted 7 of 13 opportunities to break Kessler's serve.

In her WTA debut, Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajaonah of France stunned Italian seventh seed Lucia Bronzetti 6-2, 6-3. The 19-year-old won all nine of her service games and 28 of 37 first-service points (75.7 percent).

In other results, Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina swept past Japan's Nao Hibino 6-0, 6-4 in 77 minutes, and Romanian Elena-Gabriela Ruse rallied past France's Elsa Jacquemot 1-6, 6-1, 6-4.

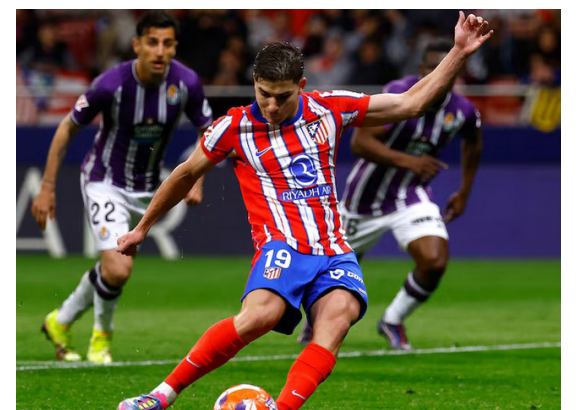
Russian eighth seed Diana Shnaider survived a challenge from countrywoman Veronika Kudrmetova and won 5-7, 6-2, 6-3 in the first round in Stuttgart, Germany.

Shnaider saved 3 of 5 break points and converted 4 of 5 chances to break Kudrmetova.

Only two other matches were played in the main singles draw Monday. Anastasia Potapova of Russia saved a

match point in the second-set tiebreaker and completed a 2-6, 7-6 (8), 6-3 comeback against Denmark's Clara Tauson. Elise Mertens of Belgium defeated Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus 7-6 (3), 6-2.

## Alvarez Double Helps Atletico to 4-2 Win Over Valladolid



MADRID (Dispatches) - Atletico Madrid's Julian Alvarez netted two penalties as they rallied to beat bottom side Real Valladolid 4-2 at a rainy Metropolitan on Monday to stay in the title hunt.

Third-placed Atletico have 63 points, three behind Real Madrid and seven adrift of Barcelona. Valladolid, who suffered their fifth consecutive defeat, are on 16 points, 14 points off the safety zone with seven games left.

"These are three important points," Atletico striker Alvarez told DAZN. "We have to keep going. Think about (Saturday's game at) Las Palmas, rest and focus. That's all."

"I had a few other chances for a hat-trick but the important thing is that we were able to win. At some point it got complicated, but we pulled it off."

Valladolid grabbed a surprise lead after 21 minutes when Mamadou Sylla calmly converted a penalty awarded following a VAR review for a handball by Clement Lenglet.

The advantage was short-lived as Alvarez equalised from the spot after another VAR intervention four minutes later following a foul by Javi Sanchez on Giuliano Simeone, who turned scorer himself to put Atletico ahead in the 27th minute.

But the visitors stunned Atletico once again by levelling in the 56th when Sanchez's free-kick took a deflection off Conor Gallagher in the wall, wrong-footing goalkeeper Jan Oblak.

Atletico regained the lead in the 71st with another well taken Alvarez penalty after Henrique fouled Marcos Llorente, and the Argentina forward almost scored his third when goalkeeper Andre Ferreira blocked his low effort eight minutes later.

However substitute Alexander Sorloth pounced on the rebound to seal the win with a close-range finish.

"We competed well. We knew we were going to suffer. It's a pity they came back," Valladolid's Sanchez said.

## World Unites in Praise of McIlroy After momentous Masters Triumph

LONDON (Dispatches) - British royalty hailed a new king of golf as tributes poured in from both sides of the Atlantic after Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy claimed a career slam with a stunning Masters triumph.

The 35-year-old became the first European man to win the four majors as he sank a birdie putt on the first hole of a sudden-death playoff against Englishman Justin Rose, a dramatic finish for McIlroy in his 11th attempt to win the tournament.

He previously won at the U.S. Open (2011), PGA Championship (2012, 2014) and Open Championship (2014).

"Congratulations @McIlroyRory on your historic win at @TheMasters!" the X account for King Charles and his wife Queen Camilla posted on Monday.

McIlroy is the sixth man in history to complete the career grand slam, joining Gene Sarazen, Ben Hogan,



Gary Player, Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods.

Sky Sports pundit and renowned coach Bub Harmon called the Augusta win "one of the greatest days in golf we will ever see."

"It had an ebb and flow that a Hollywood producer could not have come up with," said Harmon. "He was like a gladiator in the way he came back. Did he quit? No. Did he hang his head? No. Did he feel sorry for himself? No. Now he has a Green Jacket."

"I've known Rory since he was 16, done a little work with him at times, and this is one of the most amazing victories I have ever seen."

The Belfast Telegraph captured the national mood with the rapturous headline, "Putting man on the moon? What Rory McIlroy has just achieved is statistically even more impressive."