

The Foreign Ministers of Iran and Turkey Have Discussed Bilateral Relations and the Region's Latest Developments During a Phone Conversation

IRAN NEWS

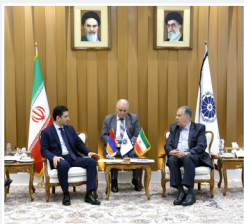
Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmaeil Baqaei Condemned the Intensified Attacks by the Israeli Regime on the Gaza Strip and the Occupied West Bank, Targeting Innocent Women and Children

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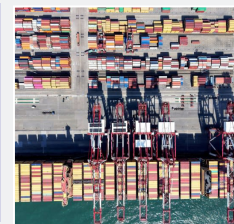
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Indirect Oman Talks Good in Early Stages But Lack of Trust Remains



TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the indirect talks between Iran and the United State in the Omani capital Musca, have been “implemented well in their initial steps,” but added that the Islamic Republic is “very skeptical” of the other side.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on Tuesday, addressing the heads of the Islamic Republic’s executive, judicial, and legislative branches.

The Leader, however, said, “We are neither excessively optimistic nor overtly pessimistic about these talks,” and stressed, “Of course, we are very distrustful about the other side.”

The Leader identified the talks as one among the many affairs that had been addressed by the Foreign Ministry.

“After all, it is an action and a measure that has been decided upon and has been carried out.”

Ayatollah Khamenei underlined that the development of the Islamic Republic’s various affairs should not be linked to the issue of the talks, asserting that the country had to lead those various affairs independently and rely on its own resources.

“Let us not tie the country’s issues to the talks,” the Leader said, adding that despite Iran’s sentiment of great skepticism regarding the talks, “We are optimistic about our own capabilities.”

The remarks came after Iran and the US held talks in the Omani capital last Saturday, with Oman’s foreign minister functioning as the mediator.

The Islamic Republic has stressed that the talks were solely aimed at addressing the US’s illegal and unilateral sanctions against the country, and various aspects of the Iranian nuclear energy program, strongly rejecting speculation about the process’s involving other issues.

U.S. Prepares to Arm Israel With 1000s More Bombs



GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - The United States has reportedly approved a new shipment of thousands of powerful munitions to the Israeli regime, further reinforcing its military arsenal as Tel Aviv is said to be readying for “vigorous expansion” of its genocidal war on the Gaza Strip.

Citing unnamed Israeli officials, Hebrew-language outlet Ynetnews reported that the Israeli air force was set to receive more than 3,000 bombs from the US in the coming weeks.

According to the report, the munitions are to be delivered to “boost readiness” for a major offensive being planned by the Israeli army’s Southern Command.

Over 10,000 additional bombs are also expected to arrive in the near future, replenishing Tel Aviv’s stockpiles as it pushes forward with its regional military adventurism that has seen it escalate its deadly attacks on Lebanon and Syria, besides the war on Gaza.

The shipment is part of a broader arms package that includes MK-84 bombs, powerful 2,000-pound munitions that have already been linked to mass civilian casualties in Gaza.

A similar transfer, which was initially halted by the previous US administration, was unfrozen earlier this year under Donald Trump’s second tenure as president, enabling the Israeli regime to resume large-scale deployment of the destructive weapons.

The regime’s minister for military affairs Israel Katz has announced that Tel Aviv was now preparing to “vigorous” broaden its assault on besieged Gaza.

FM Calls for Constructive U.S. Stance Ahead of Potential Nuclear Talks



TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araqchi emphasized the importance of clear and constructive positions from the United States in upcoming nuclear negotiations, warning that contradictory statements from U.S. officials undermine the chances for progress.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting in Tehran on Wednesday, Araqchi said Iran needs to hear the U.S.’s “real positions” during direct talks in order to assess whether negotiations toward a potential agreement can move forward.

“We have heard various and sometimes contradictory positions from the American side,” he said. “This is not helpful to a productive negotiation process. Still, we must attend the talks to determine the true stance of the U.S. If they come with a constructive approach, I remain hopeful that we can begin discussions around the framework of a possible agreement.”

Commenting on recent remarks by U.S. negotiator Steve Witkoff — who reportedly called for “zero enrichment” in Iran — Araqchi said such statements are among the mixed signals coming out of Washington.

“As I mentioned, we’ve heard contradictory and opposing statements. Mr. Witkoff has made several differing remarks so far. The real position will only be clarified at the negotiation table,” Araqchi stated.

He firmly reiterated Iran’s stance on uranium enrichment, calling it a “real, accepted, and undeniable fact.”

“Iran’s enrichment capability is a reality and not up for negotiation,” he stressed. “We are open to confidence-building measures to address any legitimate concerns, but the core principle of our right

to enrichment is not on the table.”

When asked whether uranium enrichment was discussed in the initial round of indirect talks between Tehran and Washington, Araqchi underscored that while Iran is willing to show transparency, its fundamental nuclear rights remain unchanged.

The foreign minister also addressed the ongoing pressure campaign against Iran during the negotiation process. He warned that applying pressure or attempting to force Iran’s hand would be ineffective.

“Our position and conduct are clear: no one can gain anything by applying pressure,” Araqchi said. “Negotiations can only move forward if conducted on the basis of mutual respect and equal footing. Attempts to impose positions will yield nothing — and our actions have proven this.”

He added that Iran enters negotiations with calm and confidence, unaffected by external pressure or political maneuvering.

The foreign minister also revealed he is preparing for a trip to Russia, carrying an important message.

“The purpose of my visit is to deliver a written message from the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic to the Russian leadership,” he said. “God willing, I will present this message to President Vladimir Putin during our meeting.”

The nature of the message was not disclosed, but it comes amid heightened diplomatic activity between Tehran and Moscow, possibly in light of regional security concerns and developments surrounding the nuclear talks.

China Calls for New Iran Deal Based on JCPOA

TEHRAN (PressTV) - China calls on parties to the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the world powers as well as the US that has illegally left the historic agreement to seize the “critical opportunity” to revive diplomacy and reach a new agreement rooted in the previous one, urging Washington to end its pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic.

Addressing media outlets, Chinese Ambassador to Tehran Cong Peiwu said on Tuesday that Beijing had consistently advocated for a political and diplomatic resolution to outstanding issues between Iran and the United States, and stood firmly opposed to coercive measures and unilateralism.

“The Chinese side has always supported [the idea] that Iran’s nuclear issue must be resolved through political and diplomatic means,” he stated. “We request that an agreement should be reached based on the framework of the JCPOA.”

The envoy was referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the official name of the nuclear deal, which the US ditched in 2018 before returning the illegal sanctions that it had lifted against Iran as per the accord and even piling up more coercive economic measures on the Islamic Republic. Washington has termed its hostile approach as the “maximum pressure” campaign.

He reiterated Beijing’s position that any future deal had to be built upon the foundations of the original JCPOA.

Describing the current state surrounding the nuclear issue as a “crossroads,” Cong said a vital opportunity existed for all sides to engage in constructive dialogue, stressing that contact and cooperation had to be strengthened, not undermined.

He sharply criticized Washington’s approach, saying the United States bore full responsibility for the current impasse following its unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA.

“The United States...must demonstrate political goodwill, participate in these talks (negotiations aimed at relieving the sanctions and resolving the nuclear issue as well as dialogue potentially leading to a new deal), and at the same time, stop using force and ‘maximum pressure,’” the ambassador said.

Accordingly, he warned that without genuine commitment from Washington, diplomatic efforts would remain fruitless.

“Dialogue is always better than confrontation. But is this dialogue meaningful? That must be



carefully examined.”

He emphasized that Iran had remained committed to diplomacy, while it was the United States that had to prove its sincerity and uphold the principle of mutual respect.

Cong, meanwhile, warned against attempts to bypass diplomatic channels through institutions like the United Nations Security Council.

Referring to an initiative forwarded by China on the issue, he expressed strong opposition to the re-imposition of Security Council mechanisms such as the so-called “snapback” that would return the Council’s sanctions against the Islamic Republic, arguing that such moves sabotaged confidence-building efforts.

“Resorting to the snapback mechanism renders diplomatic efforts useless, and we must be cautious in this regard.”

The envoy also took aim at Washington’s broader geopolitical behavior, saying Beijing would not be swayed by external pressures and was committed to confronting global bullying.

“We stand firm to stop the ‘powerful’ and take necessary actions to confront US bullying,” he asserted. “This is not only to protect China’s rights, but also to safeguard the shared interests of the international community.”

He warned against a return to “a jungle-like world where the strong prey on the weak,” stressing that both China and Iran advocated for globalization, free trade, and a fair international order.

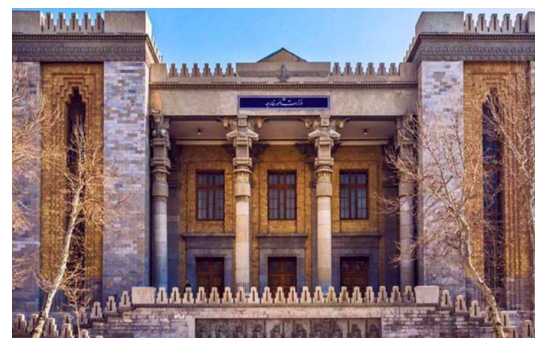
“We both seek to resist US hegemony and are willing to work with Iran to take measures against US bullying and unilateralism, and to support fairness and international justice.”

The remarks came almost a month after a high-level trilateral meeting among Iran, China, and Russia in Beijing, during which the three countries underscored their collective opposition to American unilateralism and reaffirmed support for diplomatic mechanisms like the JCPOA.

In a joint statement following the talks, the three countries condemned the illegal sanctions and stressed the need for “a clear path forward” to resolve outstanding matters without interference from outside powers.

Tehran that has taken a number of legitimate retaliatory steps in the face of the United States acts of non-commitment to the JCPOA, has, for its part, repeatedly insisted that Washington, as the original violator of the 2015 accord, had to redeem its violations before Tehran resumed full compliance with its contractual obligations.

Iran Summons Argentine Envoy Over Accusations Against Senior Officials



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has summoned the Argentine chargé d’affaires in Tehran to strongly protest against accusations by the Argentinean judiciary against senior Iranian officials, condemning the provocative move by Buenos Aires as contrary to international norms and regulations.

Iran’s Foreign Ministry on Tuesday summoned Jorge Mariano Jordan to convey Tehran’s strong protest against a ruling by Argentine Prosecutor Sebastián Basso, who issued arrest warrants for several senior Iranian officials in connection with the 1994 AMIA bombing.

“In response to the unlawful and internationally improper move by the Argentine Prosecutor’s Office in leveling allegations against senior officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the chargé d’affaires of Argentina in Tehran was summoned by Issa Kameli, Director General for the Americas at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The chargé d’affaires was delivered the Islamic Republic of Iran’s official note of strong protest,” the ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

Back in July 1994, the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) Jewish center in Buenos Aires was targeted by a bomb attack, in which 85 people were reportedly killed and some 300 others wounded.

The bombing remains unclaimed and unresolved, though Israel has consistently blamed Iran for the attack. Tehran has rejected the allegation on numerous occasions through the past three decades.

During the meeting, Kameli conveyed the Islamic Republic’s “categorical rejection and condemnation of the unfounded accusations” made by the Argentine judiciary and official authorities.

He emphasized that the decision by the AMIA case prosecutor to level accusations against senior officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran “constitutes yet another deviation in the protracted judicial proceedings related to a suspicious incident dating back to 1994.”

Iran’s Oil Output Rose Slightly in March



LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC data show Iran raised its oil production by 12,000 bpd to 3.335 million bpd in March.

Iran’s oil production rose slightly in March, according to figures released by The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and despite a decline reported in the 12-member group’s total output.

OPEC figures cited in a Tuesday report by the ISNA news agency showed that Iran had produced 3.335 million barrels per day (bpd) of oil in March, up 12,000 bpd from figures reported in February.

That came as total OPEC output in March had declined by 78,000 bpd to 26.776 million bpd.

However, production by members of a Russia-led bloc of oil-producing nations, which together with OPEC form the OPEC+ grouping, increased slightly by 41,000 bpd in March, as the 10-member group produced 14.244 million bpd of oil over the period.

Iran, along with Libya and Venezuela, are exempt from a series of cuts agreed by OPEC members in recent years to stabilize global oil prices.

The country has steadily increased its oil production in recent years despite a continued regime of US sanctions that restricts its ability to export crude oil.

Iran returned to its position as the third largest producer in OPEC in August last year after reports showed it had ramped up its exports to private refiners in China.

However, OPEC’s March figures showed that the price of Iran’s Heavy oil grade had dropped by 3.4% in March compared to August to trade at \$74.76 per barrel, just above OPEC’s March basket price and down from a 2024 average of \$81.77 a barrel.



Iran, Belarus to Boost Air Transport Cooperation With Direct Flights

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Iran and Belarus are set to enhance their air transport cooperation through the launch of direct flights between Tehran and Minsk, according to the head of Iran’s Civil Aviation Organization.

In a meeting held on Tuesday between Hossein Pourfarzaneh, Head of Iran’s Civil Aviation Organization, and Alireza Saniei, Iran’s Ambassador to Belarus, the two sides discussed the resumption and expansion of direct air services between the two countries.

Pourfarzaneh expressed appreciation for the ambassador’s efforts in facilitating high-level discussions with Belarusian aviation officials, including the Deputy Minister of Transport and the Head of Belarus’s Civil Aviation Authority.

Afghan Traders Urge Completion of Farah Road



TEHRAN - During a recent two-day economic delegation from South Khorasan to Afghanistan’s Farah and Herat provinces, officials and business leaders from both sides discussed ways to enhance bilateral economic cooperation. The visit took place on Thursday and Friday, April 10–11, with a focus on expanding trade ties between the two neighbors.

Led by the Governor of South Khorasan, the delegation included senior government and private sector representatives such as the Deputy Governor for Economic Affairs, Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy, the Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan, and the heads of Birjand Chamber of Commerce, the South Khorasan Special Economic Zone, and the Provincial Agricultural Engineering Organization.

One of the main issues raised during the visit was the completion of the Mil 78–Farah road project, a strategic 120-kilometer route that begins at the Mahiroud border terminal and extends to the provincial capital of Farah. According to the President of Birjand Chamber of Commerce, the road’s completion is a top priority for Afghan traders, who see it as a vital link for boosting trade and transit.

Currently, 38% of Iran’s exports to Afghanistan by value and 50% by weight pass through the Mahiroud-Sarbisheh border crossing.

The road project, which began 15 years ago, is reportedly 85% complete. Once finalized, it will connect the Chabahar–Mashhad corridor to Afghanistan’s ring highway, significantly enhancing Iran’s transit potential and securing Mahiroud’s strategic role as a key gateway.

Importantly, the Farah road is expected to reduce the transit distance between Iran and Afghanistan by 400 kilometers, offering substantial benefits for freight efficiency and cross-border trade.

The delegation’s visit marks a continued effort by both nations to improve infrastructure, facilitate commerce, and deepen economic ties amid growing regional cooperation.

Iran Targets 54m Tons in Rail Freight by 2025



TEHRAN – THE CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) announced that, with an improvement in the number of operational locomotives across the country’s rail network, the goal of transporting 54 million tons of domestic and international freight in the current Iranian year (ending March 2025) is within reach.

Jabar Ali Zakeri made the remarks during a meeting of the High Rail Transport Graph Commission. He highlighted that achieving this ambitious freight target by the year 1404 in the Iranian calendar (March 2025) will require close coordination across all railway departments, particularly among deputies and mid-level managers.

Zakeri, who also serves as Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, noted that more than 570 freight locomotives were operational at the start of this year. Given this capacity, he emphasized that the 54-million-ton freight target is entirely feasible.

“The key performance metric for regional and central managers will be their success in meeting freight targets across the network. Given the improved locomotive readiness, no excuse for a potential drop in freight numbers will be accepted,” he stated.

Breaking Records in International Rail Freight

Praising the Khorasan Railway for its strong growth in international freight over the past year, Zakeri underlined the strategic importance of the Khorasan and Hormozgan regions due to their significant role in cross-border freight transport. He said these regions are vital to reaching the national goal of 8 million tons of international transit freight.

The RAI chief also highlighted the importance of expanding cooperation with freight forwarding companies to boost both domestic and international cargo volumes. He urged regional directors to take a proactive role in attracting freight and supporting private sector partners.

Zakeri also announced that starting this summer, the number of high-speed trains operating on the Tehran–Mashhad route will increase. This route, considered a flagship passenger line for Iranian Railways, will see trains operating at speeds of 160 km/h.

Iranian Private Sector Poised to Boost Infrastructure in Armenia



TEHRAN - In a high-level meeting held in Tehran, the President of Iran’s Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) emphasized the private sector’s readiness to participate in Armenia’s infrastructure development projects. The discussion, held with Armenia’s Ambassador to Iran, also focused on strategies to elevate bilateral trade volume to \$3 billion, with the active engagement of both nations’ chambers of commerce.

Samad Hassanzadeh, the ICCIMA President, highlighted Iran’s considerable potential for collaboration with Armenia. He noted the significance of Armenia’s strategic position within the Eurasian region and the strong cultural and social ties between the two countries, describing Armenia as a key partner for Iran.

“Iran’s private sector is prepared to engage in technical and engineering service exports and to invest in Armenian infrastructure projects,” Hassanzadeh said. “We also see promising opportunities in the medical, pharmaceutical, and healthcare sectors, which could serve as focal points for our cooperation.”

He further outlined Iran’s strengths in various industrial fields, including oil, gas, petrochemicals, automotive manufacturing, food industries, and construction materials. “Iranian products meet high international standards and can meet the needs of the Armenian market,” he added.

In terms of tourism, Hassanzadeh stressed the potential for collaboration, especially in health tourism. He called on Armenia to offer more support and streamline procedures for Iranian tourists visiting the country.

As part of efforts to promote economic exchange, Hassanzadeh announced Iran’s plan to dispatch a business delegation to Armenia this year. He also formally invited the Armenian ambassador to attend Iran Expo 2025, which is set to open on April 28. The international exhibition will showcase Iran’s manufacturing and export capabilities, attracting ambassadors and trade delegations from across the globe.

On the diplomatic front, Hassanzadeh expressed hope for positive outcomes from ongoing Iran-U.S. negotiations, stating that the easing of restrictions would unlock broader trade opportunities with countries around the world.

Armenia’s Ambassador to Iran, Grigor Hovhannisyan (Hakopyan), echoed the sentiments, describing relations with Iran as a top priority for the Armenian government. He underscored the importance of expanding bilateral cooperation in economic, political, and cultural domains.

Despite the strong political ties, Hovhannisyan expressed regret that economic relations have not kept pace. “We do not see any limits to deepening our cooperation,” he said. “To begin with, we aim to reach \$1 billion in bilateral trade, with a longer-term goal of \$3 billion. Achieving this requires more dynamic engagement between our chambers of commerce.”

The ambassador emphasized the crucial role of business delegations in forging stronger ties. “There are abundant investment and joint venture opportunities in Armenia. The embassy is fully prepared to assist Iranian businesses in identifying and exploring these options,” he stated.

He added that Armenian trade delegations will participate in Iran Expo 2025, which will allow them to evaluate investment opportunities and conduct feasibility studies for potential joint projects.

“Private sector involvement is pivotal to the development of Iran-Armenia economic relations,” Hovhannisyan said. He also proposed that the two countries’ chambers of commerce establish joint mechanisms to address trade challenges and streamline cooperation.

The ambassador also highlighted the potential for tourism development between the two nations and called for greater efforts to promote travel and cultural exchange. He pointed out that Iran’s observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the launch of free trade with EAEU member states presents a valuable opportunity for regional cooperation.

“Through joint investments, we can produce goods tailored for export to the Eurasian market,” he suggested.

As both countries look toward a future of deeper economic engagement, the active role of the private sector and the facilitation of joint trade initiatives are expected to be critical in reaching the ambitious target of \$3 billion in bilateral trade. The upcoming Iran Expo 2025 will serve as a key milestone in realizing this shared vision.

Iran Faces Water Stress But Food Security Remains Intact

TEHRAN - Iran is currently facing serious water stress, but national food security will not be compromised if the country continues to implement its comprehensive water roadmap, said Isa Bozorgzadeh, spokesperson for the country’s water industry.

Speaking at a high-level meeting between the Minister of Energy Abbas Aliabadi and media executives, Bozorgzadeh emphasized that the volume of Iran’s agricultural economy could increase by 1.7 times with a 2.5% growth rate, while the industrial and service sectors are projected to grow 2.2 and 2.6 times respectively, provided the strategic plan is effectively pursued.

Bozorgzadeh highlighted the alarming decrease in water availability over the past 60–70 years. Per capita water availability has fallen from 130 million cubic meters to 103 million cubic meters, with the average national per capita volume now at 1,200 cubic meters—a sharp decline from approximately 7,000 cubic meters in 1956. This figure places Iran below the international water stress threshold of 1,700 cubic meters per person per year.

“Even in a normal hydrological year, we remain under water stress due to long-term declines in water resources,” he stated, citing uneven distribution of water across regions. For instance, central plateau regions are facing extreme shortages, with per capita availability around just 600 cubic meters.

Bozorgzadeh blamed outdated development models, especially over the past seven decades, for Iran’s worsening water crisis. “This issue is not just within the Ministry of Energy’s domain—multiple institutions, from agriculture to municipalities, and even Parliament, share responsibility for the unsustainable development patterns,” he noted.

Currently, 70% of Iran’s plains are classified as “forbidden” or “critically forbidden” for water extraction, and 359 out of 609 plains are experiencing land subsidence. “This is a national threat—it’s endangering homes and infrastructure,” Bozorgzadeh warned.

He stressed that solving the crisis requires a “heart surgery” approach rather than quick fixes, calling for stronger public engagement, policy reform, and a cultural shift toward conservation.

Bozorgzadeh revealed that Iran is now in its fifth consecutive



drought year. As of April 12, only 131 millimeters of rainfall had been recorded—35% less than the previous year and well below the expected 203 millimeters. He warned that spring rains would not make up for winter shortfalls, and snow levels, which are crucial for long-term water supply, also remain low.

Dam inflows have also dropped compared to last year, although authorities are attempting to manage releases efficiently. However, over 80% of decisions on water usage are made by central government institutions, while Bozorgzadeh advocated for more localized and community-driven governance.

“The imbalance between water consumption and available resources remains a major concern,” Bozorgzadeh said. He explained that 86% of Iran’s water is used in agriculture, much of which is low-efficiency subsistence farming on plots smaller than five hectares—making them difficult to mechanize.

To address this imbalance, the Ministry of Energy is focusing on increasing water supply while reducing demand. Key policies include 13 measures for water provision, 22 for demand management, three for resource protection, two for risk mitigation, and nine for institutional reform.

Bozorgzadeh unveiled a strategic operational plan featuring 49 initiatives, including distinguishing between greywater and blackwater in building codes, and strengthening participatory water basin management. Legislative backing is critical, he stressed.

The plan aligns with Iran’s Seventh Development Plan and the National Document on Knowledge-Based Food Security, which prioritizes eliminating low-efficiency agriculture and tripling environmental water allocations for ecosystem stability.

Bozorgzadeh concluded by announcing the launch of a national “Water Festival” aimed at promoting water conservation through art and culture. The event seeks to inspire public creativity, broaden perspectives, and encourage collective responsibility for Iran’s water resources.

“This is not just a technical issue. We need a cultural movement to appreciate and protect water,” he said.

Iran Ranks 123rd in Global Logistics Index



TEHRAN - At a press conference for the upcoming 6th International Exhibition of Transport, Logistics, and Related Industries, officials revealed concerning statistics about Iran’s logistics performance while highlighting new steps being taken to improve the situation.

Seyed Ali Emami, Director General of the Trade Promotion Organization’s Office for Commercial Support and Preparation, stated that Iran currently ranks 123rd in the 2023 World Bank Logistics Performance Index (LPI), whereas neighboring Turkey holds the 30th position.

“Iran has around 1,100 international road transport companies, 30 railway transport companies, and 500 maritime shipping firms, yet our logistics performance is still significantly below par,” Emami explained.

He also noted that logistics costs in Iran are disproportionately high. “In Iran, transportation accounts for about 15% of the total cost of exported goods, compared to a global average of 7–8%. This makes our logistics costs nearly 1.5 times higher than the world average,” he said.

To address these challenges, Emami emphasized the importance of hosting exhibitions and conferences focused on logistics in order to boost sector efficiency and international visibility.

Emami also stressed the strategic significance of international participation. “Turkey is recognized as a global logistics hub and maintains a strong presence at international exhibitions to attract new markets. Iran must take similar steps,” he urged.

Responding to questions about the lack of interest from Russia in using the North-South Corridor — a key logistics route from Russia through Iran to India — Emami pointed out that Iran has failed to effectively promote its logistics capabilities. “Many regional players are unaware of how to use Iran’s corridors due to weak diplomatic and commercial engagement,” he said.

Highlighting recent developments in the rail sector, Emami revealed that Iran has reached agreements with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to allow Iranian rail wagons to operate within their territories, a move expected to enhance cross-border transit.

Isfahan to Host 2025 UN Tourism Meeting



TEHRAN - Isfahan has been selected to host the 38th Meeting of the UN Tourism East Asia and the Pacific Commission in 2025, following a majority vote by over 30 member countries of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism).

According to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the Islamic Republic of Iran secured the hosting rights during the 37th session of the East Asia and Pacific Commission and the 60th session of the South Asia Commission, held in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The Iranian delegation, led by Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey, Deputy Minister of Tourism, included Moslem Shojaei, Director General of Foreign Tourism Marketing and Development, and Seyed Mohammad Hossein Hejazi, Advisor to the Minister and affiliated member of UN Tourism. They attended the official commission meeting alongside Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of UN Tourism.

During the session, Iran officially announced its candidacy to host the 2025 meeting, highlighting Isfahan’s historical significance, exceptional tourism potential, and strategic location. A promotional video showcasing Isfahan’s cultural and touristic attractions was also presented.

Following deliberations, the commission—comprising representatives from more than 30 countries—voted overwhelmingly in favor of Iran’s proposal. As a result, Isfahan will host the high-profile international tourism event in 2025.

Mohseni Bandpey described this achievement as a milestone in Iran’s tourism diplomacy, emphasizing the country’s commitment to elevating its global standing through hosting key tourism events. He affirmed that such initiatives would continue with strength and determination.

France to Expel 12 Algerian Diplomats

PARIS (Dispatches) - France will expel 12 agents serving in the Algerian consular and diplomatic network in France and will recall its ambassador to Algiers for consultations, the French presidency said in a statement, adding that Algerian authorities were responsible for "a brutal deterioration in our bilateral relations".

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot also said on X that Algeria's decision was "unjustified" and that dialogue "cannot go one way".

The move comes after Algeria protested against France's Sunday indictment of three Algerians, including a consular official, on suspicion of involvement in the 2024 abduction of Algerian opposition activist, Amir Boukhors, in a Paris suburb.

The men, who are also being prosecuted for "terrorist" conspiracy, were placed in pre-trial detention.



Hamas Raises Fears for Hostage at Center of Latest Gaza Truce Offer



GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - Hamas said that after an Israeli strike it had "lost contact" with the captors of an Israeli-American hostage in Gaza, whose release reportedly takes center stage in Israel's latest proposal for a renewed ceasefire.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited northern Gaza Tuesday, his office announced, as the military kept up the offensive it resumed on March 18, effectively ending a two-month ceasefire.

Speaking to troops, he said Hamas would continue to "suffer blow after blow".

In a statement on Telegram, Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas's military wing the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, said: "We announce that we have lost contact with the group holding soldier Edan Alexander following a direct strike on their location."

"We are still trying to reach them at this moment," he added.

The military wing later released a video addressed to the families of the remaining hostages, warning them that their loved ones were likely to return in coffins if Israel kept up its bombardment of the territory.

Over video images of masked fighters carrying black coffins out of white vans in the darkness, the video carried a subtitled message in English, Arabic and Hebrew.

"Be prepared. Soon, your children will return in black coffins with their bodies torn apart by shrapnel from your army's missiles," the message warns.

Hamas's armed wing released a video on Saturday showing Alexander alive, in which he criticised the Israeli government for failing to secure his release.

Alexander appeared to be speaking under duress in the footage, making frequent hand gestures as he criticised Netanyahu's government.

Rapid Support Forces Declare Own Gov't in Sudan



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Two years into a war that has left tens of thousands dead, Sudan's paramilitary force on announced its own government to rival the army-backed administration it is battling.

The United Nations has said that the conflict that erupted on April 15, 2023 is the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 13 million people displaced -- including more than 3.5 million to other countries -- and no sign of peace on the horizon.

The Rapid Support Forces, headed by Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, the former deputy to the regular army leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, announced the rival government amid growing international fears that Sudan could become split between the two sides, who have both been accused of abuses.

"On this anniversary, we proudly declare the establishment of the Government of Peace and Unity, a broad coalition that reflects the true face of Sudan," Daglo said in a Telegram statement.

The RSF and its allies signed a charter in Kenya in February declaring a "government of peace and unity" in areas they control.

Daglo's latest statement said the paramilitaries, with "civil and political forces", had signed a transitional constitution, that was a "roadmap for a new Sudan".

Chinese Economy Grows 5.4%, Surpassing Quarterly Forecasts



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China on Wednesday said its economy grew a forecast-beating 5.4 percent in the first quarter as exporters rushed to get goods out of factory gates ahead of swinging new US tariffs.

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

"At the moment, the imposition of high tariffs by the US will put certain pressures on our country's foreign trade and economy," Sheng Laiyun, Deputy Commissioner of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), told a news conference.

But, he said, "it will not change the general trend of China's economy continuing to improve in the long run".

The NBS said that "according to preliminary estimates, the gross domestic product in the first quarter... (was) up by 5.4 percent year on year at constant prices".

That was above the 5.1 percent predicted by analysts polled by AFP.

Retail sales, a key gauge of consumer demand, climbed 4.6 percent year-on-year, the NBS said, while industrial output soared 6.5 percent in the first quarter of the year, up from 5.7 percent in the final three months of 2024.

But Beijing warned the global economic environment was becoming more "complex and severe" and that more was needed to boost growth and consumption.

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"The foundation for sustained economic recovery and growth is yet to be consolidated," the NBS said, adding there

was a need for "more proactive and effective macro policies".

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

Observers say recent data will likely be overshadowed by more grim figures further down the line as tariffs begin to bite.

"The damage from the trade war will show up in the macro data next month," Zhiwei Zhang, President and Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said in a note.

Steve Innes at SPI Asset Management said the figures "might look like a win on the surface, but let's not pretend this caught anyone off guard".

"Much of this was front-loaded -- fueled by a burst of preemptive activity ahead of US tariff escalations and an inventory binge stateside as importers scrambled to get ahead of the curve," he wrote.

Trump said this week that the "ball is in China's court" when it comes to drawing down those eye-watering tariffs.

China's economy, the world's second-largest, was already struggling to rebound from a pandemic-induced slowdown, with the double-digit growth that fuelled its rise now a distant memory.

Beijing in 2024 announced a string of aggressive measures to reignite the economy, including interest rate cuts, cancelling restrictions on homebuying, hiking the debt ceiling for local governments and bolstering support for financial markets.

But after a blistering market rally last year fuelled by hopes for a long-awaited "bazooka stimulus", optimism waned as authorities refrained from providing a specific figure for the bailout or fleshing out any of the pledges.

NATO's Rutte Declares Unwavering Support for Ukraine

KYIV (Dispatches) - NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte visited the southern Ukrainian city of Odesa with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday and declared "unwavering" support for Ukraine in the aftermath of a deadly Russian attack in the north of the country.

Rutte's visit came two days after Russian ballistic missile strikes on the city of Sumy on Sunday killed 35 people and wounded more than 100, according to Ukrainian officials.

The trip took place as the United States - NATO's dominant power - is seeking to broker a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine and it followed fresh criticism of Zelenskyy by U.S. President Donald Trump.

Rutte said the 32-member alliance was still strongly behind Kyiv, even as it also supported Trump's peace initiative.

"NATO stands with Ukraine," Rutte said at a press conference with Zelenskyy. "You and I know that this has been true all along. I also know that some have called NATO's support into question in the last couple of months. But let there be no doubt: Our support is unwavering."

Rutte said he and Zelenskyy discussed the talks that the Trump administration was holding with both Russia and Ukraine.

"These discussions are not easy -- but we all support President Trump's push for peace," he said.



Trump has accused Zelenskyy of starting the war, which began when Russian forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022. But Rutte said there was "no doubt" Moscow had started the conflict.

"Russia is the aggressor, Russia started this war. There's no doubt," he said.

Zelenskyy said the main focus of the talks was strengthening Ukraine's air defence.

"Absolutely everyone sees how urgent Ukraine's need is for air defense systems and missiles for them," he said on X, mentioning Patriot systems, made mainly by U.S. defence companies Raytheon and Lockheed Martin.

"Patriot systems are defensive weapons, and we're not just asking for Patriots -- we are ready to purchase them," Zelenskyy said.

"This is a purely political matter -- the systems are available in the world, the missiles for the Patriots are also available, and whether we will have sufficient protection from Russian ballistic strikes depends entirely on political decisions."

Zelenskyy and Rutte visited a hospital where Ukrainian soldiers were recovering from their wounds.

Rutte also visited neighbouring Moldova to discuss regional security, President Maia Sandu said.

After Harvard Rejects U.S. Demands, Trump Adds New Threat

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to strip Harvard of its tax-exempt status on Tuesday and said the university should apologize, a day after it rejected what it called unlawful demands to overhaul academic programs or lose federal grants.

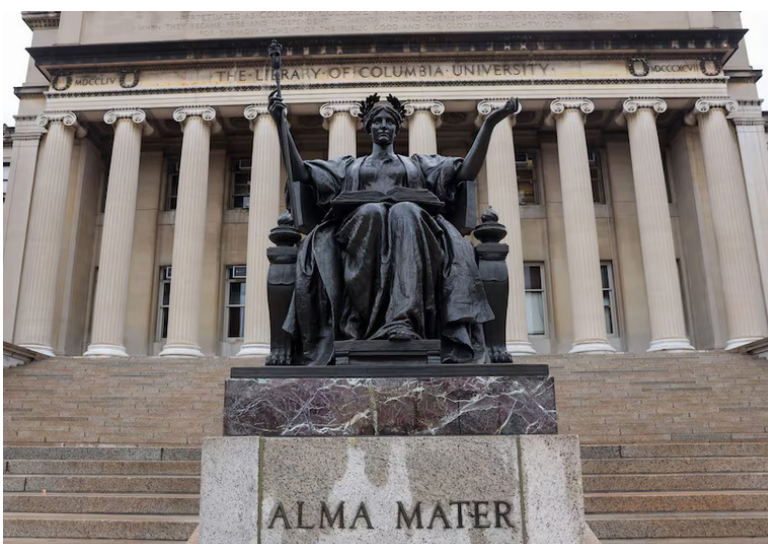
Beginning with Columbia University, the Trump administration has rebuked universities across the country over their handling of the pro-Palestinian student protest movement that roiled campuses last year following the 2023 Hamas-led attack inside Israel and the subsequent Israeli attacks on Gaza.

Trump has called the protests anti-American and antisemitic, accused universities of peddling Marxism and "radical left" ideology, and promised to end federal grants and contracts to universities that do not agree to his administration's demands.

Trump said in a social media post on Tuesday he was mulling whether to seek to end Harvard's tax-exempt status if it continued pushing what he called "political, ideological, and terrorist inspired/supporting 'Sickness?'"

He did not say how he would do this. Under the U.S. tax code, most universities are exempt from federal income tax because they are deemed to be "operated exclusively" for public educational purposes.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters Trump wanted to see Harvard apologize for what she called "antisemitism that took place on their college campus against Jewish American students."



She accused Harvard and other schools of violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination by recipients of federal funding based on race or national origin.

Under Title VI, federal funds can be terminated only after a lengthy investigation and hearings as well as a 30-day notice to Congress, which has not happened at Columbia or Harvard.

Some professors and students have said the protests are being unfairly conflated with antisemitism as a pretext for an unconstitutional attack on academic freedoms.

Columbia, a private school in New York City, agreed to negotiations over demands to tighten its protest rules after the Trump administration said last month it had terminated grants and contracts worth \$400 million, mostly for medical and other scientific research.

Harvard President Alan Garber in a letter on Monday said demands the Trump administration made of the Massachusetts university, including an audit to ensure the "viewpoint diversity" of its students and faculty and an end to diversity, equity and inclusion programs, were unprecedented "assertions of power, unmoored from the law" that violated constitutional free speech and the Civil Rights Act.

Like Columbia, he said Harvard had worked to fight antisemitism and other prejudice on its campus while preserving academic freedoms and the right to protest.



DORTMUND (Dispatches) - Barcelona are through to the Champions League semi-finals with a 5-3 aggregate win, despite losing 3-1 at Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday with Serhou Guirassy hitting a hat-trick.

Holding a 4-0 lead after a dominant performance in Catalonia, the visitors were made to sweat as Dortmund and Guirassy nearly pulled off a stunning turnaround.

Guirassy put Dortmund in front with a Panenka from the spot with 11 minutes gone and headed them two goals clear early in the second half.

Dortmund sensed a sensation but Barcelona hit back, Fermin Lopez forcing Ramy Bensebaini into an own goal with just over half an hour remaining.

Guirassy reignited Dortmund's belief with a third on the 76th-minute mark and the final stages may have been different had Julian Brandt not been offside before scoring with 11 minutes remaining.

Despite losing their first competitive game in 2025, Barcelona are through to the semis, keeping their dream of a remarkable treble alive, 10 years after last completing the feat by winning the Champions League in Berlin.

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick praised Dortmund's performance and said his side "need to focus on the positive, not the negatives".

"What the team has shown in the past few weeks is incredible. We've got a lot ahead of us this season. We're a step further but we're not even close to the end," added the German.

Barcelona, considered title favourites, will face either Inter Milan or Bayern Munich in the final four.

Clearly outclassed in the first leg, Dortmund will take inspiration from Tuesday's performance, not least the goalscoring form of Guirassy.

The 29-year-old Guinean, who has spent most of his career bouncing between the first and second divisions in Germany and France, now has 13 Champions League goals this season — more than any other player.

Meanwhile Paris Saint-Germain survived a second half onslaught to beat Aston Villa 5-4 on

aggregate and reach the Champions League semi-finals despite a 3-2 defeat.

The French champions were cruising towards the last four when full-backs Achraf Hakimi and Nuno Mendes struck in the first 27 minutes to add to their 3-1 first leg lead.

Youri Tielemans pulled a goal back for the English side before half-time and two goals in two minutes from John McGinn and Ezri Konsa transformed the tie early in the second period.

PSG were thankful to goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma for keeping Unai Emery's men at bay and preventing another famous collapse in the Champions League knockout stages.

"At the end, we got them suffering like we did," said Emery.

"To get this level is the next step forward that I want to try to build with Aston Villa."

Villa boss Emery was in charge of PSG when Luis Enrique's Barcelona overturned a 4-0 first leg deficit with a dramatic 6-1 win in 2017.

Luis Enrique again emerged victorious over his compatriot but this time was the one who watched his team almost blow a seemingly unassailable lead.

"I have to say that match for us is something that allows us to grow up and try to compete even better," said Luis Enrique.

"On the whole two matches we deserved to win and we are very happy because it's the second year in a row in the semi-finals."

Villa had not experienced a European night like this since 1983 and there was an embarrassing moment for the hosts before a ball was kicked as the Europa League anthem was played instead of the famous pre-match hymn of the Champions League.

Luis Enrique's surprise decision to start Bradley Barcola ahead of Desire Doue was justified just 11 minutes in when he sprinted down the left and Emiliano Martinez spilled his cross into the path of Hakimi, who fired home the opener.

Another blistering break from the visitors cut Villa open as Ousmane Dembele squared for left-back Mendes to stroke in his fourth Champions League goal of the season and second of the tie.

Vettel Hails Self-Critical Norris as Real Role Model



MANAMA (Dispatches) - Four-times world champion Sebastian Vettel praised Lando Norris as a "real role model" on Tuesday and said the Formula One leader's open self-criticism was a strength rather than weakness.

McLaren's Norris, who leads Australian teammate Oscar Piastri by three points going into Sunday's fifth round of the season in Saudi Arabia, blamed himself rather than the team after a scrappy Bahrain weekend.

The Briton said he was "clueless" in qualifying, had made too many mistakes in the race — starting with a false start from sixth and finishing third — and struggled to feel comfortable with the car.

The old way of thinking in Formula One was to hide such vulnerability, lest rivals use it as a psychological weapon, but Vettel, who retired in 2022, said Norris reflected a new attitude.

"I think it's a positive development because we are normal people," the German, speaking from Saudi Arabia before a karting event he organises to help young women into motorsport, told Reuters.

"We do have normal problems just like everybody else.

"Heroism is fine but it's also part of the heroism to just talk about your problems and your weakness. I think that's a great development to see and to witness and, you know, real role models."

Vettel recalled as a kid being told not to share any weakness, not to cry, and Norris was showing it was OK to be more open.

"I don't think it's a sign of weakness. It might be criticized by some people, but if you look at the broader picture, I think it's just progress," he said.

Vettel doubted the rivalry between Norris and Piastri, winner in Bahrain and managed by the German's old teammate and rival Mark Webber, would have the same heat as his first title battle of 2010.

"I would still put Lando as an indirect favourite, but time will tell," he said.

"Naturally people always look for entertainment, which is fine and it's part of the sport, but I don't see those two having a really intense and rough partnership."

Man Utd Plot Move for Porto Ace Who PSG Are Urged to Sign This Summer



PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain have a major call to make: is Gianluigi Donnarumma still their long-term solution in goal? His deal runs through 2026, but the clock's already ticking.

Since joining from AC Milan in 2021, Donnarumma has delivered some big moments—like his penalty shootout heroics against Liverpool earlier this year. But he's also had some high-profile slip-ups, including that costly mistake against Real Madrid in 2022, which continue to cast doubt over his reliability on the biggest stage.

If the club decides the Italian goalkeeper isn't the one to build around, they'll need to line up a replacement—either this summer or the next.

Although not reportedly linked to PSG, pursuing Diogo Costa does make sense since the Parisians have a connection to Portugal under Luis Campos. Nonetheless, other clubs are keen on the Portuguese shot-stopper.

Journalist Nicolò Schira reports Costa is on Manchester United's list to replace Andre Onana next season.

In his latest column for PSG Talk Extra Time, Zach Lowy—a multimedia journalist featured on BBC, SiriusXM, and more—named Costa as the player that the Parisians should be pursuing this summer.

"Boasting nerves of steel and high levels of concentration, Costa is never one to back away from a challenge and does a magnificent job of organizing his backline, coming off his line to claim crosses, and getting a strong punch to clear the danger," Lowy wrote.

"Furthermore, he's a sweeper-keeper with the reflexes and intelligence to make a desperately needed interception when required. Above all, though, he's a massive upgrade on Donnarumma when it comes to breaking the lines and spreading the ball with his cultured passing ability."

Magic Pull Away From Hawks, Earn Playoff Date With Celtics

ORLANDO (Dispatches) - Cole Anthony scored 13 of his 26 points in a fourth-quarter surge Tuesday night, allowing the Orlando Magic to claim a playoff berth via a 120-95 romp over the visiting Atlanta Hawks in an Eastern Conference play-in game.

Wendell Carter Jr. chipped in with 19 points, Paolo Banchero put up 17 and Anthony Black added to a dominant bench effort with 16 for the Magic, who move on as the seventh seed to a first-round playoff series against the second-seeded Celtics. The best-of-seven set tips off Sunday in Boston.

"That was a big-time team effort. By committee," Magic coach Jamahl Mosley said. "These guys all stepped up, did their roles, followed the game plan."

Trae Young went for a game-high 28 points before getting ejected for the eighth-place Hawks, who now return home to face either the Chicago Bulls or Miami Heat for the final Eastern playoff spot on Friday night. The winner of that game will draw the top-seeded Cleveland Cavaliers in the first round of the playoffs.

After watching the Magic score 18 of the first quarter's final 20



points to go up 32-17, the Hawks, who finished one game behind Orlando in the regular season, clawed back into the game. Atlanta got within three late in the third period and then 79-73 after a George Niang buzzer-beating 3-pointer at quarter's end.

Carter's jumper 16 seconds into the final period got the Magic going, after which Anthony and Black took charge. They combined

for five 3-pointers -- three by Anthony -- in a pull-away that was so frustrating to the Hawks, Young couldn't finish the game after venting on the referees. He drew two technical fouls with 4:47 to go.

Mosley said of his team's response to the Hawks' third-period surge, "We've been there before. We've been in these situations, close games at home. Our ability to get the stops and get on runs at the right time was very big for us. You saw the group come together on the floor."

Anthony shot 4-for-9 from 3-point range, helping the Magic to a 33-12 advantage from beyond the arc.

Franz Wagner added 13 points and 13 rebounds for Orlando, while Banchero complemented his 17 points with nine rebounds and a game-high-tying seven assists.

The Magic bench outscored its Atlanta counterparts 57-30.

Hawks coach Quin Snyder said, "For us to win, we've got to shoot more than 19 threes. We were passing them up."

Niang finished with 15 points, Mouhamed Gueye 12 and Onyeka Okongwu 11 for Atlanta. Dyson Daniels had team highs in rebounds with 12 and assists with seven to go with seven points.

Three Top 10 Seeds Fall in Munich

LONDON (Dispatches) - Unseeded Mariano Navone of Argentina pulled off the biggest upset of the day, taking down No. 3 seed Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (3) in the first round of the BMW Open in Munich, Germany.

Navone, ranked No. 70 in the world, battled back and broke Auger-Aliassime in the final set en route to the victory in just over three hours. Navone saved 14 of 19 break points and won 83 percent of his second-serve points (10 of 12).

Czech No. 6 seed Jakub Mensik and Canadian No. 8 seed Dennis Shapovalov were also upset victims, as Mensik fell to German wild card Yannick Hanfmann 7-6 (4), 4-6, 6-3, and Shapovalov lost to German lucky loser Diego Dedura-Palmero 7-6 (2), 3-0. Shapovalov was forced to retire in the second set as Dedura-Palmero, 17, became the first player born in 2008 or later to win an ATP Tour match.

No. 4 seed Ugo Humbert of France and No. 5 seed



Francisco Cerundulo of Argentina were among the other winners.

Meanwhile playing in his native Spain, World No. 2 Carlos Alcaraz was tested by American qualifier Ethan Quinn before prevailing 6-2, 7-6 (6) to reach the quarterfinals.

Quinn, ranked No. 126 in the world, was up a break in the second set before Alcaraz rebounded to pull out the win after saving a set point in the tiebreak. The Spainard broke Quinn twice in the first set while saving five break points.

No. 2 seed Casper Ruud of Norway, No. 3 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece, No. 5 seed Alex de Minaur of Australia and No. 7 seed Arthur Fils of France posted straight-set victories. No. 9 seed Frances Tiafoe was not so fortunate as the American fell to unseeded Spaniard Jaume Munar 2-6, 7-5, 6-1.