

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Has Condemned as “Baseless and Unjust” the Recent Accusations Leveled by Britain That the Islamic Republic Is Connected With Certain Criminal Groups

IRAN NEWS

Iran Has Filed a Case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Against Canada, Sweden, Ukraine, and Britain Over a UN Aviation Body’s Ruling Related to the Downing of a Passenger Plane in 2020

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2 DOMESTIC



Iran’s Economy Closes Fiscal Year 1403 in Recession

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

Hamas Rejects Israel’s Truce Proposal as Gaza Air Strikes Kill 40

> SEE PAGE 3



FM Submits Leader’s Written Message to President Putin



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has submitted a written message of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Araqchi, who has traveled to Moscow at the head of a diplomatic delegation for consultations with high-ranking Russian officials, called on Putin on Thursday afternoon.

The minister presented the Leader’s message to the president of Russia and explained the views and positions of the Islamic Republic regarding issues on the agenda of bilateral relations, as well as regional and international developments.

Araqchi touched on the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty signed by President Putin and his Iranian counterpart, Masoud Pezeshkian in Moscow in January.

He called it as “the most important manifestation of cooperation” between the two countries, emphasizing Iran’s determination to strengthen and expand bilateral relations with the Russian federation at all levels.

President Putin conveyed his greetings and well wishes for the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and emphasized the importance of the strategic partnership between Iran and Russia.

He said that strengthening ties between the two countries, along with their cooperation and coordination on regional and international issues, will serve the interests of both nations and help maintain and strengthen peace and stability.

In addition to bilateral relations, regional issues and existing threats, the latest status of negotiations on Ukraine, Iran’s nuclear issue, and international issues were discussed during the meeting.

Non-Nuclear Issues Not on Iran’s Agenda for Talks With U.S.



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A member of the Iranian negotiating team says non-nuclear issues are not on the agenda during the country’s indirect talks with the United States.

“Basically, nothing has been defined as ‘other topics’ in the negotiations,” Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi said in a televised interview.

Iran believes that the talks with the US should focus on the two main issues of the nuclear program and the lifting of sanctions, he added.

He noted that Iran pursues specific plans and objectives in the talks with the US and “seeks to achieve a win-win, fair, logical and lasting agreement.”

That agreement should be in such a way as to prevent violations in a short period of time or in case of a government change, he explained.

“We have announced that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to achieve such an agreement without any humiliation or unreasonable pressure,” Gharibabadi said, adding that during the first round of Tehran-Washington talks, the two sides agreed on the frameworks.

The senior diplomat once again reiterated that Iran would never give up its right to uranium enrichment.

“If the opposite side is concerned about the militarization of Iran’s nuclear program, this issue is negotiable and can be discussed,” Gharibabadi added.

Iran Ready to Share Its Advancements With Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has touched on “some of Iran’s advancements”, telling the Saudi defense minister in Tehran that the Islamic Republic is ready to share them with the kingdom.

Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman, brother of Crown Prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman, called on Ayatollah Khamenei in Tehran Thursday afternoon to present the message of Saudi Arabia’s King Salman.

“We believe that the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia will be beneficial for both countries and the two countries can complement each other,” the Leader said.

Referring to some of Iran’s advancements, Ayatollah Khamenei said, “The Islamic Republic is ready to help Saudi Arabia in these areas.”

“It is much better for brothers in the region to cooperate and help each other than to rely on others,” he added.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized that the expansion of relations between the two countries has enemies. “These hostile motives must be overcome, and we are ready for this,” he said.

The Saudi defense minister expressed great satisfaction with the meeting which was also attended by Iran’s Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri.

“I have come to Tehran with the agenda of expanding relations with Iran and cooperation in all fields,” Prince Khalid said, according to state news agency IRNA.

“And we hope that the constructive talks will provide for stronger relations between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran than in the past,” he added.

Meanwhile earlier in meeting with Saudi Defense Minister, President Masoud Pezeshkian said the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia can serve as a model for regional cooperation, stressing that the unity of Islamic countries is a prerequisite for achieving peace, security, and sustainable economic development in the region.

Pezeshkian made the remarks during a meeting with Prince Khalid bin Salman and his delegation in Tehran, hours after the Saudi minister arrived in the Iranian capital to discuss regional developments and bilateral relations with Iranian officials.

The Iranian president emphasized the deep religious, cultural, and historical commonalities among Islamic countries, underscoring the necessity of strengthening unity and cohesion in the Islamic world.

“We consider you our brothers, and since the beginning of this government’s tenure, we have made efforts to strengthen fraternal ties among Islamic nations,” Pezeshkian said, adding that if Islamic countries achieve a common language and genuine unity, the Zionist regime will no longer cause human tragedies like those unfolding in the besieged Gaza Strip nowadays.

He also touched on the importance of setting aside differences and boosting regional cooperation.

“Leaders of Islamic countries can, with a shared will, present an inspiring model of coexistence, prosperity, and progress for other societies. The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully prepared to expand its relations with Saudi Arabia in all fields and extend bilateral cooperation to other Islamic countries,” Pezeshkian stressed.



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

He also hailed the idea of establishing joint working groups in various political, economic, and security areas between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

“Iran and Saudi Arabia, by relying on their shared capacities and without foreign interference, can resolve many of the region’s problems. We hope the goodwill that has emerged between the two countries will strengthen the interests of the Islamic world and discourage enemies from interference and sowing discord,” Pezeshkian emphasized.

He also stressed the importance of bilateral dialogue and its constructive role in reinforcing regional stability, expressing Iran’s readiness to host Saudi Arabia’s King Salman bin Abdulaziz and the kingdom’s de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Prince Khalid bin Salman, for his part, expressed his delight at visiting Iran and conveyed the warm greetings of his father, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and his brother, the Crown Prince, to Iran’s president.

“Our meetings with officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been very useful, positive, and constructive,” the Saudi defense minister noted.

He emphasized the need for unity and convergence in the Islamic world, stressing that Pezeshkian “rightly pointed to the root cause of the Islamic world’s problems — the lack of unity and cohesion.”

Prince Khalid bin Salman also stressed that any development, whether positive or negative, inevitably affects all countries in the region.

He further highlighted the key role of Tehran and Riyadh in regional dynamics.

“Iran and Saudi Arabia are two main pillars of the region, and strong relations between the two countries can serve as an effective model for convergence and synergy in the Islamic world. The Beijing Agreement marks the beginning of a path of cooperation between the two countries, and the potential of our relations goes far beyond that,” Prince Khalid bin Salman emphasized.

Signed in March 2023, the China-mediated Beijing Agreement aims to restore diplomatic ties and promote mutual respect for sovereignty and security between Iran and Saudi Arabia under the principles of the UN Charter, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and international law.

The Saudi defense minister also noted that Saudi leaders are eager to visit Iran at the earliest opportunity.

“Iran and Saudi Arabia share common positions regarding the developments in Gaza and Palestine, and the actions of the Zionist regime in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria reveal its attempts to exploit the existing regional gaps,” Prince Khalid bin Salman added.

While stressing the importance of continuing bilateral talks, the Saudi defense minister officially invited Pezeshkian, on behalf of the Saudi King and Crown Prince, for an official visit to Saudi Arabia, affirming the readiness of Saudi officials to expand cooperation in all areas with Iran.

IAEA Urged to Maintain Neutrality in Tehran-Washington Talks



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Tehran expects the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to remain neutral and professional in its approach to the indirect negotiations between Tehran and Washington, says head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization.

Speaking at a joint press conference with IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi in Tehran on Thursday, Mohammad Eslami said that the two sides share an understanding on avoiding language or actions that Iran’s foes could exploit.

Iran and the United States kick-started indirect talks on the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program and termination of anti-Iran sanctions in the Omani capital of Muscat on Saturday. The two sides described the talks as positive and agreed to hold the second round next Saturday.

During the press conference, Eslami said deputy-level meetings between the IAEA and Iran’s nuclear agency will be held in the coming days to discuss outstanding issues and the details of ongoing cooperation.

He stressed that the 2023 joint statement between Iran and the IAEA had led to “good progress,” and that the remaining issues would continue to be addressed within the same framework.

For his part, Grossi said the IAEA is in contact with both Iranian and US officials to help facilitate progress in their indirect negotiations.

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog said he is in touch with the American negotiator to explore how the IAEA can play a positive and constructive role. “We want to be a bridge between Iran and the United States and help reach a positive outcome,” he said.

Grossi described his meetings in Tehran, including talks with Eslami and Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, as “deep and honest,” adding that the agency is committed to verifying any future agreement to ensure its credibility.

Tehran, Riyadh Stress Willingness to Expand Military Ties



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has stressed its readiness to expand military relations with Saudi Arabia whose defense minister arrived in Tehran Thursday to discuss security in the region.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri told Prince Khalid bin Salman in Tehran Thursday that “good relations between the two countries and their armed forces will bring despair and hopelessness to our enemies and joy to our friends”.

Bagheri thanked Saudi Arabia for its participation as an observer in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Maritime Exercise, known as IMEX 2024.

The exercise in the India Ocean was held by Iran, Russia, and Oman, with the participation of observer delegations from several countries, including Saudi Arabia, India, Thailand, Pakistan, Qatar, and Bangladesh.

Since the signing of the “Beijing Agreement” in March 2023 to restore diplomatic relations between the armed forces of Iran and Saudi Arabia have been growing and developing, Gen. Bagheri said.

“The policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on developing relations with its neighbors; therefore, developing and strengthening relations between the armed forces of the two countries can be a good basis for the countries in the region,” he said.

Iran’s principled policy is also to guarantee security by the countries of the region, where Tehran and Riyadh can play a significant role in realizing this important and strategic goal, he added.

U.S. Airstrikes on Yemen’s Ras Isa Oil Port Kill 38 People

SANAA (Dispatches) - The U.S. military has struck the western Yemeni oil port of Ras Isa, leaving dozens of workers and paramedics dead, and dozens more injured.

The facility in Hudaydah governorate was hit at least two times on Thursday night, with the second strike coming as civil defense and rescue teams were extinguishing fires and recovering victims. The second attack killed at least five paramedics.

The Palestinian Information Center and al-Manar TV now report that at least 38 people have been killed in that attack, while 102 others injured.

The Yemeni government slammed the attack as a clear war crime aimed at supporting the Zionist regime and enabling it to continue the Gaza genocide.

It said the strikes prove that the U.S. deliberately attacks civilian infrastructure in Yemen with false justifications.

The government vowed that this crime would not pass without painful punishment, and the US would reap nothing but humiliating defeat and failure.

The U.S. military claimed the port was a source of fuel for the Ansarullah resistance



movement.

The governorates of Sana’a, al-Bayda and Hudaydah were also hit with multiple strikes.

The United States intensified its deadly attacks on the country last month at President Donald Trump’s direct orders.

Washington claims the raids are strictly aimed at protecting shipping activity around Yemen, alleging that the regional waterways’ maritime security had been endangered by Sana’a.

Yemeni officials have, however, roundly rejected such claims, underlining that the country only targeted vessels belonging to the Israeli regime and ships taking supplies to it.

The operations implemented by Yemen’s Armed Forces began in October 2023, when the

Israeli regime, the US’s most cherished regional ally, began taking the Gaza Strip under a genocidal war.

More than 51,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed as a result of the warfare, which receives hugely enhanced and unstinting arms support on the part of Washington.

IRAN NEWS



Iran, Tajikistan Discuss Defense Partnership

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri has hosted Tajikistan's Defense Minister Lieutenant General Emomali Sobirzoda to discuss bilateral cooperation in the defense.

General Bagheri and General Sobirzoda met in Tehran on Wednesday.

The Iranian commander said cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries is on an upward trajectory.

While congratulating and wishing success to Sobirzoda as the new defense minister of Tajikistan, General Bagheri said Iran's cooperation with Tajikistan to combat terrorism is on the agenda.

The Iranian commander urged Tajikistan to pave the way for the improvement of bilateral relations between the two countries in various fields.

Iran's Trade with Eurasian Union on the Rise



TEHRAN - Iran's trade with member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has increased significantly in recent years, according to a senior government official.

Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade and Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, announced that trade volume has surged by 120% compared to two to three years ago — though he emphasized that more needs to be done.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday on the sidelines of the Khorasan Razavi province's Government-Private Sector Dialogue Council meeting, Dehnavi said that while Iran's trade with EAEU countries currently stands at under \$5 billion, there is growing political goodwill and mutual interest in expanding economic relations.

The Eurasian Economic Union comprises Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. Iran currently holds observer status in the bloc.

Dehnavi noted that a new agreement between Iran and the EAEU, set to take effect on May 14, aims to establish a long-term framework for sustained economic growth between the two sides. He added that the EAEU is already among Iran's top five trading partners.

To facilitate the implementation of the agreement, several meetings have been held with relevant executive bodies. Committees involving organizations such as Iran Customs and the Standards Organization have also been established to address issues related to plant health, quarantine, and logistical support. Dehnavi stressed the importance of making the most of this opportunity.

As part of the preparation, a nationwide educational seminar tour on the agreement's contents has been launched. The first of these seminars was held today at the Mashhad Chamber of Commerce, aiming to brief economic stakeholders on the agreement's benefits, application process, and potential challenges. Authorities hope to hold similar sessions in all major provinces before the agreement takes effect.

Dehnavi highlighted the strategic position of Khorasan Razavi, which borders Russia and Central Asian countries, as a valuable gateway for exports to the EAEU. The province's industrial capacity, he said, can be effectively leveraged for trade with the region.

Tourism Cooperation Strategies Between Iran and Indonesia Discussed



TEHRAN - In a high-level meeting with Indonesia's Minister of Tourism, Iran's Deputy Minister for Tourism explored strategies to strengthen tourism ties with Indonesia, a rising target market.

According to the Cultural Affairs Department of Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Deputy Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey held talks with Indonesia's Minister of Tourism, Widiyanti Putri Wardhana, on the sidelines of the 37th UNWTO East Asia-Pacific and South Asia Regional Commission Meeting (CAP/CSA) held April 14-15 in Jakarta.

During the meeting, both sides emphasized the tourism potential of the two Muslim-majority nations and agreed on the need to boost bilateral tourism interactions. Bandpey highlighted Iran's rich history, cultural diversity, unique tourist attractions, and high-quality handicrafts, noting that these features make Iran a compelling destination for Indonesian travelers.

He further stressed that Iran's tangible and intangible cultural heritage sites, its appeal as a halal-friendly destination, medical tourism capacities, and affordable travel costs are all strong motivators for Indonesian tourists.

The Deputy Minister also pointed out the shared religious and cultural values between Iran and Indonesia, noting that the diversity of Iran's climate, religious and pilgrimage sites, and natural attractions could help deepen tourism relations between the two countries.

Identifying Indonesia as an emerging tourism market, Bandpey referred to the success of Iran's tourism-focused Road Show held in Indonesia last year, which led to the creation of diverse promotional content about Iran's tourism offerings in the Indonesian language.

He also raised several key proposals, including the establishment of direct flights between the two countries, the signing of a bilateral tourism cooperation agreement, and the formation of a joint technical tourism committee to facilitate increased private sector engagement.

Iran's Economy Closes Fiscal Year 1403 in Recession



TEHRAN - Iran's economy wrapped up the fiscal year 1403 (ending March 2025) in a state of recession, dashing hopes of a seasonal rebound typically seen in the lead-up to the Persian New Year. According to the latest Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) data released by the Iran Chamber of Commerce's Research Center, economic activity declined for the fourth consecutive month in March (Esfand), with major business indicators signaling a deeper contraction.

Despite historical trends of increased consumer demand during Esfand, this year's market failed to deliver the expected boost. The overall economic PMI, adjusted for seasonal effects, stood at 48.7—remaining below the neutral 50-point threshold that separates expansion from contraction. While this was a slight improvement from February's 47.0, it still reflects a sluggish and shrinking economic environment.

The report highlights that four of the five main components of the index—production volume, new customer orders, inventory of raw materials, and employment—registered declines. Only the speed of delivery of orders showed improvement.

Production continued to fall for the fifth straight month, albeit at a slower pace compared to February. Businesses reported difficulty planning ahead due to sharp price fluctuations in raw materials, currency volatility, and limited access to financing. A rise in production costs and uncertainty about future demand have led many firms to reduce operations or halt expansion plans.

The decline in consumer purchasing power, largely attributed to soaring inflation and high living costs, meant that even the traditional uptick in March demand failed to materialize. New orders fell for the 11th time this year, with the index staying well below 50—indicating ongoing contraction. Compared to the same month in previous years, the situation was significantly worse.

Inventory levels of raw materials dropped more rapidly in March than in previous months. A combination of exchange rate volatility, limited foreign currency allocations, and customs delays has driven up import costs and disrupted supply chains. Many producers found it increasingly difficult to maintain optimal inventory levels, especially as domestic raw material supplies have also been constrained.

The surge in exchange rates has not only raised the cost of imported materials but has also eroded profit margins, placing more financial pressure on producers. As a result, final product prices remained high throughout March, although the pace of price increases slowed slightly compared to February.

Final product inventories also declined for the fifth consecutive month, a trend driven by reduced production volumes and limited customer orders. High

production costs and financial constraints have made it difficult for firms to restock, while prevailing uncertainty has led many to adopt a cautious approach to inventory management.

Employment continued to decline in March, reflecting the ongoing recession in both production and demand. With fewer new orders and falling output, many businesses saw no need to hire additional workers. Simultaneously, some firms actively cut back on labor costs in response to rising expenses for inputs and overhead, further weakening the job market.

Worsening economic conditions and low wage levels have also dampened workers' willingness to take on or retain jobs, exacerbating the labor market downturn.

The PMI for Iran's industrial sector saw a slight rebound in March, reaching 50.3—just above the neutral mark—thanks in part to a small increase in employment and a longer delivery timeline for orders. However, three of the five main components—production, new orders, and inventory of raw materials—continued to decline.

Although production improved slightly compared to February, it has now declined in seven of the past 12 months. High input costs and tight liquidity remain major obstacles, and concerns about future demand have deterred firms from ramping up output.

New industrial orders fell again, albeit at a slower rate than in previous months. Rising inflation and a general erosion of real incomes have dampened demand for manufactured goods. Export orders, too, have been declining for five consecutive months, reaching their lowest point since October 2023.

Prices of industrial products remained high in March, driven by soaring energy and input costs. Analysts expect further price hikes in the coming months as manufacturers attempt to pass on their rising expenses to consumers.

Final product inventories in the industrial sector also dropped in March, marking the 11th consecutive month of decline. With input prices surging and market demand weakening, many firms have been reluctant to produce for stock and have instead drawn down existing inventories to meet current orders.

Overall, the data paints a grim picture for the Iranian economy as it enters the new fiscal year. Persistent inflation, foreign exchange instability, limited access to financing, and reduced consumer demand have converged to push businesses into a prolonged state of caution and contraction.

The traditionally high-spending month of Esfand failed to break this trend, and unless structural issues such as input cost inflation and currency volatility are addressed, a broad-based recovery remains elusive.

Iran-Algeria Trade Development Faces Challenges Amid Hopes for Joint Chamber

TEHRAN - The Deputy for International Affairs at Iran's Chamber of Commerce has highlighted significant challenges in expanding trade relations between Iran and Algeria, stating that the current trade volume between the two nations stands at approximately \$15 million, and even when third-party trade is accounted for, it likely does not exceed \$50 million.

Speaking to ILNA, Seyed Hamed Asgari, Deputy for International Affairs at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, said that during last year's Iran Expo event, a meeting was held with an Algerian delegation at the Chamber of Commerce, including the Chief of Staff to the Algerian President. He noted that despite discussions on enhancing economic ties, trade between the two countries has remained limited.

“The reported \$15 million mostly represents Iranian exports, and although some goods may reach Algeria via third countries, even with this factored in, the total trade does not surpass \$50 million,” Asgari said. “These mostly include food products and construction materials.”

Asgari emphasized Algeria's potential as a major Muslim country in Africa, with both investment capability and opportunities for receiving investments. However, diplomatic processes have delayed follow-up negotiations since last year's talks. He noted that Iran's Foreign Ministry is currently working to facilitate another meeting between officials from both nations, aiming to sign a preliminary agreement for establishing a joint Chamber of Commerce. He also



pointed out that domestic political changes in Iran last year contributed to delays in progressing these initiatives.

The official also mentioned that while Iran's private sector is exploring opportunities in African markets such as Kenya and Tanzania, such efforts require time and persistence. “Iran has, for various reasons, been sidelined from global markets in recent years,” he said.

Asgari also addressed the influence of other countries in Algeria's market, explaining that due to historical ties, Algeria has leaned toward trade with France and Italy, with most of its energy sector investment coming from these countries. Additionally, Algeria's strict visa policies have discouraged Iranian traders from entering its market, who instead opt for easier destinations like the Persian Gulf states, Iraq, China, and Turkey.

“Although Algeria possesses substantial oil and gas reserves, it is not considered a wealthy nation and still imports its essential goods primarily from Europe,” Asgari noted. “This means that Algeria represents a potentially valuable new market for Iran—albeit one that remains largely unexplored.”

He concluded by stressing the importance of understanding Algeria's market dynamics before entering it. “This is not unique to Algeria,” he said. “For instance, Iranian traders have been absent from the Saudi market for the past decade, and this has significantly reduced their familiarity with it. Reentering such markets will require up-to-date knowledge and strategic preparation.”

20% Growth in Iran's Road Transit Sector in 2024



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's road transit sector experienced a 20% growth in 2024 (1403 in the Iranian calendar), according to the country's top road transport authority.

Reza Akbari, Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and Head of the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, announced the milestone, citing 14.7 million tons of road transit recorded in 2023 (1402). This marked a 58% increase over the previous year (2022), and for the first time in Iran's history, the country has achieved record-breaking transit performance for two consecutive years (2023 and 2024).

Akbari highlighted the active involvement of nearly 770,000 Iranian and foreign transport vehicles in the road transit sector in 2024. He noted that non-oil transit reached 9.9 million tons while oil transit hit 7.6 million tons last year—up by 5% and 42%, respectively, compared to the previous year.

Referring to the targets set in Iran's 7th National Development Plan, Akbari said that with a combined road and rail transit volume exceeding 20 million tons, the country has achieved 125% of its 2024 transit target of 16 million tons.

He credited this success to coordinated efforts among various organizations under the leadership of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development. Akbari emphasized the Organization's initiatives such as activating transport diplomacy with neighboring countries, reducing joint costs and tolls to make Iran's transit corridors more competitive, and showcasing Iran's logistical capabilities in international forums.

He also stressed the organization's commitment to joining international conventions and improving both hardware and software infrastructure at border terminals. Other key measures included upgrading roads leading to border crossings and hosting bilateral and multilateral transport meetings at both national and regional levels, particularly with neighboring countries.

Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce Office Opens in Urmia



TEHRAN - In a significant move to boost economic ties between Iran and Turkey, the first office of the Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce officially opened today in Urmia. The new office, established at the Urmia Chamber of Commerce, aims to organize trade activities and expand bilateral commercial exchanges.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Reza Rahmani, Governor of West Azerbaijan Province, along with members of the Urmia Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture, as well as a group of traders, businesspeople, and economic stakeholders from both countries.

Qasem Karimi, President of the Urmia Chamber of Commerce, emphasized that the launch of the office serves as a platform to connect with traders and facilitate joint trade initiatives. He expressed hope that both public and private sectors would provide strong support for the newly opened office.

Karimi highlighted the strategic importance of West Azerbaijan as a border province, stating that its unique economic position enables it to play a vital role in accessing the Turkish market. He added that the new office could significantly contribute to strengthening economic relations between the two nations.

Governor Rahmani underlined the importance of expanding economic relations with Turkey, noting, “This province is recognized as Iran's commercial gateway to Turkey, and the government fully supports any initiative to develop border and trade infrastructure. The opening of this office marks an important step in enhancing bilateral relations.”

Russian Missile Attack on Ukraine's Kharkiv Kills One

KYIV (Dispatches) - A Russian missile attack on Ukraine's northeastern city of Kharkiv killed one person and injured 57 more on Friday morning, emergency services said.

Five children were among those injured in the attack, which also damaged apartment buildings, an educational institution and a civilian enterprise, they added in a Telegram post.

Ihor Terekhov, the mayor of Ukraine's second biggest city, said the attack damaged 15 apartment buildings based on preliminary information.

Reuters photos from the scene showed emergency workers giving first aid to people with bleeding wounds near one of the apartment buildings.



India Plans to Ease Nuclear Liability Laws to Attract Foreign Firms



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India is planning to ease its nuclear liability laws to cap accident-related penalties on equipment suppliers, three government sources said, in a move mainly to attract U.S. firms that have been holding back due to the risk of unlimited exposure.

The proposal by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is the latest step to expand nuclear power production capacity by 12 times to 100 gigawatts by 2047 as well as provide a fillip to India in trade and tariff negotiations with the U.S.

A draft law prepared by the department of atomic energy removes a key clause in the Civil Nuclear Liability Damage Act of 2010 that exposes suppliers to unlimited liability for accidents, the three sources said.

India's atomic energy department, the prime minister's office and the finance ministry did not respond to requests seeking comment.

"India needs nuclear power, which is clean and essential," said Debasish Mishra, chief growth officer at Deloitte South Asia.

"A liability cap will allay the major concern of the suppliers of nuclear reactors."

The amendments are in line with international norms that put the onus on the operator to maintain safety instead of the supplier of nuclear reactors.

New Delhi is hoping the changes will ease concerns of mainly U.S. firms like General Electric Co and Westinghouse Electric Co that have been sitting on the sidelines for years due to unlimited risks in case of accidents.

Analysts say passage of the amended law is crucial to negotiations between India and the U.S. for a trade deal this year that aims to raise bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030 from \$191 billion last year.

Says Pact Signed With U.S. Is First Step Towards Minerals Deal



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said on Thursday Kyiv and Washington had signed a memorandum as an initial step towards clinching an agreement on developing mineral resources in Ukraine, a deal promoted by U.S. President Donald Trump.

Although both had been poised in February to sign a deal for cooperation on natural resources, it was delayed after an Oval Office meeting between Trump and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy turned into a shouting match.

"We are happy to announce the signing with our American partners," Yulia Svyrydenko, Ukraine's first deputy prime minister and economy minister, said on social media after the signing.

Thursday's memorandum of intent paves the way for an economic partnership deal and the setting-up of an investment fund for the reconstruction of Ukraine, she added.

The signing comes after officials in Kyiv worked to repair ties following the Oval Office episode, recognising that Ukraine needs U.S. support in its war with Russia, which mounted a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The minerals deal is part of that effort, officials in Ukraine have said.

Hamas Rejects Israel's Truce Proposal as Gaza Air Strikes Kill 40



GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - Hamas signaled its rejection of Israel's latest truce proposal and called for a "comprehensive" deal to end the 18-month-long war.

The Palestinian militants' chief negotiator spoke out after civil defense rescuers in Gaza said new Israeli air strikes killed at least 40 people, most of them in camps for displaced civilians, as Israel pressed its offensive in the Palestinian territory.

The Israeli military said it was looking into reports of the strikes.

A Hamas source told AFP that the group sent a written response Thursday to mediators on Israel's latest proposal for a 45-day ceasefire. Israel had wanted the release of 10 living hostages held by the group, according to Hamas.

It also called for the freeing of 1,231 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails and the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza, which has been under complete blockade since March 2.

The proposal called for Hamas to disarm to secure a complete end to the war, a demand the group rejects.

"Partial agreements are used by (Israeli Prime Minister) Benjamin Netanyahu as a cover for his political agenda... we will not be complicit in this policy," Hamas's chief negotiator, Khalil al-Hayya, said in a televised statement.

He said Hamas "seeks a comprehensive deal involving a single-package prisoner exchange in return for halting the war, a withdrawal of the occupation from the Gaza Strip, and the commencement of reconstruction" in the territory.

A previous ceasefire and hostage release deal began on January 19 but collapsed two months later.

Israel offered to extend the first phase, while Hamas insisted that negotiations be held for a second phase, as outlined by Joe Biden when he was US president.

Israel resumed intensive bombing of Gaza on March 18.

The emir of Qatar, which with Egypt and the United States helped mediate the January ceasefire, blamed Israel on Thursday for its collapse.

"As you know, we reached an agreement months ago, but unfortunately Israel did not abide by this agreement," Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said during a visit to Moscow.

Civil defense spokesman Mahmud Bassal said two Israeli missiles hit tents in the Al-Mawasi area of the southern city of

Khan Yunis, killing at least 16 people, "most of them women and children, and 23 others were wounded".

Tens of thousands of Palestinians flocked to Al-Mawasi after Israel declared it a safe zone in December 2023. But the area has since been hit by repeated Israeli strikes.

Survivors described a large explosion at the densely packed camp that set tents ablaze.

"We were sitting peacefully in the tent, under God's protection, when we suddenly saw something red glowing — and then the tent exploded, and the surrounding tents caught fire," Israa Abu al-Rus told AFP.

Bassal said Israeli strikes on two other camps for displaced Gazans killed a nine people — seven in the northern town of Beit Lahia, and a father and son near Al-Mawasi.

Separately, the civil defence reported two attacks in Jabalia — one that killed at least seven members of the Asaliya family, and another that killed six people at a school being used as a shelter — as well as Israeli shelling in Gaza City that killed two.

The military announced it had carried out a strike in Jabalia on a Hamas "command and control" centre.

Israel said Wednesday that it had converted 30 percent of Gaza into a buffer zone in its widening offensive.

The United Nations said half a million Palestinians have been displaced since the offensive resumed, triggering what it has described as the most severe humanitarian crisis since the war began with Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

Hamas accused Israel of attempting to starve Gaza's 2.4 million people after Defence Minister Israel Katz said Wednesday that Israel would continue preventing aid from entering the territory.

"This is a public admission of committing a war crime," the group said in a statement.

Medical supplies, fuel, water and other essentials are in short supply, the UN says.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, said it was "outraged" that an explosive hit one of its bases in Gaza on Wednesday, the second such strike in three weeks.

Israel's renewed assault has killed at least 1,691 people in Gaza, the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory reported, bringing the overall toll since the war erupted to 51,065, most of them civilians.

Italian PM Woos Trump at White House, Vows to Make the West Great Again

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Donald Trump and Giorgia Meloni hit an optimistic note about a possible US-EU tariffs deal as the far-right Italian prime minister mounted a charm offensive at the White House.

Casting herself as the only European who can de-escalate Trump's trade war, Meloni highlighted their conservative common ground and said she wanted to "make the West great again."

"There will be a trade deal, 100 percent," Trump said during her visit. Meloni said she was "sure" they could reach a deal.

The two leaders struck a warm tone during a working lunch and a meeting in the Oval Office, with Trump hailing the 48-year-old Italian premier as "fantastic."

Meloni is the first leader from Europe to visit the Republican since he slapped 20 percent tariffs on EU exports, which he has since suspended for 90 days.

The Italian leader said Trump had accepted an invitation to visit Rome in the "near future" and that he might also meet European leaders there.

"Even if we have some problems between the two shores of the Atlantic, it is the time that we try to sit down and find solutions," she said.

Meloni highlighted their shared views on immigration and "woke" ideology and added: "The goal for me is to make the West great again, and I think we can do it together."



But while Trump expressed confidence about an eventual deal with the 27-nation bloc he accuses of trying to "screw" the United States, he said he was in "no rush."

"Everybody wants to make a deal — and if they don't want to make a deal, we'll make the deal for them," Trump added.

Trump also returned to his administration's familiar criticisms of Europe,

saying it needed to "get smart" on immigration and boost defence spending on NATO.

The US leader said separately that superpower rival China had "reached out" about a possible deal to end the bitter trade war between the world's biggest economies.

Trump has slapped eye-watering 145 percent tariffs on Chinese goods after it retaliated to his worldwide "Liberation Day" tariffs announcement on April 2.

"I think we're going to make a very good deal with China," he added.

Russia's war in Ukraine meanwhile remained a touchy subject between the US and Italian leaders.

Meloni has been a staunch ally of Ukraine and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy since Russia's invasion of the country in 2022, most recently calling Moscow's Palm Sunday attack on the city of Sumy "horrible and vile."

Trump however has stunned allies with a pivot toward Moscow and repeated attacks on Zelenskyy, whom he berated in an Oval Office meeting in February.

The US leader said with Meloni beside him that "I don't hold Zelenskyy responsible but I'm not exactly thrilled with the fact that that war started," adding that he was "not a big fan" of the Ukrainian.

Meloni had earlier acknowledged the uncertainty weighing on her trip as Europe reels from repeated blows from a country that has been the continent's defender for decades.

Macron Hails Important Talks With U.S. on Russia-Ukraine Ceasefire

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday hailed rare talks involving top US, European and Ukrainian officials as a "very important occasion for convergence" as Kyiv's allies seek to rekindle stalled ceasefire efforts amid transatlantic tensions.

The talks involving U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US envoy Steve Witkoff come as Donald Trump's push to end three years of fighting has not borne fruit so far and after Russian leader Vladimir Putin refused to agree to a complete truce despite multiple efforts to engage him.

"This is a very important occasion for convergence," Macron said in English after hosting Rubio and Witkoff for lunch earlier in the day.

"I think everybody wants to get peace for sure, and a robust and sustainable peace," Macron said.

The meetings in Paris took place just days after Witkoff met Putin.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff Andriy Yermak, Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga and Defence Minister Rustem Umerov were also in Paris to talk with European and U.S. delegations.



Britain and Germany's national security advisors were also in Paris, the French presidency said.

Macron has taken the lead in seeking to forge a coordinated European response to defending Ukraine, both during the current conflict and in its eventual aftermath, after Trump shocked the world by opening direct talks with Russia.

Russia's strikes, which have recently killed dozens of people including children in Ukraine's cities of Sumy and Kryvyi Rig, show how the war is taking a hefty toll despite a series of diplomatic efforts.

"Arrived in Paris with one goal in mind: secure real, practical solutions to end the Russia-Ukraine war," Rubio said on X.

Earlier Thursday, Zelenskyy urged the allies meeting in Paris to lean on Russia to agree to a ceasefire.

"Russia uses every day and every night to kill. We must put pressure on the killers," he said on Telegram.

Zelenskyy also said Ukraine had "finally" received information that China was supplying weapons to Russia.



Man United Stun Lyon in 120th-Minute Thriller

PARIS (Dispatches) - Harry Maguire headed in the winner as Manchester United produced an astonishing extra-time comeback yesterday to beat Lyon and set up a Europa League semi-final against Athletic Bilbao, while Tottenham Hotspur are also through to the last four after beating Eintracht Frankfurt.

Maguire's header in added time in extra time gave United a 5-4 win on the night at Old Trafford, and a 7-6 triumph on aggregate.

They appeared to be cruising towards the last four when, after a 2-2 first-leg draw last week in France, Manuel Ugarte turned in an Alejandro Garnacho cutback on 10 minutes and then Diogo Dalot fired home in first-half injury time.

Bruno Fernandes had hit the bar with a brilliant volley in between, and United had chances to kill the tie before Corentin Tolisso headed in on 71 minutes to give Lyon hope.

Nicolas Tagliafico then levelled the scores on the night, and in the tie, with 12 minutes of normal time remaining, his shot crossing the line before goalkeeper Andre Onana got a hand to it.

Lyon then had Tolisso sent off for a second yellow card just before the end of normal time, but they went 3-2 up when Rayan Cherki fired in following a fine run by Malick Fofana in the 105th minute.

And the French side looked to be going through when Alexandre Lacazette netted a penalty to make it 4-2 on the night, and 6-4 on aggregate, five minutes into the second half of extra time following a foul on Fofana by Luke Shaw.

However, almost from the restart the hosts were awarded a penalty of their own following a VAR check for a foul on Casemiro, and Fernandes converted to give them renewed hope.

A fine finish by substitute Kobbie Mainoo levelled the tie again in the 120th minute, seemingly setting up a penalty shoot-out, but Maguire had the last word as he headed in Casemiro's cross to spark delirium on the pitch and in the Old Trafford stands.

"It was a great night," United boss Ruben Amorim told broadcaster TNT Sports.

"Here everything is possible, you feel the environment. At 4-3, after the Bruno Fernandes penalty, we felt we could change the game."

United will play Athletic in the last four, with the first leg in Bilbao, in their first European semi-final since losing the 2021 Europa League final on penalties to Villarreal.

Tottenham Hotspur fans celebrate after the UEFA Europa League quarter-final second leg football match with Eintracht Frankfurt in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany on April 17, 2025. — AFP pic

Tottenham Hotspur fans celebrate after the UEFA Europa League quarter-final second leg football match with Eintracht Frankfurt in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany on April 17, 2025. — AFP pic

In Bilbao, Athletic beat Rangers 2-0 to progress to the last four following a goalless draw in the first leg in Glasgow.

Athletic went ahead on the night, and in the tie, in first-half stoppage time when Oihan Sancet converted a penalty after Maroan Sannadi was fouled in the box by John Souttar.

Nicolas Raskin struck the post for Rangers early in the second half before Athletic secured the victory, and their qualification, when Nico Williams headed in a cross by Oscar De Marcos.

The Basque club are determined to go all the way to the final which will be played in their San Mames stadium on May 21.

Tottenham, struggling in the Premier League, beat 2022 Europa League winners Frankfurt 1-0 on the night in Germany to advance 2-1 on aggregate.

Dominic Solanke scored the only goal of the game, netting a penalty two minutes before the break after James Maddison was clattered by home goalkeeper Kaua Santos.

"Our fans have been through a tough time. Hopefully this gives them something to look forward to," said coach Ange Postecoglou of his team's victory.

It is Tottenham's first European semi-final since their run to the Champions League final in 2019, and they will play Bodo/Glimt in the last four.

The Norwegians beat Lazio 3-2 on penalties in Rome after another remarkable tie finished 3-3 on aggregate.

Lazio needed to overturn a 2-0 defeat in last week's first leg and went ahead on the night through Taty Castellanos before a Tijani Noslin goal deep in injury time levelled the tie on aggregate and forced extra time.

Boulaye Dia then headed Lazio into the lead in the 100th minute, only for Andreas Helmersen to pull it back to 3-1 on the night and even up the tie again.

Chelsea Scrape Past Legia Warsaw to Reach Conference League Semis



PARIS (Dispatches) - Chelsea edged into the UEFA Conference League semi-finals when a 2-1 home defeat by Legia Warsaw was enough for a 4-2 aggregate win.

Chelsea went 1-0 down to a 10th minute penalty before Marc Cucurella's close-range equaliser on 33, but French defender Steve Kapuadi put the Poles ahead again in the 53rd minute with what proved to be the winner on the night.

Legia had a lively following at Stamford Bridge with flares and shirtless chanting from around 1,000 clearly delighted fans.

Thanks to their 3-0 win in Poland a week ago Chelsea however will next face Sweden's Djurgardens, who thumped 10-man Rapid Vienna 4-1 away in extra-time their second leg.

A penalty by Czech forward Tomas Pekhart gave Legia the lead before Cucurella levelled and then saw a goal ruled out by VAR before Kapuadi's winner.

The manner in which Chelsea were defeated at home by the team currently fifth in the Polish Ekstraklasa, does not bode well for their Premier League top-five bid as coach Enzo Maresca's problems continued to mount.

But Chelsea remain favourites to join Roma, West Ham and Olympiakos as winners of the third-tier European competition.

Twice runners-up Fiorentina drew 2-2 in a see-saw match with Slovenians Celje, going 1-0 up in the first half before slipping to 2-1 down with on form Moise Kean scoring the clincher for a 4-3 aggregate win.

In their semi they face in-form La Liga side Real Betis who drew 1-1 at home to secure a 3-1 aggregate win over Jagiellonia Bialystok of Poland.

Newcastle Thrash Palace to Boost Top-Five Premier League Push



NEWCASTLE (Dispatches) - Newcastle soared up to third in the Premier League with a 5-0 thrashing of Crystal Palace to close in on a return to the Champions League next season.

Jacob Murphy, Harvey Barnes, Fabian Schar and Alexander Isak were on target for the Magpies, with Marc Guehi also scoring an own goal, as Newcastle made light of the absence of manager Eddie Howe due to pneumonia.

A sixth consecutive victory in all competitions opens up a five-point lead for Newcastle over sixth-placed Chelsea, with a place in the top five good enough for Champions League qualification.

Palace remain down in 12th with their season now fully focused on an FA Cup semi-final date with Aston Villa later this month.

Newcastle travel to Villa on Saturday in a huge clash in the battle for European places.

But the League Cup winners are pulling away from the chasing pack for a top-five finish, buoyed by ending their 70-year wait for domestic silverware last month.

"That gave us huge confidence," said Newcastle assistant manager Jason Tindall, who is deputising for Howe, of lifting the League Cup.

"We were able to enjoy that for a period of time but we knew what our objectives were for the remainder of the season - to finish as high up the league table as possible.

"The manager always leads and sets that example of never switching off. They've gone out there, been really consistent and delivering performances."

Isak wasted two big early chances to open the scoring when he was firstly denied by a fine Dean Henderson save and then headed over from Murphy's enticing cross.

Newcastle only had to wait until the 14th minute to open the scoring when Murphy blasted in a remarkable finish from a narrow angle.

Palace were gifted the chance to get back into the game when goalkeeper Nick Pope rushed off his line and wiped out Chris Richards in his attempt to punch the ball clear.

After a lengthy VAR check, a penalty was finally awarded.

Alcaraz Reaches Barcelona Quarterfinals

MADRID (Dispatches) - Top-seeded Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz defeated Serbia's Laslo Djere 6-2, 6-4 to reach the quarterfinals at the Barcelona Open Banc Sabadell in Spain.

Alcaraz, who won the tournament in 2022 and 2023, needed only 71 minutes to finish Djere and sets up a meeting with No. 5 seed Alex De Minaur of Australia, a 6-1, 6-2 winner over Britain's Jacob Fearnley.

Russia's Karen Khachanov held off Spain's Jaume Munar 7-5, 6-4. He will face another Spaniard in the quarterfinals after Alejandro Davidovich Fokina saved eight of 11 break points in a 7-5, 6-4 upset of No. 4 Andre Rublev of Russia.

Belgium's David Goffin rallied for an 0-6, 7-5, 6-1 win against Argentina's Mariano Navone to reach the quarterfinals in Munich, Germany.

Goffin saved four break points in the decisive set and moved on to face fifth-seeded Francisco Cerundulo, also of Argentina, who advanced with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko.

Also meeting in the final eight will be Belgium's Zizou Bergs and Hungary's Fabian Marozsan. Bergs beat 17-year-old Diego Dedura-Palomero of Germany 6-1, 6-1 in 69 minutes, while Marozsan knocked out fourth-seeded Frenchman Ugo Humbert 6-4, 6-4.

Meanwhile Ekaterina Alexandrova upset fellow Russian and No. 6



seed Mirra Andreeva 6-3, 6-2 in 65 minutes to reach the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix quarterfinals in Stuttgart, Germany.

Alexandrova, 30, recorded her fourth Top 10 win of the season. She had 19 winners and eight aces while the 17-year-old Andreeva struggled with 24 unforced errors and landed only 48 percent of her first serves.

Top seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus won in a walkover due to an

injury to Russia's Anastasia Potapova. Fourth-seeded Coco Gauff sailed past Germany's Ella Seidel 6-1, 6-1 in 57 minutes. American Jessica Pegula, the third seed, downed Poland's Magdalena Frech 6-1, 6-1 in 59 minutes, and fifth-seeded Jasmine Paolini of Italy defeated Germany's Jule Niemeier 6-1, 7-5 in one hour, 26 minutes.

In the final match of the day, Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko upset No. 7 seed Emma Navarro 7-5, 3-6, 6-2. Ostapenko converted 6 of 9 break points against her opponent while saving 14 of the 18 break points she faced.

Suzan Lamens of the Netherlands knocked off second-seeded Linda Noskova of the Czech Republic 6-4, 6-1 to qualify for the quarterfinals in Rouen, France.

Lamens saved 4 of 5 break points, while Noskova saved 6 of 11. Lamens won 81.8 percent of her first-serve points (27 of 33); Noskova was at 56.8 percent (25 of 44).

In other matches, top seed Elina Svitolina downed fellow Ukrainian Anhelina Kalinina 6-4, 6-0. Third-seeded Olga Danilovic of Serbia went three sets to defeat Czech Linda Fruhvirtova 6-2, 3-6, 6-4, and fifth-seeded Moyuka Uchijima of Japan rallied for a 1-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4 win over France's Lois Boisson.

The last match of the day saw Spaniard Jessica Bouzas Maneiro get past France's Varvara Gracheva 6-3, 6-3.

Mavs Keep Comfortable Lead, Eliminate Kings in Play-in

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Anthony Davis recorded 27 points, nine rebounds and three blocked shots and the Dallas Mavericks kept their playoff bid alive with a convincing 120-106 victory over the host Sacramento Kings in a Western Conference play-in game.

Klay Thompson scored 23 points, P.J. Washington had 17 points and nine boards and Brandon Williams added 17 points off the bench for the Mavericks, who will visit the Memphis Grizzlies on Friday night in the final West play-in contest. The winner earns the No. 8 seed and will face the top-seeded Oklahoma City Thunder in the first round.

DeMar DeRozan registered 33 points and seven rebounds and Zach LaVine added 20 points and nine assists for Sacramento,



which was eliminated with the Wednesday setback. Domantas Sabonis added 11 points, 13 rebounds and five assists for the Kings.

The contest marked just the 10th time Davis had played for Dallas since being acquired from the Los Angeles Lakers in the Luka Doncic deal. Most recently, Davis has been dealing with an adductor injury.

"There's no give in this group," Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said. "No matter who's playing, they always believe that they got the right information to compete at a high level, and you saw that on a nightly basis, no matter if we're starting two two-ways or we have our healthy group."