

In a Meeting Held by the Organization for Investment, Economic, and Technical Assistance of Iran, Foreign Investments Totaling \$7 Billion Were Approved Across Various Sectors

IRAN NEWS

Judiciary Chief Qolam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei Will Travel to China to Participate in the 20th Summit of the Chairs of Supreme Courts From the Nine Member Countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

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IRGC Ready for Sacrifice to Defend the Nation



TEHRAN - The General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasized that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), while strengthening its deterrent power, stands fully prepared to sacrifice and serve in defense of the nation and the noble people of Iran against any threat at any level.

In a statement issued on the occasion of the anniversary of the IRGC's establishment on the 2nd of Ordibehesht (April 21), the General Staff praised the IRGC as a powerful, brave, insightful, and security-creating force. It stated that the IRGC was born out of the heart of the Islamic Revolution and the will of its people, with the farsighted vision of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini (RA), to safeguard the Revolution and its sacred ideals.

The statement further noted that the IRGC, in coordination and unity with other branches of the armed forces and leveraging the unique capabilities of the Basij under the wise leadership of the two leaders of the Islamic Revolution, has demonstrated unwavering devotion, bravery, and sacrifice. This was evident during its confrontations with criminal elements, anti-revolutionary forces, and extremist groups, as well as throughout the Sacred Defense (Iran-Iraq war) and beyond, especially within the regional Resistance Front against global hegemony led by the United States and its "watchdog," the "illegitimate and child-killing Zionist regime."

According to the statement, the IRGC has proven its commitment to defending the Islamic Republic and the dignity of the Iranian people with steel-like strength. It declared that under the leadership of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the IRGC, with strong public support, has been able to defeat adversaries of any scale, forcing them into regret. The recent "True Promise" operations against the aggressive Zionist regime were cited as a small example of this capability.

Uranium Enrichment Is Iran's Red Line in Talks With U.S.



TEHRAN - Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi has reiterated the Islamic Republic's right to enrich uranium, stressing that the issue is a red line in the indirect negotiations with the United States.

Gharibabadi made the remarks at a meeting of the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy commission on Sunday, where he briefed the lawmakers on the second round of indirect talks between Tehran and Washington, held in Rome, Italy, the day before.

Ebrahim Rezaei, the committee's spokesman, said Gharibabadi attended the session to elaborate on the content of the negotiations.

During the meeting, Gharibabadi noted that the Iranian side has once again emphasized that the Islamic Republic is not seeking to build nuclear weapons and that the country's nuclear activities are entirely peaceful.

He also said one of the main issues of the talks had been the complete lifting of sanctions, including those issued by the US Congress and the executive orders signed by US President Donald Trump.

Gharibabadi also emphasized that the removal of sanctions must be thorough and effective, ensuring tangible economic benefits for the Iranian nation rather than serving as merely a symbolic gesture.

Iran Emphasizes Lifting Sanctions as Core Demand in Talks with U.S.

TEHRAN - In a weekly press briefing held on Monday, , Ismail Baghaei, the spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, outlined the Islamic Republic's firm position in ongoing diplomatic engagements, declaring that the lifting of sanctions remains Tehran's fundamental demand in all negotiations, particularly those with the United States.

Baghaei emphasized that all sanctions imposed on Iran are "illegitimate and unjust," and that Tehran seeks their removal in a manner that has "tangible and effective results." He cited Iran's prior experience with the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), noting that the failure of the U.S. to uphold its commitments justifies Iran's insistence on guarantees this time around.

"Sanctions must be lifted in a way that Iran can engage in normal banking and trade operations," Baghaei said. "Our emphasis on guarantees stems from the need to ensure that any agreement reached is sustainable and that all parties will adhere to their commitments."

Addressing recent speculation surrounding the location and progress of negotiations, Baghaei confirmed that the next round of technical and high-level talks will be held in Muscat, Oman. He thanked the Omani government for its professional mediation and noted that Italy also played a cooperative role in hosting previous sessions.

He dismissed media reports about the content of the negotiations, calling them speculative and inaccurate. "We're at the beginning of a long path, and the details of such sensitive talks are not meant to be discussed in the media," he added.

Baghaei reiterated Iran's intention to maintain positive relations with its neighbors, stating that the country values good neighborliness. He referred to ongoing consultations with countries across the region, including Saudi Arabia, whose defense minister recently visited Iran—a move seen as a result of Tehran's regional diplomacy.

On the international front, Baghaei said that Iran has been in constant communication with China and Russia, as well as with European JCPOA signatories, keeping them informed of developments in the talks. He also confirmed that Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi will visit China to continue bilateral discussions and follow up on strategic agreements.

Responding to questions on the nature of indirect talks with the U.S., Baghaei said the discussions are strictly centered around nuclear issues and sanctions relief. "There is no agenda for broader normalization," he said. Expert-level talks are set to delve into technical frameworks and the alignment of both parties' positions.

He also commented on statements made by former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, criticizing current efforts to resume negotiations. "It's ironic that individuals who once initiated the JCPOA now oppose it," Baghaei said, accusing both the Democratic Party and the Israeli



regime of attempting to derail the diplomatic process.

Touching on regional matters, Baghaei criticized Israel's continued occupation of the Golan Heights, calling it a serious concern for regional stability. "The Golan is Syrian territory. The passage of time does not legitimize occupation," he declared, adding that Iran continues to support Syria's territorial integrity and internal stability.

In response to recent events in Yemen, Baghaei strongly condemned the attacks as violations of international law and described them as part of a broader campaign supporting atrocities in Gaza. He also criticized the international community's

silence, especially that of the UN and so-called human rights defenders.

Baghaei highlighted the upcoming Iran Export Capabilities Exhibition, which will be held from April 28 to May 2 and is expected to be the country's largest economic diplomacy event of the year. Over 100 countries, including 40 from Africa, have expressed interest in participating.

He also addressed Iran's relations with Pakistan, affirming the long-standing ties and shared concerns, especially regarding border security. Both countries have recently increased cooperation, including establishing liaison officers and ongoing high-level contacts.

In a nod to Iran's broader foreign relations, Baghaei confirmed new ambassadorial appointments in Cuba and Mexico, and underscored continued efforts to implement agreements with Iraq and resolve disputes with Kuwait over the Arash gas field through dialogue.

Baghaei condemned the U.S. policy of applying maximum pressure, not only on Iran but also on China. He criticized recent sanctions on Beijing as "unacceptable interference" and part of a broader pattern to disrupt South-South cooperation.

He further noted that Rafael Grossi, the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), recently visited Italy but held no meetings with Iranian officials. Previous discussions in Tehran had already clarified Iran's positions.

The Foreign Ministry spokesperson confirmed an upcoming trip by Iran's President to the Republic of Azerbaijan, which is scheduled for the first week of May. He also acknowledged that Araghchi had been invited to a conference in Washington, with a speech planned for Monday afternoon, schedule permitting.

Finally, Baghaei reiterated Iran's readiness to defend itself against any threats to its nuclear facilities. "We know how to respond to any form of threat," he warned, emphasizing that Iran's policies remain firm despite inconsistent rhetoric from American officials.

Iranian Armed Forces Achieve Most Sophisticated Defense Technology



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A senior Iranian military official has commended the country's Armed Forces for possessing the one of the most advanced defensive technology developed indigenously.

Brigadier General Mohammad Mehdi Nouri, deputy chief of science, research, and technology at the General Staff of the Armed Forces, made the remarks on Sunday.

The official highlighted the "most sophisticated" technological advancements that have been developed within the forces, particularly in unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and artificial intelligence.

According to the official, the forces had made groundbreaking strides in defense technology, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence and unmanned systems.

Nouri noted that these breakthroughs were integral to enhancing the country's national power, stressing the necessity of various technologies such as AI, quantum sciences, microelectronics, and digital systems in maintaining countrywide security.

He, meanwhile, described artificial intelligence as a "critical" technology for the future of Iran's defense strategy, noting that AI integrated multiple technological fields, which were

crucial for responding to modern threats.

To further enhance Iran's defense capabilities, the official emphasized the importance of integrating a range of advanced technologies, including AI, digital systems, quantum technologies, and microelectronics, into a cohesive, intelligent network.

Looking ahead, Nouri asserted that the Islamic Republic's defense sector would continue to expand its partnerships with universities, research parks, and innovative companies.

"Our foremost priority in the Armed Forces is national security," Nouri stated. "While economic factors are important, the development of advanced defense technologies is our primary concern."

According to the official, the Islamic Republic began its journey into unmanned aerial systems in 1985, and today, it boasted significant

advancements, enabling it to export these technologies. He pointed out that, over the past two years, the country's defense sector had invested thousands of dollars into partnerships with academic and technological institutions to push forward

U.S. Investment in Iran Requires Proper Infrastructure



TEHRAN - Fatemeh Mohajerani, spokesperson for Iran's 14th government administration, stated on Tuesday that for any potential investment by American entities in Iran, suitable infrastructure and foundational steps are essential — and these have not yet been put in place.

Speaking at a press conference held during the 7th Exhibition of Export Capabilities and the 3rd Iran-Africa Economic Cooperation Summit, Mohajerani emphasized the government's commitment to creating conditions that facilitate exports and showcase national capabilities.

Highlighting Africa's growing significance due to its natural, mineral, and human resources, she expressed hope that the summit would lead to increased cooperation between Iran and African nations. "Africa will be an economic powerhouse in the future," she noted.

Mohajerani added that holding such exhibitions is part of the government's role in supporting the private sector, and she hoped upcoming changes would further boost private enterprise in Iran. She also underlined the country's potential in terms of peace, stability, security, and beauty, stating that Iran aims to offer these opportunities to the private sector to fuel economic growth.

The spokesperson stressed the government's responsibility to develop the necessary infrastructure for economic expansion, asserting that Iran is a stable and secure destination full of potential for business. "Correcting the false narrative of Iranophobia pushed by hostile media is a duty we all share," she said.

In response to reporters' questions, Mohajerani reiterated Iran's openness to cooperation with all countries except Israel. She noted that if sanctions were lifted, the government's primary focus would be addressing domestic processual and structural challenges — not just the outcomes of negotiations.

Araqchi Holds Talks With Counterparts



TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has discussed the latest developments surrounding indirect talks with the United States in separate phone calls with his Swiss and Pakistani counterparts.

In his conversation with Switzerland's Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis on Sunday, Araghchi hailed Bern's valuable role during negotiations in the 2010s that led to the Iran nuclear deal.

The Swiss foreign minister, for his part, welcomed the indirect talks between Tehran and Washington and reiterated his country's readiness to extend any form of assistance in support of the negotiations.

Araqchi and Cassis also discussed mutual relations and global issues.

The Iranian foreign minister and Steve Witkoff, the U.S. president's special envoy for West Asia affairs, led two rounds of indirect talks about Iran's nuclear program and the termination of US sanctions in the Omani capital of Muscat and the Italian capital, Rome, on April 12 and 19, respectively.

Speaking at the end of the second round of talks on Saturday, Araghchi said Tehran and Washington had reached a "better understanding" on certain principles and goals.

Araqchi also informed Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar about the talks.

The top Iranian and Pakistani diplomats discussed mutual relations and the developments in Afghanistan as well as regional and international issues.



Moscow Hosts 18th Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The 18th Joint Economic Commission between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation is being held in Moscow from April 22 to April 24, 2025.

This round of talks is aimed at expanding bilateral cooperation. The event is co-chaired by Iran's Oil Minister, Mohsen Paknejad, and Russia's Energy Minister, Sergey Tsivilev, who head the two countries' joint economic commission.

The agenda includes a series of expert-level meetings over the first two days, where Iranian and Russian specialists—organized into various working groups—will explore strategies for strengthening collaboration. These discussions are expected to address current challenges and lay out a roadmap for future cooperation. The outcomes will be formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding, to be signed by both ministers.

Details Announced for Iran Expo 2025



TEHRAN - Iran Expo 2025 is set to take place amid growing optimism that ongoing negotiations between Iran and the United States could boost international participation in the event, officials said during a press conference.

Ghadir Ghiyafeh, Vice President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, stated that last year's Iran Expo 2024 saw limited participation due to concerns stemming from regional tensions. However, this year's event coincides with renewed diplomatic talks between Tehran and Washington, a factor that is expected to positively impact the number of participants.

"Iran Expo is organized with the aim of showcasing Iran's industrial and commercial capabilities," Ghiyafeh said. "Around the world, turning an event into a recognized brand takes time. In previous years, the event did not meet the expectations of the private sector, but last year we focused on improving the quality, which encouraged greater private sector involvement."

He noted that Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is overseeing the invitation of international guests and added that 34 local chambers of commerce from across the country will also take part in the expo.

"After more than 20 years of isolation from global markets, we need time to re-integrate," Ghiyafeh emphasized. "Remember, just one dollar of exports from our country supports a stable job."

Ali Chaghavand, Head of the Expo Committee at Iran's Chamber of Commerce, shared more logistical details. He confirmed that Iran Expo 2025 will be held from April 27 to May 2 (corresponding to 8-12 Ordibehesht in the Iranian calendar).

"This is the second consecutive year that the Chamber of Commerce is participating in a coordinated and unified manner," Chaghavand said. "Since last year, this event has gained increased importance for us."

According to Chaghavand, 31 joint chambers of commerce will represent Iran, while foreign delegations, including heads of chambers of commerce from other countries, are also expected to attend.

Iran Set to Export 50,000 Tons of Chicken Feet to China, Boosting Trade Ties



TEHRAN - Iran is gearing up to export approximately 50,000 tons of chicken feet to China, marking a significant step in expanding commercial ties between the two nations, according to Seyed Saeid Hosseini, Deputy for Health and Prevention at Iran's Veterinary Organization. The announcement follows China's formal request to import the product directly from Iran, a shift from previous indirect exports.

In a video conference with Liu, a Chinese customs official responsible for animal disease control, and senior Iranian Veterinary Organization officials, Hosseini highlighted the economic potential of this trade. "With an export capacity of around 50,000 tons, this opportunity can generate substantial benefits for Iranian poultry breeders and traders," he stated, as reported by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Hosseini noted that China has outlined specific requirements for the exports, including documentation verifying Iran's freedom from Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), certified by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Iran is preparing these documents for submission to meet Chinese standards. Additionally, China has requested a certificate from Iran's National Diagnostic Laboratory, part of the Veterinary Organization, to further validate compliance.

"The certification process is nearing completion," Hosseini said. "Once issued, the necessary documentation will be sent to Chinese customs authorities." He also mentioned China's request for a self-declaration confirming the absence of HPAI in Iran, which will be addressed in a follow-up meeting within the next two to three months.

The export deal is expected to bring significant foreign currency earnings to Iran's poultry and slaughterhouse sectors. By transitioning to direct exports, Iran aims to strengthen its position in the Chinese market, capitalizing on growing demand for chicken feet, a popular ingredient in Chinese cuisine.

Iran Eyes Mining Sector to Boost Economic Ties With Uzbekistan



TEHRAN - Iran's mining sector is poised to become a cornerstone for strengthening economic relations with Uzbekistan, according to Mohammad Aghajanlou, head of the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO). Speaking at a meeting with Shakhrokh Gholamov, Uzbekistan's Deputy Minister of Investment, Industry, and Trade, Aghajanlou highlighted the potential for collaboration in mining and mineral industries to drive bilateral ties.

The discussions, reported by IMIDRO, underscored Iran's advancements in mining and mineral processing, positioning the country as a key player in the region. Aghajanlou emphasized Iran's expertise in exporting technical and engineering services, as well as its robust production of steel, copper, gold, and other commodities. "These capabilities create a strong foundation for deepening cooperation with Uzbekistan," he stated, noting Iran's leadership as the Middle East's largest steel producer and the world's tenth-largest.

Aghajanlou showcased Iran's technical prowess, particularly in producing direct reduced iron (DRI), a critical component in steelmaking, which Iran exports globally. He proposed that this expertise could form the basis for joint projects with Uzbek counterparts. Additionally, he highlighted the growth of Iranian companies in designing and executing mining and industrial projects, signaling readiness to undertake ventures in Uzbekistan under various contract models.

The meeting, attended by IMIDRO deputies and managers, also explored avenues for commercial growth. Aghajanlou suggested that initial steps could involve expanding trade and exporting Iranian products to

Uzbekistan, paving the way for joint investments and knowledge transfer in the future. "Iran's path to enhanced cooperation in minerals is clear, and we are prepared to take concrete steps," he affirmed.

On the Uzbek side, Deputy Minister Gholamov echoed the enthusiasm, emphasizing the strategic importance of mining collaboration within the framework of the two nations' economic cooperation commission. He outlined Uzbekistan's ambition to partner with Iran across the mining value chain, from exploration to product manufacturing. Gholamov cited shared cultural ties as a facilitator for stronger relations and expressed interest in establishing joint companies to execute mining projects.

Beyond mining, Gholamov indicated Uzbekistan's interest in broadening cooperation to include oil and gas, petrochemicals, and power generation. "Our goals extend beyond minerals to encompass a wide range of industrial sectors," he noted, signaling a comprehensive approach to bilateral engagement.

The talks reflect a mutual commitment to leveraging Iran's mining expertise and Uzbekistan's strategic priorities to foster economic growth. As both nations explore joint ventures and trade opportunities, the mining sector could serve as a catalyst for a new chapter in Iran-Uzbekistan relations, with potential ripple effects across other industries.

This development comes as Iran continues to bolster its global standing in mineral production, seeking new markets and partnerships to enhance its economic resilience. For Uzbekistan, the partnership offers access to Iran's advanced technologies and resources, promising mutual benefits in a rapidly evolving regional landscape.

Foreign Shipping Lines May Return Following U.S. Deal



TEHRAN – Former head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization, Mohammad Rastad, has revealed that container traffic in Iranian ports dropped by half after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), better known as the Iran nuclear deal. Speaking to ILNA, Rastad explained that container throughput had peaked at over 3 million TEUs during the JCPOA era, but fell to just 1.5 million TEUs following the collapse of the agreement.

According to Rastad, the drop in traffic was primarily due to sanctions, which forced Iranian cargo to be routed through intermediary ports like Jebel Ali in the UAE. These transshipment processes involved unloading cargo, transferring it to other containers, and reloading it onto different ships, significantly increasing both time and cost for exporters, importers, and end consumers.

"If sanctions are lifted and foreign liners can resume direct services to Iranian ports, we could make full use of our existing infrastructure," he said. Iran currently has a container handling capacity of 8 million TEUs, but has been utilizing less than 3 million TEUs.

Rastad noted that allowing foreign shipping lines to operate freely would not only fill the underutilized capacity but also boost value-added activities at terminals, stimulate economic growth, and increase employment. He added that, without restrictions, major Iranian ports like Shahid Rajaei could become regional hubs, serving as transit points for cargo headed to smaller neighboring countries.

He stressed that lifting sanctions would eliminate the added costs currently imposed by third-party transshipment through the UAE. However, he acknowledged that established ports like Jebel Ali, with

a throughput of over 13 million TEUs, have a strong foothold in the region, and Iran still faces a challenging path to becoming a competitive hub.

"To become a central port, every regional hub uses strategic policies to increase competitiveness, including reducing transshipment costs to attract more cargo and vessels," Rastad said.

Referring to the brief resurgence of international interest during the JCPOA period, he highlighted that 17 foreign liner companies resumed operations in Iran during that time. He expressed optimism that a similar return is possible if sanctions are lifted again.

"There's no doubt that with the removal of sanctions, we will see increased port traffic. Iran has a large, attractive market and is surrounded by landlocked countries that could benefit from using our ports for imports and exports," he said, pointing out that both Shahid Rajaei and Chabahar ports could become key destinations for global liners.

When asked whether Iranian vessels would still be limited to government-controlled Chinese and Indian ports, Rastad responded: "As long as we're not under sanctions, Iranian and foreign ships transporting Iranian cargo will face no restrictions in choosing the most suitable ports. They will opt for the closest and most efficient options."

In conclusion, Rastad reiterated that while the drop in port activity was stark after JCPOA, broader political and market dynamics also play a significant role in shaping foreign trade. "If transportation is no longer restricted, it will serve as a major factor in strengthening trade performance," he said.

3 European Freight Trains Transit Through Iran to Afghanistan Each Month



TEHRAN - According to a senior transport official, Iran is currently facilitating the monthly transit of three freight trains—equivalent to 10,000 tons of cargo—from Turkey to Afghanistan, while also advancing high-speed rail initiatives on key domestic routes.

Jabar Zakeri, Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, announced during a press conference that the monthly transit of goods via rail from Europe through Turkey, Iran, and into Afghanistan has reached 10,000 tons, highlighting Iran's growing role as a regional transport corridor.

Zakeri also provided updates on the Shalamcheh-Basra railway project, stating that demining operations along the route have reached 8 kilometers and are expected to be completed within three months. "The further we get from the border, the fewer mines and war remnants we encounter. We hope to complete this phase in the next three months," he said.

Construction on the first foundation pile for a new bridge on the route has begun, a critical and technically demanding phase of the project. According to Zakeri, progress is being made at Shalamcheh Station's passenger facilities to accommodate Arbaeen pilgrims, with a target to complete key sections by July 2025.

On the East-West rail corridor, Zakeri explained that Iran has completed railway infrastructure up to Khavaran Station in Tabriz. Plans are underway to extend the railway to the city's main station and complete the Marand–Cheshmeh Soraya segment. A future connection from Cheshmeh Soraya to Kars in Turkey would integrate Iran into the European standard-gauge network.

"This rail link is of great importance," Zakeri noted. "In meetings over the past three months with the Turkish Transport Minister, both countries have expressed strong determination to boost freight transit and finalize this strategic corridor."

On domestic developments, Iran is accelerating efforts to reduce travel time between Tehran and Mashhad, one of the busiest passenger rail routes. The network is being upgraded for speeds up to 160 km/h, and some trains are already operating at this pace.

Foreign Nations Seek Iran's Expertise for Power Plant Repairs



TEHRAN - Iran's prowess in power plant maintenance has attracted international interest, with several countries requesting the expertise of the Iranian Power Plant Repairs Company, according to its CEO, Masoud Meradi. Speaking at a press conference during a media tour of repair projects, Moradi revealed that these operations save Iran between 7 and 10 million euros annually.

Moradi highlighted that 90% of Iran's electricity comes from thermal power plants, with most maintenance scheduled between October and May. Last year, the company completed 70 repair projects, totaling 18,000 megawatts, achieving a 95% completion rate. Two provinces remain, with repairs set to conclude by May's end, fulfilling contractual commitments.

"Iran has made remarkable strides in power plant repairs," Moradi stated. In the 2000s, Iran repaired four rotors under foreign supervision, but last year, it independently restored 12 rotors. The company also slashed repair times from three months to a record 27 days, showcasing efficiency and expertise unmatched in the region. Moradi noted that Iran's ability to service a diverse range of turbines and equipment is unparalleled, drawing consistent demand from neighbors like Iraq.

Moradi shared success stories of reviving equipment deemed irreparable by foreign firms. "Rotors and turbines labeled as scrap by international supervisors were restored by our specialists and are now operational in regional power plants," he said. Notable projects include the repair of a Siemens turbine for Iraq and a rotor for Syria, though the latter awaits delivery due to logistical changes. Iran has also collaborated with Turkmenistan and Turkey on repair programs, while Belarus has proposed a partnership for gas power plant technology transfer.

Congo Suspends Former President Kabila's Political Party

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Democratic Republic of Congo suspended former President Joseph Kabila's political party and ordered his assets seized over accusations of supporting Rwandan-backed rebels in the east, the government said. The 53-year-old, who ruled from 2001-2019 and only stepped down after deadly protests against him, has said he wants to return to Congo to help seek a solution to the war.

But in statements late on Saturday, the interior ministry said his party was suspended for aiding the M23 rebels, while the justice ministry said his and other party leaders' assets would be seized after acts amounting to high treason. Both statements said prosecutors had been instructed to initiate proceedings against him, but no details of the accusations were given.



Israel's Military Finds Professional Failures in Killings of Gaza Medics



TEL AVIV (Dispatches) - The Israeli military on Sunday said a review into last month's killing of emergency responders in Gaza found there had been "several professional failures" and that a commander would be dismissed over the incident.

The 15 paramedics and other rescue workers were shot dead on March 23 in three separate shootings at the same location near the southern Gaza city of Rafah. They were buried in a shallow grave where their bodies were found a week later by officials from the United Nations and the Palestinian Red Crescent.

In a statement on Sunday, the military said a commanding officer is to be reprimanded. A deputy commander, a reservist who was the field commander, will be dismissed from his position for providing an incomplete and inaccurate report, it said.

"The examination identified several professional failures, breaches of orders, and a failure to fully report the incident," the military said.

"The fire in the first two incidents resulted from an operational misunderstanding by the troops, who believed they faced a tangible threat from enemy forces. The third incident involved a breach of orders during a combat setting," it said.

The military advocate general was conducting its own investigation and criminal charges could be pursued, according to the military.

A video recovered from the mobile phone of one of the dead men and published by the Palestinian Red Crescent showed uniformed emergency responders and clearly marked ambulances and fire trucks, with their lights on, being fired on by soldiers.

El Salvador Proposes Swapping U.S.-Deported Venezuelans for Venezuelan Political Prisoners



SAN SALVADOR (Dispatches) - El Salvador President Nayib Bukele on Sunday proposed sending 252 Venezuelans deported from the U.S. and imprisoned in his country to Venezuela, in exchange for taking "political prisoners" held by Venezuela.

In a post on X, Bukele asked that Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro hand over 252 "of the political prisoners you are holding," under his proposed deal.

The Salvadoran leader did not say whether the prisoners would be incarcerated again upon an exchange.

Venezuela's chief prosecutor Tarek William Saab criticized Bukele's proposal and accused El Salvador of unlawfully detaining 252 Venezuelans.

In a statement, Saab demanded to know what crimes the detainees are accused of, whether they have appeared before a judge, have access to legal counsel, or have been allowed to contact family members.

Among those Bukele proposed for release from Venezuela were journalist Roland Carreno, human rights lawyer Rocio San Miguel and Corina Parisca de Machado, mother of Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who he said is subjected to daily threats at her home.

China Warns Countries Against Striking Trade Deals With U.S. at Its Expense



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China on Monday warned countries against striking a broader economic deal with the United States at its expense, ratcheting up its rhetoric in a spiralling trade war between the world's two biggest economies.

Beijing will firmly oppose any party striking a deal at China's expense and "will take countermeasures in a resolute and reciprocal manner," its Commerce Ministry said.

The ministry was responding to a Bloomberg report, citing sources familiar with the matter, that the Trump administration is preparing to pressure nations seeking tariff reductions or exemptions from the U.S. to curb trade with China, including imposing monetary sanctions.

President Donald Trump paused the sweeping tariffs he announced on dozens of countries on April 2 except those on China, singling out the world's second largest economy for the biggest levies.

In a series of moves, Washington has raised tariffs on Chinese imports to 145%, prompting Beijing to slap retaliatory duties of 125% on U.S. goods. Last week, China signalled that its own across-the-board rates would not rise further.

"The United States has abused tariffs on all trading partners under the banner of so-called 'equivalence', while also forcing all parties to start so-called 'reciprocal tariffs' negotiations with them," the ministry spokesperson said.

China is determined and capable of safeguarding its own rights and interests, and is willing to strengthen solidarity with all parties, the ministry said.

"The fact is, nobody wants to pick a side," said Bo Zhengyuan, partner at China-based policy consultancy Plenum.

"If countries have high reliance on China in terms of investment, industrial infrastructure, technology know-how and

consumption, I don't think they'll be buying into U.S. demands. Many Southeast Asian countries belong to this category."

Pursuing a hard line stance, Beijing will this week convene an informal United Nations Security Council meeting to accuse Washington of bullying and "casting a shadow over the global efforts for peace and development" by weaponizing tariffs.

Earlier this month, U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said nearly 50 countries have approached him to discuss the steep additional tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump.

Several bilateral talks on tariffs have taken place since, with Japan considering raising soybean and rice imports as part of its talks with the U.S. while Indonesia is planning to increase U.S. food and commodities imports and reduce orders from other nations.

The Trump administration has been trying to curb Beijing's progress in developing advanced semiconductor chips which it says could be used for military purposes, and last week imposed port fees on China-built vessels to limit China's dominance in shipbuilding.

AI chip giant Nvidia said last week it would take \$5.5 billion in charges due to the administration's curbs on AI chip exports.

China's President Xi Jinping set off through three Southeast Asian countries last week in a move to bolster regional ties, calling on trade partners to oppose unilateral bullying.

"There are no winners in trade wars and tariff wars," Xi said in an article published in Vietnamese media, without mentioning the United States.

Pentagon Chief Shared Yemen Strike Details in Second Signal Chat

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth shared information on forthcoming U.S. air strikes on Yemen in a private Signal chat group that included his wife, brother and personal lawyer, the New York Times reported on Sunday.

AFP was not able to independently verify the Times' report, which detailed what would be the second time Hegseth has been accused of sharing sensitive military information on the commercial messaging app with unauthorized personnel.

Last month, The Atlantic magazine revealed that its editor-in-chief was inadvertently included in a Signal chat in which officials including Hegseth and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz discussed the strikes, which took place on March 15.

The revelation sparked an uproar, with US President Donald Trump's administration facing a scandal over the accidental leak. A Pentagon Inspector-General's probe into that leak is ongoing.

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On Sunday, the Times reported that Hegseth had shared information on the same March 15 strikes with the second Signal group chat.

The information shared "included the flight schedules for the F/A-18 Hornets targeting the Houthis in Yemen," the newspaper reported. The outlet said that unlike the accidental leak where journalist Jeffrey Goldberg was mistakenly included in the group, this group chat was created by Hegseth. The other chat was initiated by Waltz.



"It included his wife and about a dozen other people from his personal and professional inner circle in January, before his confirmation as defense secretary," the Times' reported, citing unnamed sources.

Hegseth's wife Jennifer is a journalist and former Fox News producer. The group also included his brother Phil and Tim Parlatore, both of whom serve in roles at the Pentagon.

Parlatore also continues to serve as Hegseth's personal lawyer, the Times reported.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

Trump largely pinned the blame for the earlier leak on Waltz, but has dismissed calls to fire top officials and insisted instead on what he called the success of the raids on the Yemeni rebels.

This week, three top Pentagon officials were put on leave pending investigations into unspecified leaks in the Defense Department.

Deputy chief of staff Darin Selnick, senior advisor Dan Caldwell and Colin Carroll hit back on Sunday, releasing a statement saying Pentagon officials had "slandered our character with baseless attacks."

"At this time, we still have not been told what exactly we were investigated for, if there is still an active investigation, or if there was even a real investigation of 'leaks' to begin with," they said in a joint statement posted on social media.

"While this experience has been unconscionable, we remain supportive of the Trump-Vance Administration's mission to make the Pentagon great again and achieve peace through strength."

Kyiv, Moscow Accuse Each Other of Countless Violations of One-Day Easter Ceasefire

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia and Ukraine accused each other of thousands of attacks that violated the one-day Easter ceasefire declared by President Vladimir Putin, with the Kremlin saying there was no order to extend the pause in frontline fighting.

Washington said it would welcome an extension of the truce, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reiterated several times Ukraine's willingness to pause strikes for 30 days in the war.

But Putin, who sent thousands of Russian troops into Ukraine in February 2022 and who ordered on Saturday the halt in all military activity along the front line until midnight Moscow time (2100 GMT) on Sunday, did not give orders to extend it.

"There were no other commands," Russia's TASS state news agency cited Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying when asked whether the ceasefire could be prolonged.

While there were no air raid alerts in Ukraine on Sunday, soon after midnight on Monday the Ukrainian air force issued alerts for east and southeast regions of the country, warning of missile and drone strikes.

Ukrainian forces reported nearly 3,000 violations of Russia's own ceasefire vow,



Zelenskyy said early on Monday, adding that Kyiv forces were instructed to mirror Russian army's actions.

"We will respond to silence with silence, our strikes will be to protect against Russian strikes," Zelenskyy said in a post on the Telegram messaging app.

The largest number of Russian shelling and assault operations took place along the frontline part near the embattled eastern town of Pokrovsk, Zelenskyy said.

Late on Sunday, Zelenskyy said the absence of air raid alerts suggested a "format of ceasefire that has been achieved," and he proposed that Russia abandon drone and missile strikes on civilian targets for at least 30 days.

If Russia does not agree, it will be proof that it intends to continue doing only those things that destroy human lives and prolong the war, Zelenskyy added.

In a separate Easter video message, Zelenskyy urged Ukrainians not to give up hope that peace will one day return.

"We know what we are defending," said Zelenskyy, wearing a traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirt and standing in front of Saint Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv. "We know what we are fighting for."



Piastri Claims Saudi Grand Prix Victory

JEDDAH (Dispatches) - McLaren's Oscar Piastri won the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix from Red Bull polesitter Max Verstappen to lead the world championship for the first time in his career after one of his "toughest" ever races.

Charles Leclerc's Ferrari completed the podium for this fifth round of the season under the floodlights at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit.

Piastri's third win this year was in large part decided at the first turn, when Verstappen picked up a five-second penalty for gaining an advantage after going off the track.

He becomes the first Australian to lead the drivers' standings since his agent, Mark Webber, 15 years ago.

"I'm looking for a couch! It was a pretty tough race," said Piastri, as fireworks lit up the night sky. "I made the difference at the start and made my case in to Turn One and that was enough."

"Definitely one of the toughest races I've had in my career so I'm happy I could come out on top in it."

"Max was still a bit too close for my liking!" Piastri added, after crossing the line 2.843 seconds clear of the four-time world champion.

"I'm going to keep it quite short," said Verstappen, not wanting to discuss his penalty. "It's been a great weekend along the track and the rest is what it is."

Piastri's McLaren teammate Lando Norris, who went into the weekend leading the standings, took fourth ahead of the two Mercedes of George Russell and Kimi Antonelli.

As the sun dipped and the tension rose, the lights went out at the world's fastest street circuit, a strip of asphalt hugging a lagoon on the Red Sea coastline.

Piastri got off to a flyer and was upsides Verstappen at the first corner but the Dutchman cut the chicane prompting Piastri to tell his team: "He needs to give that back, I was ahead."

"He just forced me off," was Verstappen's verdict.

Behind, Verstappen's teammate Yuki Tsunoda and Pierre Gasly's Alpine tangled, bringing out the

safety car and taking them both out of the race.

Racing resumed on lap three with news that Verstappen had been slapped with a five-second penalty for leaving the track and gaining an advantage.

On being told of his sanction the Dutchman responded with an expletive, adding: "That is lovely". He led Piastri on the restart, with Russell racing third and Leclerc fourth.

Norris was up to eighth after starting way back on the fifth row — his car as good as new after all the 'TLC' showered on it last night by McLaren mechanics following Saturday's major bust-up with a wall in qualifying.

Piastri was content to bide his time behind Verstappen, around a second back, safe in the knowledge that the lead was effectively his once Verstappen took his penalty.

On lap 20 with Norris up to fifth Piastri was the first of the leaders to come in to fit fresh rubber on his car.

Verstappen came in on lap 22 to serve his penalty.

Up front Leclerc and Norris, both yet to pit, led from Piastri, with Verstappen fourth.

Leclerc finally came in on lap 30, Norris following suit a couple of laps later to leave his teammate in firm control of the race.

Piastri duly held on to move on to 99 points in the race for the 2025 world title, 10 clear of Norris, with Verstappen a further two points back.

After this final leg of a frantic, not to say draining, triple-header, F1 takes a breather before its well-oiled circus pitches up again in Miami in a fortnight's time.

Even if he parties well into the night — unlikely for the quiet, composed Aussie — at least Piastri will know he's going to wake up without a hangover as podium celebrations are tweaked to adhere to the oil-rich kingdom's nationwide prohibition on alcohol, with fizzy rose water replacing the traditional sparkling grape juice.

Donovan Mitchell, Ty Jerome Power Cavaliers Past Heat



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points and Ty Jerome scored 16 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter as the top-seeded Cleveland Cavaliers pulled away for a 121-100 victory over the visiting Miami Heat in Game 1 of their Eastern Conference first-round series.

Jerome, a backup point guard, was making his playoff debut in his sixth season. He also dished three assists in the final period after being named a finalist for the Sixth Man of the Year award earlier in the day. He made 10 of 15 field-goal attempts, including 5 of 8 on 3-pointers.

Mitchell, a six-time All-Star, posted his seventh straight 30-point performance in a series opener, tying Michael Jordan for the NBA record. Jordan accomplished it twice in his legendary playoff career with the Chicago Bulls.

"That's Donovan. That's Spida Mitchell. He's the head of this snake and we go as he goes," said the Cavaliers' Darius Garland, who added 27 points.

Jarrett Allen had 12 points, 11 rebounds and three steals for Cleveland, which outscored the Heat 34-21 in the fourth. Its largest lead was the final score, courtesy of Mitchell's two free throws with 1:23 remaining.

"When we see guys come off the bench like that, we definitely feed off the energy," Garland said, referring to Jerome. "It gets us fired up. That's for everybody on this team. We love each other."

Bam Adebayo had 24 points and nine rebounds, and Tyler Herro scored 21 points for the Heat, who were playing their third game in five days. Miami needed play-in tournament wins at Chicago on Wednesday and Atlanta on Friday to become the first 10th seed to qualify.

Valverde's Late Stunner Keeps Real Madrid's Title Hopes Alive



MADRID (Dispatches) - Fede Valverde's superb 93rd minute strike kept Real Madrid on Barcelona's tail in the Spanish title race, earning the champions a 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao.

Madrid stayed four points behind Barca after Valverde smashed into the top corner with a sliced, swerving effort.

After Champions League elimination by Arsenal it looked like Madrid were set for another devastating result until the Uruguay international's stoppage-time intervention.

"Fede has such a good shot... in training yesterday he shot a ball that looked like it was going out and then it picked up a curl like that and you go 'how do you shoot like that?'" said Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

"In training he does that once or twice a week."

Athletic Bilbao, who reached the Europa League semi-finals on Thursday by beating Rangers, rotated heavily.

Despite that, the Basque side proved a hard nut for Madrid to crack, especially with their top goalscorer Kylian Mbappe both suspended and recovering from an ankle problem.

The forward was whistled by some fans for his failure to help the team overcome Arsenal in the Champions League quarter-finals in midweek when he was shown watching the game on the stadium screens.

"Valverde was key in this game because he scored the goal," said Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"The team was good, a bit slower in the first half but very good in the second."

"We wanted to win, we wanted to react after the elimination against Arsenal — the team came through and Fede was the key player."

Vinicius, who was previously criticised by Ancelotti for lack of defensive work ethic, was running hard on the left, which fans at the Santiago Bernabeu appreciated.

The Brazilian has struggled for form at times this season but was Madrid's brightest player against Athletic, giving Unai Nunez a difficult night.

Madrid played with intensity after their European elimination, trying to keep La Liga in their sights after Barcelona made a late comeback to beat Celta Vigo on Saturday.

Rune Upsets Carlos Alcaraz in Barcelona

LONDON (Dispatches) - Sixth-seeded Holger Rune upset top seed Carlos Alcaraz 7-6 (6), 6-2 to win the title at the Barcelona Open Banc Sabadell in Spain.

It is the first ATP Tour title since 2023 for Rune, who now has five career wins -- three of them on clay.

Rune was down a break in the first set but came back to win in the tiebreaker and then cruised through the second set, against Alcaraz, who required two medical timeouts to have medical staff look at his upper right leg during the one-hour, 41-minute match.

With the win, Rune, of Denmark, will return to the Top 10 when the updated ATP rankings are released Monday. Alcaraz would have retained his No. 2 spot with a victory but will drop to the No. 3-ranked singles player in the world after the defeat.

Alcaraz won the Barcelona title in 2022 and 2023 in his home country.

Meanwhile Alexander Zverev gave himself a memorable birthday gift, defeating Ben Shelton 6-2, 6-4 to win the championship in Munich.



On his 28th birthday, the German secured his third title at the tournament in front of his home fans in just 71 minutes. It was his 24th ATP Tour victory.

Since reaching the Australian Open final in January, Zverev

was just 6-6 in tour matches, but he seemed refreshed in Munich, taken to three sets just once on the road to the final of the clay-court tournament.

In the final, Zverev won 89 percent of points on his first serve and had just seven unforced errors compared to 21 for Shelton. He didn't face a break point and broke Shelton's serve three times as he moved to 2-0 in his career against the 22-year-old American.

Zverev, who will move up to No. 2 in the ATP rankings, previously won in Munich in 2017 and 2018.

Meanwhile Aryna Sabalenka, the World No. 1, will attempt to win her first Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in her fourth attempt in Stuttgart, Germany.

She reached the final for the fourth time in five years with a 7-5, 6-4 semifinal win over No. 5 seed Jasmine Paolini of Italy in one hour, 35 minutes.

Both players jumped out to 3-0 leads in the two sets -- Sabalenka in the first and Paolini in the second. Paolini fought back to even the match at 5-5 and was serving with a chance to win the first set, but Sabalenka broke serve and served for the set.

Liverpool's Victory Seals Leicester's Fate

LEICESTER (Dispatches) - Leicester City were relegated from the Premier League as Liverpool moved to within one win of the title yesterday with a 1-0 victory at the King Power.

Trent Alexander-Arnold came off the bench to score the only goal 14 minutes from time as the Reds moved to the brink of a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title.

Liverpool could be crowned champions on Wednesday should Arsenal lose at home to Crystal Palace.

If the Gunners avoid defeat, Arne Slot's men have the chance to seal the deal when Tottenham visit Anfield next Sunday.

Leicester have not scored a single goal at home since December as nine consecutive defeats at the King Power have taken Ruud van Nistelrooy's men down.



Alexander-Arnold appears to be coming towards the end of his time at his boyhood club.

The England international is reportedly close to joining Real Madrid when his contract expires at the end of the season.

Unlike Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk, who have signed new deals in recent weeks to prolong their stay at Anfield, Alexander-Arnold has just weeks to run on his current deal.

"I've said all season, I'm not going to speak on my situation," Alexander-Arnold told Sky Sports.

"But these days like today are always special."

"Scoring goals, playing, winning games, being close to winning titles as well as being in title races. They're special moments that will be with me forever and I'm glad to be a part of them."