

A Huge Explosion Has Taken Place at Shahid Rajaei Port Near Bandar Abbas, in Southern Iran, With Conflicting Reports About the Cause of the Incident

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Foreign Ministry Summoned the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Tehran in Protest at the Baseless Accusations the European Country Has Made Against the Islamic Republic

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Iran, Oman Discuss Arrangements for 3rd Round of Indirect Tehran-Washington Talks



TEHRAN (PresSTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi and his Omani counterpart have discussed the implementation and arrangements for the third round of Tehran-Washington negotiations, scheduled for April 26 in Muscat, Oman.

Araqchi, who is leading the Iranian technical-expert delegation, met twice with Omani Foreign Minister Badr Al Busaidi to finalize the preparations.

Earlier on Friday, Araqchi arrived in Muscat and held meetings with Omani officials ahead of the upcoming talks.

During the third round, experts from both sides are expected to begin detailed discussions on the technical aspects of a potential agreement to replace the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Iran's technical delegation will be headed by Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht-Ravanchi and Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi.

On the U.S. side, Michael Anton, head of policy planning at the State Department, will lead the technical discussions.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei reiterated in a post on his X account Friday that the "Termination of unlawful and inhumane sanctions" remains a key priority for the Iranian negotiating team.

Intelligence Minister Urges Avoiding Polarization During Iran-U.S. Negotiations



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesperson for the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission announced that, according to the Minister of Intelligence, efforts must be made to prevent society from becoming conditioned or polarized during the recent negotiations between Iran and the United States.

Speaking to reporters after a joint session with Intelligence Minister Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Esmail Khatib, Ebrahim Rezaei explained that the Minister provided an analysis and report on the country's security situation. Khatib emphasized that intelligence agencies view supporting the government as their duty and are striving to assist the administration through intelligence operations.

Rezaei noted that Minister Khatib addressed the ongoing negotiations between Iran and the U.S., offering his assessment and stressing the importance of preventing social polarization around these talks. He also referred to the guidance of the Supreme Leader, which has helped the country navigate crises and challenges.

The Minister further highlighted various social challenges facing Iran and emphasized that addressing these vulnerabilities should be a top priority for officials.

Rezaei reported that Minister Khatib pointed to the enemies' anti-security campaigns against the country, noting that in the past three years, there have been shifts in the enemy's hybrid warfare strategies, especially in the realm of technology.

Iran Backs Sovereign, Stable Syria Free of Terrorism

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations has reaffirmed Tehran's support for a sovereign, stable, and united Syria, free from terrorism, occupation, and foreign interference.

In remarks at the UN, Ambassador Amir Sa'ed Iravani emphasized the importance of "fighting terrorism in Syria, especially from foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs)." He described these groups as a "serious threat to Syria and the wider region."

"FTFs must be returned to their countries and held accountable under international law. Iran is ready to work with all responsible partners to fight terrorism," Iravani stated.

The Iranian mission also addressed the "tragic loss of civilian life in Latakia and Tartus on March 6, especially among the Alawite community," expressing Tehran's support for "the Security Council's call for an independent and transparent investigation."

"Syria's interim authorities must ensure accountability and protect all communities in line with international law," Iravani noted.

He also reaffirmed Iran's "unwavering commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic."

"We call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign forces that are in Syria illegally," he said, stressing that ending this occupation is "essential for restoring Syria's sovereignty and achieving lasting peace."

Iravani condemned the Israeli regime's acts of aggression against Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, describing them as "a blatant violation of international law, the United Nations Charter, relevant Security Council resolutions, and the 1974 Disengagement Agreement."

He cited the "latest UNDOF report which confirms Israel's illegal incursions into the buffer zone and details the occupying forces' abuses," warning that the Israeli regime's acts of aggression in Syria pose a "serious threat to international peace and security."

The Iranian envoy further criticized Israeli forces for establishing "military outposts and promoting tourism in the occupied areas," calling it clear evidence of Israel's "expansionist



agenda."

According to Iravani, Israel's objective is the systematic destruction of Syria's infrastructure and the dismantling of its military and defensive capabilities, leaving the country unable to defend itself against further aggression.

The envoy also stated that Israeli acts of aggression in Syria "are possible only because of full US political and military support," holding the US "directly responsible for Israel's continued violations."

In response to these "violations," Iravani urged the Security Council to "act now," warning that silence "encourages further aggression and impunity, just as we are tragically witnessing in Gaza."

He also drew attention to the "severe humanitarian crisis" in Syria, noting that

"around 16.7 million people, over 70% of the population, need aid, the highest level since 2011."

"More than 7 million individuals are internally displaced, and millions more have sought refuge in neighboring countries. Humanitarian efforts are underfunded," he warned.

Addressing the impact of US sanctions, Iravani said, "We are deeply concerned about the continued US sanctions on Syria," describing them as "unjustified."

Iravani called for the "immediate and unconditional removal" of sanctions on Syria, stating that such measures "block reconstruction, hurt the economy, and prevent refugees from returning."

The Iranian envoy also emphasized that Tehran has never taken any action to destabilize Syria or the region, rejecting attempts to distort Iran's position as "politically motivated."

He reaffirmed Iran's support for a "Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process, in line with Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015)," stressing the need for "free and fair elections, a national dialogue, and an inclusive government" as the foundation for a "peaceful solution."

"The United Nations must lead this process fairly while respecting Syria's sovereignty," Iravani urged.

Yemeni Ballistic Missile Triggers Sirens Across Israeli-Occupied Territories



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

SANAA (Dispatches) - Air raid sirens echoed throughout numerous regions of the Israeli-occupied territories following the launch of a ballistic missile by the Yemeni Armed Forces targeting the occupying Zionist entity.

According to Israeli media outlets, the fresh Yemeni missile attack set off sirens in towns and cities south of the occupied territories, including Beersheba and the surrounding area, on Saturday morning.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage.

The retaliatory strike came in response to the Israeli regime's relentless genocidal war against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip, where close to 51,500 Palestinians, most of them women and children have been killed so far.

The Israeli military claimed in a statement that its anti-air missile systems had intercepted the projectile, and shot it down before crossing into the skies over the occupied territories.

The overnight attack came a few hours after the United States conducted new acts of aggression against Yemen by launching a wave of airstrikes across multiple regions in the Arab country.

Five airstrikes hit the Nihm district in the capital province of Sana'a, while the Bani Matar district in the same province was also bombed. No immediate reports of casualties have emerged.

American warplanes also carried out seven airstrikes on the Medghal district in the central province of Ma'rib.

No immediate casualty reports or damage assessments were available from the strikes, according to local media.

Yemen's official Saba news agency, citing a local source speaking on condition of anonymity, reported that a woman was killed and another civilian sustained injuries when a US air raid struck a residential building in the Sahar district of the northwestern Sa'ada province.

In the western province of al-Mahwit, US fighter jets bombed the At Tawilah district, while the Ras Isa fuel terminal in the strategic coastal province of Hudaydah was targeted with four attacks.

In response to the atrocities perpetrated by Israel in Gaza and the US and UK aggression against

Yemen, the Yemeni Armed Forces have launched a series of retaliatory strikes targeting Israeli, American, and British interests in the Red Sea and surrounding areas.

As the genocidal war in Gaza intensified, the Yemeni forces implemented a strategic blockade of vital maritime routes to obstruct the supply of military resources to Israel. This move aimed to urge the international community to address the dire humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza.

The Yemeni Armed Forces have vowed to sustain their attacks until Israel halts its ground and aerial assaults in Gaza.

Meanwhile Yemenis once again held nationwide rallies, reiterating their solidarity with Palestinians while condemning the U.S. attacks against their homeland.

Huge crowds in Sana'a filled the city's main square on Friday amid ongoing U.S. airstrikes targeting the Arab country.

They carried the Yemeni and Palestinian flags and chanted slogans condemning Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Yemenis say they will remain steadfast in their support for Palestine despite the ongoing US aggression against their country, insisting that the strikes have only strengthened their support for Palestinians.

"Despite the American strikes being launched against our country, we emerge from under the bombing, from beneath the rubble, and from the bleeding wounds," Yemeni activist Akram al-Dhabibi said.

The protesters denounced the deadly US airstrikes against Yemen, expressing commitment to the retaliatory operations conducted by Yemeni armed forces, targeting the occupied territories as well as Israel-bound vessels and US warships.

Yemenis have been holding pro-Palestine rallies almost every Friday since the beginning of the genocidal war on Gaza in October 2023.

Tehran Slams Paraguay's Blacklisting of IRGC as Illegal



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Ministry denounced Paraguay's decision to blacklist the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) as illegal, asserting that it aligns with Israel's anti-Tehran policies and aims to divert attention from the ongoing genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Issa Kameli, the director general for the Americas department at the Foreign Ministry, said the Paraguayan move is "illegal, unjustifiable and in violation of international legal rules and norms."

Paraguay designated on Thursday the Iranian elite force as a "terrorist" organization and expanded its previous blacklisting of Palestine's Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah to encompass the military and political arms of the two resistance movements.

Expressing disappointment with Paraguay's alignment with the occupying and genocidal Israeli regime's anti-Iran policies, Kameli emphasized Paraguay's global accountability for its illegal action against Iran's IRGC.

"The political action undertaken by the Paraguayan government sets a dangerous precedent, orchestrated at the behest of the Zionist regime to distract public attention from the genocide in Gaza, thereby implicating Paraguayan policymakers as complicit in the crimes currently under prosecution by the International Criminal Court," the Iranian Foreign Ministry official said.

Kameli pointed to the lofty, empowering, and honorable position of the IRGC as part of the country's official armed forces, and said the force has played an unparalleled role in defending the integrity of Iran and confronting terrorism, including Daesh.

He further emphasized the Iranian government's unwavering commitment to undertaking all essential measures to safeguard the standing and reputation of the nation's armed forces in the face of any "belligerent labeling."

Iran Pursues Regional Status Upgrade, Activates Africa Committee in 14th Gov't



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's First Vice President, Mohammad Reza Aref, emphasized on Saturday that the Islamic Republic is aiming to enhance its regional standing through initiatives like the "Iran Expo." He stated that the exhibition should lead to the development of regional and international cooperation for the country.

Speaking to IRNA, Aref described the Iran Export Capabilities Exhibition ("Iran Expo") as a vital platform for maximizing economic gains and strengthening the country's economic, political, and cultural diplomacy. He stressed the importance of delivering clear messages about Iran's domestic export capabilities and knowledge-based achievements to senior political figures and economic stakeholders from other countries.

Aref called the Expo a critical opportunity for bolstering Iran's diplomatic and economic efforts, noting that the event should be leveraged not just for business, but also to advance Iran's political and cultural goals.

Highlighting the importance of the export capabilities exhibition as a strategic tool for organizing and advancing the country's trade and export objectives, Aref said that the government's national unity strategy is now more serious than ever in economic and trade development.

He also pointed to Iran's observer membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and its active participation in regional organizations across its shared civilizational space. Aref noted that the signing of a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Union, alongside the 14th Government's foreign policy focus on strengthening ties with neighbors and like-minded countries, presents valuable opportunities for Iranian businesses, the private sector, and regional traders. He underlined Eurasia as a primary target market for Iran's exports during the current administration.



Iran Ready to Mediate Between India and Pakistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says that India and Pakistan are ‘brotherly neighbors of Iran’ and that Tehran is ready to mediate between New Delhi and Islamabad.

In a message on his X account on Friday, Araqchi wrote: “India and Pakistan are brotherly neighbors of Iran, enjoying relations rooted in centuries-old cultural and civilizational ties. Like other neighbors, we consider them our foremost priority.”

He also said, “Tehran stands ready to use its good offices in Islamabad and New Delhi to forge greater understanding at this difficult time, in line with the spirit taught by Persian poet Saadi.

24 Iranian Airlines Operate with 140 Active Aircraft



TEHRAN - The Secretary of the Iranian Airlines Association announced that out of 346 aircraft in Iran, only 140 are currently active. He added that there are presently 24 airlines operating in the country, a figure he does not consider excessive, especially when compared to some neighboring countries where over 30 airlines are active.

In an interview with ILNA, Maqsood Asadi Samani, Secretary of the Iranian Airlines Association, responded to criticisms regarding the number of airlines in Iran’s aviation industry. “This criticism is unfounded,” he said. “Currently, 24 airlines are operating, which is not a high number. In fact, in some neighboring countries, more than 30 airlines are active. In some countries, it’s even possible to establish an airline with just one leased aircraft, while in Iran, founding an airline faces much stricter conditions.”

He explained that, in Iran, applicants must possess at least three owned aircraft to establish an airline. For a full Air Operator Certificate (AOC), at least five aircraft are required — three owned and two leased. “In contrast, in many countries, a single leased aircraft suffices to launch an airline,” he noted.

Samani emphasized the need to encourage investment in the aviation sector, urging for support to facilitate the flow of capital into air transportation. “The Civil Aviation Organization has set rigorous requirements for granting flight operation licenses, and applicants must meet numerous standards to receive authorization,” he added.

Regarding the number of active aircraft in the Iranian fleet, Samani said: “Currently, there are 346 aircraft in Iran, with around 140 active at any given time. However, an aircraft that is operational today may be grounded tomorrow due to technical or operational issues.”

Iran Exports Over \$250m in Petrochemical Products to Russia



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Iran exported more than \$250 million worth of petrochemical products to Russia in the Iranian calendar year 1403 (ending March 2025), according to the Managing Director of the National Petrochemical Company of Iran. The implementation of the Iran-Eurasian Economic Union Free Trade Agreement is expected to further boost exports to the five member states of the union.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Moscow accompanying Iran’s Oil Minister and head of the Iranian delegation in the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission, Hassan Abbaszadeh highlighted growing cooperation with Russia in the petrochemical sector in recent years. This collaboration, he said, has led to a significant increase in Iranian exports to Russia.

Abbaszadeh noted that Iranian petrochemical companies have actively participated in specialized exhibitions in Russia, allowing them to introduce their products and secure a solid foothold in the Russian market.

“This presence is part of broader cooperation under the Joint Economic Commission, supported by financial infrastructure and trade facilitation,” he added.

He emphasized that the oil minister’s visit could pave the way for enhanced infrastructure development—especially in transportation and railway corridors—aimed at facilitating the movement of goods. Abbaszadeh also welcomed the upcoming reduction in customs tariffs between Iran and Russia, announced with the support of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister. This, he said, would further ease petrochemical exports.

Referring to the Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union set to take effect on May 14, 2025, Abbaszadeh said the treaty creates favorable conditions for wider participation of Iranian petrochemical firms in the markets of Russia and other member states.

Now that Iran is an observer member of the Eurasian Economic Union and the agreement has been officially signed, Abbaszadeh stressed the need for a strategic roadmap for petrochemical companies to maximize opportunities—particularly considering current export capacities and the development goals outlined in Iran’s Seventh National Development Plan.

Iran, Russia Stress the Need to Remove Barriers and Accelerate Implementation of Agreements



TEHRAN - The closing session of the 18th meeting of the Iran-Russia Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation concluded in Moscow with both sides emphasizing the necessity of eliminating structural barriers and expediting the implementation of bilateral agreements.

The session was held on Friday, with the participation of Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad and Russian Energy Minister Sergey Tsivilev.

In the meeting, attended by the ambassadors of Iran and Russia in the respective capitals, the Iranian oil minister stressed the importance of fully implementing the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty. He called for the removal of structural obstacles within economic relations and urged faster execution of mutual agreements.

Paknejad expressed gratitude for the hospitality of the Russian government and people, emphasizing the need to maximize the use of available capacities to elevate the economic and trade relations between the two nations.

“I hope that the 18th Commission meeting, through the joint efforts and synergy of the Iranian and Russian sides, will lead to overcoming existing structural limitations and challenges, and that bilateral relations, given the high potential of Iran and Russia, will be elevated to a desirable and worthy level,” Paknejad stated.

Highlighting the signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty by the presidents of Iran and Russia, and its ratification by Russia’s State Duma and Federation Council, Paknejad described the document as a major step in elevating bilateral ties to a new, long-term, and strategic level.

He also expressed hope that the ratification of the Free Trade Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) by Iran’s Parliament, and its expected implementation starting May 15, 2025, would help remove trade barriers with EAEU member states, especially the Russian Federation.

Referring to recent collaborations and agreements between the central banks of Iran and Russia, Paknejad noted that linking the financial messaging networks and card payment systems of the two countries is a significant step towards facilitating investment and increasing trade volumes.

He further stated that expanding cooperation into areas such as transferring experiences to allied nations and international organizations like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) could enhance the economic resilience of both Iran and Russia against external threats and strengthen their strategic ties.

Paknejad emphasized the important role of regularly holding the Iran-Russia Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation, noting that this framework has laid a solid foundation for expanding collaboration in sectors such as energy, finance, banking,

investment, transportation, agriculture, nuclear energy, and more.

He added that removing obstacles to the development of bilateral cooperation and drafting new strategies for expanding interactions should become a serious agenda item for both public and private sectors of the two countries, both within the commission framework and through direct bilateral engagement.

Highlighting the necessity for consistent follow-up on agreement implementations, Paknejad stressed the importance of continuously monitoring the status and progress of projects, identifying and resolving domestic barriers, and addressing institutional inconsistencies between the two nations. He called for both sides’ Joint Commission Secretariats to pursue this matter with utmost seriousness.

The oil minister concluded by expressing hope that bilateral cooperation would be executed in the best possible manner, allowing Iran and Russia to leverage each other’s capacities in pursuit of sustainable development and mutual interests.

Meanwhile on Friday a cooperation agreement between two leading research centers from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation in the field of cell research and gene therapy was signed during a ceremony at the conclusion of the 18th Iran-Russia Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in Moscow.

The signing ceremony took place on Friday, attended by Iran’s Minister of Oil, and Sergey Tsivilev, Russia’s Minister of Energy, who serve as the heads of their respective countries’ joint economic commissions.

During the event, the Iranian Oil Minister and his Russian counterpart first signed the final document of the 18th joint commission meeting, which lays the foundation for expanding strategic cooperation across various economic sectors between Tehran and Moscow.

Following that, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Children’s Cell and Gene Therapy Research Center at Tehran University of Medical Sciences and the Federal State Budgetary Institution, National Medical Research Center for Hematology, affiliated with Russia’s Ministry of Health.

The agreement aims to advance joint research in the fields of cell therapy and gene therapy and to promote the medical knowledge of both nations.

The document was signed by Maryam Behfar, Deputy Director of Research at the Gene, Cell, and Tissue Research Institute of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, and Elena Nikolaevna Parovichnikova on behalf of the Russian side.

It was announced during the ceremony that the collaboration seeks to enhance scientific diplomacy and leverage the academic and specialized capacities of both countries.

Women Hold 16% Share in Iran’s ICT Market



TEHRAN - As the world celebrates Girls in ICT Day, senior Iranian officials and business leaders gathered to spotlight the critical role of women in the digital economy, stressing that with adequate digital literacy, women could capture up to 50% of Iran’s ICT market by 2030.

Speaking at the national ceremony, Samad Hassanzadeh, President of Iran’s Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, underscored the importance of inclusive digital transformation. “Empowering girls digitally is not symbolic—it is the cornerstone of a competitive and equitable future for our country,” he said.

Hassanzadeh highlighted the Chamber’s initiatives to support female-led startups, promote international collaboration for digital governance, and invest in educational programs targeting schoolgirls and female university students. He also introduced a new accolade, the “Digital Girl of the Year” award, aimed at recognizing innovative young women in the digital space.

According to Meshkat Asadi, CEO of ON Business Group, Iranian women currently occupy just 16% of the ICT job market—well below the global average of 33% and the EU’s 30%. In leadership, only 10% of C-level ICT roles in Iran are held by women, slightly trailing the global average of 19%.

Despite this, Asadi noted, “The gap between Iran and other regions isn’t insurmountable—what’s needed is better integration of female ICT graduates into the workforce.”

Payam Bagheri, Vice President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, emphasized the alignment between youth traits—creativity, innovation, and boldness—and the ICT sector. “We are committed to supporting young women who aspire to enter digital fields. Our collaboration with vocational training bodies is designed to tailor skill-building programs to business needs,” he said.

Sadina Abai, Head of the Chamber’s ICT Commission, announced the Chamber’s stewardship of the “Digital Girl of the Year” award and the launch of a new platform specifically for girls in ICT. She stressed the importance of accessibility across regions and genders, saying, “Digital transformation only succeeds when it includes everyone.”

Plans are also underway to notify the United Nations of this initiative to promote it on a global scale.

A message from Seyed Sattar Hashemi, Iran’s Minister of ICT, called for sustainable educational foundations for girls in the tech space. “The goal is to ensure girls become not just users but creators and leaders in tomorrow’s digital economy,” the message read.

Zahra Behrouz Azar, Deputy to the President for Women and Family Affairs, stressed the importance of better digital marketing skills for women and proposed more meaningful dialogue between female professionals and policymakers. She referenced Iran’s 7th Development Plan, which mandates removing obstacles to women’s empowerment.

Fatemeh Mohajerani, government spokesperson, noted that although women make up 60% of university undergraduates, their participation drops in graduate studies and professional fields. She expressed hope that more women would rise to leadership roles in ICT and related industries.

Gholamhossein Mohammadi, Acting Head of the Technical and Vocational Training Organization, argued that the traditional focus on home-based jobs for women is outdated. He emphasized the need for comprehensive digital skill training, noting, “Currently, 18 million Iranian women of working age are unemployed. This must change.”

He added, “If we ensure universal access to digital education, women could effectively control 50% of Iran’s job market by 2030.”

Parvin Dadandish, Head of Women and Family Affairs at the Interior Ministry, revealed that 19% of IT executives in Iran are women. She urged expanded training and policy changes to support women’s digital businesses and shift societal attitudes.

As Iran marks Girls in ICT Day, officials, educators, and entrepreneurs agree: equipping young women with digital skills is not only a matter of equity but a strategic imperative for national development. With continued investment and cultural change, Iran could see a dramatic shift in gender dynamics in its digital economy by the end of the decade.

Iran Ranks Third Globally in Land Subsidence Crisis



TEHRAN - Iran ranks third in the world in terms of the severity of its land subsidence crisis, according to Dr. Ali Beitollahi, a member of the Scientific Board of the Road, Housing, and Urban Development Research Center.

Speaking to IRNA, he stressed that, despite the gravity of the issue, successful global examples from countries like the U.S., China, and Japan show the phenomenon can be controlled—if there is serious administrative commitment and water-saving policies, particularly in agriculture.

Dr. Beitollahi pointed out that a negative water balance across Iran is causing daily depletion of groundwater resources. The most severe declines, both in groundwater levels and the extent of subsidence zones, have been recorded in Razavi Khorasan Province—five times greater than in provinces like Fars, Kerman, Isfahan, and Tehran.

He noted that the southern areas of Tehran, including Districts 17 through 20 and neighboring cities housing over 3 million people, are under threat, along with entire urban zones in Isfahan and multiple cities in Fars and Kerman.

Significant historical monuments are also endangered by subsidence. In Isfahan, landmarks like Naqsh-e Jahan Square are showing visible damage such as cracks and ground shifts. Similar signs have emerged in Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars Province, and in the cultural heritage sites of Yazd and Semnan.

In Tehran, groundwater over-extraction in recent years—exacerbated by reduced rainfall and shrinking dam reservoirs—has led to the drilling of numerous wells, further intensifying subsidence risks and threatening urban infrastructure.

South Tehran hosts critical infrastructure like fuel reservoirs, refineries, water and gas pipelines, and sewage systems—all of which are vulnerable due to underground water extraction. Dr. Beitollahi highlighted that current approaches, rather than resolving the crisis, are worsening it, unlike global cities such as Tokyo, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Los Angeles, which have implemented successful solutions like artificial aquifer recharge.

Except for Gilan (which experts believe will soon show signs of subsidence as well), nearly all provinces are now experiencing the phenomenon, including the typically water-rich regions of Mazandaran and Golestan.

Tehran, Tashkent Call for Joint Investment in Tourism



TEHRAN - Iran’s Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri, met with Uzbekistan’s Deputy Minister of Environment and Head of the State Committee for Tourism, Umid Shadiev, as the meeting signals a fresh chapter in bilateral relations, anchored not merely in political strategy but in shared cultural identity.

Salehi Amiri’s emphasis on the historical and civilizational ties between Iran and Uzbekistan sets a tone of cultural diplomacy rather than mere economic cooperation. He urges redefining their relationship beyond standard tourism, framing it as a reconnection with a shared heritage. His critique of mutual neglect in promoting these deep-rooted cultural bonds is a candid acknowledgment of missed opportunities and a call to action.

The proposed steps—signing a memorandum of understanding, systematic promotion of tourism, and organizing joint events—offer a structured roadmap to revitalizing tourism. The idea of hosting exhibitions in historical cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Isfahan is particularly compelling, as these locations embody the very cultural synergy the two countries seek to harness.

Shadiev’s response adds emotional depth to the dialogue. His comment, “In Iran, I found a part of my identity,” highlights the authenticity of the connection and moves the conversation beyond policy into personal and cultural resonance. His proposals for educational and scientific collaborations, particularly between Silk Road University and Iran’s Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, broaden the scope of cooperation to include archaeology, restoration, and training—areas that solidify long-term cultural engagement.

UAE Becomes First Country to Use AI for Law Drafting, Review

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The United Arab Emirates has announced plans to become the first country in the world to systematically use artificial intelligence for writing and reviewing laws.

This ambitious initiative will extend beyond federal and local legislation to include judicial rulings, executive procedures and public services as part of the Persian Gulf nation's broader digitalisation strategy, The Telegraph reported.

Last week, the UAE government established the Regulatory Intelligence Office, a new cabinet unit tasked with overseeing this technological transformation of the legislative process.

"This new legislative system, powered by artificial intelligence, will change how we create laws, making the process faster and more precise," said Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the UAE's Vice-President and ruler of Dubai.



UN Food Agency Warns Food Stock in Gaza Has Run Out Amid Israeli Aid Blockade



GENEVA (Dispatches) - The UN's World Food Programme warned it has depleted all its food stocks in war-ravaged Gaza, where the entry of humanitarian aid has been blocked by Israel since March 2.

"Today, WFP delivered its last remaining food stocks to hot meals kitchens in the Gaza Strip. These kitchens are expected to fully run out of food in the coming days", WFP, one of the main providers of food assistance in Gaza, said in a statement.

After 18 months of war, the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA on Tuesday said the situation in Gaza "is probably the worst" now.

Israel blocked the entry of all aid into the Palestinian territory of around 2.4 million people days before it resumed its aerial and ground offensive after the collapse of a two-month ceasefire with Hamas.

"For weeks, hot meal kitchens have been the only consistent source of food assistance for people in Gaza. Despite reaching just half the population with only 25 percent of daily food needs, they have provided a critical lifeline," the WFP said Friday.

The UN agency added that all 25 WFP-supported bakeries in Gaza were forced to close on March 31 as wheat flour and cooking oil ran out.

Gaza humanitarian crisis deepens amid longest Israeli aid blockade

One of your browser extensions seems to be blocking the video player from loading. To watch this content, you may need to disable it on this site.

"No humanitarian or commercial supplies have entered Gaza for more than seven weeks as all main border crossing points remain closed", it added.

Rwanda and DR Congo Set May 2 Deadline for Peace Deal



PARIS (Dispatches) - Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo on Friday set a goal of reaching a draft peace agreement by May 2 and vowed to respect each other's sovereignty following sweeping rebel gains.

The top diplomats of Rwanda, which has faced criticism for backing the M23 rebels, and DR Congo, which has seen major cities fall in its turbulent but mineral-rich east, signed a declaration in Washington in the presence of Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

The foreign ministers "commit to coordinate through existing channels to generate an initial draft peace agreement for the Participants' mutual review no later than May 2", it said.

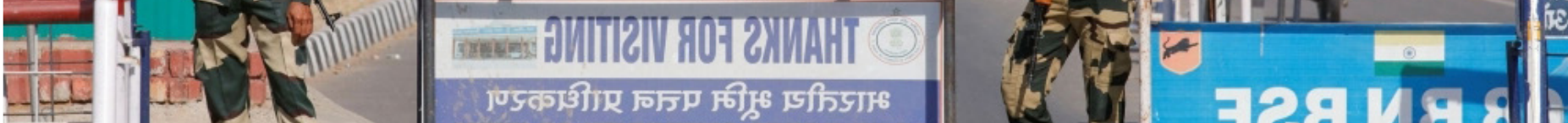
The two countries "mutually acknowledge each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and commit to a pathway to resolve their disputes by peaceful means grounded in diplomacy and negotiation rather than hostile force or rhetoric", the declaration said.

Without naming the M23 rebels explicitly, the statement said that both countries acknowledged concerns of the other and would "refrain from providing state military support to non-state armed groups".

The two sides also said they would establish a "joint security coordination mechanism to counter non-state armed groups".

In a surprise announcement Wednesday, the DRC and M23 rebels said they had agreed to halt fighting in the east of the country while they work toward a permanent truce.

India, Pakistan Trade Fire After Kashmir Massacre Sparks Diplomatic Crisis



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Troops from Pakistan and India exchanged fire overnight across the Line of Control in disputed Kashmir, officials said Friday, after the United Nations urged the nuclear-armed rivals to show "maximum restraint" following a deadly shooting in the region.

Relations have plunged to their lowest level in years, with India accusing Pakistan of supporting "cross-border terrorism" after gunmen carried out the worst attack on civilians in contested Muslim-majority Kashmir in a quarter of a century.

Syed Ashfaq Gilani, a government official in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, told AFP Friday that troops exchanged fire along the Line of Control (LoC) that separates the two countries.

"There was no firing on the civilian population," he added.

India's army confirmed there had been limited small arms fire that it said had been "initiated by Pakistan", adding it had been "effectively responded to".

On Thursday, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters in New York that issues between the countries "can be and should be resolved peacefully through meaningful mutual engagement".

"We very much appeal to both the governments... to exercise maximum restraint, and to ensure that the situation and the developments we've seen do not deteriorate any further," he said.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed to hunt down the gunmen responsible for killing 26 civilians at the popular tourist site of Pahalgam, after Indian police identified two of the three fugitive gunmen as Pakistani.

"I say to the whole world: India will identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backer," Modi said, in his first speech since Tuesday's attack in the Himalayan region.

"We will pursue them to the ends of the Earth."

Denying any involvement, Islamabad called attempts to link Pakistan to the Pahalgam attack "frivolous" and vowed to respond to any Indian action.

"Any threat to Pakistan's sovereignty and to the security of its people will be met with firm reciprocal measures in all domains," said a statement following a National Security Committee meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since independence in 1947, with both claiming the territory in full but controlling separate parts of it.

Rebel groups have fought an insurgency in Indian-controlled Kashmir since 1989, demanding independence or unification with Pakistan.

India's air force and navy carried out military exercises on Thursday.

Indian police said the three gunmen were members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistan-based group designated as a terrorist organisation by the UN.

Authorities offered a bounty of two million rupees for information leading to each man's arrest.

Following the attack, New Delhi suspended the water-sharing treaty, closed the main land border crossing, downgraded diplomatic ties, and cancelled visas for Pakistani citizens.

In response, Islamabad expelled Indian diplomats and military advisers, cancelled visas for Indian nationals except Sikh pilgrims, and closed the border from its side.

Pakistan also warned that any Indian attempt to block Indus River water supplies would be treated as "an act of war".

The attack in Pahalgam marks a shift in tactics, with civilians — rather than security forces — the direct targets.

Experts suggest a military response may be imminent.

In 2019, a suicide attack killed 41 Indian troops in Kashmir and led to Indian air strikes inside Pakistan.

Modi, after holding two minutes of silence for victims, said: "Whatever little land these terrorists have, it's time to reduce it to dust."

The assault took place as tourists enjoyed mountain views at Pahalgam, when gunmen emerged from forests and opened fire with automatic weapons.

Survivors said the attackers spared those who could recite the Islamic declaration of faith.

Indian forces have launched a vast manhunt and detained a large number of people.

Reports have emerged of Kashmiri students across India facing harassment and threats in the aftermath.

Russia Blames Ukraine for Car Bombing That Killed Top General Near Moscow

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia on Friday accused Ukraine of being behind a car bombing that killed a senior general, the latest in a spate of assassinations of figures linked to Moscow's military offensive.

An explosive device ripped through a parked car outside Moscow on Friday killing senior Russian General Yaroslav Moskalik, deputy head of the main operational directorate of the military's General Staff, Russian authorities reported.

Kyiv has not commented on the blast, which bore the hallmarks of previous attacks on military figures and high-profile backers of the Kremlin's offensive over the last three years.

"There are reasons to believe that Ukraine's special services were involved in the murder," Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

If Ukrainian involvement is confirmed, she said it would be a sign of Kyiv's "barbaric" nature and accused them of "escalating" attacks and trying to ruin ceasefire talks.

The blast occurred as US presidential envoy Steve Witkoff was arriving in Moscow for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Kyiv says Russia is not serious about peace, as shown by a wave of deadly missile attacks that have killed dozens of civilians over the last three weeks — including 12 in the capital Kyiv on Thursday.

Russia's Investigative Committee said it had opened a murder probe after a Volkswagen Golf blew up outside a block of flats in the town of Balashikha, east of Moscow.

AFP journalists saw investigators lifting a body in a black plastic sack and



carrying it to an ambulance.

Police had cordoned off the site on Friday, with ambulances and fire engines surrounding the area.

'Improvised explosive device'

Footage from the Investigative Committee showed the charred remains of a white car with its front section torn away.

Locals said they heard a loud blast at around 10:45am (0745 GMT).

"The explosion was very strong, it even gave me heart pain," Lyudmila, who lives nearby, told AFP.

The killing appeared similar to previous attacks claimed by Kyiv on

figures linked to Russia's three-year offensive on the country.

Ukraine's secret services said last December it was behind the assassination of the head of the Russian military's chemical weapons department, general Igor Kirillov.

Ukraine's 'modus operandi': SBU targeting high-ranking Russian military figures like Igor Kirillov

A remotely operated bomb attached to a scooter had exploded as Kirillov left an apartment block in Moscow.

Security camera footage posted by the Izvestia newspaper of Friday's blast showed a massive explosion, sending fragments flying into the air. The blast happens just as someone can be seen walking towards the car.

Attackers triggered an improvised explosive device packed with metal fragments designed to cause maximum harm, investigators said.

The TASS state news agency reported that Moskalik was 59. According to the Kremlin website, he had represented the Russian military at ceasefire talks with Ukraine in 2015 during the conflict between Kyiv and Russian-backed separatists.

Russian President Vladimir Putin made Moskalik general-lieutenant in 2021.

The department where he is deputy chief was described as "a key link in planning operations in Ukraine", by the independent Vazhnyiye Istoriy outlet.

Russians linked to Moscow's military offensive in Ukraine had been targeted in attacks over the last three years.

These include the August 2022 car bombing of nationalist Darya Dugina and an explosion in a Saint Petersburg cafe in April 2023 that killed high-profile military correspondent Maxim Fomin, known as Vladlen Tatarsky.

North Korea Unveils New Kim Jong Un Style 5,000-Ton Warship

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attended a ceremony for the launch of a "new multipurpose destroyer," state media KCNA reported on Saturday.

The 5,000-tonne warship was equipped with the "most powerful weapons" and built "within 400-odd days perfectly with our own strength and technology," Jo Chun Ryong, a secretary in the ruling Workers' Party, was quoted as saying.

Kim, in a speech from the launch reported by KCNA, said the warship would be handed over to the navy and go into service early next year.

The launch took place on Friday at the military shipbuilding dockyard of Nampo, and marked a new era of the "great Kim Jong Un-style fleet building," KCNA said quoting Vice-Admiral Pak Kwang Sop. The ship was graded as the "Choe Hyon-class" named after anti-Japanese revolutionary fighter Choe Hyon, the report added.

Earlier this month, Reuters reported that North Korea's new class of warship was able to accommodate dozens of vertical launch cells to carry missiles its



military has already developed, citing analysis of a satellite image.

Kim also said strong pre-emptive attack capabilities were the most "convincing war deterrent" and that there was no limit to the scope of such attacks.

"The security environment of our country is very serious right now," the leader was quoted as saying.

He also thanked the workers and technicians for building the new destroyer, which was "true to the party's line of strengthening the naval forces," according to KCNA.

Kim also said that the United States was deploying strategic assets in the Korean Peninsula on a regular basis.

The B-1B was used in a joint military drill between South Korea and the U.S. earlier this month alongside fighter jets, according to Seoul's defence ministry.

B-1B bombers have featured regularly in joint military exercises in recent years. North Korea has long condemned the drills as a rehearsal for war. Seoul says they are purely defensive.

Trent Jr. Leads Bucks to Comeback Win Over Pacers



LONDON (Dispatches) - Gary Trent Jr. and Giannis Antetokounmpo each scored 37 points while leading the Bucks to a 117-101 comeback victory over the visiting Indiana Pacers on Friday, cutting Milwaukee's deficit in the Eastern Conference first-round playoff series to 2-1.

Trent was inserted into the starting lineup in place of Taurean Prince and delivered for coach Doc Rivers, hitting 9 of 12 3-point attempts. The nine tries tied the franchise playoff record set by Ray Allen in the 2001 Eastern Conference finals.

"We wanted somebody aggressive to attack (Tyrese) Haliburton," Bucks coach Doc Rivers said of Trent. "One thing about Gary, there's players who turn themselves off, Gary's not going to do that. When Gary gets it going, he's going to go for it and we love that. He's a tough kid."

Antetokounmpo grabbed 12 rebounds and dished out six assists, while teammate AJ Green finished with 12 points on four 3-pointers.

Pascal Siakam put up 28 points on 12-for-19 shooting for Indiana, which led by 12 points in the second quarter. Aaron Nesmith contributed 18 points, while Tyrese Haliburton logged 14 points and 10 assists.

Game 4 is scheduled for Sunday in Milwaukee.

The third quarter belonged to Trent and the Bucks. The sharpshooter shot 5-for-6 from deep while scoring 18 points, leading Milwaukee to dominate the period 39-18 and move on top 86-75.

"We knew we were getting a lot of good open looks," Green said. "(Gary Trent Jr.) can shoot it with the best of 'em, so he did his job tonight. He knocked them down. We're going to keep finding him, keep creating those shots, those advantages for him and everyone else the rest of the series."

Bucks guard Damian Lillard, who shot 1-for-10 through the first three quarters, hit a 3-pointer to start the fourth, and Green followed suit on Milwaukee's next two possessions.

The Bucks shot 6-for-10 from beyond the arc in the fourth, with Trent connecting on both of his long-range shots.

"They played with a lot of force, lot of determination," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. "We made some

early defensive mistakes in the second half. We were bad on both sides of the ball. They were great, we were bad."

It was a rock fight early, with both teams struggling to shoot, in particular from beyond the arc. Both clubs made just two shots from deep in the first quarter, and they went into the second tied at 26.

Indiana found some momentum late in the second and took a 57-47 lead into halftime. The Pacers shot 46 percent from the floor before the break, while the Bucks hit just 38 percent, including a 4-for-23 showing (17.4 percent) from deep.

Antetokounmpo led all scorers with 17 points in the half. Nesmith topped Indiana with 15.

Meanwhile Franz Wagner broke a late tie with consecutive driving hoops over Kristaps Porzingis, and the Orlando Magic, riding a suffocating defense and surviving a wild finish, held off the visiting Boston Celtics 95-93 in Game 3 of their Eastern Conference first-round playoff series Friday night.

Wagner finished with a team-high 32 points and Paolo Banchero 29 for the Magic, who held serve at home after losing the first two games of the best-of-seven series in Boston. Game 4 also will be played at Orlando on Sunday.

"It was a great team effort," Banchero said. "We knew it was going to be a helluva game. Being at home, we wanted to get the win and have a chance to tie it up 2-2."

After Boston, which led most of the way, rallied from a 12-point deficit in the fourth quarter to tie the game at 91-91 on a Derrick White layup with 2:31 left, Wagner hit one layup with 2:13 remaining and another with 1:26 to go, putting the hosts up four.

The Celtics got back within two on a White dunk with 28.1 seconds remaining and then appeared to get a turnover when an eight-second backcourt violation was called on the Magic. But the referees conferred and decided that Orlando had in fact advanced past the midcourt line in time and gave the ball back to the Magic.

Winning FA Cup Not Enough to Restore Man City's Aura

LONDON (Dispatches) - Winning the FA Cup would not be enough to put Manchester City back on their pedestal after the Premier League champions fell by the wayside this season but it would be a nice way to wrap up their domestic campaign, manager Pep Guardiola said.

City fell behind title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal earlier this season having suffered nine defeats -- more losses than in their previous two campaigns combined -- while they were knocked out of the Champions League in the knockout phase playoffs.

A six-times league winner as City boss, Guardiola has not had a trophyless campaign since his first year at the club and he expects the team will get back to their best next season.

"The FA Cup win does not give you the certainty to come back to



what we were. That is a title, it's a number. Obviously it would be nice to finish in that way, to take a little break before we go to the (Club) World Cup," Guardiola told reporters.

"But I will not change... It can happen to all the teams in the world, not just Manchester City. It surprised me in the mid-season, eight years to arrive at that stage. Now we are third in the table.

"There are reasons why we dropped, maybe unexpectedly, too much. I have the feeling that next season will be better. We will compete better. We will be more who we are."

City play Nottingham Forest in the second semi-final on Sunday at Wembley and Guardiola is targeting a third straight final appearance where they would face either Crystal Palace or Aston Villa.

Real Demand Action Against Referees and Boycott Pre-Cup Final Activities

SEVILLE (Dispatches) - Preparations for the Copa del Rey final were thrown into turmoil when Real Madrid accused the match referees of having "animosity and hostility" towards them and called on the Spanish FA to take action.

Real had boycotted pre-match activities ahead of final against Barcelona after the match referee gave an emotional press conference in which he called out the club for criticising him on their in-house TV channel.

A club source told Reuters that the decision to pull out of their pre-match obligations was taken due to Real's "unprecedented astonishment" at the press conference given by referee Ricardo de



Burgos Bengoetxea earlier on Friday. The referee had broken down in tears while responding to a critical video put out by RMTV.

The source said Real saw the press conference as "a clear conflict of interest" and, while they had not asked the Spanish FA (RFEF) to replace the officials, they believed the refereeing team should be changed.

Real issued a statement later on Friday in which they defended RMTV as "protected by freedom of expression" and said the match referees had a "clear and manifest animosity and hostility... against Real Madrid".

Medvedev Advances Via Walkover in Madrid



MADRID (Dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev advanced to the third round of the Mutua Madrid Open after Laslo Djere withdrew due to a left shoulder injury.

Seeded ninth, Medvedev is making his sixth Madrid appearance this fortnight and will next face Argentine lefty Juan Manuel Cerundolo. It will be their first Lexus ATP Head2Head meeting.

The World No. 10 in the PIF ATP Rankings holds a 14-8 season record, according to the Infosys ATP Win-Loss Index. Should Medvedev go one step further than last year's quarter-final run in Madrid, he would become the fifth man to complete the set of semi-finals at all active ATP Masters 1000 events, alongside Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray. The 29-year-old Medvedev is seeking his first title since winning Rome in 2023.

Djere defeated Fabio Fognini in the opening round Wednesday and leaves Madrid with a 10-3 season record at Tour level. In February, he won the ATP 250 in Santiago.

Meanwhile Emma Raducanu was knocked out of the Madrid Open despite a positive performance against clay-court specialist Marta Kostyuk.

The former US Open champion reached the quarter-finals of one of the WTA Tour's premier events for the first time at the Miami Open last month but will not be repeating the feat in the Spanish capital.

Raducanu recorded an impressive straight-sets win over Suzan Lamens in the opening round, but despite showing flashes of world-class brilliance, she was unable to stop Ukraine's Kostyuk, who is seeded 24th, sealing a 6-4 2-6 6-2 win.

Mondo Duplantis Confident No Pole Vaulter in History Could Match Him Jump for Jump



LONDON (Dispatches) - Pole vault sensation Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis, crowned World Sportsman of the Year at the Laureus Awards, says no competitor in history could match him jump for jump.

"I don't think that there's ever been anybody in the history either that could line up with me and go jump for jump with me," the 25-year-old Swede told Olympics.com on Friday.

"I have the confidence in my abilities to where, if there's anybody going to line up on the track against me, and it comes to pole vaulting, I'm the best one out there."

With two Olympic gold medals and 11 world records to his name, the Swede's swagger is backed by substance. His winning streak, which stretches back to July 2023, stands at 28 consecutive victories.

But even as he soars above his contemporaries, Duplantis acknowledges the towering legacy of Ukrainian Sergey Bubka - the 1988 Olympic champion who rewrote the record books 35 times - while stopping short of a direct comparison.

"I'm still pretty young and I think I might need a bit more longevity to match a career like Bubka's, because he was able to jump at such a high level for such a long time," Duplantis, who makes his outdoor season debut at the Xiamen Diamond League meeting in China this weekend, added.

The record-breaker, whose last mark of 6.27 metres was set at the All Star Perche meeting in Clermont-Ferrand, France, in February, sees his extraordinary achievements as simply waypoints on his journey.

"I understand pole vaulting and I know that I'm not going to break the world record every time I compete. But I know the times when I have a good chance.

"For me, it's just a journey. It's just trying to improve myself. I like records. But I think that I'm more obsessed with just being the best version of myself," Duplantis added.