

President Masoud Pezeshkian Expressed Iran's Readiness to Help Relieve Tensions Between India and Pakistan Following a Fatal Terrorist Attack in the Indian-Administered Kashmir

IRAN NEWS

Iran Expo 2025 Is Scheduled in Tehran From April 28 to May 2 With the Presence of More Than 2,500 Businessmen, Economic Managers, and Heads of Chambers of Commerce From More Than 100 States Around the World

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FM Satisfied With Progress in Talks With U.S., More Consultations Necessary



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has expressed satisfaction with the progress made in indirect nuclear talks with the United States.

Araqchi made the remarks while speaking to reporters after the third round of indirect negotiations between Iran and the United States in Muscat, Oman.

He added that both parties are determined to reach an agreement. "I am satisfied with the progress of the negotiations and their pace. They are proceeding well and remain satisfactory," he told reporters after the talks on Saturday.

He noted that Oman, as the facilitating country, would determine the details of the next round of the talks, which is likely to be held next Saturday.

The top Iranian diplomat noted that the sides had agreed to hold further consultations in their respective capitals to explore ways to resolve differences.

He explained that Tehran and Washington should first establish a general understanding on certain issues before moving on to detailed negotiations.

"There are differences between the two nations, both on key issues and their specifics," Araqchi said.

He noted that Oman, as the facilitating country, would determine the details of the next round of the talks, which is likely to be held next Saturday.

\$10b Trade Boost Between Iran and Africa on the Horizon



TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade announced plans to expand Iran-Africa trade relations tenfold, aiming to reach \$10 billion, highlighting the vast potential for cooperation between the two sides.

Mohammad Atabak made the remarks on Sunday during the opening ceremony of the Third Iran-Africa Cooperation Summit, held at the Summit Conference Center with the presence of President Masoud Pezeshkian and First Vice President and Head of the Africa Taskforce, Mohammad Reza Aref.

Atabak emphasized that the longstanding cultural and historical ties between Iran and Africa have evolved into a valuable asset. Referring to the long-established economic relations between the two sides, he noted that the current level of trade is insufficient, amounting to only 3% of Iran's exports and 1% of its imports, totaling around \$800 million.

The Minister stated, "Imagine a future where Iran and Africa exchange over \$10 billion annually in goods, services, technical know-how, and value chains." He outlined major initiatives aimed at achieving this goal.

Key areas of focus include the development of infrastructure, the construction of industrial parks and refineries, expansion of renewable energy projects and overseas farming, establishment of shipping lines to southern and southwestern Africa, launching direct flights, facilitating banking exchanges and barter trade mechanisms via a foreign exchange fund, formulating an operational plan for Africa's strategic mines, and allocating €2 billion in buyer-seller credits from Iran's National Development Fund. He also highlighted plans to increase the number of joint chambers of commerce from 13 to 20 and to raise the number of commercial attachés to 12.

Iran Ready to Expand Relations with Africa in All Areas



TEHRAN - The President of Iran, emphasizing the vast potential and capabilities of the African continent, announced that Iran is ready to share all its achievements with Africa and expand cooperation across all fields.

Masoud Pezeshkian, speaking on Sunday, at the Third Iran-Africa Cooperation Summit — held with the participation of representatives from 51 countries at the Summit Hall of Islamic Countries — expressed his condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the recent explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port. He also wished a speedy recovery for the injured, noting that the Ministry of Health has been directed to take all necessary measures to address the incident.

Addressing the summit attendees, Pezeshkian stated:

"We all live in one small home on this Earth, labeled with names like Africa, Asia, or America. But if we have a broader perspective, we recognize that we all live together on this planet, sharing in the blessings granted to us by God."

Referring to verses from the Holy Quran that consider humanity as one unified community, the President stressed that God sent prophets and scriptures to prevent disputes among humans. He emphasized that divine teachings call for justice, fairness, and mutual respect, and that individuals should uphold human dignity and cultivate human values within themselves.

Pezeshkian condemned those who, driven by greed and aggression, have violated others' rights, expelled people from their homelands, committed atrocities, and undermined human dignity. He described such individuals as the most brutal and inhumane beings, who massacre innocent civilians — women, children, and the elderly — without hesitation.

Reaffirming Iran's belief in the unity of humanity, Pezeshkian asserted: "We believe that all of us come from the same root, that we are one unified community, and there is no superiority among us except through humanity, ability, and service to others."

He added: "We are prepared to share all our achievements with you — in health, trade, industry, agriculture, security, peace, and stability — to help create a world where all human beings can live together in welfare, peace, and security."

Pezeshkian called for cooperation and solidarity, urging nations to build a home filled with health, love, compassion, freedom, and humanity. Instead of sowing seeds of hatred, he advocated for nurturing a spirit of friendship, brotherhood, and mutual respect.

Highlighting that belief in brotherhood and compassion can ease life on Earth, Pezeshkian

the best deeds and services within their lives.

The Third Iran-Africa Economic Cooperation Summit kicked off in Tehran with the presence of the President, the First Vice President, the Minister and officials from the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade, alongside a delegation of African leaders.

Iran is hosting senior officials from the African Union, presidents, prime ministers, economic and trade ministers, heads of chambers of commerce, traders, economic activists, and executives from major African banks, insurance companies, production units, and international corporations.

The summit marks a turning point for systematizing Iran's cooperation with the African continent, while Africa represents a unique opportunity for developing nations to engage in trade.

African countries, seeking to overcome historical underdevelopment, require imports of goods, services, and skilled manpower — areas where Iran sees significant opportunities to contribute.

More than 700 traders from 38 African countries have registered to participate in the summit, and over 50 senior African officials — including ministers and heads of chambers of commerce from 29 countries — have traveled to Iran for the event.

The summit features four specialized ministerial panels focusing on petrochemicals, mining and metal industries, agriculture and food industries, and health and pharmaceuticals. Dedicated B2B (business-to-business) meetings tailored to each panel topic are also planned.

said: "Together, we can create a future filled with love, kindness, mercy, and humanity for all people around the world."

He stressed that trade and economic exchanges between Iran and African countries should be based on the spirit of tranquility and goodwill. He also expressed hope that during their stay in Iran, African guests would strengthen unity, coherence, and mutual ties, reiterating Iran's readiness for comprehensive cooperation with African nations.

"As human beings, it is our duty to help each other and create peace, humanity, and tranquility across the planet," the President said, adding that humans were created to serve and support one another, striving for

Iran Supports Any Measure to Strengthen Peace, Tranquility



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Masoud Pezeshkian praised the growing cooperation with Turkmenistan in various fields, saying the Islamic Republic supports any measure that helps stabilize peace and tranquility.

Pezeshkian made the remarks in a phone conversation with Turkmenistan's National Leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on Saturday, stressing that peace and trust will deepen and stabilize economic, trade, cultural, and political cooperation between countries.

He further expressed hope that the upcoming Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation between Iran and Turkmenistan will play an effective role in accelerating the implementation of the agreements between the two sides and in enhancing the level of interactions between the two countries.

Pezeshkian also thanked Berdimuhamedov for inviting him to visit the country and participate in the international conference on Peace and Trust, saying, "Peace and trust are the missing things of humanity today, and your initiative in presenting this proposal deserves appreciation."

Turkmenistan is the fourth destination of President Pezeshkian's foreign trips after Iraq, the UN and Qatar, indicating the Central Asian nation's priority in Iran's foreign policy.

Berdimuhamedov, for his part, hailed the development and deepening of bilateral relations on the basis of respect and mutual benefits, expressing Turkmenistan's readiness to comprehensively develop cooperation with its long-time friend and neighbor, Iran.

He further voiced deep concern about the continuous and severe decrease in the water level of the Caspian Sea, proposing that a summit of the Heads of State of the Caspian littoral states be hosted by Tehran in this regard.

Yemeni Forces Conduct New Missile Attack on Israeli Nevatim Airbase



SANAA (Dispatches) - The Yemeni Armed Forces have carried out a fresh missile strike against a strategic Israeli military position in the northern part of the Negev Desert in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amid Israel's ongoing genocidal war in the besieged coastal sliver.

Brigadier General Yahya Saree, the spokesperson for the Yemeni military, announced in a statement that the country's missile units targeted Nevatim Airbase, located 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) southeast of Beersheba, on Sunday morning, using a homegrown hypersonic ballistic missile.

He added that the missile strike could successfully attain its desired objectives.

Saree emphasized that Yemeni forces will keep developing their military capabilities in the face of unfolding developments and US acts of aggression.

The Yemeni Armed Forces will not stop their operations in support of oppressed Palestinians in Gaza until Israel's ground and aerial offensives in the region end and the total blockade on the Strip is completely lifted.

Yemenis have been hitting Israeli and American targets in support of Palestinians in Gaza since the regime launched its devastating war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, and in response to the American-British aggression on their homeland.

The operations have effectively shut down the Eilat port south of the occupied territories, causing significant economic setbacks for the Israelis.

The Yemeni Armed Forces has said it will not stop attacks until the bloody Israeli onslaught against Gaza ends.

Meanwhile the United States has reportedly carried out a new wave of aerial assaults on Yemen, hitting a confiscated Israeli-linked cargo ship off the Arab country's coast.

28 killed, Over 800 Injured After Huge Explosion Rocks Shahid Rajaei Port



TEHRAN - A powerful explosion at Shahid Rajaei port in southern Iran has caused widespread damage and casualties, with emergency teams rushing to the scene to bring the situation under control.

The blast occurred after a fuel tanker exploded for unknown reasons at Shahid Rajaei port in Hormozgan Province on Saturday.

According to the latest death toll as of Sunday, at least 28 people were killed and more than 800 others injured in the incident.

The director general of Hormozgan's crisis management department said the explosion was extremely strong, but the cause has not yet been determined.

Initial reports indicate that the blast originated in an administrative building within the port complex. The blast was so intense that it completely destroyed the administrative building and severely damaged many vehicles.

Babak Mahmoudi, head of Iran's Relief and Rescue Organization, had earlier confirmed to Press TV that the massive explosion at Shahid Rajaei had left four people dead.

"So far, 516 people have been injured, and they have been evacuated from the site. Most of them have been injured by broken glass and most of them were superficial wounds and they have been released and four people have so far been confirmed dead at the site because at this site there were chemical storage facilities," Mahmoudi said in an interview with Press TV as he provided details of the blast.

He said that the fire is still ongoing and the firefighters are trying to put it out, expressing hope that they could bring the situation under control in the next few hours.

Mahmoudi further explained that the blast took place around 11:55 local time, adding that several relief and rescue teams were quickly dispatched to the scene.

"Helicopters were also deployed to extinguish the fire," he said, noting that another helicopter was dispatched for emergency services.

Following the incident, all port operations were suspended as security and emergency teams worked to secure the area. Authorities immediately declared a state of emergency at hospitals

across Bandar Abbas in preparation for possible mass casualties.

In phone calls with the interior minister and Hormozgan's governor, President Pezeshkian issued specific directives to expedite the response.

He ordered immediate, coordinated measures to assist the injured, prioritizing rapid dispatch of medical equipment and emergency personnel to the site, while obliging all relevant governmental bodies and relief organizations to fully mobilize their resources to minimize the consequences of the incident.

The chief executive also tasked the interior minister to travel to Bandar Abbas to oversee the response, and evaluate the response efforts, he said.

investigate various aspects of the incident, and submit a comprehensive report.

Momeni was additionally assigned to implement necessary measures based on the evolving situation, including crisis control, securing the area, and expediting the repair and reopening of Shahid Rajaei port.

Having received initial reports and assessments of the likely causes of the incident, the president, meanwhile, emphasized the urgent need for a comprehensive and thorough investigation into the reason behind the explosion to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf announced the formation of a special committee comprising members from four specialized parliamentary commissions of Civil Affairs, National Security, Internal Affairs, and Health.

The committee has been tasked with conducting an on-site investigation to assess the situation and evaluate the response efforts, he said.

Their mission includes providing a detailed and transparent report on the handling of the incident and the performance of relevant authorities to the Parliament.

Commenting on the tragic development, Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei wrote on X, former Twitter, "We mourn the loss of our dear fellow citizens who tragically lost their lives in the explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port."

"We pray to the Merciful God to grant patience and strength to the families of the victims and wish a swift recovery and full healing for all those injured in the incident."



Iran’s Non-Oil Exports to Kazakhstan Rise by 38.5 Percent

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Azerbaijan’s Trend News Agency has reported that the value of Iran’s non-oil exports to Kazakhstan increased by 38.5 percent over the past year.

According to the report, Iran exported approximately 360,000 tons of non-oil products to Kazakhstan from March 20, 2024, to March 20, 2025. The value of these exports reached \$203 million.

Compared to the same period last year, the value of exports rose by 38.5 percent, while the volume increased by 2 percent.

During the previous year, Iran had exported 353,000 tons of goods to Kazakhstan, generating \$146 million in revenue.

The report noted that major Iranian exports to Kazakhstan during this period included agricultural products, foodstuffs, tobacco products, and petrochemical derivatives.

Iran’s Aquatic Exports Rise by 30 Percent



TEHRAN - Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Head of the Iran Fisheries Organization, Hamzeh Rostampour, announced that exports of fish, shrimp, and caviar increased by 30 percent last year compared to the previous year.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Khorkhan Fishing Port in Dayyer County, Bushehr Province, Rostampour stated that China and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are the primary destinations for Iran’s aquatic exports.

Highlighting the organization’s new strategies for expanding international markets, he noted that efforts are underway to penetrate new European and East Asian markets.

Rostampour added that diversifying export destinations and targeting five new European and Asian markets this year is a key focus. He also revealed plans to hold ten specialized international exhibitions with active participation from Iranian producers.

The Deputy Minister emphasized that Iran Fisheries Organization is pursuing two major goals: boosting domestic production and expanding export markets. He underlined that all programs are designed around quality enhancement, the adoption of modern technologies, and support for producers.

Rostampour further announced plans to increase the capacity for fish and shrimp farming by 20 percent through the modernization of existing farms and the construction of new shrimp farming complexes in southern provinces by the end of the year.

He cited optimization initiatives, such as the use of smart feeding and water monitoring systems, as well as research projects aimed at improving growth rates and reducing mortality rates in aquaculture.



Iran to Become a Tourism Hub of the Middle East by Attracting Foreign Investment

TEHRAN - In a meeting with Iranian expatriates in Turkey, Iran’s Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts emphasized the need to strengthen relations with neighboring countries and enhance Iran’s international standing, highlighting the crucial role of foreign investment in the country’s tourism sector.

According to ILNA, the meeting was held in Arzum, Turkey, and attended by Seyed Reza Salehi Amiri, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, along with Mohammad Hassan Habibollahzadeh, Iran’s Ambassador to Ankara, and members of the Iranian community in Turkey.

Adopting a strategic approach, Minister Salehi Amiri provided an in-depth analysis of Iran’s economic situation, addressing the challenges ahead and outlining government strategies to overcome economic crises and international sanctions.

At the start of his remarks, Salehi Amiri pointed to the impact of sanctions and global economic challenges, stating, “The top priority of the Iranian government is to overcome economic difficulties and the crisis of sanctions. These two issues are closely intertwined and cannot be resolved without addressing international relations.” He emphasized the government’s efforts to improve international ties through negotiation and constructive engagement with other countries.

Highlighting the importance of international dialogue, the minister noted, “We believe that if commitments are fulfilled by other parties, we will witness positive developments in international relations.” He mentioned that Iran’s relationship with neighboring countries, particularly Turkey, is currently strong. This year has been designated the “Joint Cultural Year of Iran and Turkey,” with numerous cultural programs underway to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation.

Salehi Amiri also referenced ongoing negotiations and new developments in Iran’s relations with Central Asian countries, the Caucasus region, and Gulf states. “Negotiations with Saudi Arabia are progressing, and soon there will be significant developments in tourism, economic, and cultural relations between the two countries,” he announced.

Criticizing anti-Iran media propaganda, the minister stressed, “Iran is one of the safest countries in the region. The false image propagated by certain media outlets aimed at promoting Iranophobia must be countered through strategic planning and proper information dissemination.” He underscored the need for Iran to manage its international image more effectively.

Turning to tourism infrastructure, Salehi Amiri stated that the Iranian government has made considerable efforts in recent years to develop this sector, including expanding accommodation facilities, improving transportation services, and promoting eco-tourism. Over 3,500 eco-lodges are now operational across the country, reflecting a growing capacity to host both domestic and international tourists.

Emphasizing Iran’s potential to attract international travelers, he said, “Iran offers a rich blend of historical, cultural, natural, and religious attractions, making it a highly promising destination for global tourists. Particularly in the field of religious tourism, Iran is a major destination for Muslim visitors worldwide.” With its extensive cultural heritage, valuable historical sites, and diverse natural landscapes, Iran holds significant potential to become a leading global tourism destination.

The minister also revealed government initiatives to attract greater investment into the tourism sector, including easing visa issuance procedures, conducting international promotional campaigns, and showcasing Iran’s tourism potential on the global stage. Additionally, customs exemptions have been introduced for the import of hotel equipment to further boost tourism infrastructure development.

Salehi Amiri pointed to several major ongoing tourism projects, such as the construction of boutique hotels and five-star hotels in Kish Island, Mashhad, and Yazd, noting that Iran is actively seeking further investments in this sector.

He also highlighted the significance of culinary tourism, stating, “With an unparalleled diversity of cuisine—over 300 distinct dishes registered in Gilan province alone—Iran has the potential to become a top culinary destination.”

Furthermore, the minister discussed the government’s focus on developing maritime tourism, announcing the introduction of cruise ships in Iran’s northern and southern waters and inviting investors to contribute to projects at 224 identified coastal points.

In conclusion, Salehi Amiri expressed hope that with government incentives and increased investment, Iran’s tourism industry will experience faster and more substantial growth, with positive impacts soon to be felt on the international stage.

Iranian Handwoven Carpet Industry Falls Victim to Political Rivalries



TEHRAN - The Senior Advisor to the Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade (IMT) has stated that Iran’s handwoven carpet industry has suffered a major setback due to internal political rivalries. Yahya Al-e Es’haq explained that in the decades following the Iranian Revolution, carpets became entangled in domestic political struggles. A political faction, believing the lucrative carpet industry was controlled by their rivals, deliberately undermined it.

Speaking to ILNA, Al-e Es’haq discussed the decline of Iranian carpets in both domestic and global markets over the past few decades. He emphasized that Iranian carpets are not merely economic products but also embody significant cultural value. “The carpet industry has provided employment and income for various economic groups in both urban and rural areas, and is deeply tied to the historical identity of Iranian ethnic groups,” he said. Historically, Iranian ambassadors and ministers proudly showcased handwoven carpets in their offices worldwide, and notably, even the coffin of the recently deceased Pope Francis was placed on an Iranian carpet at the Vatican.

Al-e Es’haq added that during his tenure as Minister of Commerce from 1993 to 1997, carpet exports reached between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion. Today, that figure has plummeted to just \$40 million.

He revealed that during that four-year period, around 5 million people were directly or indirectly employed in the industry. However, the key event leading to the industry’s downfall was its politicization. According to Al-e Es’haq, a domestic political group, believing the industry served their rivals’ interests, used their power to introduce restrictive laws and pricing policies, stripping the carpet sector of its economic viability.

He also cited the rise of machine-made carpets as another factor that diminished demand for handwoven products. “Machine-made carpets attracted part of the market demand and investments,” he said.

Furthermore, Al-e Es’haq criticized the industry’s failure to innovate and adapt to global trends, leading to further loss of market share.

Turkmen Ambassador to Iran Announces Readiness to Visit North Khorasan



TEHRAN - According to the Public Relations Office of Bojnourd Chamber of Commerce, Abbas Kazemi highlighted the Turkmen Ambassador’s interest and warm reception towards expanding relations with North Khorasan Province. Kazemi noted that there is a strong market in Turkmenistan for North Khorasan’s fishery products, Turkmen horses, ornamental flowers, and greenhouse products.

The President of the Bojnourd Chamber pointed out that the main demands of the investors and entrepreneurs present at the meeting included support for completing the value chain of medicinal plants in the province, resolving issues related to obtaining permits and selling products, expediting the payment of bank loans, and ensuring water supply for Shirvan’s agro-industrial projects and industrial dairy cattle farming units.

Zahra Mocini, head of the Business Commission of the Bojnourd Chamber, stated that the aim of these sessions is to support investors in production and to overcome investment challenges and obstacles.

She added that the session also reviewed four cases related to the allocation of water resources, securing funding, licensing in the medicinal plants sector, mining royalties, and auditing records from the Social Security Organization.

Bahman Nouri, Governor of North Khorasan, emphasized during the session that production is a priority for the province. He acknowledged that part of the investors’ challenges stems from past shortcomings and weaknesses in the executive and production systems.

Nouri stressed that, inspired by this year’s national slogan, the provincial administration is determined to resolve investors’ problems, noting that these meetings are far from ceremonial.

He added that government departments must ensure the adequacy of infrastructure at project sites before issuing any investment permits, moving away from traditional methods of production and product distribution.

Per Capita Dairy Consumption in Iran a Quarter of Global Average

TEHRAN - The spokesperson for the Iranian Dairy Products Industries Association announced that the country’s dairy exports grew by 43% during the first 11 months of the Persian year 1402 (March 2023–February 2024) compared to the same period the previous year. He also highlighted that per capita dairy consumption in Iran stands at only a quarter of the global average, with low purchasing power pushing a portion of domestic production toward exports.

According to ISNA, while the country has seen significant growth in dairy exports over the past year, domestic production and consumption are facing serious challenges. On one hand, statistics show a 43% increase in dairy exports; on the other, the closure of around 1,000 small and medium-sized dairy production units and declining per capita dairy consumption have raised alarms regarding food security. The association’s spokesperson stressed the need for serious attention to supportive and promotional policies to boost domestic dairy consumption, citing structural issues such as a weak distribution network and low profitability.

Speaking to Radio Eqtasad, Mohammad Farbod, spokesperson for the Iranian Dairy Products Industries Association, said that the closure of some dairy units, due to factors like ineffective product distribution and weak supply chains, has led to decreased production, worker layoffs, and negative impacts on food security.

He noted that continuous follow-ups and inter-agency cooperation have helped some units resume operations. Drawing a comparison, Farbod mentioned that Germany had 3,000 active dairy units in the 1960s, a number that has now decreased to about 110–120 units due to a focus on production volume, machinery upgrades, and the development of distribution networks. He warned that units unable to establish effective distribution networks in Iran are likely to fail.

Farbod added that the dairy industry operates on very slim profit margins. Currently, the average profit margin for dairy companies listed on the Tehran Stock Exchange is around 5%, despite being legally allowed up to 17%. The short shelf life of dairy products and distribution weaknesses further exacerbate the industry’s vulnerabilities.

He explained that when government subsidies for bagged milk were removed, single-product dairy units were the first to shut down, while multi-product units with strong distribution networks managed to survive. Today, it is estimated that about 300 dairy units are active in Iran, down from around 1,200 previously, meaning



roughly 900 to 1,000 small and medium-sized units have closed in recent years.

Farbod said many of these closed units had received operating licenses from the Ministry of Agriculture, but structural weaknesses and a lack of owner interest have prevented them from returning to production.

Regarding the reuse of equipment from closed factories, Farbod pointed out that most machinery is outdated and unsuitable for modern production lines. Moreover, like some team sports in Iran, there is limited cooperation and interest in merging production units.

Commenting on a specific case, he noted that a dairy factory in Tehran Province was forced to shut down after losing its contract to supply milk to schools, emphasizing that over-reliance on subsidized projects increases the risk of closure for smaller units.

The spokesperson underlined the critical role of dairy products in maintaining health, providing essential calcium, proteins, vitamins, and minerals.

Highlighting the export boom, Farbod stated that according to Iran Customs statistics, dairy exports rose 43% in value and 19% in volume during the first 11 months of 1402 compared to the previous year. The greater increase in export value compared to volume was attributed to a diversification of dairy products.

He also noted significant growth in butter exports, with export value jumping by nearly 262% compared to previous years.

Farbod explained that per capita dairy consumption in Iran is only one-quarter of the global average, largely due to high prices and changing consumer tastes. As a result, instead of consuming these products domestically, the industry is increasingly turning to exports because many Iranians cannot afford enough dairy products to meet their needs.

He stressed that promoting a culture of dairy consumption is key to improving the situation. Fortunately, for the next academic year, the President has allocated around 60 trillion rials (approximately \$120 million) for the “School Milk” program, which could positively impact domestic dairy consumption.

Statistics show that butter exports last year reached 33,924 tons valued at \$169 million, while in 1402, exports were about 13,305 tons valued at \$46 million. This represents a 155% increase in export volume and a 262% increase in export value.

Omani Delegation Impressed by Investment Opportunities in West Azerbaijan



TEHRAN - The head of the Chamber of Commerce for Northeastern Oman has praised the remarkable development potential of Iran’s West Azerbaijan Province, expressing strong interest in investing in the region.

Speaking to IRNA on the sidelines of a meeting with the governor of West Azerbaijan, Mohammad bin Nasser Al-Maskari highlighted the province’s significant capacities in tourism, mining, and agriculture, describing them as key sectors for expanding ties between Oman and Iran.

“We are genuinely surprised by the historical and tourism assets of West Azerbaijan,” Al-Maskari said. “We aim to start practical steps toward investment in the hotel and tourism sectors of this province before the end of 2025.”

He referred to Reza Rahmani, the governor of West Azerbaijan, as an internationally recognized figure in industry and economics, emphasizing that Rahmani’s strong relations with Omani officials could greatly facilitate future investments in the province.

Al-Maskari noted that Oman is particularly interested in prioritizing cooperation in tourism, agriculture, and food industries as the initial focus areas for investment.

He further stated that during the administration of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, cooperation between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries has been steadily increasing. As part of this growing engagement, Oman will soon host groups of tourism companies from West Azerbaijan to discuss opportunities for expanding bilateral collaboration.

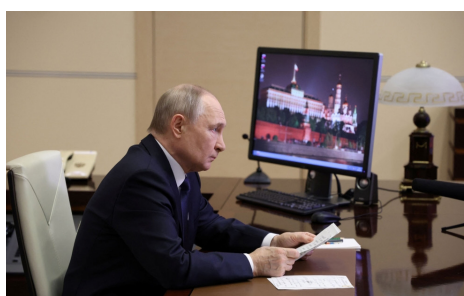
Putin Declares Kursk Fully Liberated From Ukraine

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Russian army has fully liberated the border Kursk region from Ukrainian control, Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov told Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Kyiv had hoped it could use land in the Kursk region as a bargaining chip in future peace talks with Russia, which has seized parts of eastern and southern Ukraine since its offensive began in 2022.

"Today, the last settlement in the Kursk region, the village of Gornal, has been liberated from Ukrainian forces," Gerasimov said during a video conference meeting with Putin.

"The Kyiv regime's adventure has completely failed," Putin told Gerasimov, thanking the soldiers for the service and saying that Kursk's liberation will create the conditions for further advances at other parts of the front.



Abbas Appoints First PLO Vice President, Signals Potential Succession Plan



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas appointed a close aide as the first ever vice president of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on Saturday, positioning him as a potential successor to the veteran leader.

Hussein al-Sheikh was appointed by Abbas, 89, after the vice presidency position was created during a convention held in Ramallah this week.

The creation of the post follows years of international pressure to reform the PLO and comes as Arab and Western powers envision an expanded role for Abbas's Palestinian Authority (PA) in the post-war governance of the Gaza Strip.

"Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas appointed Hussein al-Sheikh as a deputy (vice president) of the PLO leadership," a member of the organisation's executive committee, Waseel Abu Yousef, told AFP.

Founded in 1964, the PLO is empowered to negotiate and sign international treaties on behalf of the Palestinian people, while the PA is responsible for governance in parts of the Palestinian territories.

The PLO is an umbrella organisation comprising several Palestinian factions, but not the militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which are currently at war with Israeli forces in Gaza.

Sheikh, 64, is a veteran leader of Abbas's Fatah movement, which dominates the PA, and is considered close to the president.

He spent more than 10 years in Israeli jails in the late 1970s and early 80s, during which he learned Hebrew.

In 2022, he was made the PLO Executive Committee's secretary-general and head of its negotiations department, a sensitive portfolio, demonstrating his close ties to Abbas.

Young Canadians Favor Conservatives in Election Despite Trump Threat



VAUGHAN (Dispatches) - Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre strode on stage for a rally at a union headquarters north of Toronto, as Canadian country music blared.

"Who is voting for a change in Canada?!" he yelled.

Poilievre, a 45-year-old career politician, then evoked nostalgia for the 1970s, when he said it was possible to pay off a mortgage in seven years in Canada compared to the decades it would take in some cities now.

The opposition Conservatives, who a few months ago had a 20-point lead in polls, are expected to lose Monday's election to Prime Minister Mark Carney's Liberals thanks largely to Carney's tough words for U.S. president Donald Trump.

But Poilievre's focus on cost of living is resonating with one set of voters: the young, and young men especially.

A poll by Nanos on April 24 found 49.3% of voters aged 18-34 support the Conservatives, compared to 30% support for the Liberals. When all age groups were considered, the Liberals led 42.9% to 39.3%. Filtered for men of all ages, 45.5% prefer the Conservatives compared to 36.7% for the Liberals, the poll found.

It surveyed 1,307 Canadians from April 21 to 23, and is considered accurate plus or minus 2.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Mighty and Meek Bid Farewell to Pope Francis at Funeral Mass



ROME (Dispatches) - World leaders and rank-and-file Catholic faithful bade farewell to Pope Francis in a funeral Saturday that highlighted his concern for people on the peripheries and reflected his wish to be remembered as a simple pastor. Though presidents and princes attended the Mass in St. Peter's Square, prisoners and migrants welcomed Francis' coffin at his final resting place in a basilica across town.

According to Vatican estimates, some 250,000 people flocked to the funeral Mass at the Vatican and 150,000 more lined the motorcade route through downtown Rome to witness the first funeral procession for a pope in a century. They clapped and cheered "Papa Francesco" as his simple wooden coffin traveled aboard a modified popemobile to St. Mary Major Basilica, some 6 kilometers (3.5-miles) away.

As bells tolled, the pallbearers brought the coffin past several dozen migrants, prisoners and homeless people holding white roses outside the basilica. Once inside, the pallbearers stopped in front of the icon of the Virgin Mary that Francis loved. Four children deposited the roses at the foot of the altar before cardinals performed the burial rite at his tomb in a nearby niche.

"I'm so sorry that we've lost him," said Mohammed Abdallah, a 35-year-old migrant from Sudan who was one of the people who welcomed Francis to his final resting place. "Francis helped so many people, refugees like us, and many other people in the world."

Earlier, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re eulogized history's first Latin American pontiff during the Vatican Mass as a pope of the people, a pastor who knew how to communicate to the "least among us" with an informal, spontaneous style.

"He was a pope among the people, with an open heart towards everyone," the 91-year-old dean of the College of Cardinals said in a highly personal sermon. He drew applause from the crowd when he recounted Francis' constant concern for migrants, exemplified by celebrating Mass at the US-Mexico border and traveling to a refugee camp in Lesbos, Greece, when he brought 12 migrants home with him.

"The guiding thread of his mission was also the conviction that the church is a home for all, a home with its doors always open," Re said, noting that with his travels, the Argentine pontiff reached "the most peripheral of the peripheries of the world."

Despite Francis' focus on the powerless, the powerful were out in force at his funeral. US President Donald Trump and former President Joe Biden, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, UN Secretary-General António Guterres and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer joined Prince William and continental European royals leading more than 160 official delegations. Argentine President Javier Milei had pride of place given Francis' nationality, even if the two didn't particularly get along and the pope alienated many in his homeland by never returning there.

Francis choreographed the funeral himself when he revised and simplified the Vatican's rites and rituals last year. His aim was to emphasize the pope's role as a mere pastor and not "a powerful man of this world."

It was a reflection of Francis' 12-year project to radically reform the papacy, to stress priests as servants and to construct "a poor church for the poor." He articulated the mission just days after his 2013 election and it explained the name he chose as pope, honoring St. Francis of Assisi "who had the heart of the poor of the world," according to the official decree of the pope's life that was placed in his coffin.

The white facade of St. Peter's glowed pink as the sun rose Saturday and throngs of mourners rushed into the square to get a spot for the Mass. Giant television screens were set up along the surrounding streets for those who couldn't get close.

Police helicopters whirled overhead, part of the massive security operation Italian authorities mounted, including more than 2,500 police, 1,500 soldiers and a torpedo ship off the coast, Italian media reported.

Many mourners had planned to be in Rome anyway this weekend for the now-postponed Holy Year canonization of the first millennial saint, Carlo Acutis. Groups of scouts and youth church groups nearly outnumbered the gaggles of nuns and seminarians.

Trump, Zelenskiy Hold Productive Vatican Meeting to Discuss Ukraine Conflict

VATICAN CITY (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy had a "very productive" meeting today in Rome, a White House official said, as both leaders attended the funeral of Pope Francis.

A spokesman for Zelenskyy's office said the two leaders, in an encounter in St. Peter's Basilica that lasted about 15 minutes, had agreed to have a second meeting later today, and that their teams were working on arrangements for that.

The meeting at the Vatican, their first since an angry encounter in the Oval Office in Washington in February, comes at a critical time in negotiations aimed at bringing an end to fighting between Ukraine and Russia.

"President Trump and President Zelenskyy met privately today and had a very productive discussion. More details about the meeting will follow," said Steven Cheung, White House communications director.

Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, described the meeting as "constructive" in a post on social media. Zelenskyy's office released photographs of the Rome meeting. In one, the Ukrainian and US leaders sat opposite each other in a large marble-lined hall, around two feet apart, and were leaning in towards each other in conversation. No aides could be seen in the image.

In a second photograph, from the same location, Zelenskyy, Trump, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron were shown standing in a tight huddle. Macron had his hand on Zelenskyy's shoulder.

Trump, who has been pressing both sides to agree a ceasefire, said on Friday that there had been productive talks between his envoy and the



Russian leadership, and called for a high-level meeting between Kyiv and Moscow to close a deal.

Trump had previously warned his administration would walk away from its efforts to achieve a peace if the two sides do not agree a deal soon.

After a round of shuttle diplomacy this week, differences have emerged between the position of the Trump White House on peace talks and the stance of Ukraine and its European allies, according to documents from the talks obtained by Reuters.

Washington is proposing a legal recognition that Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014, is Russian territory, something that Kyiv and its allies in Europe say is a red line they will not cross.

There are also differences on how quickly sanctions on Russia would be lifted if a peace deal was signed, what kind of security guarantees Ukraine would have, and how Ukraine would be financially compensated.

Trump and Zelenskyy have had a rocky personal relationship. At their Oval Office meeting, Trump accused the Ukrainian leader of "gambling with World War Three".

Since then, Kyiv has tried to repair relations, but the barbs have continued. Zelenskyy has said Trump was trapped in a "disinformation bubble" that favoured Moscow, while the US leader accused Zelenskyy of foot-dragging on a peace deal and making "inflammatory" statements.

But the two men need each other. Trump requires Zelenskyy's buy-in to achieve his stated ambition of bringing a swift peace between Russia and Ukraine, while Kyiv needs Trump to pressure Moscow into diluting some of the more onerous conditions it has set for a truce.

At the Oval Office meeting in February, a reporter who was present from a conservative US news network accused Zelenskyy of disrespecting the occasion by not wearing a suit.

Zelenskyy, since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, has eschewed suits in favour of military-style attire, saying it is his way of showing solidarity with his countryman fighting to defend Ukraine.

In Rome, Zelenskyy again decided against a suit, and instead wore a dark shirt, buttoned up to the neck with no tie, and wore a dark military-style jacket over the top of that.

Pakistan Calls for Neutral Probe Into Kashmir Attack

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan called on Saturday for a "neutral" investigation into the killings of mostly Indian tourists in Kashmir that New Delhi has blamed on Islamabad, saying it was willing to cooperate and favoured peace.

India has identified two of the three suspected militants as Pakistani, though Islamabad has denied any role in the attack on Tuesday that killed 25 Indian and one Nepali tourists.

"Pakistan is fully prepared to cooperate with any neutral investigators to ensure that the truth is uncovered and justice is served," said Pakistan's interior minister, Mohsin Naqvi.

"Pakistan remains committed to peace, stability and the following of international norms but will not compromise on its sovereignty," he told a press conference.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed to pursue the attackers to "the ends of the earth" and said that those who planned and carried it out "will be punished beyond their imagination". Calls have also grown from Indian politicians and others for military retaliation against Pakistan.



After the attack, India and Pakistan unleashed a raft of measures against each other, with Pakistan closing its airspace to Indian airlines, and India suspending the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty that regulates water-sharing from the Indus River and its tributaries.

The two sides, who both fully claim Kashmir while partly ruling it, have also exchanged fire across their de facto border after four years of relative calm.

The Indian Army said it had responded to "unprovoked" small arms fire from multiple Pakistan Army posts that started around midnight on Friday along the 740-km (460-mile) de facto border separating the Indian and Pakistani areas of Kashmir. It reported no casualties.

The Pakistani military did not respond to a request for comment.

Indian security forces have continued their hunt for the suspects and have demolished the Kashmir houses of at least five suspected militants, including one they believe took part in the latest attack.

Djokovic Hints at Madrid Farewell After Crashing Out in 2nd Round



MADRID (Dispatches) - Three-time champion Novak Djokovic may have played at the Madrid Open for the last time after crashing out in the second round to Italian Matteo Arnaldi on Saturday, with the Serbian admitting he did not know if he would return.

Arnaldi beat fourth seed Djokovic 6-3 6-4 to reach the third round. The result condemned the 37-year-old, who received a bye in the opening round, to his third consecutive defeat.

Djokovic, who has been chasing a 100th tour-level title, was handed a shock defeat in Miami Open final in late March before his second-round Monte Carlo exit earlier this month.

All three defeats came in straight sets.

“Obviously after you lose a match you don’t feel good, but I’ve had a few of these this year where I lose in the first round, unfortunately,” Djokovic told a press conference.

“I think the positive thing is that I really enjoyed myself more than I have in the Monte-Carlo or some other tournament, so that’s a good thing.

“But obviously still level of tennis is not where I would like it to be. But it is what it is. I lost to a better player.”

Djokovic, who made his Madrid debut in 2006 and won the tournament in 2011, 2016 and 2019, was looking for his first win on clay since defeating Carlos Alcaraz to win gold at the Paris Olympics.

Asked whether he just played his last match in Madrid, Djokovic said: “It could be. It could be. I’m not sure if I will come back. So, I don’t know, I don’t know what to say.

“I mean, I’ll come back, maybe not as a player. I hope it’s not, but it could be.”

Djokovic won three out of the four major titles in 2023 but has not been able to reproduce that kind

of form since, being shut out of the game’s biggest tournaments last year as Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz claimed took majors apiece.

“(It’s) kind of new reality for me, I have to say. You know, trying to win a match or two, not really thinking about getting far in the tournament,” Djokovic added.

“It’s a completely different feeling from what I had in 20-plus years of professional tennis, so it’s kind of a challenge for me mentally to really face these kind of sensations on the court, going out early now regularly in the tournaments.

“But that’s, I guess, the circle of life and the career, eventually it was going to happen.”

The former world number one owns ATP Masters 1000 records for most wins (414), semi-finals (79), finals (60) and titles (40).

Meanwhile Jannik Sinner held onto his world number one ranking ahead of his return from a three-month doping ban, but the Italian does not expect his comeback to be as smooth when he takes to the court again at the Rome Masters next month.

Sinner has not played since winning the Australian Open at the start of the season and accepted a ban in February following a deal with the World Anti-Doping Agency, which had challenged a tribunal’s decision to clear him after two positive tests.

The 23-year-old was allowed to return to training on April 13 and his suspension will end on May 4, before his competitive return at the Italian Open, which gets underway three days later.

Sinner, who spent time building fitness mindful of the French Open starting on May 25, was assured of retaining the top ranking for his home tournament after his closest challenger Alexander Zverev crashed to an early defeat in Monte Carlo.

Gordon’s Dunk at Buzzer Lifts Nuggets Over Clippers



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Aaron Gordon slammed down a dunk as time expired to give the Denver Nuggets a dramatic and much-needed 101-99 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers in Game 4 of their first-round series at Inglewood, Calif.

Nikola Jokic airballed a 3-pointer as the clock wound down and Gordon leaped to catch the ball and released his dunk just before the red light came on the backboard. A replay review upheld the ruling and the basket allowed Denver to even the best-of-seven Western Conference series at two games apiece.

“You could say it was a lucky play but Aaron is a big athletic man,” Nuggets interim coach David Adelman said. “He met the ball early. I couldn’t tell if it was good or not. I was preparing for overtime. ...

“That’s going to be on NBA TV someday and I’m glad we won the game. I’m glad it will be on Nuggets Day and not Clippers Day.”

Jokic had 36 points, 21 rebounds and eight assists as the fourth-seeded Nuggets bounced back from a 117-83 pummeling in Game 3 on the road.

Kawhi Leonard registered 24 points and nine rebounds and Norman Powell scored 22 for the fifth-seeded Clippers.

“This was really big for us,” Gordon said. “We did what we came here to do and that was get homecourt advantage back.”

Game 5 is Tuesday at Denver.

Los Angeles trailed by 22 in the fourth quarter before making a 32-9 charge to take its first lead of the contest with 1:11 left in the game.

“We picked up our intensity and were being more aggressive,” said Clippers coach Tyrone Lue. “... We kind of got them off-guard and surprised them and took advantage of that. The fourth quarter is when we really executed and did what we were supposed to do.”

Bayern Cruise Past Mainz 3-0 But Title Celebrations on Ice



MUNICH (Dispatches) - Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich eased past Mainz 05 3-0 but had to put title celebrations on ice after Bayer Leverkusen matched their win to stay eight points behind with three matches left to play.

The Bavarians, who top the standings with 75 points ahead of reigning champions Leverkusen, can secure a 34th German league title with a win at RB Leipzig next week.

But they will have to do it without Bundesliga top scorer Harry Kane, with the England striker desperate to clinch the first trophy of his career for club or country, as he will be suspended after picking up a fifth booking and a suspension.

“It’s not ideal but we won,” said Bayern coach Vincent Kompany of Kane’s yellow card. “But it is not like a final (next week).”

“We will play 34 games this season and I think (injured) guys like Jamal (Musiala), Alphonso (Davies), Dayot Upamecano and (Hiroki) Ito also have to celebrate the title,” he said

“Every title you have to celebrate it like it’s your first so I don’t think it will make much of a difference for Harry.”

“It doesn’t take away a single percent of his contribution this season.”

With 24 league goals this term, the 31-year-old England captain looks set to become the first player to be crowned the league’s top scorer in each of his first two Bundesliga seasons.

“Crazy, crazy decision,” said Kane. “It’s kind of my story that I’ll miss the Leipzig game. But no worries, I’ll celebrate more than anyone else.”

Mainz dropped to seventh place and outside the European qualifying places.

With Mainz briefly down to 10 players due to the injury of Anthony Caci, Leroy Sane made the most of the extra man, firing in after a quick combination in the box with Serge Gnabry to give Bayern a 28th-minute lead.

The Bundesliga leaders, who last week were eliminated by Inter Milan in the Champions League last eight, doubled it with Michael Olise’s solo effort and superb finish from a tight angle five minutes before the break.

Sane, who is in talks with the club over a contract extension, twice hit the woodwork in the second half before Eric Dier headed home their third goal in the 84th.

Barcelona Sink Real Madrid in Extra Time to Win Copa del Rey



SEVILLE (Dispatches) - A Jules Kounde goal in the dying minutes of extra time handed Barcelona a dramatic 3-2 win over fierce rivals Real Madrid in an enthralling Copa del Rey final in a raucous atmosphere at Seville’s La Cartuja stadium.

Barca won a record extending 32nd Spanish Cup title thanks to a stunning strike from the French defender, who slotted a low drive into the bottom corner from 25 yards in the 116th minute.

The match ended on a sour note for Real Madrid as Antonio Ruediger and Lucas Vazquez, both on the bench after being substituted earlier, received red cards for dissent from the sidelines, with Jude Bellingham also being flashed a red after the final whistle for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Pedri put Barca ahead in the 28th minute with a brilliant curling strike into the top corner from outside the box in a first-half they dominated.

Newcastle Climb to Third as Ipswich Relegated



LONDON (Dispatches) - Newcastle United got a boost in their quest for Champions League football next season with a 3-0 Premier League win that saw Ipswich Town relegated, while Chelsea got back into contention for a top-five finish with a 1-0 win over Everton.

Fulham beat bottom side Southampton 2-1 while Brighton & Hove Albion struck two late goals in a thrilling 3-2 victory over West Ham United in the chase for European places.

Wolverhampton Wanderers extended their winning run to six league games with a 3-0 victory over relegated Leicester City.

Newcastle climbed to third place on 62 points, while Ipswich have 21 points after a defeat that saw them reduced to 10 men when Ben Johnson was sent off for two yellow cards.

Newcastle took the lead in first-half stoppage time when Alexander Isak scored from the spot after Julio Enciso was penalised for pulling down Jacob Murphy.

Dan Burn got their second 11 minutes after the break and substitute William Osula also netted a header in the 80th.

Ipswich defender Luke Woolfenden blamed a lack of concentration for their relegation along with Southampton and Leicester as the promoted sides went straight back down.

“We’ve not been at it this season - I think, brain-wise, we have probably let ourselves down one too many times,” he said. “Disappointed and gutted the dream is over ...”

Chelsea helped their chances of qualifying for next season’s Champions League with a first-half strike by Nicolas Jackson.

The Senegal striker, fed by Enzo Fernandez, drove the ball low into the bottom corner past Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford in the 27th minute for his first goal in four months.

The result leaves Enzo Maresca’s side fifth in the table on 60 points, one point behind Manchester City who are in FA Cup action this weekend. Everton are 14th.