

Russia's Largest Car Manufacturer AvtoVAZ Eyes to Launch a Localization Project in Iran Where It Can Assemble the Latest Version of Its Popular Lada Model

# IRAN NEWS

The U.S. Government Has Announced New Sanctions Targeting Chinese and Iranian Firms and Individuals Despite the Ongoing Nuclear Talks With Tehran

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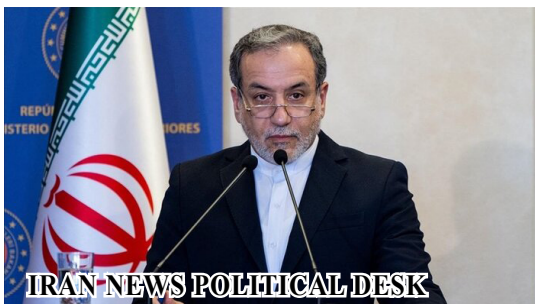
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### Amnesty Accuses Israel of Live-Streamed Genocide Against Gazans



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### Iran Warns U.S. Provocations Could Undermine Negotiation Efforts



TEHRAN - Foreign Minister has warned that provocative actions by the United States during ongoing indirect talks could call into question Washington's seriousness in pursuing a resolution.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of Wednesday's cabinet meeting, Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi announced that the next round of indirect negotiations between Iran and the U.S. will take place in Rome, Italy. He criticized recent American actions, saying, "Such moves undoubtedly send a negative message. Engaging in provocations during negotiations can undermine the other side's credibility."

Araqchi acknowledged the political divisions within the U.S. and said Iran is closely monitoring developments and lobbying efforts in Washington. He emphasized that the very nature of negotiations lies in addressing disputes, and "without disagreements, there would be no need for dialogue."

On the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Araqchi clarified that while the agency does not currently have a direct role in the ongoing talks, it will be central in verifying any potential nuclear agreement. "Any verification of nuclear-related issues in a future deal will be conducted by the IAEA," he said, adding that discussions regarding this verification role will occur if an agreement is reached.

He also stated that Iran maintains ongoing consultations with the IAEA and that these will continue depending on the trajectory of talks with the United States.

Araqchi reaffirmed that Iran's red lines in the negotiations have been clearly defined and communicated to the U.S. side. Regarding the choice of venue, he noted that while Oman is the host nation for the talks, Rome has been chosen for the second and fourth rounds for logistical reasons. "The venue itself is not a major issue for us," he said, stressing the importance of content and mediation over location.

On the duration of the negotiations, Araqchi said no formal timeline has been set but stressed that Iran does not seek drawn-out talks. "We are not interested in wasting time, and it seems the other side shares this sentiment," he added.

### Iran Urges Germany to Probe Wartime Supply of Chemical Weapons to Iraq



TEHRAN - Iran has called for full accountability for the use of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq War, urging Germany to investigate and reveal the truth about its role in arming the regime of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with the destructive weapons.

In a statement issued on the anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention's entry into force, Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said that for the Iranian nation, the day represents a global consensus on preventing a recurrence of the atrocities committed against Iranian soldiers and civilians through chemical warfare in the 1980s.

"Revealing the truth is the prerequisite for the realization of justice. Shedding light on the role of those who supplied materials and technologies used in Saddam's chemical weapons program remains a serious item on the Foreign Ministry's agenda," Baghaei stated.

He said Iran has demanded Germany inform the world of its role in arming Iraq with chemical weapons.

"Iran's demand that Germany establish a mechanism to uncover the truth and inform both Iranian and international public opinion about its role in arming Iraq with chemical weapons is a direct expression of that pursuit," the spokesman added.

Celebrated on April 29, the Chemical Weapons Convention marks a landmark achievement in international law aimed at preventing the spread and use of chemical weapons.

## Foreign Forces Undermine Security of Persian Gulf

TEHRAN - The presence of foreign naval forces in the Persian Gulf undermines regional security and hampers Iran's efforts to safeguard this strategically vital region, said the commander of Iran's IRGC Navy.

Speaking in Bandar Abbas on the eve of Persian Gulf National Day on April 30, Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri emphasized that the region's strategic and economic importance is compromised by the movement of foreign warships, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz, where disruptions could affect the global economy.

The commander argued that foreign powers pursue two nefarious objectives in the Persian Gulf: first, to establish an unauthorized foothold in the region, and second, to sell weapons to regional states.

"Achieving these sinister objectives requires fomenting hostility in the region," he said. "Have no doubt that those who travel thousands of miles to this area do not seek the security of this region."

General Tangsiri further stressed that a country like Iran, which boasts the longest coastline, the greatest number of islands, and the deepest waterways in the Persian Gulf, must naturally prioritize the region's security.

"We seek the security of this region," he stated. "What matters to us in the Persian Gulf is peace, security, brotherhood, and friendship."

The commander said Iran is proud to have secured the Strait of Hormuz and facilitated the daily transit of more than 80 vessels, a testament to the critical strategic value of this maritime corridor.

Tangsiri also later stated during the National Persian Gulf Day ceremony in Bandar Abbas: "We have built a missile-launching vessel that can reach a speed of 116 knots, equivalent to 215 kilometers per hour on land, and it has successfully passed all technical and specialized tests."

He emphasized, "In the IRGC Navy, we build our own vessels, missiles, drones, and submarines," adding, "We work day and night to ensure the security of the Persian Gulf."

Referring to the capabilities of the force, Admiral Tangsiri noted: "We remember the pre-revolution era when we couldn't even build a small fishing skiff — an American company had to do it for us. But today, we have built the Shahid Soleimani vessel with the most advanced technology, capable of sailing 5,000 nautical miles nonstop across the oceans."



The IRGC Navy Commander further said, "The Persian Gulf has intrinsic importance. The deepest shores are on the Iranian side, and the best and most suitable international waterways are located along Iran. Iran has 1,735 kilometers of straight coastline on the Persian Gulf. Including the islands, the total coastal length extends to 5,800 kilometers — highlighting the inherent significance of the Persian Gulf."

Pointing to the historical importance of the region, he said, "When we look back through history, we see that the Portuguese came to the region in 1508 and stayed until 1622 — for 117 years. At that time, there was neither oil nor gas, which underscores the historical importance of the Persian Gulf."

On the economic significance of the Persian Gulf, Tangsiri remarked: "This region holds a very important economic position. Oil and gas exports from here are extremely high — about 40% of the world's gas and 62% of its oil exports come from the Persian Gulf. This indicates its vital economic role."

He stressed, "The strategic and security importance of the Persian Gulf is immense. We have repeatedly sent messages of peace and friendship to regional countries and have consistently stated our pursuit of peace, friendship, and brotherhood."

Regarding daily vessel traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, Tangsiri said: "Today, we are proud to have established security in the Strait of Hormuz, where over 80 vessels pass through daily. This is a clear sign of the importance and strategic nature of this region."

He further stated, "Instability in the strategic Strait of Hormuz has international economic repercussions. That's why the security of this area is of paramount importance. What matters to us in the Persian Gulf is peace, security, brotherhood, and friendship. We believe that the presence of foreign powers in the Persian Gulf undermines security. A strategic and economic region like this is of great importance to us and our neighbors. Our adversaries are pursuing two sinister goals: one is their illegitimate presence in the region, and the other is to sell arms in this strategic zone."

The IRGC Navy Commander added: To achieve these sinister goals, they must create enemies in the region. It's clear that a country like Iran, which strives for the security of this area and has the longest coastline, the most islands, and the deepest waterways in the Persian Gulf, must prioritize its security. Therefore, we are pursuing security. Rest assured, those who come here from thousands of miles away are not here to provide security."

## Iran Rejects French Nuclear Accusations in Letter to UNSC

TEHRAN - Iran has strongly rejected recent remarks by the French Foreign Minister suggesting that Tehran is on the verge of developing nuclear weapons. In a formal letter addressed to the United Nations Security Council, Iran's Permanent Representative to the UN, Amir Saeid Iravani, denounced the statements as "baseless" and "politically irresponsible," reiterating that the Islamic Republic has never sought nuclear arms and remains committed to a peaceful nuclear program.

The letter, addressed both to the Security Council's rotating president and UN Secretary-General António Guterres, was in response to comments made by French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot during a closed-door session of the UN Security Council on April 28. In that meeting, Barrot reportedly claimed that Iran was "on the brink" of developing nuclear weapons—a claim Iran firmly denies.

"This accusation is either rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding or represents a deliberate distortion of Iran's legal rights under international law," Iravani wrote. He emphasized that such remarks represent a "selective interpretation of facts" and reflect a "pattern of double standards" from a permanent Security Council member with unique responsibilities.

Iran categorically dismissed the claim that it is close to developing nuclear weapons. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has never pursued nuclear weapons and has not altered its defensive doctrine," Iravani stated. He further emphasized Iran's consistent opposition to all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear arms.

As a founding member of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Iran continues to fulfill its obligations, Iravani noted. He added that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) routinely monitors and verifies Iran's nuclear activities, with repeated reports confirming no diversion toward non-peaceful objectives.

Iran defended the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a multilateral



agreement endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231. Iravani argued that the deal's collapse was due not to Iranian actions, but to the "illegal and reckless" U.S. withdrawal and the European parties' failure to honor their economic commitments.

Iran responded to these failures with over a year of what it described as "strategic patience" before gradually reducing its JCPOA commitments, in full compliance with Articles 26 and 36 of the agreement. These measures were transparent and proportional, Iravani emphasized.

The Iranian envoy sharply criticized recent French threats to reimpose sanctions on Iran, describing them as "clear examples of political and economic coercion." He warned that such tactics violate the

UN Charter and undermine the legitimacy of diplomatic processes.

In particular, he condemned France's mention of potentially triggering the so-called "snapback" mechanism to reinstate UN sanctions—a move Iran says is legally invalid, especially given France's own alleged non-compliance with the JCPOA.

Iravani questioned France's standing in non-proliferation debates, citing its continued modernization of its own nuclear arsenal, refusal to provide unconditional negative security assurances to non-nuclear states, and silence regarding Israel's undeclared nuclear weapons program. "France has not fulfilled its disarmament obligations under Article VI of the NPT," he asserted.

Iran reaffirmed its commitment to diplomacy and constructive engagement but stressed that true diplomatic efforts cannot proceed under threat and pressure. "If France and its partners are truly committed to a diplomatic resolution, they must cease their threats and respect the sovereign rights of nations under international law," the letter concluded.

The letter serves as a formal rebuttal and an appeal for more balanced and lawful conduct by Western powers, particularly those involved in nuclear diplomacy with Iran. It also signals Tehran's ongoing frustration with what it sees as double standards in the international system.

### Gov't Spokesperson Urges Against Politicization of Ministerial Impeachments



TEHRAN - Fatemeh Mohajerani, the spokesperson for the Iranian government, expressed hope that the parliamentary impeachment process will not be used as a political tool.

Speaking to reporters after the weekly cabinet meeting, Mohajerani addressed the recent efforts by some members of parliament to impeach the Minister of Roads and Urban Development.

"Impeachment is a right granted to the parliament, and we respect that. However, we expect this instrument not to be misused for political purposes," she stated. She referenced the recent dismissal of the Minister of Economy, noting that despite the loss of a cabinet member, the ministry continues to function effectively under interim leadership. "We hope decisions will be made on professional grounds," she added.

Regarding the appointment of a new Minister of Economy, Mohajerani confirmed that a nominee will be introduced soon.

On the issue of the recent fire at Shahid Rajaei Port, Mohajerani denied any deliberate sabotage, stating that current investigations suggest human error may have been involved. "According to investigations so far, there is no evidence of sabotage," she said.

Addressing concerns over alleged censorship of news about the fire, Mohajerani stressed transparency. "There has been no censorship. We have nothing to hide from the public. Field reporting and updates have been provided by the Minister of Interior and the head of the Crisis Management Organization," she emphasized.

She urged the public and media to wait for the expert report, adding, "We will take action against anyone found responsible. There is no reason not to disclose the truth to the people."

Commenting on why selling cigarettes to individuals under 18 has not been criminalized, Mohajerani explained that the Judiciary is still working on defining what constitutes a crime in this context. "We must define crimes in a way that allows for proper legal action. If we define them too broadly and cannot enforce penalties, the law loses credibility," she said.

On the controversial Miankaleh petrochemical project, Mohajerani reiterated that the government has decided to ban its construction. She stated that the Ministry of Agriculture has been tasked with reclaiming the land and returning it to national holdings. "The process is underway," she confirmed.

### Iran Expresses Readiness to Help Rebuild Sudan's Industrial Sector



TEHRAN - Iran's First Vice President, Mohammad Reza Aref, emphasized the importance of enhancing bilateral ties with Sudan and declared Iran's readiness to assist in modernizing Sudan's industry.

Aref made the remarks during a meeting with Sudanese Minister of Industry, Mohasen Ali Yaqoub. Wishing peace and stability for Sudan, Aref highlighted that the reopening of embassies over the past year signals a promising step toward stronger relations between the two countries.

Aref stressed that Western powers and the Zionist regime are attempting to sow division among Muslim nations and dismantle major Islamic countries, imposing heavy burdens on their people. "But with God's help, they will not succeed," he stated.

The Vice President expressed appreciation for Sudan's sympathy following the tragic explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port, calling it a reflection of the emotional and brotherly bond between the two nations. He noted that strategic ties between the Islamic Republic and the African continent have been a key priority since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and Iran has maintained a strong political relationship with Sudan.

"With such a background, we are ready to cooperate with Sudan across various sectors, but the first step is to determine the nature of the cooperation and the country's specific needs," Aref said.

He added that the reopening of embassies is a positive start toward advancing Iran-Sudan cooperation. Recent visits by Sudan's foreign and economic ministers to Iran also signal a desire to boost relations. Aref expressed hope that the joint cooperation commission between the two countries will soon convene.



# IRAN NEWS



## Operations Are Back to Normal at Blast-Hit Shahid Rajaei Port

BANDAR ABBAS (IRNA) - Acting director of the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Saeed Rasouli says loading and unloading operations at Shahid Rajaei Port are proceeding without disruption following a deadly explosion and subsequent fire. While expressing sympathy with families of the victims, Rasouli said on Tuesday that 26 ships were currently docked at the port and all maritime operations were being conducted in accordance with safety protocols. The official added that the blast had occurred in a section of the port's container storage area, adding that the remaining terminals and yards were functioning normally and were secure. He said that the governor of Hormozgan is supervising an investigation into the cause of the incident. Reconstruction efforts in the damaged area have already begun, he said.

## Kazakhstan Signs Investment Agreement to Build Dedicated Terminal at Shahid Rajaei Port



TEHRAN - Kazakhstan and Iran have signed a landmark investment agreement to construct a dedicated terminal and logistics center at Shahid Rajaei Port, Iran's largest commercial port on the Persian Gulf.

The agreement was signed via video conference involving Saeed Rasouli, Acting Deputy Minister of Transport and Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO); Hormozgan Governor Mohammad Ashouri; Ali Akbar Marzban, Deputy for Maritime Affairs at PMO; Ontalap Onalbayev, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Iran; and Mukhametkali Kaldeibayev, Head of Kazakhstan's Export Development Corporate Fund.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) aims to enhance regional transport and transit cooperation. It was formally signed by Kazem Salehi, Director General of Transit and Logistics at the PMO, and Kaldeibayev on behalf of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Under the agreement, Iran has committed to allocating land in the hinterlands of Shahid Rajaei Port for the project. Kazakhstan will submit its proposed business plan within one month. The investment will proceed under Iranian law and will be eligible for protections under the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Act (FIPA). A joint technical committee will be formed to finalize the agreement and oversee implementation.

Speaking at the ceremony, Saeed Rasouli emphasized Iran's role as Kazakhstan's gateway to open waters, reaffirming Iran's support for foreign investments in port infrastructure, especially from Kazakhstan. He highlighted Iran's strategic location, boasting 1,800 kilometers of coastline and direct access to international waters.

## Gasoline Production Falls Short of Soaring Demand in Iran



TEHRAN - Despite plans to boost gasoline production to 129 million liters per day, Iran's surging consumption is likely to outpace supply, warns Mohammad Sadeq Azimifard, CEO of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC).

Speaking to ILNA, Azimifard explained that the country's average gasoline consumption has already reached 124 million liters daily. With an annual growth rate of 5 to 6 percent, he cautioned that even hitting the 129 million-liter production goal by the end of the Seventh Development Plan won't be enough to meet demand.

"If no steps are taken to manage consumption, even with maximum production, we'll still face a shortfall," he said.

Azimifard emphasized the necessity of diversifying Iran's fuel mix, pointing to efforts to expand compressed natural gas (CNG) usage and ongoing initiatives to electrify parts of the transport sector.

He revealed plans to install electric vehicle charging infrastructure at 7,000 fuel distribution and CNG stations across the country. A recent government meeting prioritized rapid feasibility studies and the swift rollout of these installations.

One of the most pressing issues, Azimifard noted, is the outdated vehicle fleet: "Currently, 53 percent of Iran's transport fleet is obsolete. We must accelerate scrappage programs to replace these inefficient vehicles."

Azimifard also criticized the fuel efficiency of domestically manufactured vehicles, which consume more than the global average. He called for improvements in vehicle quality and a policy shift to ease the import of fuel-efficient, high-quality cars.

He stressed the need for a review of fuel pricing policies, suggesting that redistribution of fuel subsidies should be seriously considered to better manage consumption.

Highlighting the broader systemic challenge, Azimifard urged faster implementation of plans under the Seventh Development Plan, including the creation of a national energy efficiency organization under the President's supervision.



By: F. Taherpoor

## Bangladesh Celebrates Independence Day in Tehran With Message of Renewal and Resolve

TEHRAN - The Embassy of Bangladesh in Tehran marked the 54th anniversary of the country's Independence and National Day in Hotel Parsian Azadi of Tehran with a solemn and spirited celebration attended by Iranian dignitaries, members of the diplomatic corps, Bangladeshi expatriates, business leaders, and friends of Bangladesh.

Welcoming the guests, the Bangladeshi Ambassador H.E. Manjurul Karim Khan Chowdhury expressed deep appreciation for their presence, calling it a reflection of the strong and growing relationship between Bangladesh and Iran. He extended special gratitude to the Chief Guest, Iran's Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mr. Seyed Hamed Ameli, for joining the commemoration.

The ceremony opened with a moment of remembrance for the victims of the recent tragic incident at Shahid Rajaei Port in Bandar Abbas on April 26. The Ambassador conveyed heartfelt condolences to the Iranian people, prayed for the souls of the deceased, and wished a swift recovery to the injured.

Highlighting the significance of March 26—the day Bangladesh declared its independence from Pakistan in 1971—the Ambassador described it as a powerful symbol of national resilience, dignity, and the unyielding will of the people. He paid tribute to the countless martyrs and freedom fighters who laid down their lives during the nine-month Liberation War.

"The birth of Bangladesh is a story of immense sacrifice, suffering, and courage," he stated. "We began our journey with nothing but determination and the ashes of a war-torn country."

Reflecting on Bangladesh's trajectory over the past five decades, the envoy noted that despite political turbulence, natural disasters, and structural challenges, the nation has made remarkable socio-economic progress. He emphasized that the country has consistently recovered from setbacks and now often surpasses regional peers in key development indicators.

A significant portion of the speech focused on the recent political transformation in Bangladesh. The Ambassador recounted the mass uprisings of July and August 2024, where youth-led protests swept the nation and led to the collapse of what he termed an "authoritarian regime."

"The monsoon revolution of 2024 has given rise to a new Bangladesh—one that stands for democracy, rule of law, and justice," he declared. "The people's voice has once again shaped our future."

He praised Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus for leading the country's current reform agenda, aimed at strengthening

institutions, improving governance, and promoting political transparency.

"This is our chance to fulfill the dreams of the martyrs of 1971 and create a nation built on the foundations of freedom, fairness, and opportunity," the Ambassador said.

Touching on the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and Iran, the Ambassador highlighted the historical and cultural ties that bind the two nations. He noted that both countries have enjoyed longstanding religious and cultural connections for over a millennium, and that mutual goodwill continues to define their interactions.

In recent years, he said, exchanges at multiple levels—including trade, diplomacy, and cultural engagement—have intensified, with growing interest from both nations' private sectors to boost economic cooperation. The two countries also work closely at the United Nations and other international forums.

"Bangladesh supports Iran's legitimate rights as a responsible member of the international community," he affirmed.

The Ambassador also stressed that Bangladesh, though a relatively young nation, is rooted in a civilization spanning over two thousand years. He portrayed Bangladesh as a peace-loving country committed to global cooperation, regional integration, and multilateral diplomacy.

"Our contributions to UN peacekeeping missions reflect our commitment to global peace," he said. "We continue to advocate for moderation, constructive engagement, and practical solutions on the world stage."

Concluding his speech, the Ambassador expressed hope for a brighter future for both Bangladesh and Iran, built on mutual respect and deepened partnership.



"Though the journey is long and the road challenging, we are determined to stay the course," he said. "May Bangladesh live forever, and may the friendship between Bangladesh and Iran continue to flourish."

The evening concluded with a cultural segment and a reception showcasing traditional Bangladeshi cuisine and hospitality. Guests departed with a deeper appreciation for the nation's history, its present challenges, and its aspirations for a just and democratic future.

Meanwhile addressing the event, Iran's Deputy Industry, Mine and Trade Minister Ameli hailed Bangladesh and the ties between the two countries and called for boosting cooperation between the two states in any sphere.

Then the Ambassador, accompanied with his wife as well as esteemed guests cut the special cake, prepared for the day.

## Iran, Romania Seek Stronger Economic Ties Despite Underwhelming Trade Volume

TEHRAN - In a high-level meeting between Qadir Qiafeh, Vice President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, and Aurelian Gogulescu, Vice President of the Romanian Chamber of Commerce, both sides emphasized the urgent need to enhance bilateral economic relations, noting that current trade volumes fall far short of the potential capacities of the two nations.

Speaking in Tehran, Qiafeh highlighted that although Iran has 34 regional chambers, 39 joint chambers with other countries, and over 110,000 members representing small, medium, and large enterprises, trade with Romania remains modest. According to the latest figures, trade between Iran and Romania stands at \$348 million—an amount Qiafeh described as "insignificant" considering the combined GDP of over \$700 billion between the two countries.

He emphasized that the two economies are complementary, but cooperation has been limited mostly to sectors such as petrochemicals, construction materials (from Iran), and car parts, corn, and wheat (from Romania). He urged expansion into other high-potential sectors, citing Romania's strengths in agriculture, automotive manufacturing (including the well-known Dacia brand), and oil and gas equipment.

Qiafeh also pointed out logistical and tariff-related barriers hindering trade, suggesting that infrastructure such as the Port of Constanta—a key transit route linking the Indian Ocean to the Black Sea—could play a vital role in resolving some of these challenges.

Iran, he said, brings key advantages to the table, including rich resources in oil, gas, and ferrous and non-ferrous metals. Despite decades of sanctions, Iran has achieved global recognition in advanced technologies, ranking fifth worldwide in nanotechnology



and making notable progress in pharmaceuticals.

To unlock the full potential of bilateral ties, Qiafeh proposed forming joint banking working groups and ensuring the implementation of previously signed agreements. He also advocated for a five-year roadmap to increase annual trade volume to \$1 billion, suggesting regular participation in each other's trade exhibitions as a way to build trust and partnerships.

Echoing these sentiments, Gogulescu welcomed the dialogue and provided historical context, noting that in 2016, trade between the two nations exceeded \$400 million before declining due to various factors. He called on both chambers to reinvigorate ties by promoting mutual participation in trade shows and building stronger relationships among private sector players.

He referenced a memorandum of understanding signed in 2000 and a 2023 agreement between the Chamber of Commerce of Prahova Province—which he chairs—and the Chamber of Commerce of Hamedan, Iran. Under this agreement, a 30-member Iranian delegation from Hamedan is set to visit Romania in June 2025, where they will host an exhibition showcasing Iranian handicrafts, jewelry, and porcelain.

Gogulescu also underscored the historical and industrial significance of Prahova, home to the world's first oil refinery and three of Romania's four refineries. He added that the province offers unique tourism opportunities, especially in mountainous regions.

Both officials concluded by affirming that chambers of commerce in Iran and Romania can and should play a leading role in driving economic cooperation forward.

## Emphasis on Completion of Basra-Shalamcheh Railway



TEHRAN - In a meeting between the advisor to the Iraqi Prime Minister and the acting head of Iran's Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, both sides stressed the importance of strengthening bilateral cooperation by accelerating joint agreements on the completion of the Basra-Shalamcheh railway project and the launch of joint economic zones and free trade areas between Iran and Iraq.

The two parties also agreed to seriously follow up on matters such as the resolution of outstanding financial claims and the issuance and acceptance of banking guarantees for Iranian economic actors by the Iraqi side.

During the meeting, Seyed Rahmatollah Akrami, Acting Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, welcomed the Iraqi delegation led by Hazem Majid Naji Al-Khalidi, advisor to the Iraqi Prime Minister, and expressed appreciation for Iraq's sympathy following the recent tragic explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port. He noted that such expressions of solidarity demonstrate the close and enduring bond between the Iranian and Iraqi people.

Akrami also highlighted the significance of the Iraqi delegation's visit coinciding with the 7th Iran Expo 2025, which showcases the country's export capabilities. He considered this timing an excellent opportunity for Iraqi investors and economic players to become familiar with Iran's economic and engineering capacities.

Referring to the sixth session of the Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Commission held in May of last year, Akrami emphasized that Iranian institutions and businesses are seriously pursuing the implementation of the commission's resolutions and called on the relevant Iraqi entities to do the same.

Akrami expressed satisfaction with the progress of the Basra-Shalamcheh railway project and noted that its final completion could significantly enhance the capacity of Iranian companies to export engineering and technical services to Iraq. He also called for mechanisms from the Iraqi side to settle debts owed to Iranian companies and contractors and to facilitate the issuance of banking guarantees.

## Iran, Niger Sign Joint Cooperation Agreement at Economic Commission Meeting



TEHRAN - Iran and Niger signed a joint cooperation agreement during the third session of their Joint Economic Commission, held on the sidelines of the 7th Iran Expo 2025 in Tehran.

The meeting took place at the Persian Gulf Pearl Hall and was attended by Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade Seyed Mohammad Atabak, Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, Head of the Iran Trade Promotion Organization, and Niger's Minister of Petroleum, Sahay Amrou.

In his opening remarks, Minister Atabak emphasized the significance of reactivating the Joint Commission after a 13-year hiatus. He expressed hope that the newly signed cooperation document would elevate the level of economic relations between the two nations. Atabak acknowledged the currently limited trade volume between Iran and Niger and called for the establishment of a designated authority in Niger to monitor and implement the agreement's terms.

Dehghan Dehnavi noted that extensive discussions were held over the past two days between technical experts from both countries. The agreement spans various sectors, including mining, energy, industry, and technology transfer. He added that expert working groups will continue to follow up on the implementation of the agreement.

"The joint document lays the groundwork for cooperation across strategic sectors, and the efforts of both countries' experts have been instrumental in finalizing it," Dehnavi stated.



## Chinese Navy Patrols South China Sea

BEIJING (dispatches) - China's navy conducted a patrol in the South China Sea, saying that the Philippines has been creating "disturbances" and carrying out its own patrols with other countries.

China, which claims almost the entirety of the South China Sea, has been involved an increasingly tense stand-off with the Philippines in the waters there, as both seek to assert their sovereignty claims.

More than 14,000 Filipino and US soldiers are participating in joint exercises which run from April 21 through May 9 for a "full battle test" in the face of shared regional security concerns. China has said the drills are provocative.

In a statement late on Tuesday, the Southern Theatre Command of China's People's Liberation Army said its forces had that same day carried out "routine" patrols in the South China Sea, without giving an exact location.



## North Korea Conducts First Test Firing of Its New Warship's Weapons System



SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea earlier this week conducted the first test-firing of the weapons system of the new "Choe Hyon-class" warship it recently unveiled, state media KCNA reported on Wednesday.

Cruise and anti-air missiles were launched and artillery fired as part of the test-firing attended by leader Kim Jong Un and senior officials, the report said.

The time has come for North Korea's navy to choose to accelerate nuclear armament for maritime sovereignty and for the sake of national defence, Kim was quoted as saying.

The intelligence agencies of South Korea and the U.S. were closely monitoring North Korea's shipbuilding activities, an official at Seoul's defence ministry said.

More work might be needed before the new naval destroyer could take to the sea under its own propulsion, said 38 North, a think tank focusing on North Korea, noting a satellite image of tug boats nudging the ship back towards a floating drydock.

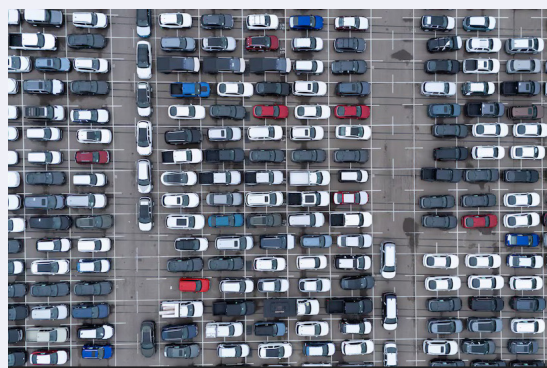
"The use of tugboats to move the ship into place and back again could indicate the lack of a functioning propulsion system," the think tank said.

North Korean state media on Saturday revealed the 5,000-tonne warship that it said was equipped with the "most powerful weapons."

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 "Choe Hyon-class" ship was named after anti-Japanese revolutionary fighter Choe Hyon, according to KCNA.

## Trump Eases Auto Tariffs Burden



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump signed a pair of orders to soften the blow of his auto tariffs on Tuesday with a mix of credits and relief from other levies on materials, and his trade team touted its first deal with a foreign trading partner.

The developments helped eased some investor worries about the erratic trade policies of Trump as the president visited Michigan, a cradle of the U.S. auto industry, just days before a fresh set of 25% import taxes was set to kick in on automotive components.

The trip, on the eve of his 100th day in office, came as Americans take an increasingly dim view of Trump's economic stewardship, with indications his tariffs will weigh on growth and could drive up inflation and unemployment.

In his latest partial reversal of tariff policies, the Republican president agreed to give carmakers two years to boost the percentage of domestic components in vehicles assembled domestically.

It will allow them to offset tariffs for imported auto parts used in U.S.-assembled vehicles equal to 3.75% of the total value of the Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price of vehicles they build in the U.S. through April 2026, and 2.5% of U.S. production through April 30, 2027.

## Amnesty Accuses Israel of Live-Streamed Genocide Against Gazans



GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - Rights group Amnesty International Tuesday accused Israel of committing a "live-streamed genocide" against Palestinians in Gaza by forcibly displacing most of the population and deliberately creating a humanitarian catastrophe.

The UN aid agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, warned Israel's blockade on aid had become a "silent killer" in Gaza, with children and the sick suffering the most.

In its annual report, Amnesty said Israel was acting with "specific intent to destroy Palestinians in Gaza, thus committing genocide".

Israel has repeatedly denied such accusations from rights groups and some states. Officials and the military did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the latest allegations.

The Gaza war erupted after the Palestinian militant group Hamas's deadly October 7, 2023 attacks inside Israel which resulted in the deaths of 1,218 people on the Israeli side, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

Israel in response launched a relentless bombardment of Gaza and a ground offensive that according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory has left at least 52,365 dead.

"Since 7 October 2023, when Hamas perpetrated horrific crimes against Israeli citizens and others and captured more than 250 hostages, the world has been made audience to a live-streamed genocide," Amnesty's secretary general Agnes Callamard said in the report.

"States watched on as if powerless, as Israel killed thousands upon thousands of Palestinians, wiping out entire multigenerational families, destroying homes, livelihoods, hospitals and schools."

Gaza's civil defense agency reported Tuesday at least seven people killed in Israeli strikes, including four in a raid on tents housing displaced people near the Al-Iqleem area in southern Gaza.

"I just want to lay my head on a pillow and sleep. We don't want to be collecting remains (of body parts)," said Widad Fojo, who lost relatives in one strike.

Israel resumed its Gaza offensive on March 18, ending a two-month ceasefire and insisting that military pressure was aimed at securing the release of hostages.

"We have changed the face of the Middle East... of course, we also have another important mission," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, referring to captives held in Gaza, said at a function to commemorate fallen soldiers on Tuesday.

Amnesty said that throughout 2024 it had "documented multiple war crimes by Israel, including direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks".

It said Israel's actions forcibly displaced 1.9 million Palestinians, around 90 percent of Gaza's population, and "deliberately engineered an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe".

"Children in Gaza are going to bed starving. The ill and the sick are not able to get medical care because of shortages in supplies in hospitals and clinics," UNRWA spokeswoman Juliette Touma said.

"Gaza has become a land of desperation... The siege on Gaza is a silent killer, a silent killer of children, of older people, of the most vulnerable in the community."

UNRWA also accused the Israeli military of abusing more than 50 of its staff when they were detained.

"Since the start of the war in October 2023, over 50 UNRWA staff among them teachers, doctors, social workers, have been detained and abused," UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini wrote on X.

"They have been treated in the most shocking & inhumane way. They reported being beaten + used as human shields."

Israel has accused some UNRWA employees of involvement in the October 7 attack and has subsequently banned the agency from operating within its territory.

Amnesty said it was a collective failure by the international community in responding to the war in Gaza.

Heba Morayef, Amnesty director for the Middle East and North Africa, denounced "the extreme levels of suffering that Palestinians in Gaza have been forced to endure on a daily basis over the past year" as well as "the world's complete inability or lack of political will to put a stop to it".

## France Accuses Russia of Cyberattacks on Defense, Finance, Media Sectors



PARIS (Dispatches) - France accused Russian military intelligence of staging cyberattacks, including against an organization involved in the Paris Olympics and President Emmanuel Macron's first election campaign in 2017.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot took the accusations to the UN Security Council, demanding that Russia, whose envoy was in the chamber, immediately halt the attacks.

Barrot said Russia used a branch of the GRU military intelligence known as the "APT28 attack group". Also known as Fancy Bear, the branch has been linked to global attacks including in the 2016 US election, when emails of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton were leaked.

France's foreign ministry said that since 2021, APT28 had targeted a dozen French entities in the "defense, financial and economic sectors".

Barrot linked the renewed APT28 attacks to France's support for Ukraine since the start of Russia's invasion in February 2022.

"They targeted a dozen French entities -- public services, enterprises, sporting organisations linked to the Olympic Games and Paralympics," he told a Security Council debate on Ukraine. France and Russia are two of the council's five permanent members.

"We condemn these cyberattacks in the strongest manner," he added.

"They are unworthy of a permanent member of the Security Council and against frameworks fixed by the United Nations. They must therefore cease straight away."

Russia's UN envoy did not comment on the French accusations but defended Russia's actions in Ukraine.

The Russian group is said to target personal email accounts to retrieve data and messages, or gain access to other systems.

In 2017, hackers hit Macron's first presidential run, leaking thousands of documents barely 24 hours before the vote.

"In the midst of the presidential election, APT28 participated in a massive hacking operation" aiming "to sow doubt and influence public opinion", France's foreign ministry said in a video shared by Barrot on X.

"Thousands of documents were stolen and disseminated, hoping to manipulate voters, but the manoeuvre failed to really impact the electoral process," the ministry video said.

Macron easily won the election in a second-round runoff against far-right

veteran Marine Le Pen. French officials have also warned in the past over the risk of interference in elections set for 2027, when the far right is expected to be a major contender.

Media is another key target of the hackers, the foreign ministry added.

In 2015, ATP28 -- posing as Islamic State militants -- hacked the French TV5 Monde channel "to manipulate public opinion" and "create a panic in France", it said.

France has been a frequent target of Islamist attacks over the last decade, notably in 2015 when at the Bataclan concert hall in Paris.

Several international intelligence services, including German authorities, warned in September 2024 of Fancy Bear cyberattacks against NATO countries.

The group is "targeting our partners," the foreign ministry video said, adding that Ukraine has been one of the group's "priorities" since Russia's 2022 invasion.

"APT28 is also being used to exert constant pressure on Ukrainian infrastructure in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine," the foreign ministry said.

Poland, a staunch ally of Kyiv, has warned that Moscow might seek to interfere with a presidential vote set for May 18 through cyberattacks and disinformation.

France and Poland will sign a "friendship treaty" on May 9, when Russian President Vladimir Putin is to preside over a huge parade in Moscow to mark victory in World War II.

## Pakistan Says India Planning Imminent Military Strike Over Kashmir Attack

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's information minister said early Wednesday that Islamabad had "credible intelligence" that India was planning an imminent military strike and he vowed a "decisive response", as worries of spiralling conflict grew over a deadly attack in Kashmir.

The statement by Attaullah Tarar -- issued shortly before 2:00 am local time (2100 GMT Tuesday) -- came after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a closed-door meeting the previous day with army and security chiefs, at which he gave the military "complete operational freedom" to respond to the attack, a senior government source told AFP.

"Pakistan has credible intelligence that India intends to launch a military strike within the next 24 to 36 hours using the Pahalgam incident as a false pretext," Tarar said on X.

Pahalgam is a tourist hub in Indian-administered Kashmir where 26 men were killed on April 22 in the deadliest attack on civilians in the contested region in years.

India has accused Pakistan of supporting the attack, a claim Islamabad has rejected.



"Any act of aggression will be met with a decisive response," said Tarar. "India will be fully responsible for any serious consequences in the region!"

The development comes as nations around the world, from neighbouring China to the United States, express deep concerns over the nuclear-armed neighbors' mounting tensions and urge restraint.

India's army on Tuesday said it had repeatedly traded gunfire with Pakistani troops across the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto Kashmir border, a heavily fortified zone of high-altitude Himalayan outposts.

Pakistan's military did not confirm the shooting, but state radio in Islamabad reported on Tuesday it had shot down an Indian drone, calling it a violation of its airspace.

It did not say when the incident happened, and there was no comment from New Delhi.

Tensions have been rapidly mounting in the week since the Pahalgam attack, with tit-for-tat diplomatic barbs, expulsion of citizens and land border crossings shut.



## Dembele Goal Gives PSG Narrow Advantage Over Arsenal in Champions League



LONDON (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain beat Arsenal 1-0 in the Champions League semi-final first leg on Tuesday, with Ousmane Dembele scoring early at the Emirates. PSG controlled the game to protect their lead and head into the May 7 return leg in Paris as favourites to reach their first-ever Champions League final.

Paris Saint-Germain seized the advantage in their Champions League semi-final against Arsenal as Ousmane Dembele sealed a 1-0 win in the first leg on Tuesday.

Dembele struck in the opening minutes at the Emirates Stadium and Luis Enrique's side held on to the lead with a composed display that kept Arsenal at bay.

PSG will head into the second leg at the Parc des Princes on May 7 as favourites to reach the final against Barcelona or Inter Milan as they look to win the tournament for the first time.

But the French champions should take nothing for granted given their history of epic European collapses.

Arsenal's first defeat in 18 home European matches was a painful blow to their own bid to win a first Champions League crown.

Mikel Arteta had labelled Arsenal's run to the semi-finals a "beautiful story".

The last chapter might make for frustrating reading, but they aren't dead and buried just yet.

The Gunners had beaten holders Real Madrid 5-1 on aggregate to reach their first Champions League semi-final since losing to Manchester United in 2009.

They could not replicate the swaggering display that blew Madrid away 3-0 in the first leg, despite a frenzied atmosphere as kick-off approached.

When Arsenal's players gathered for a pre-match huddle in the tunnel, Declan Rice implored his teammates to give everything as he roared "if we don't have the ball we die".

A video message from Arteta played on the Emirates screens struck a similarly rousing chord as the Spaniard urged fans to raise the roof.

But PSG had already eliminated Premier League champions Liverpool in the last 16 and Aston Villa in the quarter-finals, after coming back from two goals down to beat Manchester City in the league phase.

Arsenal were the one English side they had failed to conquer, losing 2-0 in north London in October.

However, PSG were without the influential Dembele for disciplinary reasons on that occasion and Luis

Enrique insisted his side were "more complete" seven months on.

Dembele took just four minutes to prove the point as the France star started and finished a ruthless raid.

Taking possession in the centre circle, Dembele worked the ball out to Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and he

drove at Jurrien Timber with intent.

Dembele had carried on his run into the Arsenal area and Kvaratskhelia's perfectly weighted pass picked

him out for a clinical finish that went in off the far post.

Having seized the momentum, PSG went for the kill and Marquinhos rose to meet Achraf Hakimi's cross

with a header that was just too close to Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya.

Kvaratskhelia had a strong penalty appeal waved away when Timber appeared to halt the forward's burst

into area with an arm around his chest.

Kvaratskhelia was undeterred, forcing Raya to save after attacking Timber again.

Dembele was proving equally hard for Arsenal to handle, his clever run and pass reaching Desire Doue

for a low strike that Raya saved at full stretch.

Arsenal had been out-gunned but they should have equalised just before half-time when Myles Lewis-Skelly's sublime pass found Gabriel Martinelli, whose shot was superbly saved by Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Arsenal thought they had drawn level two minutes into the second half when Mikel Merino headed home

from Rice's free-kick, yet their celebrations were premature as VAR disallowed the goal for offside against the Spain midfielder.

Arteta's men had the momentum and Leandro Trossard was inches away from equalising when Rice's pass sent him bursting into the PSG area for a shot that Donnarumma brilliantly tipped away.

Feeling the shift in the balance of power, PSG looked to take the sting out of the game by playing at a slower pace.

The tactic almost worked to perfection when Bradley Barcola sauntered through, but with just Raya to

beat he dragged his shot wide of the far post.

It was a woeful miss, leaving Luis Enrique holding his head in disbelief.

The PSG coach was in the exact same stunned pose moments later when Goncalo Ramos fired against the bar from close-range.

## Top seed Zverev Loses in Madrid Open



MADRID (Dispatches) - Power was restored at the Caja Magica tennis complex Tuesday and the Madrid Open resumed with a packed schedule that included second-ranked Iga Swiatek advancing to the quarterfinals after a "more relaxed" day because of the blackout.

Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka made into the last eight by defeating Peyton Stearns in straight sets, while on the men's side, top-seeded Alexander Zverev was upset by 21st-ranked Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina.

Following the major blackout that prompted 22 matches to be postponed on Monday, Swiatek returned to the center court and defeated Diana Shnaider 6-0, 6-7 (3), 6-4 to stay on track to defend her title in the Spanish capital.

"I liked yesterday. I think the whole world was just more relaxed, kind of, obviously the people who didn't lose because of this," she said. "I enjoyed the time off, and I tried to just recover, because we need to savor these free days, for sure."

Swiatek said she took away food from the tournament site and relaxed at the hotel until the power came back on.

"I just chilled and used that time to not think about what I should do," she said. "There was no signal, so basically no one used their phones. It was nice, I liked it."

Most parts of Madrid regained power overnight, but the Caja Magica was still without electricity early Tuesday, causing a delay in the opening of the gates for fans.

The power came back quickly, though, and organizers did not have to alter the day's schedule of matches, although there was the possibility of the night session being delayed because of the high number of matches during the day.

Swiatek cruised in the first set but had to save 11 of 13 break points to seal a hard-fought victory against the 13th-seeded Shnaider.

Swiatek has not lost before the quarterfinals in seven tournaments this season but hasn't gone past the semifinals since Roland Garros last year. She will next face Madison Keys, who defeated Donna Vekic 6-2, 6-3.

## Snedeker and Ogilvy Named Captains for 2026 Presidents Cup



LONDON (Dispatches) - Brandt Snedeker and Australia's Geoff Ogilvy have been named as captains of the U.S. and International Teams, respectively, for the 2026 edition of the Presidents Cup at Medinah Country Club outside Chicago.

Snedeker, a nine-times winner on the PGA Tour who was the U.S.-based circuit's 2007 rookie of the year, was a captain's assistant at last year's Presidents Cup and will serve as one of Keegan Bradley's vice captains for the 2025 Ryder Cup.

The 44-year-old American represented the U.S. Team in the 2013 Presidents Cup, where he compiled a 2-3-0 record, and played in the 2012 and 2016 Ryder Cups.

"I'm looking forward to leading our guys into Medinah for what will certainly be an amazing week of golf," said Snedeker.

"Representing my country in team competition has been a highlight of my PGA Tour career, and I will lean on those experiences to ensure we are prepared and ready to compete against what I know will be a unified and determined International Team."

Ogilvy, who counts the 2006 U.S. Open among his eight wins on the PGA Tour, takes over at the helm of the International Team after serving as a captain's assistant in the last four iterations of the Presidents Cup.

The 47-year-old Australian played on three consecutive International Teams (2007, 2009, 2011), where he amassed a 7-6-1 record.

"Since Ernie Els debuted the shield in 2019, the International Team's spirit has intensified and grown as we have rallied around this symbol which embodies our shared ambition and unifies both players and fans," said Ogilvy.

"I intend to carry that momentum forward, just as the captains before me have, to build strong support for our international players in the lead up and throughout the event."

## Pistons Edge Knicks to Stay Alive

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Cade Cunningham scored 24 points and Ausar Thompson added 22 as each made clutch shots in the final two minutes to help the visiting Detroit Pistons avoid elimination in the first round with a gritty 106-103 victory over the New York Knicks in Game 5.

The Pistons won their fourth game this season in New York and sent the series back to Detroit for Game 6 on Thursday. If the Pistons can win their first home game, the series would return to New York for Game 7 on Saturday.

Tobias Harris added 17 and Dennis Schroder contributed 13 off the bench for the Pistons, who shot 42.4 percent. Malik Beasley finished with 10 while Jalen Duren added nine points and 14 rebounds, including the putback dunk that snapped a 95-95 tie with 3:05 left and a putback that gave the Pistons a 99-95 lead with 2:28 left.

OG Anunoby scored 19 to lead the Knicks, who failed to clinch a series on their home court for the first time since beating the Indiana Pacers in Game 6 of the 1999 Eastern Conference finals. Karl-Anthony Towns and Mikal Bridges finished with 17 apiece but Jalen Brunson was held to 16 on 4-of-16 shooting as the Knicks shot 43.3 percent and missed 11 free throws

Cunningham gave Detroit a 101-95 lead with a difficult floater in



the lane with 1:57 left and Thompson converted a dunk with 27.4 seconds for a 103-97 edge. After those shots, the Pistons survived Bridges hitting a corner 3 with 25.3 seconds and Anunoby's left side 3 over Cunningham with 7.1 seconds left to cut Detroit's lead to 104-103.

Detroit called its final timeout with 5.7 seconds left and

Cunningham put Detroit up three with 5.4 seconds remaining. After Miles McBride missed two free throws with 2.6 seconds remaining, the Knicks secured an offensive rebound but could not get off a final shot before the horn sounded.

Detroit held a seven-point lead on Thompson's dunk with 4:18 left but the Knicks ended the half with a 17-9 spurt to get a 50-49 lead by halftime.

Thompson's dunk opened a 59-53 lead and capped an 8-0 run less than three minutes into the third and Harris hit an open 3 for a 66-57 lead with six minutes left. Two free throws by Thompson gave Detroit a 71-61 edge with 4:29 left and the Knicks ended the quarter with a 13-6 burst to cut the lead to 77-74 entering the fourth.

Cunningham went around a screen by Thompson and gained separation for an open 3 from the left side by the Knicks' bench to give Detroit a 95-90 lead with 4:17 left before Duren's tiebreaking hoop countered a deep 3 by Towns.

Meanwhile Tyrese Haliburton scored 26 points, including the go-ahead layup with 1.4 seconds remaining in overtime, and the Indiana Pacers rallied for a 119-118 win over the Milwaukee Bucks to clinch their Eastern Conference quarterfinal series in Indianapolis.

## Djokovic Withdraws From Rome Masters

ROME (Dispatches) - Six-time champion Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from this year's Italian Open, organisers said on Tuesday, in a blow to his French Open preparations.

Djokovic, who has been chasing a 100th tour-level title, will miss the Masters 1000 event in Rome for the first time since making his first appearance in 2007.

The Serb former world number one was handed a shock straight-sets defeat by Italian Matteo Arnaldi in the second round of the Madrid Open over the weekend.

The 37-year-old hinted it may have been his final appearance at the tournament, and he will now head to Roland Garros without a single win on clay this year after his second-round exit in Monte Carlo.

The 24-times Grand Slam champion has not won a title on the men's tour since his ATP Finals triumph in 2023, when he won



three out of four major titles.

World number five Djokovic owns ATP Masters 1000 records for most wins (414), semi-finals (79), finals (60) and titles (40).

The French Open begins on May 25.

Meanwhile Australia's two-times Grand Slam doubles champion Max Purcell has accepted an 18-month ban after breaching anti-doping rules, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) said on Tuesday.

Purcell admitted to a breach of rules relating to the use of a "prohibited method" after unknowingly receiving an IV infusion of vitamins above the allowed limit of 100 ml in a 12-hour span and entered into a provisional suspension in mid-December.

The world number 12 said at the time he had informed the clinic he was a professional athlete and that the infusion had to be less than 100 ml.