

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi Plans to Visit Pakistan and India This Week as Part of Tehran's Ongoing Consultations With Regional Countries, the Foreign Ministry Spokesman Said

IRAN NEWS

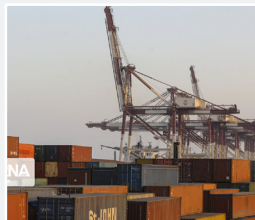
Deputy for International Affairs of Iran's Judiciary and Secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights Emphasized the Need for a Strong and Decisive Fight Against Terrorism and Terrorist Activities During a His Visit in Baghdad

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U.S., West Complicit in Israel's Killing of Journalists in Gaza



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei says the Israeli regime's systematic targeting of Palestinian journalists has been enabled by the unwavering support of its Western backers, particularly the United States.

On World Press Freedom Day, Baghaei hailed "the courage of those journalists, photographers and videographers who, over the past two years, risked their lives to expose the brutality of colonial genocide of Palestinians."

"We honor over 200 media workers who fell victim to the genocidal campaign they sought to unveil," Baghaei said Saturday in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

These journalists, he said, "were targeted because they felt obliged to document the extreme pain and suffering of Palestinians in Gaza and broadcast the atrocities of the apartheid occupying regime."

The Foreign Ministry spokesman also reiterated that Israel's ally, "the United States and other supporters, enablers and apologists of Israeli atrocities are complicit in those heinous crimes and shall be held accountable too."

Hamas said in an earlier statement that Israel's continued crimes against Palestinian media shed light on the extent of the regime's "fear of the media's impact and its role in exposing its crimes and aggression against our people."

According to Ajith Sunghay, representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, Gaza is one of the deadliest places in the world for journalists.

Iran-Afghanistan Trade Grows Under Taliban Rule



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Trade between Iran and Afghanistan has experienced notable growth since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 2021, according to Mahmoud Siyyadat, President of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce. Despite this upward trend, challenges remain, including unreliable trade statistics and the limited role of Iran's Export Guarantee Fund in supporting business with Afghanistan.

In an interview with ILNA, Siyyadat noted discrepancies in trade data between the two countries. While Afghanistan's Ministry of Industry and Commerce reports annual trade exceeding \$3 billion, Iranian customs places the figure closer to \$2.3 billion. He attributes the inconsistency to issues such as underreporting or overreporting by Iranian exporters struggling with repatriating export revenues, as well as differing reporting standards in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, bilateral trade saw growth last year, largely due to increased Iranian exports to Afghanistan. However, Siyyadat cautioned that a sustained trade imbalance—where Iran exports more than it imports—is not ideal for long-term relations.

A key factor driving this growth has been the shifting political landscape. "Before the Taliban's return, the presence of foreign powers in Afghanistan—many of whom were at odds with Iran—impeded trade. With the Taliban in power, many of those barriers have diminished," Siyyadat said. Additionally, millions of Afghan migrants living in Iran have developed a preference for Iranian products, further boosting demand.

No Benefit for Islamic Ummah Greater Than Unity



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says it is imperative on Muslim countries to unite and prevent tribulations similar to what is befalling on Gazans and the people of Yemen.

In a speech in Tehran on Sunday, Ayatollah Khamenei touched on the annual congregation of Hajj, which brings together and unites Muslims from different parts of the world irrespective of their race, color, and culture.

"The Hajj gathering is for the benefit of humanity and there is no benefit for the Islamic Ummah greater than unity," he told officials and organizers of the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, which able Muslims must make at least once in their lifetime.

"If the Islamic Ummah were united, the issues of Palestine and Gaza would not happen and Yemen would not be pressured like this," the Leader added.

Gaza is the target of a brutal campaign of aggression by Israel which has killed nearly 53,000 people in the besieged Palestinian territory since October 2023 and left it in total ruin.

U.S., UK and Israeli warplanes have been launching deadly attacks against Yemen since March 15, when U.S. President Donald Trump intensified the campaign that was started by the former administration last year to stop the Arab country's operations against Israel in solidarity with Gazans.

Ayatollah Khamenei highlighted the political aspect which underpins the role of Hajj, saying

that "contrary to the efforts, words, and actions of some who tarnish it, the essence of Hajj is political, its form is political, and its composition is political".

"Hajj perhaps is the only obligation whose outward form and appearance and its composition are 100 percent political," the Leader said.

"Gathering people in one place, at one time, every year - everyone who can - the very essence of this gathering together is political."

Far from being an ordinary pilgrimage and a sightseeing trip, the journey for Hajj is "participation in a very important practice that God Almighty has ordained for the management of humanity - not just the management of believers and Muslims, but for the management of humanity", the Leader said.

"Hajj is for the administration of humanity. The true Hajj is a service to humanity - not just to yourself, your country and the Islamic Ummah; it is a service to humanity," he added.

In continuation of his remarks, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution described knowledge and understanding of the goals and various dimensions of Hajj as a necessary prelude for pilgrims of the House of God to correctly fulfill this very important obligation. Citing numerous verses from the Holy Qur'an, he added: the repeated use of the word "tas" (people) in many of the verses related to Hajj shows that God has ordained this obligation for the management of the affairs of all people—not just Muslims. Therefore, a properly conducted Hajj is a service to all humanity.

Country Must Avoid Both Extremism and Dogmatism

TEHRAN - In a keynote address at the International Conference on Islamic Humanities, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Speaker of Iran's Majlis, emphasized the critical need for a transformation in the humanities grounded in Islamic teachings. He warned against the twin dangers of extremism and rigid traditionalism, stating that both hinder the development of effective Islamic governance.

"You cannot run a scientifically advanced country without producing knowledge," Qalibaf asserted. "One side denies the possibility and necessity of Islamic humanities, while the other suppresses intellectual growth. Both approaches are detrimental to Islamic rule."

Commemorating the late Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari and marking National Teachers' Day, Qalibaf cited Motahhari's belief that an Islamic society and government cannot be realized without an Islamic approach to the humanities. He outlined three essential pillars for forming an effective Islamic system: critically reassessing current humanities, reviving and reproducing Islamic sciences, and developing new Islamic humanities.

He also referenced the role of Ayatollah Khomeini's ideas in shaping the Islamic Revolution, noting that the Islamization of academic institutions and the democratization of governance are intertwined. "Islam seeks public engagement, and the people demand Islamic values. One cannot exist without the other," he said.

The speaker urged that Islamic humanities be both theoretically rooted in religion and practically informed by the lived experiences of Iranian society and governance. As the Islamic Republic enters its fifth decade, he identified two key priorities: organizing the public's way of life and governing based on religious values and teachings.

He called on scholars and academic institutions to move beyond abstract theoretical debates and instead focus on accurately analyzing the present state of society and offering concrete solutions. "If Islamic humanities do not serve to interpret realities and resolve practical societal issues, they will become ineffective," he warned.

With nearly five decades passing since the Islamic Revolution, Qalibaf acknowledged the accumulation of complex challenges that remain unaddressed by both society and the government. He emphasized the need to turn Islamic humanities into a widely accepted and specialized discourse to garner public support and enable its implementation in governance.

He reiterated that transformation in the country must be driven by reform and critical thinking rather than destruction or regression. "We must promote scientific competition in the field of Islamic humanities, align governance with academic outcomes, and prioritize



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

research that addresses the everyday problems of the public," he said.

Rejecting both blind imitation of Western humanities and the belittlement of Islamic sciences, Qalibaf said neither path leads to effective and desirable governance in Iran. "Islamic humanities are neither a failed project nor an inefficient endeavor, but they do require balanced and thorough review by experts."

He stressed the importance of moving beyond vague ideals and delivering tangible, practical results that benefit both society and government. Quoting the Supreme Leader's repeated calls for intellectual engagement, Qalibaf warned that a lack of critical thought leads to deviation and ultimately undermines legitimacy.

Addressing a decline in intellectual discourse in the 2010s, Qalibaf said the current decade is suffering from the consequences of that stagnation. "Without thought, governance fails. The result is public dissatisfaction and a loss of legitimacy."

He also referenced the Supreme Leader's recent remarks on reviving the scientific and cultural movement, noting that Iran's scientific momentum has slowed and the role of humanities in national progress has been overlooked.

Drawing on four decades of post-revolutionary governance, Qalibaf urged a critical and innovative examination of this experience to develop new academic models. He also encouraged engagement with mainstream global humanities—not to reinvent the wheel, but to go beyond a subordinate role and actively shape the discipline.

"If we want a functional Islamic governance system, we must take knowledge management seriously," he stated. "Islamic humanities can play a strategic role in that effort."

In closing, Qalibaf emphasized the importance of updating Iran's comprehensive national scientific roadmap with a stronger focus on Islamic humanities. "This isn't just another document for managers' bookshelves—it's a practical response to the civilizational and cognitive challenges we face," he said.

He added that Parliament, through its research bodies such as the Majlis Research Center, the Islamic Research Center in Qom, and the Parliamentary Library and Archives, is both equipped and obligated to help advance Islamic humanities.

He concluded, "If we fail to properly identify and define our problems, we will not be able to solve them. The Parliament stands ready to apply the insights of Islamic humanities in all areas of governance—from economics and administration to culture, society, domestic and foreign policy, defense, security, and the environment."

Low Incomes Force Gov't to Intervene in Economy



TEHRAN - The government is compelled to intervene in the economy at times due to the low average income levels in the country, Government Spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani said on Saturday.

Speaking at a meeting with economic stakeholders and members of the Kerman Chamber of Commerce, Mohajerani addressed the issue of government subsidies and responded to some participants' calls for subsidy reform. She emphasized that sudden changes are not feasible.

"We cannot make abrupt decisions because they would endanger the livelihoods of many people," she said. "Changes must be gradual, consistent, and goal-oriented. These are part of economic and administrative reforms."

Mohajerani acknowledged governance shortcomings, saying, "We wish we had governed in a way that allowed us to speak about achievements instead of problems. Governance must be reformed, and steps are being taken in that direction, including through the Seventh Development Plan."

Highlighting the economic challenges, she said parts of the population are severely impoverished, making it necessary for the government to intervene in market regulation. "Although in many countries the market regulates itself, our conditions require us to have a market regulation task force," she noted.

Referring to limitations on exports, she said the Seventh Plan stipulates that the government should not block exports. However, she added, "There are specific times, such as during Ramadan, when domestic demand for products like dates forces us to halt exports. This is a natural market mechanism."

Mohajerani also commented on energy pricing, stating that while market forces signal that current energy prices are unrealistic, aligning prices with real values is difficult under present economic conditions.

She acknowledged that the government is sometimes used to certain practices and, in some cases, lacks clear direction on implementing changes.

The spokesperson emphasized the government's belief in strengthening the private sector. "There is consensus within the government that we must empower the private sector and avoid imposing excessive regulations," she said.

She called on business leaders and economic actors to view problems from different angles and offer targeted solutions.

Iran Censures Israel's Attack on Gaza-Bound Aid Ship Off Malta



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has denounced Israel's "blatant crime" in conducting a drone attack on a Gaza-bound ship carrying humanitarian aid and activists off the coast of Malta in international waters.

In a statement on Saturday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said the drone attack "is a blatant crime against the people of Palestine and a terrorist act against maritime security and safety."

A vessel belonging to the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, the Conscience, came under attack by an Israeli drone strike in international waters near Malta, while it was attempting to bring humanitarian aid to the besieged Palestinian territory. The attack caused an explosion and fire.

The Maltese government said the fire had been brought under control, adding that 16 people were on board. But the Freedom Flotilla Coalition said 30 people were aboard the vessel when it came under attack, adding that the targeted ship sent a distress signal.

Baghaei said the attack was part of the genocidal and colonial plan against the Palestinian people to ensure the continuation of the food and medical blockade on the innocent people of Gaza.

The Israeli regime continues its genocide in Gaza by dropping bombs and imposing famine on the strip, he said.

"Depriving the wounded, sick, and mourning children and women in Gaza of food, water, and medicine is a clear example of a war crime and a crime against humanity," the spokesman emphasized.

IRAN NEWS



Joint Iran-Germany Vocational Training Initiative Launched

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A new joint initiative between Iran and Germany is set to bring the dual vocational training model to the Arvand Free Zone, following preliminary agreements reached during the Iran Expo exhibition. Seyed Mostafa Mousavi, President of the Khorramshahr Chamber of Commerce, announced that the initial understanding has been reached for the implementation of the national “Khorramshahr Chamber Campaign” – a project aimed at launching vocational and technical training programs based on the dual education system, which integrates theoretical and practical learning, modeled after successful experiences in Germany.

VP Emphasizes Leveraging Global Scientific Expertise for National Progress



TEHRAN - In a meeting with senior officials from the Center for Strategic Transformation and Progress, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref called on the organization to take a proactive role in addressing the country's pressing challenges. He emphasized the importance of learning from international scientific and technological experiences and adapting them to suit domestic needs.

According to a report by the Vice President's Office, Aref described the Center as the government's strategic think tank, stressing that its input is crucial in tackling key issues such as economic imbalances and living standards.

"The efforts and achievements of this center are vital to the implementation of government programs," Aref stated. "We must urgently establish mechanisms for collaboration with relevant government sectors aligned with the center's activities."

Highlighting the center's previous contributions, Aref noted that it has been a major driver of scientific and technological advancement in Iran, thanks to the involvement of young, knowledgeable, and dedicated experts.

He reiterated the center's pivotal role in the implementation of long-term strategic national plans and emphasized the continued need for international collaboration. "We must draw on the scientific and technological experiences of other countries and localize them for Iran's development," he said.

Referring to the Supreme Leader's guidance on the centrality of science and technology to national progress, Aref noted that the center has always prioritized problem-solving in its agenda, achieving noteworthy results.

He also urged the center to expand its international cooperation, particularly in light of enhanced foreign relations under the 14th government. Aref encouraged stronger ties with regional organizations and African nations.

Additionally, he highlighted the importance of prioritizing key national needs, particularly in pharmaceuticals, technology, and artificial intelligence.

The meeting began with presentations by the center's deputies, who outlined achievements in biotechnology, food security, industrial development, aviation, medicine, and public health.

Iran's Tourism Industry Targeted by "Iranophobia"



TEHRAN - The Director General of Iran's Office for Foreign Tourism Marketing and Development has warned that the spread of negative news aimed at fueling "Iranophobia" is a deliberate tactic to undermine the country's tourism industry, despite the absence of major visa barriers for most international travelers.

In an interview with IRNA, Moslem Shojaei stated that while many tourists face no issues obtaining visas to enter Iran, widespread dissemination of negative media coverage—often by hostile foreign outlets—creates fear and uncertainty. "Incidents like the one in Shahid Rajaei Port in Hormozgan are exaggerated by adversarial media to deter tourists," he said. "We need to actively counter these narratives."

Shojaei emphasized that Iran has mutually or unilaterally lifted visa requirements with over 40 countries. Among them are Turkey, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Oman, and Tunisia, which enjoy reciprocal visa waivers, while Uzbekistan benefits from a unilateral exemption. "With the exception of about 10 or 11 countries—where our diplomatic strategy has chosen to enforce stricter visa rules—citizens of most nations can obtain a visa on arrival at Iranian airports," he added.

Addressing why some visa waivers are one-sided, Shojaei explained, "We usually take the first step, hoping the other country reciprocates. Some don't, due to diplomatic or economic reasons."

When asked about the effectiveness of international events like expos and business-to-business (B2B) tourism meetings in combating Iranophobia, Shojaei stressed their importance as key marketing tools. "Over 120 foreign tour operators recently visited Iran for a B2B event. They're active on social media, so by sharing their experiences, they help broadcast the message that Iran's tourism sector is vibrant, appealing, and ready to engage with the world."

Shojaei highlighted the significance of this B2B event, noting that while a similar gathering took place a decade ago in Tehran, this was the first of its kind organized inside Iran. The private sector handled the identification and invitation of tour operators, while the government focused solely on policy-making. During the event, participants networked at designated tables, exchanged business cards, and discussed joint initiatives for future tours.

Global Tariff Tensions Pose Threat to Iran's Export Markets



TEHRAN - The head of the Trade Development Research Institute at the Institute for Trade Studies and Research has warned that recent global tariff tensions and China's excess industrial capacity could pose a serious threat to consumer markets in the Middle East, particularly Iran's export market to Iraq.

According to IRNA, during a forum on identifying export markets for industrial goods in Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (P)GCC countries, Amin Maleki stated that by the end of the Iranian year 1403 (March 2025), Iran's exports to Iraq had reached \$12 billion. This made Iraq Iran's second-largest non-oil export destination after China, which accounted for nearly \$15 billion.

Maleki highlighted Iraq's strategic importance in Iran's trade portfolio. He pointed out that while Iran exported \$12 billion worth of non-oil goods to Iraq, Iraq's exports to Iran stood at just \$566 million. This trade surplus in Iran's favor is five times larger than Iran's surplus with Afghanistan, which ranks second in terms of trade surplus with Iran.

However, Maleki cautioned that this trade imbalance is unsustainable from Iraq's perspective. As a country lacking an industrial production system, Iraq has shown little interest in signing preferential or free trade agreements with Iran. Instead, in recent years, Iraq has sought to diversify its trade routes and balance its trade by enhancing cooperation with other countries.

He stressed that one of the key strategies outlined in Iran's development plans is to redirect trade flows from the United Arab Emirates to Iraq, especially in goods for which infrastructure already exists. Maleki also noted that due to new European Union import regulations—such as increased scrutiny on carbon border adjustment mechanisms—Turkey is emerging as another strong competitor in Iraq's market, leveraging its strategic trade relations and aggressive marketing efforts.

During the same session, Mehdi Nejatnia, Iran's former commercial attaché in Iraq and author of several trade guides on Iraq, emphasized the underutilization of trade infrastructure and the lack of Iraqi participation in the bilateral trade process. He explained that this has led to dissatisfaction among Iraqi citizens, particularly in border areas and the transport sector. They expect Iran to give them a greater share in the logistics of transporting goods into Iraq.

Nejatnia suggested that Iraq could also serve as a strategic hub for the re-export of goods needed by Iran. This would help reduce Iraq's trade deficit with Iran and allow Iran to better use the foreign currency earned from gas and electricity exports to Iraq to fund essential imports.

He warned that without a change in trade policy, Iran's access to the Iraqi market could face serious challenges within the next two years. Therefore, coordinated and unified policymaking is necessary across various decision-making bodies.

Nejatnia emphasized the need to implement a comprehensive roadmap for economic and trade cooperation between Iran and Iraq. He stressed that commercial priorities should be given as much weight as religious, military, and cultural ties to create a mutually reinforcing relationship.

He also advocated for identifying key areas for joint investment, establishing a robust trade command center, and ensuring the Iranian government plays a facilitating role in advancing private sector goals in Iraq.

Finally, he concluded that Iran has the capability to engage in multilateral investment projects in Iraq and to build industrial zones there. This would not only reduce the distance to key export markets but also increase Iraqi involvement and perceived benefits in bilateral trade.

Global Stage Open for Iran's Scientific Engagements



TEHRAN - The President of the Center for Scientific and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Science emphasized on Sunday that under Iran's 14th administration, international scientific collaboration is not limited to neighboring countries—global opportunities remain open for such engagement.

Farhad Yazdandoust, in an interview with IRNA, stated: "International activities are inherently part of the responsibilities of university faculty and academic systems worldwide, and the Ministry of Science under the 14th government is no exception to this global norm."

He highlighted that since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has made significant progress in science, technology, and higher education by relying on its own capabilities. "Through our collaborations with universities worldwide, we've been able to further showcase these advancements," he said.

Yazdandoust pointed to the presence and achievements of Iranian elites abroad as evidence of Iran's scientific potential. "Iranian talents are highly regarded internationally and have attained special status in the academic ranks of various countries," he noted.

He stressed the importance of recognizing and investing in the intelligence and capabilities of Iranian youth and elites, regardless of the political orientation of the government. "These young minds are a vast source of innovation and should be at the heart of national priorities."

Yazdandoust also announced the revival of scientific exchanges and cooperation with countries that maintain an active focus on research and development. "We hope, with the support of other agencies, these efforts will be successful," he added.

He asserted that expanding scientific collaboration with other countries fosters self-confidence, generates momentum, and serves as a long-term investment. "This shows young people that the path to global engagement is open and that they can build scientific ties internationally."

Clarifying his role, Yazdandoust stated: "I don't see myself as managing a mere international office—we are fundamentally responsible for enabling and facilitating deeper connections between universities and national research bodies."

Emphasizing that neighboring countries remain a priority for international collaboration, he said:

"Despite the unfair treatment Iran faces from some global powers and biased perceptions about our country, our neighbors present vast opportunities. Their need for Iran's scientific and technical expertise is a strong foundation for joint ventures."

He also pointed out that Iran's scientific relations are not confined to neighboring states. "Our ties with CIS countries are strengthening, and we are working to establish exchanges with both nearby and more distant nations that have weaker scientific infrastructures, so we can assist them."

Yazdandoust added that cooperation with leading Asian countries such as China and South Korea helps these nations better understand Iran's hidden scientific capabilities, paving the way for positive developments.

He concluded by highlighting the scientific and technological aspirations of African and South American nations: "We can and should collaborate with these countries. The global stage is open to us—we are not limited."

Concerns and Hopes Surround Russian Carmaker's Entry Into Iran



TEHRAN - The Russian automaker AvtoVAZ, known globally under the "Lada" brand, has announced plans to begin assembling cars in Iran, aiming to introduce its vehicles into the domestic market. This news has stirred both optimism and caution within the Iranian automotive industry.

While some view the move as an opportunity to offer consumers more affordable and higher-quality alternatives to domestically produced vehicles, others warn of a repeat of past experiences involving low-quality imports—particularly from certain Chinese brands.

Mostafa Pourdehghan, a member of Iran's Parliament Commission on Industries and Mines, stated that while expanding car supply—both domestic and imported—is a legislative priority, quality must not be sacrificed. He emphasized that Parliament has officially warned the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade (commonly referred to as "Sanat") to ensure strict quality control on imported and assembled vehicles.

"We won't allow a repeat of the bitter experience we had with some Chinese car brands. The Iranian people deserve modern, high-quality vehicles," he said.

Pourdehghan added that while joint ventures with reputable international automakers could help boost vehicle supply, the government must ensure such collaborations do not lead to the entry of substandard products.

Kambiz Mirkarimi, a board member of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce, expressed a positive outlook on the Russian investment, noting that Lada is a well-established automaker with a long history of exports to CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries.

He highlighted that AvtoVAZ has recently begun exploring new markets, including Vietnam, the UAE, and Cuba. With the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union set to take effect on May 14, Mirkarimi believes conditions are favorable for Russian investment. He emphasized that the elimination of tariffs on raw materials and finished products between Iran and Russia could significantly lower production costs, making Russian vehicles more competitive.

Iran's Share in Syrian Import Market at Just 10%



TEHRAN - According to a recent report by the Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce, Iran currently holds only a 10% share of Syria's import market, despite significant export growth to global markets. The report highlights serious logistical and political challenges that limit Iran's trade potential with Syria, while countries like Turkey, China, and Russia dominate the Syrian market.

Turkey alone supplies nearly 50% of Syria's imports, making it the leading trade partner and a formidable competitor for Iranian exporters. While Iran has achieved over 25% growth in its global exports, its comparatively modest presence in Syria underscores a major underutilized opportunity.

A key issue hampering Iranian trade is limited access to reliable transit routes. Syria and Iran do not share a direct border, making cooperation with neighboring countries—particularly Iraq—vital for overland transport. However, the report stresses that some of these transit countries enforce restrictive regulations or fail to align with Iran-Syria trade agreements, effectively impeding the movement of goods. This lack of regional coordination creates both tariff and non-tariff barriers, disrupting efforts to expand bilateral trade.

Another obstacle identified in the report is the restrictive business environment in Syria itself. Government-backed organizations and parallel entities often dominate market access, making it difficult for private sector players—especially foreign firms—to compete. These entities frequently benefit from preferential treatment, leading to reduced trust among private investors and Iranian exporters.

The report concludes that for Iran to improve its economic footprint in Syria, greater diplomatic and logistical cooperation is needed with transit countries, along with efforts to foster a more competitive and transparent trade environment in Syria. Without such changes, Iran risks being sidelined in a market where it could otherwise play a much larger role, given its industrial capabilities and proximity.

Russia's Drone Attack on Kyiv Sets Several Residential Buildings on Fire

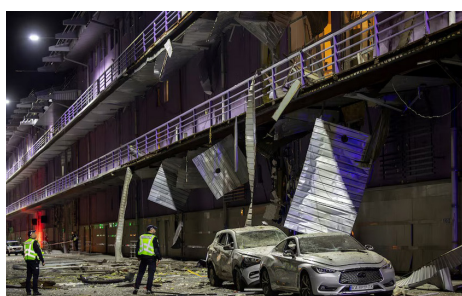
KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia's overnight drone attack on Kyiv damaged several residential buildings and set cars on fire throughout the city, the military and officials of the Ukrainian capital said.

Falling debris from destroyed drones sparked fires at residential buildings in Kyiv's Obolonskyi and Sviatoshynskiy districts, Timur Tkachenko, head of Kyiv's military administration, said on social media.

He added that several cars throughout the city also caught fire from falling drone debris.

Mayor Vitali Klitschko said on the Telegram messaging app that medics were called to the Sviatoshynskiy district, west of the city centre, where they provided assistance.

Reuters' witnesses heard several explosions in what sounded like air defence systems in operation.



Australia's Re-Elected Gov't Says U.S.-China Tussle a Top Priority



SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Australia's government will prioritise dealing with the "dark shadow" of the U.S.-China trade war following its resounding reelection victory, Treasurer Jim Chalmers said on Sunday, after a campaign that highlighted concerns over U.S. trade policy and the global economy.

Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese, Australia's first prime minister to win a second consecutive term in two decades, promised in remarks on Sunday that he would run a disciplined and orderly government, stressing that Australians had voted for unity.

The centre-left Labor Party appeared likely to expand its majority in parliament to at least 85 seats from 77, the Australian Broadcasting Corp projected, after most polls had suggested it would struggle to keep its slim hold on the 150-seat lower house. More than two-thirds of votes have been tallied, with counting to resume on Monday.

Echoing an election in Canada less than a week earlier, Australia's conservative opposition leader, Peter Dutton, lost his seat as voters, who initially focused on cost-of-living pressures, grew increasingly concerned over U.S. President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs and other policies.

"We will be a disciplined, orderly government in our second term, just like we have been in our first," Albanese told reporters while visiting a coffee shop in his Sydney electorate where he said his late mother took him as a child.

"The Australian people voted for unity rather than division," Albanese added in brief public comments.

Polls had shown Labor trailing the opposition conservative coalition for nine months until March, amid widespread angst about the government's handling of inflation.

Singapore's Ruling Party Extends Monopoly With Decisive Election Win



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore's People's Action Party won its 14th successive election on Saturday to extend its unbroken six-decade rule, delivering a strong mandate to its new premier as the city-state braces for economic turbulence from a global trade war.

The PAP, which has ruled since before Singapore's 1965 independence, won 87 of the 97 parliamentary seats up for grabs, with victories by huge margins in many of the 33 constituencies as the opposition failed to extend gains in previous contests.

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The election was a bellwether of the popularity of the PAP amid some signs of disenchantment with its tight grip on power in the Asian financial hub, whose six million people have known no other kind of government.

Though the PAP has consistently won about 90% of seats, its share of the popular vote is closely watched as a measure of the strength of its mandate, with Prime Minister Lawrence Wong eager to leave a mark on his first election in charge after one of the PAP's worst performances on record last time.

Zelenskiy Says He Discussed Air Defense, Sanctions With Trump in Vatican Meeting



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he discussed air defense systems and sanctions on Russia with Donald Trump on the sidelines of Pope Francis' funeral at the Vatican, in what he called the best meeting the two had ever had.

In comments released by his presidential administration, Zelenskyy also said he and the U.S. president agreed that a 30-day ceasefire between Kyiv and Moscow was the correct first step towards ending the war in Ukraine.

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He said he raised the topic of sanctions with Trump at the impromptu meeting last week, and that Trump's response on this question was "very strong". Zelenskyy did not give specifics.

He also said the critical minerals deal signed by the two countries on Wednesday was mutually beneficial, and that it would allow Ukraine to defend future U.S. investments, as well as its own territory and people.

The accord, heavily touted by Trump, will give the United States preferential access to new Ukrainian minerals deals and unleash U.S. investment in Ukraine's reconstruction.

Zelenskyy said that the money would, at least initially, be reinvested and not leave Ukraine.

"Only if the parties then, in the future, agree that in 20 years the fund is fine, things are being built, there is production," he said, appearing to refer to the possibility of withdrawals in the longer term.

The deal aims to establish a fund to manage investments and hold profits. Zelenskyy said there will be a 3-3 split between Ukrainian and U.S. appointees on the plan's supervisory board, which would choose its director.

On the security element of the deal, Zelenskyy highlighted the importance of more effective air defences that have remained one of Kyiv's main requests to its allies throughout Russia's three-year-old full-scale invasion.

"And so we are ready for air defence systems to be a contribution (to the fund). I told him about the number (of systems

that we need) - he told me that they will work on it, (that) these things are not free."

Zelenskyy said that \$30 billion of military aid allocated in 2024 by the U.S. Congress was due to be supplied in 2025 and 2026, \$15 billion of it each year. It was not clear if his remark included aid already supplied in 2025.

His comments raised the issue of whether the amount allocated for 2026 could, as a result of the minerals agreement, be brought forward to this year, and then counted towards the U.S. contribution to the deal's fund.

"Ukraine will then return its half bit by bit, and this is what the agreement is about," Zelenskyy said. "What is historic about this event is that the Americans can come to the Ukrainian market for the first time."

The minerals agreement was reached at a time when the U.S. says it is growing increasingly frustrated by the failure of Moscow and Kyiv to come to the table for peace talks.

Kyiv says it wants an immediate unconditional ceasefire for at least 30 days. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he agrees in principle, but that there are many issues that need to be clarified before that can happen.

Responding to Moscow's offer of a three-day ceasefire around May 9, when Russia celebrates its World War Two victory over Nazi Germany, Zelenskyy said he was ready as long as the truce would be 30 days in length.

He said Ukraine, given continued war with Russia, could not guarantee the safety of any foreign dignitaries who came to Moscow for the traditional May 9 victory parade there.

"We cannot be responsible for what happens on the territory of the Russian Federation. They are responsible for your security, and therefore we will not give you any guarantees."

In response, Dmitry Medvedev, headline deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said nobody could guarantee the Ukrainian capital Kyiv would survive to see May 10 if Ukraine attacked Moscow on May 9.

India Bans Pakistani Stars, Halts Mail and Trade in Tit-for-Tat Escalation

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - New Delhi widened tit-for-tat measures against Islamabad on Saturday, blocking access to the social media accounts of Pakistani actors and cricketers, as well as extending trade blocks and stopping postal services.

India blames Pakistan of backing the deadliest attack in years on civilians in Indian-administered Kashmir on April 22, in which 26 men were killed.

Islamabad has rejected the charge, and both countries have since exchanged gunfire across their contested de facto border in Kashmir.

Pakistan's military said it carried out a "training launch" of a surface-to-surface missile weapons system on Saturday, further heightening tensions.

On Saturday, India's communications ministry issued a statement saying it had "decided to suspend the exchange of all categories of inbound mail and parcels from Pakistan through air and surface routes".

The arch-rivals had already expelled each other's citizens and closed the main border crossing, and barred aircraft from each other's airspace.

Indian media on Saturday, citing a Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) order, said that Pakistani-flagged ships are barred from any Indian port — and Indian ships are banned from Pakistan.



The move, however, is seen as largely symbolic, as regular diplomatic flare-ups between the neighbours over decades have prevented close economic ties.

But cultural ties remain far stronger; the nations were only divided by the 1947 colonial creation at the violent end of British rule, partitioning the sub-continent into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan.

On social media, India banned on April 28 more than a dozen Pakistani YouTube channels for allegedly spreading "provocative" content, including Pakistani news outlets.

On Saturday, further restrictions blocked access in India to the Instagram account of Pakistan's ex-prime minister and cricket captain Imran Khan.

Bollywood movie regulars Fawad Khan and Atif Aslam were also off limits, as well as a wide range of cricketers — including star batters Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan and retired players Shahid Afridi and Wasim Akram.

Olympic gold medalist Arshad Nadeem's Instagram account was also no longer accessible to Indian users, reflecting the broad scope of the clampdown beyond just cricket.

Users in India attempting to access these accounts are shown a message indicating that they are unavailable due to compliance with a legal request.

Israel Mobilizes Tens of Thousands of Reservists as Gaza Offensive Intensifies

TEL AVIV (Dispatches) - Israel was issuing orders to call up tens of thousands of reservists ahead of an expanded offensive in Gaza, Israeli media reported Saturday, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attacked truce mediator Qatar.

Several news outlets reported the military had begun sending the orders for reservists to replace conscripts and active-duty soldiers in Israel and the occupied West Bank so they can be redeployed to Gaza.

A military spokesperson neither confirmed nor denied the reports, but relatives of AFP journalists were among those who received mobilisation orders.

According to Israel's public broadcaster, the security cabinet is scheduled to meet on Sunday to approve the expansion of the military offensive in Gaza.

Israel resumed major operations across Gaza on March 18 amid deadlock over how to proceed with a two-month ceasefire that had largely halted the war sparked by Hamas's October 2023 attack.

Qatar, which hosts Hamas's political office, brokered the truce alongside the US and



Egypt that came into effect in January. Efforts to secure a new deal however have appeared to stall in recent weeks.

Netanyahu accused the gas-rich Persian Gulf state of "playing both sides with its double talk". Posting on X, he said Qatar had to "decide if it's on the side of civilization or if it's on the side of Hamas barbarism".

The Israeli prime minister, under pressure from his far-right supporters, without whom he would lose his governing coalition, has been increasingly vocal in his calls to continue the war since the restart of the Gaza offensive.

"Israel will win this just war with just means," he added.

Qatari foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari rejected the "inflammatory" comments, charging that they "fall far short of the most basic standards of political and moral responsibility" in a statement on X.

Israel has also blocked all aid deliveries to Gaza since March 2, prompting warnings from UN agencies of impending humanitarian disaster.



LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal suffered a blow ahead of their Champions League showdown with Paris Saint-Germain as Evanilson fired Bournemouth to a historic 2-1 victory, while Aston Villa boosted their top five bid with a 1-0 win against Fulham.

Mikel Arteta's side took the lead through Declan Rice's first half opener on his 100th appearance for the club.

But Dean Huijsen equalised in the second half and Evanilson completed the comeback to give Bournemouth their first ever away win over Arsenal.

Beaten 1-0 by PSG in the Champions League semi-final first leg on Tuesday, Arsenal will need a much-improved performance in the second leg in Paris on Wednesday.

The second-placed Gunners also still require six points to guarantee Champions League qualification for next season via a top five finish in the Premier League.

Arsenal finished as runners-up behind Manchester City for the last two seasons and the Champions League is their last hope of a trophy this term.

They last reached the Champions League final in 2006 and have never won the tournament.

"We should have put the game to bed. We defended really poorly, nowhere near the standards that

we are used to," Arteta said.

"We wanted to generate the momentum and a really positive vibe today and we haven't.

"What we have created is frustration, rage and anger. Make sure we use that on Wednesday."

Unai Emery's side are back in the hunt to finish in the Premier League's top five thanks to Youri Tielemans' 12th-minute header at Villa Park.

Seventh-placed Villa extended their unbeaten run on home turf to 20 games in all competitions, lifting them level with sixth-placed Nottingham Forest and fifth-placed Chelsea on 60 points.

After bouncing back from their dismal FA Cup semi-final loss to Crystal Palace last weekend, Villa will hope their rivals falter over the weekend as the top five race heads for a dramatic climax.

"If we weren't winning today, forget it completely," Emery said.

"Today, we got more or less to be close to Europe. Wow, fantastic, brilliant. The best gift we can achieve after it is the Europa League or Champions League.

"We will fight for it, Europe, and hopefully we can fight for the Champions League."

Southampton wasted a chance to avoid a share of the lowest points total in Premier League history as Jamie Vardy's 199th Leicester goal inspired a 2-0 win at the King Power Stadium.

Verstappen Flies to Miami Pole as Hamilton Hits Ferrari Slump

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Red Bull's Max Verstappen grabbed pole position for the Miami Grand Prix with a blistering fastest lap of 1:26.204 in qualifying.

The Dutchman was 0.065 seconds ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris, while 18-year-old Kimi Antonelli of Mercedes again impressed by powering into third place on the grid.

There was more disappointment for seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton in his first season with Ferrari as he was eliminated in Q2 and will start in 12th place.

Verstappen's aggressive approach in the first sector paid off and gives him a chance for a third win in four years at Miami.

"It has been a great qualifying. We improved the car a tiny amount too. Q1, Q2, Q3 — just improving every run, trying to find the limit. It worked out well. I'm very happy to be on pole," said Verstappen.

"Race pace, I don't know. We have to wait and see with the weather. To be honest, the colder the better. No one has really done any long running with the sprint race here."

The Dutchman announced on Friday that he had become a father for the first time, with his girlfriend Kelly Piquet giving birth to their daughter, Lily.

That prompted speculation among some pundits that fatherhood might slow him down — a belief occasionally heard in the sport that drivers lose their edge once they become parents.



It is not a view Verstappen takes seriously.

"I don't listen to these kinds of silly things," he said.

"I just do my thing. I think there are enough racing drivers in the past that have been world champions even after having kids. Honestly, I don't even know where that comes from."

Norris, who won the sprint race earlier in the day to close the gap on championship leader and teammate Oscar Piastri, was disappointed not to grab pole as he eyes a repeat of his win here last year, but said he was pleased with his performance.

"I'm happy with today, happy with the progress I've been making with the car and myself. Max did a Max lap again, I can't fault him. It's all shoulda, woulda, coulda. I didn't deliver again but the pace is good. I still haven't put it together," said the Briton.

"I don't mind if it is dry or wet, I'll be ready for both."

Antonelli, who became the youngest driver to grab pole in any F1 race after taking the top position for the sprint race, again showed his speed and potential.

Although he could not capitalise on his sprint pole, finishing seventh, he remains confident.

"This weekend is going well so far. A bit disappointing this morning, but good to bounce back this way. I struggled a little bit in quali, I didn't have a clean lap like yesterday. It's really about putting everything together and so far this weekend, I am doing that," said the Bologna-born driver.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc qualified a disappointing eighth, having never contended for the front row, and he could not hide his frustration.

"The feeling is not great. But it's the way it is. It's just frustrating because when you do your best and the best is P8, with a Ferrari it hurts, and the two Williams in front of us — I didn't do any mistakes... we are just not fast enough," he said.

Adding to Ferrari's woes, Hamilton failed to reach the final session.

Nuggets Throttle Clippers, Take Game 7 in First-Round Series

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Aaron Gordon scored 22 points, Christian Braun had 21 and the host Denver Nuggets used a big third quarter to beat the Los Angeles Clippers 120-101 in Game 7 of their Western Conference quarterfinal series.

Denver advances to face the top-seeded Thunder in the conference semifinals. Game 1 is Monday night in Oklahoma City.

Nikola Jokic finished two assists shy of a triple-double, posting 16 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists along with three steals.

"In the playoffs, we know that everybody needs to step up," Jokic said. "Is it offensive? Is it defensive? Really, whatever. Energy-wise, in players, everybody needs to step up. And everybody who plays needs to contribute something, especially today ... everybody did that."

The Nuggets had six scorers reach double figures. Russell Westbrook had 16 points, five rebounds, five assists and five



steals, Jamal Murray also scored 16 points and Michael Porter Jr. finished with 15.

Kawhi Leonard led Los Angeles with 22 points, Ivica Zubac had 10 points and 14 rebounds, Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 12 off the bench and Derrick Jones Jr. also had 12.

James Harden was held to seven points on 2-for-8 shooting but dished out 13 assists for the Clippers, who lost in the first round of the playoffs for the third straight season.

"I haven't thought about the offseason, to be honest," Clippers coach Tyronn Lue said. "I thought about OKC; that's what I was thinking. But it didn't work out that way. ... It's frustrating losing, but I'm not frustrated with the guys in the locker room."

The Nuggets outscored Los Angeles 37-21 in the second quarter to take an 11-point halftime lead and came out hot in the third.

Jokic hit a fall-away 16-footer, Gordon fed Braun for a 3-pointer then dunked to make it 65-50 and prompt a Clippers timeout.

Al-Ahli Down Kawasaki Frontale to Lift Asian Champions League Title



JEDDAH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's Al-Ahli beat Japan's Kawasaki Frontale 2-0 to win the Asian Champions League Elite title for the first time at a raucous King Abdullah Sports City Stadium.

Brazil winger Galeno broke Kawasaki's resistance in the 35th minute when he bent an unstoppable strike into the top corner to send the home side on the way to their first Asian title, with Franck Kessie heading in the second seven minutes later.

The victory makes Al-Ahli the third Saudi club to win the competition in its various guises, joining city rivals and twice winners Al-Ittihad and Riyadh's four-times champions Al-Hilal.

"We are so proud," said Al-Ahli goalkeeper Edouard Mendy. "Once we knew the final eight would be played in Jeddah it was our goal to be champions in front of our fans. Since I came here 18 months ago they have supported us so much.

"As I said when I signed here, it's to make history, to continue to win trophies and make this club as big as it was before."

Al-Ahli were heavy favourites with a lineup featuring an expensively acquired array of foreign talent that includes UEFA Champions League winners Riyad Mahrez and Roberto Firmino.

Twice inside the opening six minutes Louis Yamaguchi denied the home side, the Kawasaki goalkeeper blocking Ivan Toney's viciously struck right-foot effort before making a point-blank block at the resulting corner from Ziyad Al-Johani.

The Japanese outfit almost silenced the crowd in the 11th minute with a moment of individual skill from Marcinho, the Brazilian gliding beyond Ali Majrashi to bear down on goal only to shoot across the area and past the far post.

Toney fired wide and Roger Ibanez was just off target with a curling effort from the edge of the area as Al-Ahli increased the pressure, but a disciplined Kawasaki held firm.

However, the opener eventually came with 10 minutes remaining of the first half when Kawasaki gave away possession close to their own goal.

Messi and Miami Bounce Back With 4-1 Crushing of Red Bulls



MIAMI (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi was on target as Inter Miami bounced back from their CONCACAF Champions Cup exit, beating the New York Red Bulls 4-1 at Chase Stadium.

Miami had lost their last three games, including a 5-1 aggregate defeat to the Vancouver Whitecaps in the Champions Cup semi-finals, but they got a much-needed morale boost with a comfortable Major League Soccer victory.

Fafa Picault opened the scoring in the ninth minute, blasting home at the back post after Luis Suarez had flicked on a cross from Marcelo Weigandt.

Full-back Weigandt doubled the advantage in the 30th minute when his diving header was parried by Carlos Coronel and the Argentine followed in to scoop the ball home.

The goal was initially flagged for offside but after a VAR review the referee ruled it should stand.

Suarez made it 3-0 nine minutes later, firing home at the second attempt after his initial shot had been blocked but the Red Bulls pulled a goal back before the break.

An Omar Valencia corner deep to the back post was looped over Oscar Ustari and into the far corner to give the visitors some hope for the second half.

Miami stayed on top, however, and Messi extended their advantage in the 67th minute, playing a one-two with Telasco Segovia and holding off Noah Eile before beating Coronel with a left-foot finish.

The goal ended a run of four matches without Messi being on the scoresheet and the win moved Miami up to fourth place in the Eastern Conference.

Elsewhere, former Saint-Etienne midfielder Dylan Chambost opened his account in MLS with the first goal in the Columbus Crew's 4-2 win over Charlotte.