

At the Invitation of Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov Is Scheduled to visit Tehran on Sunday, May 11, Leading a High-Level Delegation

# IRAN NEWS

Director of International, legal and Parliamentary Affairs at the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Says Iran Is Not the Only Country in the World that Enriches Uranium But Does Not Have a Nuclear Weapons Program

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## Iran, U.S. to Hold Fourth Round of Talks in Oman



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says the fourth round of indirect talks between Iran and the United States will be held on Sunday.

Speaking in an interview, Araqchi said Oman, as the mediator country, determines the time and venue of the negotiations.

He added that Oman has asked about Iran's view on the resumption of the talks with the US on Sunday, "and we announced our agreement."

Oman has apparently held talks with the opposite side in this regard, he added.

The top Iranian negotiator emphasized that the Tehran-Washington talks are progressing.

"Naturally, the more progress we make, the more consultations and reviews will be required," he said, adding, "the delegations need more time to examine the issues raised."

"But it is important that we are moving forward in a way that will gradually lead us into the details," he explained.

Mediated by Oman, Iran and the US have held three rounds of talks in the Omani capital of Muscat and Italian capital of Rome on April 12, 19, and 26 with the aim of reaching a deal on Iran's nuclear program and the removal of sanctions on Tehran.

Both parties have so far expressed satisfaction with the way the negotiations are moving on, praising the talks as "positive" and "moving forward."

## Iran and Russia to Expand Maritime Transport Cooperation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Russia have agreed to deepen maritime transport cooperation and will hold a joint meeting in the Russian port city of Makhachkala within the next two months, according to Iranian and Russian transport officials.

During a phone conversation, Saeed Rasouli, Iran's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and Director of the Ports and Maritime Organization, and Dmitry Azarov, Russia's Deputy Minister of Transport, discussed plans to operationalize an Iran-Russia maritime transport consortium.

The upcoming meeting in Makhachkala will involve key officials from Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization, Russia's Ministry of Transport, the Russian Maritime Transport Agency, and representatives from the private sector on both sides.

The two officials reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing transportation ties and boosting the volume of maritime freight exchange. Their efforts are aligned with the 2025 Joint Action Plan for Transportation Cooperation, signed on February 18, 2025, in Tehran by the Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development and the Russian Minister of Transport, as well as resolutions from the latest Iran-Russia Joint Commission held recently in Moscow.

Rasouli emphasized the strategic significance of increasing combined transport and transit through the Caspian Sea, especially within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). He stressed the need to streamline logistics across all available routes, with a focus on activating container shipping between northern Iranian and Russian ports.

# Supreme Leader Calls for Worldwide Resistance Against Israeli-U.S. Crimes in Gaza, Palestine

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has urged the Muslim world not to allow the issue of Palestine to sink into oblivion, emphasizing the need to confront the Israeli regime's ongoing genocide in the blockaded Gaza Strip.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks as he received a large group of workers from across the country in the capital Tehran on Saturday.

"The biased policies that are being implemented in the world today against nations are aimed at making issues related to Palestine forgotten; Muslim nations should not allow this; they should not allow it to happen," the Leader said.

"Through various rumors, different kinds of statements, and by bringing up new, irrelevant, and meaningless issues, they try to distract minds from the issue of Palestine. Minds must not be diverted from the issue of Palestine."

Pointing to the all-out Western support for Israel in its atrocities in Gaza, Ayatollah Khamenei called on the international community to rise and confront the occupying regime and its sympathizers.

"The crime that the Zionist regime is committing in Gaza, in Palestine, is not something that can be overlooked. The whole world must stand against it.

"They must stand against the Zionist regime itself, and they must stand against the supporters of the Zionist regime," he said.

The leader also emphasized that the US and its allies, such as Britain, are complicit in the Israeli regime's oppression of the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza, and, despite public statements that may appear critical, these nations actively support Israel.

"The Americans, in the truest sense of the word, are providing support [to the Israeli regime]; now in the realm of politics, certain statements are made, and things are said that might lead people to think otherwise—but this is not the reality.

"The truth of the matter is that the oppressed nation of Palestine, the oppressed people of Gaza,



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are today not only confronting the Zionist regime; they are confronting the United States, they are confronting Britain," the leader noted.

Meanwhile Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized the importance of strengthening domestic production, praising Iranian scientists and workers for their resilience in the face of global economic and scientific restrictions.

During his speech, the Supreme Leader underlined several key points: "If Iranian scientists can make major breakthroughs despite international sanctions and closed doors, if young Iranians can manufacture advanced weapons and missiles, then they certainly can build cars with better fuel efficiency and higher quality," said Ayatollah Khamenei.

He urged authorities to invest in and rely on Iranian capabilities rather than opting for easier solutions such as opening the market to foreign imports, which he said would harm the country's economy and workforce.

"It's easier to say, 'Let imports in,' but this damages our national interest and our labor force. Supporting local production is essential. This must become a national culture," he stated.

In a pointed criticism, Ayatollah Khamenei referred to recent decisions by some government bodies to lift restrictions on importing goods with domestic equivalents, calling such moves counterproductive.

He also stressed the importance of workplace safety, expressing concern over recent accidents in the mining sector.

"Worker safety is critical and must be ensured," he said.

The Supreme Leader paid tribute to the late President Ebrahim Raisi, highlighting his efforts to revive many idle or semi-active factories during his tenure.

"One of the proud achievements of our dear martyr President Raisi was restoring numerous inactive industrial units," he noted.

# Central Bank Official Says Unifying Currency Exchange Rates Never a Policy Objective

TEHRAN - The Director of Economic Research at Iran's Central Bank emphasized that the bank has never pursued a policy of unifying the official and unofficial exchange rates. He noted that due to significant risks in the economy, aligning these rates precisely is not feasible at this time, although it may become possible in the future if uncertainties related to currency issues are resolved.

Speaking at a press conference ahead of the 32nd Annual Conference on Monetary and Foreign Exchange Policies, Mohammad Akhbari stated that the Central Bank has faced numerous challenges in its currency policies over the years. He explained that two major strategies—open market security and controlling the balance sheets of banks—have been central to the bank's efforts. These strategies aimed to manage demand in the economy but came with their own limitations.

Akhbari highlighted that the limitations within the banking network have hindered the effective implementation of these strategies. Moreover, the Central Bank's balance sheet control policy has faced obstacles due to the government's budgetary imbalances. While the issuance of bonds has been used to address fiscal shortfalls, this approach has created further liquidity challenges for the Central Bank.

Regarding access to banking facilities, Akhbari said the Central Bank is planning new initiatives to help small businesses. He stressed that Iran's economy needs significant investment, particularly in infrastructure, which has suffered from extensive depreciation in recent years. Without adequate investment—especially in the energy sector—economic growth will face serious setbacks, he warned.

The official mentioned that last year, Iran established the Integrated Foreign Exchange Market to stabilize fluctuations in unofficial exchange rates, which are often influenced by political developments. However, he clarified that the Central Bank does not base its policy decisions on shifts in the unofficial market.



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Reiterating that currency rate unification is not the bank's objective, Akhbari explained that due to sanctions, Iran has limited foreign currency resources. At the same time, the country's economic growth requires substantial foreign exchange. This mismatch creates constraints in the official currency market, inevitably leading to some leakage into the unofficial market as exporters seek higher returns.

He added that negative news can widen the gap between official and unofficial exchange rates. Nonetheless, the Central Bank is not reactive to such news and is working toward creating a more stable and optimistic economic outlook.

Akhbari emphasized that the creation of the integrated exchange market was not meant to unify rates but to narrow the gap and ensure a steady supply of foreign currency for importers and exporters.

He also pointed out that investment in Iran depends on liquidity, foreign exchange availability, and human capital. Eliminating the so-called "NIMA exchange rate" (a semi-official rate) had only a minor inflationary impact, according to Akhbari—just 1 out of 10 on an inflation-driving scale. He noted that the latest monthly inflation rate stood at 3.8% in the Iranian month of Farvardin (March-April).

Commenting on banking interest rates, Akhbari said that while the Central Bank does not currently recommend lowering rates, the decision could change based on future economic developments. New policies will be announced as needed, especially as economic uncertainties ease and conditions become clearer.

The 32nd Annual Conference on Monetary and Foreign Exchange Policies will be held over two days starting Tuesday, May 21, at the Central Bank's conference center. Senior officials, including the acting Minister of Economy, the head of the Planning and Budget Organization, and the Central Bank Governor, are expected to outline this year's monetary and exchange rate policies.

## Aref Emphasizes Policy Reform to Provide Role Models for Iran's Youth



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - First Vice President of Iran, Mohammad Reza Aref, highlighted the need for significant policy changes aimed at presenting constructive role models for younger generations, stating that past mistakes in policy and practice have contributed to the erosion of valuable societal examples.

Speaking on Saturday during a meeting with members of the Iranian Psychological Association, Aref emphasized that misplaced decisions and approaches over the past decades have led to what he called "role model burnout," where youth increasingly turn to figures disconnected from Iranian-Islamic values.

"The standing of professors and public figures has changed considerably over time," Aref said. "As a result, some segments of society, especially adolescents and young adults, have chosen role models who are far removed from our cultural and national identity."

He urged the Psychological Association to prioritize a health-oriented rather than illness-centered strategy in their activities and stressed the collective responsibility in protecting and improving the mental well-being of the younger generation.

Aref pointed out that, despite improvements in Iran's mental health indicators compared to global averages, social and economic challenges have weakened the nation's social capital at times. He called on psychologists to boost hope among youth—particularly the educated—through timely guidance and counseling that could shift their outlook inward, toward national solutions rather than external aspirations.

Calling attention to the importance of social responsibility across all sectors, Aref stated: "The enhancement of mental health for all citizens is a core issue. The Psychological Association should systematically assess mental health indicators and provide their findings to state officials, so appropriate measures can be collaboratively adopted with government and civil society."

## UN Committee Warns of New Mass Displacement of Palestinians Amid Israeli Genocide



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A United Nations special committee has warned that the world could be witnessing "another Nakba" as the Israeli regime presses ahead with the forced mass displacement of Palestinians in its long-running war on the besieged Gaza Strip.

The UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories sounded the alarm on Friday, stressing that Israel is committing "ethnic cleansing" and inflicting "unimaginable suffering" on Palestinians.

The warning comes as the Israeli regime has declared that its genocidal actions in Gaza will not cease until "hundreds of thousands" of Palestinians have been displaced.

For Palestinians, any forced displacement evokes memories of the "Nakba" or catastrophe, the mass displacement in the war that accompanied the illegal entity's creation in 1948.

In 1948, approximately 760,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of the events leading up to the occupation of Palestine.

"Israel continues to inflict unimaginable suffering on the people living under its occupation, whilst rapidly expanding confiscation of land as part of its wider colonial aspirations," the UN committee warned in a statement.

"What we are witnessing could very well be another Nakba."

Underlining that the goal of wider colonial expansion is the occupying regime's priority, the report added, "Security operations are used as a smokescreen for rapid land grabbing, mass displacement, dispossession, demolitions, forced evictions, and ethnic cleansing, in order to replace the Palestinian communities with Jewish settlers."





## Iran Congratulates New Pope

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi extended his congratulations to newly-elected Pope Leo XIV, and expressed hope that the new pope will strengthen the role of religious values in promoting justice, peace, and dialogue in an increasingly troubled world.

In a message sent on Friday following the selection of Cardinal Robert Prevost as the 267th leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Araqchi offered his congratulations.

“At a time when the world is plagued as rarely before by injustice and cruelty, poverty and inequality, and war and bloodshed, the global attention to the election of a new pope reflects a shared hope for religion and religious teachings to safeguard lofty moral and human values and to prevent the dominance of moral vices over humanity,” Araqchi wrote in his message.

## Yazd and Hungary Strengthen Ties with Focus on Joint Investment



TEHRAN - In a high-level meeting between the Yazd Chamber of Commerce and a Hungarian trade delegation, both sides emphasized the expansion of economic cooperation and development of bilateral relations, particularly in the field of joint investment.

The meeting opened with remarks from Yazd's Governor, who referenced the sister-city relationship between Yazd and the Hungarian city of Jászberény. “We are proud that a part of Yazd's spirit lives in Hungary,” he said, expressing hope for deeper international engagement between the two regions.

Governor Mohammad Reza Babaei highlighted Yazd's economic strengths, noting that the province produces over 850 types of goods across diverse sectors. Yazd is Iran's leading producer of tiles and ceramics, accounting for 50% of national output. It is also a major player in steel, textiles, and greenhouse agriculture, despite its arid climate. “From raw materials to finished products, Yazd is self-sufficient in the construction industry,” he added, inviting Hungarian investors to explore opportunities in industry, mining, agriculture, and tourism.

Mojtaba Dastmalchian, head of the Yazd Chamber of Commerce, reaffirmed the city's commitment to stronger ties with Jászberény and welcomed both investment and technology transfer. He described Yazd as a globally recognized historical city in the heart of the desert with significant tourism potential. He also proposed hosting Hungarian tour operators and sending a delegation of Yazdi traders to Hungary to foster deeper ties.

Iran's commercial attaché in Hungary, Hossein Arghi, noted the emotional bond Jászberény residents feel toward Yazd, suggesting they are eager to reconnect with their “ancestral homeland.” He also stated that the Hungarian delegation is particularly interested in investment opportunities in recycling and technology transfer and could serve as cultural ambassadors promoting tourism between the two nations.

## Kerman Chamber Calls for Action Plan to Boost Iran-Russia Relations



TEHRAN - In a high-level meeting with the Russian Consul General in Isfahan, the head of the Kerman Chamber of Commerce stressed the need for a concrete and actionable plan to expand economic ties between Kerman Province and Russia.

Seyed Mehdi Tabibzadeh, President of the Kerman Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, highlighted four key sectors—tourism, agriculture, mining, and industry—where Kerman and Russia could establish strong partnerships. He called for a clearly defined roadmap with measurable objectives to enhance bilateral cooperation.

According to a statement from the Chamber, Tabibzadeh noted that despite various meetings and initiatives in recent years aimed at strengthening Iran-Russia relations, tangible outcomes have been limited. “With all the cultural, political, and social links, why haven't Iran and Russia managed to capture a significant share of each other's markets?” he asked.

Comparing Iran's trade volume with Russia to that of Turkey, Tabibzadeh said Iranian traders feel they face discrimination and restrictions in Russia—issues that have been raised repeatedly without resolution. He added that Kerman's infrastructure, including multiple airports, diverse climate, and greenhouse capacity, positions the province to supply a significant portion of Russia's agricultural needs. However, logistical barriers, tariff agreements, and financial transaction challenges remain major hurdles.

To address these issues, Tabibzadeh proposed organizing a joint meeting between Kerman trade officials and Kerman's business community, including site visits to explore the province's economic potential.

Mohammadreza Bahrami, Vice President of the Kerman Chamber, emphasized tourism as a powerful tool for fostering goodwill and mutual understanding between the two regions. He extended an invitation to Russian tour operators to visit Kerman, highlighting the province's unique attractions such as ten UNESCO World Heritage Sites and the world's hottest recorded location.

# Iran Rules Out Gas Exports to Europe for Now

TEHRAN - The Managing Director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), Majid Tavakoli, stated that Iran is hopeful about the operationalization of its gas deal with Turkmenistan, while confirming that there are currently no plans to export gas to Europe.

Speaking at a press conference on the sidelines of the 29th International Oil Exhibition, Tavakoli said that during the past winter, Iran faced a gas supply-demand imbalance of 350 million cubic meters per day — a situation that has been building up over several years. Despite this, the country managed the winter energy demand with coordinated efforts, achieving several operational milestones.



Tavakoli highlighted that for the first time, Iran's gas network reached the production of 880 million cubic meters of dry gas per day. This was achieved under difficult conditions, including record-low temperatures in 11 provinces, depleted gas reservoirs, and an increased number of new users — approximately 900,000 households.

The successful navigation through winter 2024-2025, according to Tavakoli, was the result of early planning and interdepartmental coordination within the Oil Ministry. Despite ongoing refinery overhauls, gas supply stability was maintained. Notably, gas distribution to households, especially in the north, faced no disruptions, even as output from certain refinery units exceeded nominal capacity limits.

Among key developments, 17 gas compression stations were launched, 30 turbo-compressors were deployed at critical sites, and gas transmission capacity in eastern Iran increased by 50 million cubic meters. Tavakoli praised the Oil Minister's initiative to launch early fuel management meetings, which played a decisive role in ensuring preparedness.

On the efficiency front, Tavakoli criticized the widespread use of low-efficiency domestic heaters, which make up a large portion of household consumption. With 20 million heaters in operation, many still function at only 60-70% efficiency. He confirmed the rollout of high-efficiency heaters (above 85%) free of charge for consumers, provided old units are returned.

Regarding pricing policy, Tavakoli said gas tariffs fall under the jurisdiction of the Planning and Budget Organization. Last year, higher rates were applied to excessive users in the top consumption brackets, with some gas bills in Tehran reaching up to 300 million tomans. He emphasized that pricing tools are crucial for encouraging responsible consumption.

On gas supply projections for the upcoming winter, Tavakoli noted that to meet the full demand from all consumers, Iran would require 1.2 billion cubic meters of gas per day — a figure that remains unattainable with current infrastructure. As such, alternative fuels will continue to supplement winter energy needs, especially in industrial sectors, to ensure uninterrupted household supply.

Tavakoli reported a 16% year-on-year increase in fuel deliveries to power plants during the first 45 days of the Persian calendar year (starting March 20), with a notable growth in gas's share — indicating stronger supply performance.

In terms of international gas trade, Tavakoli confirmed Iran's strategic priority

under its 7th Development Plan to deepen energy ties with neighboring countries and establish a regional gas hub. However, he clarified there are no current plans or serious negotiations for gas exports to Europe. He emphasized that the focus remains on regional cooperation, particularly with countries in the CIS.

Responding to questions about gas transit to Turkey via Turkmenistan, he said an export agreement has already been signed and became operational at the end of winter. Iran continues to support the swap arrangement and hopes to finalize a long-term gas purchase contract with Turkmenistan.

Regarding cooperation with Russia, he revealed that negotiations are ongoing, with discussions focused on pricing and payment mechanisms for a proposed project with a 55 bcm annual capacity. Iran is studying whether existing infrastructure via intermediary

countries — Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia — can accommodate Russian gas imports, as Iran and Russia do not share a land border.

Tavakoli highlighted the importance of gas imports for stabilizing supply in northern Iran, where no major gas production sources exist. He said facilitating such projects is part of Iran's legal obligations under the 7th Development Plan.

On gas storage, he said the Sarajeh Qom storage facility is nearing completion and will be operational before the end of summer. A second unique project is under study, which would store gas in a salt dome for the first time in Iran, offering strategic proximity to energy infrastructure.

During winter 2024-25, he said, 80% of gas was consumed by households, commerce, and smaller industries, with only 18% going to power plants and major industries. Residential supply remained the top priority, while large industrial consumers were served based on coordination with the Ministry of Industry.

He reiterated the need for better consumption management, urging implementation of energy efficiency mandates requiring a 1% annual improvement in industrial gas usage. He criticized the geographic placement of energy-intensive industries, noting that while 75% of Iran's gas is produced in the south, 92% is consumed in the north.

Discussing plans to boost output, Tavakoli said South Pars remains the primary source, with recent enhancements in gas processing capacity at Phase 14 thanks to new turbo-compressors. The completion of Iran's 9th nationwide transmission pipeline from Ahvaz to Dehghan will further improve transport capacity.

He noted that weather is a major factor in gas planning, beyond the company's control. If next winter mirrors the milder winter of 2022-23, conditions will be favorable. However, another harsh winter like 2023-24 would pose significant challenges, though planning efforts are already underway.

Tavakoli also welcomed foreign investment in Iran's gas sector, highlighting recent promising negotiations. He encouraged energy-intensive industries to invest in upstream gas projects, offering them a share of the output in return.

Regarding gas exports to Pakistan, he confirmed Iran's readiness but said the initiative depends entirely on the Pakistani government. On Turkey, he said Iran is working to extend its gas export contract, set to expire in 2026, while reaffirming the internal supply priority.

# Iran Launches \$50m Drilling Project in Caspian Sea Without Waiting for Foreign Investors

TEHRAN — Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad announced the start of exploratory drilling in the Caspian Sea with a \$50 million investment, emphasizing that the country will no longer wait for foreign investors to develop its oil and gas sector.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 29th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition in Tehran, Paknejad said, “Our upstream and downstream teams are fully mobilized. We will not wait for outsiders.”



He confirmed that the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has been tasked with accelerating investment proposals, aiming to finalize upstream contracts within three to four months—a significant improvement from previously lengthy timelines. The move aligns with directives from Iran's Supreme Leader to streamline contract processes.

Highlighting a major development project, Paknejad announced the resumption of drilling in the Rodsar structure in the southern Caspian Sea after a 30-year hiatus. The site lies 15 kilometers offshore in waters 70–75 meters deep, with drilling planned to reach depths of 5 kilometers. Initial studies estimate the presence of over 600 million barrels of oil in place and up to 2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, though Paknejad cautioned these figures are preliminary.

The \$50 million exploratory operation is being carried out under an EPD (Engineering, Procurement, and Drilling) contract, using domestic platforms such as the semi-submersible “Iran-Amir Kabir,” which had previously drilled two exploratory wells in the Sardar Jangal field.

Paknejad emphasized that full production in deep-sea fields, some located in depths of 700 meters, requires advanced technology. The ministry is working with knowledge-based companies to acquire essential tools like ROVs (Remotely Operated Vehicles), although such development will take time.

Regarding the past winter, the minister noted it was one of the least challenging years for gas supply, thanks to increased production—

up by 30 million cubic meters per day in a short span—and effective crisis management. However, he criticized the inefficiency of power plants, which led to excessive fuel consumption. “Only \$200 million of the \$600 million spent on imported diesel went to electricity generation. The rest was essentially wasted,” he stated, urging the Ministry of Energy to improve power plant efficiency.

Paknejad reaffirmed Iran's policy of self-reliance in development, stating: “We are aggressively pursuing upstream and downstream projects. We don't wait for foreign investors, and with support for the private sector and local technologies, we can make significant progress.”

He also referenced efforts to boost pressure at the South Pars gas field and noted that financing options, including the National Development Fund, are being considered. On oil production and exports, Paknejad said they are operating at full capacity and exports are proceeding without disruption. However, due to sanctions, he declined to disclose exact figures.

The minister acknowledged that rising energy demand continues to outpace supply, calling for greater public cooperation and energy-efficient technologies. He encouraged the continuation of public campaigns like the “2 Degrees Less” initiative and emphasized government responsibility in providing efficient appliances and consumption incentives.

Looking ahead, Paknejad expressed optimism about meeting targets set in the Seventh Development Plan, which includes producing 4.58 million barrels of crude oil and 1.35 billion cubic meters of gas per day.

He concluded by stating that the exploratory phase in the Caspian Sea is fully managed by domestic firms and does not currently require foreign participation. However, Iran is open to future technology and investment partnerships—with the exception of one unnamed country.

## Tax-to-GDP Ratio in Iran Reaches 8%, Nearing Global Average



TEHRAN - The share of tax revenue in Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) has reached 8 percent, approaching the global average, according to the Deputy Minister for Planning and Economic Policy at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance.

Speaking at the 14th Iranian Fiscal and Tax Policy Conference, Vahid Majid emphasized that achieving sustainable economic growth, macroeconomic stability, an improved business environment, and stronger investment incentives in production relies on sound fiscal and tax policies.

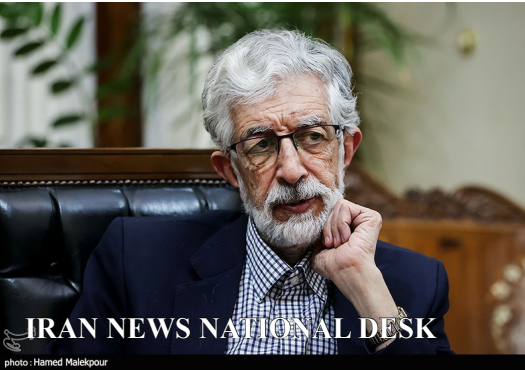
Majid underscored the importance of the tax system's stabilizing, allocative, and redistributive roles, stating, “While we are committed to increasing tax revenues, our primary aim is to uphold vertical and horizontal equity. The effectiveness of policy tools lies in their ability to direct economic activity toward production, which is a sign of successful justice implementation.”

He highlighted that one of Iran's notable achievements in the tax domain has been increasing the tax share in GDP to an average of 8 percent, with 70 percent of the government's current expenditures now being funded through taxes.

When asked whether this rise in the tax-to-GDP ratio is commendable, Majid responded, “It is a success if it aligns with citizen satisfaction and results in improved quality of public goods.”

The Deputy Minister stressed that the Ministry seeks to secure stable government funding through taxation without burdening the production sector or increasing production costs.

## Iran Corresponds with Indian Gov't to Promote Persian Language



TEHRAN - Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, head of the Saadi Foundation, has announced that Iran has formally corresponded with the Government of India to collaborate on Persian language education, including authoring textbooks and training teachers.

Haddad-Adel revealed that India had declared Persian one of its classical languages for school curricula around five years ago—a significant decision given the language's declining status in the region in recent decades. Many cultural advocates have raised concerns about the fading influence of Persian in India, which was once a dominant language.

To seize this opportunity, the Saadi Foundation has developed a four-volume Persian textbook series titled “Tuti” (Parrot) for Indian schools. The first volume has been published, and the second is completed, according to Haddad-Adel.

He further stated that Iran has officially reached out to the Indian government, expressing its readiness to cooperate in writing educational materials and training Persian language instructors. “Although we haven't yet received an official response, we are pursuing the matter to take full advantage of India's policy to support the revival of Persian,” he said.

Currently, Persian is taught in a number of Indian high schools and more than 100 universities across the country. Haddad-Adel suggested that the number of Persian language students in India may rival or even surpass those in Iran.

Persian is also taught in Shia and Sunni religious seminaries and Sufi spiritual centers in India. In addition, many private learners continue to study the language in informal classes.

Historically, Persian served as the official and scholarly language of the Indian subcontinent for over seven centuries. However, with British colonization, English gradually replaced it. Despite this, Persian's deep roots remain evident in India's culture, architecture, and even vocabulary.

Iranian officials have also prioritized preserving the vast Persian literary and historical heritage in India, which includes thousands of manuscripts and millions of archival documents. Due to India's climate, many of these are at risk of deterioration.



## Port Sudan Hit by Drone Strikes for Sixth Consecutive Day

PORT SUDAN (Dispatches) - Drone strikes hit Port Sudan for a sixth straight day, an army source said, blaming the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, at war with the regular army since April 2023.

“Our air defenses intercepted some of the enemy drones which were targeting sites in the city,” the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Witnesses reported strikes across Port Sudan, seat of the army-backed government and the country’s main aid hub. The port city, which had been seen as a safe haven from the devastating conflict between the army and the RSF, has been hit by daily drone strikes since Sunday.



## U.S., Europeans Finalizing 30-Day Ukraine-Russia Ceasefire Proposal



PARIS (Dispatches) - The United States and its European allies are finalising a proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine that if refused would see them jointly impose new sanctions on Russia, a French diplomatic source said on Friday.

U.S. President Donald Trump called on Thursday for a 30-day unconditional ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, warning that Washington and its partners would impose further sanctions if the ceasefire was not respected.

Ukraine has expressed readiness to accept the U.S. proposal. Russia has unilaterally declared a three-day ceasefire running from May 8-10 to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the end of World War Two.

“We’re not completely with a finalized project, but we hope that we’re at a moment of convergence,” said the diplomatic source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“What could happen in the coming hours and days, there could be an announcement of a ceasefire either of 30 days or compartmentalized, which is still being discussed.”

France, Britain and Germany in recent weeks have sought closer coordination with Washington. Two weeks ago they pushed back against some U.S. proposals on how to end Russia’s war in Ukraine, making counterproposals on issues from territory to sanctions, according to the full texts of the proposals seen by Reuters.

“We are reaching a point where we will not wait for a formal response from Moscow to a joint proposal to declare this ceasefire,” said the source.

The source said there were still discussions on whether to announce a unilateral ceasefire or to give a short response time to Russia, although if it refused then new American and EU sanctions would be imposed on Moscow.

The two sides are coordinating on the sanctions packages.

## Thousands Rally in Romania in EU Support Ahead of Presidential Election Run-Off



BUCHAREST (Dispatches) - Thousands of people rallied in Romania’s capital, Bucharest, and other cities in support of the European Union on Friday, one week before a presidential election run-off that could see a hard-right eurosceptic sweep into power.

Hard-right nationalist George Simion won the first round of the presidential ballot on Sunday, and an opinion survey earlier this week showed him leading ahead of the May 18 run-off vote against centrist Bucharest Mayor Nicusor Dan.

Simion, 38, opposes military aid to Ukraine, is critical of the EU leadership and says he is aligned with U.S. President Donald Trump’s Make America Great Again movement.

Analysts have said a Simion victory could isolate Romania, erode private investment and destabilise NATO’s eastern flank, where Bucharest plays a key role in providing logistical support to Ukraine as it fights a three-year-old Russian invasion.

In Bucharest on Friday, an estimated 15,000 people rallied, waving EU and Romanian flags and chanting, “Russia, don’t forget Romania is not yours” and “We want our country forward not backward.”

## Pakistan Launches Military Offensive Against India



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan said it launched a military operation against India early on Saturday, targeting multiple bases including a missile storage site in northern India as the neighbours extended their worst fighting in nearly three decades.

Pakistan said that before its offensive India had fired missiles at three air bases, including one close to the capital, Islamabad, but Pakistani air defences intercepted most of them.

Locked in a longstanding dispute over Kashmir, the two countries have engaged in daily clashes since Wednesday when India launched strikes inside Pakistan on what it called “terrorist infrastructure”. Pakistan vowed to retaliate.

“BrahMos storage site has been taken out in general area Beas,” Pakistan’s military said in a message to journalists, adding that the Pathankot airfield in India’s western Punjab state and Udhampur Air Force Station in Indian Kashmir were also hit.

India’s defence and foreign ministries did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside regular business hours. India’s military was expected to brief the media shortly, the ministry of defence said in an advisory to the media.

Pakistan’s information minister said in a post on social media site X that the military operation was named “Operation Bunyanun Marsoos”. The term is taken from the Koran and means a firm, united structure.

Pakistan’s planning minister said on local television that “special measures” had been taken to avoid civilian targets and that they were targeting locations that had been used to target Pakistan.

Pakistan’s military said the prime minister had called a meeting of the National Command Authority, a top body of civilian and military officials, which oversees decisions on its nuclear arsenal.

Sounds of explosions were reported in India’s Srinagar and Jammu, where sirens were sounded, a Reuters witness said.

“India through its planes launched air-to-surface missiles ... Nur Khan base, Mureed base and Shorkot base were made

targets,” Pakistan military spokesman Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said in a late-night televised statement.

The chief minister of Indian Kashmir Omar Abdullah said in a statement a local administration official had been killed by shelling in Rajouri, near the line of control that divides the contested region.

One of the three air bases that Pakistan said were targeted by India is in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, just outside the capital Islamabad. The other two are in Pakistan’s eastern province of Punjab, which borders India.

The Pakistani military spokesman said only a few missiles made it past air defences, and those did not hit any “air assets”, according to initial damage assessments.

India has said its strikes on Wednesday, which started the clashes between the countries, were in retaliation for a deadly attack on Hindu tourists in Indian Kashmir last month.

Pakistan denied India’s accusations that it was involved in the tourist attack. Since Wednesday, the two countries have exchanged cross-border fire and shelling, and sent drones and missiles into each other’s airspace.

Much of the fighting on Friday was in Indian Kashmir and states bordering Pakistan. India said it shot down Pakistani drones.

The Group of Seven countries on Friday urged maximum restraint from both India and Pakistan and called on them to engage in direct dialogue. The United Kingdom’s High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, said in a statement on social media platform X that they were monitoring the developments closely.

Sounds of explosions were also heard in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore and the northwestern city of Peshawar, as the fighting threatened to spread.

At least 48 people have been killed since Wednesday, according to casualty estimates on both sides of the border that have not been independently verified.

## NATO Chief Seeks Defense Spending at 5% of GDP by 2032

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - NATO chief Mark Rutte wants member countries to agree at a summit in June to reach five percent of GDP on defence-related spending by 2032, Dutch premier Dick Schoof said Friday.

U.S. President Donald Trump has demanded that NATO allies ramp up their military spending to five percent of GDP, a level that not even the United States currently hits.

Schoof said Rutte had written to NATO’s 32 member countries calling for them to reach 3.5 percent of GDP on “hard military spending” and 1.5 percent of GDP on “related spending such as infrastructure, cybersecurity and other things” over the next seven years.

Trump is piling the pressure on Europe and Canada to ratchet up NATO’s spending target at a summit in The Hague next month.

Foreign ministers from alliance countries are expected to tackle the matter at an informal gathering in Antalya, Turkey, next week.

Rutte on Friday refused to confirm the figures being debated but said “internal discussions” were taking place within NATO.

Diplomats within NATO, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the proposal circulated last week envisioned increasing direct military spending by 0.2 percent each year to 2032.

They said the discussions were at an early stage and there were no clear signs



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yet that there would be consensus for the figures.

The parameters of what could be included in the 1.5 percent of loosely related defence spending were still to be defined, they said.

“It makes no sense to argue about abstract GDP percentages now. What is crucial is that we continuously expand our efforts over the next few years,” Germany’s new chancellor Friedrich Merz said during a visit to NATO’s

headquarters in Brussels on Friday.

Merz said that for Germany, every increase of one percent of GDP represented 45 billion euros (\$50 billion).

Trump has long accused Washington’s allies of underspending on their defence and taking advantage of US largesse.

He has also threatened not to protect countries that do not spend enough on their military in his eyes.

European countries have ramped up their defence spending since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but Rutte says they must go considerably higher to ward off Moscow.

Last year 22 of NATO’s 32 allies hit its current spending target of two percent of GDP on their militaries.

A string of countries such as Italy, Spain, Canada and Belgium that still lag below that level have pledged to reach it in 2025.

The United States last year spent 3.19 percent of its GDP on defense, behind eastern flank countries Poland, Estonia and Lithuania close to Russia.

But Washington remains by far the biggest military spender in NATO in absolute terms, accounting for 64 percent of all defense expenditure last year.

In a bid to help European countries bolster their spending, the EU has proposed loosening budget rules and establishing a 150-billion-euro defense fund.

## France, Poland Sign Treaty With Mutual Defense Pledge

PARIS (Dispatches) - France and Poland on Friday signed a treaty committing both sides to mutual assistance in case of an attack by an aggressor, strengthening ties between the EU heavyweights in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The deal was signed in France’s eastern city of Nancy by French President Emmanuel Macron and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, both among the strongest European backers of Ukraine following Russia’s 2022 invasion.

Condemning Vladimir Putin’s comments at a Moscow military parade marking 80 years since the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, Macron said that the Russian leader was “on the side of war, not peace”.

Macron said one of the key aspects of the treaty was a clause on “mutual defence”, in addition to the protections already offered by NATO and the European Union.

“It does not substitute for NATO or EU,” Macron said alongside Tusk, adding that it “reinforces what already exists today”.

He also suggested that troops could mobilise quickly: “I have no doubt that yes, such a deployment would be possible in the face of aggression and if the worst were to happen.”

Tusk described the treaty as “a historic event”.



“I am profoundly convinced... that France and Poland will be able to count on each other in all circumstances, good and bad,” he said.

The text of the friendship and cooperation treaty states that “In the event of armed aggression on their territories, the parties shall provide mutual assistance, including by military means”.

Macron, who leads the EU’s only nuclear weapons power, also implied that France’s atomic arsenal could be part of such assistance.

“The interests of our main partners are integrated in deciding what our vital interests are,” he said.

Such protection is of immense interest to Poland, which shares a border with Russia’s exclave of Kaliningrad and has repeatedly warned that it too could be the target of Russian aggression.

With the United States, backed by its European allies, proposing an unconditional 30-day ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, Macron painted a bleak picture of Putin’s interest in peace.

“President Putin is on the side of war, not the side of peace. The belligerent comments that he made, the reality of every day, only underline that,” he said.





## Mitchell Goes Off as Cavaliers Take Game 3 From Pacers

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donovan Mitchell scored 43 points to lift the Cleveland Cavaliers to a 126-104 victory over the Indiana Pacers in Game 3 of their Eastern Conference semifinal series in Indianapolis.

Mitchell, who added nine rebounds, made 14-of-29 shots from the floor and 10-of-14 from the free-throw line. The six-time All-Star drained five 3-pointers after entering the contest just 2-for-18 from beyond the arc.

The top-seeded Cavaliers outscored Indiana by a 34-13 margin in the second quarter en route to cutting their deficit to 2-1 in the best-of-seven series. Game 4 is Sunday in Indianapolis.

Max Strus collected 20 points and seven rebounds, Jarrett Allen had 19 and 12 and reigning Defensive Player of the Year Evan Mobley added 18 and 13, respectively, in his return from a one-game absence due to a sprained left ankle.

Darius Garland finished with just 10 points while being plagued by foul trouble. He was playing in his first game since April 23 because of a sprained left toe.

Cleveland held a decisive 56-37 edge in rebounds, including an 18-4 advantage on the offensive end.

Indiana's Benedict Mathurin scored 23 points off the bench and Pascal Siakam added 18.

Star Tyrese Haliburton was limited to just four points on 2-of-8 shooting for the fourth-seeded Pacers.

Siakam made a basket on the interior to forge a 36-36 tie before Cleveland went on a 30-9 run to end the second quarter. Strus, Mitchell and Sam Merrill each made 3-pointers during that sequence.

Andrew Nembhard drained consecutive 3-pointers to trim Indiana's deficit to 15 points at 80-65 with 4:50 remaining of the third quarter. The Cavaliers, however, responded with a 9-0 run to bolster

their cushion.

Siakam sank a 3-pointer to bring the Pacers within 11 at 104-93 with 8:26 to play, however Cleveland went on a 19-5 run to seal the victory.

Cleveland scored the first 11 points of the game and upped its advantage to 15 before Indiana responded by scoring 22 of the final 29 points to earn a 32-32 tie at the end of the first quarter.

Meanwhile the Minnesota Timberwolves hope their third California adventure of the postseason proves to be as fruitful as the first two when they tip off a two-game sequence of the Western Conference playoffs against the Golden State Warriors in San Francisco today.

The teams are scheduled for Game 3 and Game 4 on Monday in the best-of-seven series, with the clubs each having won a game when the Western semifinals opened in Minneapolis earlier in the week.

As the sixth seed in the West, the Timberwolves were the underdogs when they began their first-round series with a road win over the third-seeded Los Angeles Lakers last month.

Minnesota came away from the trip with a split, then never lost again in a 4-1 elimination of the Lakers, a three-game winning streak that included a clinching victory back in L.A. in Game 5.

The upset win earned the Timberwolves the home-court advantage over the Warriors, who also pulled a first-round surprise as the West's No. 7 seed, outlasting the Houston Rockets in seven games.

When last seen at home, Golden State blew a chance to wrap up the first-round series in six games, dropping a 115-107 decision to the second-seeded Rockets last Friday.

The Warriors have been on the road ever since, having returned to Houston for a successful Game 7 before heading straight to Minneapolis for Games 1 and 2.

## Salah Voted Football Writers' Player of the Year

LONDON (Dispatches) - Mohamed Salah won the Football Writers' Association Player of the Year award for the third time on Friday after inspiring Liverpool's march to a record-equalling 20th English title.

Salah earned the prize after scoring 28 goals and producing 18 assists for Liverpool in the Premier League this season.

The Egypt forward broke the record for the most goal involvements in a 38-game Premier League campaign as Arne Slot's side romped to their first title since 2020.

Salah secured almost 90 percent of the football writers' votes, marking the biggest winning margin this century.

Liverpool centre-back Virgil van Dijk came second in the contest, with Newcastle striker Alexander Isak



third and Arsenal midfielder Declan Rice fourth.

Salah, who was previously given the award in 2017-18 and 2021-22, is now level with former Arsenal forward Thierry Henry as the only players to win it three times.

The 32-year-old recently ended speculation over his future by signing a new two-year contract to stay at Anfield until 2027.

Salah's decision to commit to Liverpool will make them favourites to win a record 21st title next season as they look to move ahead of Manchester United as England's most successful top-flight club.

Alessia Russo became the second Arsenal player to land the women's award as the striker finished ahead of last year's winner Khadija Shaw

## Guardiola Calls Season His Most Difficult Managerial Year



LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola admits this season has been the toughest of his 16-year managerial career as Manchester City's Premier League title challenge collapsed and they exited the Champions League early.

The Spaniard has experienced little but success in glittering spells at Barcelona, Bayern Munich and City.

But after four successive Premier League triumphs, City's form nosedived from late October onwards.

They can still finish the campaign with a top-five spot and the FA Cup, while they have an additional shot at silverware at the Club World Cup.

But even if they end on a high note, it will not change Guardiola's verdict of the season as a whole.

"It's been the most difficult, that's for sure," said the 54-year-old, whose team exited the Champions League at the hands of Real Madrid in the knockout phase playoffs.

"It's been more demanding — much more. When you don't win it's more demanding emotionally and (in terms of) preparing and the moods and everything.

"It's been more difficult than the previous seasons when we played for the titles."

Injuries, particularly to midfielder Rodri, have been a huge factor in City's decline while a number of individuals have suffered a drop in form.

Guardiola does not absolve himself from blame.

"We had a lot of injuries, we didn't have the energy," he said. "We tried most of the time but we were not able to do it.

"I didn't find the way to let them feel comfortable and winning the games."

Guardiola, whose third-placed side travel to relegated Southampton, admitted City's high standards had slipped.

"But, even with that, I would say, it could be worse. I was not good enough to find a way but we didn't give up," he said.

"We're still fighting to qualify for the Champions League — that is a big, big prize — and the FA Cup."

## Europe-Chasing Milan Rallies Again to Beat Bologna 3-1 in Serie A



MILAN (Dispatches) - Santiago Gimenez scored twice and had a goal disallowed as AC Milan rallied to beat Bologna 3-1 in Serie A and keep alive its hopes of European soccer next season.

It was the second game in row in which Milan has come from behind to secure three points.

Milan is eighth in the Italian league, a point above Fiorentina and two points behind a faltering Bologna. The top four will go into the Champions League and the fifth- and sixth-placed teams qualify for the Europa League and Europa Conference League, respectively.

Juventus is fourth with 63 points, the same as the two teams behind it, Roma and Lazio.

Bologna was hoping to snap a two-game winless run and it took the lead after 48 minutes when Riccardo Orsolini cut in from the right and fired a low drive past Mike Maignan.

However, Gimenez equalized in the 73rd minute with a cool finish after Christian Pulisic set him up inside the box.

The Argentina-born Mexican international had a second goal disallowed two minutes later but another goal seemed inevitable as Milan pushed forward. It came four minutes later and again Pulisic was involved.

Joao Felix's 79th-minute shot was blocked but fell perfectly for the American and he coolly slotted the ball home from 12 meters out.

Gimenez capped a standout performance in stoppage time when he made space for himself inside the box and scored his second and Milan's third.

The game was a dress rehearsal for next Wednesday's Coppa Italia final in Rome.

## Sabalenka, Alcaraz Power Into Italian Open Third Round

ROME (Dispatches) - Coco Gauff survived a scare at this year's Italian Open, coming back from a set down to beat qualifier Victoria Mboko 3-6, 6-2, 6-1 as Aryna Sabalenka and Carlos Alcaraz both cruised through their opening matches.

World number three Gauff will play Magda Linette in the third round in Rome after prevailing despite being far from her best in a match which signalled more progress from her up-and-coming opponent.

Canadian Mboko played with a maturity which defied the 153 places separating her from Gauff in the world rankings in a prime-time clash on centre court.

The 18-year-old has risen from 333 to 156 since the start of the year and the Foro Italico crowd quickly took to her confident, and powerful play.

Mboko had Gauff on the ropes in the first set, breaking the former US Open winner four times, but eventually gave way to her more experienced opponent who is one of the favourites for overall victory after losing to Sabalenka in the recent Madrid final.

"It was a tough match, Victoria came out playing some tough tennis, I knew she was going to do from watching some of her previous matches," said Gauff.

"But overall I'm just happy that I was able to step up my game." Current world number one Sabalenka swept past Russia's Anastasia



Potapova 6-2, 6-2 in just over an hour.

Sabalenka will play Sofia Kenin in the next round after the American beat another Russian in Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova in straight sets, 6-3, 6-0.

The 27-year-old Sabalenka has reached the final of her last four tournaments, winning both in Madrid and in another 1000 series in Miami.

"I know that if I bring my best game and my fight spirit on court, I know that I can win this tournament," Sabalenka told reporters.

Emma Raducanu got off to a flying start with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Jil Teichmann, a lucky loser who replaced Ekaterina Alexandrova following the Russian's withdrawal with a shoulder injury.

Alcaraz got past Dusan Lajovic 6-3, 6-3 in one hour and 23 minutes in his first match since suffering a thigh injury in his Barcelona Open final defeat to Holger Rune last month.

The Spaniard showed some signs of ring rustiness with 22 unforced errors but saw off Serbian qualifier Lajovic and was positive about his comeback display.

"It was a great performance, a great level, which was surprising for me a little bit but I'm just really happy," said Alcaraz.

Alcaraz will now face Laslo Djere, a 6-0, 6-3 winner over Alex Michelsen, in the third round as he eyes a potential final with world number one Jannik Sinner in the Italian capital.