

Iran Welcomed the Announcement of an Immediate Ceasefire Between Pakistan and India After Days of Deadly Clashes Between the Two Nations Over a Terrorist Attack in Indian-Administered Kashmir Last Month

IRAN NEWS

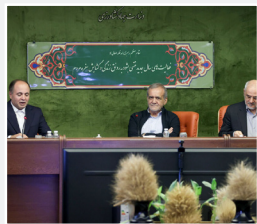
Iranian and Saudi Arabian Foreign Ministers Met on Saturday to Discuss Key Issues Related to Bilateral Relations, as Well as Regional and International Developments

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Iran Rejects Totally Absurd Allegations of Sending Missile Launchers to Russia



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations has categorically rejected accusations that the Islamic Republic is preparing to supply launchers for short-range ballistic missiles to Russia.

Citing two supply launchers for short-range ballistic missiles to Russia, Reuters reported that Iran was preparing to deliver Fath-360 launchers to Russia, which would give Moscow additional firepower in the war with Ukraine.

The missiles have a range of 75 miles (120 km) and could be used to target Ukrainian frontline positions, nearby military facilities, and population centers close to Russia's border, Reuters said.

Iran's mission said the allegation was "utterly absurd."

"We regret that Reuters persists in its habit of circulating baseless allegations against the Islamic Republic of Iran," it said in a statement.

"So long as conflict persists between the parties, Iran will abstain from rendering any form of military assistance to either side," it added.

The United States previously accused Iran of sending Fath-360 missiles to Russia last September on nine Russian-flagged ships. But reports at the time suggested the missile launchers had not been included in the shipment.

The Western security officials and the regional source, speaking anonymously to Reuters, alleged that the delivery of the launchers was imminent but declined to provide further details, including reasons for the apparent delay in their initial transfer.

Iran Inaugurates Its First Biorefinery



TEHRAN - Iran has officially launched its first biorefinery in the western province of Kermanshah, marking a major step toward environmentally-friendly fuel production. The new facility is expected to produce 200,000 liters of bioethanol per day, which will be primarily used to enhance the octane level of gasoline.

Farshad Moqimi, head of the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO), announced the project at a press conference, emphasizing the growing global trend of ethanol use in fuel. "Over 90 countries worldwide use ethanol to boost gasoline octane levels," he said. "IDRO has now joined this movement by developing bioethanol production from corn."

According to Moqimi, the Kermanshah plant is one of two initial bioethanol projects—another is underway in the province of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. He noted that Iran requires at least 28 such facilities to meet a daily demand of 6 million liters of ethanol.

Moqimi highlighted the broader objectives behind the project, citing the dual energy and environmental imbalances the country faces. "These projects will help mitigate environmental disparities and support industrial renewal. IDRO aims to make industrial renovation profitable for the private sector."

The deputy minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade also stated that the project is part of a broader investment package approved earlier this year, which includes permits for industrial renewal. "Private sector involvement has been crucial," Moqimi said, confirming that the bioethanol plant was developed in cooperation with private investors.

Iran's Nuclear Enrichment Was Paid for in Blood and Is Not Open to Negotiation

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi emphasized on Sunday, that nuclear enrichment is Iran's sovereign right and not subject to negotiation or compromise. He described the United States' contradictory positions in the nuclear talks as one of the main challenges in the ongoing negotiations.

Speaking before the fourth round of indirect talks between Iran and the United States, Araqchi said, "Following yesterday's regional consultations with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, I am heading into the next round of negotiations. We held additional consultations this morning in Tehran, and we hope to reach a decisive point in this round."

Araqchi criticized the American side for inconsistent statements, both in the media and during negotiations. "We're witnessing contradictory behavior from the other side, whether inside the negotiation room, outside it, or in the media space," he said. "Their positions keep shifting, which creates a serious challenge for the talks. In contrast, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always maintained clear and principled positions and moved along a straightforward path."

Araqchi reiterated that Iran's nuclear program is firmly rooted in legal and regulatory frameworks, emphasizing that its peaceful nature has always been under international monitoring. "This is a matter of the Iranian people's rights and not something to be negotiated or traded away. Nuclear enrichment is a national achievement and point of pride, for which we have paid dearly—even with the blood of our nuclear scientists. It is certainly not negotiable, and we have always stated this position clearly."

He added that Iran has presented a proposal to the other parties that guarantees the peaceful nature of its nuclear program. "The other side has submitted its own proposal as well, but unfortunately, we're still seeing conflicting ideas from them."

Araqchi stressed that Iran's nuclear rights are clearly defined, and its principles are non-negotiable. However, he expressed readiness to take further steps toward transparency and



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confidence-building. "We are prepared to do more than what we have done so far in order to build trust. But we expect the other side to come to the table with a clear and consistent negotiating logic."

He criticized the publication of negotiation details in the media, saying, "Bringing negotiation matters into the media contradicts the spirit of serious diplomacy and casts doubt on the other side's sincerity. We hope this round will lead to constructive and forward-looking talks while upholding Iran's principled positions."

He clarified that if the goal is to ensure Iran does not develop nuclear weapons, that is "completely achievable" and an agreement to that effect is "certainly within reach." However, "if irrational, unrealistic, or unfeasible demands are made, the negotiations will naturally face problems."

Reflecting on previous rounds, Araqchi noted a constructive atmosphere and genuine interest from the other side. "However, some of their statements outside the negotiating room contradict this seriousness and blur the process. We understand they may face domestic pressures and various audiences, but that's their issue, not ours. It shouldn't affect the talks."

He emphasized the importance of maintaining a professional negotiation framework: "There must be consistency and a code of conduct at the negotiation table. Negotiations cannot be conducted through the media. We expect the other side to adopt stable and coherent positions—as Iran's positions have been consistent, principled, and foundational."

Araqchi also shared logistical details, stating that the negotiations would begin this afternoon and that their duration would depend on the atmosphere and progress. "Our expert team is already in Muscat, ready to be involved if needed. The opposing side will bring any delegation it deems appropriate. Talks will continue indirectly through Oman's foreign minister, and we will keep the public informed as progress is made."

Raising Concerns About Iran's Peaceful Nuclear Work "Unacceptable"

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has called attention to the double standards of the international community regarding nuclear weapons, calling it "unacceptable" for Western powers to raise alleged concerns over the country's peaceful nuclear energy program while overlooking the Israeli regime's extensive nuclear arsenal.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi made the remarks during an extended address during the Fourth Round of Iranian-Arab Dialogues conference in the Qatari capital Doha on Saturday.

The top diplomat reminded that the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy activities were a peaceful and legitimate pursuit in contrast to the nuclear weapons possessed by the Israeli regime.

He reaffirmed that Iran did not seek nuclear weapons and that weapons of mass destruction had no place in the country's security doctrine.

The foreign minister pointed out that the country was one of the initiators of a nuclear-weapon-free zone concept in Asia and called on Western countries to abandon their double standards regarding nuclear proliferation.

"Iran is committed to the international non-proliferation regime," Araqchi explained, denouncing Western countries' and their allies' decades-old way of raising uncalled-for alarm about the nation's peaceful nuclear energy program while turning a blind eye to the Israeli regime's nuclear arsenal.

For decades, the United States, its European allies, and Washington's allied parties elsewhere across the globe have been using allegations of Iran's pursuing non-conventional arms to either enact or agitate anti-Iranian policies, including sanctions, and anti-Iranian discourse.

This is while Iran's leadership has categorically ruled out such endeavor in line with moral and religious imperatives.

The Islamic Republic's refusal to either pursue, develop or stockpiles such weaponry has also been unexceptionally proven during the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s inspections, making the country the most-verified member of the United Nations nuclear watchdog.

Pointing again to the Israeli regime's nuclear weapons program and arsenal and instances



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of its deadly adventurism and expansionism across the West Asia region, the official said, "The existence of the Zionist regime remains the single greatest threat to peace in the region."

He condemned the United States for supporting the regime unwaveringly and exponentially, calling Washington an accomplice in the regime's atrocities, including its acts of violence and injustice targeting Palestinians.

The foreign minister described the regime's ongoing genocidal and other aggressive measures as a direct attempt to erase the Palestinian nation.

Such prospect, he said, would amount to complete colonial erasure of the Palestinian nation through the most horrific forms of violence and forced displacement.

He identified the so-called "two-state solution" as a myth used to delay the realization of Palestinian rights for decades, and reminded that the regime, itself, had ruled out even that prospect.

As the fourth round of indirect talks between Iran and the United States was set to begin the following day, Araqchi said, "We will continue our discussions with the United States—and concurrently with Europe, Russia, and China—in good faith."

However, he made it clear that if the goal of these discussions was to ensure that Iran was not pursuing nuclear weapons, that objective had already been achieved.

The official also firmly stated that if the aim was to deny Iran its legitimate nuclear rights and impose unrealistic demands, the Islamic Republic would not yield. "The Islamic Republic of Iran will never, under any circumstances, surrender any of the legitimate rights of the proud Iranian nation."

In the same context, he underscored that Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy, including enrichment, was non-negotiable.

Araqchi stressed the importance of regional convergence as the path forward for Western Asian nations.

He called for deeper trust-building and mutual understanding, advocating for cooperative initiatives in areas like cultural exchange, trade, and tourism.

According to Araqchi, prosperity in the region depends not on the rise of dominant nations, but on the success of a strong region as a whole.

Iraq Increases Import Tariffs on Iranian Goods



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TEHRAN - A senior member of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce has raised concerns over Iraq's recent decision to raise import tariffs on Iranian goods, warning of potential consequences for Iranian exports and highlighting ongoing issues with cross-border smuggling.

Seyed Hamid Hosseini, a board member of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, said that smuggling goods from Iran into Iraq remains relatively easy in certain border areas due to the lack of customs oversight. He noted that light live animals are among the items frequently trafficked illegally into Iraq, adding that concealing goods in shipments bound for Iraq has also become a common practice.

Speaking to ILNA, Hosseini explained that Iraq has recently increased the import tariff on Iranian rebar from 20% to 30%. "This is concerning," he said, "as it undermines the competitiveness of Iranian steel producers in the Iraqi market." Iraq, aiming to protect and develop its domestic industries, has launched rebar production facilities in several cities including Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Karbala, and Basra. These facilities import steel billets from Iran and manufacture rebar domestically to meet local demand for construction materials. Iraq typically imported between \$75 million and \$100 million worth of rebar from Iran each month.

Hosseini added that Iraq has adopted a strategy of raising tariffs on any goods it believes it can produce domestically. The country has recently expanded its production of urea, steel products, and several agricultural and food items such as tomatoes, beverages, snacks, poultry, and eggs—achieving varying levels of success in replacing imports.

Despite these developments, Hosseini noted that Iraq has not always been successful in maintaining high tariffs on Iranian goods. "In many cases, the imbalance created in the market forces them to reduce the tariffs again—although they usually do this quietly and only notify border customs, without any official announcement," he explained.

Possible Decline in Car Imports This Year



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TEHRAN - Saeed Mottamemi, the former head of the Tehran Auto Dealers and Showroom Owners Union, has warned that car imports in Iran are likely to decline in the current year due to a drop in vehicle import order registrations for 2024 (Iranian calendar year 1403).

In an interview with ILNA, Mottamemi said that the decrease in car import registrations this year signals a potential reduction in the number of vehicles entering the Iranian market, as many of the cars currently being imported were based on orders placed last year. He noted that last year's stronger import flows had a calming effect not only on the imported car market but also helped moderate prices in the domestic vehicle market.

However, Mottamemi cautioned that the lower volume of import orders placed in 2024 will likely result in reduced availability of imported cars this year. This shortfall, he said, is expected to drive up prices in the imported vehicle sector.

He also pointed to the broader economic uncertainty created by the suspension of negotiations—widely interpreted as nuclear or international policy talks—as a major factor contributing to market stagnation. "The shadow of negotiations is still felt across all markets," Mottamemi said. "The suspension of talks has plunged all sectors, including the automotive market, into a state of absolute stagnation. Uncertainty about the outcome of the negotiations has left many hesitant to make financial decisions."

Despite this overall stagnation, Mottamemi observed that car prices have inched up slightly over the past week, driven by the rise in the exchange rate of the U.S. dollar.

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Oil Industry is Driving Force Behind Iran's Economy

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Government Spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani says the oil industry is a key pillar of Iran's economy, describing it as the driving force behind the nation's development and a crucial contributor to its knowledge-based companies. Mohajerani made the remarks on Saturday during a visit to the 29th Iran Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition. Speaking on the sidelines of the event, she highlighted the exhibition's role as a platform for exchanging knowledge, experience, and technology. "This exhibition is a meeting place for supply and demand and plays an effective role in displaying the technological capabilities and achievements of knowledge-based companies."

Iran Signals Readiness to Enter Arash Gas Field Talks



TEHRAN - The commander of Iran's Khatam al-Anbia Construction Headquarters announced the country's readiness to participate in the development of the Arash gas field, while reports suggest Kuwait is preparing to begin work on the same shared field with the help of a neighboring country.

Speaking to ILNA, Brigadier General Abdolreza Abed emphasized the strategic significance of the Arash field, stating that discussions have already taken place with Iran's Ministry of Petroleum. "We have expressed our readiness to enter the Arash field. The matter has been brought to the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs so that diplomatic negotiations can be initiated, and relevant follow-ups have been communicated to the Ministry of Petroleum," he said. "We are holding sessions to actively pursue this issue."

Addressing Iran's stake in the field, Abed highlighted the need to clarify the country's share, which is currently estimated at around 40 percent. "Whether it is more or less than 40 percent, this issue must be pursued. The Arash field is a joint resource, and Iran has a rightful share. Agreement between the involved countries is essential before production can begin," he stated.

In response to reports that Kuwait has already begun operations in the field, Abed said, "There are conflicting reports, but it appears Kuwait is determined to proceed. We have heard that they are receiving assistance from a company in a neighboring country, though we don't have full details yet."

Abed also addressed recent challenges in the South Pars gas field, noting a drop in pressure last year. "Given our experience, we declared our readiness to join this project. Our engineering team proposed two options for platform installation—onshore and offshore. The Ministry of Petroleum has decided on offshore installation."

Iran Proposes Practical Steps to Boost Regional Trade at ECO Meeting



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, has presented a series of practical proposals aimed at enhancing regional trade among member countries of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), stressing the current insufficiency of intra-regional trade volumes.

Speaking during the 14th ECO Trade Promotion Organizations Meeting, hosted virtually by Pakistan, Dehnavi emphasized the urgent need for ECO member states to deepen economic collaboration, particularly in the field of trade.

"With our considerable population, rich natural resources, strategic geographic location, and shared cultural and historical ties, ECO countries have all the ingredients to become a global economic hub — but this requires a strong collective will and effective cooperation," he stated.

Dehnavi described regional trade development as a key tool for securing economic stability, cultural integration, and regional security. However, he noted that ECO's share of regional trade in its members' overall trade portfolios remains insufficient. To address this, he proposed several practical measures: Establishing a harmonized system to streamline customs procedures; Launching and activating joint transportation lines and regional corridors, including the North-South and East-West trade corridors; Creating bilateral and multilateral barter mechanisms; Expanding joint trade exhibitions, events, and economic delegation exchanges; and developing digital infrastructure and enabling platforms for e-commerce.

Highlighting Iran's readiness to host specialized meetings on the export of engineering and technical services, knowledge-based agriculture, and the halal industry, Dehnavi stressed the vital role ECO trade organizations can play in financing and investment initiatives. He called for a more active role from the ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) in supporting these efforts.

President Warns Against Unsustainable Agricultural Practices

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has warned that agricultural exports effectively equate to "hidden water exports" and stressed the urgent need for sustainable water and land resource management.

During a visit to the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad on Saturday morning, President Pezeshkian met with the Minister of Agriculture and other top officials. The meeting was also attended online by provincial heads of agricultural organizations across the country. Officials provided updates on current projects and programs.

In his closing remarks, Pezeshkian highlighted the pressing challenges Iran faces regarding water and soil, emphasizing the need for timely and effective action to prevent these issues from escalating into full-blown crises.

"We must develop a comprehensive and precise understanding of our water and soil resources," Pezeshkian said. "The first step is to ask: what should we be producing given our current capacities? Do our current cropping patterns align with our available water and soil resources?"

The president posed a critical question: "Is it economically and logically justifiable to produce every type of agricultural export using our limited water resources?"

He continued, "Exporting agricultural products is effectively exporting water — a hidden export we can't afford. We must scrutinize whether the production and export of each product are justifiable given our national water situation."

Pezeshkian cautioned against drawing groundwater without a long-term plan and called such practices irrational, especially as over-extraction causes land subsidence and environmental degradation. He cited reports indicating that, despite deeper and more frequent well drilling, water output has not increased significantly in some regions.

"Every development plan must be sustainable. Are the crops we produce today the most efficient and cost-effective? Could we not instead cultivate higher-value crops using our limited water more wisely?"

He also criticized the lack of a comprehensive data system for the agricultural



sector, calling it a major barrier to effective planning. "If we don't guide farmers with accurate information, they'll continue doing what they know best, and we can't blame them for that. We are responsible."

The president emphasized the importance of guiding farmers with data-driven decisions — telling them what, where, and how much to plant — and ensuring support is aligned with regional capacities and climates.

He called for greater involvement from universities, experts, and local stakeholders, noting that agricultural cooperatives and farmers themselves must be trusted and empowered.

President Pezeshkian praised the Agriculture Ministry's recent efforts but stressed that building a precise and reliable national database on agriculture, water, and soil must be the top priority. "We need to know exactly what resources we have and how to use them for sustainable development," he said.

He also urged the rapid installation of solar panels to power agricultural wells and warned that excessive groundwater extraction threatens farmers' livelihoods. He called for academic and public involvement to solve these challenges more quickly and effectively.

Highlighting marine resources as an alternative, he pointed out the potential of sea-based protein production for being healthier, more sustainable, and less costly.

On market reform, Pezeshkian welcomed efforts to streamline agricultural product distribution and reduce the role of middlemen, saying such moves boost producers' profits and help fix deeper issues in the agricultural economy.

He concluded by affirming his belief in the power of public participation: "I personally believe in the people's ability to solve problems. We must trust them and give them the space to take action. Experience shows that when people and stakeholders are involved, solutions come faster and are more effective."

Before the president's speech, the Minister of Agriculture and senior officials, including two provincial directors, presented detailed reports and outlined their priorities and concerns.

Tehran, Beijing Emphasize Expanding Bilateral Cooperation in AI, Digital Economy, ICT



TEHRAN - In a high-level meeting in Tehran, Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Seyed Sattar Hashemi, met with China's Ambassador to Iran, Cong Peiwu, to discuss the expansion of bilateral cooperation across critical sectors including communications, digital economy, artificial intelligence (AI), and ICT infrastructure.

The talks underscored the need to fully leverage shared capacities and strategic agreements between the two nations. Hashemi highlighted the long-standing historical and cultural ties between Iran and China, tracing back to the Silk Road era, as a foundation for deeper technological and economic collaboration in the 21st century.

Reaffirming Iran's commitment to previously signed agreements, especially in the ICT domain, Hashemi called for the active implementation of the strategic roadmap established in earlier memoranda of understanding between the two countries' communications ministries. He announced plans for an upcoming official visit to China, which he described as a key opportunity to advance joint projects.

Among the top priorities for future cooperation, Hashemi listed AI development, space systems, high-performance computing infrastructure, and cross-border data transit networks. He emphasized that both Iran and China possess considerable strengths in AI, which could serve as the foundation for joint ventures and innovation.

Chinese Ambassador Cong Peiwu echoed this sentiment, praising Iran's achievements in ICT and expressing strong support for enhanced collaboration, especially in cutting-edge fields. He stressed that, despite external challenges and geopolitical pressures, China remains committed to deepening its strategic partnership with Iran.

Strategic Rasht-Astara Railway Project Critical for Iran's Access to Int'l Markets



TEHRAN - The continuation of the Rasht-Astara railway construction is both an economic necessity and a strategic imperative for Iran's transportation policy, according to the CEO of the Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company.

During a meeting held on Saturday to review the latest developments on the Rasht-Astara railway project, attended by Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development Houshang Bazvand, officials reiterated the importance of sustained support for this key national priority.

Bazvand emphasized the strategic significance of the Rasht-Astara railway, warning that delays due to managerial hurdles or resource shortages must be prevented. "This railway line holds strategic importance for us. We should not allow its progress to stall due to bureaucratic entanglements or lack of funding," he stated.

He called for coordinated efforts among relevant agencies to ensure the project continues and accelerates in its execution.

Addressing some of the existing challenges, Bazvand pointed out that while there have been formal communications with the Minister's office regarding the concerns, issues related to workforce allocation, machinery, and on-site coordination still require more robust follow-up. He stressed the need to witness tangible progress in the project from the Iranian calendar year 1404 (beginning March 2025).

Highlighting the project's geopolitical significance, Bazvand added that the Rasht-Astara railway is not only economically vital but also strategically essential for integrating Iran into the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

According to IRNA, completing the Rasht-Astara railway is critical for closing the last gap in the North-South Corridor—a major rail network linking Iran to Russia and European markets via Azerbaijan. Given the current geopolitical developments, including Russia's conflict with Ukraine, the Iranian route is increasingly viewed as the most viable path for cargo transit between Southeast Asia and northern neighbors.

Kish Gas Field Refinery to Be Constructed Soon



TEHRAN - The CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company has announced plans to construct a refinery in the Aftab Kish area, highlighting that the Kish gas field has a daily production capacity of 75 to 100 million cubic meters of gas.

Speaking at a press conference on the third day of the 29th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, CEO Touraj Dehghani stated that out of 14 wells drilled in the Kish gas field, 9 to 10 are completed and ready for production. These wells are expected to yield about 28 million cubic meters of gas per day—equivalent to one phase of the South Pars gas field.

He added that the first phase of the planned refinery in the Aftab Kish region is underway. The Kish gas field is considered a major field with the potential to match three to four phases of South Pars in terms of daily output.

Dehghani also mentioned that tenders for the North Pars field—located 130 km west of Assaluyeh—and for Kish field—200 km from South Pars—have been launched. Gas production from North Pars is expected to begin within three to four years.

Engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contracts for Aftab Kish are set to start in the first half of this year, including the initiation of phases 2 and 3.

Dehghani described the Kish field as one of the country's largest gas reserves, offering significant investment opportunities for major industries and end-users.

Addressing issues in the South Pars field, Dehghani confirmed that pressure drops have begun, with phase 12 being the most severely

affected. Similar issues are also emerging in some eastern blocks.

He noted that contracts for gas pressure boosting were signed in March of last year, and operations are expected to begin soon to counteract the reservoir pressure decline in South Pars.

Major maintenance work on phase 14 has been completed due to warmer weather and reduced domestic gas consumption. Maintenance on other phases is set to commence shortly.

According to Dehghani, the company is responsible for producing 720 million cubic meters of refined gas per day from South Pars to supply the national grid.

He emphasized the strategic management role of the company in overseeing pressure boosting projects, with coordination meetings ongoing with contractors across seven hubs in South Pars. These projects will soon be launched by domestic contractors.

He described pressure enhancement as critical for sustaining the country's long-term gas production.

Dehghani also provided updates on the crude oil pipeline from Khuzestan to Jask port in the Makran region, stating that the Goreh-Jask pipeline has achieved 70–80% progress with a \$1 billion investment. The project is expected to deliver crude oil to the Jask export terminal by the end of the year.

He noted that the company currently operates seven offshore drilling rigs, which are active within the field. He stressed the country's urgent need for additional drilling rigs, anticipating a high demand over the next decade.

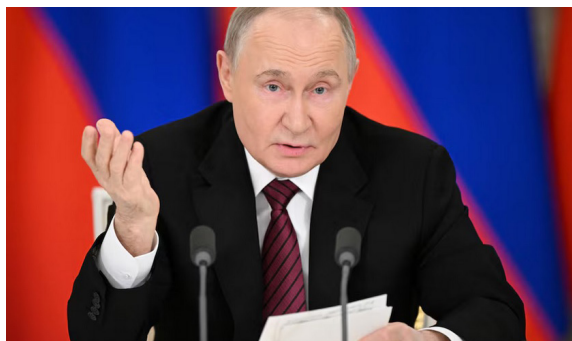
Panama's Ex-President Martinelli Departs for Asylum in Colombia

PANAMA CITY (Dispatches) - Colombia granted asylum to Panama's former President Ricardo Martinelli, Colombian authorities said on Saturday, and two sources close to the ex-president said that he had departed the Nicaraguan embassy in Panama City for Colombia.

Martinelli, who was sentenced to over a decade in prison in Panama for money laundering, has been living in the Nicaraguan embassy in Panama City since February last year, after Panama's Supreme Court confirmed his sentence. Panamanian authorities said in a statement that they offered the ex-president safe passage from the embassy to a local airport in "full compliance with the obligations set forth in the 1928 Convention on Asylum and the 1933 Convention on Political Asylum."



Putin Proposes Direct Peace Talks With Ukraine



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday proposed direct talks with Ukraine on May 15 in Istanbul that he said should be aimed at bringing a durable peace and eliminating the root causes of the war.

Putin sent thousands of troops into Ukraine in February 2022, unleashing a war that has left hundreds of thousands of soldiers dead and triggering the gravest confrontation between Russia and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

He said Russia was proposing direct talks with Ukraine in Istanbul in an attempt to "eliminate the root causes of the conflict" and "to achieve the restoration of a long-term, lasting peace" rather than simply a pause for rearmament.

"We are proposing that Kyiv resume direct negotiations without any preconditions," Putin said from the Kremlin in the early hours of Sunday. "We offer the Kyiv authorities to resume negotiations already on Thursday, in Istanbul."

Despite public and private pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump and repeated warnings from European powers, Putin has offered few concessions towards ending the conflict.

Putin said that he would speak to Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan later on Sunday about facilitating the talks, which he said could lead to a ceasefire.

"Our proposal, as they say, is on the table, the decision is now up to the Ukrainian authorities and their curators, who are guided, it seems, by their personal political ambitions, and not by the interests of their peoples."

There was no immediate response from Kyiv to the proposal, which came in the early hours of Sunday morning.

Bangladesh Bans Activities of ousted PM Hasina's Party



DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's interim government has banned all activities of the Awami League, the political party of deposed former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, under the country's Anti-Terrorism Act, citing national security concerns.

The decision, announced late Saturday, follows days of street protests led by the student-driven National Citizen Party, which emerged from last year's uprising that toppled Hasina.

Several Islamist and right-wing parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami and other opposition groups, joined the demonstrations, demanding the Awami League be designated a terrorist organisation.

The ban would remain in place until the trial of the party and its leadership over deaths of hundreds of protesters at the International Crimes Tribunal is completed, the government said in a statement.

The government also announced an amendment to the ICT Act, allowing the tribunal to prosecute not only individuals but also political parties and organisations. The change clears the way for the Awami League to be tried as a collective entity for alleged crimes committed during its time in power.

The Awami League, which was founded in 1949, dismissed the decision as illegitimate, posting on its official Facebook page: "All decisions of the illegal government are illegal."

Trump Hails China Talks, Says Two Sides Negotiated Total Reset in Geneva

GENEVA (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump hailed talks with China in Switzerland, saying the two sides had negotiated "a total reset ... in a friendly, but constructive, manner."

"A very good meeting today with China, in Switzerland. Many things discussed, much agreed to," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

Trump added: "We want to see, for the good of both China and the US, an opening up of China to American business. GREAT PROGRESS MADE!!!" He did not elaborate on the progress.

Earlier, top US and Chinese officials wrapped up the first day of talks in Geneva aimed at defusing a trade war that threatens to hammer the global economy and planned to resume negotiations today, a source close to the discussions said.

Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng met for about eight hours with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer in their first face-to-face meeting since the world's two largest economies heaped tariffs well above 100 per cent on each other's goods.

Neither side made any statements afterwards about the substance of the discussions nor signaled any specific progress towards reducing crushing tariffs as meetings at the residence of Switzerland's ambassador to the UN concluded at about 8pm local time.

Bessent, Greer and He were meeting in Geneva after weeks of growing tensions prompted by Trump's tariff blitz starting in February and retaliation from Beijing that has brought nearly US\$600 billion (RM2.6 trillion) in annual bilateral trade to a virtual standstill.

The trade dispute, combined with Trump's decision last month to impose duties on dozens of other countries, has disrupted supply chains, unsettled financial markets and stoked fears of a sharp global downturn.

The location of the talks in the Swiss diplomatic hub was never made public. However, witnesses said both delegations returning after a lunch break to the gated U.N. ambassador's villa, which has its own private park overlooking Lake Geneva in the leafy suburb of Cologny.

Earlier, US officials including Bessent and Greer smiled as they left their hotel on the way to the talks, wearing red ties and American flags on their lapels. Bessent declined to speak to reporters.

At the same time, Mercedes vans with tinted windows were seen leaving a hotel where the Chinese delegation was



145 per cent levies he has imposed on Chinese imports.

He has suggested the discussions were initiated by China. Beijing said the US requested the discussions and that China's policy of opposing US tariffs had not changed.

China could be looking for the same 90-day waiver on tariffs that Washington has given other countries as negotiations take place, while any kind of tariff reduction and follow-up talks would be seen as positive by investors.

Swiss Economy Minister Guy Parmelin met both parties in Geneva on Friday and said the fact that the talks were taking place was already a success.

"If a road map can emerge and they decide to continue discussions, that will lower the tensions," he told reporters on Friday, saying talks could continue into today or even tomorrow.

Switzerland helped to broker the meeting during recent visits by Swiss politicians to China and the United States.

Explosions Reported After India and Pakistan Agree to Ceasefire

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan agreed to a ceasefire on Saturday after U.S. pressure and four days of fighting, but within hours explosions rang out in border cities and towns and India accused Pakistan of violating the pact.

Artillery fire and attack drones were witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir, the centre of much of the fighting, while blasts from air-defence systems boomed in cities under blackout, similar to the previous evening, according to authorities, residents and Reuters witnesses.

Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told reporters that Pakistan had violated the understanding arrived at by the two countries earlier in the day, and that the Indian armed forces had been instructed to "deal strongly" with any repetition.

"We call upon Pakistan to take appropriate steps to address these violations and deal with the situation with seriousness and responsibility," Misri told a media briefing.

In response, the foreign ministry of Pakistan said the country was committed to the ceasefire and blamed India for the violations. "Our forces are handling the situation with responsibility and restraint," it said.

The ministry also called on troops on the ground to exercise restraint and said that any issues in the implementation of the ceasefire should be addressed through communication at appropriate levels.

Pakistan's military spokesperson did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The fighting has been the worst between the old South Asian enemies in nearly three decades and threatened to erupt into a full-scale war in one of the world's most volatile and densely populated regions.

There were briefly fears that nuclear arsenals might come into play as Pakistan's military said a top body overseeing its nuclear weapons would meet.

But the defence minister said no such meeting was scheduled, hours after a night of heavy fighting in which the two countries targeted each other's



military bases and the combined civilian death toll rose to 66.

"Pakistan and India have agreed to a ceasefire with immediate effect," Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar posted on X. "Pakistan has always strived for peace and security in the region, without compromising on its sovereignty and territorial integrity!"

Misri had earlier said the chiefs of the two countries' military operations had spoken to each other and agreed that all fighting would stop at 5 p.m. Indian time (1130 GMT).

U.S. President Donald Trump posted: "After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to announce that India and Pakistan have agreed to a FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE. Congratulations to both Countries on using Common Sense and Great Intelligence."

Dar told the broadcaster Geo News that military channels and hotlines between India and Pakistan had been activated, and three dozen countries had helped to facilitate the agreement.

On Wednesday, India had attacked what it said was "terrorist infrastructure" in Pakistani Kashmir and Pakistan, two weeks after 26 people were killed in an attack on Hindu tourists in Indian Kashmir.

Pakistan denied India's accusations that it was involved in the attack. Days of cross-border fire, shelling and drone and missile attacks followed.

Despite the truce, two Indian government sources told Reuters that the punitive measures announced by India and reciprocated by Pakistan, such as trade suspension and visa cancellations, would remain in place for now.

The sources also said the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, a critical water-sharing pact that India suspended after the Kashmir attack, would remain suspended.

The Indian foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that he and Vice President JD Vance had engaged with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistan's Shehbaz Sharif, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Pakistan's army chief Asim Munir, and the two national security advisers over the course of 48 hours.

In a post on X, Rubio commended Modi and Sharif on the agreement, which he said included not only an immediate ceasefire but also the start of talks on "a broad set of issues at a neutral site."

News of the ceasefire was greeted with relief on both sides of the border and Pakistan's airport authority said its airspace had been fully reopened.

But the subsequent violations sparked alarm in India.

"What the hell just happened to the ceasefire? Explosions heard across Srinagar!!!" Omar Abdullah, chief minister of Indian Kashmir, posted on X. "This is no ceasefire. The air defence units in the middle of Srinagar just opened up."

India and Pakistan have been locked in a dispute over Kashmir ever since they were born at the end of British colonial rule in 1947. Hindu-majority India and Muslim Pakistan both rule part of Kashmir but claim it in full.

Ukraine, Allies Set Ultimatum to Russia to Accept 30-Day Ceasefire

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine and four European leaders pressed Russia on Saturday to accept a 30-day unconditional ceasefire starting Monday, threatening Moscow with coordinated sanctions if it did not comply.

The ultimatum was given after talks in Kyiv attended by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the leaders of Britain, France, Germany and Poland.

The United States and other countries back the proposal, they said.

The Kremlin's spokesman told CNN that Moscow will "think through" the proposal, but stressed "there are lots of questions" and that Russia is "resistant to any kind of pressure".

President Vladimir Putin did not immediately comment.

The unprecedented visit was the first time the leaders of the four European nations had made a joint trip to Ukraine.

"We have just now... decided to support a ceasefire which will begin next Monday, without any preconditions," France's President Emmanuel Macron told a press conference.



Leaders from about 20 other member countries of the "coalition of the willing" supporting Ukraine held a videoconference with Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Zelenskyy.

"In the event of a violation of this ceasefire, we have agreed that massive sanctions will be prepared and coordinated between Europeans and Americans," Macron said.

The United States and Ukraine have been for weeks pushed a similar proposal, which Russia has not accepted.

US President Donald Trump had threatened to walk out of talks over the lack of progress on ending the war. Trump vowed during the US election campaign to halt the conflict within a day of taking office.

Kyiv and its allies had feared that Trump was pivoting towards Moscow's position, because he has clashed with Zelenskyy. But Trump has recently expressed growing impatience with Putin.



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City were held to a shock goalless draw by Premier League basement club Southampton yesterday while Aston Villa beat Bournemouth as the race for Champions League places hots up.

Pep Guardiola's dethroned champions were expected to waltz to three points on England's south coast and pull level with second-placed Arsenal on 67 points.

But although City dominated possession and had 26 shots, they could not break their opponents down, despite the return of top-scorer Erling Haaland.

Third-placed City, who play Crystal Palace in next week's FA Cup final, remain well-placed to finish in the top five, which would secure qualification for the Champions League next season.

But Villa, in sixth spot, are now just two points behind them, on 63 points—level with Newcastle and Chelsea, who play each other—after their 1-0 win at Bournemouth.

“(Southampton were) playing to defend and defend and defend and waste time,” Guardiola told the BBC. “We take that point still, it’s in our hands.

“Didn’t expect them to defend so deep. Defensively we were so good but unfortunately we missed the last actions.”

There was an explosion of joy among the home fans at the final whistle even though Southampton’s relegation was sealed weeks ago.

The point for managerless Saints takes them to 12 for the season, meaning they have avoided the tag of being the joint-worst team in Premier League history.

They are now one point clear of Derby’s tally of 11 in the 2007/08 campaign.

“Everyone knows it’s been a difficult season for us,” said Southampton goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale.

“That one was for the fans and also the lads who have given everything. A lot of Mondays coming in

after heavy defeats. Today is a relief.”

Ollie Watkins’ goal in the dying seconds of the first half gave Villa a narrow win at Bournemouth, in a blow for the European hopes of Andoni Iraola’s men.

England forward Watkins is now the club’s all-time top goalscorer in the Premier League, his 75th goal taking him past Gabriel Agbonlahor’s tally of 74.

Villa’s Jacob Ramsey was dismissed after a second yellow card with 10 minutes to go, adding a touch of jeopardy.

Antoine Semenyo flashed a shot just wide and Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez saved smartly from Evanilson.

There was a heart-in-mouth moment for the visitors in the final moments when Martinez made a fingertip save to keep out Semenyo’s effort and Matty Cash cleared off the line.

Unai Emery’s team, who have suffered the crushing disappointment of defeats in the Champions League quarter-finals and FA Cup semi-finals in recent weeks, can still finish the season on a high.

“Of course we want to try to get our best dreams to play in Europe, in the Champions League again,” Emery told Sky Sports.

“But there are still matches to play, there are other teams in front of us but with this victory we can feel there are some possibilities to get it.”

Elsewhere, Brentford and Brighton both won to keep alive their European hopes.

Brentford beat already relegated Ipswich 1-0 for their fourth straight win, climbing to eighth in the table, which may be enough for European football next season.

Kevin Schade headed home from Bryan Mbeumo’s corner in the 18th minute for his 11th Premier League goal of the season.

Celtics Overwhelm Knicks to Pull Within 2-1 in NBA Playoff Series

BOSTON (Dispatches) - Payton Pritchard, the 2025 NBA Sixth Man of the Year as the top reserve player, led Boston’s blowout with 23 points while Jayson Tatum added 22 points, nine rebounds and seven assists, Jaylen Brown had 19 points and Derrick White scored 17.

No team has ever rallied from 0-3 down to win a series, a fact the Celtics knew all too well.

“We understood the magnitude of this game,” Tatum said. “We needed this one. Didn’t like the way we felt after last game so just coming out here with the right mindset, just trying to put it all together.”

The visiting Celtics pulled within 2-1 in their NBA second-round playoff series and can equalize the best-of-seven Eastern Conference matchup by winning game four on Monday at Madison Square Garden.

“We understand Monday is going to be a great atmosphere, a big game. It’s going to be fun,” Tatum said.



“Just coming out with the right mindset, understanding we played better but we can play a lot better based on a lot of things we did we really didn’t like tonight. So just building off that.”

Coming off two woeful games of three-point shooting, the Celtics made 20-of-40 from beyond the arc in game three, Pritchard sinking 5-of-10 three-point shots, Tatum making 5-of-9 and Al Horford hitting 3-of-4.

“We made some shots,” Tatum said. “It’s a make or miss league sometimes.”

Boston made 40-of-83 shots overall (48.2%) while the Knicks made only 32-of-80 overall (40.0%) and 5-of-25 (20.0%) from three-point range.

Boston had pulled away to big leads in the first two games at home but faded late with poor three-point shooting and lost in the final minutes while delivering their worst three-point shooting efforts of the campaign.

Sinner Enjoys Triumphant Return at Italian Open following Doping Ban

ROME (Dispatches) - World number one Jannik Sinner was ecstatic after a victorious return following a three-month doping ban, with a 6-3 6-4 win over Argentina’s Mariano Navone in the second round of the Italian Open.

Sinner agreed a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency in February and began an immediate three-month suspension after authorities accepted that the anabolic agent clostebol had entered his system via massages from his physiotherapist.

For the three-times Grand Slam champion, who had not played since winning the Australian Open in January, was not about just winning on home soil but rebuilding momentum.

“It’s an amazing feeling,” said the 23-year-old. “I waited quite long for this moment. I’m very happy to be back.

“It’s very difficult to have the right feedback when you don’t have any matches, and that’s exactly what I need. Now I think the best practice is the match itself, so I’m very happy about that.”

Sinner admitted there was natural rust, but the joy of simply competing again overrode any doubts about sharpness or rhythm.



“I’m very happy about the win today. It was very difficult. (Navone) is such a great player, especially on this surface. I tried to move around the ball.

“At times it went very well, at times it could have been better, yes, but in any case, it doesn’t matter about the result today. It has been a remarkable day for me, so I’m very happy.”

The Italian said he was surprised about how well his game felt after the layoff, as he extended his tour-level winning streak to 22 matches.

“I was surprised how things can (feel good) so quickly. I tried to give everything I have. I think that’s the only thing I can do and that’s the only thing I can control right now,” Sinner said.

“The sensation felt quite good, to be honest. Of course, there were some ups and downs, that is normal, but (Navone) played some great tennis, especially when he broke me in the second set.

“I tried to accept that and tried to work again. Now I have some good feedback, and hopefully I can work with that.”

Sinner will next face lucky loser Jesper de Jong.

Messi Suffers Worst Defeat in MLS as Miami Fall Again



MIAMI (Dispatches) - The Argentine scored in the second half but Miami’s defence was once again exposed as they fell to a fourth defeat in their last five games in all competitions – a run which has seen them concede 14 goals.

With Luis Suarez injured, Inter Miami coach Javier Mascherano opted to play without a recognised target striker with Messi floating in front of a five-man midfield.

Bongokuhle Hlongwane fired Minnesota ahead in the 32nd minute after Miami’s defence was exposed by a clever pass from Joaquin Pereyra to Carlos Harvey, who picked out the South African international striker in the box.

Messi provided the first real reminder of his presence six minutes later when he worked some space in a crowded area but his low right-foot shot was harmless.

Minnesota doubled their lead on the stroke of half-time when a long throw from Michael Boxall was headed on by Nicolas Romero and Anthony Markanich nodded home at the back post.

Messi struck three minutes after the interval when he was found in the box by Jordi Alba and provided his characteristic killer first touch and deadly finish to reduce the deficit.

But Minnesota responded magnificently – Tani Oluwaseyi headed a corner goalwards and Miami defender Marcelo Weigandt headed into his own net.

Then the excellent Oluwaseyi held off Noah Allen before slipping the ball inside to Robin Lod and the Finnish midfielder made no mistake with a perfect side-foot finish from the edge of the box.

Former Barcelona and Argentina midfielder Mascherano, who said his plans had to been impacted by stand-in forward Fafa Picault suffering a migraine before the game, was disappointed with the way his team had failed to react to a threat they had been ready for.

“It’s a tough loss for us. We knew Minnesota could hurt us in this way, in transitions, on set pieces, and they hurt us in (exactly) the way we had prepared for the game and that’s what worries me the most,” he said.

Kane Tastes First Title as Bayern Bid Farewell to Mueller



MUNICH (Dispatches) - Harry Kane opened the scoring ahead of lifting his first career silverware as Bayern Munich beat Borussia Moenchengladbach 2-0, with veteran Thomas Mueller playing his last home game for the club.

Bayern officially won the title today when defending champions Bayer Leverkusen were held to a 2-2 draw at Freiburg, but were presented with the Bundesliga shield in front of their home fans at full-time.

Dripping wet after being showered with beer by teammates, Kane said the title win was “an incredible feeling,” and hoped it would be “the first of many”.

“It’s been lot of hard work, a lot of sacrifice in between, for moments like this—to enjoy it with the team, enjoy it with the fans. I’m loving every minute,” said the England captain.

Kane opened the scoring 31 minutes in, heading in a curling Michael Olise shot for his 25th goal of the league campaign.

With Bayern lacking their usual energy, Gladbach had several chances to equalise but were let down by poor finishing. Olise tapped in from close range to score a goal of his own in the final minute, sealing the occasion.

In his 750th game in all competitions for the club, Mueller—who will leave Bayern after 25 years in the summer—went close to scoring but had his shot saved in the 57th minute.

The 35-year-old was subbed off with seven minutes remaining, hugging his teammates as reserves and members of staff rushed to form a guard of honour. Mueller won a record 13 Bundesliga titles and two Champions Leagues at Bayern.

Speaking with Sky Germany, Mueller said: “I can’t really work it through in my mind at the moment,” but said he was touched by “75,000 hearts which were beating just a little bit for me”.