

Iran Says Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu Has Attempted to Stop a Reported Deal Between the Palestinian Resistance Movement Hamas and the United States to Free an Israeli-American Captive Held in Gaza

IRAN NEWS

The United States Has Imposed New Sanctions on Iran Despite Ongoing Nuclear Negotiations Between the Two Countries, Prompting Tehran to Denounce Washington's Contradictory Positions

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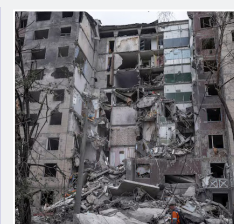


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Enhanced Iran-Uzbekistan Ties to Promote Regional Peace, Security



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian says the expansion of relations between Iran and Uzbekistan will promote mutual and regional peace and security.

Pezeshkian made the remark in a Monday meeting with Uzbekistan's Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov, who arrived in Tehran on Sunday at the head of a delegation to hold talks with senior Iranian officials.

"We can bring greater comfort and welfare to the people of our countries as well as more peace, security, and stability to the region by deepening relations and exchanging experience, capabilities, and mutual achievements," he said.

He pointed to the historical, cultural, linguistic, and ideological commonalities between Tehran and Tashkent and added that geographical borders have failed to and will not be able to separate the two countries.

Pezeshkian noted that more exchange of visits among the two countries' officials and people will play an effective role in strengthening mutual relations in all fields.

The Uzbekistan's prime minister, for his part, said great efforts by the two countries' presidents have been very effective in advancing common objectives and promoting mutual relations.

Referring to his visit to an exhibition of Iran's scientific, industrial and technical achievements, Aripov hailed the country's considerable progress in various fields.

Enemy Attempts to Dominate Society by Creating Identity Crisis



TEHRAN - The Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces stated that our enemies are trying to dominate the emotional and psychological space of society by creating an identity crisis and through strategic miscalculations. They are utilizing think tanks and media capabilities to advance this agenda.

In a speech at the National Cognitive Warfare and National Security Conference at the National Defense University, Brigadier General Mohammadreza Ashtiani noted that cognitive warfare has been pursued extensively within the Armed Forces, with the formation of a Cognitive Group dedicated to leveraging software, hardware, and artificial intelligence to enhance security measures in this area.

He explained that the aim of cognitive warfare is to control perceptions, beliefs, and willpower, which significantly influence behavior, actions, and reactions. The enemy seeks to dominate these aspects, and this issue has been a focus of our attention in various domains.

The Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces further elaborated that perception has four dimensions: sensory, intellectual, imaginary, and fictitious. The sensory aspect involves how we interpret our surroundings, shaped by our beliefs and the time period in which we live. The intellectual dimension refers to our general understanding, which is not usually problematic. The imaginary aspect deals with specific meanings and emotions that come to mind, such as love and hatred, while the fictitious aspect concerns mental images that are formed in our perception.

General Ashtiani pointed out that while we do not face challenges in understanding the general, we do encounter difficulties with specifics and their interpretations. This is the area where the enemy carries out its cognitive operations.

Iran Moves Toward Ending Internet Filtering, Vice President Confirms



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref has announced that the country's top decision-making bodies have agreed to lift internet filtering, signaling a significant shift in policy that aligns with President Pezeshkian's campaign promises.

Speaking at a policy roundtable with political, cultural, and social leaders in East Azerbaijan Province on Tuesday, Aref emphasized that the administration is not pursuing "shock therapy" but rather sustainable reform. He stated, "In regard to unblocking filtered platforms, the nation's decision-making and policy-setting institutions have reached a conclusion: filtering will be lifted."

Aref noted that the implementation is being approached with caution and strategic planning. "We seek to ensure national security with full intelligence oversight," he said. "But lifting filters was one of the key promises made by Dr. Pezeshkian during his presidential campaign—and it is now being carried out step by step."

He stressed that this process aims to be irreversible: "We are determined that the reforms will not be undone, and the country will not return to its previous state."

Aref also reflected on the short time available to President Pezeshkian to prepare for the recent election, which followed the tragic death of President Raisi in a helicopter crash. "The message from the 14th presidential election was clear: the people wanted change," he said. "In this short time, the new government has worked with young reform-minded individuals within the system to implement meaningful reforms."

Highlighting progress in gender equality, Aref stated that women have been appointed to senior leadership positions previously considered out of reach. "We didn't include women for show—this government genuinely recognized their capabilities."

He added that the government encouraged the inclusion of ethnic minorities and women during provincial governor appointments and emphasized meritocracy. Aref acknowledged that some women were reluctant or unprepared for such roles due to a lack of long-term talent development, which the government is now addressing.

"We are proud that many women now hold executive roles in the 14th administration," he

said.

The administration has also prioritized bringing young talent into leadership. "The Supreme Leader urged the training of 100 exceptional young managers," Aref said. "We are now working to develop 1,000 young professionals, with a core group of 100 as envisioned."

The national unity cabinet includes Sunni Muslims and even a young cabinet member from a martyr's family—moves Aref described as essential for inclusivity and representation.

Aref praised the swift passage of the 1404 (2025) budget, saying it demonstrates internal cooperation and frees ministers to focus on their objectives.

He welcomed criticism—even when harsh—if it comes with solutions. "We believe even sharp critiques can reflect a desire to solve problems. We ask critics to offer constructive paths forward."

Addressing journalists, Aref emphasized the need for responsible reporting. He cited a recent controversy regarding the transfer of water from the Aras River, which led to public confusion due

to miscommunication. "Just a few misplaced words can distort the message and lead to misinformation," he warned.

He called on journalists to receive proper training and uphold ethical standards. "In our society, ethics come first—and only then can we expect true freedom of expression."

On the issue of the hijab and modesty bill, Aref clarified that any changes must respect the values and dignity of the Islamic Republic, its citizens, and the Constitution. "Revisions to the bill are currently underway within the government," he confirmed.

The meeting also included input from local philanthropists, NGOs, political parties, youth representatives, journalists, and women leaders, who shared their views and proposals with the vice president.

Iran's government, under President Pezeshkian and Vice President Aref, is moving toward lifting internet filtering as part of broader reforms focused on inclusivity, youth empowerment, and transparency. The shift aligns with campaign promises and is being carefully implemented to ensure long-term success.

Deputy FM Clarifies Remarks on Potential Enrichment Limits



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi recently addressed the statements made by Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, Iran's senior nuclear negotiator, regarding potential restrictions on uranium enrichment. Takht-Ravanchi emphasized that these comments were only part of a broader framework proposal and that no specific details about enrichment limits had yet been discussed.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Tehran International Book Fair, Takht-Ravanchi clarified that the discussions so far had only touched on the possibility of temporary restrictions on Iran's enrichment capacity as part of confidence-building measures in ongoing negotiations. He stated, "We have not yet entered the details of the level or extent of enrichment. We have merely outlined a framework, suggesting that for a limited period, we could accept some restrictions related to the level and capacity of enrichment as part of a confidence-building process."

Takht-Ravanchi further explained that any such actions would be contingent upon the lifting of international sanctions, stating that Iran would not take unilateral steps but would seek mutual actions from other parties to ensure sanctions relief. "Our willingness to accept these measures is tied to the removal of sanctions. It is part of the broader process to assure that Iran's nuclear program is entirely peaceful," he noted.

In response to questions about the duration and percentage of enrichment restrictions, Takht-Ravanchi indicated that discussions were still in the early stages, with no firm timelines or specific limits being established yet. He also dismissed speculation about a potential 25-year restriction, clarifying that no such timeline or specific percentage had been proposed.

Araqchi's earlier remarks had sparked widespread media attention, but Takht-Ravanchi's comments emphasized that the focus was on setting a framework for future negotiations, rather than agreeing on specific terms at this point in the process.

Iranian Army, IRGC Naval Units at Height of Operational, Combat Readiness



TEHRAN (pressTV) - Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri has underscored the combat and operational readiness of the country's Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) naval units to confront hostile acts, warning the enemies that any miscalculation would have dire consequences.

He made the remarks during a ceremony as he was paying a visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran Army and IRGC naval units stationed on the shores of the Persian Gulf and the northern tip of the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Chief Commander of the Iranian Army Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, IRGC Chief Commander Major General Hossein Salami and several top-brass military commanders were in attendance.

"We are in our best form in terms of combat capability and readiness. Thank God our Armed Forces are in the best situation as to intelligence collection, operational planning, and readiness to implement scenarios," Bagheri stated.

"Our advice to the enemies who sometimes pose threats against the establishment is: You may initiate a conflict with the Islamic Republic based on a miscalculation, but the ending, manner, timing, location and developments on the battleground will not be within your control. It will be the Islamic Republic of Iran that will determine them," the high-ranking Iranian military figure pointed out.

CBI to Remove Four Zeros from National Currency in 2025

TEHRAN - In a major monetary reform, the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, Mohammad Reza Farzin, announced that the country will proceed with its long-discussed plan to remove four zeros from its national currency, the rial, in 2025. Speaking at the 32nd Annual Conference on Monetary and Foreign Exchange Policies, Farzin emphasized the need to improve the international image of the Iranian rial and strengthen the country's financial governance and economic resilience.

Farzin said the currency redenomination is one of several monetary policy reforms aimed at enhancing the functionality of Iran's financial system. "The image of the Iranian rial in the global economy is not favorable," he stated. "Eliminating four zeros from the currency is a key step toward correcting this perception."

The move, which has been under consideration for years, is modeled on similar reforms implemented in over 70 countries, including Germany, Turkey, and Russia. Farzin expressed confidence that the policy, if implemented at the right time, would yield positive results for the economy.

In his remarks, Farzin highlighted Iran's macroeconomic indicators, stating that the country's GDP has been on a growth trajectory since 2020. The economy expanded by 5.3% in 2023, and although growth slowed to 3.7% in the first nine months of 2024, it remains strong relative to regional peers.

He identified the oil sector as a primary driver of growth, with oil sector expansion rates reaching 13.9% in 2021, 9.6% in 2022, and an impressive 18.8% in 2023. The rate dropped to 6% in 2024, attributed to a high base effect from previous years.

The services sector, which holds a significant share of the economy, has also been affected by a deceleration in industrial growth. Farzin stressed the need for renewed focus on both services and oil to sustain economic momentum.

Farzin reported positive developments in capital formation, especially in machinery investment, buoyed by appropriate foreign currency allocation to capital goods. Over 80% of Iran's foreign currency reserves are now directed toward capital imports.

In 2024, the country registered a 15.4% growth in exports and 8.2% growth in imports, indicating a trade surplus. Iran exported a total of \$116 billion worth of goods—\$67 billion in oil exports and \$49 billion in non-oil exports. Imports totaled \$89 billion, bringing total trade volume to \$200 billion, equivalent to 40% of the nation's GDP.

Farzin stated that the current account balance for 2024 is expected to show a surplus of \$14 billion, up from \$8 billion in 2023. He noted that imports of \$8 billion worth of gold last year



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

contributed positively to national reserves.

Addressing inflation, Farzin explained that annual inflation peaked at 57.7% in 2023, with point-to-point inflation hitting 62.4%. However, a decline followed, with inflation dropping to 35.8% by the end of the Persian calendar year. He attributed the earlier spike to currency market reforms that shifted exchange transactions from the NIMA platform to the new foreign exchange center.

Farzin stressed the influence of exchange rates on inflation, especially for imported goods. "When the exchange rate rises, it directly impacts the cost of goods," he said. "This was clearly observed when the inflation in goods exceeded that in services."

In response, the government reintroduced a fixed exchange rate of 28,500 toman for essential goods, helping to stabilize the market. Farzin expressed

optimism that inflation will decline further in the coming months as currency stabilization efforts take effect.

Turning to liquidity management, Farzin acknowledged challenges due to fiscal pressures, including a high government budget deficit. Liquidity growth, which had been reduced to 24.3%, rebounded to 29.1% by March 2025. He cited the issuance of 2,000 trillion rials (200 "hemi") in government bonds late last year, most of which were purchased by banks, as a key factor.

The total value of bonds held by banks soared by 179% in 2024, with bank financing for the government reaching 4,220 trillion rials. Farzin warned that such reliance on bank financing could crowd out the private sector.

He also addressed concerns over "directed lending" policies that mandated banks to issue large volumes of subsidized loans, contributing to liquidity growth. Measures such as releasing 50% of banks' legal reserves were implemented to fund marriage loans and settle longstanding government debts to banks.

Farzin concluded by reiterating that the Central Bank's core priorities for 2025 include the implementation of the currency redenomination, continued balance sheet controls, expansion of under-the-line financing instruments like electronic promissory notes and credit-based financing, and promoting financial inclusion.

He emphasized the need for an industrial development plan tailored to each province and greater autonomy for regional bank branches to approve large loans.

"With more targeted financial policies, we aim to create a more resilient and equitable banking system," Farzin said. "Removing zeros from the currency is just one step toward a more modern and stable economy."

IRAN NEWS

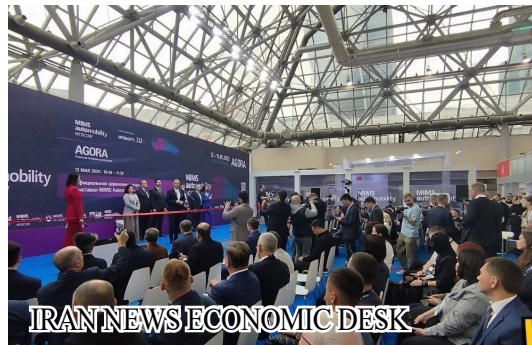


Iran's Steel Production Rises 4.6% in April

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian Steel Producers Association has released the country's steel production figures for Farvardin 1404 (March 20 – April 19, 2025), reporting a 4.6% increase in crude steel output compared to the same period last year. According to the association's report, crude steel production reached 3.312 million tons in this period, reflecting year-on-year growth. The data shows billet and bloom production increased by 2.7% to 1.969 million tons, while slab production rose by 7.6% to 1.343 million tons.

The report noted that electricity restrictions, which began affecting steel producers from April 4 (16 Farvardin), limited potential output. Without these limitations, production growth in April could have been higher.

Iran Seeks to Expand Automotive Cooperation With Russia



TEHRAN - Iran is seeking to expand its cooperation with the Russian Federation in various sectors, particularly in the automotive and auto parts industries, according to the Iranian ambassador in Moscow.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 29th MIMS Automobility Moscow, Russia's leading international exhibition for the automotive industry and aftermarket services, held at the Expocentre in Moscow on Monday, Ambassador Kazem Jalali emphasized Iran's commitment to strengthening ties with Russia.

Jalali highlighted the recent strategic developments in bilateral relations, including the signing of a comprehensive strategic treaty between the two nations on January 17, 2025, and the implementation of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union, which began on May 15, 2025. He described these milestones as indicators of growing cooperation between Iran and Russia.

He noted that Iranian automotive and auto parts manufacturers are participating in the MIMS Automobility Moscow exhibition for the fourth consecutive year through a unified national pavilion. According to Jalali, Iran currently produces around 1.2 million vehicles annually, with potential for higher output in certain years.

The ambassador also stated that Iran has made significant progress in auto parts manufacturing, with over 1,850 active companies currently operating in the sector.

"The message of my presence at the opening ceremony of this international exhibition is clear: Iran is ready to elevate its cooperation with Russia, especially in the field of auto parts manufacturing," Jalali declared.

The 29th MIMS Automobility Moscow, which began on Monday, May 12, 2025, will run for four days and is considered the largest annual automotive industry event in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Iran, Turkmenistan Aim for 30% Boost in Bilateral Trade



TEHRAN - The head of the Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Chamber of Commerce has announced plans to increase bilateral relations by 30%, following the successful hosting of the first Turkmenistan Export Capabilities Exhibition in Iran.

The three-day exhibition, held from May 5-7 in Gorgan at the city's permanent international exhibition center, showcased the capabilities of 53 private companies and 12 government entities from Turkmenistan. The event marked a strategic milestone in regional economic diplomacy and received strong interest from Iranian industrialists and business leaders.

Ramazan Bahrami, President of the Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and head of Golestan Province's Chamber of Industry, Mining, and Trade, highlighted the event's significance. "This is the first time such an exhibition has been held in Iran since Turkmenistan's independence. Its successful organization was made possible by collaboration between the private sector and public institutions," he said.

Bahrami explained that the exhibition was a key outcome of the 17th session of the Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Economic Commission, where reciprocal exhibitions were approved to enhance bilateral trade. The event, entirely funded by private investment without reliance on government budgets, facilitated several preliminary agreements in fields including petrochemicals, oil products, construction materials, food industries, textiles, and logistics.

"In 2024, trade between Iran and Turkmenistan reached nearly \$600 million. With new agreements and the momentum from this exhibition, we are targeting at least a 30% increase this year," Bahrami stated, adding that the growth will be reflected in both provincial and national export statistics.

Gorgan was chosen as the host city due to its cultural and ethnic ties with Turkmenistan. Over one million ethnic Turkmen live in Golestan and North Khorasan provinces, creating a natural bridge for strengthening socio-economic ties.

Iranian Investors Exempt from Taxes and Customs Duties in Uzbekistan

TEHRAN - Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov has announced that Iranian investors will be exempt from taxes and customs duties when investing in Uzbekistan's industrial zones. The statement came during the Iran-Uzbekistan Business Forum, aimed at strengthening economic cooperation between the two nations.

Highlighting the deep historical and cultural ties between Iran and Uzbekistan, Aripov emphasized that current global events necessitate greater economic collaboration. He noted that such forums are vital for informing both sides about investment capacities, creating new opportunities, and enhancing mutual understanding.

"In meetings with Iranian officials, we identified industrial cooperation and the activation of technology exchanges as key strategic goals," Aripov stated. He stressed the crucial role of entrepreneurs and the private sector in both countries in achieving these objectives.

According to Aripov, trade between Iran and Uzbekistan has reached a relatively stable level, with bilateral exchange currently valued at \$500 million annually. However, he acknowledged that this figure still falls short of its full potential. Notably, the number of joint Iranian-Uzbek factories in Uzbekistan has surpassed 210, signaling significant progress.

The Uzbek Prime Minister also pointed to his country's growing economy, projecting that Uzbekistan's GDP will reach \$160 billion within the next five years. Last year alone, the country attracted \$70 billion in foreign investment, reflecting a stable and secure investment climate.

He further highlighted Uzbekistan's ongoing reforms to bolster a free-market economy, including the introduction of tax incentives and other measures to boost production and attract foreign capital. In 2024, Uzbekistan exported over \$2.5 billion in agricultural food products and holds free trade and preferential agreements with many countries—creating additional opportunities for economic cooperation.



"We assure Iranian economic actors that any capital brought into our industrial zones will be exempt from taxes and customs duties," Aripov declared. "The government will provide all necessary infrastructure, and we will also guarantee the repatriation of investment profits."

Meanwhile the Vice President of the Uzbekistan Chamber said that exchanging quality goods at competitive prices and establishing systematic trade relations between Iran and Uzbekistan are among the main objectives of the Uzbekistan Chamber.

Rasulov, speaking at the Iran-Uzbekistan Business Forum, added: The interest of Uzbek traders in conducting business with Iran is increasing. Given the incentives offered by the Uzbek government to attract foreign investments, Iranian traders' interest in investing in Uzbekistan is also growing.

He stated that supplying chemical products, foodstuffs, and construction materials is a priority in trade with Iran. He added that the volume of bilateral trade between Iran and Uzbekistan has exceeded 497 million dollars, which still falls significantly short of the full potential of both countries. Therefore, measures should be taken to further increase the level of cooperation.

Rasulov said that 260 Iranian factories are operating in Uzbekistan, of which at least 160 are joint ventures. In addition, planning visits to specialized exhibitions and the exchange of updated trade delegations and commercial information on investment opportunities has contributed to advancing the two countries' relations.

He noted that more than 100 Uzbek businesspeople visited Iran for Iran Expo 2025, stating that the Chambers of Commerce of both countries play a crucial role in organizing trade exhibitions and establishing cohesive relations between private sector traders from Iran and Uzbekistan. He emphasized that these efforts must be further strengthened.

High C-Section Rates Raise Alarms Amid National Push for Increased Birth Rates

TEHRAN - Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raeisi raised serious concerns on Tuesday over the country's high cesarean delivery rate, which currently stands at over 56%, well above the global average. Speaking during a press conference marking National Population Week, Raeisi emphasized the urgent need to address Iran's declining birth rate, calling it a multifaceted issue with social, economic, and security implications.

Raeisi stated that population decline is a global issue and cannot be resolved merely through immigration. "Childbearing must be incentivized," he said, citing countries like Hungary, which has allocated 4% of its GDP to population growth initiatives. In comparison, Iran's entire health budget accounts for just 5% of its national budget.

Hungary exempts mothers from paying taxes—a policy Iran began implementing at the end of last year. Similar strategies are being adopted in countries like South Korea and Japan, where falling fertility rates have led to shorter workweeks and other family-friendly policies.

The deputy minister expressed concern over the soaring cesarean section rate, identifying the provinces of Gilan, East Azerbaijan, Ilam, Fars, and Tehran as having the highest rates, while cities like Zabol, Zahedan, and Sabzevar had the lowest.

Raeisi emphasized the need to promote painless and more comfortable childbirth experiences, stating that the current dissatisfaction with natural births stems largely from poor birthing environments. "40% of mothers report dissatisfaction with delivery conditions. The birthing environment must respect hygiene, privacy, and human dignity," he said.

According to Raeisi, the country saw a 7% drop in birth rates in 2024 compared to the previous year. The highest birth numbers were recorded in the provinces of Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, and Sistan and Baluchestan. He noted that while first and second child births have declined, third and higher-order births have seen a slight increase, though they still represent a small share.

One of the most pressing concerns, Raeisi noted, is the aging population of women in childbearing years. "60% of women of childbearing age are between 35 and 50. These women—mostly born in the 1980s—must be the focus of family planning policies," he said.

In 1986, there were 10 million married women who collectively



had 2 million children. By 2024, this number had risen to 16 million married women, but they had fewer than one million children. "This dramatic change highlights the decline in fertility despite an increase in the number of women in reproductive age," he added.

The marriage rate dropped by 2% in 2024, with the provinces of Semnan, Ilam, Kohgiluyeh, and South Khorasan showing the highest marriage numbers. Raeisi also noted that the average age of first-time mothers and fathers is rising—27.5 years and 32 years, respectively—which negatively affects fertility. However, the divorce rate has seen a

7% decrease, a positive trend in terms of family stability.

Raeisi reported encouraging progress in maternal and infant health. Maternal mortality has dropped to 22 per 100,000 births, and infant mortality has decreased to 8.3 per 1,000 live births. Prenatal care coverage has improved significantly, with at least two care visits increasing from 54% to 76%.

Despite these gains, Raeisi emphasized the need for better childbirth services and warned about the illegal abortion trend. Over 90% of unauthorized abortions occur at home and outside medical facilities. Any illegal abortion performed in a healthcare setting will face strict legal action.

Raeisi highlighted several support initiatives, including the "Nafas" program, which provides psychological and medical counseling for expectant parents uncertain about continuing a pregnancy. The program currently operates 357 centers and has already served over 18,000 people—more than 15,000 of whom chose to continue their pregnancies after counseling.

He also reported that no married student is currently on a waiting list for fertility-related loans, housing aid, or marriage grants. Dormitory space allocation for married students has increased, along with childcare facilities near campuses.

Iran currently has 3 to 4 million infertile couples, according to Raeisi. He noted that significant progress has been made in infertility treatment, with 146 active centers, including public, private, and university-affiliated institutions.

In conclusion, Raeisi stressed that tackling population decline requires a holistic approach, encompassing better maternity services, legal frameworks, social support, and above all, an improvement in the overall childbirth experience in Iran.

Niger Welcomes Imports of Iranian Mining Products



TEHRAN - In a meeting with the head of Iran's Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), the Ambassador of Niger expressed his country's interest in strengthening mining ties with Iran, emphasizing a welcoming stance toward importing Iranian mining and mineral industry products.

Sidou Zataou Ali, the Ambassador of Niger, met on Monday with Mohammad Aghajani Lou, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Chairman of IMIDRO. Ambassador Zataou Ali conveyed hope that formal cooperation between the two nations — through a memorandum of understanding — would be established swiftly, avoiding bureaucratic delays.

The ambassador also extended an invitation to the IMIDRO chairman to visit Niger to explore mining opportunities firsthand. He expressed optimism that commercial links, including enhanced maritime trade and transport infrastructure, would be developed. He added that the planned visit of Niger's Minister of Mines to Iran would be an appropriate occasion to finalize the agreement.

During the meeting, IMIDRO's chairman Aghajani Lou stressed the importance of developing trade across the mining value chain and exporting Iranian engineering and technical expertise.

He highlighted Iran's significant capacity in the mining sector and noted the country's aim to activate these capabilities by deepening economic relations with African nations. Aghajani Lou stated that IMIDRO's initial focus would be on exporting mining and mineral industry products to Niger, along with engineering know-how, subject to completion of legal procedures.

Central Bank Should Oversee All Foreign Currency Assets



TEHRAN - In a strong endorsement of centralized monetary control, the head of Iran's Plan and Budget Organization, Seyed Hamid Pourmohammadi, emphasized the need for the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) to manage all of the country's foreign currency assets, both domestically and abroad.

Speaking at the National Monetary and Banking Policies Conference on Tuesday, Pourmohammadi stated that macroeconomic stability depends on the Central Bank's full visibility and control over Iran's foreign exchange resources. "Whether the assets belong to the government, the National Development Fund, or other entities committed to returning currency earnings, they must be accessible to the Central Bank," he said.

Pourmohammadi, who also serves as a member of the Central Bank's Supreme Council, stressed that any conflict between the Central Bank and his own organization should be resolved in favor of the bank. "If the Central Bank faces disruption, the entire economy suffers," he warned.

He highlighted cases where municipalities or state-owned companies have frozen foreign currency assets abroad, preventing the Central Bank from using them for vital imports like raw materials or production equipment. "Such practices must stop. All foreign holdings—currency, property, or shares—must be made transparent to the Central Bank," he added.

The Deputy President also criticized exporters who fail to repatriate their earnings, sometimes using shell trade cards to avoid detection. He called for enhanced monitoring and legal action, referencing a recent meeting with the judiciary chief who pledged support for protecting the economy.

Pourmohammadi further argued that the Central Bank should not be blamed for foreign exchange shortages or surpluses. Instead, all government agencies, including the Oil Ministry and the Ministry of Industry, should coordinate efforts to boost foreign currency revenues.

He cited the Oil Ministry's proposal to generate up to \$8 billion annually if given an initial \$3 billion investment—yet, he said, the proposal has been largely ignored.

Poland to Close Russian Consulate in Krakow

WARSAW (Dispatches) - Poland summoned the Russian ambassador and said it would close the Russian consulate in Krakow after evidence showed Moscow was responsible for a huge fire that almost completely destroyed a Warsaw shopping center in 2024. Russia denied any involvement in the arson attack and accused Poland of Russophobia.

Already tense relations between Warsaw and Moscow have hit new lows since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. NATO member Poland says its own role as a hub for aid for Kyiv has made it a target of Russian sabotage, cyberattacks and disinformation. "The ambassador was invited to the ministry at 1500 (CET)," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pavel Wronski said on Monday. On Sunday, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Poland knew "for sure" that Russian secret services were behind last year's fire.



Detained in The Hague, Philippines' Duterte Wins Hometown Mayoral Election



MANILA (Dispatches) - Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was almost certain to be elected mayor of his home city by a landslide on Monday, unimpeded by his detention at the International Criminal Court on charges of murder as a crime against humanity.

With 80% of votes counted in an unofficial tally, Duterte, who was brought to The Hague in March over his bloody "war on drugs" that killed thousands of people, was winning the Davao mayoral contest with eight times more votes than his nearest rival. The victory during nationwide midterm elections is testament to the 80-year-old's enduring influence in the southern city, owing to his reputation as a crime-buster that earned him the nicknames "Duterte Harry" and "the Punisher".

Duterte's old Facebook account was flooded with congratulatory messages from supporters, with some calling for his return to serve his people.

"Congratulations, Tatay (father) D! Let's bring him home," read one of the comments.

Duterte could become the first Asian former head of state to go on trial at the ICC. His surprise arrest by Philippine police at the request of the ICC caused outrage among his army of supporters, who called it a kidnapping at the behest of a foreign court.

He has defended the anti-drugs crackdown and his legal team says his arrest was unlawful. The ICC maintains it has jurisdiction to prosecute alleged crimes committed before Duterte withdrew the Philippines from its founding treaty in 2019.

Despite the ICC's case also including alleged killings of criminal suspects by a "death squad" in Davao while Duterte was mayor - which he has denied - analysts have said his arrest has only hardened support for him and his family, in Davao and beyond.

The former president's two sons were also set to win posts on Monday, one reelected congressman and the other winning the contest for Davao vice mayor and likely to serve in his father's absence.

Starmer Pledges Big Drop in Immigration



LONDON (Dispatches) - Prime Minister Keir Starmer promised to cut net migration to Britain significantly over the next four years, saying the country risked becoming "an island of strangers" without tougher rules on immigration.

Controlling immigration was a key factor in Britain's 2016 vote to leave the European Union, yet net arrivals reached record levels after it left the bloc, helping to boost Nigel Farage's right-wing, anti-immigration Reform UK party.

In a sweeping set of immigration reforms, Starmer's centre-left Labour government said it would increase English-speaking requirements for immigrants, make it harder for them to stay in the country, and prevent companies including care homes from recruiting abroad.

The automatic right to apply for citizenship will only be granted to someone who has lived in Britain for 10 years, not five, and skilled worker visas will be restricted to graduate-level applicants. "Make no mistake, this plan means migration will fall. That is a promise," Starmer told reporters in Downing Street. "If we do need to take further steps... then mark my words, we will."

Ukraine Says Russia Attacking With Drones Amid Ceasefire Calls

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia launched more than 100 Shahed and decoy drones at Ukraine in nighttime attacks, the Ukrainian air force said Monday, after the Kremlin effectively rejected an unconditional 30-day ceasefire in the more than three-year war, but reiterated it would take part in possible peace talks later this week without preconditions.

There was no direct response from the Kremlin, meanwhile, to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's challenge for Russian leader Vladimir Putin to meet him for face-to-face peace talks in Turkey on Thursday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Monday refused to say who might travel to Istanbul from the Russian side.

"Overall, we're determined to seriously look for ways to achieve a long-term peaceful settlement. That is all," Peskov said.

The United States and European governments are making a concerted push to stop the fighting, which has killed tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides, as well as more than 10,000 Ukrainian civilians. Russia's invading forces have taken around one-fifth of Ukraine in Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

US President Donald Trump said Monday that he's optimistic about the Istanbul talks. There is "the potential for a good meeting" between Putin and Zelenskyy, Trump said in Washington, adding that he was "thinking about flying over" to the talks from his visit to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates that day.

Zelenskyy supported the prospect of Trump attending the negotiations. "I supported President Trump with the idea of direct talks with Putin. I have openly expressed my readiness to meet," he said. "And of course, all of us in Ukraine would appreciate it if President Trump could be there with us at this meeting in Turkey."

In a flurry of diplomatic developments over the weekend, Russia shunned the ceasefire proposal tabled by the US and European leaders, but offered direct talks with Ukraine on Thursday.

Ukraine, along with European allies, had demanded that Russia accept a ceasefire starting Monday before holding peace talks. Moscow effectively rejected that proposal and instead called for direct negotiations in Istanbul.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday he had discussed Russian-Ukrainian peace efforts in separate calls with Zelenskyy, Putin and Trump.

Erdogan said "a new window of opportunity has emerged for peace," and claimed that previous talks hosted by Turkey



in 2022 came close to success but were derailed by "war barons."

"We support my dear friend Trump's determination to resolve active conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy," he said.

US President Donald Trump insisted that Ukraine accept the Russian offer of talks. Zelenskyy went a step further Sunday and put pressure on Putin by offering a personal meeting.

France added its voice to that offer Monday, with Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot urging Putin to accept — though Barrot repeated the European position that a truce must be in place before the talks.

Russia's failure to join the ceasefire offered by Ukrainewould bring further sanctions on Moscow, European leaders say. Germany on Monday reminded Russia of that intention.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, who met with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday, said the pressure on Russia was increasing.

"Everybody wants peace now. Ukraine wants peace, Europe wants peace, the US wants peace," he told The Associated Press during an interview in London. "Now Russia needs to make up their mind whether they also want peace or not, an unconditional ceasefire."

Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said that giving ultimatums to Russia was "unacceptable" and wouldn't work. "You cannot talk to Russia in this language," he told reporters.

Also on Monday, UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy was hosting in London senior diplomatic officials from France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Poland and the European Union to discuss how best to fight back against Russian aggression.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said he expected the two sides to reach a compromise in the coming days that might break the deadlock over whether talks could begin without a truce in place.

Russian and Ukrainian officials are mindful of public opinion in their countries and are trying to secure the support of the United States for their stances, he said in explaining the delay.

In Kyiv, residents expressed a mixture of hope and despondency at the latest peace efforts.

Putin doesn't want a truce to halt the war, because "it will mean that he has lost," Antonina Metko, 43, told The Associated Press. "That is why they are postponing it. And everything will continue in the same way. Unfortunately."

Indian PM Vows Strong Response to Any Future Terrorist Attack by Pakistan

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed Monday to respond strongly to any future "terrorist attack", and warned that New Delhi would not tolerate "nuclear blackmail" in the event of further conflict with Pakistan.

A weekend ceasefire which US President Donald Trump said he brokered appeared to be holding Monday after four days of intense jetfighter, missile, drone and artillery attacks — the worst violence between the two nuclear-armed neighbours since 1999.

Trump said Monday that US intervention had prevented a "bad nuclear war".

"We stopped a nuclear conflict ... millions of people could have been killed. So I'm very proud of that," he told reporters at the White House.

Modi, in a televised address to the nation — his first since hostilities began last Wednesday — said Pakistan has chosen to attack rather than help it fight "terrorism".

"If another terrorist attack against India is carried out, a strong response will be given," he said.

The conflict followed an April 22 attack on tourists in Indian-administered Kashmir which killed 26 civilians.

India accused Pakistan of backing the attack, but Islamabad denied involvement.

The alarming spiral towards all-out war began before dawn on Wednesday, when India launched missile attacks destroying what it called "terrorist camps" in the Pakistan-administered part of Kashmir.

Each side then accused the other of launching waves of warplane and drone strikes, as well as missile and artillery bombardments that killed at least 60 people on both sides.

"If Pakistan wants to survive, it will have to destroy its terror infrastructure," Modi said Monday.

"India will strike with precision and decisiveness against the terrorist groups thriving under the cover of nuclear



blackmail.

"India's stand is very clear. Terror and talks cannot go together ... Terror and trade cannot go together ... Water and blood cannot flow together."

His address came after the Indian army reported the "first calm night in recent days" in disputed Kashmir and along its western border with Pakistan.

The flare-up in violence was the worst since the rivals' last open conflict in 1999 and sparked global shudders that it could spiral into full-blown war.

The rivals also accused each other of breaching the ceasefire just hours after it was unexpectedly announced by Trump on social media on Saturday.

Top India and Pakistan military officials held briefings late Sunday with each claiming the upper hand and warning they were ready to respond if there were fresh attacks.

"We have delivered the promise we made to our people", Pakistan's military spokesman Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said, calling it a "success on the battleground".

"We have thus far exercised immense restraint so far and our actions have been focused, measured and non-escalatory," said Indian Lieutenant General Rajiv Ghai.

Pakistan claimed to have downed five Indian fighter jets — something New Delhi has not commented on.

On Monday, people were trickling back to Poonch, a frontier town in Indian-administered and one of the worst-hit places.

But thousands of schools remained closed across Pakistan-administered Kashmir as areas were cleared of debris from strikes and firing, said local official Naved-ul-Hassan Bukhari.

India, meanwhile, reopened 32 airports on Monday that had been closed due to the conflict, authorities said.

Militants have stepped up operations in Kashmir since 2019, when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government revoked the region's limited autonomy and took it under direct rule from New Delhi.

Hamas Releases Israeli-American Hostage Edan Alexander

GAZA (Dispatches) - Hamas on Monday released an Israeli-American soldier who had been held hostage in Gaza for more than 19 months, offering a goodwill gesture toward the Trump administration that could lay the groundwork for a new ceasefire with Israel.

Edan Alexander, 21, was the first hostage released since Israel shattered an eight-week ceasefire with Hamas in March and unleashed fierce strikes on Gaza that have killed hundreds of Palestinians.

He was handed over to the Red Cross and then to Israeli forces before being flown by helicopter to a hospital in Tel Aviv. Israeli authorities released video and photos showing a pale but smiling Alexander in an emotional reunion with his mother and other family members.

Israel has promised to intensify its offensive, including by seizing Gaza and displacing much of the territory's population again. Days before the ceasefire ended, Israel blocked all imports from entering the Palestinian enclave, deepening a humanitarian crisis and sparking warnings about the risk of famine if the blockade isn't lifted. Israel says the steps are meant to pressure Hamas to accept a ceasefire agreement on Israel's terms.

Wearing shirts emblazoned with his name, Alexander's extended family gathered in Tel Aviv to watch the release. They chanted his name when the military said he was free,



while in the city's HostageSquare, hundreds of people broke out into cheers.

Alexander's grandmother, Varda Ben Baruch, beamed. She said her grandson looked mostly all right in the first photo of him after nearly 600 days in captivity.

"He seemed like a man. He has really matured," she said. Reports that Alexander cracked a joke on the phone while speaking to his mother for the first time did not surprise her. "He's got such a sense of humor," she said.

Alexander was 19 when he was taken from his military base in southern Israel during Hamas' cross-border attack on Oct. 7, 2023, which set off the war in Gaza.

In his hometown of Tenafly, New Jersey, hundreds of supporters packed the streets, holding signs with his image and listening to speakers blasting Israeli music. As they watched the news of his release on a large screen, the crowd hugged and waved Israeli flags. Since he was taken hostage, supporters there gathered every Friday to march for the hostages' release.

Israel says 58 hostages remain in captivity, with about 23 of them said to be alive. Many of the 250 hostages taken by Hamas-led militants in the 2023 attack were freed in ceasefire deals.



Brunson, Knicks Again Rally Past Celtics for 3-1 Edge

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jalen Brunson scored 26 of his 39 points in the second half and the New York Knicks became the first home team to win in the series by dispatching the Boston Celtics 121-113 night to take a 3-1 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinal matchup.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 23 points and 11 rebounds and Mikal Bridges also second 23 for the Knicks, who recovered from a 14-point third-quarter deficit. OG Anunoby made some key plays late while contributing 20 points.

Brunson also had 12 assists for third-seeded New York.

Boston star Jayson Tatum sustained a possible serious right ankle injury late in the contest. Tatum had 42 points, eight rebounds, four assists and four steals. He knocked down seven 3-pointers for the second-seeded Celtics, who squandered 20-point leads while dropping the series' first two games.

Derrick White made six 3-pointers and scored 23 points and Jaylen Brown added 20 points and seven rebounds for Boston. Payton Pritchard had 12 points for the Celtics.

The Knicks can clinch the best-of-seven series with a win in Game 5 at Boston on Wednesday night.

Anunoby drilled a tiebreaking 3-pointer with 5:52 left to start a decisive 14-2 spurt.

A jumper in the lane by Bridges made it 111-104, and Anunoby added a steal and dunk to increase the gap to 113-104 with 3:03 left. Tatum was injured on the latter play and grabbed for his ankle and signaled for a timeout with 2:58 to go.

Tatum was helped off the floor with his right foot kept in the air and was later seen being pushed to the locker room while sitting in a rolling chair.

Brunson nailed a trey to cap the run and all but seal it at 116-104 with 2:25 remaining.

New York connected on 54.3 percent of its shots and was 12 of 34 (35.3 percent) from behind the arc.

Boston made 18 of 48 3-point attempts (37.5 percent) and is 38 of 88 (43.2 percent) over the past two contests after being a dreadful 25 of 100 in its opening two setbacks. Overall, the Celtics made 48.1 percent of their shots in Game 4.

Boston led 72-58 after White's 3-pointer with 9:06 remaining in the third quarter before the Knicks went on a 30-13 burst over the rest of the period.

A 3-pointer by Anunoby with 32.1 seconds left gave New York an 86-85 edge, the hosts' first lead since the opening quarter. Josh Hart added a layup with 3.5 seconds left before Bridges opened the fourth quarter with a short jumper to give the Knicks a 90-85 lead.

Tatum drilled a 3-pointer to knot the score at 96 with 8:22 remaining. Tatum knocked down another trey 65 seconds later to give Boston a one-point advantage, and he later converted a three-point play to tie it at 102 with 6:12 to go.

Tatum (20 first-half points) and White (17) each made four 3-pointers as Boston led 62-51 at the break. Brunson led the Knicks with 13 points in the half.

Zverev Says Out-of-Form Djokovic Can Become Dangerous Again



LONDON (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic's tennis prowess is beyond question despite a sharp dip in form during the European claycourt swing and the veteran Serb can return to his devastating best again if he wants to, world number two Alexander Zverev has said.

Djokovic turns 38 three days before the French Open, which begins on May 25, and the 24-times Grand Slam winner's preparations have been far from ideal, with opening losses at Masters tournaments in Monte Carlo and Madrid last month.

After skipping the ongoing Italian Open without giving a reason, Djokovic will make one final attempt to rediscover his rhythm at next week's Geneva Open after accepting a wild card and Zverev warned against writing off his friend completely.

"Maybe he didn't play up to his standard or his liking, but who does sometimes? If you're a top guy and you're not winning the tournament, you always go home a little bit upset," Zverev told reporters in Rome on Sunday.

"I believe once he finds his game, he's still one of the most dangerous players in the world."

World number six Djokovic, who is chasing his 100th tour-level title, has struggled to assert his dominance after winning three out of the four Grand Slams in 2023.

However, he stepped up his game at the Paris Olympics last year to win gold, outclassing four-times major champion Carlos Alcaraz in the final at Roland Garros.

"There's no question about his ability at all," said Zverev, who advanced to this year's Australian Open final after Djokovic retired injured midway through their clash.

"It's more whether he still wants to put in the work. That's a question to him. His tennis ability is above everyone else's."

Second seed Zverev, who beat Lithuanian qualifier Vilius Gaubas 6-4 6-0 in Rome on Sunday, meets Frenchman Arthur Fils next in the third round.

Sinner Fends Off injured De Jong and Progresses at Italian Open

ROME (Dispatches) - Jannik Sinner beat Dutchman Jesper de Jong in the third round of the 2025 Italian Open, following a two-set outing that ended in misfortune for De Jong.

24-year-old Dutchman De Jong, the 93rd-ranked player on the ATP rankings, surprised the crowd in the Italian capital by beating Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the second round of the Italian Open, and thus became Jannik Sinner's second opponent since returning from his doping suspension.

Down two breaks at 4-1, De Jong fought back to get to break point in the sixth game and got a break back on the Italian. After losing in De Jong's service game, Sinner erased two break points after upping his pace. A double fault put De Jong back in the driver's seat and earned the Dutchman his second-straight break against the Italian ace.

De Jong concluded a sloppy service game with a mishit and got Sinner back in the game, gifting the Italian the opportunity to serve for the set. The three-time Grand Slam champion made the most of this opportunity and took the set after a brave fight from De Jong: 6-4.

De Jong and Sinner kept up their high-quality fight at the start of the second set, but after a tumble and injuring his right wrist, De Jong couldn't keep up the challenge and forfeited the final three games of the set without winning a single point.

Sinner won the final set 6-2 and set up a meeting with Argentinian



Francesco Cerundolo, who eliminated Sinner from the Italian Open in 2023.

Meanwhile Emma Raducanu was comprehensively beaten by Coco Gauff at the Italian Open as the American advanced to the quarter-finals in Rome.

Raducanu showed flashes of brilliance on the clay but was ultimately unable to match Gauff's intensity as the fourth seed won 6-1 6-2 in an hour and 20 minutes.

The contest is likely to be Raducanu's final competitive action before the French Open, with the second major of the year getting under way on May 25.

Raducanu told Sky Sports Tennis: "I found it a really difficult match. I think the conditions were very different to my last round, it was different court and it was very bouncy, there wasn't much clay on the court. And it was quite windy too.

"Coco also played a really good match and I definitely saw why she's No 3 in the world right now. She played really well. I do think I got outplayed today but I guess I have no shame in saying that and looking forward to working to try to get better."

Gauff, who was a beaten finalist at the Madrid Open - the previous WTA 1000 tournament - earlier in May, will face either Clara Tauson or Mirra Andreeva in the last eight on Wednesday.

"It was definitely an A [grade]. It was tough conditions, it was super windy," Gauff told Sky Sports Tennis.

"Emma is a tough opponent no matter what surface. She's tough to play, so I am really happy with how I played.

"My game is getting better every match, I think. Madrid was a step in the right direction. Obviously, I lost in the final and I don't like losing, especially in the final, so I am hoping to redeem myself here."

Gauff made an unconvincing start with a double fault in the Grand Stand Arena but battled through the first game before quickly setting into a nice rhythm despite the breezy conditions.

Raducanu was slower to adjust as she gifted her opponent a break with a series of errors, and then spurned a good opportunity to break back immediately after a poor Gauff drop shot.

Alonso Poised to Take Over at Real Madrid

MADRID (Dispatches) - Former Spain midfielder Xabi Alonso is set to become the next Real Madrid manager on a three-year deal when he leaves Bayer Leverkusen after this season, Spanish media reported.

Alonso, 43, is expected to replace current Real boss Carlo Ancelotti, who is being lined up for the vacant Brazil job ahead of the 2026 World Cup, soccer sources told Reuters.

Despite the Italian having a year remaining on his contract, Real's underwhelming season and his desire to coach Brazil have led to a mutual agreement to part ways, the sources added.

Alonso, who said earlier this month that he was leaving Leverkusen after guiding them to the double last term, will join Real before the inaugural Club World Cup in the United States from June 14 to July 14, multiple media reports said.

Alonso, who also played for Liverpool and Bayern Munich, last season steered Leverkusen to their first Bundesliga title, ending the Bavarians' 11-year domination, and they also won the German Cup and German Super Cup.



Reports of Ancelotti's likely departure come as no surprise after Real's 4-3 defeat at Barcelona in a thrilling 'El Clasico' on Sunday left his side on the brink of a trophyless season.

The 65-year-old Italian, who returned for a second stint at Real in June 2021, led the Spanish giants to two Champions League and LaLiga doubles, the latest of which came last season.

He is the most successful manager in the club's history with a total of 15 trophies and the first coach to claim titles in Europe's top five leagues.

However, this season Real were knocked out of the Champions League in the quarter-finals by Arsenal and allowed Barca to fight back and win 3-2 in the Copa del Rey final.

Second-placed Real are seven points adrift of Barcelona, who could secure the league title on Wednesday without kicking a ball if Real fail to win at home to Mallorca.

Regardless of Real's result, a Barca victory in the city derby away to Espanyol on Thursday would clinch the title.



PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain forward Ousmane Dembele was named the Ligue 1 player of the year on Sunday, after leading the club to a 13th French title and the Champions League final.

Dembele is the top scorer in Ligue 1 this season with 21 goals and has struck 33 times in 46 matches across all competitions, including eight goals in Europe.

He succeeds Kylian Mbappe who won the prize five times in a row before departing for Real Madrid at the end of last season.

Luis Enrique earned coach of the year honours at the UNFP (French players' union) Trophies gala, while Desire Doue took home the prize for the best young player in Ligue 1.

Lille's Lucas Chevalier denied PSG a clean sweep of the accolades as he beat Gianluigi Donnarumma to the best goalkeeper award.

PSG are on course for a treble after easing to an 11th Ligue 1 title in 13 years. They will play Inter Milan in the Champions League final on May 31, a week after facing Reims in the French Cup showpiece.