

Russian Citizens Holding Bank Cards Connected to Their National Payment System, Known as Mir, Can Now Use the Cards for Making Payments Inside Iran, According to the Central Bank of Iran Official

# IRAN NEWS

The United States Government Has Announced New Sanctions Against Companies, Individuals, and Tankers That It Claims Have Been Involved in the Export of Iranian Oil

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### Iran Ready for Any Scenario Amid Renewed U.S. Military Threats



TEHRAN - The Chief Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), Major General Hossein Salami, declared on Tuesday that the country is fully prepared for any confrontation, responding firmly to renewed U.S. threats of military action amid stalled nuclear negotiations. Speaking at a public event in the northeastern city of Mashhad, General Salami warned that any aggression against Iran would be met with overwhelming force, asserting that adversaries would face "complete humiliation" in any potential conflict. "We know the enemy thoroughly and are closely monitoring its movements," Salami said. "Even as diplomatic contacts and negotiations continue, we stand firm and dignified. Anyone who dares confront Islamic Iran will be crushed."

His remarks come amid growing tensions between Tehran and Washington, as diplomatic efforts to revive or replace the 2015 nuclear agreement—known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—remain deadlocked. US officials have hinted at the possibility of military options if diplomacy fails.

Salami emphasized that Iran's military capabilities have expanded significantly in the past year and rejected claims that allied resistance groups across the region had been weakened by Israeli strikes.

## President Says If We Stand United, the U.S. Can't Defeat Us

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has declared that the United States cannot act against Iran if the country remains united. Speaking at a national meeting with mayors of Iran's major cities on Tuesday evening, Pezeshkian emphasized the importance of national solidarity in tackling domestic and international challenges.

"If we all stand together, the United States cannot do anything against us. Hand in hand, we can overcome our problems," he stated. "We have strong relations with neighboring countries and can engage in trade with them. They are ready to cooperate with us."

During the meeting, the President highlighted the shared responsibility of the government and municipalities to serve the public. He encouraged close cooperation between the two bodies to solve people's problems and announced the government's readiness to utilize the capacities of city administrations.

The President acknowledged the country's ongoing struggles with energy imbalances, inflation, and nearly 5,000 unfinished infrastructure projects. He said the government is actively planning to resolve these issues, though some will take time. Efforts to increase solar energy production through private sector investments are underway, with a target of generating 7,000 megawatts from solar panels.

He stressed the need to both increase production and manage consumption. "We need to reform our consumption culture because we use too much energy," Pezeshkian said, adding that municipalities could play a key role in public education and cultural change.

Pezeshkian also reaffirmed the government's commitment to enhancing both the quality and quantity of educational facilities. He criticized the disparity in the educational system, noting reports that some families in Tehran spend up to 200 million tomans on non-public schools, while many public schools lack basic resources.

"Our students will shape the future of this country. If we train them properly, they will solve our problems," he said.

He invited municipalities to assist in building high-quality, modern schools equipped with new technologies, proper heating and cooling systems, and sustainable designs that promote energy conservation.

The President also mentioned plans to redesign the national educational model in collaboration with university experts and education professionals. The aim is to enhance teacher training, improve curriculum design, and emphasize practical skills development.



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He called for setting fair educational standards to ensure all students in public schools receive quality instruction. "If we can raise the quality of education, we will secure the future of our nation," he asserted.

Pezeshkian promoted the idea of mobilizing communities, mosques, and neighborhoods to tackle poverty and trident energy-saving practices. He cited last year's "Two Degrees Lower" campaign, which reportedly saved \$25 million per day. He proposed a new campaign encouraging citizens to reduce lighting usage.

"We consume six times more electricity and gas than Europe. If consumption is managed, the government can redirect the savings to improve people's livelihoods."

He also called for penalties on excessive energy users and asked municipalities to support enforcement efforts.

Pezeshkian urged municipalities to contribute to energy balance, housing, and public welfare. He proposed they form task forces and create service improvement plans, emphasizing structured delegation of authority rather than unchecked expansion of power. He advocated for nature-friendly cities and a cohesive approach to urban renewal, public services, and infrastructure.

He also suggested that instead of each municipality independently purchasing public service vehicles, they should pool resources and work with a few reputable international manufacturers. These companies could then be encouraged to set up production facilities in Iran, particularly in the southern Makran coastal region.

The President criticized previous efforts in the Makran coastal region and revealed he had discussed its development with the Supreme Leader. "We must build cities there that rival those on the Gulf coast," Pezeshkian said, calling for the use of international expertise to achieve this.

Addressing the mayors directly, he noted strong cooperation between the heads of the government branches and said their weekly meetings could be used to address municipal challenges.

Tehran's Mayor Alireza Zakani also spoke at the meeting, urging government support to eliminate barriers facing municipalities and improve public service quality. He said municipalities can actively support national campaigns such as school construction, urban regeneration, and promotion of clean energy.

### Iran More Prepared Than Ever Against Enemies



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A high-ranking commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has hailed Iran's sophisticated capabilities in the fields of missiles and drones, ruling out military threats posed by enemies against the country.

Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC's Aerospace Division, made the remarks as cited by Ebrahim Rezaei, the spokesman for the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, during a meeting between the senior commander and the committee, Tasnim news agency reported.

Pointing to the Islamic Republic's defense capabilities, not least in the missile and drone sectors, Rezaei cited Hajizadeh as saying, "Iran is stronger and more prepared today than in the past, and no military threat against the country has a real basis."

The IRGC commander also described last year's retaliatory operation of True Promise II against the occupied territories as "the largest missile operation in the world," and said over 75% of the missiles hit their designated targets, with the success sending a clear message to the enemies, especially the Israeli regime, the Iranian MP said.

Rezaei cited Hajizadeh as saying that the recent propaganda suggesting Iran's defense capabilities are on the wane had been created by Hebrew and Western media.

"The enemies are trying to deceive public opinion by portraying a weakened image of the Islamic Republic; while Iran's military power has not only not decreased but has also increased compared to the past," Hajizadeh said, according to Rezaei.

"Iran's enemies are now more vulnerable than ever in the face of Iran's offensive capabilities and are unable to inflict damage on the country's defense structure."

Days after Israel's deadly attack on the Iranian diplomatic premises in Syria that killed seven members of its armed forces, including two generals, on April 1, 2024, the IRGC launched extensive missile and drone strikes against the occupied territories, in an operation called Operation True Promise I.

### Nuclear Technology Deeply Rooted in Iran, Cannot Be Uprooted



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TEHRAN - The Deputy Head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization (AEOI) and Head of the National Center for Atomic Standards and Quality Systems, Javad Karimi-Thabet, stated on Tuesday that Iran's nuclear technology has taken deep root in the country and cannot be dismantled.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the 31st National Conference on Nuclear Science and Technology, Karimi-Thabet emphasized the long-standing tradition of the event. "The very fact that we are holding the 31st edition of this nuclear conference is evidence of its three-decade history. We expect each session to grow in both quality and substance," he said.

The 31st edition of Iran's nuclear conference officially kicked off this morning in the holy city of Mashhad. The event, hosted by Mashhad with the support of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and organized by the Iranian Nuclear Society, brings together key stakeholders in the nuclear field.

Karimi-Thabet highlighted the strong participation in the conference: "We are starting this conference with over 1,200 participants from academia, private industry, students, and nuclear industry leaders. This high turnout itself shows how the conference has expanded. Even compared to the previous international edition, which had about 1,000 attendees, this one has drawn even more interest, though we continue to face limitations in venue capacity."

## Regional Sustainable Development Requires Cultural Articulation of Nations and Political Will of Gov'ts

TEHRAN - Cultural Heritage Minister Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri emphasized the need for deeper cultural integration among nations and stronger political commitment from governments to ensure sustainable regional development. He made these remarks during the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Symposium held on Kish Island.

Outlining a strategic vision for regional collaboration, Salehi Amiri described the ECO as a civilization-based and potential-driven platform that requires a renewed framework for interaction among nations. He stressed that this framework must transcend governmental levels and penetrate the deeper cultural and social layers of member states.

Highlighting shared historical, civilizational, religious, and linguistic ties among ECO member states, the Minister called these commonalities a fundamental asset for fostering people-centric relations. He noted that regional dynamism depends on transforming symbolic connections into practical ones, such as active cultural networks, scientific and artistic exchanges, and elite-driven platforms.

Proposing the convening of a "Cultural Elites Summit of ECO Member States" in Tehran, Salehi Amiri asserted that structured and goal-oriented dialogue among elites could pave the way for improved mutual understanding and, ultimately, greater regional cohesion.

One of the key challenges, he noted, is the issue of visa restrictions. "Visa waivers among ECO member countries must become a top strategic priority," he said. He added that Iran has already taken significant steps in this regard and expects the ECO Secretariat, with the backing of member governments, to accelerate the facilitation of travel between citizens of member states.

The Minister further underlined the need for systematic utilization of tourism capacities



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across ECO countries. He suggested that joint exhibitions in tourism, cultural heritage, and handicrafts—such as through the Tehran International Tourism Exhibition—could provide an effective platform for member nations to showcase their cultural strengths both to each other and to the global community.

Referring to Iran's national media resources, Salehi Amiri expressed readiness to promote the tourist attractions of ECO countries to the Iranian public. "Currently, around 10 million Iranians travel abroad each year," he said, adding that a significant portion of this potential could be directed toward ECO nations, provided that cultural engagement infrastructure and tourism services are adequately developed.

He also called for the development of joint educational programs, sharing of marketing experiences, and the signing of specialized cooperation agreements among tourism, handicrafts, and aviation organizations. Coastal ECO members, he noted, should view maritime potential as a strategic advantage for advancing regional tourism.

Stressing the decisive role of governments' political will, Salehi Amiri pointed out that Iran, in its Seventh Development Plan, has set a clear target to double the number of incoming tourists from 7.3 million to 15 million. Currently, over 2,700 tourism projects are underway across the country. Kish Island alone, with 57 operational hotels and 52 under construction, accounts for approximately 10% of the nation's total tourism capacity.

In conclusion, Salehi Amiri affirmed Iran's full readiness to act as a driver of cultural and tourism development in the region and to cooperate comprehensively with ECO member states under a cohesive, sustainable, and people-oriented strategy.

### Iran's Export Freight Costs Double Global Average



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TEHRAN - The Director General of Logistics and Commercial Support at Iran's Trade Promotion Organization has revealed that Iran's export freight costs are approximately twice the global average, citing both domestic and international challenges that have severely hindered the country's logistics development.

Ali Emami, speaking to ILNA, highlighted that Iran holds a logistics ranking of 123 globally, a position he described as far from ideal. He attributed this poor standing to a combination of internal inefficiencies and the lack of international cooperation, particularly with neighboring countries.

"Iran possesses attractive logistical potential," Emami noted, "and if this potential were realized, the country could meet a significant portion of the region's logistics needs."

He explained that Iran could serve as a key transit corridor for goods moving between India, China, and Europe via the Indian Ocean. However, Emami lamented that Iran has not yet integrated itself into the global value chain, which has limited its ability to capitalize on this strategic position.

Emami pointed out that Iran has failed to establish essential agreements with its neighboring countries to streamline cargo transit, resulting in multiple bottlenecks that have hampered the nation's logistics development.



## Iran, Iraq Emphasize Expansion of Joint Energy Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - In an official meeting, Iran's Oil Minister and Iraq's Electricity Minister reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and expanding joint cooperation in the energy sector.

According to a report from Iran's Ministry of Oil, Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad met with Iraqi Electricity Minister Ziyad Ali Fadel on Tuesday at the ministry headquarters, where both sides highlighted the strategic importance of energy collaboration between the two neighboring countries.

During the meeting, the two officials discussed the development of joint energy projects and stressed the need to deepen ties, drawing on the strong historical, cultural, religious, and political connections between Iran and Iraq.

## Industry Minister Reaffirms Ban on Imported Goods With Domestic Equivalents



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TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade (MIMT), Seyed Mohammad Atabak, announced that the ministry remains firmly committed to its longstanding policy of maximum support for domestically produced goods. He emphasized that this includes a continued ban on the import of foreign goods that have local equivalents, as well as combating the smuggling of such products.

In a statement released Tuesday by the MIMT, Atabak highlighted the strategic importance of domestic production, describing the ongoing support from the Supreme Leader for Iranian manufacturing as a unique asset for the nation's economic growth and the advancement of its industrial base.

Atabak stressed that the government's 14th administration will continue to focus on enhancing various policies and tools that bolster local manufacturing. He pointed out that the merger of the Ministries of Commerce and Industry has enabled more effective policy-making in favor of domestic products, allowing the ministry to deploy a broad range of supportive measures. These include facilitating access to production loans, managing currency allocation for imports, categorizing goods, overseeing quality improvements in local products, and combating the sale of smuggled goods.

The minister dismissed recent media reports suggesting a possible lifting of import bans on certain goods, clarifying that there has been no change in policy. "The ministry has never pursued lifting import bans where domestic alternatives are available," he said.

He added that the enforcement of this policy in recent years has led to both quantitative and qualitative growth in domestic production. He also noted that the ministry continues to collaborate with private sector producers and trade associations, citing a recent agreement with textile and fabric manufacturers aimed at maintaining support policies following the success of import reduction and local production initiatives.

## Economic and Technical Assistance Organization Signals Readiness to Boost Foreign Investment



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TEHRAN - Iran's Organization for Investment, Economic, and Technical Assistance has declared its readiness to facilitate and accelerate the presence of foreign investors in the country. According to Abolfazl Koudei, Deputy Minister of Economy and head of the organization, efforts are underway to streamline legal processes and provide technical support to attract more international capital.

Speaking on Tuesday during a meeting with Hassan Argi, Iran's commercial attaché in Hungary, Koudei highlighted the importance of commercial envoys in fostering foreign investment. He stressed the need for greater activity from Iran's commercial representatives abroad to support the organization's strategic goals.

Koudei also called for enhanced coordination among executive bodies to support the national slogan "Investment for Production." He emphasized that closer cooperation between the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran and the Investment Organization could yield significant results.

Referring to his recent meeting with the Hungarian ambassador in Tehran, Koudei noted the favorable environment for expanding economic cooperation between the two nations. He said that as the Ministry of Economy leads the Iran-Hungary Joint Economic Commission, there is full readiness to expedite investment-related processes for Hungarian businesses through special legal facilitation.

Hassan Argi, Iran's commercial attaché in Hungary, expressed hope that he could play a key role in enhancing exports not only through trade but also by attracting investment. He emphasized that with support from the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization and the Iranian ambassador in Hungary, significant progress could be made in bringing investors from Hungary and other EU countries to Iran.

# Iran Moves to Expand Banking Network Ties With BRICS, Regional Countries

TEHRAN - In a significant move to bolster economic and financial ties, the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), Mohammadreza Farzin, announced plans to operationalize the integration of Iran's domestic banking network, known as "Shetab," with Russia's "Mir" payment system. The broader strategy includes extending this connectivity model to all BRICS member states and neighboring countries, marking a major shift in Iran's international banking outreach.

Speaking at a ceremony on Tuesday to unveil the second phase of the Shetab-Mir integration, Farzin emphasized the pivotal role of banking infrastructure in enhancing both economic and cultural ties between nations. "No economic relationship is possible without banking and financial cooperation," he said. "This initiative aligns with the government's strategy of strengthening political and economic relations with neighboring countries and BRICS members."

Farzin reiterated that the integration effort with Russia is part of a larger plan to reduce reliance on Western banking systems, particularly the SWIFT network. "Our goal is to establish an independent and secure financial transaction channel," he stated. The project is the result of close collaboration between Iranian and Russian banking authorities and has already led to the establishment of correspondent banking relations between multiple Iranian and Russian banks.

In outlining the broader vision, Farzin noted that the Central Bank of Iran aims to implement this Shetab-Mir model across all BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as well as other nations in the region. He emphasized that building a secure banking infrastructure free from Western platforms is a top priority, especially given the current dependence on what he termed "insecure Western systems."

The Shetab-Mir project also encompasses the interconnection of Iran's "SEPA" and Russia's "SPFS" messaging systems, which serve as alternatives to SWIFT. Additional measures include establishing credit lines, signing monetary agreements, and enabling banking services that support both trade and tourism between the two nations.

According to Farzin, under the newly expanded system, citizens of both countries can now access banking services during travel without needing international banking cards. He confirmed that preliminary work is already underway to implement similar systems with other BRICS and regional countries.

Also speaking at the event, Zulfya Kakhramanova, Deputy Governor of the



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Central Bank of Russia, hailed the Shetab-Mir integration as a crucial step in strengthening bilateral banking relations and facilitating services for citizens of both nations.

"In the first phase, Iranian citizens could withdraw cash in Russia using their bank cards," she said. "With today's launch of the second phase, Russian citizens can now use their cards to make purchases in Iran. The third and final phase will see full functionality of the system in both countries."

Kakhramanova added that this cooperation with Iran has been successful and reflects deepening financial ties between the two countries.

Kazem Jalali, Iran's ambassador to Russia, also spoke at the event, announcing that the Iran-Eurasian Economic Union Free Trade Agreement will be officially implemented on May 15. "This agreement is another major step in cementing economic cooperation between Iran and its northern neighbors," he said.

Jalali noted that Iran's auto parts manufacturers are already actively engaging with Russian partners, although challenges still remain. He added that the Shetab-Mir connection would greatly benefit the approximately 10,000 Iranian students and businesspeople residing in Russia, as well as Russian tourists and traders visiting Iran.

He praised the second phase of the project, which allows Russian cardholders to make purchases inside Iran, and called for further action from Iran's tourism ministry to encourage more Russian travelers.

Noush Afarin Momen Vaghefi, Deputy for Payment Systems and Modern Technologies at the CBI, emphasized the technical robustness of the system. "The connection between the Iranian and Russian card networks has been developed based on international standards, enabling direct transactions without intermediaries," she explained.

She highlighted the strategic importance of this project, describing it as Iran's first experience connecting its card network with a neighboring country. Since the first phase became operational, nearly 2 million transactions have been recorded by over 100,000 Iranian users in Russia.

The integration of Iran's Shetab and Russia's Mir networks marks a significant milestone in Iran's push to build an independent and secure banking ecosystem with BRICS and regional partners. As geopolitical shifts drive countries toward multipolar alliances, Iran's banking strategy reflects a broader attempt to circumvent Western restrictions and foster deeper financial cooperation with emerging economies.

# Iran's Carpet Market in China at Risk From Counterfeit Goods

TEHRAN - In a recent meeting focused on improving Iran-China trade relations, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Mohammad-Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, outlined a new strategic direction for boosting exports to China, emphasizing the need to move away from raw materials and instead promote high value-added goods.

Dehnavi explained that a significant portion of Iran's trade with China currently consists of crude and semi-processed mineral and petroleum products. These goods naturally attract buyers without much marketing effort. However, he stressed that the organization's core mission is to develop exports of products that sit further down the value chain.

He argued that a well-formulated strategy—featuring joint investments, integration into global value chains (especially those centered in China), and technological cooperation—could enable Iran to export more high value-added products to China. Even if such ventures do not directly increase exports to China, they could serve as a launchpad for entering other markets, he noted.

"We're prepared to introduce joint investment projects and are ready to engage with Chinese investors to form practical collaborations," Dehnavi said, adding that discussions have already taken place at the political level to facilitate this.

The TPO chief also emphasized the importance of expanding e-commerce with China, pointing to recent developments on JD.com, one of China's largest online retail platforms. He announced that Iranian products can now be listed on JD, creating an avenue for direct-to-consumer sales in China—an opportunity he believes should be utilized more aggressively.

Dehnavi also addressed logistics issues, explaining that Iran's trade route with China currently relies almost entirely on sea freight. However, a northern railway corridor through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan can also be used to reach China. He encouraged traders—especially those targeting western Chinese markets or operating out of Iran's northeast—to



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use this route. The TPO is ready to offer incentives and logistical support to encourage the use of rail transport, he said, noting that a two-way flow of goods is necessary for the route to become fully operational.

Also speaking at the session, Majid-Reza Hariri, head of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce, highlighted ongoing structural issues in Iran's trade with China. He noted that over 90% of Iran's exports to China are crude or semi-processed goods,

mainly handled by state-owned enterprises. Manufactured goods make up less than 10% of the trade volume, he said.

Hariri emphasized the urgent need for both policy reform and greater private sector engagement to diversify and expand non-oil exports to China. He reiterated that numerous opportunities exist, especially via online sales platforms like JD, but lamented the prevailing skepticism among Iranian exporters about their ability to sell to Chinese consumers.

Discussing Iran's traditional carpet industry, Hariri said Iran began exporting carpets to China in 2009, and the product has since developed a strong market presence. However, he warned that the market is now under serious threat due to widespread counterfeiting, which has eroded consumer trust and jeopardized the reputation of authentic Iranian carpets.

To protect this market, Hariri called for immediate and robust measures, including legal protections and trade monitoring, to curb the spread of counterfeit Iranian rugs in China.

He also pointed to a broader issue impacting trade: the shortage of foreign currency. According to Central Bank statistics, state-run exporters repatriated only 60% of their foreign earnings in the previous year, exacerbating Iran's foreign currency challenges and affecting the broader import economy.

The session concluded with a shared understanding that enhancing Iran's export capabilities to China—both in volume and quality—requires a coordinated strategy, stronger private sector involvement, and systematic efforts to combat challenges like counterfeit goods and currency repatriation.

## South Korea Offers Housing Development Expertise to Iran



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TEHRAN - The South Korean ambassador to Tehran has expressed his country's readiness to share its successful housing development experiences with Iran, drawing on lessons learned during South Korea's rapid urban expansion in the 1980s.

In a meeting with the CEO of Iran's Urban Regeneration Company, Ambassador Kim Jun-pyo highlighted the South Korean Embassy's plans to launch five joint projects with Iran in 2025. He emphasized that the most significant of these will involve cooperation with Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development in exchanging knowledge and experience in housing construction—a collaboration he believes could yield valuable outcomes for both nations.

Ambassador Kim also announced a joint housing seminar to be held in Iran later this year. He said the event would facilitate deeper understanding of potential areas for cooperation and help attract South Korean investors to Iran's urban construction sector.

Reflecting on his recent visit to the historic city of Shiraz, Kim noted the unique blend of modern and traditional architecture, describing it as a harmonious coexistence of past and present. He admitted that South Korea overlooked the preservation of historical structures during its 1980s urbanization push, but has since shifted focus in the 1990s toward protecting historic urban fabric.

During the meeting, Iran's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Abdolreza Golpayegani, expressed Iran's willingness to share its own extensive experience in preserving and revitalizing historical urban areas with South Korea.

## Necessity of Advancing Tehran-Beijing Technological Cooperation



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TEHRAN - Minister of Information and Communications Technology, currently on an official visit to Beijing at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart, met with Li Licheng, China's Minister of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), to discuss avenues for strengthening bilateral technological collaboration.

The two sides held a meeting on Tuesday, emphasizing the expansion of cooperation in key areas such as artificial intelligence, industrial digitization, communications infrastructure development, and human resources training.

During the talks, Minister Issa Zarepour described the People's Republic of China as a "strategic partner and ally" for the Islamic Republic of Iran. He referred to the recent meeting between the presidents of both countries in Kazan, Russia, and highlighted the importance of further enhancing bilateral relations.

Zarepour expressed hope that the 25-year strategic cooperation agreement between Iran and China would be implemented more swiftly and purposefully, especially in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT).

The Iranian minister also emphasized the importance of exchanging experiences in areas such as e-government, smart public services, and educational collaboration aimed at training skilled specialists.

China's Minister of Industry and Information Technology, Li Licheng, echoed these sentiments, stressing the historic and friendly ties between the two nations. He described Iran as one of Beijing's key regional partners and called for expanding practical cooperation in technological domains.

Li acknowledged Iran's significant capabilities in ICT, artificial intelligence, and communications infrastructure, affirming China's readiness to deepen bilateral ties and implement the terms of the 25-year strategic cooperation framework.

"Enhancing technological cooperation," he said, "not only serves the national interests of both countries but also contributes meaningfully to advancing regional tech collaboration."

## Peruvian PM Resigns Ahead of Censure Vote in Congress

LIMA (Dispatches) - Peruvian Prime Minister Gustavo Adrianzen resigned on Tuesday, a day before he was set to face a censure vote in Congress related to rising crime and the recent killing of a group of miners. Adrianzen's exit is the latest test for Peru's massively unpopular President Dina Boluarte, who must now replace her entire cabinet. She can name previous ministers to the same roles, but only under a new prime minister. Boluarte's approval ratings have dropped to historic lows, with a poll released this week showing support at just 2%. Adrianzen's announcement at an event alongside Boluarte on Tuesday evening capped a day of shake-ups for the government.

Earlier on Tuesday, Boluarte replaced her economy and interior ministers.



## Israeli Strike on Gaza Hospital Kills Wounded Journalist



CAIRO (Dispatches) - An Israeli airstrike on the Gaza Strip on Tuesday killed a well-known Palestinian journalist whom it accused of working with Hamas and was recovering in hospital from an earlier strike, the territory's health ministry said.

Israel has accused Hassan Aslih, who has hundreds of thousands of followers on social media platforms, of taking part in the October 7, 2023 attack by Palestinian militant group Hamas that triggered the war in Gaza.

It has said Aslih documented and uploaded footage of "looting, arson and murder" during the Hamas-led incursion into Israel.

Ahmed Siyyam, a Gaza civil emergency service member, told Reuters the attack hit the third floor of a Nasser Hospital building in the southern city of Khan Younis, where dozens of patients and injured were being treated.

Two patients, including Aslih, were killed and several others were wounded, the health ministry said.

Later on Tuesday, the Gaza health ministry also said nine missiles slammed into and around the courtyard of the Gaza European Hospital in the south of the enclave, killing at least 16 people and wounding 70 others.

Israel's military said it hit a "Hamas command center" beneath the hospital. Hamas denies exploiting hospitals and civilian properties for military purposes.

In a separate statement about the Nasser Hospital strike, the Israeli military said it "eliminated significant Hamas terrorists" in Nasser Hospital, among them Aslih, who it said had "operated under the guise of a journalist".

Reuters footage showed heavy damage to one of the Nasser hospital buildings, including to the medical equipment and beds inside.

"I came to the hospital not knowing whether to mourn the martyrs, treat the patients and injured, or deal with the staff who no longer feel safe," said Atef Al-Hout, director of Nasser Hospital.

## Albania PM's Socialist Party Scores Large Victory in Parliamentary Elections



TIRANA (Dispatches) - Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama's Socialist Party scored a large victory in parliamentary elections, securing him his fourth term, official results showed late Tuesday.

The Socialist Party won 52.1 percent of the vote on Sunday compared with 34.2 percent for an alliance of opposition parties led by his main rival Sali Berisha, according to results released by the Central Election Commission (CEC).

Diaspora votes have yet to be counted, but according to initial results, Rama was also leading there.

According to projections, the Socialist Party could have more lawmakers than in 2021 elections. At the time, it won 74 seats in the 140-seat assembly.

The vote was dominated by the contest between three-time premier Rama, 60, who focused his campaign on European integration, and right-winger Berisha, from the Democratic Party of Albania.

The two campaigned mainly on economic issues, such as pensions, wages, infrastructure and tourism.

# Trump Shocks Riyadh Summit With Syria Sanctions U-Turn, Trillion-Dollar Saudi Deals on the Table

RIYADH (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump kicked off his trip to the Gulf on Tuesday with a surprise announcement that the United States will lift long-standing sanctions on Syria, and a \$600b commitment from Saudi Arabia to invest in the U.S.

The U.S. agreed to sell Saudi Arabia an arms package worth nearly \$142b, according to the White House which called it the largest "defense cooperation agreement" Washington has ever done.

The end of sanctions on Syria would be a huge boost for a country that has been shattered by more than a decade of civil war. Rebels led by current President Ahmed al-Sharaa toppled President Bashar al-Assad last December.

Speaking at an investment forum in Riyadh at the start of a deals-focused trip that also brought a flurry of diplomacy, Trump said he was acting on a request to scrap the sanctions by Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"Oh what I do for the crown prince," Trump said, drawing laughs from the audience. He said the sanctions had served an important function but that it was now time for the country to move forward.

The move represents a major U.S. policy shift. The U.S. declared Syria a state sponsor of terrorism in 1979, added sanctions in 2004 and imposed further sanctions after the civil war broke out in 2011.

Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani said on X that the planned move marked a "new start" in Syria's path to reconstruction. Trump has agreed to briefly greet Sharaa in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, a White House official said.

Trump and the Saudi crown prince signed an agreement covering energy, defense, mining and other areas. Trump has sought to strengthen relations with the Saudis to improve regional ties with Israel and act as a bulwark against Iran.

The agreement covers deals with more than a dozen US defense companies for areas including air and missile defense, air force and space, maritime security and communications, a White House fact sheet said.

It was not clear whether the deal included Lockheed F-35 jets, which sources say have been discussed. The Saudi prince said the total package could reach \$1 trillion when further agreements are reached in the months ahead.

Saudi Arabia is one of the largest customers for US arms, and the two countries have maintained strong ties for decades based on an arrangement in which the kingdom delivers oil and the superpower provides security.

But relations were strained after the 2018 murder of U.S.-based Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents in Istanbul caused a global uproar. U.S. intelligence concluded that bin Salman approved an operation to capture or kill Khashoggi, a prominent critic, but the Saudi government has denied any involvement.



Trump did not mention the incident during his visit and called bin Salman an "incredible man."

"I really believe we like each other a lot," Trump said.

Trump was to go from Riyadh to Qatar on Wednesday and the United Arab Emirates on Thursday in a trip that is focused on investment rather than security matters in the Middle East.

Several US business leaders attended the event, including Elon Musk, the Tesla chief who has led a government-downsizing effort for Trump in Washington; OpenAI CEO Sam Altman; BlackRock CEO Larry Fink and Blackstone CEO Stephen Schwarzman.

Trump was shown speaking with several Saudi officials, including sovereign wealth fund governor Yasir al-Rumayyan, Aramco CEO Amin Nasser and investment minister Khalid al-Falih as he viewed models for the kingdom's flashy, multi-billion-dollar development projects.

Bin Salman has focused on diversifying the Saudi economy in a major reform program dubbed Vision 2030 that includes "Giga-projects" such as NEOM, a futuristic city the size of Belgium. Oil generated 62% of Saudi government revenue last year.

The kingdom has scaled back some of its ambitions as rising costs and falling oil prices weigh.

No Israel visit

Trump has not scheduled a stop in Israel, raising questions about where the close ally stands in Washington's priorities as Trump presses Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to agree to a new ceasefire deal in the 19-month-old Gaza war.

Trump said it was his "fervent hope" that Saudi Arabia would soon normalize relations with Israel, following other Arab states that did so during his first 2017-2021 term. "But you'll do it in your own time," he said.

Netanyahu's opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state makes progress with the Saudis unlikely, sources told Reuters.

Trump on Tuesday called Iran "the most destructive force" in the Middle East and warned that the U.S. will never allow it to obtain a nuclear weapon. He said he was willing to strike a new deal with the Islamic Republic but only if its leaders changed course.

"I want to make a deal with Iran," he said. "But if Iran's leadership rejects this olive branch... we will have no choice but to inflict massive maximum pressure."

# Macron Says France Does Not Want to Unleash World War III Over Ukraine

KYIV (Dispatches) - President Emmanuel Macron said Tuesday that France did not want to unleash "World War III" over Russia's invasion of Ukraine and vowed referendums on key issues as he outlined his aims for the remaining two years of his mandate in a marathon television appearance.

Macron, who came to power in 2017 promising radical change, will step down in 2027 after serving the maximum two terms allowed under the constitution.

On occasion over the last year, Macron has appeared as a lame duck especially after his decision to hold snap legislative elections backfired, leaving the far-right as the biggest party in parliament and his own party a diminished, minority presence.

But recent months have seen a newly energized Macron, boosted by his presence on the international front as he seeks to bring an end to the three-year-war sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"We must help Ukraine defend itself but we do not want to unleash a Third World War," Macron said in the interview that lasted more than three hours.

"The war must cease and Ukraine must be in the best possible situation to go into negotiations," he added.

But Macron said France was ready to start discussing with other European countries deploying French warplanes armed with nuclear weapons on their territory, as the United States does.

"The Americans have the bombs on planes in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Turkey," Macron said.

"We are ready to open this discussion. I will define the framework in a very specific way in the weeks and months to come," he said.

Those who put their points of view in front of Macron ranged from the head of the hardline CGT union, Sophie Binet,



to Tibo Inshape, a muscular and massively followed fitness influencer.

Amid concern about some 600 jobs in France, Macron told Binet that the French operations of steelmaker ArcelorMittal would not be nationalised but vowed to save its two plants in the country.

In a key announcement, he said he favoured holding several referendums on the same day for voters to decide on French social and economic "reforms".

"I want us to organise a series of consultations," Macron said, adding that the votes would take place on one day in coming months and address "major" economic and social reforms.

While he would not go into details, he was open to a suggestion by Prime Minister Francois Bayrou, who has proposed holding a referendum on a plan to reduce France's debt.

Referendums could also address social reforms such as access to social media for under-15s and assisted dying.

However, Macron rejected the idea of putting immigration issues to a popular vote despite repeated requests from the right and far right.

Tackling delicate social issues, the French president spoke out against the wearing of religious symbols, such as the Islamic veil, in sports competitions, but he added that for non-competitive sports practice it was up to sports federations to decide.

While Macron, 47, must step down in 2027 after serving two consecutive terms, he could in theory return in 2032, something no French leader has ever done before.

But he said at the end of the TV marathon he had not yet thought about his future after 2027 and was only thinking of France in his daily work.

"When I'm done (with the current term), I'll think about what's next. Then I'll be able to answer you. But today, I haven't thought about it," he said.

# Uruguay's Ex-President Jose Mujica, Leftist Icon, Dies at 89

MONTEVIDEO (Dispatches) - Uruguay's former president Jose "Pepe" Mujica, an ex-guerrilla fighter and hero of the Latin American left, has died at the age of 89, the government said Tuesday.

The humble leader -- who once spent a dozen years behind bars for revolutionary activity -- lost his battle against cancer after announcing in January the disease had spread and he would stop treatment.

"With deep sorrow, we announce the passing of our comrade Pepe Mujica. President, activist, guide and leader. We will miss you greatly, old friend," Uruguay's sitting president, Yamandu Orsi, posted on X.

Leftist leaders from across Latin America and Europe paid tribute to the politician described by Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum as an "example for Latin America and the entire world."

Gustavo Petro of Colombia -- himself a former guerrilla -- paid tribute to "a great revolutionary."

The cardigan-wearing earned the moniker "world's poorest president" during his 2010-2015 presidency for giving away much of his salary to charity and living a simple life



on his farm, with his ex-guerrilla wife and three-legged dog.

Mujica himself had rejected the title in a 2012 AFP interview.

"I do not live in poverty, I live in austerity... I need little to live," he said.

He transformed Uruguay, a country of 3.4 million people best known for football and beef, into a bastion of progressive politics on a continent plagued by corruption and strongman rule.

In later life, he was disappointed at the authoritarian drift of some left-wing governments, accusing repressive leaders in Venezuela and Nicaragua of "messing things up."

He was diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus in May last year, and it spread to his liver.

His wife Lucia Topolansky said this week he was receiving palliative care.

Tributes poured in from Latin America and beyond.

Former Bolivian president Evo Morales hailed Mujica's "experience and wisdom," while Brazil's government bid farewell to "one of the most important humanists of our time."



## Alcaraz Sets Up Draper Clash in Italian Open

ROME (Dispatches) - Jasmine Paolini became the first Italian woman to reach the Italian Open semi-finals since 2014 when she beat Russian world number 11 Diana Shnaider 6-7(1) 6-4 6-2.

In a stunning first-set collapse, Paolini was 4-0 up but lost the next five games before Shnaider then forced a tiebreak, which the 21-year-old Russian dominated.

Backed into a corner, world number five Paolini mounted a comeback of her own in the second set, winning six successive games after trailing 4-0.

Down a break in the decider, French Open runner-up Paolini continued to show resilience with the crowd behind her to become the first Italian woman to reach the last four of the WTA 1000 event since doubles partner Sara Errani just over a decade ago.

Paolini, who reached the last four in Rome for the first time, will face Peyton Stearns for a spot in the final after the American knocked out Elina Svitolina 6-2 4-6 7-6(4).

In the men's draw, world number one Jannik Sinner overcame Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo 7-6(2) 6-3 to extend his winning streak to 24 matches, which started in October last year.

The 23-year-old continued his run of reaching the quarter-finals at every event played since the start of 2024.

Fellow Italian Lorenzo Musetti, seeded eighth, powered to a 7-5 6-4 win against Daniil Medvedev to set up a quarter-final clash with defending champion Alexander Zverev, after the German second seed beat Frenchman Arthur Fils 7-6(3) 6-1.

Earlier, four-times Grand Slam champion Carlos Alcaraz recovered from a second set blip to beat world number 24 Karen Khachanov 6-3 2-6 7-5 and reach the quarter-finals for the first time.

The third seed will next face Britain's world number five Jack Draper, who rallied from a set down to beat Frenchman Corentin Moutet 1-6 6-4 6-3.

Former Australian Open and U.S. Open semi-finalist Khachanov started well and took a 3-1 lead before Alcaraz responded swiftly to level things up, making it 3-3 and sweeping the next three games to close out the opening set.

Despite being 3-2 down in the second set, Khachanov forced a decider — the first time the 28-year-old Russian had taken a set off Alcaraz in four meetings.

The Spaniard saw his lead slip away again after being up 4-1 in the third as Khachanov clawed his way back to draw level at 4-4, threatening an upset.

However, the 22-year-old Alcaraz steadied himself just in time, breaking Khachanov in the 12th game to clinch victory in two hours and 29 minutes.

"It feels amazing to get the win at the end against a really big and really tough guy like Khachanov," Alcaraz said.

"Physically I struggled a bit. Not any pain on any part of the body, but I was just tired. The match was really tough. I had to run a lot, so I'm just really proud of the way I fought for every ball."

## Pacers Escape 19-Point Hole, KO Cavaliers in Game 5

5

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tyrese Haliburton scored 31 points and dished out eight assists as the Indiana Pacers eliminated the host Cleveland Cavaliers with a 114-105 decision in Game 5 of the Eastern Conference semifinals on Tuesday.

Pascal Siakam put up 21 points for fourth-seeded Indiana, which closed the best-of-seven series with consecutive wins.

Indiana has qualified for back-to-back trips to the Eastern finals for the first time since 2013-2014, when it lost to the Miami Heat twice. The Pacers were beaten by the eventual champion Boston Celtics last season.

"We're happy to go to the conference finals, but we want the whole thing this year," Indiana's Myles Turner said.

Donovan Mitchell posted 35 points and nine rebounds while playing with a sprained left ankle and sore calf for top-seeded Cleveland, which blew a 19-point lead on Tuesday and lost all three home games in the series. Evan Mobley added 24 points and 11 rebounds but a team that went 64-18 in the regular season was sent home.

"They were the better team. They deserved it and played great," Cleveland coach Kenny Atkinson said. "They wore us down. I thought we were built for it, but we weren't ready for that."

"The season was not a success in terms of where our goal was. Success would be going to the conference finals, but we didn't do that. Quite honestly, I expected more coming off the Miami series (a four-game sweep). Now, we've got to figure out the next piece."



After the Cavaliers went up 44-25 early in the second quarter, Haliburton scored 22 points and drained six 3-pointers during an epic 55-24 burst that put the Pacers up 80-68 with 1:50 remaining in the third.

Cleveland got as close as 98-97 with 5:03 left in the fourth on a Mitchell 3-pointer, but Andrew Nembhard answered with a 3-pointer and Haliburton made a three-point play. Haliburton wound up 10 of 15 from the field, including 6 of 10 on 3-point attempts.

Nembhard finished with 18 points and six assists, Aaron Nesmith collected 13 points and 13 rebounds, and Myles Turner had 10 points and four blocked shots for Indiana. The Pacers held the Cavaliers to a 9-of-35 shooting (25.7 percent) from beyond the arc.

"We had a lot of confidence in what we did last year, even though a lot of people didn't," Haliburton said of again reaching the conference finals.

Meanwhile Cleveland All-Star guard Darius Garland had 11 points on 4-of-16 shooting and Max Strus missed all nine of his field-goal attempts. They combined to miss all 12 of their 3-point tries while committing eight fouls.

Mitchell was aggressive from the tip, scoring 13 points and making 7 of 8 free throws as the Cavaliers went up 31-19 after the first.

Haliburton sank five 3-pointers in a 27-12 run to end the first half, bringing the Pacers within 56-52. Haliburton had 17 points at the break, while Mitchell topped Cleveland with 16.

"If we got one when we were up 20 (in Game 2), the series looks a lot different," Mobley said, referencing a 120-119 home loss. "You have to win the ones you can, and when you're up 20, these are the ones you have to win."

"We didn't start out the best in Game 1, then we got hurt and everything went downhill. We've got to be mentally stronger from the jump."

Anthony Edwards poured 11 of his 30 points into a 17-0 third-quarter flurry as the Minnesota Timberwolves moved within one win of a second consecutive berth in the Western Conference finals with a 117-110 road win over the Golden State Warriors in Game 4 on Monday in San Francisco.

## Forest's Awoniyi in Induced Coma After Surgery



LONDON (Dispatches) - Nottingham Forest striker Taiwo Awoniyi is in an induced coma after undergoing surgery on a serious abdominal injury, according to British media reports.

The Nigeria international, 27, collided with the goalpost in the 88th minute of Sunday's 2-2 Premier League draw with Leicester City at the City Ground, attempting to connect with a cross from Anthony Elanga.

Awoniyi, who joined Forest from Union Berlin in June 2022, came on as a late substitute for Ibrahim Sangare and spent only five minutes on the pitch before the incident.

He received immediate treatment on the field and then rejoined the game but was limping for the last 10 minutes of the match.

The BBC was among British media outlets that reported late on Tuesday that Awoniyi had been placed in an induced coma after having the first phase of surgery.

In a statement earlier on Tuesday, Forest said Awoniyi had undergone surgery and was "recovering well".

"Nottingham Forest can confirm that Taiwo Awoniyi is recovering well so far following urgent surgery on a serious abdominal injury sustained during Sunday's match against Leicester City," the club said.

Reuters has contacted Forest for comment.

Forest owner Evangelos Marinakis came onto the pitch after the Leicester game and appeared to remonstrate with manager Nuno Espirito Santo.

Espirito Santo said that the incident was due to Marinakis's frustration over Awoniyi not being substituted. The Forest manager added that the Nigeria international was left on due to a misunderstanding between the coaching and medical departments.

Forest on Tuesday dismissed reports as "fake news" that Marinakis was involved in a confrontation with the manager.

## Australia Opening Spot for World Test Final Still Up for Grabs



SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Australia's opening partnership has been the subject of much debate since David Warner retired and remains unresolved less than a month before the World Test Championship final against South Africa.

Since Warner played his last test match in January 2024, Usman Khawaja has had no fewer than four opening partners in 11 matches and the 38-year-old could have yet another with the world title on the line at Lord's in mid-June.

"I do think that it's a role that more people could do than we would probably give credit to," head selector George Bailey said on Tuesday after announcing the squad for the final and the tour of West Indies that follows.

"There is a prevailing thought (that) it's a specialised role, but I think in certain conditions there's opportunities at different times where other guys could do it."

Of Khawaja's recent partners, Steve Smith has moved back down the batting order, Nathan McSweeney has been dropped while Travis Head and Sam Konstas remain options after being named in the squad.

Head has an impressive record in the middle order in English conditions, however, and teenager Konstas enjoyed a stunning debut against India late last year but was dropped for the tour of Sri Lanka in January and February.

"It's pretty clear that he's not the finished product," Bailey said of Konstas.

"He's on a journey. He's a highly talented player. But again, that's not to discount his ability to play in the World Test Championship, should he be required."

With all-rounder Cameron Green returning after back surgery, albeit only as a batsman initially, Marnus Labuschagne has been floated as a candidate to move to the top of the order to make space for him.

## Djokovic Splits With Coach Murray Ahead of French Open

LONDON (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic is splitting with coach Andy Murray just two weeks ahead of the French Open, following a dismal start to the clay-court season.

Murray's representatives announced Tuesday that the two former No. 1-ranked players will "no longer be working together."

"Thanks to Novak for the unbelievable opportunity to work together and thanks to his team for all their hard work over the past six months," Murray was quoted as saying. "I wish Novak all the best for the rest of the season."

The decision comes after Djokovic lost his opening match in his last two tournaments in Monte Carlo and Madrid, both on clay.

Djokovic thanked Murray in a post on social media "for all the hard work, fun & support over last six months on & off the court."



"I really enjoyed deepening our friendship together," Djokovic wrote.

Djokovic and Murray joined forces ahead of the Australian Open in what initially was seen as an unlikely pairing. After Murray retired last year, Djokovic reached out with the coaching proposition.

Djokovic said in February that Murray had agreed to stay on for an "indefinite" period, including "some clay-court tournaments" this season. Djokovic has yet to win a tournament this season after having to retire from the Australian Open semifinals with a hamstring injury and losing in the final in Miami to leave him one shy of 100th career title.