

Commander-in-Chief of the IRGC Major General Hossein Salami Praised the Heroism of Young Relief Workers During the Iran-Iraq War, Describing Their Efforts as Extraordinary and Beyond the Bounds of Human Imagination

IRAN NEWS

Iran Has Expressed Concerns About the Continuation of Deadly Armed Clashes in the Libyan Capital of Tripoli, Calling for an Immediate End to the Violence and Bloodshed There

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Islamic Duty to Stop Biggest Genocide in History



TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has called on Muslims to strengthen unity and echo the voice of the oppressed Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, who are being subjected to an Israeli genocide.

He made the remarks after Friday prayers at the Istiqlal Mosque in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, where he attended the 19th high-level parliamentary meeting of the Parliamentary Union of the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (PUIC).

“Today, it is our Islamic duty to stand together in unity and not allow the global arrogance to continue the biggest genocide in history,” he said.

“Today, the people of Gaza, including children, women and patients, expect us to be by their side. They want us to be the voice of the oppressed and not leave them alone in these difficult days.”

Israel launched its war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, but it has failed to achieve its declared objectives despite killing at least 53,010 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injuring more than 119,998 others.

The regime accepted longstanding negotiation terms by the Hamas resistance group under a Gaza ceasefire, which began on January 19. However, Israel violated the truce on March 2, cutting off humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. Just over two weeks later, the regime resumed its relentless bombing and redeployed troops to the besieged territory.

None of Iran’s Nuclear Facilities Will Be Dismantled



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has stressed that none of the country’s nuclear facilities will be dismantled, amid indirect talks with the United States over the Islamic Republic’s peaceful nuclear program.

Araqchi firmly underscored the nation’s unwavering stance on its right to enrich uranium during a visit to the 36th Tehran International Book Fair as he addressed a forum at the Foreign Ministry booth on Thursday.

“Defending the rights of the Iranian people in the nuclear field, including [uranium] enrichment, is one of these principles and rights of the people that we will not compromise on, neither in the media nor at the negotiation table. This is the right of the Iranian people, and no one can deny it,” Araqchi told reporters.

He reiterated that Tehran is ready to “build trust and offer transparency” regarding its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of anti-Iran sanctions.

“We may clarify this process, but none of the nuclear facilities will be dismantled.”

The minister expressed Tehran’s readiness to continue the talks, as long as the other side “is prepared to reach an agreement that recognizes our rights”.

He noted that the two sides are yet to reach a framework of understanding. “If we reach a framework of understanding and agreement, other issues will also be raised, but we have not yet reached that point.”



Iran Will Never Bow to Threats, Pressure

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Masoud Pezeshkian says Iran will never bow to threats and pressure, rebuking US President Donald Trump, who has accused Tehran of being a destabilizing force in the region.

Speaking at a meeting with economic actors and investors in the western province of Kermanshah on Thursday, Pezeshkian criticized the United States for pursuing double-standard policies toward Iran.

“Trump thinks that he can sanction us, threaten us, and then sit back and talk about human rights ... All the crimes in the region are because of these policies and these individuals,” he said.

“We seek peace, not war. We have always been seeking to live in peace and [based on] mutual respect, both when it comes to internal issues and also in relations with our neighbors.”

During his visit to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, Trump labeled Iran as the “most destructive force” in the West Asia region. He accused Iran of fueling regional instability and said the United States would not allow the country to develop a “nuclear weapon,” rebuffing Tehran’s total rejection of such non-conventional arms.

Trump, meanwhile, threatened to deploy “massive maximum pressure” against the Islamic Republic.

Pointing to the Israeli regime’s crimes in the Gaza Strip, Pezeshkian said those who massacred 60,000 people in Gaza, buried them under rubble, and deprived the defenseless people of water, medicine, and food now falsely claim to advocate for human rights.

They commit genocide before the eyes of the world and brazenly speak of peace and tranquility, the Iranian president emphasized.

He asked, “How can one believe that someone who overtly produces bombs, missiles, and weapons, and takes pride in it, can claim to promote security and peace? By what logic do they say that we are a threat while they themselves manufacture weapons for the mass killing of human beings?”

Pezeshkian emphasized that world powers are encouraging wars by selling weapons and missiles to the region, saying, “If there is no war, there will be no market for them. They need to create tension in order to sell their military equipment.”

He emphasized Iran’s cordial relations with regional countries and noted that there is no reason for engaging in any conflict that would serve the interest of outsiders.

The Iranian president added that the development of trade among the Muslim countries would lead to the establishment of a huge market.

“We can also create security and peace in this region. This region belongs to us, not to others,” Pezeshkian pointed out.

He warned against enemies’ plots to sow discord among the countries in the region, adding that Iran aims to boost interaction and peaceful coexistence with them.

“The establishment of peace in the region is the goal of the Islamic Republic, and even if some seek instability, we have chosen a different path,” Pezeshkian emphasized.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry also firmly rejected the pejorative remarks that had been made by the US president against the country, calling them “false, divisive, and misleading.”

The ministry condemned Trump’s accusations as an attempt to distort the realities of the region and shift blame onto Tehran.

Trump’s Iran Comments “Insulting”; Won’t Conceal U.S., Israeli Crimes

TEHRAN - The Foreign Ministry has firmly rejected the pejorative remarks that had been made by U.S. President Donald Trump concerning the Islamic Republic earlier, calling them “false, divisive, and misleading.”

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the ministry condemned Trump’s accusations as an attempt to distort the realities of the region and shift blame onto Tehran.

It further described Trump’s allegations as an effort to divert attention from the ongoing crimes that were being committed by the Israeli regime, the US’s most cherished ally in the West Asia region, and Washington’s complicity in the Israeli atrocities.

On Tuesday, Trump had labeled Iran as the “most destructive force” in the West Asia region.

He had accused the country of fueling regional instability and said that the United States would not allow it to develop a “nuclear weapon,” rebuffing Tehran total rejection of such non-conventional arms.

Trump had, meanwhile, threatened to deploy “massive maximum pressure” against the Islamic Republic.

The Foreign Ministry’s statement pointed out that the accusations had come while the Israeli regime, backed by the United States, continued “the most brutal colonial genocide in occupied Palestine.”

It was referring to the regime’s October 2023-present genocidal warfare against the Gaza Strip that has so far claimed the lives of more than 52,900 Palestinians, mostly women and children. The war has received unrestricted military and political support on the part of the US.

The statement further noted that the regime had also been responsible for acts of deadly



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military occupation and aggression elsewhere across the region, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

The ministry stressed that these atrocities, including violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries, along with the terrorizing and war crimes that were being committed by the regime against those nations, were rather being overshadowed by false accusations against Iran.

“The remarks of the US president are yet another example of a deceitful approach by US policymakers, seeking to prevent Israel from being held accountable for its actions against the nations of the region.”

The ministry, meanwhile, emphasized that such inflammatory rhetoric would not succeed in dividing the Iranian people, whether they resided within the country or abroad.

It also pointed to Washington’s direct and indirect support for previous oppressive regimes throughout the region, and its continuous role in imposing coercive measures that harmed Iranian citizens’ rights.

However, “the deceptive and insulting remarks of the president of the United States will in no way create a rift in the national unity of Iranians, whether they are inside or outside the country,” the statement read.

Additionally, the ministry reaffirmed that Iran and its regional partners were determined to continue strengthening ties and promoting cooperation, unaffected by external attempts to sow discord.

“The malicious intent behind these remarks is clear, but Iran and its allies will continue to build friendly relations based on mutual respect and shared interests, undeterred by third-party attempts to cause division,” the statement concluded.

The JCPOA Experience: Useful in Oman



By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

In 2015 (1394 in the Iranian calendar), Iran and the so-called P5+1 countries, including the United States, reached an agreement that apparently lasted only three years.

Because the events that occurred during the drafting and implementation of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) divided Iranian society into two distinct camps.

Supporters of the JCPOA believed it was a way to open up closed doors in the economy. Beyond economics, they viewed it as a gateway for the West to enter Iran’s internal environment—strengthening the foundations of secularism in the country and creating a more conducive environment for deals with Western companies.

On the other hand, opponents—who were more concerned with preserving the Islamic Republic and the Revolution—argued that the JCPOA would dry up the roots of religion in Iran. Supporters of the JCPOA, in turn, labeled and mocked them as “the worried ones” (delvapasans).

The failure of the JCPOA—coupled with regret over its apparent success—fueled a cancerous attack on the Revolution and religion, further deepening the divide between the two camps in the country. In 2018 (1397), Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the agreement essentially rendered the JCPOA a useless document. Today, the stigma of it marks the foreheads of Ali Larijani, the Parliament during his term, and the pro-Western government of Hassan Fereydoun (Rouhani). It evokes memories of the Anglo-Saxon historiography of the Constitutional Era and figures such as Taghi Zadeh and Vosough al-Dowleh.

It is very important to evaluate and understand what actions led to the JCPOA not becoming a successful experience. Even nearly ten years after the start of negotiations in 2015 until now in 2025 (1404), debates, analyses, and arguments about it continue within the country. This demands a deep understanding from the perspective of subservient thinking.

Perhaps the first negative aspect of the JCPOA’s media portrayal was that expectations for it were raised hundreds or perhaps thousands of times beyond its actual benefits.

Hassan Fereydoun’s (Rouhani’s) government was forced to exaggerate the benefits of the JCPOA thousands of times to defend it. But its failure and the exposure of Europe’s and America’s collusion with the Zionist regime soon proved otherwise. The JCPOA became a full-blown sedition against the people, the Revolution, and religion—even among the most underprivileged sectors of society, it lost credibility.

Critics mocked the “exaggerated promises” of the JCPOA, and public opinion gradually joined in with the ridicule.

On the other hand, the political faction supporting the JCPOA tried to reduce it to a campaign slogan for the 2017 (1396) presidential election, further turning the JCPOA into a divisive tool in internal political strife. This greatly contributed to the sedition and further weakened the agreement.

Let us not forget how Mohammad Javad Zarif was turned into a manufactured hero by the same group of New Yorkers aligned with Velayati from previous foreign ministry administrations. Promoting him as a potential presidential candidate turned the JCPOA from a national treaty into an electoral pitch. Repeating this scenario with Abbas Araqchi would be alarming, misleading, provocative, and based on false premises—though without a doubt, Araqchi will never have the capacity to become a presidential candidate. His contradictory statements in Parliament and the media, as well as his alignment with Zarif, have left a less-than-clean image. Even Kamal Kharrazi’s invitation for him to join the Strategic Studies Center after Rouhani’s government raised many doubts.

Besides this, the JCPOA experience showed that the role of some intermediary countries had been exaggerated. For instance, Europe—especially the UK, which played a key role in shaping the JCPOA—had no real influence in securing Iran’s interests without the US. Including these countries in negotiations turned out to be useless, even harmful and deceptive. The “snapback” and trigger mechanism serve as the clearest evidence of this betrayal.

The JCPOA also showed that it could not function effectively if other political and social challenges were ignored. The spillover from these challenges soon tainted the JCPOA itself, making it subject to accusations of sedition. It became likened to the historical betrayals of the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties.

In any case, the JCPOA experience demonstrated that achieving a successful foreign diplomatic agreement requires comprehensive, genuine domestic consensus, without partisan interests.

Such a consensus must be deeply rooted in realism. This lesson must now be applied to the upcoming negotiations in Oman—where Iran no longer has the former optimism. It approaches the talks with the bitter lessons of the JCPOA in mind and faces a party who openly claimed responsibility for assassinating Martyr Soleimani. Donald Trump harbors goals that are partly Zionist and partly Pan-Americanist.

Trump’s urgency to reach a deal in the Oman negotiations stems first from confronting his rival Democratic Party, which lost Iran during Jimmy Carter’s presidency. Secondly, it is about containing the ideology and roots of the resistance movement in the region, and breaking the barriers to Zionist political, social, and geographic expansion in West Asia. Of course, Trump is also counting on support from the Trumpists inside Iran who are rooting for his success in the negotiations.

Walsalam

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Spain's Share in Trade with Iran Grows

TEHRAN - Iran's Chamber of Commerce International Affairs Department has announced that trade volume between Iran and Spain reached \$350 million in 2024, marking a 3% increase compared to the previous year. Iran's share of exports accounted for \$70 million. According to the report from the Chamber, the bilateral trade volume in 2024 rose from \$332 million in 2023 to \$350 million, reflecting a moderate but steady increase.

Spanish exports to Iran amounted to approximately \$280 million—up 2% from the previous year—while Iranian exports to Spain grew by 7%, reaching \$70 million.

Iran's primary exports to Spain included petrochemical products, saffron, and dried fruits. In contrast, Spain's main exports to Iran were machinery, medical equipment, and processed food products.

Iran Emphasizes Countering Iranophobia, Promoting a True Image of the Country



TEHRAN - Deputy Minister of Tourism has called for efforts to counter Iranophobia and present the true image of Iran internationally, following the country's recent election to the Executive Council of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism).

According to the public relations office of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey, in a virtual meeting with Harry Theoharis, the Greek candidate for the next Secretary-General of UN Tourism, discussed Iran's perspectives on global tourism policies and international relations.

Mohseni Bandpey noted the historical and cultural commonalities between Iran and Greece and described Theoharis' proposed plans for the organization as "notable and significant." He stressed the need for UN Tourism to focus on areas such as establishing a data and statistics center, enhancing marketing strategies, adopting successful global tourism models, and acknowledging the achievements of Islamic countries, particularly in halal food and pilgrimage tourism.

Highlighting that "the Islamic Republic of Iran is currently pursuing an active tourism diplomacy and international engagement," he said promoting Iran's diverse tourism capabilities is a key priority.

Welcoming the Greek candidate's vision of "thinking globally and acting regionally," Mohseni Bandpey emphasized the importance of strengthening regional management within UN Tourism. He added that the next Secretary-General must play a vital role in combatting Iranophobia and portraying an accurate image of Iran to create balance in global narratives about the country's tourism potential.

He also extended an invitation to Theoharis, should he be elected, to visit Iran to experience firsthand the nation's safety, tranquility, and rich tourism diversity, and to help convey this positive image to the world.

Iran Offers an Attractive Climate for Foreign Investment



TEHRAN - Iran's rich underground resources, educated workforce, and advanced investment laws make the country an appealing destination for foreign investors, according to Ghadir Ghiafeh, Vice President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce.

Ghiafeh emphasized that Iran boasts underground reserves valued at over \$27.5 trillion and a landmass equivalent to one-eleventh of Russia. "While Russia, the largest country in the world, has underground reserves worth \$75 trillion, Iran's reserves are estimated at one-third of that figure," he said. "These numbers highlight Iran's substantial economic potential."

He also pointed to Iran's 22 million university-educated citizens as a critical asset. "Although in recent years, we have lost a significant portion of this human capital to migration, our educated population remains a strong advantage," Ghiafeh noted.

Highlighting Iran's advanced legal framework for foreign investment, he stated that the country has one of the most well-designed investment laws globally. However, he stressed that capital only flows to destinations where investors feel secure, and the banking system plays a key role in providing that sense of security.

"Despite the political and economic tensions Iran has experienced in recent years, many foreign investors have continued their presence in the country," Ghiafeh said.

He also expressed concern that Iranian business professionals have become distanced from the current global standards in trade and banking, noting a need for updated knowledge and practices to operate effectively on the international stage.

To further enhance foreign investment prospects—especially amid possible international openings—Ghiafeh stressed the importance of restoring trust between Iran and global banking institutions. "Rebuilding that damaged trust is essential for enabling official financial channels for export revenues and import payments related to capital goods, raw materials, and intermediates," he said.

Economic Recovery Hinges on Lifting Sanctions Through Successful Negotiations

TEHRAN - In a joint meeting between the Board of Representatives of the Yazd Chamber of Commerce and the Iran-Japan Joint Chamber of Commerce, high-level discussions were held on key economic challenges including foreign exchange policy, the need for expanded international cooperation—particularly with Japan—and Iran's structural economic issues.

Mojtaba Dastmalchian, head of the Yazd Chamber of Commerce, criticized the practice of issuing foreign currency loans. "These loans are problematic because with the annual rise in exchange rates, repayment becomes impossible and national resources are lost," he stated. He also warned that when importing becomes more profitable than production, even textile producers shift toward import activities.

Dastmalchian further criticized the repetitive nature of chamber sessions and the dominance of the same speakers and representatives, saying, "Personal relationships have hindered the implementation of strategic decisions."

Hossein Selahvarzi, President of the Iran-Japan Joint Chamber of Commerce, emphasized the importance of boosting economic ties with Japan. He noted that Yazd could leverage Japanese technology and investment to trigger a significant economic transformation. "Yazd and Japan have numerous fields for cooperation, and Yazd can become a pioneering province in this regard," Selahvarzi said.

He proposed establishing sister-city relations between Yazd and a Japanese city, and supported the expansion of joint chamber activities to increase bilateral engagement.

Highlighting Yazd's strengths in handicrafts, carpets, and tourism, Selahvarzi called for efforts to attract Japanese tourists, asserting that despite sanctions, Yazd maintains standards capable of supporting tourism development.

He described tourism as one of the few sectors capable of revitalizing Iran's economy under current conditions, and stressed the need to support innovation centers. "Many knowledge-based and tech firms face serious financial constraints, and a technology export consortium could help resolve this," he added.

Selahvarzi attributed Iran's economic problems to international sanctions, flawed currency policies, and corruption in currency allocation. He stressed that "the resolution of these issues is contingent on lifting sanctions through successful negotiations."

He warned that inflation is driven largely by sanctions, and limited foreign currency earnings have led to erratic currency policies that disrupt imports of essential raw materials.



Selahvarzi also criticized Iran's decision-making systems: "Many of the problems stem from an inefficient decision-making structure that overlooks expert opinions."

Beigi, Vice President of the Yazd Chamber, highlighted persistent obstacles to production: "We're aware of the issues, but we remain active. For example, the textile industry has opposed the allocation of subsidized currency for fabric imports, which has led to a ban on such allocations."

Ghazanfari Amirjalili, head of the Yazd Chamber's APFN Commission, lamented the lack of market awareness among some

entrepreneurs, leading to misplaced innovation efforts. "We are working on identifying high-tech projects tailored to Yazd's climate and focusing on producing high value-added goods. Our youth and students have the potential to lead in this area."

Motavaselian, a chamber board member, stated that businesses are overwhelmed by external challenges and cannot predict even the next month. "Producers need at least six months of planning capability, but they're forced to navigate constant crises."

Mohammad Sadegh Hosseini, another speaker, compared Iran's economic decline to that of Turkey and Saudi Arabia. "In 2010, the GDPs of Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia were nearly equal. Today, Iran's economy is half the size of Turkey's and 60% that of Saudi Arabia's—due to sanctions compounded by poor policymaking."

He also referenced the concept of a "dominant coalition" in global politics—a group of powerful elites including wealthy individuals, military leaders, bureaucrats, and influential intellectuals—who together shape a nation's strategic direction through control over money, arms, and political power. "Such a coalition in Iran resists reform to protect its privileges," he said.

The meeting also addressed key operational concerns including power shortages, delays in foreign currency allocation for importing machinery, lack of transparency in policymaking, and protracted licensing processes for power plants.

At the end of the session, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Yazd Chamber of Commerce and the Iran-Japan Joint Chamber. The agreement, signed by Mojtaba Dastmalchian and Hossein Selahvarzi, aims to foster mutual cooperation in scientific research, education, cultural exchange, and advisory services, leveraging each side's capabilities to improve the business environment and enhance bilateral trade and innovation.

Iran-Eurasia Trade Expected to Reach \$10b Under New FTA

TEHRAN - The implementation of a free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is set to significantly boost bilateral trade, potentially reaching \$10 billion, according to officials. The agreement, which officially came into effect yesterday, removes tariffs on the majority of traded goods between Iran and the five EAEU member states — Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan.

Speaking on a national economic panel hosted by IRINN (Islamic Republic of Iran News Network), Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), emphasized the strategic importance of the deal. "Under the new agreement, 87% of goods exchanged between Iran and the Eurasian bloc will now enjoy zero tariffs. This is a significant move to enhance Iran's exports and reduce operational costs for businesses," he said.

Mohammad Lahouti, President of the Iranian Export Confederation, highlighted the agreement's impact on competitiveness. "With more than 4,700 tariff lines now covered, this is Iran's first real step toward integrating with global trade networks," he explained. "Producers will also benefit from lower costs for imported raw materials, while consumers could see more variety at better prices."

However, officials acknowledged the potential risks for domestic producers. "The agreement creates both opportunities and threats. While exporters gain access to new markets, some local industries might face increased competition," warned Dehnavi. He added that the agreement includes protective measures, such as temporary tariff increases and import quotas, to safeguard vulnerable sectors.

The deal also paves the way for increased joint investment and technological collaboration. "Expanding trade ties naturally leads to shared investments, improved productivity, and new



export opportunities," Dehnavi said.

Customs readiness was another key focus of the discussion. Mohammadali Behpoori, Director General of Iran's Customs Imports Office, stated that customs authorities have already established national and interagency working groups to coordinate implementation. "We've begun electronic exchange of information with EAEU member countries and initiated the use of electronic Certificates of Origin (CDT forms) to facilitate zero-tariff clearances," he noted.

Compared to the previous preferential trade agreement, which covered only about 400 items, the scope of the new deal has expanded significantly — now encompassing over 7,000 products based on eight-digit tariff codes.

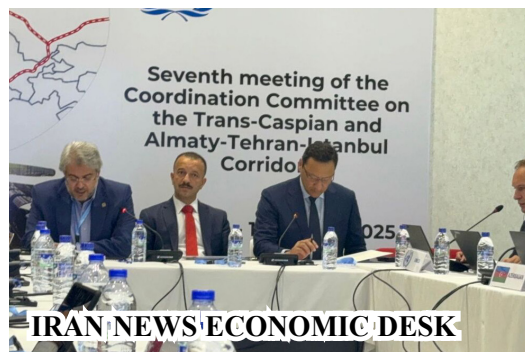
Lahouti emphasized that the main challenges lie in imports rather than exports. "If Iranian manufacturers cannot compete on quality and price, they may struggle. However, this also presents a chance to improve standards and enter partnerships with foreign investors," he said.

Challenges remain in fully digitalizing the trade process. While most EAEU countries are prepared for electronic data exchange, Kazakhstan has requested six more months to complete the transition.

In conclusion, Dehnavi expressed optimism about the trade outlook. "We expect bilateral trade with EAEU nations to reach at least \$10 billion. This agreement marks a turning point in Iran's integration with the global economy."

The success of the agreement hinges on effective coordination among government bodies, private sector readiness, and the timely execution of customs procedures. Economic stakeholders are urged to adapt quickly and capitalize on the new export and investment opportunities.

Trans-Caspian and Almaty–Tehran–Istanbul Corridor Meeting Held in Tashkent



TEHRAN - The 7th Coordination Committee Meeting of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty–Tehran–Istanbul transport corridors was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

According to ECO's public relations office, the meeting brought together representatives from eight ECO member states to discuss progress and coordination on regional transport initiatives. The event aimed to strengthen transport connectivity across the ECO region through key corridors.

Alireza Mahmoudi, Director of the Transport and Communications Department at ECO, represented the ECO Secretariat at the meeting.

The discussions focused on operationalizing regional transport corridors, modernizing infrastructure, increasing data flows during multimodal transport operations, and harmonizing transport documents to support cross-border trade and integrated logistics within the ECO region.

The meeting further examined critical aspects of operational and digital management of the corridors, including data flow simulations across segments of the Trans-Caspian routes. Delegates addressed practical bottlenecks and explored opportunities for improved coordination and real-time information sharing.

Different types of transport documents currently used along the corridors were also reviewed with the aim of identifying clear opportunities for harmonization, simplification, and digitalization — measures intended to boost efficiency and reduce the administrative burden on transport companies and border agencies.

Iran Holds 21% Share in Afghanistan's Trade



TEHRAN - The Deputy for the Indian Subcontinent at Iran's Trade Promotion Organization emphasized the need to develop, facilitate, and promote trade between Iran and Afghanistan, stating that Iran currently holds a 21% share in Afghanistan's import market, valued at \$10.6 billion.

According to a report from the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, Hamidreza Karbalaei made the remarks during the first session of the specialized committee under the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Commission. He noted that the committee is currently reviewing the provisions of the sixth joint commission agreement and is focusing on drafting the seventh commission, which is expected to be signed by both nations in June 2025.

Karbalaei said the commission aims to strengthen trade relations by targeting areas such as commercial infrastructure, industry, mining, standards, agriculture, and more. He also announced plans for agreements in technical and engineering services, as well as knowledge and technology transfer to Afghanistan.

He added that specialized committees across various sectors will be formed under the commission, allowing experts from both countries to refine and finalize proposed provisions for mutual benefit.

The official further stated that the specialized committees — focused on trade, industry, mining, oil, standards, and free trade zones — will work under the leadership of the Indian Subcontinent Office of the Trade Promotion Organization. Their goal is to identify and resolve obstacles, proposing practical solutions to promote a "win-win" trade model in the upcoming seventh commission.

Calling Afghanistan a strategic and significant trade partner for Iran, Karbalaei pointed out that Afghanistan ranks among Iran's top five trading partners. Iran's exports to the country currently stand at approximately \$2.2 billion. He stressed that trade between the two nations must be mutually beneficial and that one of the committee's goals is to bring the trade balance between the two countries closer together.

NATO Members Will Agree to 5% Defense Spending

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Thursday that all NATO members will have agreed on a goal of spending the equivalent to 5% of GDP on defense over the next decade by the 2025 NATO Summit in June.

He made the comments while appearing on Fox News' "Hannity."

U.S. President Donald Trump cut defence funding to NATO during the latter part of his first term in 2017-21, and has frequently complained that the U.S. is paying more than its fair share.

"I can tell you that we are headed for a summit in six weeks, in which virtually every member of NATO will be at or above 2% but more importantly, many of them will be over 4% and all will have agreed on the goal of reaching 5% over the next decade," said Rubio.



India Weighs Plan to Slash Pakistan Water Supply With New Indus River Project



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India is considering plans to dramatically increase the water it draws from a major river that feeds Pakistani farms downstream, as part of retaliatory action for a deadly April attack on tourists that New Delhi blames on Islamabad, according to four people familiar with the matter.

Delhi suspended its participation in the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, which governs usage of the Indus river system, shortly after 26 civilians in Indian Kashmir were killed in what India called an act of terror. Pakistan has denied involvement in the incident, but the accord has not been revived despite the two nuclear-armed neighbours agreeing a ceasefire last week following the worst fighting between them in decades.

After the April 22 attack, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered officials to expedite planning and execution of projects on the Chenab, Jhelum and Indus rivers, three bodies of water in the Indus system that are designated primarily for Pakistan's use, six people told Reuters.

One of the key plans under discussion involves doubling to 120km the length of the Ranbir canal on the Chenab, which runs through India to Pakistan's agricultural powerhouse of Punjab, two of the people said. The canal was built in the 19th century, long before the treaty was signed.

India is permitted to draw a limited amount of water from the Chenab for irrigation, but an expanded canal - which experts said could take years to construct - would allow it to divert 150 cubic meters of water per second, up from about 40 cubic meters currently, the four people said, citing official discussions and documents they had seen.

Details of the Indian government's deliberations on expanding Ranbir have not previously been reported. The discussions started last month and continue even after the ceasefire, one of the people said.

Trump Announces \$200b in Deals During UAE visit, AI Agreement Signed

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump on Thursday pledged to strengthen U.S. ties to the United Arab Emirates and announced deals with the Persian Gulf state totalling over \$200 billion and the two countries also agreed to deepen cooperation in artificial intelligence.

After Trump's meeting with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the White House said he announced deals that included a \$14.5 billion commitment from Etihad Airways to invest in 28 Boeing 787 and 777x aircraft powered by engines made by GE Aerospace.

The U.S. Commerce Department said the two countries also agreed to establish a "US-UAE AI Acceleration Partnership" framework and Trump and Sheikh Mohamed attended the unveiling of a new 5GW AI campus, which would be the largest outside the United States.

Sources have said the agreements will give the Persian Gulf country expanded access to advanced artificial intelligence chips from the U.S. after previously facing restrictions over Washington's concerns that China could access the technology.

Trump began a visit to the UAE on the latest stage of a tour of wealthy Persian Gulf states after hailing plans by Doha to invest \$10 billion in a U.S. military facility during a trip to Qatar.

"I have absolutely no doubt that the relationship will only get bigger and better," Trump said in a meeting with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

"Your wonderful brother came to Washington a few weeks ago and he told us about your generous statement as to the 1.4 trillion," Trump said, referring to a UAE pledge to invest \$1.4 trillion in the U.S. over 10 years.

Trump was referring to Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Sheikh Mohamed's brother and the UAE's national security adviser and chairman of two of Abu Dhabi's deep-pocketed sovereign wealth funds.

The U.S. president was met at the airport in Abu Dhabi by Sheikh Mohamed, and they visited the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, its white minarets and domes, impressive in the late-afternoon light.

"It is so beautiful," Trump told reporters inside the mosque, which he said had been closed for the day.

"First time they closed it. It's in honor of the United States. Better than in honor of me. Let's give it to the country.



That's a great tribute."

A White House fact sheet said Trump had secured \$200 billion in new U.S.-UAE deals and accelerated the previously committed \$1.4 trillion.

It said Emirates Global Aluminum would invest to develop a \$4 billion primary aluminum smelter project in Oklahoma, while ExxonMobil Corp, Occidental Petroleum and EOG Resources were partnering with the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company in expanded oil and natural gas production valued at \$60 billion.

Sheikh Mohamed told Trump the UAE was "keen to continue and strengthen this friendship for the benefit of the two countries and peoples," adding to Trump: "your presence here today, your excellency, the president, confirms that this keenness is mutual."

Before his departure for the UAE, Trump said in a speech to U.S. troops at the Al Udeid Air Base southwest of Doha that defense purchases signed by Qatar on Wednesday were worth \$42 billion.

UAE has been seeking U.S. help to make the wealthy Persian Gulf nation a global leader in artificial intelligence.

The U.S. has a preliminary agreement with the UAE to allow it to import 500,000 of Nvidia's most advanced AI chips a year, starting this

year, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

The deal would boost the UAE's construction of data centres vital to developing AI models, although the agreement has provoked national security concerns among sectors of the U.S. government.

The AI agreement "includes the UAE committing to invest in, build, or finance U.S. data centers that are at least as large and as powerful as those in the UAE," the White House said.

"The agreement also contains historic commitments by the UAE to further align their national security regulations with the United States, including strong protections to prevent the diversion of U.S.-origin technology."

Former U.S. President Joe Biden's administration had imposed strict oversight of exports of U.S. AI chips to the Middle East and other regions. Among Biden's fears were that the prized semiconductors would be diverted to China and buttress its military strength.

At the UAE presidential palace, Trump and Sheikh Mohamed could be seen in TV footage in conversation with Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang.

China-U.S. 90-Day Tariff Truce Should Be Extended



BEIJING (Dispatches) - The 90-day tariff truce agreed by the United States and China during trade talks in Switzerland last weekend is too short, China's state-backed Global Times said on Friday, as envoys from the world's two biggest economies regrouped in Korea.

During the Geneva summit, the U.S. agreed to cut the extra tariffs it imposed on Chinese imports last month to 30% from 145% for the next three months, while China committed to cutting duties on U.S. imports to 10% from 125%.

"The window for mutually beneficial cooperation should extend far beyond a mere 90-day period," said the Global Times, which is owned by the newspaper of the ruling Communist Party, People's Daily, and has often been first to report China's next steps in trade disagreements over the last few years.

"Hopefully, the U.S. side will build on the outcomes of the recent talks and continue to meet China halfway."

Beijing also agreed to pause or remove the non-tariff countermeasures it has imposed against the U.S. since April 2, although China so far has only paused its decision to add around 50 U.S. firms to various lists restricting their ability to trade and invest.

APEC Says Concerned Over Challenges to Global Trade

JEJU (Dispatches) - The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group said Friday that it was "concerned" over the challenges to global trade, as ministers from APEC countries met in South Korea in the shadow of growing woes from US tariffs.

Trade ministers from the top economies that make up APEC are meeting on South Korea's Jeju Island amid concerns for the global trading system since US President Donald Trump unveiled bombshell levies on most partners.

The United States is a key APEC member and was represented by Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, who held a series of bilateral meetings with nations eager to soften the blow of Washington's tariffs.

"We are concerned with the fundamental challenges faced by the global trading system," trade ministers from the 21-member group said in a joint statement.

They urged greater cooperation, saying they "remain committed" to APEC as a means of "bringing us together to address the economic challenges facing our region".

South Korea's Minister for Trade, Cheong In-Kyo, said the joint statement was hard-won, with "significant differences" in positions clear early on in the talks.

But at the last minute, the countries "dramatically" reached an agreement, he said, with the APEC emphasizing the importance of global trading mechanisms such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as well as sustainable supply chains.

This "sends a highly positive signal to global markets", he said, adding that "APEC members can work together to navigate the current highly uncertain global trade environment effectively".



Cheong said there had been no discussion of "joint responses" to US tariffs, saying it was not possible as "each country faces significantly different circumstances".

South Korea recorded a \$66 billion trade surplus with the United States last year -- behind only Vietnam, Taiwan, and Japan -- making it a key target of Trump's trade tirade.

Highly dependent on exports, the country has been hit hard by the 25 percent tariffs on automobiles imposed by Trump in early April.

The auto industry accounts for 27 percent of South Korea's exports to the United States, which takes in nearly half of the country's car exports.

Trump announced additional "reciprocal" tariffs of up to 25 percent on South Korean exports last month, but later suspended them until early July.

Seoul aims to leverage the talks with commitments to purchase more US liquefied natural gas (LNG) and offer support in shipbuilding, a sector in which South Korea is a leader, after China.

Earlier Friday, Greer met Chung Ki-sun, the vice chairman of HD Hyundai, which owns South Korea's country's largest shipbuilding company.

HD Hyundai said in a statement that discussions covered cooperation with US shipmaker Huntington Ingalls Industries.

Greer is also set to meet the CEO of South Korean shipbuilder Hanwha Ocean, which provides maintenance, repair and overhaul services for US Navy vessels.

Shares of Hanwha Ocean rose nearly three percent on Friday morning, while HD Hyundai Heavy Industries gained as much as 3.6 percent.

Russia Says Forces Capture Two Settlements

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's Defense Ministry said on Thursday that its forces seized two more settlements in their drive through eastern Ukraine, but Kyiv made no such acknowledgement and its top commander said battles raged over 1,100 km of the front line.

The frontline fighting continued as direct talks between Ukrainian and Russian negotiators appeared set to get underway in Turkey.

The talks will be the first direct discussions between the sides since March 2022, but hopes of a breakthrough were limited as Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin ignored a call by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to meet.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday said there would be no progress towards peace without a meeting between himself and Putin.

A Russian Defence Ministry statement said Moscow's forces had seized Novooleksandrivka, a village near Pokrovsk, a logistics hub that Moscow has targeted for months without capturing it.

The ministry said its forces had also taken Torske, further northeast and near two other cities Moscow would like to capture in the longer term -- Sloviansk and Kramatorsk.



The General Staff of Ukraine's military, in a late evening report, listed Novooleksandrivka as one of more than dozen settlements which it said had come under Russian attack.

The General Staff made no mention of Torske, but the popular blog DeepState said Russian forces had tried to seize the settlement but had been repelled.

Reuters could not independently confirm battlefield reports from either side. Russia, which launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, currently holds about one-fifth of Ukrainian territory.

Ukraine's top military commander, Oleksandr Syrskyy, said Kyiv wanted a "just peace", but continued to face "active combat continuing on a stretch of the front extending about 1,100 km (680 miles)".

Describing on Telegram his presentation to a meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Council, Syrskyy said Russia "has turned its aggression against Ukraine into a war of attrition and is using a combined force of up to 640,000 troops."

After an initial unsuccessful drive on Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, in the first weeks of the invasion, Russian forces focused their efforts on the Donbas in the east, made up of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.



Ailing Jamal Murray, Nuggets Down Thunder, Force Game 7

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jamal Murray shook off an illness to produce 25 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, helping the host Denver Nuggets beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 119-107 night and force a decisive seventh game in their Western Conference semifinal series.

Nikola Jokic finished with 29 points and 14 rebounds as Denver earned a trip back to Oklahoma City for Game 7 on Sunday. Christian Braun added 23 points and 11 rebounds, and Julian Strawther came off the bench to score 15 points, his postseason career high.

The Nuggets responded after squandering late leads in Games 5 and 6.

“To win that (fourth) quarter, after what’s happened the last two games, says a lot of our guys, and the fact that they can bounce back from anything, I keep saying that,” Denver interim coach David Adelman said. “We just keep finding our way.”

Michael Porter Jr. added 10 points for the Nuggets, who beat the Los Angeles Clippers in Game 7 to advance out of the first round. Denver lost to the Minnesota Timberwolves in Game 7 of last year’s Western Conference semifinals.

Strawther, who had a total of 17 points in this year’s playoffs before Thursday, scored all of his points in the second half to give Denver a lift off the bench with Murray compromised. Murray was listed as questionable before the game but played a game-high 42 minutes.

Strawther said, “Those are moments you dreamed about when you were little. Coming into the game, having all the guys believing you find your spots and be able to just make an impact.”

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder with 32 points, Chet Holmgren wound up with 19 points and 11 rebounds, and Luguentz Dort, Alex Caruso and Cason Wallace scored 10 points apiece. Jalen

Williams added 10 assists for Oklahoma City.

“We had the same opportunity in the second half that Denver did, and they outplayed us,” Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said.

Murray hit a 3-pointer to open the fourth, giving Denver a 93-82 lead, and blocks by Russell Westbrook and Peyton Watson helped keep the Nuggets comfortably in front.

The Thunder cut the deficit to seven, but Westbrook scored on an offensive rebound and Strawther hit two free throws to make it an 11-point game with just under eight minutes to go. Jokic came back in after a four-minute rest and hit a 3-pointer and a floater to extend the lead to 102-88 with 6:09 left.

Strawther’s corner 3-pointer made it 109-93 with 3:56 to play before Oklahoma City went on a 9-2 run to make it 111-102 with 1:53 remaining.

Williams said of the Thunder’s attitude moving forward, “We’ve been big on just saying it’s first to four. This game, kind of just have to be willing to wipe the slate clean.”

Westbrook hit a driving layup and the Nuggets made six free throws down the stretch to seal it.

Denver scored 12 consecutive points late in the second quarter to get within 61-58 at halftime. The Nuggets went on a 10-2 run in the final 1:37 of the third to lead 90-82 heading into the fourth.

Nuggets forward Aaron Gordon scored just five points, and he was seen grabbing at his left hamstring. After the game, Adelman said, “It’s nice to have two days to get guys right going into a Sunday matinee. Concern for Aaron is so high. He’s played through a lot through this whole season, so we’ll see where he’s at.”

Paolini Reaches Rome Final, Sinner Thrashes Ruud

ROME (Dispatches) - Jasmine Paolini became the first Italian woman in more than a decade to reach the final of her home Italian Open when she beat American Peyton Stearns 7-5 6-1.

Paolini is the first Italian to advance to the final in Rome since her doubles partner Sara Errani lost to Serena Williams in 2014.

She will face Coco Gauff, who battled past Zheng Qinwen 7-6(3) 4-6 7-6(4) in a marathon semi-final lasting over three and a half hours.

Paolini had found herself a set and 4-0 down to Diana Shnaider in her quarter-final tie before storming to victory and once again the world number five had a slow start in the opening set before mounting a comeback.

“I am very happy, I don’t know what to say! It’s a dream to be here, it’s a dream to play in Italy, it’s a dream to be able to play the final,” the 29-year-old said.

Any hopes of a quick start for Paolini were put to rest when Stearns jumped into a 3-0 lead amid muted applause from the home crowd and the Italian soon found herself 4-1 down.

The American looked comfortable and poised to take the opening set before Paolini clawed her way back as she saved set points to level it at 5-5, pumping her fist with a triumphant scream that got the crowd roaring again.

The comeback was complete when Paolini, having won four games in a row, took the opening set after more than an hour of play.



The momentum was firmly with Paolini as she broke Stearns for a fifth time to go 4-1 up in the second set and the deflated American had no answer as the Italian’s winners whizzed past her.

Stearns fired a forehand wide on match point as the crowd erupted and Paolini raised her arms in celebration.

“You (the crowd) gave me a boost because today it was a bit of an uphill start and I struggled at the beginning, thank goodness you were there,” she added.

“We won this match together. Point after point I managed to fight, to turn it around, even if at the beginning I did not have a good feeling. But I am happy with the way I managed to turn this match around.”

Gauff also reached her first final in Rome with a gritty win in a match marked by wild momentum swings.

She let a 5-3 lead slip in the opener but capitalised on Zheng’s double faults to edge a scrappy first set, which featured 35 unforced errors from both players.

Zheng hit back with an early break in the second to force a decider, but after failing to serve out the match, the Olympic champion faded in the final tiebreak.

The American held her nerve to book a second straight WTA 1000 final, following her runner-up finish in Madrid.

It was a good day for Italy as men’s world number one Jannik Sinner put in a ruthless display in the evening session to dismantle newly-crowned Madrid Open champion Casper Ruud 6-0 6-1 in the quarter-final.

Sinner dropped only seven points in the opening set while he won eight games in a row before Ruud managed to get on the board.

The Norwegian even raised his arms in mock celebration when he finally won a game amid cheers from the home fans but Sinner was in no mood to hang around as he wrapped up the match in 63 minutes to reach his first semi-final in Rome.

“I was feeling great on court today. I think we all saw that. My goal was trying to understand where my level is here in this tournament. It raised day by day, so I’m very happy about that,” Sinner said.

Ronaldo Tops Forbes’ List of Highest-Paid Athletes for Third Year in a Row

LONDON (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo topped Forbes’ list of the world’s highest-paid athletes for the third consecutive year and the fifth time in his career.

Following his move to Saudi Arabian club Al-Nassr, Ronaldo’s estimated total earnings are around \$275 million.

The Portuguese forward increased his income by \$15 million through off-field endorsements as well as lucrative sponsorship deals backed by his large social media followers: 939 million in total as of May.

Meanwhile, Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry, who in March became the first NBA player to reach 4,000 career three-pointers, jumped to second place in the rankings with \$156 million.



Boxer Tyson Fury claimed third place with \$146 million. Despite losing his world heavyweight titles to Oleksandr Usyk in December, Fury’s income has been boosted by partnerships promoting Maltese tourism and his Netflix reality show.

Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott, reached fourth with \$137 million, thanks to record-breaking signing bonuses and a lucrative contract extension.

Meanwhile, Argentine Lionel Messi dropped to fifth place with \$135 million — the same as last year — having moved to Major League Soccer side Inter Miami, as well as continuing to receive high-profile endorsements from Adidas and Apple.

Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, nearing the end of his illustrious career, came sixth with \$133.8 million.

Infantino Says Every Idea Is a Good Idea



ASUNCION (Dispatches) - FIFA President Gianni Infantino appeared on Thursday to give some support to South American confederation CONMEBOL’s idea of having 64 teams in the 2030 World Cup, saying that “every idea is a good idea” and should be reviewed.

In his inaugural address at the 75th FIFA Congress in Paraguay, CONMEBOL President Alejandro Dominguez said all member associations should think creatively to ensure no one is left out of the tournament, which will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first World Cup, hosted and won by Uruguay.

“The 100-year celebration will be something special. And I want to underline the words of Alejandro (Dominguez) in this speech. He told all of us to think on how we can really celebrate it in the way it deserves to be celebrated. So every idea is a good idea,” Infantino said in his closing remarks.

The 2026 World Cup, which will be played next year in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, has been expanded to 48 teams. CONMEBOL wants the next World Cup, which will be played in Spain, Portugal, and Morocco and also include matches in Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay, to have 64 teams.

After the Congress, CONCACAF President Victor Montagliani reiterated his disagreement.

“I’ve already made a comment on that, no it’s not a great idea, and you know, I think that we haven’t even kicked the ball for 48 (in 2026), and I think, obviously they can study all they want, but it just doesn’t feel right,” Montagliani told reporters.

Meanwhile European soccer’s governing body UEFA hit out at FIFA president Infantino after his late arrival at the world body’s Congress in Asuncion led to a delayed start on Thursday.

The FIFA Congress opened more than two hours later than planned after Infantino’s flight landed late in Paraguay, following his Middle East trip accompanying U.S. president Donald Trump on state visits.

Barcelona Claim 28th LaLiga Title After 2-0 Win at Espanyol



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona secured their 28th LaLiga title on Thursday when they beat city rivals Espanyol 2-0, securing an unassailable seven-point lead over second-placed Real Madrid with two games left to play.

Following a 4-3 loss at Barcelona on Sunday, Real needed to win their final three games and hope the leaders didn’t earn more than one point in the same period to maintain any mathematical chances of claiming the title.

However, their slim title hopes were dashed when Lamine Yamal curled a superb shot into the back of the net in the 53rd minute, with Fermin Lopez securing the victory by striking a ball from inside the box, assisted by Yamal, five minutes deep in stoppage time.

The result moved Hansi Flick’s Barca to 85 points, seven ahead of last season’s champions Real, with Atletico Madrid third on 70 points. It caps a remarkable first season at Barca for coach Hansi Flick as his side have won the LaLiga and Copa del Rey double.

The Catalan side said they will be presented with the league trophy on Friday during a special celebration in the city.

Barca were seconds away from celebrating the title without stepping on the pitch on Wednesday until Real scored a late winner against Mallorca to keep their slim hopes alive.

But Barca took care of business themselves with a hard-fought win at Espanyol, with the match being delayed for a few minutes after several fans were injured after being hit by a car outside the stadium.

The hosts were arguably the better side in a first half that was goalless thanks to Barca goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny who made a brilliant reflex save to deny a Javi Puado effort from close range in one of several dangerous Espanyol counter-attacks.