

Iran Has Strongly Condemned Israel's Recent Attacks on the Gaza Strip and Called for an End to the "Ethnic Cleansing" and the Impunity of the Israeli Regime's Rulers

# IRAN NEWS

Three Individuals Have Been Sentenced to Death for Aiding the Deadly Terrorist Attacks on the Shahcheragh Shrine in Shiraz, According to the Chief Justice of Fars Province

VOL. XXIX, No. 8269 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

MONDAY MAY 19, 2025 ORDIBEHESHT 29, 1404

2 DOMESTIC



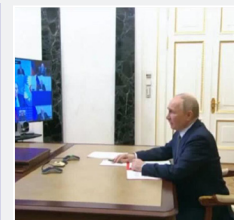
## Major National Space Projects to Be Completed This Year

> SEE PAGE 2

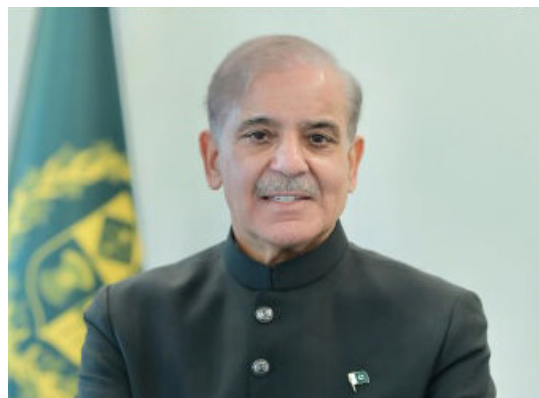
3 INTERNATIONAL

## Kremlin Fixes Conditions for New Ukraine Talks, Trump to Speak With Putin

> SEE PAGE 3



## Pakistan PM Appreciates Iran Efforts to De-Escalate Tensions With India



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has hailed Iran's efforts in helping reduce tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi following a terrorist attack in Indian-administered Kashmir last month, emphasizing the need for resolving differences through dialogue and political solutions.

Sharif made the remarks in a phone conversation with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday, as he appreciated the "benevolent, compassionate, and fraternal efforts" of Iran in resolving misunderstandings and paving the way for a ceasefire between Pakistan and India.

He also praised the recent visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister to Islamabad and the Islamic Republic's initiative in proposing a ceasefire, assessing the action as an "effective and constructive" step towards reducing tensions.

Sharif further noted that over the past decades, three wars have taken place between Pakistan and India, but none of these conflicts have been able to resolve the main issues between the two nuclear-armed nations.

The Pakistani premier said that his country believes that crises such as the Kashmir conflict, the phenomenon of terrorism, and other disputes between Pakistan and India can only be resolved through dialogue and political solutions.

## Iran More Industrialized Than Saudi Arabia



TEHRAN - In response to recent remarks by former U.S. President Donald Trump suggesting Saudi Arabia's technological superiority over Iran, a former Iranian trade official argues that while the statement contains partial truth, it overlooks key aspects of Iran's industrial and scientific strength.

Farshid Farzanegan, former head of the Iran-UAE Joint Chamber of Commerce, told ILNA that Iran surpasses Saudi Arabia in several critical areas. "Scientifically, Iran is clearly ahead. We are among the top 20 countries globally in academic research output and have made genuine, homegrown progress in advanced technologies like nanotech, biotechnology, and even space," he said. Farzanegan also emphasized Iran's advantage in skilled local human resources across the region.

However, he acknowledged that Saudi Arabia has made significant strides in recent years, fueled by large-scale foreign investment and efforts to reduce its dependency on oil. "Saudi Arabia has outpaced Iran in attracting foreign technologies, developing free trade zones, digitalizing government services, expanding infrastructure, and diversifying its industrial base," Farzanegan explained.

"In simple terms, Iran remains more industrialized than Saudi Arabia, but Saudi Arabia is more modern and stable in its management," said Farzanegan. He noted that Trump's view of Saudi Arabia as a "good buyer" stems from Riyadh's heavy purchases of American military and infrastructure goods.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized on Sunday that all Muslims are duty-bound to resist oppression and injustice, calling for steadfast efforts to uphold justice and defend the oppressed.

Speaking at the International Conference on "Resistance Diplomacy and Commemoration of Martyrs of Service," Pezeshkian paid tribute to those who lost their lives in service to justice and the people. He described the late President Ebrahim Raisi as a tireless manager who was deeply committed to public service and social equity.

"Martyr Raisi was a tireless leader," Pezeshkian said. "The Supreme Leader, government officials, and administrators of our country live among the people and strive to uphold justice and defend the oppressed."

Quoting the will of Imam Ali (AS), Pezeshkian underscored the importance of piety and righteous deeds, stating that these values apply broadly across political, educational, economic, and administrative spheres. "Imam Ali advised not to chase worldly desires even if they pursue you, and to never regret the loss of material possessions, as it is the pursuit of worldly gain that distances people from truth," he added.

Pezeshkian criticized materialism and highlighted the danger it poses to truth and justice. "When we are not obsessed with worldly gains, we can truly stand with the oppressed and oppose the oppressors," he said.

He rejected claims that Islamic Republic officials are materialistic, citing personal experiences visiting the modest homes of late President Raisi's mother in Mashhad and the late Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. "When I visited Raisi's family home, it was even more humble than an average household," he said. "The Omani Foreign Minister could not believe Amir-Abdollahian lived in such a simple house. These homes are beyond the imagination of those used to power and wealth."

Pezeshkian emphasized that the country's top officials, including the Supreme Leader, live modest lives. "If the claims made by American officials were true, we wouldn't see such humility. What they accuse us of is a reflection of their own actions," he noted. "In Iran, the honesty and simplicity of our leaders are evident."

He said the simplicity of Iranian officials surprises foreign visitors and carries more influence than any propaganda. "When they see the lives of our president, ministers, governors, and clerics, they are astonished," he said. "This has a deeper impact than words."

The president reaffirmed the Islamic Republic's stance in support of Palestine and Gaza. "Our position is clear against those who wear fine clothes and preach human rights while committing the most brutal acts," he declared. "There is no barbarity worse than the indiscriminate killing of innocent women and children."

He stressed that Muslims have a religious and moral obligation to confront injustice anywhere in the world. "If we remain silent in the face of oppression, we must question not only our faith but our humanity," he said.

Pezeshkian said that achieving justice and serving the people remain the primary goals of Iran's leadership. "When justice prevails, there is no reason for conflict or aggression," he said. "Injustice arises from greed and the desire to seize what belongs to others."

He highlighted the need to govern based on justice for all people—not just one group, ethnicity, or party. "If we follow our base desires—my wealth, my position, my tribe—we stray from the path of righteousness," he said. "We must pursue truth, not personal gain."

The president once again honored the legacy of the late Raisi, describing him as a selfless public servant. "He worked with love and dedication to serve the people and implement his beliefs," Pezeshkian said. "The memory of Raisi and all nameless martyrs who gave their lives for justice must live on in our society."

In closing, Pezeshkian prayed that the Iranian people and leaders remain true to the path of justice and not be led astray by selfish desires. "We must always remember that we will be held accountable for our actions," he warned.

Quoting Imam Khomeini, he concluded, "Conflicts arise from ego and selfishness. True service to the people leaves no room for dispute. The path to serve others is open across Iran, the Middle East, and the world—if only one rolls up their sleeves and takes action."

During the conference, President Pezeshkian also honored the families of the victims of the tragic May plane crash that claimed the lives of President Raisi and several top officials.

## Implementation of Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Deal Will Lead to Lasting Stability, Security



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says the speedy implementation of the peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan will help establish lasting stability and security in the region.

"Iran calls for the acceleration of the conclusion of a peace agreement between the two countries to stabilize lasting stability and security and assist in the process of comprehensive development and progress in the region," Araqchi said in a meeting with Secretary of Armenia's Security Council Armen Grigoryan in Tehran.

The Islamic Republic would spare no effort to expedite the signing and implementation of the document between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as it enjoys good relations with both sides, he added.

Armenia and Azerbaijan in March agreed on the text of a peace agreement to end nearly four decades of conflict between the South Caucasus countries, with Yerevan agreeing to surrender its claim to Karabakh.

The long-disputed region of Karabakh was at the center of two costly wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020 and the 1990s. The region has always been internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, whose troops retook it in a 24-hour offensive.

Araqchi pointed to very good relations between Iran and Armenia and said Tehran is keen to improve cordial ties based on mutual respect.

He also reiterated Iran's principled stance on safeguarding the Iranian people's right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and briefed the Armenian official on the latest developments regarding indirect talks with the United States.

Grigoryan, for his part, pointed to very good and positive ties between Armenia and Iran and expressed his country's firm determination to promote all-out relations with Tehran, particularly in the economic and trade sectors.

He elaborated on the latest developments regarding the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty and commended Iran's stance on support for Armenia's national security and territorial integrity and the peace agreement.

## Iran's Oil Exports at \$67b in Year to March



TEHRAN - Iran's oil exports reached a 10-year record in the calendar year to late March, according to figures by the country's central bank, despite U.S. sanctions that impose heavy penalties on foreign buyers of Iranian oil shipments.

Central Bank of Iran (CBI) figures cited in a Saturday report by the Tasnim news agency showed that Iran had exported some \$67 billion worth of crude oil in the calendar year to March 20.

Iran's oil exports showed an increase of 19.64% from the year to March 2024 and were nearly triple the figures reported in 2021, when shipments fell significantly because of sanctions imposed by US President Donald Trump during his first term in office.

CBI figures showed that Iran had exported \$55 billion worth of oil in the year to March 2023 and some \$38 billion in the calendar year before that.

The figures are another sign that Trump's so-called maximum pressure campaign, which he restored a month after returning to the White House in February, has failed to meet its objective of driving Iran's oil exports to zero.

Trump said earlier this week during a Middle East tour that he would double down on pressure on Iranian oil exports if the country does not reach a nuclear agreement with the US.

Iranian and U.S. representatives have held four rounds of indirect talks since early April in search of a deal that can lift sanctions on Tehran in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

However, Iranian authorities have dismissed Trump's threats about more oil sanctions, saying the country will be able to continue to export oil regardless of the outcome of the ongoing nuclear talks.

## FM Calls for Regional Autonomy in Shaping Middle East Future

TEHRAN - At the opening of the Tehran Dialogue Forum, Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi emphasized that the future of the Middle East must not be determined in think tanks of external powers, but by the nations of the region themselves. Addressing over 200 delegations from 53 countries, including high-ranking officials, UN representatives, and Gulf ministers, Araqchi highlighted the failures of the international system in addressing the Gaza crisis and called for a fundamental shift in regional diplomacy.

Araqchi began his remarks by paying tribute to the late President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, both of whom were killed in a helicopter crash last year. He praised President Masoud Pezeshkian for revitalizing Iran's foreign policy with a development-oriented approach.

The Foreign Minister described the war in Gaza as a humanitarian catastrophe and a turning point that exposed the moral, legal, and political failures of international institutions. "Over 60,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 2023, many of them women and children. Millions are displaced, facing famine under complete siege," he stated. "The silence of those who claim to uphold the conscience of humanity is alarming."

He argued that the ethical and legal foundations meant to support global order have collapsed, and this situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Araqchi reiterated that the destiny of West Asia should not be in the hands of foreign forces, stressing that the "so-called regional realities" shaped by outside interests must be redefined from within. He called for a fundamental rethinking of regional self-perception to break free from the illusions of perpetual threats and foster meaningful cooperation.

He outlined three central pillars of Iran's 14th government foreign policy: Maximum engagement with neighbors; Expanded ties with emerging powers and the Global South; and balanced relations with global powers in the East and West.

This policy, he said, is rooted in realism and balance.

Araqchi emphasized Iran's commitment to regional cooperation, noting that relations with neighbors from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia are on a positive trajectory. He also underlined Iran's active participation in global multilateral organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai



Cooperation Organization as part of its vision for a multipolar international order.

He stressed the importance of shifting from threat-based to opportunity-based approaches. "Regional prosperity and security are interlinked," he said, urging economic interdependence, joint investments, and technological cooperation to lay the foundation for peace and regional development.

Calling the Palestinian issue the "most urgent matter" in the region, Araqchi labeled Israel a chronic threat to peace, citing its ongoing occupation, apartheid, and access to weapons of mass destruction.

He proposed a peaceful resolution through a national referendum involving all original inhabitants of Palestine—Muslims, Christians, and Jews—to determine the future political structure. He compared the model to the successful anti-apartheid transition in South Africa.

Addressing nuclear negotiations, Araqchi reiterated Iran's religious and moral opposition to nuclear weapons. He affirmed Iran's commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to resolving international concerns about its nuclear program through dialogue and transparency.

"We seek a fair and balanced agreement," he said, calling for the genuine lifting of unilateral sanctions imposed by the U.S., which he said directly target the Iranian people. "Iran remains committed to diplomacy," he added.

Araqchi signaled Iran's willingness to rebuild relations with Europe if there is evidence of an independent and constructive approach. He lamented that past focus on disagreements prevented fruitful collaboration but suggested there is still potential for mutual trust and expanded engagement.

In closing, he stressed the historic opportunity before the region to reclaim agency over its destiny. He urged Middle Eastern countries to act as architects of their own order, rather than passive players in a system designed by external actors.

"The future of our region must not be drafted in the war rooms of foreign powers," he declared. "It should emerge from regional capitals, grounded in local values, realities, and aspirations."

He concluded by reaffirming Iran's commitment to building a strong, integrated region, emphasizing that Tehran stands ready as a reliable partner for all neighboring states.





## 18th Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Economic Commission Meeting Begins in Tehran

TEHRAN (IRA) - The 18th session of the Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Economic Commission is being held from May 17 to May 20 (corresponding to 27–30 Ordibehesht) in Tehran, hosted by Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development. Amin Tarfa, advisor to the minister and head of the International Affairs Center, said the session is being co-chaired by Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, and Turkmenistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Rashid Meredov. The first two days of the event are dedicated to expert-level meetings aimed at reviewing and finalizing a draft memorandum of understanding between the secretaries of the joint commission from both countries.

### Iran's Exports to Kazakhstan See 27% Increase



TEHRAN - Iran's commercial attaché in Kazakhstan has announced a 27% increase in Iranian exports to the Central Asian country, expressing optimism about further growth in bilateral trade this year.

Eliham Pabarja, Iran's commercial representative in Kazakhstan, reported that Iranian exports to Kazakhstan reached \$278 million in the Iranian year 1403 (March 2024–March 2025), marking a 27% rise compared to the same period last year. In return, Iran imported \$61 million worth of goods from Kazakhstan.

Pabarja highlighted food products, petrochemicals, and construction materials as Iran's primary exports to Kazakhstan. Conversely, Iran mainly imports barley, corn, oilseed meal, and meat from the country.

The Iranian official expressed hope that increased exchanges of official, economic, and business delegations between the two nations would further boost trade volume this year.

She emphasized the importance of Kazakhstan's growing familiarity with the competitive prices and quality of Iranian goods, as well as Iran's export capabilities. This mutual understanding, she said, has helped build trust and is likely to lead to further growth in trade between the two countries.

Pabarja also pointed to Kazakhstan's vast land and fertile agricultural potential, noting that a significant portion of Iran's current exports to Kazakhstan target this sector. Plans are underway, she added, to expand commercial ties through trade talks and delegation exchanges specifically focused on agriculture.

Concluding her remarks, Pabarja noted that a delegation of Iranian companies specializing in food and agriculture is currently in Kazakhstan holding discussions with local partners. She expressed confidence that continued participation in trade events and delegation visits will contribute to an increase in the overall trade volume between Iran and Kazakhstan.

### Iran Aims to Attract 15m Foreign Tourists by End of Seventh Development Plan



TEHRAN - The Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has set a target to increase the number of foreign tourists to 15 million by the end of the country's Seventh Development Plan, a senior official announced.

Speaking at a specialized meeting of tourism and investment deputies in Khorasan Razavi Province on Friday, Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey said that while past national development plans have achieved less than 30% of their goals, the Ministry is now implementing performance-based strategies with annual evaluations to ensure steady progress.

He added that a five-year strategy has been developed and communicated, aiming for balanced growth in both domestic and international tourism. As part of this vision, improving tourism infrastructure is considered essential.

"More than half of the country's hotels are located in Mashhad," Mohseni stated, "but we still face challenges in ground transportation, which requires significant investment."

He also emphasized the importance of enhancing tourism diplomacy. "Our representatives have actively participated in international exhibitions. For instance, during the recent EXPO 2025 event, delegates from 28 countries — including Spain, Italy, and Austria — took part, indicating a positive shift in tourism diplomacy and its growing influence."

However, the Deputy Minister acknowledged that tourism investment is still not highly profitable in Iran, noting that some projects can take up to 10 years to become operational.

Reflecting on the Ministry's performance during the recent Nowruz holidays, Mohseni reported a record-breaking 36 million domestic tourism registrations. He praised the crucial role played by provincial governors, particularly in Khorasan Razavi, which was recognized as the top-performing province due to its innovative approaches and structural reforms.

## Major National Space Projects to Be Completed This Year

TEHRAN - Minister of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Seyed Sattar Hashemi, announced that several large-scale national space projects will reach completion this year. These include key developments in the Chabahar Space Base and infrastructure advancements in Salmas and Chenaran.

Speaking on Saturday at the Iranian Space Research Center during a ceremony marking World Telecommunication and Information Society Day and AI Week — attended by President Masoud Pezeshkian — Hashemi stated that the country's space industry is not only continuing to grow but is accelerating rapidly.

He noted that major achievements are expected this year in both satellite development and infrastructure projects, highlighting the Chabahar base and the Salmas and Chenaran initiatives as pivotal milestones.

Hashemi emphasized that data-driven governance is a top priority for the 14th administration. Referring to President Pezeshkian's emphasis on digital infrastructure, he said the national geospatial project, "G-NAF" (Geocoded National Address File), will be pursued seriously in the management of land resources. "We've seen significant progress and established constructive engagement with government bodies and the judiciary," he added.



The minister also underscored the importance of content production alongside infrastructure development, a topic regularly emphasized by the Supreme Leader. He announced the finalization of a revenue-sharing agreement on content creation with telecom operators, stating that it will soon be implemented.

"We believe a domestic content production movement will take shape — a promising step for Iran's digital economy," Hashemi said. He pledged transparency with the public, asserting that statistics shared will reflect on-the-ground realities — "neither exaggerated nor diminished."

He added that local content creation could act as a driving force for the country's digital economy.

Hashemi credited presidential support for improvements in communication quality since last year. He emphasized that communication has always been central to human development — from early human interactions to today's advanced digital technologies.

He announced the ministry's slogan for the year: "Sustainable Connectivity, Smart Living", and stressed the need to maintain open communication channels to foster knowledge sharing and human development.

He also acknowledged public demand for better infrastructure and admitted that, in past years, investment in the communications sector had not kept pace with national

strategy: to make Iran a regional hub of the digital economy. This includes expanding digital infrastructure, attracting investment, and supporting local tech innovation.

"From the beginning of human civilization, communication has shaped societies. Today, thanks to modern technologies, we are entering a new phase of human development," he said.

He reiterated the ministry's main goals: improving network quality, boosting investment, developing 5G and fiber networks, and expanding international partnerships. He cited a recent visit to China, where agreements were reached to enhance technology cooperation.

The minister also emphasized "technology diplomacy" as a priority and said domestic production is now mature enough for global markets. He highlighted partnerships with countries like Venezuela as successful examples of this effort.

In a notable development, he reported a 50% increase in data transit through Iran in the past four months, reinforcing the country's strategic role in regional connectivity.

In closing, Hashemi highlighted the critical role of human capital in driving the digital economy. He announced a government initiative to train 500,000 individuals in digital skills through partnerships with the Technical and Vocational Organization and private sector stakeholders.

"Our vision is to build a strong and forward-looking Iran — powered by young talent and global cooperation," he said.

## Tehran Set for Major Technological Transformation in Coming Months

TEHRAN - In a press conference, Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani announced that the city is poised for a significant transformation in the field of advanced technologies, while also assuring that the capital faces no "burial crisis" due to the approval of five new cemeteries.

Speaking to journalists, Zakani reflected on his administration's 44 months in office, stating that the support of the Sixth City Council and the leadership of Council Chairman Mehdi Chamran had enabled substantial progress. "We have targeted four key transformations in Tehran," he said, "including urban infrastructure, lifestyle and public comfort, the role of city governance, and technological innovation — with our goals set through 2031."



Zakani highlighted an upcoming tech-driven shift, including the development of a 200-hectare science and technology park and nine innovation factories. "The face of the city is changing," he noted.

In transportation, Zakani announced major expansions across metro, bus, and tramway lines, describing this year as one of "leaps in development."

On urban decay, the mayor emphasized the need to invest in Tehran's aging neighborhoods, especially as 51% of residents are renters. He also detailed safety efforts targeting unsafe buildings: 16,000 structures have been identified, and over 5,000 assessed. These buildings are categorized into safe and unsafe, with the unsafe ones further divided into those requiring renovation or complete reconstruction.

Discussing the high-profile Alaeddin building, Zakani confirmed issues with its facade, internal safety, and legal violations. Due to its lack of parking provisions, the city has imposed fines exceeding 8 trillion rials. The owner is now obligated to construct parking facilities or face steeper penalties.

Turning to international relations, Zakani cited Tehran's growing role in BRICS+, with recent summits held in Russia, the UAE, and Tehran — attended by officials from China, Brazil, South Africa, and Russia. The mayor noted that diplomatic outreach has included

meetings with ambassadors from Serbia, China, and Saudi Arabia, aimed at enhancing city-level diplomacy. Tehran has signed memorandums of understanding with China totaling €13 billion over the past 18 months, with €1 billion already implemented.

In social initiatives, Zakani referenced cultural events like the 10-kilometer "Ghadir Celebration" parade, aimed at fostering public happiness and unity.

Addressing burial infrastructure, he firmly denied any crisis, stating that permits for five cemeteries had been secured, with two already under construction.

On municipal staffing, Zakani asserted that leadership remains stable but performance-focused. "If changes are made, it's to better meet our goals," he said, referencing new appointments in financial and economic departments.

Regarding city cleanliness, he reported that public complaints via the 137 hotline had decreased by 13% over the past year — with a 35% drop in March alone — suggesting growing citizen satisfaction.

In public transport, Zakani announced daily additions of buses to the fleet. Contracts for over 3,200 diesel buses and 3,500 electric buses have been signed. Over 1,300 units have been delivered from domestic manufacturers, with another 800 expected by year's end — a sharp contrast to the previous administration's 1,504 buses acquired over 12 years.

Discussing social welfare, the mayor said Tehran lacked capacity for even a single addiction treatment camp under Article 16 prior to his term. Now, 8,000 beds have been added, and 21,000 individuals have been housed in treatment centers over the past year.

Addressing the issue of waste scavenging and child labor, Zakani said, "This is a real issue. About 85% of child laborers are foreign nationals. We are working with welfare organizations to intervene." He acknowledged the financial lure of this underground industry, estimated to circulate between 4,000 to 5,000 billion rials annually.

### Forced Unity is Not Sustainable



TEHRAN - The Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri, stated that cohesion cannot be achieved through coercion. He emphasized that belief, not obligation, is the driving force behind social change, and that true unity in society is only possible when rooted in shared beliefs.

Speaking on Saturday, at a gathering of public relations and communications managers from executive bodies — held at the National Museum of Iran to mark World Communications Day — Salehi Amiri expressed concern over the rise of populism and the trivialization of fundamental concepts through banners and slogans.

"Public relations should not be reduced to populism," he cautioned. "Given the presence of experts and intellectuals here, I expect PR to move towards a scientific space aligned with the realities of Iranian society, instead of remaining in the realm of simplistic information dissemination or promotional rhetoric."

He continued, "Public relations must transition from a service-based role to a policy-making role. Otherwise, it risks fading into irrelevance."

Salehi Amiri addressed the concepts of social cohesion and consensus, citing his academic work, including his books "Ethnic Issues in Iran in the Past Year" and "National Cohesion and Cultural Diversity." He explained:

"True cohesion exists when the components of a system move toward shared goals without conflict — like different wagons of a train traveling together on a single track toward a common destination."

### Two New Refineries to Be Launched



TEHRAN - The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) has announced the launch of two new refineries and the commissioning of three fuel quality improvement projects within the current year.

Mohammad Sadegh Azimifar stated that NIORDC has outlined several key strategic priorities in line with the 14th government's strategic roadmap. He emphasized that the primary objective is to expand the refining industry and boost the production of high-quality fuels — goals that can only be achieved by completing prioritized, unfinished projects.

"In line with these priorities, two new refineries will join the country's existing ten, and three fuel quality enhancement projects will be operational this year," Azimifar said. "But increasing production alone will not resolve the challenges in Iran's refining and distribution sectors."

Addressing current fuel consumption issues, Azimifar pointed out that several important measures are being pursued. These include diversifying the national fuel mix, expanding the use of compressed natural gas (CNG), electrifying aging transport fleets, and combating fuel smuggling.

He also noted that reforming governance in the refining sector is a major focus. "We aim to create a conducive environment for industry growth and greater private sector participation," he added. "Boosting workforce motivation and expanding the use of smart technologies across the production, transportation, and distribution chains are among our top priorities."

On the issue of fuel smuggling, Azimifar stressed the need to accurately identify its root causes. "Our analysis shows that most smuggling occurs in the transport sector, particularly due to fake freight permits and shipment documents," he said.

He highlighted the importance of a smart monitoring system as a countermeasure. "In 2024, we signed a key contract to implement real-time tracking of petroleum products. With this system, we can monitor every drop of fuel from production to end-user delivery."

Azimifar concluded by underscoring the vital role of smart technologies in both controlling consumption and combating smuggling. "Our strongest tool against fuel smuggling is digitalization," he said. "But for these efforts to yield results, all responsible government bodies must fulfill their legal duties. We hope active inter-agency cooperation will help us significantly reduce smuggling and boost efficiency."



## Pro-Palestinian Protest in Basel Turns Violent Over Israel's Eurovision Appearance

BASEL (Dispatches) - Pro-Palestinian demonstrators clashed with riot police in Basel as the Swiss city hosted the Eurovision Song Contest Saturday, AFP journalists at the scene witnessed.

Protesters demonstrating against Israel's participation in the contest while it ramps up its war in Gaza clashed briefly with police in the centre of the city shortly before Israel's Eurovision entrant Yuval Raphael took to the stage at the St. Jakobshalle venue across town.



## One Dead, Four Injured After Car Bomb Explodes Outside U.S. Fertility Clinic



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - A bomb exploded on Saturday outside a California fertility clinic, killing one person in what the FBI labelled a terror attack.

The blast tore through downtown Palm Springs, ripping a hole in the clinic and blowing out the windows and doors of nearby buildings, an AFP journalist on the scene reported.

"Make no mistake, this is an intentional act of terrorism," Akil Davis, the head of the FBI's Los Angeles field office told reporters near the site of the fatal explosion.

"This is probably one of the largest bombing investigations that we've had in southern California," he added.

He confirmed that one person near the clinic at the time of blast had been killed and that four others were wounded. Work was ongoing to identify the deceased, he added.

In response to a reporter's question on whether the clinic in Palm Springs was deliberately targeted, Davis answered: "We believe so, yes."

The city's mayor, Ron deHarte had earlier told AFP that investigators confirmed a bomb exploded in or near a vehicle outside the clinic.

Eyewitnesses told local media they had seen human remains near the American Reproductive Centers clinic, with aerial footage of the scene showing the building roof had collapsed.

The charred remnants of a vehicle lay in a parking lot, some distance from the apparent epicenter of the explosion.

## Syria Launches National Efforts for Truth and Reconciliation



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria announced the formation of a national commission for missing persons and another for transitional justice, more than five months after the ouster of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad.

Syria's new authorities have pledged justice for victims of atrocities committed under Assad's rule, and a five-year transitional constitution signed in March provided for the formation of a transitional justice commission.

The fate of tens of thousands of detainees and others who went missing remains one of the most harrowing legacies of Syria's conflict, which erupted in 2011 when Assad's forces brutally repressed anti-government protests, triggering more than a decade of war.

A decree signed by interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa and released by the presidency announced the formation of an independent "national commission for missing persons".

The body is tasked with "researching and uncovering the fate of the missing and forcibly disappeared, documenting cases, establishing a national database and providing legal and humanitarian support to their families".

# Kremlin Fixes Conditions for New Ukraine Talks, Trump to Speak With Putin

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Kremlin on Saturday said that Ukraine and Russia must first complete an agreed prisoner-of-war exchange and come up with ceasefire conditions before planning any new talks.

"For now, we need to do what the delegations agreed on yesterday" in Turkey – the first direct talks in over three years – the Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists following a question on whether there were plans for a second round of talks. "This, of course, means first and foremost to complete a 1,000 for 1,000 (POW) swap."

US President Donald Trump said on Saturday he will speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday to discuss stopping the war in Ukraine, days after the first face-to-face talks in three years between Russia and Ukraine took place in Istanbul.

Trump said in a Truth Social post that his call with Putin will be on Monday at 10am Eastern (1400 GMT).

"THE SUBJECTS OF THE CALL WILL BE, STOPPING THE 'BLOODBATH' THAT IS KILLING, ON AVERAGE, MORE THAN 5000 RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN SOLDIERS A WEEK, AND TRADE," he said.

Trump said he would also speak with Zelensky and leaders of various NATO countries afterwards.

Zelensky had challenged the Kremlin leader to meet him in Turkey this week but Putin instead sent a team of aides and officials to meet Ukrainian negotiators on Friday for the first bilateral, face-to-face talks since March 2022. Ukraine said it had raised the issue of a Putin-Zelensky meeting at the talks.

Peskov said Russia considered such a meeting was possible, but only as a result of work between the two sides to "achieve certain results in the form of agreements".

He added: "At the same time, when signing documents that the delegations are to agree upon, the main and fundamental thing for us remains who exactly will sign these documents from the Ukrainian side."

Peskov did not elaborate on that remark. Putin has previously challenged Zelensky's legitimacy as president because his elected term of office expired last year. Ukraine, under martial law as it defends itself against Russia, has not set a date for a new election.

On Saturday, the morning following the talks, a Russian drone attack on a minibus carrying evacuated civilians in the eastern Sumy region killed nine people and wounded seven, local authorities said.

The latest strike shows how little progress has been made towards halting the fighting that has dragged on for more



than three years, destroyed large swathes of Ukraine and displaced millions of people.

Ukraine's Sumy border region has come under increasing deadly bombardments by Moscow since March when Ukrainian forces were pushed out of Russia's neighbouring Kursk region, which they had partially controlled since the summer of 2024.

Furthermore, two people were killed and 13 wounded in the southeastern Kherson region, after a Russian shelling hit a residential area and a truck carrying humanitarian aid on Saturday morning.

In the eastern Kharkiv region, right on the border with Russia, two people were killed and about a dozen were wounded as a result of Russian aerial attacks over the past 24 hours.

The latest attacks came after three people were killed in Russian strikes on Friday on Ukraine's eastern Donetsk and southeastern Kherson regions, as the talks were ongoing.

French President Emmanuel Macron said he was sure that US counterpart Donald Trump would "react" to Putin's "cynicism" on Ukraine following the deadly minibus attack.

Putin had declined to travel to Turkey for the meeting, with Zelensky accusing him of being "afraid" and Russia of not taking the talks "seriously".

"Yesterday in Istanbul, everyone saw a weak and unprepared Russian delegation with no significant powers. This must change. We need real steps to end the war," Zelensky said on Saturday.

The Ukrainian leader attended a European summit in Albania alongside the leaders of France, Germany, Britain and Poland, among others, where he urged a "strong reaction" from the world if the Istanbul talks failed, including new sanctions.

Macron said European nations were coordinating with the United States on additional sanctions against Russia should Moscow continue to refuse an "unconditional ceasefire".

Both Moscow and Washington have talked up the need for a meeting on the conflict between Putin and Trump.

Trump has said "nothing's going to happen" on the conflict until he meets Putin face-to-face.

During the Istanbul talks, a Ukrainian source told AFP that Russia was advancing hardline territorial demands that Ukrainian foreign ministry spokesman Georgiy Tykhy called "unacceptable".

Moscow claims annexation of five Ukrainian regions – four since its 2022 invasion, and Crimea, which it annexed in 2014.

# World Leaders Urge Israel to Stop Its Deadly Military Offensive in Gaza

GAZA (Dispatches) - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called on Saturday for pressure to stop Israel's "massacre in Gaza" and said Madrid is planning to introduce a UN resolution requesting a world court ruling on aid access to the Palestinian territory.

Israel's military has announced it is in the "initial stages" of a new offensive in Gaza aimed at defeating Hamas.

More than 100 people in Gaza were killed in Israeli strikes on Friday and at least another 10 on Saturday, according to the Gaza civil defence agency.

Sanchez told an Arab League summit in Baghdad that the war triggered by Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel has led to "unacceptable numbers" of victims in Gaza, violating the "principle of humanity".

"The extremely grave humanitarian crisis Gaza has endured since October 2023 has caused more than 50,000 dead, 100,000 wounded and two million displaced," Sanchez said.

World leaders should "intensify our pressure on Israel to halt the massacre in Gaza, particularly through the channels afforded to us by international law", he said.

The launch of Israel's new ground offensive in Gaza is a cause for deep concern, a Germany Foreign Office spokesperson said in a statement on Saturday.

Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul spoke with his Israeli counterpart by phone the same day and is in close contact with other partners in the region, the statement said.

European Council President Antonio Costa said on



Saturday that he was "shocked" at the situation in Gaza, which is the target of an expanded Israeli offensive.

"Shocked by the news from Gaza: starving civilians, hospitals hit again by strikes. The violence must stop!" Costa said on social media platform X.

Arab leaders at the summit in Baghdad called Saturday for an immediate end to the war in Gaza, accusing Israel in stark language of trying to drive the Palestinians out of the enclave altogether after it ramped up its bombing campaign.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, whose country is one of the main mediators in Gaza peace talks, described Israel's actions as "systematic crimes" aimed at "obliterating and annihilating" the Palestinians and "ending their existence in the Gaza Strip".

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, the summit's host, said Israel was engaged in genocide.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who addressed the summit, said "nothing justifies the collective punishment of the Palestinian people".

Italy's government on Saturday also increased its calls for Israel to stop its deadly military strikes in Gaza, with Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani saying: "Enough with the attacks."

"We no longer want to see the Palestinian people suffer," Tajani said during a trip to Sicily, in remarks relayed by his spokesman.

"Let's come to a ceasefire, let's free the hostages, but let's leave people who are victims of Hamas alone," he was cited as saying.

# Germany, Italy Say Europe's Leaders Far From Talks on Troop Deployment in Ukraine

ROME (Dispatches) - Europe is a long way from talking about deploying troops in Ukraine as all its efforts are currently focused on securing an unconditional ceasefire from Russia, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said.

"The next step must be that the format for peace talks is made clear, as well as which security guarantees could possibly, one day, be necessary for Ukraine," Merz said, describing these matters as currently unforeseeable.

"There is no reason to talk about (troops) at the moment, we are far from that. We want the weapons to stop, the killing to end ... these are the questions we are dedicated to now, and no others," he added.

The leaders of France, Germany, Britain and Poland, together with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, met on the sidelines of a summit in Albania on Friday to discuss the situation. They also called U.S. President Donald Trump, who said on Saturday he would speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday.

Meloni did not take part in the meeting - an absence that Italian media has described



as a deliberate snub, suggesting that French President Emmanuel Macron had not wanted her involved.

Meloni told reporters on Saturday that Italy was open to joining any international format aimed at ending the war, but warned against divisions within the West.

"Western unity has been our greatest strength since the beginning of Russia's invasion," she said. "At a delicate time like this, it is important to set aside any personal (differences) that could undermine that unity."

The European Union is working on a new package of sanctions to increase pressure on Moscow over the war, after the first face-to-face talks between Russia and Ukraine in three years on Thursday failed to yield a ceasefire, though Russia agreed to continue contacts.

"Yesterday's talks in Istanbul ended below our expectations despite the extremely constructive positioning of Ukraine's negotiators," Merz said.

Merz's position on peacekeeping troops echoes that of his predecessor Olaf Scholz, who also prioritised peace deal talks over discussion of boots on the ground.





## Crystal Palace Stun Man City to Win First FA Cup in 120-Year History

LONDON (Dispatches) - Crystal Palace stunned Manchester City to win the FA Cup for the first time as Eberechi Eze sealed a 1-0 victory that piled on the misery for Pep Guardiola's troubled side. Eze's early strike rocked City before Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson saved Omar Marmoush's penalty late in the first half of a dramatic final at Wembley.

While Eze's clinical finish was the culmination of his remarkable rise from rejection by Arsenal, Fulham and Millwall as a youngster, it was Henderson who emerged as Palace's hero with a series of superb saves.

City will protest that Henderson should have been sent off for a first-half handball outside his penalty area.

But Henderson made the most of that controversial moment to ensure Palace clinched the first major trophy in their 120-year history and a place in next season's Europa League.

"To be honest I can't really believe it. I think when you play this game 10 times, you win it once, and this happened today," Palace boss Oliver Glasner said.

"The goal was the first time we were in their half and then we just defended with every single part of the body."

Beaten by Manchester United in their previous FA Cup final appearances in 1990 and 2016, Palace's shock win was no more than they deserved as City once again imploded in a dismal season that will be their first without major silverware since 2016-17.

"We did everything but if you're not going to score goals, you're not going to win," Guardiola said.

"We performed really well. Football is like this sometimes."

On the Henderson controversy, Guardiola would only add: "Ask the referee."

After winning the Premier League in the previous four seasons, City have endured a turbulent campaign that ranks among the worst in Guardiola's storied managerial career.

Currently sixth in the Premier League, City host Bournemouth on Tuesday and travel to Fulham on May 25 as they try to salvage their wretched year by at least qualifying for the Champions League.

Not for the first time, Guardiola sprang a surprise with his selection for a final as he picked an ultra-attacking line-up with no holding midfielder.

However, Guardiola's habit of tinkering with his tactics for finals has backfired in the past.

Asked about City's line-up just before kick-off, Guardiola said he was putting his faith in "talent", but Glasner had spotted an opening, saying: "When you have so many attacking players it could give you an opportunity in transitions."

Erling Haaland nearly gave City the perfect start when he stretched to meet Kevin De Bruyne's cross with a volley that forced a scrambled save from Henderson.

Josko Gvardiol's towering header from Savinho's corner was smartly repelled by Henderson.

But Glasner's clever decision to set up Palace deep inside their own half had lured City in for the sucker punch.

## Norris Blames Himself as Critics Question His Mettle



IMOLA (Dispatches) - Lando Norris said he had been simply not quick enough after another disappointing qualifying session at Imola left the McLaren driver facing accusations of crumbling under pressure.

Norris will start Sunday's Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix in fourth place on the grid while Australian teammate and championship leader Oscar Piastri lines up on pole position for the third time in seven races this season.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen and Mercedes' George Russell also qualified ahead of Norris.

The McLaren drivers had dominated practice, finishing all three sessions one-two with Norris quicker than Piastri in Saturday's final session before qualifying.

Then it all went wrong when it mattered.

"I made a lot of mistakes. Never good enough in my final lap in qualifying, everyone goes quicker and I go slower," said Norris, who is 16 points adrift of Piastri after leading the standings early on.

"Not good enough, the car is mega and it is the best car on track. I'm not going to blame the car. I felt good all weekend but when I try and go for lap time it does not go," he told reporters.

"In my whole career qualifying has been my biggest strength by a long way but this year it is not coming my way."

Canadian Jacques Villeneuve, the 1997 world champion with Williams who now attends races as a television pundit, suggested Norris was feeling the pressure of being up against a very quick teammate.

"Last year Lando was the qualifier of the team. And now Lando collapses every time there's a little bit of pressure, and Piastri seems to make a step," he told Sky Sports television.

Team boss Andrea Stella said Piastri had kept his calm but Norris was still searching for performance even as McLaren racked up five wins in six races.

"For Lando, I think the loss was distributed in a couple of corners, not just in one place," said the Italian.

## Knicks KO Celtics in Game 6, Charge Into East Finals

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Jalen Brunson and OG Anunoby each scored 23 points as the New York Knicks reached the Eastern Conference finals for the first time since 2000 by steamrolling the visiting Boston Celtics 119-81 in Game 6 of their semifinal series.

Mikal Bridges had 22 points and Karl-Anthony Towns added 21 points and 12 rebounds for third-seeded New York, which led by as many as 41 points. The Knicks wrapped up the best-of-seven series with the largest winning playoff margin in franchise history.

"There's more to go," Bridges said. "We're not done. We came out there tonight and played hard and handled business. But our season is not over. We have much more to go."

New York surpassed a 36-point playoff victory over the Milwaukee Bucks in the decisive Game 5 of the 1970 Eastern Division finals.

Josh Hart contributed 10 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists to record New York's first postseason triple-double since Walt Frazier accomplished the feat in 1972.

"I want to congratulate the Celtics on a terrific season," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "Unfortunate injury to Jayson Tatum. They're a terrific organization, ownership, front office, Joe



Mazzulla is a terrific coach, great players.

"They're not going to hand you anything. You have to earn it."

The Knicks will open the conference finals at home against the fourth-seeded Indiana Pacers on Wednesday.

Defending NBA champion Boston was led by Jaylen Brown,

who had 20 points, six rebounds and six assists before fouling out late in the third quarter. The Celtics were again short-handed after losing Tatum to a ruptured right Achilles during Game 4 on Monday.

"Upset or not, we beat a great team," Brunson said. "They obviously lost a huge piece (in Tatum). The way they came out in Game 5, they're still a good team. Regardless of what anyone thinks - upset or not -- we're just happy to come out of the series with a win and now we'll prepare for another team."

New York shot 46.2 percent from the field, including 16 of 45 (35.6 percent) from 3-point range. The Knicks held a 55-36 rebounding advantage.

Payton Pritchard scored 11 points and Al Horford added 10 for Boston, which shot 36 percent and was 12 of 40 (30 percent) from

3-point range.

The score was tied at 16 before the Knicks began pulling away. New York led 26-20 at the end of the first quarter and then opened the second with a 16-4 surge to open up an 18-point lead midway through the period.

## Dortmund Snatch Last Champions League Spot



DORTMUND (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund cruised past relegated Holstein Kiel 3-0 to finish fourth and snatch the last Champions League spot for next season, in the best comeback of the last seven matchdays in Bundesliga history.

Niko Kovac's Dortmund won six of their last seven matches to climb from 10th to fourth in the standings and finish on 57 points, two ahead of Freiburg who lost 3-1 at home to third-placed Eintracht Frankfurt.

Kovac had taken over in February with the team in 11th place after the departure of Nuri Sahin following a disappointing first half to the season.

No other Bundesliga team have managed such a comeback in the last seven matchdays.

"We are all happy but there is no reason to celebrate," Kovac told a press conference. "I am happy and we are all happy to have pushed this through, to have taken that last step which is sometime difficult to take."

Missing out on the lucrative Champions League would have been both a sporting and financial setback for the publicly-traded club.

"For a long time we were just passengers and on the final matchday we were in the driving seat and did it just in time," said the Croat.

"I did my job but I want to underline that you cannot achieve anything in football alone."

Dortmund players will now go into a two-week break before returning in early June ahead of the Club World Cup in the United States.

## Scheffler Storms Home, Leads PGA Championship by Three

CHARLOTTE (Dispatches) - Scottie Scheffler capped the third round of the PGA Championship in style to grab a three-shot lead over Sweden's Alex Noren at Quail Hollow Club, where the world number one has a third major title in his grasp.

Scheffler followed a back-nine eagle with a birdie, then picked up two more strokes over the tricky three-hole closing stretch known as the Green Mile for a six-under-par 65 that was the day's low round and brought him to 11 under on the week.

Despite the stellar finish, Scheffler was not perfect, as evidenced by the three bogeys on his card, but he managed not to compound mistakes on a windy day or get rattled even when his tee shot ended up in a divot on the 18th fairway.

"Some days it works better than others," Scheffler said about his ability to stay calm on the course. "Today was a day down the stretch



where it worked well, and other days it doesn't.

"At the end of the day, just proud of my fight the last three days and looking forward to the challenge tomorrow."

After two days of staring at a leaderboard that did not pack the usual star power many expect from a major championship, some of the game's biggest names did their part to deliver a drama-filled third round that featured several lead changes.

Jhonattan Vegas squandered his overnight two-shot cushion after a bogey-bogey start but by the time he made the turn was sharing the lead with Scheffler, twice major champion Jon Rahm and reigning U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau.

But it was Scheffler who pulled away late, starting with the stunning eagle at the par-four 14th where he made an eagle after his tee shot settled within three feet of the cup.