

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi Emphasized That Enhancing Iran-Afghanistan Ties as Neighboring Muslim States Is Rooted in Good Neighborliness and Common Interests, Serving Both Nations' Top Priorities

IRAN NEWS

President Masoud Pezeshkian Stressed That Iran Has Extended a Hand of Friendship to All of Its Neighboring Countries, and Is Making Efforts to Deepen Ties With Them Based on Cultural, Historical and Human Commonalities

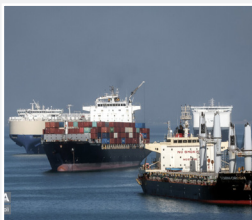
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DOMESTIC



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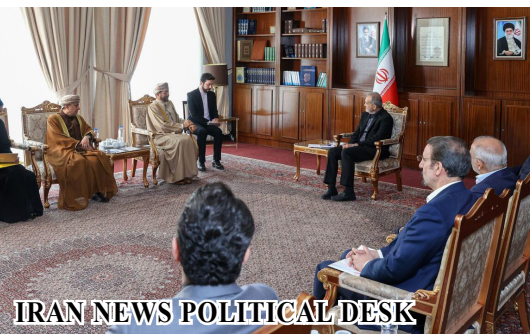
INTERNATIONAL

Pope Leo Urges Unity for Divided Church, Vows Not to Be Autocrat

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President Expresses Hope for Fair Iran-U.S. Agreement Ensuring Regional Stability



TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has expressed hope that the ongoing indirect talks between Iran and the United States, hosted by Oman, will lead to a fair agreement that guarantees lasting peace and stability in the region. He praised the high level of bilateral relations and the constructive, committed, and benevolent role of the Omani government in facilitating the negotiations.

Speaking on the sidelines of the "Tehran Dialogue Forum 2025," during a meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi, President Pezeshkian said: "We hope that with the sincere and genuine efforts and intentions of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, these talks will yield a just agreement that ensures durable peace and stability in the region."

The president emphasized the importance of greater unity among Islamic countries, stating: "The closer Muslim nations grow to one another and expand their cooperation, the more disappointed the enemies of the Islamic ummah will become in their attempts to sow discord."

President Pezeshkian also announced his upcoming visit to Oman next week, expressing Iran's readiness to broaden cooperation in all fields—including trade, politics, economy, science, and technology—particularly with the "friendly and brotherly" nation of Oman. He noted that this trip could mark a turning point in enhancing comprehensive relations between the two countries and hoped it would bring tangible benefits to both nations.

Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership Treaty Approved by Majlis Committee



TEHRAN - The spokesperson for Iran's Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission announced that the committee has approved the draft of a comprehensive strategic partnership treaty between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation.

Ebrahim Rezaei briefed reporters following Sunday's session (May 18) of the commission, stating that the treaty was jointly reviewed by three subcommittees: Foreign Relations, National Security, and Defense.

Rezaei noted that Abbas Golroo, head of the Foreign Relations Committee, presented a report on the treaty, explaining that the draft is the result of four years of negotiations between Iran and Russia. He emphasized that in light of ongoing regional and global developments, the two nations need to stand together.

Additional briefings were provided by Ahmad Ajami, chair of the National Security Committee, and Salar Velayatmadar, head of the Defense Committee. Both supported and confirmed the treaty's provisions.

Rezaei stressed that, given the treaty's approval by both the State Duma and the Federation Council of Russia, and its ratification by the Russian president, it is essential that Iran's parliament prioritizes its review in the main legislative session following approval by the Parliamentary Presidium.

Detailing the treaty, Rezaei said it includes 47 articles and was officially signed by both countries' presidents during the Iranian president's visit to Moscow last year. The treaty requires compliance with Articles 77, 120, and 139 of Iran's Constitution for its implementation.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Iran Reaffirms: Uranium Enrichment Is Non-Negotiable

TEHRAN - In his weekly press briefing, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baghaei reaffirmed Iran's steadfast position on its nuclear program, declaring that uranium enrichment is a sovereign and non-negotiable right. Speaking to reporters, Baghaei tackled a range of pressing issues from international diplomacy to regional conflicts and Iran's nuclear activities.

Baghaei condemned the ongoing violence in Gaza, blaming Israel for what he described as a humanitarian disaster. "The situation is heartbreaking. Innocent civilians are being killed, many remain trapped under rubble," he said, criticizing the "active military support" of the United States and the United Kingdom for Israel. He warned that these actions would leave an indelible stain on history, adding, "The perpetrators and their backers must be held accountable."

On the issue of renewed U.S. sanctions amid ongoing indirect talks, Baghaei accused Washington of bad faith, stating that the U.S. continues to act with hostility toward the Iranian people. "Every new package of sanctions adds weight to the evidence of crimes against humanity," he said. He stressed that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful and transparent, asserting that the continuation of sanctions only undermines the U.S.'s credibility in diplomacy.

Responding to comments by U.S. envoy Abram Paley and European officials, Baghaei reiterated that Iran's right to enrich uranium is not up for discussion. "Enrichment is not a luxury or a political tool. It is a technological necessity and part of the natural cycle of our nuclear industry," he emphasized. Describing enrichment as the result of decades of effort by Iranian scientists, Baghaei added, "This is a legal right of the Iranian nation. Our position is crystal clear."

He criticized the shifting positions of the U.S., comparing negotiations to a game of snakes and ladders. "Each time we feel an understanding has been reached, the Americans shift their stance. This raises serious questions about their seriousness," he remarked.

Dismissing rumors of parallel negotiations with the U.S., Baghaei confirmed that the only ongoing process is the indirect talks mediated by regional actors, primarily Qatar and Oman. "There have been four rounds, and all have been transparently reported. Participation in talks doesn't equate to accepting the other party's views," he said, underlining Iran's aim to reach a fair and durable agreement.

Baghaei confirmed Iran's readiness to participate in United Nations peacekeeping missions, calling it a continuation of Iran's commitment to international peace. "We have previously collaborated and are prepared to contribute where conflict resolution is needed," he said, noting that further details would be provided by military officials.

On Turkey's military presence in northern Iraq and the disarmament of the PKK, Baghaei expressed cautious optimism, hoping such measures would promote regional stability. He reaffirmed Iran's support for Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, urging all neighboring states to uphold the same respect.

Baghaei rejected threats to invoke the UN's snapback mechanism against Iran, calling such actions legally baseless. "This is a peaceful program. Using this mechanism signals a rejection of diplomatic solutions and a preference for coercion," he said. Baghaei warned of reciprocal actions and urged European countries not to misuse what he called "a double-edged sword."

The spokesman noted a decline in constructive engagement between Iran and some European countries, calling for an upgrade in bilateral ties. "Certain European actors must abandon non-constructive behaviors and refrain from interference in Iran's internal affairs," Baghaei stated. Baghaei praised the constructive roles of Qatar and Oman in facilitating dialogue between Iran and the United States. He expressed hope that Gulf countries prioritize regional stability and independence from foreign influence.

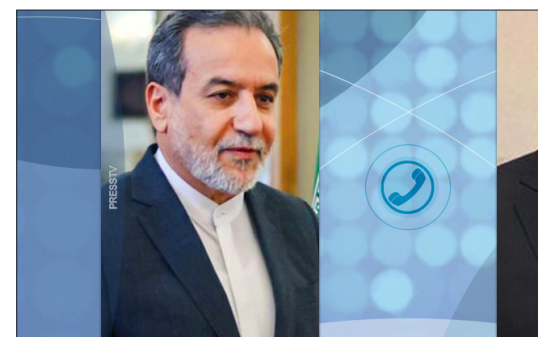
Commenting on Israel's role in regional tensions and its alleged sabotage of nuclear negotiations, Baghaei said the regime "does not recognize any boundaries in violating international norms." He cited the wars in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, as well as the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, as examples of Israel's destabilizing actions.

Baghaei confirmed an upcoming state visit by the Iranian president to Oman, calling such high-level exchanges routine and beneficial.

On the issue of detained Iranian nationals in Europe, Baghaei expressed serious concerns. While one detainee in France has been released, three Iranians remain in custody in the UK under unclear charges. "The accusations appear politically motivated," he said, confirming that Iran had formally protested to the UK government and is demanding transparency.

Finally, Baghaei dismissed claims of written proposals from the U.S. during nuclear negotiations, stating that any verbal suggestions have been inconsistent and frequently changed. "The reports by certain foreign-language media have only added confusion," he added. Baghaei also addressed speculation about a regional nuclear fuel consortium, clarifying that while such initiatives could be welcomed, they cannot and will not replace Iran's right to enrich uranium. "If the aim is to halt Iran's enrichment, that is not an option," he concluded.

Iran Ready for Win-Win Deal If Sanctions Terminated



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says Iran is ready to reach a win-win deal on its nuclear program if the US sanctions against the country are terminated.

Araqchi made the remark in a phone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on Sunday evening.

He reaffirmed Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy, stressing that Tehran will never give up the right.

He briefed his Turkish counterpart on the latest state of indirect talks between Iran and the United States as well as a recent meeting with the European trio of Britain, France, and Germany (E3) on Iran's civilian nuclear program.

The top Iranian negotiator expressed Tehran's readiness to engage in win-win interaction with the opposite sides if they show real determination to remove the sanctions and respect the country's legitimate rights under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The Turkish foreign minister, for his part, hailed Iran's constructive approach to a diplomatic path and said his country is ready to provide any assistance in this regard.

Araqchi's remarks came just a few hours after he responded to the latest comments by US President Donald Trump's regional envoy Steve Witkoff, who said that Washington would not allow Iran to have even a 1-percent enrichment capability.

Speaking to reporters, Araqchi warns the United States against making "unrealistic demands" in talks, saying Tehran will continue its enrichment program with or without a deal with Washington.

Araqchi also said such statements were "completely detached from the reality of negotiations."

Iran has held four rounds of indirect talks with the US on its nuclear program and the termination of sanctions.

Iranian deputies foreign ministers Kazem Gharibabadi and Majid Takht-Ravanchi met representatives of the E3 political directors in the Turkish city of Istanbul on Friday.

Regional States Urged to Resolve Differences Through Dialogue



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Strategic Council on Foreign Relations Kamal Kharrazi says the emerging multipolar world order requires regional countries to unite and resolve their differences through dialogue.

"The reality is that the unipolar system is collapsing, and regional powers are assuming a greater role," Kharrazi stated on Sunday, speaking on the sidelines of the Tehran Dialogue Forum.

He noted that the world is shifting towards multilateralism, enabling nations to play a more effective role within the international system. Kharrazi stressed that regional powers—including China, India, Iran, Turkey, and Russia—must actively participate in shaping global affairs.

The former foreign minister also urged organizations that claim independence and seek to avoid dominance by hegemonic forces to contribute to the evolving world order, describing it as a "parallel process aimed at preserving the independence of nations."

Addressing the post-war global order led by the United States, Kharrazi asserted that "after the end of the era of American dominance, the multipolar system can foster social justice and equitable international development."

Kharrazi also addressed contradictory statements by U.S. officials amid the ongoing indirect negotiations with Iran. "Washington's self-entry into talks showed that they could not deal with Iran like other countries," he said.

He warned against using the language of threats against the Islamic Republic, saying, "Iran is a powerful country and will give a response to threats."

Kharrazi said that while some countries relied on others, Iran's nuclear know-how has been indigenous, and the country has pursued this path alone.

Production Halts a Major Threat to Iran's Economic Future



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's top business representative has warned that ongoing production halts and industrial shutdowns could deal severe long-term damage to the country's economic future.

Speaking at the 23rd meeting of the Council of Presidents of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture across Iran, Samad Hassanzadeh, President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, identified energy imbalance as one of the main challenges facing the private sector.

"The cost of halting production and business closures will be extremely heavy for the country's future," Hassanzadeh said during the session, which focused on enhancing transparency and administrative integrity. The meeting was attended by Zabihollah Khodaeian, head of the General Inspection Organization of Iran (GIO).

Hassanzadeh also listed taxation issues, social security pressures, banking problems, and lackluster privatization efforts as key challenges. He proposed forming a think tank involving current and former officials to formulate practical solutions.

He noted that production units are facing financial strain, particularly due to high interest rates, which he said hinder the ability of businesses to sustain operations. "The rise in banking interest rates has made it extremely difficult for businesses to manage or resolve their financial issues," he added.

On social security, Hassanzadeh said outdated job classifications within production units are creating complications and must be reformed.

He further criticized the lack of progress in privatization, pointing out that despite the approval of Article 44 of the Constitution over two decades ago, only 11% of state assets have been

transferred to the private sector, even though 80% of the economy remains state-controlled.

Also speaking at the event, Zabihollah Khodaeian, head of the General Inspection Organization, emphasized the need for collaboration between his office and the private sector to tackle corruption and managerial negligence.

"The private sector can play a key role in identifying corruption hotspots, bureaucratic hurdles, managerial lapses, and irregularities in license and loan allocations," Khodaeian said.

He noted that supporting the private sector has been a priority under Judiciary Chief Hojjatolislam Mohseni Ejei, and that contract stability under the current administration is unmatched compared to previous governments. "There hasn't been a single contract overturned by the judiciary under this administration," he stated.

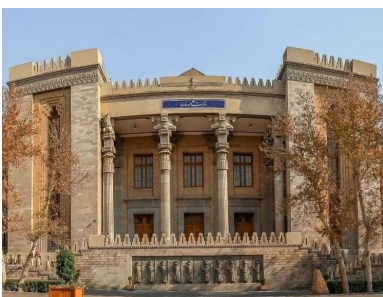
Khodaeian added that judges with negative views of the private sector have been reassigned, affirming that contracts signed by government officials must be honored.

He also highlighted the ongoing provincial visits by the Judiciary Chief, which often include meetings with chambers of commerce and private sector representatives. "The Chief Justice recently told senior managers not to fear accusations. If someone visits a business owner and is accused of collusion, don't be afraid," Khodaeian recalled.

He concluded by emphasizing that Economic Resilience Committees, operating under the supervision of the First Deputy of the Judiciary and senior officials, are actively addressing private sector issues with full support.

"The GIO operates under the policies of the Judiciary," Khodaeian said. "We currently have several units within the organization working specifically to resolve private sector challenges."

IRAN NEWS



British Chargé d’Affaires Summoned Over Illegal Arrest of Iranian Expats

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Foreign Ministry summoned Britain’s chargé d’affaires in Tehran (in the absence of the ambassador) in response to the illegal arrest of some Iranian expatriates.

On Sunday, Director of the Third Department for Western Europe Shahram Ghazizadeh demanded an explanation from the British government regarding the legal basis for the detention of the individuals. He conveyed the Iranian government’s strong protest against this action, which included unfounded accusations directed at the Islamic Republic.

Ghazizadeh emphasized the Islamic Republic’s commitment to respecting the laws of host countries. He condemned the unlawful detention of Iranian nationals, the lack of evidence for the accusations, the failure to notify the Iranian embassy in London, and the denial of consular access for those detained. He said that such actions violate established international law and human rights standards.

Tehran–New Delhi Trade Could Shift if Iran-U.S. Deal Reached



TEHRAN - The Vice President of the Iran-India Joint Chamber of Commerce has said that a potential agreement between Iran and the United States could significantly transform trade relations between Tehran and New Delhi.

In an interview with ILNA, Mehdi Rangruna, Vice President of the Iran-India Joint Chamber of Commerce, discussed the impact that resumed negotiations between Iran and the U.S. could have on bilateral trade with India.

“We predict that if the negotiations between Iran and the United States lead to a result, the upward trend in trade between Iran and India—which began last year—will be further strengthened,” Rangruna said. “India’s presence at the Tehran Expo 2025 was more prominent than in 2024, with around 160 Indian traders traveling to Iran to participate.”

He noted that independent of the ongoing negotiations, exchanges between business delegations from both countries have increased since last year, which has helped open up new avenues for trade. “India is definitely one of the countries whose trade relations with Iran will undergo major changes if the talks with the U.S. are successful,” he said. “India has been a traditional buyer of Iranian oil, and U.S. sanctions remain the main obstacle to further trade growth.”

Rangruna emphasized that India’s political system is highly conservative, maintaining close ties with both Europe and the United States. As a result, engagement with Iran is seen as a risk unless the geopolitical climate shifts.

VP Urges Cooperation Among Islamic Nations to Boost Share in Global AI Market



TEHRAN - First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref has emphasized the need for coordinated intergovernmental efforts among Islamic nations to enhance their share in the global artificial intelligence (AI) market.

Speaking at the Summit of Science Ministers from Islamic Countries, Aref highlighted Iran’s scientific and technological advancements since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. “Over 2,500 universities and higher education institutes have been established since the revolution, and today, more than 3 million students are enrolled in Iranian universities, compared to just 176,000 before the revolution,” he said.

He also noted significant improvements in healthcare, stating that Iran’s global ranking in the medical field has risen from 43rd before the revolution to 9th place today. “In recent decades, the Islamic Republic has made remarkable progress in nanotechnology, aerospace, biotechnology, ICT, medicine, and Olympic-level inventions, alongside a major rise in women’s literacy rates,” Aref added.

From an industrial standpoint, Aref pointed out that Iran has advanced from 64th to 17th place globally since the revolution. “The number of research institutes has grown from 80 to over 340, and faculty members have increased from 900 to over 63,000. We now have more than 13,000 knowledge-based companies operating in the country,” he stated.

Turning to artificial intelligence, Aref stressed the profound impact the technology is expected to have on global employment and development. “Credible estimates suggest that AI will affect 40 to 60 percent of jobs worldwide. While approximately 83 million jobs could be lost in the next four years, at least 69 million new jobs related to AI are expected to emerge,” he warned.

Despite this growing influence, Aref expressed concern over the current marginal role of Islamic countries in the AI sector. “The Islamic world’s contribution to scientific output, technological development, and economic value creation in AI is estimated at less than 5 percent—far below its potential,” he said.

IRISL Transported 27m Tons of Cargo in Past Year

TEHRAN - The CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL), Mohammad Reza Modarres Khiabani, announced that the company transported 27 million tons of various goods over the past year, emphasizing the company’s frontline role in facing international sanctions.

Speaking at a press conference titled “One Publisher, One Monday,” hosted by the Tehran Stock Exchange, Khiabani highlighted that IRISL has been active in the capital market since 2008 and noted that its primary shareholders are retirement funds. The company operates with a fleet boasting a total cargo capacity of 5 million deadweight tons (DWT).

In addition to maritime transport, IRISL is also involved in rail and road logistics, although its non-maritime divisions are not solely dedicated to supporting the shipping operations, he explained.

Khiabani noted that IRISL holds the top regional position and ranks 18th globally in cargo transportation. The company’s fleet is active in both the Caspian Sea and southern Iranian ports and also engages in logistical, operational, and supply-related activities.

He also emphasized IRISL’s role in training maritime professionals, stating that 70% of the country’s seafarers have been trained through the company’s educational institute.

“All employees of the company, except 24 emergency personnel, are Iranian,” he said, adding that the number of foreign employees has significantly declined from 670 in 2019 to virtually zero today.

Khiabani referred to the 2019 mission when two IRISL oil tankers delivered gasoline to Venezuela, an action that received praise from Iran’s Supreme Leader. He also criticized the continued sanctions imposed by Western countries on IRISL, stating that the latest round of sanctions came last year from the European Union and the UK.

The IRISL CEO unveiled plans to establish a major logistics hub in Chabahar, noting its strategic potential for Iran in the coming years.

“We aim to develop Chabahar not only as a key logistics hub but also as part of our corporate social responsibility to contribute to the development of the Makran region,” he said.

In 2024, IRISL handled 86,000 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) containers through Chabahar, positioning it as the country’s second-largest container port. The company increased container traffic at the port from 6,000 TEUs in 2022 to 90,000 TEUs in 2024 and plans to further expand operations.



Khiabani emphasized the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz—one of the world’s eight main maritime choke points—and said this has enabled the company to operate feeder services within the Persian Gulf.

He also noted that IRISL maintains offices in key international markets, including Europe, Russia, China, and India. The company aims to play a pivotal role in the North-South Transport Corridor, contingent on collaboration with other national and governmental entities.

In the Caspian region, IRISL manages the Russian port of Astrakhan, which has faced sanctions in recent years but remains one of the most active ports in Russia’s Caspian sector.

Khiabani acknowledged the need to modernize the fleet, which currently has an average age of 20 years, and expressed the goal of reducing that figure to under 10 years. He said necessary permits have been obtained to access bank loans and National Development Fund resources.

Despite receiving approval for a \$1 billion loan last year, no funds have been disbursed yet. IRISL currently has \$542 million in outstanding loans and repays \$106 million annually to its creditor banks, he noted.

As part of its social responsibility initiatives, IRISL has built or renovated schools in port cities, believing that these efforts ultimately benefit shareholders.

Prior to the press conference, Khiabani participated in a ceremony marking the beginning of the trading session at the Tehran Stock Exchange, commemorating the 17th anniversary of IRISL’s listing as Iran’s national fleet.

He reported that IRISL’s profits surged over 90% in the Iranian calendar year 1403 (March 2024–March 2025), rising from 100 trillion rials in 1402 to 190 trillion rials in 1403. He expressed optimism that this growth would continue in 1404 (March 2025–March 2026), despite global shipping market fluctuations.

Looking ahead, IRISL plans to hold an extraordinary shareholders meeting in June to seek approval from the Securities and Exchange Organization to raise its capital from 82.5 trillion rials to 116 trillion rials.

He added that the “Hekashti” stock symbol has performed well in the first two months of 1404, gaining 32%, signaling a positive trend for the rest of the year.

Khiabani concluded by announcing that, for the first time in 12 years, IRISL’s financial statements for 1403 have been deemed “acceptable” by the Supreme Audit Court of Iran, underscoring a new level of financial transparency and governance.

Fars Province Ready to Expand Economic Ties With Germany

TEHRAN - In a recent meeting held in Tehran, the President of the Shiraz Chamber of Commerce, Mohammad Sadegh Hamidian, met with Germany’s Ambassador to Iran, Markus Potzel, and emphasized the vast economic, cultural, and healthcare potential of Fars Province, calling for expanded private-sector cooperation between Iran and Germany.

According to the Shiraz Chamber’s public relations office, Hamidian highlighted that Fars Province, which accounts for 7% of Iran’s land area and 6% of its population, is a key center for agriculture, industry, mining, healthcare, and tourism.

He noted that agriculture makes up 17% of the province’s economy, placing it at the top of the economic sectors in the region. Agricultural processing industries also lead the province’s industrial sector, followed by non-metallic mineral industries. Fars ranks second nationally in ornamental stone production and fourth in mineral potential.

Hamidian emphasized the province’s strong medical capacity, particularly in liver transplants. “Shiraz is recognized as a global hub for liver transplants, with over 1,000 successful procedures annually,” he said. He also pointed to the province’s significant cultivation of medicinal plants—over 80,000 hectares certified—which offers opportunities for partnership with German pharmaceutical companies.

The chamber president recalled historical industrial ties between Fars and German companies in sectors such as cable manufacturing, electrical and electronic industries, and telecommunications. However, he lamented that these partnerships have diminished due to sanctions, resulting in higher costs from indirect trade routes through third countries.

“Despite these challenges, German companies remain key buyers of Fars products such as licorice extract and powder, and continue to supply raw materials to many of our pharmaceutical firms,” Hamidian stated.

He urged for a revitalization of direct economic relations independent of political tensions, encouraging increased exchanges between businesspeople from both countries. Hamidian also invited Ambassador Potzel to allocate more time during his next visit to Fars to tour production facilities, farms, and research centers to help pave the way for broader cooperation.



German Ambassador Markus Potzel, visiting Fars Province, echoed Hamidian’s sentiments and expressed optimism that political de-escalation could unlock new economic opportunities. He praised Shiraz’s advancements in tourism infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, and food industries.

“During my previous tenure as head of the economic section at the German Embassy in Tehran from 2000 to 2004, I witnessed the early stages of development. I’m now pleased to see significant progress across multiple sectors,” he said.

Potzel noted that current trade between Iran and Germany stands at around €1.5 billion, largely focused on pharmaceuticals and food products. However, he acknowledged that banking restrictions and sanctions remain serious obstacles.

Referring to the nuclear deal (JCPOA), the ambassador said that after its signing, many European companies re-entered the Iranian market. “We hope ongoing negotiations will lead to a breakthrough, enabling the private sectors of both countries to re-engage,” he added.

While stressing that economics cannot be entirely separated from politics, Potzel remarked, “Sanctions have complicated economic engagement. We’re working to ease some of these restrictions through dialogue with Iranian officials, but it requires time and political will on both sides.”

Highlighting Iran’s rich tourism potential, particularly in Shiraz, the ambassador said he visited key historical sites including Persepolis, Pasargadae, and the tombs of Hafez and Saadi. He commended the city’s progress in cultural heritage preservation and tourism development.

Regarding concerns about German nationals traveling to Iran, Potzel acknowledged existing travel warnings but noted that German tourists still visit the country. “We hope for improved safety conditions that will encourage more visitors,” he said.

In conclusion, Potzel voiced cautious optimism about improved political and economic relations, noting a more positive approach toward Iran under Germany’s new administration. He also pointed to the large and successful Iranian diaspora in Germany, particularly in medicine, law, and business, as a valuable bridge for future cooperation.

Iran Requires 120 Trillion Rials to Complete 26 Museums Under Construction



TEHRAN - The Deputy Minister and Acting Head of Iran’s Cultural Heritage Ministry announced on Sunday that over 120 trillion rials (approximately \$240m) is needed to complete 26 museums currently under construction across the country.

Speaking at a ceremony marking International Museum Day, held at the National Museum of Iran, Ali Darabi emphasized the critical role of private sector participation in overcoming the budget shortfall. “We currently lack the necessary funding to finish the construction of these museums. This is where the private sector can step in and support cultural development,” he said.

Darabi highlighted Iran’s rich cultural and historical heritage, describing the country as a “vast open-air museum.” He also noted that under Iran’s Seventh Development Plan, the total number of museums is expected to increase from 800 to 1,000.

The Deputy Minister also announced that Iran’s National Cultural Heritage Document is in the final stages of approval and will soon be ratified by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. Additionally, initiatives are underway to integrate cultural heritage topics into school curricula and to introduce heritage studies at the university level.

Addressing the audience, Darabi stressed the need to improve public awareness and education regarding cultural heritage, especially among younger generations. “Museum professionals must go beyond simply attracting visitors—they must also rethink how they narrate history to align with today’s realities,” he said.

He described museums as cultural gathering spaces and guardians of national identity, playing a vital role in resilience and sustainable development. Darabi pointed out ongoing challenges in education and training within the sector. “Despite organizing workshops with top instructors, attendance remains low. We welcome feedback and are open to making improvements,” he added.

Iran Expresses Readiness to Boost Trade Facilitation With Asia-Pacific



TEHRAN - The head of Iran’s Customs Administration has declared the country’s readiness to actively participate in enhancing trade facilitation, digital transformation, and information sharing with countries across the Asia-Pacific region.

According to ISNA, citing the Customs Administration, Faroud Asgari, Deputy Minister of Economy and Director General of Iran Customs, made the announcement during the 26th Annual Conference of Customs Directors from the Asia-Pacific region held in Hong Kong.

“This conference provides a crucial platform for collaboration and progress,” Asgari said, emphasizing that the 2025 theme of the World Customs Organization (WCO)—“Customs Engaged in Fulfilling its Commitment to Efficiency, Security, and Prosperity”—aligns well with the shared mission of participating nations.

He noted that in a rapidly evolving landscape shaped by globalization and dynamic trade developments, customs administrations must fully uphold their commitments to facilitating legal trade, ensuring border security, and fostering economic prosperity.

“Iran is prepared to strengthen regional cooperation and take an active role in initiatives that promote trade facilitation, digital transformation, and information sharing,” Asgari stated. “Through joint efforts, we can streamline customs processes, combat illicit trade, and reinforce supply chain security—allowing our economies to thrive while safeguarding our communities.”

Asgari underscored the importance of the conference as a valuable opportunity to align strategies with WCO objectives, exchange best practices, and build partnerships that will shape the future of customs operations.

He invited fellow customs leaders to engage in constructive dialogue and explore innovative solutions aimed at boosting regional efficiency and resilience.

“With cooperation,” Asgari concluded, “we can build a more connected, secure, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region.”

Biden Diagnosed With Aggressive Prostate Cancer

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Former U.S. President Joe Biden has been diagnosed with an “aggressive form” of prostate cancer that has spread to his bones, his office said in a statement on Sunday.

Biden, 82, was diagnosed on Friday after experiencing urinary symptoms, and he and his family are reviewing treatment options with doctors, according to the statement.

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Centrist Dan Wins Romanian Presidency Over Hard-Right Pro-Trump Rival



BUCHAREST (Dispatches) - Romania's centrist Bucharest mayor, Nicușor Dan, won the country's presidential election in a shock upset over a hard-right, nationalist rival who had pledged to put Romania on a path inspired by U.S. President Donald Trump's politics.

Official results from nearly all voting stations showed Dan garnering about 54% of ballots cast by voters in the EU and NATO member country of about 19 million people, while Trump supporter George Simion was at 46%.

Dan, 55, a soft-spoken mathematician, made a last-minute dash to the top in recent days after weeks of trailing Simion, a eurosceptic wanting to end military aid for Ukraine in its war with Russia. The election drew the highest percentage of voter turnout in a Romanian election in 25 years.

Simion, who was the top vote-getter in the first round of the election two weeks ago with 41% of ballots cast, conceded after earlier saying he won the election.

Dan had campaigned on a pledge to fight rampant corruption, to maintain support for Ukraine - where Romania has played an important logistic role - and to keep the country firmly within the European mainstream.

On Sunday evening in the capital Bucharest, Dan supporters chanted “Russia, don't forget, Romania isn't yours.” Staunchly pro-EU and NATO, Dan said in the run-up to the election that Romania's support for Ukraine was crucial for its own security against a growing Russian threat.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy congratulated Dan on his “historic victory,” writing on social media: “For Ukraine - as a neighbour and friend - it is important to have Romania as a reliable partner.”

Pro-EU Candidate Narrowly Ahead in First Round of Poland's Presidential Election



WARSAW (Dispatches) - Poland's presidential election looked to be on a knife edge on Sunday, after Rafal Trzaskowski from Poland's ruling centrists Civic Coalition (KO) was seen narrowly ahead in the first round, setting up a close fight over Poland's pro-European path.

Trzaskowski placed first with 30.8% of the vote, ahead of Karol Nawrocki, the candidate backed by the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party, who had 29.1%, according to an Ipsos exit poll.

If confirmed, the result would mean that Trzaskowski and bNawrocki will go head-to-head in a runoff vote on June 1 to determine whether Poland sticks to the pro-European path set by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk or moves closer to nationalist admirers of US President Donald Trump.

“We are going for victory. I said that it would be close and it is close,” Trzaskowski told supporters. “There is a lot, a lot, of work ahead of us and we need determination.”

Nawrocki also told supporters he was confident of victory in the second round and called on supporters of far-right candidates to get behind him to “save Poland.”

Far-right candidates Slawomir Mentzen and Grzegorz Braun scored almost 22% combined, a historically high score.

Pope Leo Urges Unity for Divided Church, Vows Not to Be Autocrat

VATICAN CITY (Dispatches) - Pope Leo XIV formally began his reign by reaching out to conservatives who felt orphaned under his predecessor, calling for unity, vowing to preserve the Catholic Church's heritage and not rule like “an autocrat”.

After a first ride in the popemobile through an estimated crowd of up to 200,000 in St. Peter's Square and surrounding streets, Leo was officially installed as the 267th pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church at an outdoor Mass.

Well-wishers waved U.S. and Peruvian flags, with people from both countries claiming him as the first pope from their nations. Bom in Chicago, the 69-year-old pontiff spent many years as a missionary in Peru and also has Peruvian citizenship.

Robert Prevost, a relative unknown on the world stage who only became a cardinal two years ago, was elected pope on May 8 after a short conclave of cardinals that lasted barely 24 hours.

He succeeded Francis, an Argentine, who died on April 21 after leading the Church for 12 often turbulent years during which he battled with traditionalists and championed the poor and marginalised.

In his sermon, read in fluent Italian, Leo said that as leader of the world's 1.4 billion Roman Catholics, he would continue Francis' legacy on social issues such as combating poverty and protecting the environment.

He vowed to face up to “the questions, concerns and challenges of today's world” and, in a nod to conservatives, he promised to preserve “the rich heritage of the Christian faith”, repeatedly calling for unity.

Crowds chanted “Viva il Papa” (Long Live the Pope) and “Papa Leone”, his name in Italian, as he waved from the open-topped popemobile ahead of his inaugural Mass, which was attended by dozens of world leaders.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert who clashed with Francis over the White House's headline immigration policies, led a U.S. delegation alongside Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who is also Catholic.



him of sowing confusion, particularly with his extemporaneous remarks on issues of sexual morality such as same-sex unions.

Saying he was taking up his mission “with fear and trembling”, Leo used the words “unity” or “united” seven times on Sunday and the word “harmony” four times.

“It is never a question of capturing others by force, by religious propaganda or by means of power. Instead, it is always and only a question of loving, as Jesus did,” he said, in apparent reference to a war of words between Catholics who define themselves as conservative or progressive.

Vance briefly shook hands with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the start of the ceremony. The two men last met in February in the White House, when they clashed fiercely in front of the world's media.

Zelenskyy and Leo were to have a private meeting later on Sunday, while Vance was expected to see the pope on Monday.

In a brief appeal at the end of the Mass, Leo addressed several global conflicts. He said Ukraine was being “martyred”, a phrase often used by Francis, and called for a “just and lasting peace” there.

He also mentioned the humanitarian situation in Gaza, saying people in the Palestinian enclave were being “reduced to starvation”.

Among those in the crowds on Sunday were many pilgrims from the U.S. and Peru.

Dominic Venditti, from Seattle, said he was “extremely excited” by the new pope. “I like how emotional and kind he is,” he said. “I love his background.”

Since becoming pope, Leo has already signalled some key priorities for his papacy, including a warning about the dangers posed by artificial intelligence and the importance of bringing peace to the world and to the Church itself.

Francis' papacy left a divided Church, with conservatives accusing

Israel Begins Extensive Ground Operation in Gaza After Devastating Air Strikes

GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - Israel launched “extensive” new ground operations in the Gaza Strip on Sunday after Israeli air strikes across the enclave killed at least 103 people overnight. Hamas claimed responsibility for two projectiles identified near Kissufim, Israel, that launched shortly after the ground offensive began. Indirect talks between Israel and Hamas continued in Doha.

The Israeli army announced “extensive ground operations” Sunday as part of its newly expanded campaign in the Gaza Strip, where rescuers reported dozens killed in a wave of Israeli strikes.

The announcement came just hours after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signalled Israel was open to a deal with Hamas that involved “ending the fighting” in the besieged Palestinian territory.

And since March 2, Israel has blocked the entry of humanitarian aid, vital to the 2.4 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu's office nevertheless indicated Sunday evening that Israel would allow the entry of “a basic quantity of food intended for the population, in order to prevent the spread of famine in the Gaza Strip.”

Such a crisis would jeopardise the army's new operation, it said, adding Israel would “act to prevent Hamas from seizing this humanitarian aid”.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot called on Israel following the latest announcement, to allow the “immediate, massive and unhampered” resumption of aid.

Israel says its ramped-up campaign aims to free hostages and defeat Hamas, but as the early operation's stages got underway Saturday, Israel and the group were entering indirect talks in Qatar aimed at hammering out a deal.

In a statement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said that “the negotiation team in Doha is working to



exhaust every possibility for a deal – whether according to the Witkoff framework or as part of ending the fighting”, referring to US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, who has been involved in previous discussions.

Such a deal, according to Netanyahu's statement, “would include the release of all the hostages, the exile of Hamas terrorists, and the disarmament of the Gaza Strip”.

Ever since a two-month ceasefire fell apart in March as Israel resumed its offensive, negotiations mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States have failed to reach a breakthrough.

Netanyahu has opposed ending the war without Hamas's total defeat, while Hamas has balked at the prospect of handing over its weapons.

Senior Hamas official Taher al-Nunu said on Saturday that the talks in Doha had kicked off “without any preconditions from either side”.

A Hamas source familiar with the negotiations said that “Egyptian and Qatari mediators, along with the American side, are making efforts to bridge the gaps on the disputed issues”.

On the ground, civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP that at least 50 people had been killed Sunday “as a result of ongoing Israeli air strikes since the early hours”.

He said 22 people were killed and at least 100 others wounded in a predawn attack on tents sheltering displaced Palestinians in Al-Mawasi, in the southern Gaza Strip.

AFPTV footage showed people sifting through what was left of ruined shelters and rescuers treating the wounded.

“All my family members are gone. There is no one left,” said a distraught Warda al-Shaer standing amid the wreckage.

“The children were killed as well as their parents. My mother died too, and my niece lost her eye.”

There was no immediate comment on the strikes from the Israeli military.

Russia Launches War's Largest Drone Attack Ahead of Putin-Trump Call

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia launched its largest drone attack on Ukraine since the start of the war, destroying homes and killing at least one woman a day before U.S. President Donald Trump is due to discuss a proposed ceasefire with Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Ukraine's intelligence service said it also believed Moscow intended to fire an intercontinental ballistic missile later on Sunday as an attempt to intimidate the West. There was no immediate response from Moscow to the accusation.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, straining to restore ties with Washington after a disastrous February White House visit, met Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Rome on Sunday on the sidelines of Pope Leo's inauguration.

Zelenskyy said the meeting was “good” and released pictures of Ukrainian and U.S. officials sitting outside at a round table and smiling. Ukrainian media said the meeting lasted 40 minutes.

“I reaffirmed that Ukraine is ready to be engaged in real diplomacy and underscored the importance of a full and unconditional ceasefire as soon as possible,” said Zelenskyy, who also met the new pope.

Ukraine and Russia held their first face-to-face talks in more than three years on Friday, under pressure from Trump to agree to a ceasefire in a war he has pledged to



bring to a quick end. The foes agreed to swap 1,000 prisoners each but failed to agree a truce, after Moscow presented conditions that a member of Ukraine's delegation called “non-starters”.

The leaders of Britain, France, Germany and Poland planned to speak to Trump before the U.S. and Russian presidents speak on Monday, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said. The four European leaders jointly visited Kyiv last week and have been calling for Trump to back new sanctions on Russia.

Asked if it was time to impose tougher sanctions on Russia, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that was up to Trump.

“I think we will see what happens when both sides get to the table,” he told NBC News' “Meet the Press” program.

“President Trump has made it very clear, that if President Putin does not negotiate in good faith, that the United States will not hesitate to up the Russia sanctions along with our European partners.”

After a night of air alerts, Ukraine's air force said that as of 8 a.m. on Sunday Russia had launched 273 drones at Ukrainian cities, more than the previous record Moscow had set in February on the war's third anniversary.

Verstappen Wins at Imola in Red Bull's 400th Race



IMOLA (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen took a dominant victory at Imola to celebrate Red Bull's 400th grand prix and end Formula One leader Oscar Piastri's run of three wins in a row for McLaren.

Australian Piastri started on pole but finished third, overtaken at the start around the outside in a brilliant move by Verstappen and then passed by teammate Lando Norris on fresher tyres seven laps from the end. Piastri's championship lead over Norris was trimmed from 16 points to 13 after seven rounds.

The victory was Verstappen's 65th, second of the season and the four-times world champion's fourth in a row at the Italian circuit near Bologna after 2021, 2022 and 2024. There was no race in 2023 due to flooding.

"The start itself wasn't particularly great but I was still on the outside line, the normal line, so I was like 'well I'm going to try and send it around the outside' and it worked really well," said the Dutch driver.

"Of course, that unleashed our pace because when we were in the lead, the car was good. I could look after my tyres."

Team boss Christian Horner described Verstappen's attitude as "win it or bin it".

Piastri had started the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix as favourite for a fourth win in a row, and fifth in seven races but events went against him.

A virtual safety car, triggered by Esteban Ocon stopping his Haas halfway through the race, came after his first early pitstop.

"It's never a great day when you start first and finish third," said Piastri, who felt he had opened the door to Verstappen by braking too early.

"You're going to have tough days in the championship, and this is clearly one of them. So as long as we learn the lessons, that's all I can ask."

A later safety car after Mercedes rookie Kimi Antonelli's home debut ended by the side of the track, bunched up the field again with Verstappen and Norris stopping for fresh tyres and Piastri staying out.

Verstappen, now only nine points behind Norris, was never in any real danger when the safety car returned to the pits and he took the chequered flag 6.109 seconds clear of the Briton.

"We had a good little battle at the end between Oscar and myself which was tense, but always good fun," said Norris, who confirmed there had been no team orders for Piastri to cede position.

"A good race. For us as a team, second and third is great. Of course you would love to be up there fighting against Max but they were too good for us today."

Seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton finished a surprising fourth in his first race in Italy for Ferrari after starting 12th following a qualifying nightmare and then making the tyre strategy work for him.

The 40-year-old, winner of the Shanghai sprint, passed teammate Charles Leclerc and was closing on Piastri as he scored his best result so far this season in a regular grand prix.

"I've always loved when you're fighting from further back and coming through," he said. "That's always such a better feeling than starting first and finishing first."

Alex Albon was fifth for Williams with Leclerc sixth after having to hand back the place for forcing the Thai off the track.

George Russell started third but ended up seventh while Carlos Sainz was eighth for resurgent Williams. Racing Bulls rookie Isack Hadjar was ninth and Verstappen's teammate Yuki Tsunoda took the final point for Red Bull after starting in the pit lane following a big crash in Saturday's qualifying.

Argentine rookie Franco Colapinto, making his Alpine debut after replacing dropped Australian Jack Doohan, started and finished 16th.

Aston Martin's promise, after Fernando Alonso qualified fifth, faded as the safety cars played havoc with the team's strategy.

"I'm the unluckiest driver in the world," said the 43-year-old double world champion, who has yet to score this season and finished 11th.

No Mercy for Sinner as Alcaraz Storms to Italian Open Title

ROME (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz had little trouble dismantling Jannik Sinner in the Italian Open final, sealing a 7-6(5) 6-1 victory to snap the world number one's 26-match winning streak and break the hearts of the home crowd.

Alcaraz edged a tense opening set in a tiebreak after he and Sinner traded blows from the baseline on a warm evening in front of a packed Centre Court crowd.

However, from the second set onwards, Alcaraz silenced the home crowd as he completely outplayed Sinner, cruising to victory in their first-ever clash in a Masters 1000 final.

"I'm proud of myself, with the way I approached the match mentally. Tactically, I think I played pretty well from the first point until the last one," Alcaraz said in an on-court interview.

"I'm just really happy to get my first Rome (title), hopefully it's not going to be the last one."

For Sinner, it was particularly disappointing that he could not make it a double celebration for Italy after



compatriot Jasmine Paolini won the women's title a day earlier.

Sinner was playing his first tournament since winning the Australian Open in January and was hoping to become the first Italian man to triumph in Rome since Adriano Panatta in 1976, but he had to settle for second best.

Sinner, who was making his comeback this week after serving a three-month doping ban, thanked his family for their support.

"After three months coming here making this result means a lot to me, a lot to my team also. We worked a lot to be here. Happy also with my family and everything," he said.

"A special thank you to my brother, who, rather than being here, is in Imola to watch Formula 1," he concluded to the laughter of the crowd.

The Spaniard Alcaraz has now beaten Sinner in their last four meetings, firing a warning shot to his rivals ahead of the upcoming French Open where he is set to defend his title.

"Beating Jannik, winning Rome. Both things mix together and give (me) great confidence going to Paris," Alcaraz said.

Rice Thunderbolt Fires Arsenal Into Champions League Slot

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal booked their place in the Champions League as Declan Rice's thunderbolt sealed a 1-0 win against top five rivals Newcastle.

Rice's brilliant second half strike at the Emirates Stadium guaranteed Arsenal will compete in Europe's elite club competition next season.

Mikel Arteta's side ended a five-game winless streak to avoid a nervous last day of the season next weekend, with the battle for top five places no longer a concern for the Gunners.

Second-placed Arsenal are likely to finish as Premier League runners-up for a third successive season after failing to keep pace with champions Liverpool.

The north Londoners, who lost in the Champions League semi-finals against Paris Saint-Germain, have now gone five years without



a trophy.

Despite another season of frustration for Arsenal, they still look the most likely challengers for Liverpool's crown next term.

In a pointed message to Arsenal's transfer chiefs after their failure to sign a striker in January, Arteta said: "Finish the season, go to the beach and make sure the ones upstairs do what they have to do.

"Our dream needs to not get blurry. What we have done to sustain the level this season with everything that has happened (with injuries) is incredible."

Third-placed Newcastle are above fourth-placed Chelsea and fifth-placed Aston Villa on goal difference.

Sixth-placed Manchester City would go above Eddie Howe's team if they avoid defeat in their game in hand at home to Bournemouth on Tuesday.

Thunder Run Away From Nuggets in Game 7, Reach Western Finals



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 125-93 home win over the Denver Nuggets in Game 7 of their Western Conference second-round series.

The Thunder advanced to the Western Conference Finals for the first time since 2016. Oklahoma City opens the conference finals against the Minnesota Timberwolves at home Tuesday.

After scoring just six points in Thursday's loss, Thunder All-Star Jalen Williams bounced back in a big way, pouring in 24 points on 10-of-17 shooting. Gilgeous-Alexander was 12 of 19 from the floor with three steals and no turnovers.

"He (Williams) was amazing," said Gilgeous-Alexander. "He wouldn't have played the way he played today last year, I know that 100 percent. To see him take that step forward is a really proud moment."

Early on, it looked like the Nuggets were carrying over the momentum from their Game 6 win. Denver led by double digits with a minute left in the first quarter before the Thunder ripped off a 13-0 run spanning the first and second quarters to take the lead for the first time.

The Thunder grabbed the lead for good on Luguentz Dort's 3-pointer with 7:20 left in the first half. Oklahoma City closed the first half on an 18-5 run, including back-to-back Denver turnovers that led to Williams buckets at the other end and helped the Thunder build a 60-46 lead at halftime.

Then the Thunder put the game on ice with a 37-point third quarter, with 10 of those points coming off the Nuggets' five turnovers. Oklahoma City led by as many as 43 points in the fourth quarter.

Denver was also 3 of 14 from beyond the arc in the third quarter and finished the game just 10 of 45 on 3-pointers.

"To have the start we wanted and then to have it go sideways so quickly (was tough)," said Nuggets' interim coach David Adelman. "I thought we controlled the pace of the game early, it's easy to forget that now. ... Once they got back into it, they kept bringing new people in and it did overwhelm us."

Scheffler Pulls Away Late for Runaway PGA Championship Victory



CHARLOTTE (Dispatches) - Scottie Scheffler was put to the test at the PGA Championship but stood tall in the face of adversity as he corrected swing issues in time to hold off a spirited effort by Spaniard Jon Rahm for a runaway victory and third career major title.

Scheffler began the day with a seemingly comfortable three-shot lead but what many felt was an inevitable victory turned into a back-nine tussle as the world number one golfer struggled off the tee early and Rahm mounted a charge.

But like a true champion, the unflappable Scheffler did not panic and found his stride on the homeward stretch while Rahm, playing two groups ahead, endured a stunning collapse that robbed the final holes of any drama.

"Finishing off a major championship is always difficult, and I did a good job of staying patient on the front nine," said Scheffler.

"I didn't have my best stuff, but I kept myself in it, and I stepped up on the back nine and had a really good nine holes. That's about it."

Scheffler made two key birdies midway through the back nine to regain control just as Rahm was falling apart and went on to card an even-par 71 that left him at 11 under on the week at the year's second major.

His five-stroke win is the largest at the PGA Championship since Rory McIlroy won by eight in 2012.

Ryder Cup hopeful Harris English, who began his day 11 shots adrift, shot a 65 that was the low round of the day and finished in a distant share of second place alongside fellow Americans Bryson DeChambeau (70) and Davis Riley (72).

Twice major champion Rahm (73) gave Scheffler a scare early on the back nine but came apart in stunning fashion with five dropped shots over his final three holes to slide back into a share of eighth place.