

Turkmenistan Seeks to Increase the Volume of Natural Gas It Transits to Other Countries Via Iran Amid Efforts by the Central Asian State to Use Growing Relations With Iran as an Opportunity to Expand Its Energy Exports.

# IRAN NEWS

Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran Stated That Unilateral Sanctions Are Contrary to the Charter of International Law, Emphasizing That Such Sanctions in Fact Destroy National Economies and Cause Irreparable Harm to the Livelihoods of Ordinary People

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## Iran Will Not Seek Permission for Progress



TEHRAN – President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that the Islamic Republic will never submit to coercion and does not seek permission from anyone for the growth and progress of its people. His comments came during a meeting in Tehran with Fuad Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Iraq.

Referring to ongoing indirect talks between Iran and the United States, Pezeshkian stated, “If the U.S. government is sincere in its claim that it is concerned about the potential development of nuclear weapons in Iran, we will provide the necessary assurances. However, Iran will never succumb to pressure. We will not deprive our people of the peaceful benefits of nuclear technology in health, medicine, agriculture, and industry.”

The President firmly reiterated, “We do not take orders or seek approval from anyone to ensure the development of our nation.”

During the meeting, Pezeshkian highlighted the long-standing historical and cultural ties between Iran and Iraq, noting that the relations between the two nations are deeply rooted in centuries of shared heritage. “Ethnic, linguistic, and cultural commonalities reflect unbreakable bonds that continue to strengthen our bilateral ties,” he said.

He pointed to the broad potential for cooperation across various sectors such as trade, healthcare, industry, science and technology, and academic collaboration. Expanding these interactions, he said, would bring significant and mutual benefits to both countries.

## Iran Proposes AI Collaboration at Meeting of Science Ministers From Islamic Countries



TEHRAN - The Deputy for International Affairs at the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC) has announced that Iran played a pivotal role in presenting proposals during the Second Conference of Ministers of Higher Education of Islamic Countries, particularly in the fields of joint platforms, knowledge transfer, and youth engagement in artificial intelligence (AI).

Mohammadreza Falahati explained that global science and technology policy is often shaped at high-level forums such as the annual Science and Technology in Society (STS) Forum in Kyoto, Japan, which includes participation from prime ministers, presidents, ministers, scientists, NGOs, and various institutions. Inspired by such global efforts, recent years have seen the Islamic world move to hold similar gatherings on emerging technologies like AI.

Falahati emphasized that AI is increasingly being applied in education, drought mitigation, water conservation, air pollution control, and renewable energy. He said the recent ministerial meeting aimed to foster cooperation across these domains, with Iran’s contributions focusing on coordinated action in the Islamic world.

He highlighted that the meeting’s resolutions will serve as a framework for future collaborations among Islamic countries, and outlined several key objectives, including: Clarifying the permissible uses of AI; Defining national and regional priorities; Exploring inclusive AI strategies tailored to the needs of Islamic nations; and proposing cost-sharing structures to ensure sustainable development and avoid duplication of efforts.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



## Leader Expresses Doubt Over U.S. Talks at Memorial for Late President Raisi

TEHRAN - In a solemn memorial ceremony held for the late President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi and other officials killed in recent service-related incidents, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei addressed the nation, emphasizing the legacy of Raisi and voicing serious skepticism over the ongoing indirect negotiations with the United States.

The event took place at the Imam Khomeini Hosseiniyeh in Tehran and was attended by families of the deceased and various Iranian officials. Raisi and his colleagues were honored as “martyrs of service” in what has become a moment of national reflection on leadership and the future direction of the Islamic Republic.

During his speech, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the character of President Raisi, describing him as a leader of exceptional humility and relentless dedication. “He did not see himself above the people,” Khamenei said. “He placed himself among them — even below them.”

Highlighting Raisi’s commitment to principled governance, the Supreme Leader recalled the former president’s clear stance on foreign policy. “In his very first interview as president, when asked whether he would negotiate with the United States, he responded with an unequivocal ‘No.’” According to Khamenei, Raisi’s firm refusal prevented adversaries from claiming they had coerced or deceived Iran into negotiations.

Ayatollah Khamenei noted that while indirect talks with the United States did occur during Raisi’s tenure, they did not yield any results — a trend he believes continues today. “We do not think these negotiations will lead anywhere,” he stated bluntly. “We do not know what will happen, but we are not optimistic.”

The Leader also issued a direct warning to the U.S. side engaged in current indirect talks. “They should refrain from making foolish statements,” he cautioned. He criticized American assertions that they would not allow Iran to enrich uranium, calling such statements “outrageously wrong.” “The Islamic Republic does not wait for permission from anyone,” he declared. “We have our own policies and will pursue them independently.”

Ayatollah Khamenei hinted at a future address where he would elaborate on why Western

powers, particularly the U.S., are so intent on halting Iran’s uranium enrichment. “I will explain this to the Iranian nation at an appropriate time, so they understand the real intentions of the other side,” he said.

The Leader also drew comparisons between the spirit of the current generation of Iranian officials and that of early post-revolutionary figures such as Mohammad Javad Bahonar, Mostafa Chamran, and Mohammad Ali Rajai, suggesting that the revolutionary fervor remains alive decades after 1979. “This same brightness, this same spirit, this same sense of responsibility — we see it today,” Khamenei said. “That is the strength of the revolution.”

In a symbolic gesture, Ayatollah Khamenei listed the hometowns and backgrounds of several of the fallen officials, portraying them as products of the Islamic Revolution’s values. From Raisi in Mashhad to Amir-Abdollahian in Damghan, these individuals were described as having risen from various corners of Iran to serve the nation.

He pointed to the broader transformative impact of the revolution, claiming it has produced “hundreds of thousands” of young, devoted individuals. Some, he said, have become figures of national and international prominence. “This is the revolution’s true triumph: raising competent, selfless men and women who serve their country.”

Ayatollah Khamenei further emphasized the intergenerational nature of Iran’s revolutionary legacy. “This revolution has the unique ability to bring together a 90-year-old martyr like Ayatollah Ashrafi and a young martyr like Arman Aliwardi, just 18 or 19 years old,” he said. “Despite a 70-year age gap, they stood on the same front.”

He concluded by asserting that such strength and unity render the Islamic Revolution indomitable. “This revolution, which can continue to mobilize such forces over so many years, is not one that can be defeated.”

The Supreme Leader’s remarks come amid heightened speculation about Iran’s nuclear program, regional tensions, and the uncertain path of diplomatic engagement with the West.

## Majlis Speaker Calls for Overhaul of Investment Strategies



TEHRAN - In a public session of the Islamic Consultative Assembly on Monday, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf stressed the need to rethink both domestic and foreign investment strategies, urging swift and serious action to boost production and infrastructure financing.

During a review of a joint report from the Parliamentary Committees on Production Support and Oversight of Article 44 Implementation, Qalibaf highlighted the alarming number of incomplete projects across the country, warning that they continue to impose heavy costs on the national budget. “Unfortunately, we lack any major project with a defined timeline that starts and finishes as planned,” he said.

He emphasized the necessity of reforming investment approaches: “When we talk about the law on financing production and infrastructure, we must understand that this law has been under review and consideration across the 12th, 13th, and 14th governments. Over the past five years, both the 11th and 12th parliaments have worked to consolidate this legislation with the cooperation of these administrations.”

He pointed out that 2025 has been officially designated as the “Year of Investment for Production” and stressed the importance of implementing the related financing law accordingly. He also noted the vast amount of liquidity currently trapped within the banking system, which could be mobilized for productive investment.

“Capital flight doesn’t just mean money leaving the country,” Qalibaf stated. “When domestic capital remains immobilized or locked in financial institutions, it’s effectively withdrawn from the investment cycle.”

The Speaker noted that the new law introduces innovative financial tools and includes mechanisms for smart collateral and guarantees. “Asset monetization is one of the capacities that can drive this process forward,” he said, advocating for the adoption of modern financing methods that can facilitate investment.

Qalibaf also expressed concern that some of the law’s executive regulations have yet to be finalized. He urged the government to prioritize the formation and activation of the National Financing Council, which has been granted significant policymaking authority by Parliament. “This council holds the key to resolving many financial obstacles,” he added.

He further explained that the law aligns closely with the Seventh Development Plan and enables credit institutions and banks to allocate surplus assets to infrastructure and highway projects. “There are numerous infrastructure initiatives that can be unblocked by tapping into these resources,” he said.

Referring to Article 8 of the Seventh Development Plan, he reminded that banks are now legally required to increase their capital by divesting non-essential assets—a move he said would have a positive economic impact.

Lastly, he noted the important role of provincial governors, saying they often request more authority. “Under the current law, governors can independently define projects and attract investment,” he affirmed.

Qalibaf concluded by reiterating the need for the government to activate the Production Credit Financing Council and for Parliament to monitor implementation. “Only then can we take serious steps in the field of investment this year,” he said.

## Iran-U.S. Talks Promoting Peace, Stability in Region



TEHRAN (PressTV)- Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says indirect talks between Iran and the United States can play an “effective role” in promoting peace and stability in the region.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the final day of the two-day Tehran Dialogue Forum (TDF) on Monday, Araqchi said regional countries support Iran-U.S. negotiations and are even making efforts to clear up misunderstandings and bring the viewpoints closer together.

“The region’s tranquility and [the existence of] peace and stability there are the most important issues for all countries in the region,” he said.

He reiterated Iran’s insistence on the path of diplomacy and its great emphasis on good neighborliness through dialogue.

The talks between Iran and the U.S. began in early April under Oman’s mediation. They have held four rounds of indirect talks so far on Tehran’s nuclear program and the termination of sanctions.

Both sides have described their indirect meetings as generally positive. Araqchi also hailed “unprecedented” attendance by foreign intellectuals and officials in the forum, which showed Tehran enjoys the potentiality to become a center for the exchange of views on regional and international issues.

He said regional foreign ministers and high-ranking officials, a large number of deputy foreign ministers as well as a former president and former ministers attended the event.

The top Iranian negotiator said he exchanged views with the Omani and Qatari foreign ministers about the continuation of talks with the U.S.

Araqchi expressed gratitude that regional countries, particularly the Persian Gulf littoral states, have changed their view on Iran, an indication of which can be observed in their “positive” stance on Tehran-Washington negotiations.

Meanwhile Araqchi said the process of reestablishing relations with Bahrain and Egypt has begun.

## Top General Warns Enemies of Devastating Harms If Airspace Violated



TEHRAN (PressTV)- Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri has warned that any hostile move by enemies against the Islamic Republic, including violation of the country’s airspace, will cost them dearly.

Bagheri made the remarks after a high-profile meeting of the air defense units in the Iranian capital Tehran on Monday.

“The ill-wishers of the Iranian nation and enemies should know that any violation of our country’s airspace will inflict significant harms on them, and will expose them to the costs that are definitely much higher than the results they may expect,” Iran’s highest-ranking military commander stated.

He underscored dramatic progress that has been made in improving the air defense capabilities during the past year.

Bagheri highlighted that certain sections of the Air Defense units have experienced a fivefold increase in comparison with the preceding year as regards the number of radars, monitoring systems, and detection devices used for tracking hostile moves.

The top general stated that Air Defense capabilities in the fire control systems, interception, and detonation of intruding aerial targets have developed by two to three times in some cases.

He underlined that Iran’s airspace is being monitored constantly, and the Armed Forces are a hundred percent prepared to confront any act of aggression.

The Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces highlighted that Iranian Air Defense units control the country’s airspace round the clock, and prepare themselves for any possible scenario through frequent exercises and drills.





## Iran, Pakistan Not to Let Enemies Harm Regional Peace

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali-Akbar Ahmadian says Iran and its immediate neighbor, Pakistan, will not allow regional peace to become an enemy ploy.

During a phone call with his Pakistani counterpart, Mohammad Asim Malik, Ahmadian emphasized the importance of political, economic, and security cooperation between the two countries.

Praising the two neighbors' commitment to the security of their common borders and combating terrorism, he said Tehran-Islamabad cooperation benefit not only the two countries but the region as whole and that they will not allow regional peace to become an enemy ploy.

## Agricultural Exports a Pillar of Iran's Trade Development



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization emphasized that agricultural exports remain one of the main pillars of the country's economic development, playing a vital role in increasing national income, generating employment, and ensuring food security.

Mohammad-Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and the head of the organization, issued a statement on the occasion of the opening of the 32nd International Exhibition of Agricultural Industries, Food Products, Machinery, and Related Industries, currently being held at Tehran International Exhibition Center with the organization's authorization.

His message read: "Since the Islamic Revolution, agriculture has been a key focus in Iran's economic development plans. In the first national development plan, achieving self-sufficiency in agricultural production was a fundamental goal. Today, agriculture continues to play a critical role in economic growth. It is a cornerstone of economic resilience, a provider of raw materials for other sectors, and a guarantor of national food security. It also significantly contributes to the expansion of non-oil exports, value creation, job stability, and increased investment."

In recent years, agricultural exports have been among Iran's most lucrative non-oil exports. "Put simply," Dehnavi stated, "agricultural exports are a central pillar of Iran's economic development and vital to raising national income, creating jobs, and securing food supplies."

In the Iranian year 1403 (2024-2025), agricultural exports increased by 29%, reaching \$5.2 billion. Export volume during this period was 7.6 million tons, marking an 11% increase compared to the same timeframe the previous year.

Despite global market volatility and domestic economic challenges affecting national revenues, exports of products such as pistachios, saffron, dates, and vegetables have proven to be sustainable sources of foreign currency. Iran currently exports agricultural goods to countries including Iraq, Russia, Afghanistan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In 1403, the UAE, Spain, and China were the top three importers of Iranian saffron.

## Iran Expresses Readiness to Boost Trade Facilitation, Information Sharing With Asia-Pacific



TEHRAN - The Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced Iran's readiness to collaborate with Asia-Pacific countries in trade facilitation, digital transformation, and information sharing.

Faroud Asgari made the remarks at the 26th Annual Conference of Heads of Customs Administrations in the Asia-Pacific Region, held in Hong Kong.

"This conference offers a crucial platform for cooperation and progress," Asgari said. "The 2025 theme of the World Customs Organization—'Customs Engaged with Their Commitments for Efficiency, Security and Prosperity'—is well aligned with our shared mission."

He emphasized that in an era of rapid globalization and evolving trade dynamics, customs administrations must remain fully committed to facilitating lawful trade, ensuring border security, and promoting economic prosperity.

Asgari affirmed Iran's readiness to strengthen regional cooperation and actively participate in initiatives aimed at enhancing trade facilitation, driving digital transformation, and promoting information exchange.

"Through joint efforts, we can optimize customs procedures, combat illicit trade, and bolster supply chain security—all while protecting our societies and advancing our economies," he said.

He described the conference as a valuable opportunity to align strategies with World Customs Organization objectives, exchange best practices, and forge partnerships that will shape the future of customs operations.

Asgari also invited heads of member customs administrations to engage in constructive dialogue and explore innovative solutions to enhance efficiency and regional resilience.

The Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs concluded by stating, "Together, we can build a more connected, secure, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region."

# Tehran, Ashgabat Eye \$3b Trade Target by 2028

TEHRAN - Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, proposed the creation of a three-year roadmap to boost trade between Tehran and Ashgabat to \$3 billion by 2028.

Speaking at the 18th Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission held in Tehran, Sadegh noted that bilateral trade between the two countries reached \$600 million last year — an increase compared to the year before.

She emphasized that collaboration with Turkmenistan remains a top priority for Iran, highlighting the high-level meetings and joint commissions as evidence of both nations' commitment to strengthening economic ties.

Referencing the 17th Joint Commission held in Ashgabat in November 2023, Sadegh noted that the agreements made during that meeting have been effectively pursued and are progressing well.

Sadegh revealed that Iran and Turkmenistan have reached a strategic agreement in the field of transportation and transit. The two sides are aiming to transit 20 million tons of goods through their territories annually by 2028.

A breakdown of the transit goals includes: 6 million tons via rail; 7 million tons by road; 2.5 million tons through combined transport; and 500,000 tons by sea.

Daily rail exchanges at the Sarakhs and Incheh Borun borders — 400 and 100 wagons respectively — are also being implemented through joint efforts of both countries' railways.

In customs, both sides have made notable progress. They hold biannual meetings between customs officials and have signed a joint action plan starting in 2024 to deepen cooperation.

On the energy front, negotiations for a new gas deal have been ongoing. A key agreement was signed during the visit of Turkmenistan's National Leader, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, to Iran in September 2024. A separate agreement for gas transit to Turkey was also concluded.

Sadegh added that discussions have taken place regarding: Annual direct gas sales of 40 billion cubic meters; Construction of 125 kilometers of pipeline and two gas compressor stations in Turkmenistan by Iran; Gas payments and potential barter agreements; and electricity and Infrastructure



Progress in the electricity sector has been satisfactory, according to Sadegh. In December 2024, a contract was signed to extend Turkmenistan's electricity exports to Iran for six months in 2025. Another major agreement included the launch of the Mary-Sarakhs electricity transmission line.

During the 17th summit, the two countries set a target of \$3 billion in trade. Despite some hurdles, trade grew to \$600 million in 2024. To reach the \$3 billion goal, Sadegh proposed that experts from both nations jointly develop a strategic cooperation roadmap by 2028.

She also listed several recent initiatives to boost border trade: Virtual meetings on border commerce; A new MoU on cross-border trade; Easier visa issuance for businesspeople; Reopening of the Incheh Borun border crossing; Expansion of Turkmen stalls in Bajiran border market; Identification of potential new border crossings with North Khorasan province; and participation of Turkmen officials in Iran Expo and AgriFood exhibitions.

Sadegh announced the finalization of a draft sports cooperation agreement and welcomed Turkmenistan's proposal to establish a joint trade zone in the Sarakhs border area. She also suggested considering another trade zone in Lotfabad.

In technical and engineering services, she reported progress in involving Iranian firms in Turkmen infrastructure projects, including an agreement to build the Qamdaq-Atrak road near the border.

Technical committees will continue discussions on transportation, energy, customs, trade, investment, and banking over the next two days. The 18th commission meeting, co-chaired by Minister Sadegh and Turkmenistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov, will conclude with the signing of new agreements.

The commission, held from May 17 to 20, includes expert sessions to finalize new MoUs across sectors including oil and gas, petrochemicals, agriculture, entrepreneurship, environment, meteorology, tourism, and media. The final agreements will be signed during the closing ceremony on Tuesday, May 21.

# Iran and Russia Eye \$10b Trade Target Amid Strengthening Economic Ties

TEHRAN - During a high-level trade delegation to Russia, Samad Hasanazadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, announced that key infrastructure is being developed to issue certificates of origin for free trade with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). This move is part of a broader strategy to boost bilateral trade between Iran and Russia, with an ambitious target of reaching \$10 billion in trade over the next decade.

At a joint meeting in Moscow with Sergey Katyrin, President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Hasanazadeh emphasized the need to overcome financial obstacles, enhance transactions using national currencies, and create stable and reliable financial pathways to achieve a leap in bilateral trade.

Hasanazadeh outlined several strategic initiatives to support this vision, including: Utilizing the EAEU Free Trade Agreement effectively through harmonized customs procedures and resolving disputes related to certificates of origin; Banking facilitation through currency exchange reform and secure financial routes; Upgrading transport infrastructure, including modernization of rail and maritime fleets; Expanding economic diplomacy within multilateral frameworks such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); and streamlining visa issuance and removing bureaucratic trade barriers through the support of the Russian Chamber of Commerce.

Hasanazadeh also highlighted Iran's readiness to expand commercial cooperation through joint committees, investment funds, joint industrial and petrochemical projects, and agricultural development programs, stressing that success requires coordinated action from both governments and private sectors.

Ghadir Ghiyafeh, Vice President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, noted that while Iran-Russia relations have not reached their full potential, the current geopolitical climate presents new opportunities for growth. He underscored Iran's capabilities in various sectors and mentioned that some Iranian products even surpass their European counterparts in quality.

He pointed to successful exports such as steel and industrial catalysts used in Russian urea and ammonia plants. Ghiyafeh



emphasized the importance of professional engagement, continuous presence in trade events, and close relationships with Russian consumers to deepen commercial ties.

"Our target is to increase trade volume between Iran and Russia to \$10 billion over the next 10 years," he concluded.

Kazem Jalali, Iran's Ambassador to Russia, noted that with the recent enforcement of the EAEU Free Trade Agreement on May 15, political conditions are favorable for economic expansion. He also confirmed that several banking and logistics issues between the two countries are in the process of being resolved.

Jalali emphasized the key role of chambers of commerce and joint trade councils in bridging the knowledge gap between the private sectors of both nations. He proposed that the heads of Iran and Russia's chambers of commerce meet annually to maintain momentum.

Sergey Katyrin reported a 16% increase in trade volume between Iran and Russia over the past year, attributing it to active entrepreneurial efforts and regular bilateral exchanges. He affirmed his chamber's support for provincial-level trade development and welcomed the idea of easing visa issuance for Iranian traders.

Katyrin noted that his chamber is working closely with Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate trade and mobility for Iranian businesses.

Leonid Lozhchenko, Chairman of the Russia-Iran Business Council, confirmed that following the signing of a 20-year strategic agreement between the two nations, there has been a significant increase in joint activities—including 25 business meetings and over 3,000 B2B sessions involving Iranian traders. He stated that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have played a notable role in this expansion, with agriculture being a key sector of trade growth.

The meetings signal a renewed commitment to strengthening the economic alliance between Tehran and Moscow, fueled by long-term strategic cooperation and the shared goal of deeper integration within the Eurasian economic framework.

## AI to Reshape Governance and Human Communication



TEHRAN - Minister of Information and Communications Technology emphasized the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI) and communication in shaping the country's future, highlighting the need for AI regulation and content production aligned with Iranian identity as key pillars of digital governance.

Speaking on Monday at the "Communications at the Intersection of Culture and Technology" conference at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Minister Sattar Hashemi underscored trust, empathy, and decentralization as foundational outcomes of communication development.

"From the dawn of human civilization, communication has been essential to social and cultural evolution. Its influence today spans all aspects of life — from economy and politics to science and culture — making it central to human development," he said.

He stressed the necessity of synergy between technical and human sciences, warning that narrative gaps and information voids could undermine public trust — a crucial social asset. "Lack of timely and transparent communication fosters speculation and weakens trust in governance," the minister noted.

Highlighting the essential role of communication in fostering understanding, dialogue, and social cohesion — including intergenerational links — Hashemi said modern communication systems enable responsive governance. "Moving away from rigid, hierarchical structures toward more flexible and distributed governance models is key," he stated, citing technologies such as blockchain as examples of direct, intermediary-free communication.

The minister described the adoption of emerging technologies and AI as a profound societal shift. "Artificial intelligence is a fundamental change that is reshaping our lives, interactions, and lifestyles — especially through large language models (LLMs), which enhance digital communication by understanding human language."

## Iran Holds Just 2% Share of Global Exhibition Industry



TEHRAN - Iran currently holds only a 2% share in the global exhibition industry in terms of volume, according to Rahim Jalili, President of the Iranian Association of International Exhibitions. Speaking at a strategic meeting on Monday focused on the development of the exhibition sector and collaboration with governing bodies, Jalili said the global exhibition industry was valued at \$200 billion last year, while Iran's share was only \$400 million—less than 0.5% of the total.

Jalili revealed that there are 1,432 exhibition centers worldwide, while Iran operates just 35. Global exhibition centers hosted around 353 million visitors in the past year, compared to Iran's 9 million. Similarly, while the number of exhibitions held globally stood at 33,000, Iran hosted only 835.

The total usable exhibition space in Iran is around 280,000 square meters, with about 45,000 exhibitors participating annually, compared to 4.8 million globally. The industry employs over 6,000 individuals directly in Iran, with an estimated 160,000 indirect jobs linked to related sectors such as hospitality and transportation.

Jalili emphasized the significance of exhibitions for marketing, particularly for knowledge-based companies. "Out of approximately 10,000 knowledge-based firms in Iran, more than half actively participate in domestic exhibitions," he noted, calling exhibitions a vital marketing tool for such companies.

He stressed that addressing the disparity between Iran's volume and financial contribution in the global exhibition industry could create substantial opportunities for revenue generation and job creation. Bridging this gap would also benefit Iran's knowledge-based economy.

Jalili outlined several strategic initiatives, including transforming provincial exhibition centers into hubs for foreign trade, positioning the national exhibition association as the central authority, and encouraging infrastructure development by potentially entering the stock market. He noted that all provinces now host international exhibition sites—a dramatic expansion from the pre-revolution era when Tehran housed the country's sole exhibition center.



## Brazil Supreme Court Opens Landmark Coup Trial Against Bolsonaro

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Brazil's Supreme Court began on Monday hearing testimony from key witnesses in the landmark trial of former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, who is accused of trying to stage a coup.

Bolsonaro could face decades in prison if convicted of conspiring to cling to power after losing 2022 elections. More than 80 people -- including high-ranking military officers, former government ministers and police and intelligence officials -- are to testify in a preliminary trial phase expected to last at least two weeks.

Monday's hearings were conducted by Bolsonaro's arch-foe, Judge Alexandre de Moraes, by video link. Former army commander General Marco Antonio Freire Gomes was set to be questioned on Monday, with his former air force counterpart, Carlos de Almeida Baptista Junior, set to follow suit on Wednesday.



## Poland Fights Digital Interference Ahead of Final Round of Presidential Vote



WARSAW (Dispatches) - Poland will head towards a run-off presidential vote on June 1 pitting pro-EU Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski against nationalist historian Karol Nawrocki.

The initial round of elections yielded narrow results, with 31.36 percent of the vote going to Trzaskowski and Nawrocki garnering 29.54 percent. The stakes for the EU and NATO member are high -- and so is the level of disinformation and cyberattacks seen in the run-up to the election.

Fearing an onslaught of Russian-linked disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks during the elections, the NASK national security agency deployed a new initiative months before the vote to identify and eliminate the threats.

The "cyber umbrella" initiative, part of Poland's larger effort to spend over €2 billion on cybersecurity, allows members of the public to report misinformation and stay up to date on election-related information through an online platform.

But the initial round of presidential elections showed how difficult it is to weather the cyber storm in a volatile landscape characterised by widespread conspiracy theories and foreign interference.

"The Polish authorities are doing a good job, despite a very difficult political and geopolitical context," said Saman Nazari, a co-author of a risk assessment report ahead of the 2025 Polish presidential elections along with pro-democracy NGO Alliance4Europe, Debunk.org and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

As Russia's war in Ukraine drags on, false narratives abound online about Poland's role in the conflict. "We have encountered narratives about Polish soldiers already fighting in Ukraine, Poland giving away all its military resources away to Ukraine, and about Russia wanting peace and the West wanting war," said Wojtowicz.

## China Fully Respects Denmark's Sovereignty on Greenland



BEIJING (Reuters) - China fully respects Denmark's sovereignty and territorial integrity on the Greenland issue, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Danish counterpart on Monday, urging the European nation to reciprocate over China's own sovereignty concerns.

U.S. President Donald Trump has in recent months insisted that Washington should take over the strategically located, semi-autonomous Danish territory.

Beijing hopes Denmark will "continue to support China's legitimate position on issues concerning China's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Wang told Denmark's Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen in Beijing on Monday, according to a ministry statement.

The meeting took place after Beijing criticised Denmark for hosting former Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen last week, who met Danish lawmakers and gave a speech at a democracy summit in Copenhagen.

China claims democratically-governed Taiwan as its own territory. Taiwan's government rejects Beijing's sovereignty claim.

Ties between China and Denmark are challenged by the latter's informal relations with Taiwan and hit a low point in 2009 when the Dalai Lama visited Copenhagen.

But relations improved after Denmark accepted China's offer of two pandas as part of its so-called "panda diplomacy."

Both countries' cooperation has a large focus on green solutions, with Denmark's expertise in wind power and environmental solutions matching China's appetite for the green transition.

# Trump Claims Breakthrough in Ukraine Talks With Putin

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Donald Trump said Russia and Ukraine would "immediately" start peace talks after he spoke with Vladimir Putin on Monday, despite the Russian leader rebuffing the U.S. president's call for an unconditional truce.

Trump framed the two-hour conversation as a breakthrough as the Republican seeks an elusive deal to end the conflict that he promised on the campaign trail to solve within 24 hours.

But Putin struck a more reserved tone, saying he was ready to work with Kyiv on a memorandum towards ending the war Moscow launched in February 2022 but insisting on compromises on both sides.

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky, who has patched up relations with the US president after a blazing row in the Oval Office, urged Trump in a separate call not to make any decisions "without us."

Trump has pinned his hopes on ending the conflict on a personal bond with Putin, even as he shows growing frustration with the Kremlin leader's refusal to do a deal.

"I believe it went very well," Trump said on his Truth Social network after Monday's Putin call.

"Russia and Ukraine will immediately start negotiations toward a Ceasefire and, more importantly, an END to the War."

Trump later said he thought Putin was ready for a ceasefire.

"I believe he wants to stop," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. "If I thought President Putin didn't want to get this over with, I wouldn't even be talking about it."

Trump recently called for a 30-day unconditional ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia. Kyiv agreed, but Putin has so far held off on any such truce, sparking criticism from Western countries.

Putin was more circumspect about the Trump call, even as he appeared to give one of the most concrete signs yet of being ready to discuss a ceasefire.

"It was very informative and very open and overall, in my opinion, very useful," Putin told Russian media after the call.

He said that Russia would "propose and will be ready to work with the Ukrainian side on a memorandum on a possible



sanctions against Russia to be toughened if it does not agree to a ceasefire quickly after the Trump-Putin call.

But there were signs from Trump that he is more interested in resetting relations with Moscow than imposing sanctions.

He held out the carrot that Russia could do "largescale TRADE with the United States when this catastrophic 'bloodbath' is over."

On the ground, the Russian army continued its attacks.

Moscow claimed its forces had captured two villages in Ukraine's eastern Sumy and Donetsk regions. Russia also fired 112 drones on Ukraine overnight, 76 of which were repelled, the Ukrainian air force said.

future peace agreement defining a range of positions."

His comments left many details unclear, and he added that more "compromises" were still needed.

Trump has largely refrained from criticising Putin, amid a pivot to talks with Russia after his inauguration that alarmed Kyiv and Western allies.

He has also insisted that only a face-to-face meeting with Putin will be able to end the conflict -- although Putin rebuffed his suggestion to meet in Istanbul last week, where Russia and Ukraine held their first direct talks in more than three years.

But he has shown increasing signs of impatience amid suspicions that Putin is stalling.

Zelensky spoke to Trump both before and after the Putin call, urging the US president to toughen sanctions against Russia if it refused a ceasefire.

"I asked him not to make any decisions about Ukraine without us before his conversation with Putin," Zelensky told reporters.

Zelensky also ruled out withdrawing troops from parts of eastern and southern Ukraine under Kyiv's control, rejecting demands put forward by Russia for ending its invasion.

Trump spoke to a host of Western leaders after the Putin call, including European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen and the leaders of France, Germany, Italy and Finland.

Pope Leo XIV has meanwhile offered to host the Russia-Ukraine talks at the Vatican, according to both Trump and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

European nations meanwhile backed Kyiv's calls for Western

# Gaza Residents Reel as Israel PM Vows to Take Control of All of Gaza

GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - Israel said yesterday it would "take control" of the whole of Gaza as it intensified attacks across the territory, where aid trickled in for the first time in over two months after the easing of a total blockade.

With supply shipments blocked by Israel since March 2, the World Health Organization warned Gaza's "two million people are starving".

Israel, facing mounting criticism over the humanitarian crisis, announced it would let limited aid into Gaza and said the first five trucks entered Monday carrying supplies "including food for babies".

UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher said in a statement that nine trucks had been "cleared to enter... but it is a drop in the ocean of what is urgently needed".

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric, who was unable to confirm the number of trucks inside Gaza, said that "none of the aid has been picked up" at a designated zone as it was "already dark" and due to "security concerns, we cannot operate in those conditions".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said aid had resumed because "images of mass starvation" could harm the legitimacy of Israel's war effort.

The leaders of Britain, France and Canada issued a harsh condemnation of Israel's conduct of the war, slamming its "egregious actions" in Gaza, particularly the expanded offensive and the "wholly inadequate" resumption of aid.

They warned of "concrete actions" if Israel did not ease its stepped up offensive. Netanyahu called their joint statement a "huge prize" for Hamas. A group of 22 countries, including France, Britain, Canada, Japan and Australia said in a joint statement that Gaza's population "faces starvation" and "must receive the aid they desperately need".

In southern Gaza, the Israeli military issued an evacuation call to



Palestinians around Khan Yunis city ahead of what it described as an "unprecedented attack".

Gaza's civil defence agency said 91 people were killed in Israeli attacks across the territory yesterday.

Netanyahu, in a video posted on Telegram, said that "the fighting is intense and we are making progress".

"We will take control of all the territory of the strip," he added.

Israel's military said yesterday it had struck "160 terror targets" in Gaza over the past day.

The UN's OHCHR rights office said Israel's actions were "in defiance of international law and tantamount to ethnic cleansing".

Netanyahu said that Israel "will not give up. But in order to succeed, we must act in a way that cannot be stopped", justifying to his hardline supporters the decision to resume aid.

Israel has said its blockade aimed to force concessions from Hamas -- whose October 2023 attack triggered the war -- but UN agencies say there are critical shortages of food, clean water, fuel and medicines.

"Tons of food is blocked at the border, just minutes away," World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"The risk of famine in Gaza is increasing with the deliberate withholding of humanitarian aid."

Last week, US President Donald Trump, a key ally of Netanyahu, acknowledged that "a lot of people are starving".

Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir argued against any resumption of aid, saying on X that "our hostages receive no humanitarian aid".

But Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, also of the far right, defended the decision, saying it would "allow civilians to eat and our friends in the world to keep giving us diplomatic protection".

Khan Yunis resident Mohammed Sarhan told AFP that Gaza's main southern city "felt like the apocalypse".

"There was gunfire coming from every apartment, fire belts, F-16 warplanes and helicopters firing," he said.

Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee called on Gazans in the city and nearby areas to "immediately" leave the "dangerous combat zone".

AFPTV footage from Khan Yunis's Nasser Hospital showed a young boy in a tracksuit being treated as two other boys, both barefoot and bleeding, sat on the floor.

Further north in Deir el-Balah, Ayman Badwan mourned the loss of his brother in an attack.

"We are exhausted and drained -- we can't take it anymore," he told AFP.

Hamas's October 2023 attack on southern Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,218 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

# "Choose France" Summit Brings 20b Euros of New Investment

PARIS (Dispatches) - This year's "Choose France" business summit is set to secure 20 billion euros (\$22.47 billion) of new investment, French President Emmanuel Macron said, announcing projects in defense, energy and industry as well as in artificial intelligence.

Macron's personal efforts to woo international business leaders, making the Choose France summits at the opulent Palace of Versailles a must-attend for the global corporate elite, have been credited for a turnaround in past investor perceptions of France as a high-tax, rigid economy.

On top of the 20 billion euros in new investments, Macron also announced some 20 billion euros worth of AI-focused projects pledged at a Paris AI summit in February.

"You delivered a lot of investments in different fields: AI, telco, ... green hydrogen, and circular economy ... this is a very complete edition where 20 billion were invested, and 20 billion of AI investments as a follow-up to the summit in February," Macron told CEOs and entrepreneurs in Versailles.

Among the pledges made ahead of the summit, U.S. logistics giant Prologis is set to invest 6.4 billion euros in four data centres in the Paris region, while London-



based fintech Revolut plans to invest 1 billion euros over the next three years on expanding in France and will apply for a French banking licence.

Announcements also came from the United Arab Emirates' AI-focused MGX fund and others were expected from companies ranging from Amazon to Britain's Less Common Metals Limited in the rare earth sector. Portuguese company Tekever will build a drone assembly factory in the southwest, a 100 million euro investment, the Elysee said.

Macron's government is under pressure to stem a wave of job cuts in industry, as upheaval fuelled by U.S. President Trump's trade policies puts further pressure on Europe's flagging economy.

"We have to invest much more in AI, green tech, defense and security, especially because this is a race," Macron said.

France has been the leading recipient of international investments in Europe for the past six years, according to EY's European Investment Monitor, an annual survey of thousands of business leaders that Macron's advisers have seized on as evidence his cocktail of supply-side reforms has been bearing fruit.



## Zverev Off to Stellar Start in Hamburg



HAMBURG (Dispatches) - No. 1 seed Alexander Zverev had seven aces and won 31 of 35 first-service points as the German defeated American qualifier Aleksandar Kovacevic 6-1, 7-6 (5) in the first round of the Bitpanda Hamburg Open.

Zverev won the title in Hamburg in 2023 and advanced to the final last year before falling to Frenchman Arthur Fils. He wasn't the only high seed in action Monday, as Russian third seed Andrey Rublev defeated Bosnia and Herzegovina's Damir Dzumhur 6-4, 6-3.

American seventh seed Brandon Nakashima led his first set 6-5 when Belgian opponent Raphael Collignon had to retire, while Justin Engel edged Jan-Lennard Struff 7-6 (4), 7-6 (4) in a battle between German wild cards. Other winners included Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut, France's Alexandre Muller and Jiri Lehecka of the Czech Republic.

Meanwhile No. 8 seed Matteo Arnaldi of Italy dropped his first set but clawed back to defeat Frenchman Hugo Gaston 6-7 (6), 6-4, 6-4 in first-round action in Switzerland.

Arnaldi trailed 4-2 in the second set before winning four straight games plus the first two of the third set to turn the tide. He had an 8-0 edge in aces, saved 5 of 8 break points and converted 5 of 9 break-point opportunities in the two-hour, 24-minute match.

Two other matches went the distance Monday: Japan's Kei Nishikori defeated American Learner Tien 4-6, 6-4, 6-4, and Quentin Halys of France rallied past Spain's Jaume Munar 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (5).

Also advancing were British qualifier Cameron Norrie, Austrian qualifier Sebastian Ofner, Hungary's Marton Fucsovics and Great Britain's Jacob Fearnley.

Meanwhile Great Britain's Emma Raducanu defeated sixth-seeded Daria Kasatkina of Australia 6-1, 6-3 on Monday to advance to the Round of 16 at the Internationaux de Strasbourg in France. It was the third straight loss for the Aussie, ranked No. 17 in the world.

Ninth-seeded Beatriz Haddad Maia of Brazil rallied to a 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 win over Denmark's Clara Tauson in two hours, 44 minutes on the clay court.

Other winners in the WTA 500 event's Round of 32 included Ashlyn Krueger (6-4, 7-5 over McCartney Kessler), Danielle Collins (6-1, 1-6, 6-2 over Sofia Kenin), Russia's Anna Kalinskaya and Anna Blinkova, Wang Xinyu of China and Marie Bouzkova of the Czech Republic.

No. 2 Camila Osorio of Colombia dropped her first set before charging back to beat Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 to reach the Round of 16 at the WTA 250 tournament in Rabat, Morocco.

Fourth-seeded Ann Li defeated Russia's Maria Timofeeva 7-6 (6), 6-2, and No. 9 Katie Volynets routed Brazil's Carolina M. Alves 6-3, 6-0 in one hour, six minutes.

Also advancing were Hailey Baptiste, No. 10 Jessica Bouzas Maneiro of Spain, Zeynep Sonmez of Turkey, Ajla Tomljanovic of Australia, Italy's Tatiana Pieri and Jaqueline Cristian of Romania.

## Liverpool Crumbles as Brighton Stages Stunning Late 3-2 Comeback

BRIGHTON (Dispatches) - Brighton's Jack Hinshelwood sealed a dramatic 3-2 victory against Liverpool yesterday to leave the Premier League champions without a win since clinching the title.

Arne Slot's side took the lead through Harvey Elliott's early opener before Yasin Ayari equalised at the Amex Stadium.

Dominik Szoboszlai restored Liverpool's advantage just before the interval, but Brighton staged a late fightback as Kaoru Mitoma levelled before Hinshelwood came off the bench to net with his first touch.

Liverpool have taken just one point from their three matches following the title-clinching rout of Tottenham on April 27.

The Reds have lost at Brighton and Chelsea and squandered a two-goal lead in a draw with Arsenal since their record-equalling 20th English crown was confirmed

They can now look forward to receiving the Premier League trophy in Sunday's season finale against FA cup winners Crystal Palace at Anfield before an open-top bus parade through the city 24 hours later.

"Great game of football but not the result we wanted," said Slot. "If you don't score the third goal then it's hard to win at this



level, especially away from home. We cannot miss chances like we did if you want to win.

"I know these players already for 10 months, so it's not the first time I'm judging them, but it's nice to see Harvey score a goal and have an assist.

"Federico Chiesa had some nice moments as well considering how long he's not been playing."

Slot had admitted that motivating the champions for the final two matches of the season was a tricky task and his fears were confirmed by this sloppy display.

Slot's players had a celebratory trip to Dubai this week and only returned to training on Friday, while the Reds boss was seen partying in Ibiza for several days, as they soaked in a title victory secured in April.

"Did you see me on social media?" Slot said with a laugh in reply to a question about how focused he had been on the Brighton game.

Ahead of his widely-expected move to Real Madrid when his contract expires in the close-season, Trent Alexander-Arnold was left on the bench for a second successive game.

## Lineker Sorry for Hurt and Upset as BBC Confirms His Early Departure

LONDON (Dispatches) - Presenter Gary Lineker apologised for the "hurt and upset caused" following a social media post he shared as his early exit from the BBC was confirmed.

Lineker, 64, will leave the corporation after this weekend's Match Of The Day and will not front BBC coverage of the 2026 World Cup, or coverage of the FA Cup next season, as had been previously announced.

In an Instagram video, in which he referenced a post he previously shared about Zionism, which he deleted, and which had featured a picture of a rat, he said: "Unfortunately, I did not see the emoji. If I had, I would never, ever have shared it. The minute I was made aware, I quickly deleted the post and went on to make an apology."

He added: "I would like once again to say I'm sorry,



unreservedly, for the hurt and upset caused, it was a genuine mistake and oversight, but I should have been more diligent, I know that.

"I've stood up for minorities and humanitarian issues and against all forms of racism all of my life, including, of course, antisemitism, which I absolutely abhor. There's no place for it and never should be."

The BBC's highest paid presenter has headed up Match Of The Day since 1999, and had announced he would be leaving the programme last year at the end of the season, but would still host World Cup and FA Cup coverage.

His early departure, after 26 years at the BBC, came amid reports that the corporation's bosses considered his position "untenable", according to BBC News.

## Man United, Spurs Battle for Silverware and Financial Lifeline in Bilbao



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United and Tottenham will aim to salvage disastrous domestic seasons in the Europa League final, with the prize of a lucrative place in next season's Champions League as treasured as the trophy.

Both clubs head to Bilbao for the final assailed by stinging criticism amid their worst seasons of the Premier League era.

United sit 16th and Tottenham are one point worse off in 17th with just one league game remaining.

Only the struggles of relegated trio Ipswich, Leicester and Southampton saved United and Tottenham from an embarrassing battle to avoid crashing into the Championship.

For the loser of the final, the hangover from this season threatens to be a long one as the lack of European football will deal a monumental blow to their budgets going forward.

"It really does impact I think the next two or three years for both clubs," said former United captain Gary Neville.

"They need investment into their teams and if they don't get this Champions League money then there is going to be a lot less investment, which means they might not make the Champions League next season."

United have only once failed to qualify for Europe in the past 35 years.

The club's finances are already under scrutiny as co-owner Jim Ratcliffe has implemented swingeing cuts since buying a minority stake just over a year ago.

United recently announced a further 200 redundancies were planned after 250 jobs were cut last year.

In defending those decisions, Ratcliffe claimed in March that the Red Devils would have "run out of money at Christmas" without that action.

Investment is needed at Old Trafford both on and off the pitch. United announced plans earlier this year for a new 100,000 capacity stadium at a reported cost of £2 billion.

Ruben Amorim has been unable to save the sinking ship since taking charge as manager in November, with just six wins in 26 Premier League games.

## Imola Faces the Chop and Verstappen Will Feel the Loss



IMOLA (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen has won four times in a row at Imola but a fifth next year looks unlikely with Formula One set to drop the Italian circuit.

There is no contract for 2026 and Formula One chief executive Stefano Domenicali, who was born and grew up in the town near Bologna, has said it will be hard to justify Italy having two races given the demand from elsewhere.

Four-times world champion Verstappen said he understood, with Monza having a contract to 2031 for the Italian Grand Prix, but also felt the loss.

"Losing these kind of tracks is a shame. I get it from F1's side of things, of course -- the new tracks that we are going to," said the Red Bull driver after winning Sunday's Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix.

"You have to see it from a sportive side and a financial side, right? If you want to grow the business and make it more popular, I get it.

"Personally, when I just speak about the enjoyment of driving, it's these kind of tracks that made me fall in love with racing in general," he added. "In go-karting even, because you have the same thing in karting where some tracks are more special than others."

Formula One is due to gain Madrid as a new venue next year, and something will have to give to keep the calendar at 24 rounds.

Las Vegas and Miami have been added in recent years and there is talk of Africa, Thailand and a second race in China. Germany also has no race, despite Audi joining Mercedes on the grid next year.

Imola -- old-style, with the paddock hemmed in by the river Santeramo and the narrow track -- seems destined to be dropped after making a return during the pandemic years, unless a deal can be done on a rotational basis with other venues.