

Iranian and Tajik Officials Have Signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) That Will Boost Cooperation Between Their Countries in Railway Transit

IRAN NEWS

The City of Hamedan Is Set to Host 120 International Guests From June 10 to 12 for the International Health Tourism Conference, According to the Head of the Health Tourism Unit at Hamedan University of Medical Sciences

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Iran's Missile Defense Systems Ready to Shatter the Illusion of Enemy Supremacy



TEHRAN - Brigadier General Farzad Fereydouni, commander of the Army's Air Defense Training Center, announced that Iran's domestically developed missile and radar systems are fully operational and constantly upgraded to counter evolving threats. He emphasized that the nation's defense forces are prepared to dismantle what he described as the "illusion of enemy power" through advanced training and technology.

Speaking to IRNA, General Fereydouni highlighted the critical role of specialized training in ensuring effective, continuous, and sustainable air defense. "Success in any operation is fundamentally linked to how well personnel are trained to use the weapon systems at their disposal," he stated.

The commander noted that Iran's training approach is both mission- and threat-driven, adjusting to the modern landscape of warfare. "The threats we faced during the eight-year Sacred Defense [Iran-Iraq War] differ significantly from those of today. Modern threats require modern responses," he said, stressing the importance of adapting both theoretical instruction and field exercises to current realities.

He further explained that training goes beyond technical skills. "We combine education with moral and ideological development. Our colleagues in political-ideological and intelligence units play a vital role in shaping committed, competent personnel," Fereydouni added.

The commander said that Iran's missile systems are developed and maintained through a combination of constant research and hands-on training. Live simulations and battle scenario exercises are key to reducing error margins and enhancing combat readiness, while also boosting morale and camaraderie among the troops.

Highlighting Iran's domestic technological progress, he said, "If you design the battlefield and set the rules, you will win. But if someone else does that for you, you are playing their game." He attributed Iran's defense achievements to its independence in military research and self-reliant development.

Russia Renews Proposal to Mediate Iran-U.S. Talks



TEHRAN - A senior Russian diplomat has renewed Moscow's proposal to serve as the mediator in indirect talks involving Iran and the United States, which have held five rounds of such diplomatic process with Omani mediation since April.

Speaking to Russia's Izvestia newspaper on Friday, the country's Permanent Representative to the International Organizations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, reaffirmed the Kremlin's readiness to assist both Tehran and Washington in resolving their outstanding differences.

"The Russian Federation has repeatedly stated its readiness to assist Iran and the United States in reaching an agreement on nuclear issues," the official said.

"No request from either Tehran or Washington so far" "But for this to happen, both Tehran and Washington need to make such a request. So far, there has been no such request," the Russian official said.

Russia has, on several occasions, positioned itself as a potential intermediary in the process.

On March 4, 2025, Moscow offered to mediate between the two sides, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirming President Vladimir Putin's support for the effort.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



TEHRAN - In a ceremony marking the anniversary of the passing of the late Imam Khomeini, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi reiterated the Islamic Republic's commitment to the founding principles of the 1979 Revolution, particularly the rejection of foreign dominance. Speaking at the mausoleum of the late Imam on Saturday, Araqchi was joined by a group of Foreign Ministry staff who renewed their allegiance to the revolutionary ideals.

Araqchi emphasized that Imam Khomeini was not only the architect of the Islamic Revolution but also the visionary behind Iran's independent foreign policy. "The foundation of our foreign policy is based on the principle of negation of domination, which was central to Imam Khomeini's political philosophy," he said.

He cited the Imam's historic opposition to the Capitulation Law in the 1960s, which granted immunity to American citizens in Iran, as a pivotal moment of resistance against foreign influence. "That law effectively stripped Iran's judiciary of the power to prosecute Americans, a clear manifestation of U.S. dominance," Araqchi said, noting that the Imam's bold criticism of the law became a catalyst for mass mobilization against the Shah's regime.

He also referenced the Islamic Republic's long-standing policy of "Neither East, Nor West", describing it as a strategy to maintain independence from both Western and Eastern blocs. "This slogan does not mean we reject interaction with global powers, but rather that we reject being subordinate to them," he clarified.

Turning to current developments, Araqchi addressed ongoing nuclear negotiations between Iran and the United States. He defended Iran's uranium enrichment program as both a strategic and sovereign right under international law. "Enrichment is a basic necessity for our country," he said. "From the nuclear industry to the pharmaceutical sector and beyond, our national development

plans rely heavily on this technology."

More importantly, Araqchi argued, the issue goes beyond technical needs—it is about national dignity and the right to resist domination. "When Western powers say Iran must not enrich uranium, they are effectively trying to impose their will and superiority on us," he stated. "This is a clear violation of the principles of international law, which grant all nations the right to peaceful nuclear technology."

He questioned the legitimacy of Western concerns over Iran's enrichment activities. "Should Iran be denied a legal right simply because others are 'worried'? Is that sufficient grounds to restrict a nation's development?" he asked, adding that such demands are not acceptable to the Iranian people and will be firmly rejected.

Araqchi reiterated Iran's clear stance against nuclear weapons. "We have always opposed nuclear arms, and in this respect, we actually share common ground with the West," he said. However, he criticized the West for failing to uphold its own obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). "While they are bound by the NPT to dismantle their own arsenals, they have done the opposite," he said, accusing them of hypocrisy.

Iran, he said, will continue to defend its rightful access to peaceful nuclear energy. "This is a matter of principle and sovereignty. The Iranian nation will not surrender this right, nor accept any form of imposed authority."

In conclusion, Araqchi underscored that the Islamic Republic's nuclear policy is rooted in the legacy of Imam Khomeini and is guided today by the directives of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "We see ourselves as soldiers of Imam Khomeini and of our current leader," he said. "And we hope to serve as worthy guardians of their vision."

1980s Mechanisms No Longer Viable for Project Implementation in Iran

TEHRAN - First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref emphasized the need for modern approaches in governance and development projects, stating that methods and mechanisms from the 1980s are no longer effective for executing plans in today's Iran. He made these remarks during a meeting with the deputy directors of the Foundation of the Oppressed (Bonyad Mostazafan), one of the country's largest economic and charitable institutions.

Speaking at the Foundation's leadership council meeting on Saturday, Aref underscored that the Foundation is not a competitor to the government but a strategic partner in serving the underprivileged. "This institution, supported by the entire Islamic Republic system, was founded to serve the oppressed—the true owners of the revolution," he said, highlighting its alignment with the vision of the late Imam Khomeini and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

He called for a comprehensive evaluation of revolutionary institutions like the Foundation to assess how well they have fulfilled their missions over the past four decades. "These organizations must be held accountable for the goals they were originally created to achieve," he noted.

Aref stressed that the naming of the current year by the Supreme Leader as the "Year of Investment for Production" aligns with the country's Seventh Development Plan. He positioned the Foundation as a key player capable of spearheading investments aimed at boosting national production.

Reflecting on the Foundation's contributions to national infrastructure, particularly its major role in constructing the Tehran-North Freeway, Aref said the institution had provided significant support to the government. However, he cautioned that large-scale projects must be evaluated thoroughly to avoid past mistakes. "We must steer clear of politicizing such projects, which hampers proper assessment," he said, adding that the Foundation's expertise can greatly assist the government.

Addressing economic challenges, Aref criticized the reliance on outdated methods from the



1980s, noting that government resources are currently too limited to support such approaches. While acknowledging the impact of sanctions, he argued that many projects fail not due to external pressures, but because of poor economic justification.

He urged greater collaboration among government bodies, elite professionals, and institutions like the Foundation to maximize synergies. He also called for the Foundation's active participation in implementing the country's development agenda.

Aref highlighted the post-revolution privatization policy under Article 44 of the Constitution, which shifts many state responsibilities to the private sector, except in areas where private entities are unable to operate. In this context, he outlined key expectations from the Foundation, including advancing regional equity, investing in infrastructure, supporting knowledge-based companies, enhancing local technologies, boosting exports, and promoting economic resilience.

He also acknowledged the Foundation's role in utilizing experienced managers who were previously underutilized after leaving government service. "The Foundation has effectively tapped into the expertise of skilled professionals to drive its mission forward," he said.

Concluding his remarks, Aref expressed condolences over the recent tragic explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port, which claimed the lives of several Foundation workers. He urged stricter adherence to safety standards, warning against dismissing safety concerns as political.

During the meeting, Hossein Dehghan, head of the Foundation, highlighted its streamlined structure and robust human resources network. He reiterated the Foundation's readiness to assist the government in resolving structural imbalances, enhancing food security, attracting investments, and alleviating poverty.

The session also included reports on the Foundation's economic activities, its collaboration prospects with the 14th government, and ongoing efforts to empower marginalized communities.

Abdullah II: On Foot or On Horseback



By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The King of Jordan (currently Abdullah II), as head of state and commander-in-chief, plays a central role in both the domestic and foreign policies of the country. Due to its sensitive geographical position—bordering Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, the occupied Palestinian territories, and Israel—Jordan has always been susceptible to regional developments.

Jordan is a constitutional monarchy with a British flavor, but the king holds broad powers in appointing and dismissing prime ministers, dissolving parliament, and controlling security institutions. Jordan's population is a mix of Palestinians—who make up approximately 55%—and tribal Bedouins who are loyal to the monarchy. The king must maintain a delicate balance between these groups.

The country faces challenges such as unemployment, water scarcity, and dependency on foreign aid. The king plays a key role in attracting financial support from Persian Gulf states and Western countries. Given Jordan's large Palestinian population and its past control over the West Bank, it has long played the role of a mediator in the Palestinian issue. While the Jordanian king supports the two-state solution, he is sometimes pressured into silence by Israel and the United States. It's also important to note that although Jordan is traditionally allied with Saudi Arabia, it occasionally disagrees with Riyadh, particularly over issues like Yemen and Iran.

Jordan has formal relations with Israel (since the 1994 peace treaty), but this relationship remains fragile, particularly due to sensitive matters like Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Jordan took part in the fight against ISIS and supported moderate Syrian opposition groups. While it has officially backed the Saudi-led coalition, it is clear that it does not have an active military presence in Yemen. Due to economic hardship and political constraints, occasional protests erupt against the government. Jordan finds itself squeezed between maintaining relations with the West (the U.S. and the U.K.) and preserving ties with neighboring countries (Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel).

Debate over the future of the monarchy—especially considering the growing role of Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah—is one of the key and yet uncertain topics in Jordan's future.

The Jordanian king also plays the role of a "balancer" in both domestic and regional politics. On one hand, he must preserve internal stability; on the other, he must navigate the complex dynamics of the Middle East. His policies are a blend of realism and moderation, but he faces serious economic and political challenges. It is not unlikely that King Abdullah II is also concerned about the territorial expansion of the occupied lands—and that part of his cautious stance may stem from a hidden anxiety about the future.

Prospects and Challenges of Launching a Container Train from China to Iran



TEHRAN - The President of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce has highlighted both the opportunities and hurdles surrounding the establishment of a regular container train route from China to Iran, stating that although the train has started to operate sporadically, it has yet to make a meaningful impact on bilateral trade due to the lack of export cargo from Iran to China.

Majid-Reza Hariri, President of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce, in an interview with ILNA, emphasized Iran's strategic location on the China-to-Europe rail corridor. He explained that several railway lines connect China's western provinces to Europe, with four main routes passing through different paths around the Caspian Sea—two to the north, one through the middle, and one to the south, which traverses Iran.

Hariri noted that although this southern route currently hosts some train traffic, it has not yet developed into a permanent and scheduled freight line. "A transportation corridor—be it road, rail, sea, or air—only becomes viable when there is regular demand from both ends," he said.

He explained that at present, trains from China to Iran arrive once a month or even less frequently, and always with cargo headed only one way—into Iran. "We currently do not have any significant freight to send from Iran to China via rail," he added.

IRAN
NEWS

Iran, Turkey Customs Authorities Sign Bilateral Cooperation Agreement

TEHRAN - The heads of the customs administrations of Iran and Turkey have signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance bilateral cooperation, reaffirming their commitment to strengthening trade relations between the two neighboring countries.

In a meeting held between Faroud Asgari, Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance and Head of Iran's Customs Administration, and Sezai Uçarmak, Deputy Minister of Trade and Head of Turkey's Customs Administration, both sides emphasized that the current level of trade and customs exchanges does not reflect the technical capabilities or political will of the two nations.

Unemployment Rate
Decreases

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - According to the latest report from Iran's Statistical Center, the unemployment rate in 2024 (year 1403 in the Iranian calendar) decreased by 0.5 percentage points, reaching 6.7%. Meanwhile, the number of employed individuals also increased compared to the previous year.

The data shows that among people aged 15 and older, 7.6% of the economically active population (those employed or seeking work) were unemployed in 2024. This represents a 0.5% decline in the unemployment rate compared to 2023 (year 1402).

In 2024, 41.0% of the population aged 15 and above were economically active, meaning they were either employed or unemployed but seeking work. However, the economic participation rate fell slightly by 0.3% compared to the previous year.

The number of employed individuals aged 15 and older reached approximately 24.79 million, showing an increase of 298,000 compared to the prior year. At the same time, the economically inactive population—including students, homemakers, retirees, and others receiving income without working—rose by about 607,000 to 38.52 million.

Sector-wise employment distribution in 2024 indicates that the services sector held the largest share with 52.7%, followed by industry at 33.3%, and agriculture at 13.9%.

Youth unemployment among those aged 15 to 24 stood at 20.1%, with a yearly decrease of 1.1% compared to 2023. For the age group 18 to 35, the unemployment rate was 14.7%, down by 0.5% from the previous year.

ECO Member
States Committed to
Transition from
Dialogue to Action

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Dr. Asad Majeed Khan, emphasized the strong political will of member states to shift from consultation to execution in pursuit of tangible outcomes that will benefit regional economies.

Speaking at the 10th Meeting of the Council of Heads of Customs Administrations (CHCA) in Tehran, Khan praised the Islamic Republic of Iran for its warm hospitality and hosting of the event.

"This summit marks a critical chapter in our shared journey to enhance regional customs cooperation and trade facilitation," he stated. "It provides an opportunity to build on the significant progress made since our last meeting in Baku in July 2023."

Khan noted that the ECO's regional agenda has entered a new phase of maturity, with last year's summit laying the groundwork in technical preparation and policy development. He announced the submission of the ECO Agreement on Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters for ratification—a major step toward formalizing legal cooperation between customs authorities.

He also highlighted the completion of the ECO Trade Facilitation Strategy during the second meeting of the ECO Joint Working Group in Ankara as a notable achievement, along with a pilot technical session on activating the ECO Customs Offenses and Smuggling Information Database, hosted by Turkey earlier this month.

Stressing the importance of digital transformation, Khan underlined the need to prioritize electronic data exchange systems (EDI), cross-border paperless trade, and digital solutions. "Developing a harmonized digital ecosystem in the ECO region is vital for leveraging technology to facilitate regional trade," he added.

He commended member states including Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Turkey for initiating capacity-building programs and reaffirmed the ECO Secretariat's commitment to organizing additional small-scale training-of-trainers projects to boost institutional capacity in customs and cross-border trade. The Secretariat is also exploring partnerships with international development agencies such as JICA and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) to support project financing and capacity building.

The Secretary General acknowledged that ECO's share in global trade remains below its potential. "Customs reforms are a key to unlocking that potential," he said, emphasizing that the outcomes of this meeting would shape customs priorities for the upcoming ECO Vision 2026–2035.

Tehran and Kuala
Lumpur Outline Digital
Cooperation Roadmap

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The communications ministers of Iran and Malaysia have reaffirmed their commitment to advancing bilateral technological cooperation, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity, smart governance, artificial intelligence, and space telecommunications. Both sides also expressed readiness to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and pursue joint investments.

According to reports, Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Seyed Sattar Hashemi, met with Malaysia's Minister of Communications and Digital, Ahmad Fahmi bin Mohamed Fadzil, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT) Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo. The meeting aimed to explore potential areas for bilateral collaboration in ICT.

Hashemi highlighted Iran's vast potential in the communications sector and expressed the country's openness to foreign investment of up to \$20–25 billion. He also emphasized the importance of cooperation in cybersecurity, smart government, AI, fixed communication services, and space technologies. Hashemi extended an official invitation to his Malaysian counterpart to visit Tehran.

He welcomed the strengthening of ties with Malaysia in the communications and IT sectors, pointing out the technological similarities between the two nations and stating Iran's willingness to sign a cooperation MoU.

Malaysian Minister Ahmad Fahmi bin Mohamed Fadzil spoke about Malaysia's Asian Digital Initiative, launched in 2021, which focuses on infrastructure development, particularly fiber optics and space communications. He mentioned Malaysia's implementation of Starlink-like projects and expressed a desire to share experiences in this domain.

Fahmi noted that Malaysia has invested around \$1 billion to provide high-speed internet to 10 million users. Projects are also underway to connect schools and rural regions through communication boxes that can serve up to 100 adjacent units.

He stated that 91% of Malaysia's rural areas now have internet coverage. Acknowledging similar challenges faced by Iran regarding universal service obligations (USO) and remote access, he noted that Malaysia has achieved 82% 5G coverage and currently offers some of the world's most affordable internet services.

The Malaysian minister added that during the COVID-19 pandemic, digital economy contributions reached 25% of Malaysia's GDP. Malaysia has since become a regional hub for data centers and is ready to cooperate with Iran in this field.

In the final part of the meeting, both sides emphasized regulatory collaboration in telecommunications. Minister Fahmi welcomed the invitation to visit Iran.

The two ministers agreed on the necessity of continued technical dialogue and knowledge exchange and underscored Iran and Malaysia's joint role in driving digital transformation.

At the APT Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo, Iran's Communications Minister Seyed Sattar Hashemi chaired a key session titled "Sustainable and Accessible Digital Infrastructure."

Hashemi traveled to Japan to attend the summit, held on May 30–31 (9–10 Khordad 1404 in the Iranian calendar). In addition to chairing a main session, he also held bilateral talks with fellow ministers.

The session focused on three critical themes: optimizing network and spectrum resources, implementing environmentally responsible IT solutions, and enhancing climate resilience. The panel aimed to address the digital divide and ensure equitable access to communications across the region.

Iran's leadership of this session underscores its active and progressive role in shaping regional discussions on sustainable digital development.

Senior officials and ministers from 11 countries, including Fiji, Indonesia, India, the Maldives, and Hong Kong, participated in the session, sharing national experiences and discussing challenges in building digital infrastructure.

The APT Ministerial Meeting is one of the region's most important platforms for policymaking in telecommunications and IT. It aims to foster multilateral cooperation among governments, regulators, and private sector stakeholders from member countries, promoting dialogue on shared challenges and opportunities in digital development.

Key focus areas of the summit include closing the digital divide, ensuring communication security, boosting environmental resilience of digital infrastructure, and promoting innovation.

This year's session in Tokyo is among the most highly attended, with representatives from 38 member states, alongside private sector and academic stakeholders, deliberating on the future of sustainable digital infrastructure and the region's role in global ICT trends.

Iran's active participation and leadership in one of the summit's key panels highlight its status as a founding member of APT and a significant player in shaping the future of regional communications. Iran continues to advocate for equitable access, resource efficiency, and a culturally and environmentally balanced approach to digital development.

Iran, China to
Cooperate on Water
Resource Management,
Agriculture,
Environmental
Protection

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A trilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) focusing on cooperation in water resource management, agriculture, and environmental protection was signed between Iran's Plan and Budget Organization (PBO), the University of Tehran, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).

According to a report by the PBO, the MoU was formally signed during a ceremony hosted by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The agreement involves the PBO, the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Tehran, and the Institute of Resources and Environment in Northwest China, which operates under CAS.

The agreement aims to foster collaboration in areas such as water resource management, sustainable agriculture, and environmental protection. Key components include joint project implementation, knowledge exchange, the use of advanced technologies, and pilot programs in Iran.

The primary goal is to move quickly toward actionable steps and make practical use of the scientific and technical capacities of all parties involved.

Mohammad Ebrahimmia, Director of Water, Agriculture, and Environmental Affairs at Iran's PBO, emphasized the importance of swiftly defining pilot project criteria and launching a "joint action plan" in Iran. He noted the mutual significance of water, agriculture, and environmental issues for both nations and stated that immediate steps should follow the signing of the MoU.

Ebrahimmia acknowledged that while numerous MoUs have been signed between Iran and China in various fields, only a small number have been implemented. However, he expressed optimism that the involvement of Iran's PBO—equivalent to China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)—could provide a solid foundation for putting this agreement into action.

FATF Urged to Take
Confidence-Building
Steps in Response to
Iran's Measures

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs stated at the main assembly of the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (EAG) that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is expected to take confidence-building steps in response to Iran's extensive measures in combating money laundering and terrorist financing, including the ratification of the Palermo Convention.

According to the High Council for Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, Hadi Khani, speaking at the 42nd General Assembly of the EAG, said: "In this meeting, we presented Iran's intelligent and software-based infrastructure for processing Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs), as well as our police force's actions in fighting money laundering and terrorist financing. We also sought to share our experiences with other members."

Khani highlighted Iran's previous reports presented to EAG summits and added: "The Islamic Republic of Iran, aiming to inform friendly and aligned countries and to enhance FATF's understanding of our actions, has prioritized presenting its anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing measures within the framework of close cooperation with the Eurasian group. We will continue this path within the framework of our domestic regulations and standards."

He noted that Iran's recent steps serve as a basis for the suspension of FATF's countermeasures, stating: "Iran, aiming to align with international treaties and accelerate normalization of relations with FATF, has ratified the Palermo Convention, in line with the FATF's statement emphasizing the adoption of the Palermo and CFT Conventions as prerequisites for suspending countermeasures. This ratification has now become enforceable law following a directive by the President of the Islamic Republic."

Iran, Oman Aim to Deepen
Economic Ties

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - During the Iran-Oman Business Opportunities Conference in Muscat, the President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, Samad Hassanzadeh, presented seven strategic proposals aimed at deepening economic cooperation between the two nations. Stressing the vast untapped potential in both countries, he prioritized joint investment projects as the most effective path forward.

Leading an 85-member private sector delegation to Oman, Hassanzadeh underscored the growing interest of both nations' private sectors in expanding bilateral ties. "This conference marks the beginning of a broader and more dynamic cooperation that could extend beyond our two countries to the wider region," he said.

Highlighting Iran's strategic focus on enhancing economic ties with neighboring countries, Hassanzadeh noted the private sector's strong willingness to engage with Omani partners. He emphasized the importance of developing a forward-looking roadmap that leverages both nations' diverse economic capacities.

He pointed to cultural and historical ties, good neighborliness, and strong political relations as key foundations for sustainable economic collaboration. According to Hassanzadeh, bilateral trade has already surpassed \$2 billion in recent years, with strong prospects for further growth.

While outlining areas for future cooperation, Hassanzadeh proposed the following actions: Initiating joint investment projects in both countries; Enhancing long-term trade planning through stable frameworks; Facilitating trade by identifying high-potential goods and services; Leveraging Oman's logistics infrastructure and Iran's manufacturing base; Utilizing free trade zones such as Duqm, Sohar, and Chabahar more effectively; Expanding collaboration in

technology, particularly in mining, IT, and knowledge-based industries; and encouraging third-country cooperation in engineering, construction, and infrastructure projects.

Hassanzadeh stressed that the Chambers of Commerce of both countries should actively identify joint opportunities and push for supportive policies from their respective governments.

He invited Omani investors to explore opportunities across various sectors in Iran, including: Oil, gas, and petrochemicals; Renewable energy; Power plant construction; Transportation infrastructure; Agriculture and mining; and automotive and tourism industries.

Hassanzadeh placed particular emphasis on health tourism, noting that Iran already hosts around one million health tourists annually, primarily from Arab countries. "Iran's private sector is fully prepared to provide health tourism services to Omani citizens," he said.

Beyond trade and investment, Hassanzadeh proposed collaborative infrastructure development, including road construction, rail networks, dam building, and water treatment. He noted Iran's readiness to provide engineering and technical services, both in Oman and in third-party regional projects.

The conference coincided with the signing of 18 cooperation agreements between Iran and Oman, a move expected to further facilitate bilateral economic activities.

Hassanzadeh concluded by reiterating Iran's full commitment to regional economic integration through private sector leadership and government support, urging both sides to take concrete steps toward turning shared visions into reality.

Britain to Spend an Extra \$2b on Armed Forces Housing

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain said it would spend an extra 1.5 billion pounds (\$2 billion) to tackle the poor state of housing for the country's armed forces, helping to support recruitment, retention and morale.

The spending will be included in the Strategic Defense Review (SDR), a 10-year plan to transform Britain's defenses, the government said on Saturday. The SDR is expected to be published on Monday.

The money will fund urgent repairs and maintenance, from fixing boilers to tackling damp and mould in service family accommodation, alongside developing new housing, the government said.

A report by parliament's Defence Committee last December concluded that the accommodation was "shocking" and could result in service personnel quitting the forces.



Macron Calls for Asian Coalitions as He Warns of U.S.-China Divisions



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron said that division between the two superpowers, the United States and China, is the main risk currently confronting the world as he emphasized the need for building new coalitions between Paris and partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Macron is visiting the region as France and the European Union aim to strengthen their commercial ties in Asia to offset uncertainty over U.S. President Donald Trump's sweeping global tariff measures.

"I will be clear, France is a friend and an ally of the United States, and is a friend, and we do cooperate - even if sometimes we disagree and compete - with China," said Macron, who was speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's premier defence forum, alongside a two-day state visit to Singapore.

"You have to choose a side. If we do so, we will kill the global order, and we will destroy methodically, all the institutions we created after the Second World War in order to preserve peace and to have cooperation on health, on climate, on human rights and so on," Macron added.

The French president said Asia and Europe have a common interest in preventing the disintegration of the global order.

"The time for non-alignment has undoubtedly passed, but the time for coalitions of action has come, and requires that countries capable of acting together give themselves every means to do so," Macron said.

Macron is following leaders of China, Japan and other European countries in visiting the region in recent weeks, in a sign of Southeast Asia's strategic importance amid uncertainties on global supply chains and trade.

Pakistan Military Chief Warns Next Conflict With India Could Hit Whole Region



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Pakistan and India are close to reducing the troop build up along their border to levels before conflict erupted between the nuclear-armed neighbours this month, a top Pakistani military official told Reuters on Friday, although he warned the crisis had increased the risk of escalation in the future.

Both sides used fighter jets, missiles, drones and artillery in four days of clashes, their worst fighting in decades, before a ceasefire was announced.

The spark for the latest fighting between the old enemies was an April 22 attack in Indian Kashmir that killed 26 people, most of them tourists. New Delhi blamed the incident on "terrorists" backed by Pakistan, a charge denied by Islamabad.

On May 7, India launched missiles at what it said were "terrorist infrastructure" sites across the border and as Pakistan responded with its own attacks, both countries built up additional forces along the frontier.

General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Pakistan's chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, said the two militaries had started the process of drawing down troop levels.

"We have almost come back to the pre-22nd April situation... we are approaching that, or we must have approached that by now," said Mirza, the most senior Pakistani military official to speak publicly since the conflict.

Conditions in Gaza Are Catastrophic Despite Renewed Aid

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - The situation in Gaza is the worst since the war between Israel and Hamas militants began 19-months ago, the United Nations said, despite a resumption of limited aid deliveries in the Palestinian enclave where famine looms.

Under growing global pressure, Israel ended an 11-week long blockade on Gaza 12 days ago, allowing limited U.N.-led operations to resume. Then on Monday, a controversial new avenue for aid distribution was also launched - the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, backed by the United States and Israel.

"Any aid that gets into the hands of people who need it is good," U.N. spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters in New York. But, he added, the aid deliveries so far overall have had "very, very little impact."

"The catastrophic situation in Gaza is the worst since the war began," he said.

The U.N. and international aid groups have refused to work with the GHF because they say it is not neutral and has a distribution model that forces the displacement of Palestinians.

Israel ultimately wants the U.N. to work through the GHF, which is using private U.S. security and logistics companies to transport aid into Gaza for distribution by civilian teams at so-called secure distribution sites.

However, Israel will allow aid deliveries "for the immediate future" via both the U.N. and the GHF operations, Israel's U.N. Ambassador Danny Danon said this week. GHF said on Friday that it has so far managed to distribute more than 2.1 million meals.

Israel has long accused Hamas of stealing aid, which the group denies.

The war in Gaza has raged since 2023, when Hamas militants killed 1,200 people in Israel and took some 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies, and Israel responded with a military campaign that has killed over 54,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health authorities.

The U.N. says that in the past 12 days it has only managed to transport some 200 truckloads of aid into Gaza, hindered by



coordination agency, said to the U.N. in a posting on X on Friday.

However, the U.N. said that on Tuesday the Israeli military denied all its requests to access Kerem Shalom to pick up the aid. And on Thursday, when 65 trucks of aid managed to leave the crossing, all but five turned back due to intense fighting.

Five trucks of medical aid managed to reach the warehouses of a field hospital, but "a group of armed individuals stormed the warehouses... looting large quantities of medical equipment, supplies, medicines and nutritional supplements that was intended for malnourished children," Dujarric said.

Israel says it has been facilitating all aid deliveries. COGAT said this week that since the war 1.8 million tonnes of aid, including 1.3 million tonnes of food, had reached Gaza.

insecurity and Israeli access restrictions. It was not immediately clear how much of that aid reached those in need. It said some trucks and a World Food Programme warehouse have also been looted by desperate, hungry people.

U.N. officials have also criticized Israeli limitations on what kind of aid they can provide.

"Israeli authorities have not allowed us to bring in a single ready-to-eat meal. The only food permitted has been flour for bakeries. Even if allowed in unlimited quantities, which it hasn't been, it wouldn't amount to a complete diet for anyone," said Eri Kaneko, U.N. humanitarian affairs spokesperson.

Some of recipients of GHF aid said the packages include some rice, flour, canned beans, pasta, olive oil, biscuits and sugar.

Under a complex process, Israel inspects and clears aid shipments, which are then transported to the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing. There the aid is offloaded and then reloaded on to other trucks for transport to warehouses in Gaza.

Several hundred more truckloads of aid currently await U.N. collection from the Palestinian side of Kerem Shalom.

"More aid would actually get to the people if you would collect the aid waiting for you by the crossings," COGAT, the Israeli military aid

Pentagon Chief Warns of Real and Imminent China Threat at Shangri-La Dialogue



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth warned that the threat from China was real and potentially imminent as he pushed allies in the Indo-Pacific to spend more on their own defence needs.

Hegseth, speaking for the first time at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Asia's premier forum for defence leaders, militaries and diplomats, laid out how the Indo-Pacific region was a priority for the Trump administration.

"There's no reason to sugar coat it. The threat China poses is real, and it could be imminent," Hegseth said, in some of his strongest comments on the Communist nation since he took office in January. He added that any attempt by China to conquer Taiwan "would result in devastating consequences for the Indo-Pacific and the world", and echoed Trump's comment that China will not invade Taiwan on the president's watch.

China views Taiwan as its own territory and has vowed to "reunify" with the democratic and separately governed island, by force if necessary. It has stepped up military and political pressure to assert those claims, including increasing the intensity of war games around Taiwan.

Taiwan's government rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims, saying only the island's people can decide their future.

"It has to be clear to all that Beijing is credibly preparing to potentially use military force to alter the balance of power in the Indo Pacific," Hegseth said.

But his comments on allies needing to increase spending is likely to cause consternation amongst partners, even though experts said Hegseth would face a relatively friendly audience in Singapore. China's Defence Minister Dong Jun has decided to skip the major Asian security forum and Beijing

has sent only an academic delegation.

Hegseth has previously taken aim at allies in Europe for not spending more on their own defence. In February, he warned Europe against treating America like a "sucker" while addressing a press conference at Nato headquarters in Brussels.

On FRiday, while delivering the keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue, French President Emmanuel Macron said Hegseth was justified in asking Europe to increase its own defense spending.

"It's hard to believe, a little bit, after some trips to Europe that I'm saying this, but thanks to President Trump, Asian allies should look to countries in

Europe as a new found example," Hegseth said.

"It doesn't make sense for countries in Europe to do that while key allies in Asia spend less on defense in the face of an even more formidable threat, not to mention North Korea."

Spending on weapons and research is spiking among some Asian countries as they respond to a darkening security outlook by broadening their outside industrial partnerships while trying to boost their own defense industries, according to a new study by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, the organisation that runs the Shangri-La Dialogue.

The spike comes even as the nations spent an average of 1.5 per cent of GDP on defense in 2024, a figure that has kept relatively constant over the last decade, it said.

Hegseth suggested during his speech that allies in Europe focus on security on the European continent, so that Washington could focus on the threat posed by China in the Indo-Pacific, alongside more participation by allies in Asia.

"We're pushing our allies in Europe to own more of their security — to invest in their own defence... Thanks to President Trump, they are stepping up," Hegseth said.

Hegseth, a former Fox TV host who has spent much of his first months in office focused on domestic issues, spoke to the international audience about issues that he has frequently talked about when in the United States, like "restoring the warrior ethos."

"We are not here to pressure other countries to embrace or adopt our politics or ideology. We are not here to preach to you about climate change or cultural issues," Hegseth said. "We respect you, your traditions and your militaries. And we want to work with you where our shared interests align."

Turkey Proposes Trump-Putin-Zelensky Summit, Kremlin Declines Invitation

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey on Friday proposed hosting a summit with the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and the United States as it strives to broker an elusive deal to end Russia's three-year invasion — an invitation swiftly dismissed by the Kremlin.

Moscow said it was sending a team of negotiators to Istanbul for a second round of direct talks with Ukraine on Monday — though Kyiv has yet to confirm if it will attend.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has fostered warm relations with both Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin, has become a key mediator amid Donald Trump's push for a deal to end the over three-year war.

"We sincerely think that it is possible to cap the first and second direct Istanbul talks with a meeting between Mr. Trump, Mr. Putin and Mr. Zelensky, under the direction of Mr. Erdogan," Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said during a visit to Kyiv.

The Kremlin pushed back against the idea of a face-to-face meeting involving Putin and Zelensky.

"First, results must be achieved through direct negotiations between the two countries," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Fidan met with Zelensky and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga in Kyiv on Friday.



In a statement posted on X after his meeting with Fidan, Zelensky thanked Erdogan for his "efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace". But he noted that Russia was doing everything to ensure the proposed talks in Istanbul on June 2 led to no results.

"For a meeting to be meaningful, its agenda must be clear, and the negotiations must be properly prepared. Unfortunately, Russia is doing everything it can to ensure that the next potential meeting brings no results," he said.

"Russia continues to ignore all calls from the world to cease fire and continues its killings. Moreover, for over a week now, the Russians have been unable to present the so-called 'memorandum' they had promised to prepare," he said. "Ukraine has received no documents from them."

At talks in Istanbul on May 16 — the first in over three years — the sides agree to swap documents outlining possible roadmaps to peace.

The Kremlin repeated Friday that it would hand over its version at the talks on Monday, but Kyiv is pressuring Moscow to send a copy in advance.

Ukraine has for more than two months been urging Russia to agree to a full, unconditional and immediate 30-day ceasefire — an idea first proposed by Trump.



PARIS (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz made heavy weather of his French Open clash with Dzumhur but moved into the fourth round while world number one Aryna Sabalenka and Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen blazed a trail at Roland Garros.

Defending champion Iga Swiatek continued her bid for a fifth Roland Garros title when the fifth seed stayed calm on a searing afternoon on Court Philippe Chatrier to beat Jaqueline Cristian while Holger Rune edged a brutal five-setter with Quentin Halys.

Alcaraz was expected to sizzle in the cool of the evening but the second seed found himself in hot water after his level dipped against Dzumhur before recovering to seal a 6-1 6-3 4-6 6-4 win and book a clash with Ben Shelton.

"It was under control during the first two sets, and then I don't know what happened," Alcaraz said. "I think he started to play, but I let him get into the match, get into a good rhythm. I let him get into his game and I didn't know what to do.

"I was a break down in the fourth, and I just tried to calm myself a little bit, think much clearer, and try to do the good things again. Just happy to take the chances he gave me in the fourth set and play great tennis at the end."

Sabalenka avoided the worst of the heat in the morning but had to stave off the plucky Olga Danilovic to win 6-2 6-3 and continue her bid for a maiden Roland Garros title after major triumphs at the Australian and U.S. Opens.

The three-time Grand Slam champion looked in ruthless form while racing ahead 5-0 but Danilovic avoided the bagel by taking the sixth game on serve and pulled a break back.

The resurgence did not last long as Sabalenka closed out the opening set with another break and withstood a stern test in the second set to beat her 34th-ranked opponent.

Zheng, who won her biggest title at last year's Paris Games, continued her good form on the Roland Garros clay as the Chinese eighth seed made the second week by beating Grand Slam debutant Victoria Mboko 6-3 6-4 at Court Simonne Mathieu.

That match was halted briefly when the 18-year-old Mboko was down 5-3 in the second set as a fan needed medical attention but Zheng was not affected when play resumed and quickly dispatched the

Canadian.

Former semi-finalist Amanda Anisimova required treatment for a blister on her right hand before the American secured a 7-6(4) 6-4 victory over Clara Tauson to reach the last 16 of the major where she announced herself in 2019.

Anisimova, seeded 16th, takes on Sabalenka in the next round aiming to improve her 5-2 win-loss record against the top seed.

"We're both big hitters, so I'm sure we're going to be going at it back and forth," Anisimova said. Liudmila Samsonova will expect to be tested against Zheng after beating Dayana Yastremska 6-2 6-3. Swiatek extended her spectacular French Open winning streak to 24 matches after seeing off Jaqueline Cristian 6-2 7-5 as the temperature soared.

"It was 20 degrees Celsius when I played my first match but today it was 30 degrees," Swiatek said. "It's not easy to adjust but I've played in every condition. Last year at the Olympics it was super hot, so I was ready."

Up next for Swiatek is fellow Grand Slam champion Elena Rybakina, who ousted 2017 Roland Garros winner Jelena Ostapenko 6-2 6-2.

Last year's runner-up Jasmine Paolini eased past Yulia Starodubtseva 6-4 6-1 and faces another Ukrainian after Elina Svitolina beat Bernarda Pera 7-6(4) 7-6(5).

Eighth seed Lorenzo Musetti blew hot and cold against Mariano Navone before winning 4-6 6-4 6-3 6-2 while Rune beat Halys 4-6 6-2 5-7 7-5 6-2.

"It was a brutal match," Rune said.

"I tried to change things ... I had to put more spin on the ball because of the conditions.

"The player who took the opportunities to be aggressive was the player who won."

Tommy Paul also needed five sets, the 12th seed defeating Karen Khachanov 6-3 3-6 7-6(7) 3-6 6-3, while American fans had more joy as 13th seed Shelton downed Matteo Gigante 6-3 6-3 6-4 and Frances Tiafoe beat Sebastian Korda 7-6(6) 6-3 6-4.

Alexei Popyrin overcame Nuno Borges 6-4 7-6(11) 7-6(5) to fly the flag for Australia while Daniel Altmaier sent Hamad Medjedovic packing 4-6 6-3 6-3 6-2.

Brunson, Knicks Earn Trip Back to Indiana for Game 6

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Karl-Anthony Towns knew where the Eastern Conference finals stood as he evaluated the pain in his left knee prior to the game.

The New York Knicks were staring at elimination, and the consequences supplied Towns with a clear course of action.

"I looked at the game and it was 'Game 5, do or die,'" Towns said. "That was pretty much all I needed to see."

Towns and Jalen Brunson were both on top of their games and New York staved off elimination with a convincing 111-94 victory over the visiting Indiana Pacers in Game 5.

The Knicks, who cut their deficit to 3-2 in the best-of-seven series, will have the opportunity to tie when the teams meet in Indianapolis.

Brunson scored 32 points on 12-of-18 shooting and Towns played through his injury to record 24 points and 13 rebounds as the third-seeded Knicks led wire to wire.

"I just feel like we played better," Brunson said. "We played to our standards."

Towns believes the Knicks have to play with the same conviction in Game 6.



"We have no room for error," Towns said. "Our backs are against the wall and every game is do or die. If we don't bring that energy or execution, our season will be over."

Bennedict Mathurin registered 23 points and nine rebounds off the bench for the fourth-seeded Pacers. Pascal Siakam had 15 points, and reserve Obi Toppin added 11.

Indiana star Tyrese Haliburton was largely silent, finishing with eight points, on 2-of-7 shooting, and six assists. Two nights earlier, he had 30 points, 15 assists, 12 rebounds and zero turnovers in a stellar Game 4 effort.

"Rough night for me. I've got to be better setting the tone and getting downhill," Haliburton said. "I feel I didn't do a great job of that. ... They picked up the pressure a little bit more and applied more as the game went on. Put it on me. I got to be better in Game 6."

The Knicks shot 49.4 percent from the field in Game 5, including 8 of 29 (27.6 percent) from 3-point range. Josh Hart had 12 points and 10 rebounds, Mikal Bridges also scored 12 points, and OG Anunoby had 11 points.

Indiana connected on 40.5 percent of its shots and was 10 of 30 from behind the arc while committing 19 turnovers. The Pacers trailed by as many as 22 points.

"It was a bad start. We never had the lead," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. "There were a multitude of things going wrong. There were stretches in the game where we got a little bit of traction but never enough."

Frimpong Joins Liverpool as Alexander-Arnold Departs for Real Madrid

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool have signed Jeremie Frimpong from Bayer Leverkusen, the English Premier League champions announced.

No fee or length of contract was disclosed but British media reports said Frimpong had arrived at Anfield on a five-year deal worth €35 million..

News of Frimpong's signing came just hours after Liverpool confirmed Trent Alexander-Arnold would be joining Real Madrid in time to play in the Club World Cup.

Frimpong appears to be a ready-made replacement for England full-back Alexander-Arnold, with Liverpool activating the 24-year-old Dutch international's release clause.

He was a key figure as Leverkusen won their first Bundesliga title



in 2023/24 and made 53 appearances in all competitions as they finished second this season.

Frimpong, however, will have competition at right-back from Northern Ireland defender Conor Bradley, who recently signed a new four-year contract with Liverpool.

Frimpong rose through the youth ranks at Manchester City and went on to join Celtic in September 2019 before a move to Leverkusen in January 2021.

He is now set to join a Netherlands contingent at Liverpool that includes manager Arne Slot as well as club captain Virgil van Dijk, Cody Gakpo and Ryan Gravenberch.

Liverpool are also in talks with Leverkusen over signing Frimpong's former team-mate Florian Wirtz.

Benzema Leads Al-Ittihad to Saudi Cup Win and Domestic Double



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Al-Ittihad's Karim Benzema scored twice to lead his side to a 3-1 victory over Al-Qadsiah in the Saudi Cup final on Friday as they completed the domestic double.

Laurent Blanc's side dominated the game to win the cup for the 10th time, while Al-Qadsiah finished the game with 10 men after Ezequiel Fernandez was sent off in the 81st minute.

Moussa Diaby nearly put Al-Ittihad ahead but missed a chance in the 21st minute.

Al-Qadsiah's former Spain defender Nacho escaped conceding a penalty when the ball touched his hand, but the referee didn't award a spot kick despite a VAR check in the 32nd minute.

Benzema opened the scoring for the Saudi Pro League champions, using his chest to convert Steven Bergwijn's precise cross 11 minutes before the interval.

Houssem Aouar made it 2-0 in the 43rd minute by following up after Koen Casteels saved a header from Benzema.

Al-Qadsiah's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang reduced the deficit from the penalty spot in first-half stoppage time.

Benzema, who won the SPL Player of the Season, hit the bar after the break, but Al-Ittihad were more cautious as they looked to maintain their lead.

Al-Ittihad keeper Predrag Rajkovic saved Aubameyang's shot in the 80th minute and Al-Qadsiah suffered a big blow when Ezequiel Fernandez received a second yellow card, forcing them to play with 10 men for the final minutes.

Then 2022 Ballon d'Or winner Benzema scored his side's third goal, firing in Diaby's low cross in stoppage time, before Aubameyang's shot hit the woodwork.

Piastri Keeps McLaren on Top in Spanish GP Practice



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Formula One championship leader Oscar Piastri kept McLaren on top in second Spanish Grand Prix practice after teammate and title rival Lando Norris set the pace in the opening session.

The Australian lapped the Circuit de Catalunya with a quickest time of one minute 12.760 seconds after Norris, winner in Monaco last Sunday, set a best of 1:13.718 in the early afternoon heat.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen, last year's winner, was second and third respectively in the sessions with Mercedes' George Russell Piastri's closest rival in practice two -- 0.286 slower -- with Norris fourth (+0.310)

Norris has closed the gap to Piastri in the standings to only three points after eight of 24 rounds and will retake the lead on Sunday if he wins.

Verstappen, who took his first F1 win at the circuit in 2016, missed some 20 minutes of the first session with mechanics working to change the car's rear suspension.

Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton -- winner a record-equalling six times in Spain -- was third on the timesheets in practice one but only 11th later on when teammate Charles Leclerc was fifth fastest.

Friday was the first sighting of the new front wings required to meet stricter flex tests introduced for the Spanish weekend, but there was no immediate indication of any significant change.

"I think it's going to take more than one session to see if there is an impact. Or if so, how it's affected the different cars," said Red Bull team boss Christian Horner.

"It didn't sound from the drivers' comments too different to a normal Friday."

Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli was sixth fastest in practice two with Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso seventh and Alpine's Pierre Gasly eighth.

Racing Bulls duo Isack Hadjar and Liam Lawson ended up ninth and 10th on the timesheets.