

The Foreign Ministers of Iran and France Have Discussed the Latest Developments Regarding Bilateral Consular Relations and the Recent Israeli-Imposed War on the Islamic Republic

IRAN NEWS

Ali-Akbar Velayati, Senior Adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on International Affairs, Says Iran Will Work to Hold the United States Accountable for Strikes on Iranian Nuclear Facilities

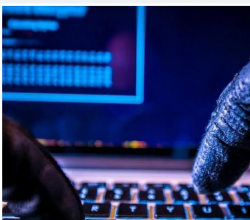
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2

DOMESTIC



Enemy Exploits Global Communication Infrastructure for Sabotage

> SEE PAGE 2

3

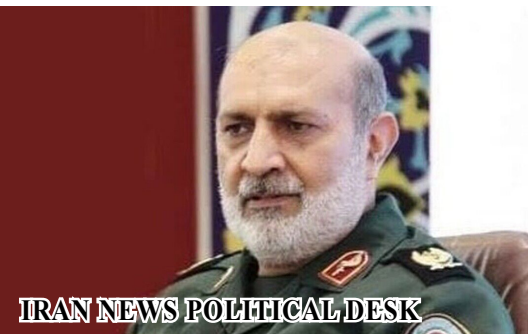
INTERNATIONAL

BRICS Leaders at Rio Summit Condemn Trump Tariffs, Slam Attacks on Iran

> SEE PAGE 3



Next Response to Israel Will Be More Crushing



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Brigadier General Rasoul Sanaeirad, Deputy for Political Affairs at the Ideological-Political Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Armed Forces, stressed Iran's full preparedness against any aggression, stating that the enemies have made miscalculations in their assessments.

In an interview with Al Mayadeen TV, General Sanaeirad outlined different aspects of the recent 12-day war between Israel and Iran, as well as the Islamic Republic's strategic stance.

Referring to statements made by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Sanaeirad said: "The Leader has emphasized that one must not yield to bullying and coercion; Iran is too big a bite for the enemies to swallow."

Commenting on the current situation on the battlefield, he clarified: "What we see today is merely a suspension of military operations, not an official ceasefire. The situation remains sensitive and tense, and enemy movements are being closely monitored."

Sanaeirad added: "The U.S. stepped in only after Israel's military actions turned into a blatant scandal. Tel Aviv's failure to manage the war put its allies under pressure, leading Washington to intervene to contain the fallout of this failure."

The senior commander warned that any new act of folly by Israel would provoke a far harsher and more crushing response from Iran than what Tel Aviv experienced during the recent 12-day conflict.

FM Slams U.S., Israeli Aggression as Gross Violation of UN Charter, Blow to Diplomacy



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says "unlawful" acts of aggression by the Israeli regime and the United States against the Islamic Republic constituted a gross violation of the United Nations Charter and were a blow to diplomacy.

Araqchi made the remark in a meeting with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira on the sidelines of the 17th summit of the BRICS group of emerging economies in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Sunday.

He said the US-Israeli strikes were an "unprecedented assault on the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the foundation of diplomacy" which would bear serious repercussions for regional peace and security.

The top Iranian diplomat also hailed Brazil's "firm and principled" stance in condemnation of the military aggression. Araqchi emphasized that the impunity granted to Israel and the full support of the US and some European countries for the regime are the root causes of the continuation and expansion of its warmongering policies.

He said all governments are legally and morally bound to put an end to the Israeli crimes against the Palestinians and its acts of aggression against regional nations.

The Brazilian foreign minister, for his part, said his country strongly condemned the military aggression against Iran's territorial integrity and national sovereignty, particularly its peaceful nuclear facilities.

Vieira added that the UN Security Council is responsible for safeguarding international peace and security.

Israeli Military, Terrorist Strikes Against Iran Lethal Blow to Diplomacy, NPT

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has condemned the US and Israeli aggression against Iran, calling it a severe blow to diplomacy, the rule of law, and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime.

Araqchi made the remarks in an address to the 17th summit of the BRICS group of emerging economies in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Sunday.

He said the Israeli regime's 12-day unprovoked "military, terrorist strikes" have been carried out with the support, collaboration and eventual participation of the United States.

He added that the Israeli unlawful attack against Iran violated the UN Charter, which killed and injured more than 6,000 innocent people and damaged infrastructures, residential areas and nuclear facilities in Iran.

"The US/Israeli attacks on our nuclear facilities were in stark violation of NPT and the UNSR resolution 2231 that has endorsed Iran's peaceful nuclear program in 2015 by consensus," the top Iranian diplomat emphasized.

"The US's subsequent involvement in this aggression by targeting Iran's peaceful nuclear installations has left no doubt as to the full complicity of the American government in Israel's war of aggression against Iran," he added.

Araqchi reiterated the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program which has been under the most robust surveillance by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

He said the strikes by the Israeli regime, and subsequently the United States, were no less than an unprecedented breach of international peace.

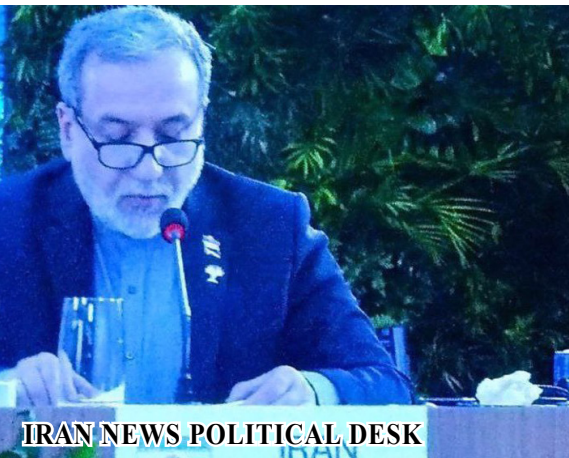
"No rule of law or logic allows anyone to target the IAEA-monitored peaceful nuclear facilities of another State simply out of speculation that the facilities may sometimes be used for weaponization," he added.

Araqchi reiterated the Iranian people's steadfastness to defend the country against such blatant acts of aggression, urging the aggressors to cease their criminal attacks following the heroic resistance of Iran's Armed Forces.

He emphasized that the Israeli regime's lawless behavior is supported and justified by its backers and apologists.

The foreign minister said, "Israel's act of aggression against Iran came as the result of absolute impunity it is granted by the US and some other European states to commit every atrocity in our region."

He warned that the common values of peace and justice are at serious stake now, reminding each UN member of its responsibility to "stand up against this grave injustice and condemn



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

Israeli aggression firmly."

"The truth and facts must not be allowed to be twisted upside-down by Israel and its backers. Israel's aggression on Iran cannot and must not be justified by any legal or moral standards. Any justification for this unjust and criminal war would be tantamount to complicity," Araqchi pointed out.

He stressed the importance of holding Israel and the United States accountable for their violations of international law, including human rights and humanitarian law.

The top Iranian diplomat said the consequences of the US-Israeli war of aggression would not be limited to any single country but the whole region, and beyond, will suffer.

The acts of aggression have undermined the whole UN-based international law system in favor of lawlessness and malicious unilateralism, he added.

He urged the world, every state, every UN mechanism and every multilateral arrangement and groupings to act now to end impunity and to hold the criminals accountable for their unending atrocities and grave violations of international law in our region.

He thanked fellow BRICS members who appreciated the high responsibility they shoulder concerning international peace and security by condemning and deploring the flagrant acts of aggression against Iran by two nuclear-armed actors since June 13.

"As a recognized voice of the Global South, BRICS shall fulfill its role as a staunch defender of international law and multilateralism, in support of the United Nations' fundamental principles of sovereign equality of all nations, non-use of force and peaceful settlement of disputes," Araqchi said.

The 17th two-day BRICS Summit kicked off in Rio de Janeiro on Sunday under the theme of "Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance".

The BRICS group of fast-developing economies initially consisted of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

In 2024, it was expanded to include Iran, Egypt, the UAE and Ethiopia as new members.

The group promotes a multipolar world order and is often seen as an alternative to Western economic and political hegemony. It comprises almost 46 percent of the global population, 36 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and 25 percent of the global trade measured in terms of exports.

Iran's Natural Gas Exports Down 30% in 2024



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's exports of natural gas fell by nearly a third last year, according to data by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), as the country continued to provide more gas supplies to its domestic customers.

Latest output data by OPEC, cited in a report by Tasnim agency, showed that Iran had exported 8.967 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas in 2024, down 30% from the year before.

Iran uses pipelines to export gas to neighboring countries with a bulk of supplies going to Turkey and Iraq.

The country, which has the world's second-largest natural gas resources, has stalled its export expansion programs in recent years, especially its plans to launch liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports, as it faces a growing domestic demand.

Iran produces more than 1 bcm per day of natural gas with exports accounting for less than 10% of the total output.

OPEC data showed that gas exports by Russia, a main rival of Iran in the regional gas market, had also declined by 34% last year to reach 159 bcm as the country continued to grapple with the impacts of US and European sanctions on its energy sector.

Other major regional producer Qatar exported 162 bcm of gas last year, almost flat on the figures reported in 2023.

The United States was the world's largest natural gas exporter last year with some 218 bcm of shipments as the country continued to benefit from restrictions on Russian supplies because of the war in Ukraine.

Yemeni Army Strike Israeli Positions



SANAA (Dispatches) - The Yemeni army has launched a fresh missile strike on Israeli positions in the occupied Palestinian territories in retaliation for the regime's earlier airstrikes on the Arab country.

Israeli warplanes on Sunday night launched at least 20 airstrikes on Hodeidah in western Yemen.

The Yemeni Armed Forces said in a statement on Sunday that the Air Force confronted the Israeli aggression on Yemen.

"The Yemeni Armed Forces assure our people and the free people of our nation that they are highly prepared and, with Allah's help, capable of confronting the aggressors, and that these aggressions will not affect them or their military capabilities, and that support operations for Gaza and Palestine will continue at a high pace, and we will defend our country and our nation with all the strength we possess, Allah willing," the statement added.

Israeli media reported that at least one Yemeni ballistic missile entered the skies over the occupied Palestine.

The attack triggered air raid sirens across several settlements, including areas in the occupied West Bank and Al-Quds.

Israel's main Ben Gurion Airport suspended all flights due to fears of a potential missile impact.

The attack followed Israel's Sunday airstrikes on several Yemeni key ports.

The Israeli army issued threats that it would soon carry out strikes.

The Israeli regime's military issued an evacuation threat for three Yemeni ports, saying it would strike those areas due to military activities being conducted there.

It identified the targets as the ports of Hodeidah, Ras Isa, and as-Salif, as well as the Hodeidah power station.

Iran, China Could Become Architects of a New "Asia-Centric" Cultural Order

TEHRAN - The Head of the International Center of Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, in a meeting with China's Deputy Minister of Culture, emphasized the deep civilizational ties between Iran and China and said that in the century of culture, nations with ancient civilizations can play a key role. He added that Iran and China could serve as the main pillars of a future Asia-centric cultural order.

On the sidelines of the Meeting of Tourism and Culture Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states, held in Qingdao, China, Hojatollah Ayoubi, Senior Advisor to the Minister and Head of the Ministry's International Center, met officially with Gao Xing, China's Deputy Minister of Culture.

During the meeting—which was also attended by four senior officials from China's Ministry of Culture—the two sides stressed the need to strengthen cultural, artistic, civilizational, and tourism relations.

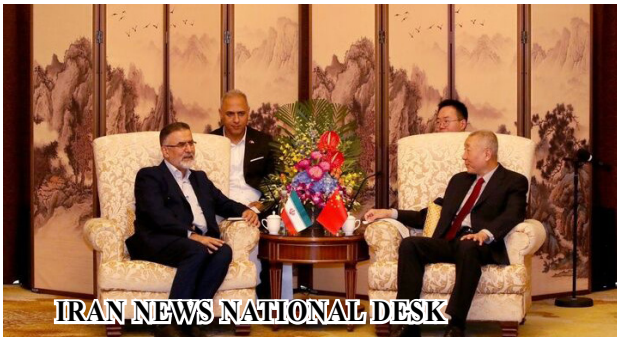
At the start of the meeting, Ayoubi highlighted the profound cultural connections between Iran and China, describing both nations as heirs to ancient Asian civilizations that embody rationality, spirituality, art, and authentic human values. He noted that these shared traits are evident not only in museum collections but also in the character of the people themselves.

Referring to the recent Israeli attack, Ayoubi said the calm, dignified, and culturally rooted reaction of the Iranian people once again demonstrated that Iran's identity is shaped by civilization, rather than emotional impulses.

Ayoubi emphasized that the 21st century is the century of culture and meaning, asserting that countries rich in cultural heritage, art, and wisdom will hold decisive positions in the future global order.

Citing the remarkable histories of Iran and China in fields such as calligraphy, book arts, traditional medicine, mysticism, and literature, he described the two nations as uniquely positioned to influence a new global cultural order. He added that the current era presents a historic opportunity for these countries not just to consume culture, but to help shape the future as civilizational architects.

Ayoubi presented a series of practical and strategic proposals to enhance cultural collaboration, which were warmly welcomed by the Chinese side. Among them was the idea of holding an annual art-of-the-book exhibition—including calligraphy, painting,



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

illumination, and related arts—alternately in Tehran and Beijing. He also proposed organizing major exhibitions of Iranian antiquities in China, exchanges involving poets, writers, musicians, and artists, co-producing cultural documentaries, and expanding cooperation in areas such as restoration, museum management, traditional medicine, and academic exchanges between professors and students.

Additionally, he suggested establishing a joint cultural committee to systematically and purposefully follow up on bilateral projects.

A significant part of the meeting focused on

cultural tourism.

Ayoubi noted that Iran has unilaterally abolished tourist visas for Chinese citizens and called on China to take a reciprocal measure.

"In today's world, filled with fake news and distorted images, the only way to truly know nations is through direct experience and observation," he said.

In this context, he proposed designing joint Iran-China programs centered around cultural, health, and pilgrimage tourism, strengthening Iran's participation in major Chinese tourism exhibitions, and encouraging visits by Chinese cultural, artistic, and media delegations to Iran.

In response, Gao Xing expressed appreciation for the Iranian delegation's visit and welcomed the cultural and civilizational approach of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He voiced support for all the proposals put forward.

He welcomed the idea of the art-of-the-book exhibition and noted the current exhibition of Iranian museum artifacts in Beijing, which has drawn over 70,000 daily visitors and been warmly received by the Chinese public.

Gao Xing also invited Iran to participate strongly in China's annual tourism fair and announced China's readiness to send cultural, cinematic, educational, and artistic delegations to Iran. He reaffirmed the Ministry of Culture's desire to expand bilateral cooperation, including through international cultural organizations.

At the conclusion of the strategic dialogue—held on Sunday, July 6, 2025—Iran's proposal to establish a joint committee to follow up on cultural projects received formal approval from the Chinese side.



Araqchi’s Message Handed Over to His Nicaraguan Counterpart

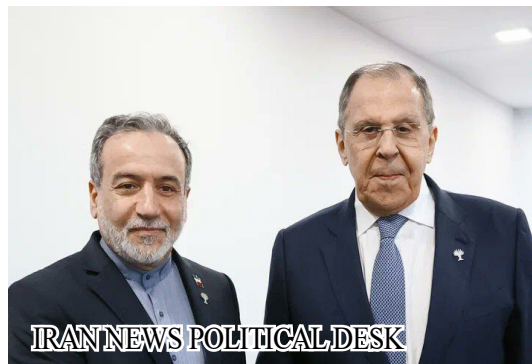
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran’s Ambassador to Nicaragua Ramin Zare has delivered a written message from Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi to his Nicaraguan counterpart.

Zare, met with Valdrack Jaentschke, Nicaragua’s Foreign Minister on Saturday.

During the meeting, Zare presented a letter from Araqchi, regarding the crimes committed by the U.S. and the Israeli regime against Iran.

Earlier, Iranian ambassadors in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, and Mauritania have also delivered written messages from Araqchi to his counterparts.

Lavrov Urges Diplomatic Solution to Iran’s Nuclear Issue



TEHRAN - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araqchi, has once again condemned the recent attacks by the United States and Israel on Iran and stressed that Tehran’s nuclear program must be resolved through political and diplomatic means.

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement late Sunday regarding the meeting between Lavrov and Araqchi, held on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The statement reaffirmed Russia’s condemnation of military attacks by Israel and the U.S. against Iran, including the bombing of nuclear energy infrastructure monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), describing these actions as violations of the UN Charter and international law.

The statement further emphasized the importance of addressing the crisis surrounding Iran’s nuclear program through political and diplomatic channels.

The Russian Foreign Ministry also noted that Moscow stands ready to assist in finding mutually acceptable solutions, including within the framework of special initiatives previously proposed by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russian officials have repeatedly condemned the attacks by the United States and Israel on Iran and have expressed willingness to mediate in the matter.

According to IRNA, on June 12, Israel carried out military strikes targeting areas in Tehran and other Iranian cities, including nuclear facilities, in clear violation of international law and the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The attack led to the martyrdom of several scientists, military personnel, and civilian citizens.

Following this assault, the United States also launched direct attacks on the Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan nuclear sites early Sunday (June 22), effectively joining Israel’s war against Iran.

In response, Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi, invoking Article 51 of the UN Charter, asserted that the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves all options to defend its national interests and the security of its people.

Farmers Ready to Sustain Production Under Any Circumstances



TEHRAN - The President of the Iranian Chamber of Agricultural Guilds emphasized that farmers will stand by the people under all conditions, highlighting their commitment to maintaining the production and supply of essential goods even during crises.

In an interview with IRNA, Peyman Alami referred to the Israeli regime’s imposed war against Iran and the efforts to continue agricultural production and supply of essential goods. “During these challenging times, farmers and producers have kept the production front active so that people need not worry about securing their daily necessities,” he said.

Alami stressed that there is currently no problem in the production of agricultural products and essential household goods, and that producers are actively working. “For the future, necessary measures have been anticipated to maintain the country’s resilience and internal stability,” he added.

He assured that in the coming days and months, there will be no shortages in the production, supply, or distribution of agricultural products and essential goods. “Farmers and producers will do their utmost to keep the market stable,” Alami stated.

At the same time, he called on the government to support farmers and announced the Chamber’s readiness to cooperate with the government to help farmers and meet consumer market demands if needed.

Alami also reassured the public not to worry about the availability of essential goods and food items, advising families to purchase according to their usual needs to avoid temporary shortages caused by panic buying.

Regarding strategic reserves in production and agricultural units, Alami mentioned that the necessary recommendations have been given to guilds to ensure they do not face supply issues.



TEHRAN - The Chairman of the Transformation and Innovation Commission of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce has stated that cutting off or restricting the country’s internet during wartime does not prevent cyber attacks, emphasizing that recent experiences have shown digital vulnerabilities can be as damaging as physical attacks.

In an interview with ILNA, Maziar Nourbakhsh, Chairman of the Commission for Transformation, Innovation, and Productivity at the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, discussed cyber attacks during the recent 12-day conflict between Iran and Israel. He explained that while there are no official statistics on the volume and severity of cyber attacks during this period, unofficial reports indicate a significant increase in both the number and intensity of attacks.

Nourbakhsh noted that during the 12-day war, cyber attacks notably targeted banks and certain cryptocurrency platforms. Due to security considerations, no official reports detailing these attacks have been published.

When asked about the usual targets and aims of such attacks, he said: “The goal of cyber attacks is to disrupt the functionality of systems, erase or manipulate data, leak information, and conduct psychological warfare.”

He added that during the recent conflict, most attacks focused on banking and military infrastructures, as well as media outlets. “In the early days of the Iran-Israel conflict, there were frequent reports of attempts to hack the country’s air defense systems,” Nourbakhsh said.

Commenting on reports that downed Israeli drones were equipped with satellite internet, Nourbakhsh said: “It was discovered that these Israeli drones were fitted with advanced Iridium satellite modems, and from a technical standpoint, this is plausible.”

Highlighting the critical role of cybersecurity, he added: “Today, cybersecurity is not just a technical issue but a key pillar of national resilience and economic stability during crises. Data has become one of the most valuable assets for any country or organization.”

Nourbakhsh stressed: “The recent experience showed that digital vulnerabilities can be as devastating as physical attacks. Imagine if these cyber attacks hadn’t been repelled and we lost access to all bank cards. The consequences could have been catastrophic.”

Discussing ways to strengthen cybersecurity, Nourbakhsh emphasized the need to review and unify data governance structures and have experts address existing weaknesses. He also suggested drafting clear, standardized contingency plans for such incidents.

He further underlined the importance of training specialized personnel and regularly upgrading defensive systems. “Organizations must routinely conduct cyber drills and exercises. Keeping both online and offline backups — stored separately from active data centers — is crucial. Moreover, every organization should have a tested crisis management plan to avoid being caught off guard,” he said.

Nourbakhsh concluded that businesses and organizations nationwide should have dedicated security auditors and crisis managers, and store data across multiple systems.

In response to whether cutting or restricting internet access during wartime could prevent cyber attacks, Nourbakhsh replied: “Disconnecting the internet does not control the flow of information because the enemy does not rely on Iran’s internet infrastructure for its attacks. Instead, it uses much more advanced tools.”

National Unity Will Endure If We Hear the People’s Voice



TEHRAN - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance emphasized that national unity, which has taken on a new dimension following recent terrorist attacks by the Zionist regime, will endure so long as officials listen to the voice of the people.

Speaking on Sunday evening at the closing day of the ten-day special program “Kheimeh Honar” (Art Tent)—a gathering dedicated to Ashura-themed arts including music, performing arts, and visual arts—Minister Seyed Abbas Salehi shared his thoughts on cultural initiatives and answered questions from journalists.

Responding to a question about public solidarity during the recent 12-day imposed war and the government’s plans to preserve and strengthen that unity, Salehi said:

“This unity was created by the people themselves. We must strive to hear the voice of the people. If we do, this unity will continue.”

Regarding the “Kheimeh Honar” program organized by the Ministry’s Deputy for Artistic Affairs after the 12-day war and its role in helping society return to normal, Salehi noted that art has multiple functions that become especially clear during certain periods.

“One of art’s features is to bring peace to individuals and society,” he said. “Naturally, after such a difficult 12-day period, a cultural space like ‘Kheimeh Honar,’ scented with the name of Imam Hussein (AS) and the spirit of Ashura art, can help soothe the public’s spirit and social mood.”

Salehi added that although he could not attend the event every night, it is reasonable to expect that over its ten-day span, the program transformed Tehran into a city infused with spiritual and emotional tranquility inspired by Imam Hussein (AS).

Discussing the unveiling of the “Maqal-Khani” (Martyrdom Recitation) album by the Iranian Music Association and its impact on strengthening ritual and religious arts, Salehi highlighted that a significant part of Iranian-Islamic art is deeply connected to ritual arts.

“It’s unfortunate that the months of Muharram and Safar are often treated as relatively inactive months for art,” he said. “Yet, many areas of our art—including visual, vocal, and performing arts—are deeply rooted in Ashura themes.”

Salehi emphasized that this year’s “Kheimeh Honar” offered an opportunity to review and revive ritual arts across different fields:

“Iran has numerous works in visual arts, vocal music, and performing arts that relate to Ashura. Muharram and Safar can be seen as opportunities for this revival.”

He described “Kheimeh Honar” as the starting point for narrating Iranian art within the framework of Ashura art, and expressed hope that with future planning, the coming years would see broader initiatives. “The album unveiled today is truly just the beginning,” he added, noting it could open the way for many more releases across vocal, visual, and performing arts.

Regarding the role of performing arts in fostering public solidarity and the government’s support for the arts after the 12-day war, Salehi said that art creates special opportunities during extraordinary circumstances.

“One problem we sometimes face is the perception that art only belongs to specific occasions, while its broader role in society is overlooked,” he remarked. “Art should never truly be put on hold. All fields—music, performing arts, visual arts—have roles to play at all times.”

Salehi stressed that Iran, as a nation navigating various challenges and phases, must be ready to produce art that fits every circumstance: “During this recent period, artists presented performances tailored to the situation. This shows that if we stay prepared, our theaters won’t need to close even during bombardment or in Muharram and Safar.”

He concluded that with such preparation, there would be less need for extraordinary government support during crises, because “art itself will never be shut down.” For the specific 12-day period, he said the Ministry was making efforts to provide additional support to compensate for disruptions.

Facilitating Legume Imports Urged to Meet National Demand



TEHRAN - The head of the Iranian Pulses Association has called for simplifying the import process for various legumes to ensure stable domestic supply.

According to Davoud Lapehchi, Iran’s annual demand for legumes stands at around 800,000 tonnes. Of this, roughly 200,000 tons—about 30%—are met through imports, with the remaining needs covered by domestic production.

Speaking to Iran Chamber Online, Lapehchi emphasized that despite recent challenges, including the impact of a 12-day conflict, there has been no shortage of legumes in the domestic market. However, he stressed the need for proactive measures such as targeted stockpiling to secure future supply, especially given legumes’ strategic role in everyday diets across all social groups.

“The main challenge we face relates to imports,” Lapehchi said. “In exceptional circumstances, imports may be disrupted, so we need special support to facilitate and expedite the process of importing and clearing legumes through customs.”

He also highlighted the importance of timely foreign currency allocation for importers to prevent market shortages.

According to the Iranian Pulses Association, the largest share of legume imports consists of lentils and a specific variety of chickpeas.

Cigarette Smuggling Costs More Than Local Production



TEHRAN - The head of Iran’s Association of Tobacco Producers, Exporters, and Importers has raised alarms over the rising impact of cigarette smuggling on the domestic market, revealing that contraband accounts for about 20–25% of cigarette sales in Iran. This, combined with long delays in importing raw materials, has driven retail prices higher than those printed on cigarette packs.

Mohammad Reza Tajdar told ISNA that smuggling’s annual toll on foreign currency reserves is even higher than that of domestic production. According to the national Anti-Smuggling Headquarters, around 6–9 billion sticks of cigarettes were smuggled into Iran in 2022, costing the country an estimated \$450 million. Meanwhile, domestic producers made roughly 70 billion sticks, using about \$300 million worth of imported raw materials.

Tajdar criticized the current oversight structure, explaining that after organizational changes at the National Tobacco Company, its anti-smuggling personnel were not transferred to the new tobacco regulatory center. As a result, enforcement now relies on police and local trade bodies, which he says lack sufficient resources. He proposed allocating a share of the tobacco industry’s over \$28 trillion rials in annual tax revenues to strengthen anti-smuggling operations.

The domestic tobacco industry faces steep taxes, including value-added and per-stick taxes, which Tajdar says account for around 60% of the retail price. This has pushed some local manufacturers out of the market or forced them to move operations abroad, particularly to countries like Iraq and the UAE. Meanwhile, the market is flooded with over 500 brands of counterfeit, smuggled, or fake tobacco products.

Despite growing domestic production, now estimated at 78 billion sticks per year, local brands struggle to compete with cheaper contraband cigarettes, which bypass taxes and use lower-cost materials. Tajdar warned that the rich variety of smuggled products has shifted demand away from legitimate Iranian brands.

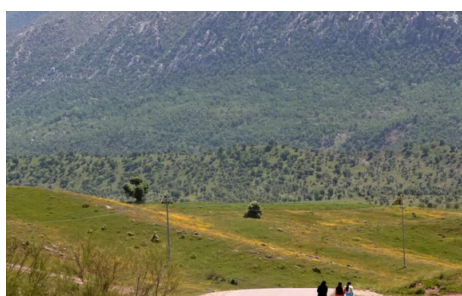
Tajdar noted that Iran technically has no law banning the import of heat-not-burn or electronic cigarettes. Yet, the Ministry of Health has imposed de facto restrictions, leaving this segment entirely to smugglers. While these alternatives still carry health risks, studies suggest they produce fewer harmful chemicals than traditional cigarettes. Tajdar questioned why legal imports and production are blocked while the illegal market thrives.

A key driver of higher retail prices, Tajdar explained, is the six-month delay in importing raw materials due to bureaucracy in the Comprehensive Trade System and foreign currency allocation. Iran’s tobacco industry depends on importing 21–29 essential items, and a hold-up in any one can disrupt production. Distributors, aware of shortages, increase prices — profits that do not reach the manufacturers themselves.

Five Turkish Soldiers Killed by Methane Gas in Northern Iraq

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish Defense Ministry on Sunday said five Turkish soldiers were killed due to exposure to a "high concentration of accumulated methane gas" while searching a cave in northern Iraq for the remains of a fellow soldier killed by Kurdish militants in 2022.

Five Turkish soldiers have died after exposure to methane gas on Sunday while searching a cave in northern Iraq for the remains of a fellow soldier killed by Kurdish militants in 2022, the Turkish Defence Ministry said. Soldiers were searching a mountain cave when 19 of them were exposed to the gas, which is colorless, odorless, flammable and can cause asphyxiation in sufficient concentration.



Suriname Elects Country's First Woman President



PARIS (Dispatches) - Lawmakers elected Jennifer Geerlings-Simons as Suriname's first woman president on Sunday, after her party won the most seats in legislative elections in May.

The 71-year-old former opposition leader was left the sole candidate for president after her rivals decided on Thursday not to nominate anyone to lead the small country on South America's northern coast.

Geerlings-Simons' National Democratic Party (NDP) won 18 of the 51 seats in the National Assembly, more than those of the centrist VHP party of outgoing president Chan Santokhi.

The NDP had already entered into an agreement with five other parties with which it jointly holds 34 seats in parliament -- obtaining the two-thirds majority needed to claim the presidency.

The NDP was founded by former coup leader and autocrat-turned-elected-president Desi Bouterse, who died in hiding in December 2024.

Under his iron-fisted rule, Suriname was labeled a narco-state, with Bouterse convicted in the Netherlands for smuggling drugs.

Santokhi's party had hoped to form a coalition to remain in power, but said in a statement that it had decided not to oppose Geerlings-Simons' election.

Geerlings-Simons said she "accepted the position," in a speech to lawmakers, ahead of an inauguration due July 16.

"I am acutely aware of the responsibility that now rests on our shoulders. This responsibility is made greater by the fact that I am, in fact, the first woman to hold this office," Geerlings-Simons said.

"I will use all my knowledge, strength and insight to make our wealth available to all our fellow citizens, with special attention to our young people and those who have so far not had the opportunities to develop," she added.

China Retaliates Against Brussels With Restrictions on EU Medical Equipment



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China said Sunday that European medical device companies will be barred from selling to the Chinese government as a countermeasure for the European Union's restrictions on the sale of similar products from China, in the latest trade salvo between the two economies.

European companies will be excluded if the budget for procurement is above 45 million yuan (\$6.28 million), according to a notice from the finance ministry on Sunday with the restrictions in place the same day. The move will not apply to European companies that have invested in China and that manufacture goods in the country.

China on Friday imposed anti-dumping duties on European brandy, most notably cognac produced in France. While the duties on brandy include several exceptions for major brandy producers, China and the EU have multiple trade disputes across a range of industries.

China protested after many European countries levied duties on EVs made in China. Since then, China has also launched investigations into European pork and dairy products.

In June, the EU announced that Chinese companies were to be excluded from any government purchases of more than 5 million euros (\$5.89 million). The measure seeks to incentivize China to cease its discrimination against EU firms, the EU said, accusing China of erecting "significant and recurring legal and administrative barriers to its procurement market".

BRICS Leaders at Rio Summit Condemn Trump Tariffs, Slam Attacks on Iran



RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - BRICS leaders meeting in Rio de Janeiro Sunday warned that U.S. President Donald Trump's "indiscriminate" import tariffs risk hurting the global economy. The final summit statement condemned last month's military strikes on Iran as a "violation of international law" without mentioning the U.S. or Israel by name.

The BRICS bloc of developing nations on Sunday condemned the increase of tariffs and attacks on Iran, but refrained from naming U.S. President Donald Trump. The group's declaration, which also took aim at Israel's military actions in the Middle East, mentioned war-torn Ukraine just once.

China's President Xi Jinping did not attend a BRICS summit for the first time since he became his country's leader in 2012. Russian President Vladimir Putin, who will make an appearance via videoconference, continues to mostly avoid traveling abroad due to an international arrest warrant issued after Russia invaded Ukraine.

The group's declaration raised "serious concerns" about the rise of tariffs which it said were "inconsistent with WTO (World Trade Organization) rules," the document says. The group added that those restrictions "threaten reduce global trade, disrupt global supply chains, and introduce uncertainty."

Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva criticized NATO's decision to hike military spending by 5% of GDP annually by 2035. That sentiment was later echoed in the group's declaration.

"It is always easier to invest in war than in peace," Lula said at the opening of the summit.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, who was expected to attend the summit before the attacks on his country in June, sent his foreign minister Abbas Araqchi to the meeting in Rio.

The restraint in Rio de Janeiro marks a departure from last year's summit hosted by Russia in Kazan, when the Kremlin sought to develop alternatives to U.S.-dominated payment systems which would allow it to dodge Western sanctions imposed after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

"We recall our national positions concerning the conflict in Ukraine as expressed in the appropriate fora, including the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly," the group said in its final declaration.

João Alfredo Nyegray, an international business and geopolitics professor at the Pontifical Catholic University in Parana, said the summit could have played a role in showing an alternative to an unstable world, but won't do so.

"The withdrawal of Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and the uncertainty about the level of representation for countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are confirming the difficulty for the BRICS to establish themselves as a cohesive pole of global leadership," Nyegray said. "This moment demands high level articulation, but we are actually

seeing dispersion."

Brazil, the country that chairs the bloc, has picked six strategic priorities for the summit: global cooperation in healthcare; trade, investment and finance; climate change; governance for artificial intelligence; peace-making and security; and institutional development.

It has decided to focus on less controversial issues, such as promoting trade relations between members and global health, after Trump returned to the White House, said Ana Garcia, a professor at the Rio de Janeiro Federal Rural University.

"Brazil wants the least amount of damage possible and to avoid drawing the attention of the Trump administration to prevent any type of risk to the Brazilian economy," Garcia said.

While Brazil advocated on Sunday for the reform of Western-led global institutions, a cornerstone policy of the group, the country's government wants to avoid becoming the target of tariffs — a predicament it has so far largely escaped.

Trump has threatened to impose 100% tariffs against the bloc if they take any moves to undermine the dollar.

BRICS was founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, but the group last year expanded to include Indonesia, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates.

As well as new members, the bloc has 10 strategic partner countries, a category created at last year's summit that includes Belarus, Cuba and Vietnam.

That rapid expansion led Brazil to put housekeeping issues — officially termed institutional development — on the agenda to better integrate new members and boost internal cohesion.

Despite notable absences, the summit is important for attendees, especially in the context of instability provoked by Trump's tariff wars, said Bruce Scheidl, a researcher at the University of Sao Paulo's BRICS study group.

"The summit offers the best opportunity for emerging countries to respond, in the sense of seeking alternatives and diversifying their economic partnerships," Scheidl said.

For Lula, the summit is a welcome pause from a difficult domestic scenario, marked by a drop in popularity and conflict with Congress.

The meeting was also an opportunity to advance climate negotiations and commitments on protecting the environment before November's COP 30 climate talks in the Amazonian city of Belem.

Hezbollah Chief Says Won't Surrender Under Israeli Threats



Israeli strikes in the country's south and east, a day after authorities said one person was killed and six others wounded in Israeli raids in the south.

Later Sunday, the Israeli military confirmed it had carried out strikes in the eastern Bekaa valley and in the south against what it called Hezbollah military sites and weapons systems.

Under the ceasefire, Hezbollah was to pull its fighters back north of the

Litani river, some 30 kilometres (20 miles) from the Israeli frontier.

Israel was to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, but has kept them deployed in five areas that it deemed strategic.

Lebanese authorities say they have been dismantling Hezbollah's military infrastructure in the south near the Israeli border.

Qassem said Israel must abide by the ceasefire agreement, "withdraw from the occupied territories, stop its aggression... release the prisoners" detained during last year's war, and that reconstruction in Lebanon must begin.

Only then "will we be ready for the second stage, which is to discuss the national security and defence strategy" which includes the issue of group's disarmament, he added.

Supporters dressed in black for Ashura marched through Beirut's southern suburbs before his speech, waving Hezbollah banners as well as the Lebanese, Palestinian and Iranian flags.

Some also carried posters of the slain leader Nasrallah.

Hussein Jaber, 28, originally from south Lebanon, said the group's weapons "can't be handed over, not now, not later. Those who think Hezbollah will turn in its arms are ignorant."

In his speech, Qassem also said his movement "will not accept normalisation with the Israeli enemy", after Israel's top diplomat said his government was "interested" in such a move.

Lebanon, which is technically still at war with Israel, did not comment.

Syria, also mentioned by Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, said it was "premature" to discuss normalisation.

U.S. Tariffs to Kick in August 1, Barring Trade Deals

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. tariffs will kick in on August 1 if trading partners from Taiwan to the European Union do not strike deals with Washington, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Sunday.

The rates will "boomerang back" to the sometimes very high levels that President Donald Trump had announced on April 2 -- before he suspended the levies to allow for trade talks and set a July 9 deadline for agreements, Bessent told CNN.

Bessent confirmed comments by Trump to reporters aboard Air Force One on Friday in which he also cited a new deadline: "Well, I'll probably start them on August 1."

The president told reporters Sunday he had signed about a dozen letters to inform countries of rate hikes, to be sent out on Monday.

"I think we'll have most countries done by July 9, either a letter or a deal," Trump told reporters Sunday, adding that some deals have already been made.

Standing at his side, U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick confirmed tariffs



would kick in on August 1, "but the President is setting the rates and the deals right now."

The tariffs were part of a broader announcement in April where Trump imposed a 10 percent duty on goods from almost all trading partners, with a plan to step up these rates for a select group within days.

But he swiftly paused the hikes until July 9, allowing for trade talks to take place.

Countries have been pushing to strike deals that would help them avoid these elevated duties.

So far, the Trump administration has unveiled deals with the United Kingdom and Vietnam, while Washington and Beijing agreed to temporarily lower staggeringly high levies on each other's products.

Bessent said the administration was "close to several deals."



Norris Wins Thrilling British Grand Prix After Piastri Penalized

LONDON (Dispatches) - Lando Norris won a thrilling, rain-hit British Grand Prix, sweeping to victory after championship-leading team-mate Oscar Piastri was penalised for an infringement behind the Safety Car. The Australian was left with second place at the flag ahead of Nico Hülkenberg who rose from 19th on the grid to take his first F1 podium at the 239th attempt.

On a wet, but rapidly drying track, the formation lap got underway behind the Safety Car and when it left the track so too did a number of drivers who pitted to swap the Intermediate tyres all had fitted for slicks.

At lights out on the partially empty grid, polesitter Max Verstappen made a good getaway and after shrugging off a brief challenge from front row rival Piastri, the Red Bull driver settled into the lead. Behind the top two, Norris held third ahead of Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Pierre Gasly who powered through to take P5.

However, further back there was contact between Haas' Esteban Ocon and Racing Bulls driver Liam Lawson and the New Zealander was bounced off track and out of the race. The VSC was swiftly deployed, and the pace froze.

When the caution ended, Verstappen held the lead but behind the leaders another incident was unfolding. Kick Sauber's Gabriel Bortoleto crashed and though he was able to get going again he eventually had to stop on track and the VSC was deployed for a second time.

The second neutralisation ended on lap 7 and this time Verstappen could do nothing to keep Piastri at bay and on lap 8, with the aid of DRS, the Australian swept past on the Hangar Straight to steal the lead.

Soon afterwards, rain began to fall and struggling on "really bad inters" the Red Bull driver slid off track at Chapel and Norris swept past. Piastri pitted and he was followed by Norris and Verstappen. Norris had a slow stop, however, and Verstappen was able to get out ahead of the Briton to steal back second place.

Piastri now led the Red Bull driver by 12 seconds, with Norris just half a second behind the Dutchman. Lance Stroll, who had started 17th and put in a brief, massively advantageous stint on Softs, rose to fourth ahead of Sauber's Nico Hülkenberg who also profit from the incidents and the conditions after starting

19th. However, with the conditions rapidly deteriorating the Safety Car was sent out on lap 14 and the race was neutralised.

The Safety Car left the track at the end of lap 17 and Piastri controlled the restart to hold his lead ahead of Verstappen and Norris. Behind them, Stroll and Hulkenberg maintained position.

The Safety car was almost immediately out again, however. In heavy spray, Hadjar failed to see Kimi Antonelli ahead of him and on the way up to Copse the Racing Bulls drove into the back of the Mercedes. Remarkably, the Italian was able to carry on, despite being deprived of a rear diffuser, but Hadjar pirouetted off track and into the barriers.

Just ahead of the Safety Car leaving the track, Piastri suddenly braked hard, dropping from 218km/h to just 52km/h. Verstappen shot past the McLaren and had to brake hard himself to allow the race leader past. The incident was quickly placed under investigation and Piastri was later handed a 10-second time penalty for erratic braking behind the SC.

The Safety Car peeled off track at the end of lap 22 and struggling for grip in Stowe Verstappen spun off track. He rejoined in P9 and slipped to P10 as he was passed by Williams' Carlos Sainz.

At half distance, Piastri led his team-mate by 3.6s and Stroll was now up to third place ahead of Hülkenberg and Gasly. Behind them, Hamilton got past Russell to take P6. Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso sat in P8 ahead of Sainz and Verstappen.

Piastri pitted from lead on lap 44 and after serving his penalty and fitting Mediums, he rejoined in P2, ahead of Hülkenberg who was now also on Medium tyres. Norris headed in at the end of the following lap and with Medium tyres on board the Briton rejoined in a lead he would hold until the end of the race.

Behind them McLaren pair Nico Hülkenberg took his first ever podium in his 239th race start, with Hamilton in fourth place. With two laps to go Verstappen closed right up to Stroll and when the Canadian made a slight error the Red Bull driver pounced to take P5 at the flag. Gasly also made his way past Stroll on the final lap to take P6. The Aston Martin driver managed to cross the line in seventh, ahead of Williams' Alex Albon, Alonso and Russell.

Alcaraz Resists Red-Hot Rublev to Reach Wimbledon Quarters

LONDON (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz came through a ferocious fourth-round firefight against a red-hot Andrey Rublev to win 6-7(5) 6-3 6-4 6-4 on Centre Court and keep his bid for a third successive Wimbledon title on track.

The Spanish second seed stuttered in his opening three rounds but found his best form to eventually subdue an inspired opponent who once again came up short against the very best.

Rublev rocked Alcaraz by roaring into a 4-1 lead only to be pegged back but the Russian produced some astonishing tennis to snatch the tiebreak and move ahead.

Alcaraz never looked ruffled though and levelled the match after Rublev double-faulted on a break point. Rublev continued throwing everything in his arsenal at the champion in the third set but paid for not taking some early break points as Alcaraz found another gear.

Alcaraz looked impregnable in the fourth set and a single break of serve was enough to seal a 22nd successive match win and set up a last-eight clash with Britain's Cameron Norrie.



"Andrey is one of the most powerful players we have on Tour and is so aggressive with the ball. It's really difficult to face him, he forces you to the limit on each point," Alcaraz, bidding to become only the fourth man to win back-to-back French Open and Wimbledon titles multiple times, said on court.

"Really happy with the way I moved and played intelligent and smart tactically. A really good match all round."

With so many seeds having fallen early, this was the first match between top-20 players in the men's singles this year and it did not disappoint as the quality scaled rare heights.

Rublev, 27, has barely been outside of the top 10 since 2022 but has never got close to winning a Grand Slam, losing all 10 quarter-finals that he has contested.

The 14th seed must have sighed when he saw Alcaraz in his way in the fourth round, but he came out in positive fashion, off-loading rockets at the five-time Grand Slam champion.

NBA's First 7-Team Trade Makes Kevin Durant Officially a Rocket



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The NBA's first seven-team trade is official on Sunday with the start of the new league year as 15-time All-Star forward Kevin Durant is moving from the Phoenix Suns to the Houston Rockets, ESPN reported.

The transaction, initially reported on June 22, also involves the Brooklyn Nets, Golden State Warriors, Atlanta Hawks, Los Angeles Lakers and Minnesota Timberwolves, per Sunday's report.

The Rockets added Durant as well as veteran Clint Capela, who played for Houston from 2014-20 before spending the last five seasons with the Hawks.

The Suns received guard Jalen Green, guard/forward Dillon Brooks, center Khaman Maluach (the No. 10 overall pick of the 2025 draft, from Houston), forward Rasheer Fleming (31st pick of draft, from Minnesota), guard Koby Brea (41st pick, from Golden State), guard Daegwon Plowden (from Atlanta) and a second-round selection.

The Nets ended up with two second-round draft picks, while the Warriors acquired forward Alex Toole (52nd overall pick in 2025, from Phoenix) and Jahmai Mashack (59th pick, from Houston).

The Lakers added forward Adou Thiero, the 36th overall draft pick, from Brooklyn.

Atlanta swapped second-round picks and also brought in veteran forward David Roddy from Houston and cash.

The Timberwolves added Rocco Zikarsky (45th overall pick of 2025 draft, from the Lakers), two second-round selections and cash.

Durant now is eligible to sign a two-year extension worth up to \$122 million. He has one season left on his current deal and is set to earn \$54.7 million in 2025-26.

Durant will join a Rockets team that finished the regular season as the second seed in the Western Conference. The star forward will join All-Star Alperen Sengun, Amen Thompson and Fred VanVleet, among others, in Houston.

Durant, who turns 37 in September, played in 62 games with the Suns in 2024-25. He averaged 26.6 points, 6.0 rebounds, 4.2 assists and 1.2 blocks, not far off of his career averages. He also shot 43.0 percent from 3-point range.

Selected to the All-NBA first team six times and the Most Valuable Player for the 2013-14 season, Durant has appeared in 1,123 games with the Seattle SuperSonics/Oklahoma City Thunder (2007-16), Golden State Warriors (2016-19), Brooklyn Nets (2020-23) and Suns. He has career averages of 27.2 points, 7.0 rebounds, 4.4 assists and 1.1 blocks, shooting 39 percent from long distance.

Arsenal Sign Spain's Martin Zubimendi



LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal announced the signing of midfielder Martin Zubimendi from Real Sociedad after they reportedly triggered his £51 million release clause.

Euro 2024 winner Zubimendi had previously been a target for Liverpool and was also linked with Real Madrid.

"This is a huge moment in my career," said the defensive midfielder, who is understood to have put pen to paper on a five-year deal.

"It's the move I was looking for and one I wanted to make. As soon as you set foot here, you realise how big this club and this team are.

"I set my sights on Arsenal because their style of play is a good fit for me. They have shown their potential recently and the best is yet to come."

The BBC reported the deal is worth almost £60 million (RM298 million), with Arsenal opting to pay more than the release clause in order to spread the cost of the fee.

Zubimendi, 26, made 236 appearances in all competitions for Sociedad after graduating from the club's academy and has played 19 times for Spain.

He will reinforce manager Mikel Arteta's midfield options after Thomas Partey's contract expired and Jorginho left the club.

Zubimendi's arrival paves the way for Arsenal's record-signing Declan Rice to play a more attacking midfield role alongside captain Martin Odegaard.

"Martin is a player who will bring a huge amount of quality and football intelligence to our team," said Arteta.

"He will fit in really well and he has all the attributes to be a key player for us."

Mexico Defeat USA 2-1 to Retain CONCACAF Gold Cup

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - Mexico defeated the United States 2-1 to retain the CONCACAF Gold Cup and lift the title for a record-extending 10th time.

A 77th-minute header from Mexico skipper Edson Alvarez completed a come-from-behind victory after a typically hard-fought tussle between the North American arch-rivals and 2026 World Cup co-hosts.

The win was no less than Mexico deserved after dominating for long periods against Mauricio Pochettino's inexperienced USA side, who went into the tournament missing several first-choice regulars.

Alvarez's winner capped a fairytale return to Houston after he had limped off in tears at the same venue during Mexico's opening game of the Copa America last year.



"It's a very emotional moment for me," the West Ham midfielder said afterwards.

"Ever since I got to Houston, I've been thinking about that heartbeat. I just asked life to give me one more joy."

The USA got off to a dream start when center-back Chris Richards headed the hosts into a four-minute lead in front of just under 71,000 fans at NRG Stadium.

Sebastian Berhalter's perfectly flighted free-kick sowed panic in the Mexican defence and Crystal Palace defender Richards stooped for a powerful header which cannoned off the underside of the bar and over the line.

That early effort was to be the USA's best chance of a first half that Mexico controlled for the most part.