

Iran Has Condemned the European Union's Double Standards Regarding Israel's Attacks on Syria, Pledging Steadfast Support for the Syrian People's National Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Foreign Ministry Decried as Unjustified and Misleading the U.S. Administration's Renewed Claims of the Involvement of Several Iranian Citizens in the "Disappearance" of Former FBI Agent Robert Levinson in an Unspecified Location in Southwest Asia Some 18 Years Ago

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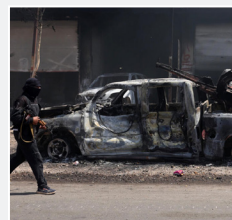
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## New Tariff Reforms in Pakistan Create Fresh Trade Opportunities with Iran



TEHRAN - The government of Pakistan has announced new decisions to reduce certain customs tariffs and base prices, creating a promising opportunity for enhanced private sector cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

Following sustained efforts by Iran's Ambassador in Islamabad and the Iranian Trade Attaché in Pakistan, productive outcomes have emerged from multiple rounds of talks with Pakistani customs officials aimed at lowering import tariffs on Iranian exports.

Murad Nematizargaran, Iran's Trade Attaché in Pakistan, told IRNA that the customs valuation and tariff rate for Iran's tile and ceramic exports were reviewed. This followed Pakistan's recent decision to increase base prices and reduce the number of country categories from four to three—placing Iran in the "others" group. In response, Iranian and Pakistani officials engaged in negotiations to adjust this categorization.

He stated that as a result, Pakistan Customs issued an executive directive creating a separate category for Iran, assigning it the lowest base price among all countries, thereby giving Iran a distinct advantage.

Previously, Pakistan's import tariffs under the "Regular Duty" system—meant to protect domestic production—reached as high as 55% for some Iranian products like tiles and ceramics.

Nematizargaran explained that, under Pakistan's recent shift to a single tariff type known as "CD" (Customs Duty) over a three- to five-year period, extensive consultations were held with Pakistani trade policymakers. He emphasized that while the policy appeared to support domestic production, the high tariffs ultimately limited consumer choice and imposed excessive costs.

## Iran Air Defense Will Make Enemies Regret Their Miscalculations



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top military official has praised the country's air defense units for their performance during last month's 12-day US-Israeli aggression, warning that the units will make any aggressor regret any potential attack against Iranian soil.

Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, Chief of the General Staff of Iran's Armed Forces, visited the national air defense headquarters on Friday, where he honored the "martyrs, wounded, and war veterans" of the recent aggression and expressed gratitude to all air defense personnel for their service.

"Air defense, standing on the front line of our sky's protection, has proven its ability to withstand all levels of threats and to make the enemies of the Iranian nation regret their miscalculations," he said on the sidelines of the visit.

His remarks come in the aftermath of a blatant and unprovoked Israeli aggression that began on June 13, targeting senior Iranian military officials, nuclear scientists, and civilians. The US later came to help Israel in the illegal aggression by striking three Iranian peaceful nuclear facilities.

Iran responded by targeting key locations across the occupied Palestinian territories and launching attacks on the US al-Udeid air base in Qatar—Washington's largest military installation in West Asia. Iran's retaliatory campaign compelled the Israeli regime to announce a unilateral ceasefire on June 24.

### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says the EU and European troika need to abandon their "worn-out policies" of threat and pressure if they seek to play a role in the possibly new round of nuclear talks between Iran and the United States.

Araqchi said in a post on his X social media account on Friday that he had made the statement in a joint teleconference with the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Britain as well as EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas.

Stressing that Washington left the negotiating table once in 2015 and then this June by opting for a military campaign against Tehran, Araqchi said any new round of talks was only possible if the other side sought to reach a "mutually beneficial nuclear deal."

"It was the US that withdrew from a two-year negotiated deal - coordinated by EU in 2015- not Iran; and it was US that left the negotiation table in June this year and chose a military option instead, not Iran," the Iranian foreign minister said. "Any new round of talks is only possible when the other side is ready for a fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial nuclear deal."

Pointing to repeated European threats about the activation of a mechanism that would re-impose hefty sanctions on the Islamic Republic, Araqchi said, "If EU/E3 want to have a role, they should act responsibly, and put aside the worn-out policies of threat and pressure, including the "snapback" for which they lack absolutely no moral and legal ground."

The Iranian Foreign Ministry has previously warned that any attempt to trigger the so-called snapback mechanism to reimpose UN sanctions amounts to a confrontational move that would

draw an appropriate response from Tehran.

Snapback would bring into force six previous Iran-related Security Council resolutions adopted between 2006 and 2010. It would reinstate the expired UN arms embargo that barred countries from supplying, selling, or transferring most military equipment to Iran and prohibited Tehran from exporting any weapons.

It would also impose export controls, travel bans, asset freezes, and other restrictions on individuals, entities, and banks.

Iran and the United States held five rounds of indirect talks on the former's peaceful nuclear program before June 13, when the Israel launched an unhinged US-backed aggression on the Islamic Republic, assassinating many high-ranking military commanders and nuclear scientists in addition to civilians.

Mediated by Oman, the 6th round of talks was planned to be held in the Omani capital of Muscat on June 15, but was called off due to the anti-Iran attacks.

On June 22, the United States officially joined the war against Iran by launching attacks on three nuclear facilities in the country in violation of the United Nations Charter and the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Iran in response fired a barrage of missiles on Al Udeid US Airbase in Qatar, which is the largest American military base in the region.

## Sharp Decline in Tehran Rainfall Prompts Water Use Crackdown



TEHRAN - In response to a drastic drop in rainfall and worsening drought conditions, Tehran authorities have announced the end of leniency toward excessive water users. The city's water utility will now strictly enforce penalties against wasteful consumption and illegal water use.

Mohsen Ardakani, CEO of the Tehran Province Water and Wastewater Company, reported that rainfall in the region since the start of the current hydrological year has fallen by approximately 48% compared to long-term averages.

"For the fifth consecutive year, Tehran is facing drought—an event without precedent in the past six decades of climate and meteorological records," said Ardakani. "While previous years were already below average, this year marks an extreme low in rainfall levels."

With only two months remaining in the water year, total precipitation in Tehran has reached just 149 mm, significantly lower than last year's already reduced figures. The long-term annual average for the province is about 280 mm.

Ardakani warned that Tehran's reservoirs and groundwater sources have been severely impacted. "Water levels in the city's dams are at their lowest, and underground aquifers cannot independently sustain water demands if the dams go offline," he said.

According to Ardakani, nearly all feasible water supply projects around Tehran have already been implemented. "There are no untapped water sources remaining around the city. Sustainable water supply now depends on consumption management and active cooperation from citizens."

## Israel Had Sought to Destroy Iran, But Tehran Won



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Hezbollah's secretary-general says the Israeli regime had sought to advance its destructive agenda against Iran during its war against the Islamic Republic last month, but Tehran managed to outmaneuver the regime.

The war took place under the pretext of confronting Iran's nuclear activities, the Lebanese resistance movement's chief, Sheikh Naim Qassem, said during an address on Friday.

The Israeli regime imposed the war on Iran on June 13, targeting the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities and other infrastructures as well as various officials and ordinary civilians.

Sheikh Qassem noted that the regime launched the warfare, while all the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s inspectors had confirmed the peaceful nature of the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy activities.

"It, therefore, became clear that Israel's true aim was to destroy Iran, but Tehran succeeded in achieving victory."

The official was pointing to the Iranian Armed Forces' successful defensive and retaliatory operations throughout the aggression that forced Tel Aviv to call for a ceasefire after no more than 12 days.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the resistance leader commended Hezbollah for preventing Israeli occupiers from reaching the country's capital, Beirut, during Tel Aviv's last round of escalated, deadly aggression against Lebanon.

He was referring to the movement's determined defense of the country throughout the escalation that the Israeli regime had started out in October 2023.

## 70% of War Wounded Rescued by Red Crescent Relief Workers

TEHRAN - In a press briefing held on Saturday, Pir Hossein Kolivand, head of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, revealed that more than 70 percent of the wounded during the recent 12-day conflict were rescued by the organization's relief workers. He also shared the tragic story of a soldier at Evin Prison whose body was identified and returned to his family just an hour after the facility was struck.

Kolivand highlighted the critical role of journalists during the war, referring to them as "fighters of truth" who helped expose the brutal nature of the "child-killing enemy" through their honest coverage.

He said the Red Crescent had provided public training in past years and had prepared 70,000 volunteers with specialized training to ensure each province knew its emergency responsibilities. A robust organizational chart ensured operational continuity even in leadership disruptions.

The organization increased its vehicle fleet and expanded field hospital capacity while putting helicopters on standby for emergency deployment. Kolivand noted that although he was abroad for Hajj during the war, Red Crescent deputies responded immediately, deploying teams within minutes to the impacted areas.

"Over 70 percent of the injured were rescued by our teams," he emphasized. "Many of the martyrs' bodies were also recovered and transferred by Red Crescent personnel."

He recounted one particularly emotional moment: during the attack on Evin Prison, the body of a soldier stationed at a guard tower was identified and returned to his family within an hour of the incident.

Kolivand stated that rapid damage assessments were conducted in more than 52 affected areas, and specialized teams continue to carry out search and rescue operations, including locating missing persons and those trapped under debris.



He added that Red Crescent teams provided a range of services including technical rescues, casualty extrications, rubble removal, and the transport of both injured individuals and the deceased to medical and forensic facilities.

The organization also initiated emergency shelter operations, distributing essential supplies to those displaced. In Tehran, five rapid deployment zones were established to activate 100 temporary relief bases within an hour. However, many displaced individuals opted for hotels coordinated by the municipality rather than Red Crescent tents.

Kolivand remarked that although the organization has no practical experience in treating nuclear-related casualties, it possesses the knowledge and

has designated specialized personnel and facilities for such scenarios — which fortunately were not required.

He also revealed that 150,000 hospital beds were prepped, with hospitals nationwide on high alert, though this capacity thankfully went unused.

Tragically, five Red Crescent workers lost their lives in the line of duty due to direct attacks. Two of them were killed inside an ambulance in the Shahid Bagheri district.

Kolivand praised the dedication of relief personnel, noting that many refused to leave the field, even when fresh teams arrived to relieve them.

He further reported that 21 medical centers and hospitals were targeted during the conflict. The Red Crescent's Peace Building was also hit twice. Despite these strikes, relief workers remained on the ground.

In total, the attacks destroyed 8,200 residential homes, resulting in the deaths of 42 children and 120 women. Kolivand compared the slain children to the tragic figure of Ali Asghar, the infant son of Imam Hussein, evoking a deep sense of mourning and injustice.





## FMs of Iran and Egypt Discuss Regional Developments

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and his Egyptian counterpart, Badr Abdelatty, have reviewed the latest developments in the region.

During a phone call, Araqchi expressed deep concern over recent events in Syria, including Israeli attacks on the country, and actions against Lebanon, as well as the ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip.

He called for concerted action by regional countries to counter the war-mongering and expansionist policies of the Israeli regime, which he stated are disrupting the stability and security of the region.

Abdelatty, for his part, reiterated Egypt's stance in supporting Syria's territorial integrity and preserving the rights of all minorities. He also emphasized Egypt's opposition to efforts aimed at the disintegration of Syria.

## Measles and Rubella Eliminated in Iran:



TEHRAN - The World Health Organization's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO), Dr. Hanan Balkhy, has officially congratulated Iran's Minister of Health on the successful elimination of measles and rubella in the country by the end of 2023.

According to a Friday report from the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (Webda), the achievement was confirmed through an official evaluation by the WHO's Regional Verification Commission for Measles and Rubella Elimination (RVC MR). The announcement was made in an official letter from the WHO's Iran office to the Health Ministry, accompanied by Dr. Balkhy's congratulatory message.

Dr. Balkhy praised the Iranian Ministry of Health for its dedication and persistent efforts in combating these diseases, calling the milestone a turning point in the country's healthcare system.

The Seventh Meeting of the Regional Verification Commission confirmed that Iran has successfully met all international criteria for the elimination of measles and rubella. The accomplishment is the result of years of strategic planning, widespread immunization campaigns, rigorous epidemiological surveillance, and the broad engagement of Iran's healthcare system.

This success not only marks a significant advancement in public health within Iran but also strengthens the country's position in achieving regional and global health goals.

## Iran to Host 2026 Global Meeting of Category 2 Centres on Intangible Cultural Heritage



TEHRAN - Iran has been selected to host the 2026 annual global meeting of Category 2 Centres working in the field of intangible cultural heritage, according to the Chairman of the Governing Board of the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in West and Central Asia.

The announcement came during the 2025 annual meeting, which was held virtually under the auspices of UNESCO and chaired by Fumiko Ohinata, Secretary of the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The online meeting took place on July 16, 2025, and was attended by over 80 international participants, including directors of Category 2 Centres from around the world.

Participants included representatives from centres in Bulgaria (Eastern Europe), Algeria (North Africa), Peru (South America), the United Arab Emirates (Arab States), Iran (West and Central Asia), as well as China, South Korea, and Japan (East Asia). The meeting was divided into two main sections focused on reviewing activities and outlining future plans.

In the first session, Tehran's Regional Centre, represented by Director-General Atousa Momeni, presented a report highlighting the Centre's achievements over the past year. These included training projects, development of digital platforms, regional capacity-building, and partnerships with local communities across its area of operation.

During the second session, Tehran's Centre proposed its Action Plan for 2025–2026, which is set to be reviewed and approved at the seventh meeting of the Governing Board for implementation in the upcoming cycle.

# Iran Targets Neighboring Countries to Boost Handicrafts Exports With Private Sector Support

TEHRAN - Iran is looking to its neighbors as primary markets for handicrafts exports, relying heavily on private sector involvement. According to Dr. Maryam Jalali, Deputy for Handicrafts at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, empowering artisans and expanding export channels are at the heart of current policies.

Iran, with its rich cultural diversity and thousands of years of artistic tradition, has identified and registered over 300 types of handicrafts. Officials see this heritage as a powerful driver for job creation, sustainable local development, and cultural diplomacy.

In an interview with Tasnim, Jalali highlighted the importance of handicraft bazaars as cultural hubs where selling, showcasing, and teaching crafts come together. "Some visitors might not buy anything, but the experience itself is valuable," she said. The goal is for these bazaars to serve three roles: promoting crafts, attracting tourists, and selling products.

Iran hosts both permanent and temporary bazaars. For example, the Wednesday Bazaar in Ilam province near the Iraqi border has become a local brand, attracting Iraqi visitors. Similar initiatives exist in other regions, like Aq Qala, which focuses on tourism.

Government policy requires governors and mayors to set up handicraft bazaars at tourist entry points, especially during peak travel seasons such as Nowruz. Some temporary markets are even established at historical sites, museums, and 30 kilometers outside cities, partly as rest stops to reduce traffic accidents.

Jalali emphasized that these bazaars combine economic, cultural, and social



functions. A five-year national plan guides where bazaars are placed, aiming to balance urban needs and tourism potential. National and religious events, like Arbacen, Yalda, and Fajr celebrations, also create opportunities for temporary bazaars.

Last year in Ilam, 120 stalls were set up along routes taken by returning pilgrims from Arbacen, selling souvenirs and practical items like felt shoes and scarves. Similar stalls appeared in Kermanshah, Khuzestan, and other provinces.

A key focus is meeting customer needs through appropriate product design, pricing, and strategic placement. Jalali stressed the need for effective storytelling and marketing rather than relying solely on production.

The ministry is also working to establish permanent bazaars at busy border points. For instance, a new bazaar is planned at Mehran border terminal, a major crossing with Iraq. Other projects include bazaars in Bandar-e-Gaz and along the Caspian coast.

Looking ahead, Jalali outlined plans to connect border provinces directly with neighboring countries: Sistan and Baluchestan with Pakistan and Afghanistan, Khuzestan with Iraq, and provinces like Gilan and Mazandaran with Central Asian and Caucasus nations.

The ministry is also developing online platforms and professional associations to modernize the sector. "We hope to transform handicraft production from individual efforts into an organized professional community," Jalali concluded.

## Iran Approaches 90% Self-Sufficiency in Sugar Production

TEHRAN - Iran's self-sufficiency in sugar production has reached nearly 90%, according to the Ministry of Agriculture's Project Manager for Sugar Plants, Peyman Hesadi. The country produced 1.973 million tons of sugar in the previous agricultural year (2023–2024) through the domestic cultivation of spring and autumn sugar beets and sugarcane, reaching a self-sufficiency rate of 89.6%.

In an interview with IRNA, Hesadi highlighted the fluctuating trends in sugar beet and sugarcane production over recent years, but noted signs of stabilization and growth in recent seasons. Despite economic volatility, social challenges, and unprecedented reductions in rainfall due to climate change, Iran has managed to stabilize spring sugar beet cultivation at around 100,000 hectares and maintain sugarcane fields at an average of 90,000 hectares. Autumn sugar beet cultivation has also expanded by approximately 12% annually.

Hesadi called for continued technical and financial support for Iran's sugar self-sufficiency initiative and emphasized the need for comprehensive analysis and diagnosis of the current challenges to ensure sustainable progress in production.

Looking ahead to the 2024–2025 agricultural year, the Ministry projects the production of over 8.5 million tons of sugar beets, with spring varieties accounting for more than 6.5 million tons from 105,000 hectares. Last year, 6.8 million tons of spring sugar beet were harvested across 107,000 hectares, achieving a yield of 64 tons per hectare.

Autumn sugar beet production is also forecast to increase. This year, approximately 2.1 million tons are expected to be harvested from 90,000 hectares, with the potential to reach 2.4 million tons by the end of the season. In the previous year, 2.1 million tons were harvested from 32,000 hectares, with a yield of 67 tons per hectare.

Sugarcane production also showed promising results. In 2023–2024, approximately 8 million tons of sugarcane were harvested from 90,000 hectares, averaging 89 tons per hectare.

Iran's annual sugar consumption stands at around 2.2 million tons. With nearly 2 million tons of domestic sugar produced last year, the country has reached 89.6% self-sufficiency in meeting its national demand. This figure breaks down to 917,000 tons



from spring sugar beet, 216,000 tons from autumn beet, and 840,000 tons from sugarcane.

Hesadi emphasized that the majority of Iran's sugar production is dependent on sugar beet, particularly the spring crop. However, due to climate change and water shortages, especially in southern and eastern provinces like Fars and Khorasan, expanding cultivation of spring sugar beet and sugarcane is not feasible.

To bridge the gap in sugar supply, the Ministry's self-sufficiency strategy includes increasing agricultural productivity—specifically improving yield per hectare for spring sugar beet and sugarcane. However, the main focus is on expanding autumn sugar beet cultivation in suitable regions.

Although autumn beet farming faces challenges, such as temperature limitations, bolting risks due to latitude, and limited processing capacity, Hesadi believes that with proper planning, Iran can achieve full self-sufficiency. Encouraging progress has already been made.

The Ministry plans to expand autumn sugar beet cultivation to 60,000 hectares nationwide by the end of the year. Of this, 45,000 hectares are targeted in the southwestern provinces of Khuzestan and Ilam, where yields are expected to reach about 70 tons per hectare. If successful, these two provinces alone could produce over 3 million tons of sugar beets.

To handle this volume, Iran would need industrial processing capacity of around 50,000 tons per day over a 60-day harvest period. Currently, facilities in the region—such as the Ahvaz and Middle East sugar plants—can process just over 5,000 tons daily. Hesadi stressed the urgent need to expand the industrial capacity, including completing the Shahid Dezful Sugar Factory and repurposing the Karun Sugarcane Complex for dual-use processing.

He warned that without sufficient processing facilities, high transport costs, beet perishability in hot weather, and reduced sugar content could undermine production gains and make the process economically unviable.

"The rapid implementation of these industrial projects in Khuzestan is critical to maintaining and increasing sugar self-sufficiency," he concluded.

## 5–10% of Iran's Meat Supplied via Imports



TEHRAN —Deputy Minister of Agriculture has announced that only 5 to 10 percent of the country's meat needs are met through imports, emphasizing that there are no imports of gazelle, ostrich, or camel meat into the country.

Speaking to ILNA, Dr. Alireza Rafeipour, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Head of the Veterinary Organization, said that the slaughter rate of livestock—including cows, sheep, camels, goats, and poultry—varies across different months but averages between 10 to 12 million animals annually.

According to Rafeipour, monthly slaughter figures in the country range from 400,000 to 500,000 animals, with no significant changes in recent months. These animals are sourced from rural, nomadic, and industrial farms across Iran.

Addressing the import of live animals, Rafeipour stated that such imports occur only in limited quantities and are exclusively slaughtered at the border abattoir in Sistan and Baluchestan. These are not included in the country's routine consumption statistics.

He reiterated that approximately 5 to 10 percent of Iran's red meat demand is covered through imports.

Rafeipour clarified that live animals are only slaughtered at Pakistan's border facilities, and red meat is imported in various forms and volumes from countries including Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Dagestan, Mongolia, India, Armenia, Australia, Romania, Brazil, and Pakistan—subject to veterinary approval.

Beef and veal are imported both fresh and frozen, while lamb is imported only in fresh form.

## Handicrafts Must Return to the Flow of Life



TEHRAN - In response to ongoing economic challenges, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has emphasized the urgent need to reintegrate handicrafts into daily life and prevent disruptions in their production and sales chain.

Minister Seyed Reza Salehi Amiri revealed that a series of high-level meetings have been held with artisans and industry stakeholders to develop crisis management strategies. "We have two types of support mechanisms," he said. "One is for normal conditions, such as bank loans, training, and regular services. The other is for emergencies, which require targeted action and thorough field research to prevent industry disruption."

Salehi Amiri highlighted the role of national organizations, such as the Handicrafts Support Fund, in stabilizing the sector. He noted that recent discussions have been held with industry associations about activating and strengthening this fund.

He also pointed to corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a key support mechanism. "Adapting to the new situation can be achieved through CSR and other strategies explored in our sessions," he said.

Stressing the importance of restoring the natural cycle of production, distribution, and market demand, the minister warned that any disruption to the handicrafts production chain could result in significant job losses and economic hardship.

To address the situation, the ministry has proposed forming expert task forces to explore specific solutions. Discussions also covered the Handicrafts Support Fund, CSR initiatives, and other critical topics.

Salehi Amiri underscored the interconnectedness of tourism and handicrafts, stating that "when tourism stalls, the handicrafts market suffers as well. These two sectors are deeply interlinked."

In recent days, the ministry has held three major meetings with stakeholders in the hotel, eco-lodge, and handicrafts sectors to identify paths out of the current crisis.

The minister concluded by announcing that the government has approved new support packages. "A key focus is financial assistance, which has now been ratified by the government," he said. "These include support for rural areas and small workshops, which will soon be included in the national support package."



## Congo, M23 Rebels to Sign Declaration of Principles to End Fighting

GOMA (Dispatches) - Congo and the M23 rebel group have agreed to a declaration of principles to end fighting in eastern Congo, a sign of progress after months of talks mediated by Qatar, though key details still need to be negotiated, four sources said on Friday.

The declaration, expected to be signed on Saturday in Doha, comes amid heavy U.S. pressure to finalise deals that would bring peace to eastern Congo. This could potentially attract billions of dollars of Western investment to a region rich in tantalum, gold, cobalt, copper, lithium and other minerals.

M23, in the latest of a string of uprisings supported by Rwanda, seized Goma, eastern Congo's largest city, in January and went on to make gains across North Kivu and South Kivu provinces.



## Hamas Says No Interim Truce Possible Without Work Toward Permanent Ceasefire Deal



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Hamas' armed wing spokesperson said on Friday that while the group favors reaching an interim truce in the Gaza war, if such an agreement is not reached in current negotiations it could revert to insisting on a full package deal to end the conflict.

Hamas has repeatedly offered to release all the hostages held in Gaza and conclude a permanent ceasefire agreement, and Israel has refused, Abu Ubaida added in a televised speech.

Arab mediators Qatar and Egypt, backed by the United States, have hosted more than 10 days of talks on a U.S.-backed proposal for a 60-day truce in the war that has laid waste to the Palestinian enclave.

Israeli officials were not immediately available for comment on the eve of the Jewish Sabbath.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement on a call he had with Pope Leo on Friday that Israel's efforts to secure a hostage release deal and 60-day ceasefire, "have so far not been reciprocated by Hamas".

As part of the potential deal, 10 hostages held in Gaza would be returned along with the bodies of 18 others, spread out over 60 days. In exchange, Israel would release a number of detained Palestinians.

"If the enemy remains obstinate and evades this round as it has done every time before, we cannot guarantee a return to partial deals or the proposal of the 10 captives," said Abu Ubaida.

Disputes remain over maps of Israeli army withdrawals, aid delivery mechanisms into Gaza, and guarantees that any eventual truce would lead to ending the war, said two Hamas officials who spoke to Reuters on Friday.

## El Salvador Sends Detained Venezuelans Home in Swap for Americans



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Over 200 Venezuelans who were deported from the United States on allegations of gang membership earlier this year and detained in an El Salvador jail arrived home to Caracas on Friday.

The release was part of a coordinated prisoner exchange, with 10 Americans held in Venezuela returned to the United States, officials from all three countries said.

In a post on X, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele said the Americans were en route to El Salvador from where they would continue "their journey home," while U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed the release of "ten Americans who were detained in Venezuela." He thanked Bukele for his help in securing the agreement.

Venezuela's government said 252 Venezuelans held in El Salvador had been freed. President Nicolas Maduro celebrated the arrival of two airplanes carrying them near Caracas on Friday evening.

The Venezuelans were sent to El Salvador from the United States in March after U.S. President Donald Trump invoked the 1798 Alien Enemies Act to swiftly deport alleged members of the Tren de Aragua gang without going through normal immigration procedures. They were held in El Salvador's notorious CECOT maximum security prison.

The deportations drew fierce criticism from human rights groups and a legal battle with the Trump administration over allegations that due process was not followed.

Family members of many of the Venezuelans and their lawyers deny they had gang ties, and say they were not given a chance to contest the Trump administration's allegations in court.



## Syria and Israel Agree to Truce as New Clashes Rock Druze Heartland

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - The United States said early Saturday that it had negotiated a ceasefire between Israel and Syria's government as new clashes erupted in Syria's Druze heartland following violence that prompted massive Israeli strikes.

At least 638 people have died since Sunday in violence between the Druze and Bedouins, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, drawing questions over the authority of Syria's interim leader Ahmed al-Sharaa.

Israel intervened Wednesday with major strikes in the heart of the capital Damascus, including hitting the army's headquarters.

Tom Barrack, the US pointman on Syria, said in the early hours of Saturday in the Middle East that Sharaa and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "have agreed to a ceasefire" negotiated by the United States.

Barrack, who is US ambassador to Ankara, said the deal was backed by Turkey, a key supporter of Sharaa, as well as neighbouring Jordan.

"We call upon Druze, Bedouins and Sunnis to put down their weapons and together with other minorities build a new and united Syrian identity in peace and prosperity with its neighbours," he wrote on X.

The United States on Wednesday announced an earlier deal in which Sharaa pulled government forces out of Sweida, the southern hub of the Druze minority.

Sharaa said the mediation helped avert a "large-scale escalation" with Israel but his office accused Druze fighters of violating it.

Sharaa's office on Friday evening pledged to deploy fresh forces to the region to break up further clashes in the south, urging "all parties to exercise restraint and prioritise reason".

Renewed fighting erupted Friday between Bedouin tribal factions and the Druze at the entrance to Sweida, an AFP correspondent said.

About 200 tribal fighters clashed with armed Druze men from the city using machine guns and shells, the AFP correspondent said, while the Syrian Observatory also reported fighting and shelling on neighbourhoods in Sweida.

In the corridors of the Sweida National Hospital, a foul odour emanated from the swollen and disfigured bodies piled up in refrigerated storage units, an AFP correspondent reported.

A small number of doctors and nurses at the hospital worked to treat the wounded arriving from the ongoing clashes, some in the hallways.

Omar Obeid, a doctor at the government hospital, told AFP that the facility has received "more than 400 bodies" since Monday morning.

"There is no more room in the morgue. The bodies are in the street" in front of the hospital, added Obeid, president of the Sweida branch of the Order of Physicians.

The UN's International Organization for Migration on Friday said that 79,339 people have been displaced since Sunday, including 20,019 on Thursday alone.

Tribal reinforcements from across Syria gathered in villages around Sweida on Friday to reinforce local Bedouin, whose longstanding enmity towards the Druze erupted into violence last weekend.

Anas al-Enad, a tribal chief from the central city of Hama, said he and his men had made the journey to the village of Walgha, northwest of Sweida, because "the Bedouin called for our help and we came to support them".

An AFP correspondent saw burning homes and shops in the village, now under the control of the Bedouin and their allies.

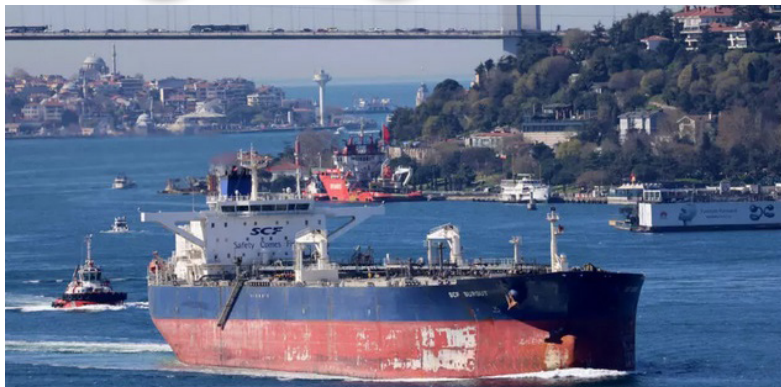
Israel, which has its own sizable Druze community, said Friday that it was sending support valued at nearly \$600,000, including food and medical supplies, to Druze in Sweida.

Israel has vowed to defend the Druze community, although some diplomats and analysts say its goal is to weaken the military in Syria, its historic adversary, seeing it at a weak point since Sharaa's Sunni Islamists toppled Bashar al-Assad, an Iranian ally, in December.

Rayan Maarouf, editor-in-chief of local news outlet Suwayda 24, said the humanitarian situation was "catastrophic".

"We cannot find milk for children," he told AFP.

## EU Agrees Unprecedented Round of Sanctions Targeting Russia's Oil Exports



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union and Britain on Friday sought to ramp up economic pressure on Russia to halt the war in Ukraine by slashing a price cap meant to choke off revenues from key oil exports.

The move from the EU was part of a sweeping new package of sanctions – the bloc's 18th since the start of Russia's 2022 invasion – that also took aim at Moscow's banking sector and military capabilities.

The measures come as allies closely watch whether US President Donald Trump follows through on his threat to punish Moscow over Russian President Vladimir Putin's failure to move forward on a truce.

"The message is clear: Europe will not back down in its support for Ukraine. The EU will keep raising the pressure until Russia ends its war," said EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas.

British foreign minister David Lammy announced the UK was joining the EU price cap sanction, saying they were "striking at the heart of the Russian energy sector".

"As Putin continues to stall on serious peace talks, we will not stand by," he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed the EU's new sanctions as "essential and timely".

The bloc's new measures were approved after Slovakia dropped a weeks-long block following talks with Brussels over separate plans to phase out Russian gas imports.

Kremlin-friendly Slovakian leader Robert Fico – whose country remains dependent on Russian energy – dropped his opposition after getting what he called "guarantees" from Brussels over future gas prices.

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot called the latest EU moves

"unprecedented" and said that "together with the United States we will force Vladimir Putin into a ceasefire".

But the Kremlin said it would seek to "minimise" the impact, and warned the measures would backfire.

The price cap is originally a G7 initiative aimed at limiting the amount of money Russia makes by exporting oil to countries such as China and India.

The EU and Britain said they would lower the cap on Russian oil exported to third countries around the world to 15 percent below market value.

That comes despite Washington's allies failing to convince Trump to go along with the plan.

Set at \$60 a barrel by the G7 in 2022, the measure bans shipping firms and insurance companies dealing with Russia from exporting oil above the cap amount.

Under the new plan – which Brussels hopes other G7 allies like Canada and Japan will join – the initial level will start at \$47.60 and can be adjusted as oil

prices change in the future.

The EU already largely cut off imports of Russian oil.

EU officials admit the scheme will not be as effective without US involvement.

In addition to the oil price cap, officials said the EU was blacklisting over 100 more vessels in the "shadow fleet" of ageing tankers that security analysts say Russia uses to circumvent oil export curbs.

It was also imposing measures to stop the defunct Baltic Sea gas pipelines Nord Stream 1 and 2 from being brought back online in the future.

Among other targets, sanctions will be placed on a Russian-owned oil refinery in India and two Chinese banks, as the EU seeks to curb Moscow's ties with international partners.

The bloc is expanding a transaction ban on dealings with Russian banks and placing more restrictions on the export of "dual-use" goods that Russia's forces could use on the battlefield in Ukraine.

The latest round of measures comes after Trump on Monday threatened to hit buyers of Russian energy with massive "secondary tariffs" if Moscow doesn't halt the fighting in 50 days.

The move from Trump represented a dramatic pivot from his previous effort of rapprochement with the Kremlin, as he said his patience was running out with Putin.

The multiple rounds of international sanctions imposed on Moscow in the three-and-a-half years since its invasion have failed so far to cripple the Russian economy or slow its war effort.

But Western officials argue that despite Russia's economy largely weathering the punishment so far, key economic indicators such as interest rates and inflation are getting worse.

## Bolsonaro Is the One to Stop Lula, China and Trump Tariffs

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - With dark jeans pulled over an ankle monitor attached just hours earlier, Brazil's right-wing former President Jair Bolsonaro made clear on Friday that the humiliation of court-ordered restraints would not curb his role in global politics.

In a defiant interview with Reuters at his party's offices, raided at dawn in the latest crackdown from the Supreme Court, Bolsonaro cast himself as the man to renegotiate U.S. tariffs, curb Chinese influence and beat back leftists in Brazil.

"They want to get me out of the political game next year," he said, referring to an election in which President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is set to seek a fourth term. "Without me in the race, Lula could beat anyone."

Even after Brazil's Supreme Court barred him on Friday from contact with foreign officials, the ex-president insisted he wants to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump, who slapped a 50% tariff on Brazilian goods last week and demanded an



end to Bolsonaro's trial for trying to overturn the last election.

While some allies worry Trump's tactic is backfiring, tying Bolsonaro to the economic fallout and rallying support behind Lula, the ex-president remained supportive of his ally in the White House.

"I would never give advice to Trump. Who am I? I respect him," said Bolsonaro, seated at a table with two volumes within reach: a copy of the Brazilian constitution and a magazine with Trump on the cover. "His country is an example for us. We're not an example for them."

In court orders on Friday, based on allegations that Bolsonaro had courted Trump's intervention in legal matters, Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes slapped the ex-president with a curfew and ankle monitor and banned him from using social media, approaching foreign embassies or dealing with foreign officials.





## Misolic Storms Past Borges in Sweden

LONDON (Dispatches) - Argentina's Juan Manuel Cerundolo swept the final six games to complete a 6-2, 1-6, 6-3 upset of top-seeded Casper Ruud of Norway at the EFG Swiss Open Gstaad in Switzerland. Cerundolo's comeback against the World No. 13 Ruud marked the biggest win of his career by ranking and sent him into the semifinals against Peru's Ignacio Buse, a 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 winner over Argentina's Roman Andres Burruchaga.

The other semifinal at the ATP 250 clay-court event pits second-seeded Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan against France's Arthur Cazaux. Bublik defeated No. 7 seed Francisco Comesana of Argentina 6-4, 6-3 in 72 minutes, while Cazaux outlasted home hopeful Jerome Kym 7-6 (3), 3-6, 7-5.

Cerundolo, whose brother Juan Manuel, is in the semifinals in Gstaad, Switzerland, converted six of his eight break chances and will face No. 6 seed Luciano Darderi. The Italian dispatched fourth-seeded Sebastian Baez of Argentina 6-0, 6-2 in 66 minutes.

The ATP 250 clay-court tournament's other semifinal matches No. 5 seed Camilo Ugo Carabelli of Argentina against unseeded Jesper De Jong. Ugo Carabelli knocked out Austria's Filip Misolic 6-3, 7-5 and De Jong rallied to defeat his fellow Dutchman and No. 2 seed Tallon Griekspoor 4-6, 7-6 (3), 6-3.

Meanwhile three-time Grand Slam finalist Ons Jabeur is taking a break from competitive tennis, the 30-year-old said in a social media post.

Tunisia's Jabeur, the first Arab woman to reach a Grand Slam final, has struggled with her form in recent months, failing to get past the third round of a major this year.

The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here. The two-time Wimbledon finalist's campaign came to a disappointing end at the All England Club last month as she retired from her first-round clash against Viktoriya Tomova, unable to continue after a long medical timeout.

The former world number two suffers from asthma and experienced breathing difficulties at this year's Australian Open.

Jabeur, often called the 'minister of happiness' for her cheerful personality, said she was not feeling truly happy on the court.

"For the past two years, I've been pushing myself so hard, fighting through injuries and facing many other challenges. But deep down, I haven't truly felt happy on the court for some time now," she said in a statement.

"Tennis is such a beautiful sport. But right now, I feel it's time to take a step back and finally put myself first: to breathe, to heal, and to rediscover the joy of simply living."

Jabeur, married to former fencer Karim Kamoun, has also been open about her wish to start a family.

"Thank you to all my fans for understanding. Your support and love mean the world to me. I carry it with me always," she added.

## Pogacar Claims Fourth Stage Win to Extend Lead

LOUDENVIELLE (Dispatches) - Tadej Pogacar continued his charge towards an anticipated fourth Tour de France title when he stretched his overall lead to over four minutes by winning the 13th stage, a lung-busting 10.9-km uphill time trial.

The defending champion dominated the eight-kilometer climb at 7.9% to clock 23 minutes and beat Denmark's Jonas Vingegaard by a massive 36 seconds, a day after dealing a significant blow to his closest rival in the first major mountain stage in the Pyrenees.

Fellow Slovenian Primož Roglič took third place, 1:40 off the pace, while Belgian Remco Evenepoel hung on to third place overall by the skin of his teeth following a disappointing effort that saw him finish 2:39 behind Pogacar.

After his fourth stage win in this year's race, UAE Team Emirates - XRG rider Pogacar leads Vingegaard by 4:07 and Evenepoel by 7:24.

German Florian Lipowitz showed great form again and trails Evenepoel by six seconds.

Pogacar picked a regular road bike for the solo effort against the clock while Evenepoel and Vingegaard opted for a time trial bike - heavier but with better aerodynamics.

It was quickly clear that regardless of those calculations,



Pogacar was again the strongest rider as he posted the best time on the brief flat portion ahead of the main ascent before further extending his advantage.

"I'm super happy. This time trial was a question mark for me back in December. I wanted everything to be perfect, and the team delivered - everything was on point," he told reporters.

"I was targeting to go all out from start to finish. I almost blew up at the end, but when I saw I was going to win at the finish, it gave me an extra push."

The 26-year-old said it had been a close call between the road and the TT bike, but in the end he chose the most comfortable ride.

"The biggest decision was which bike to ride today. Obviously, we ride road bikes all year round, but we did the calculations and the time ended up about the same. So I decided to go with what I felt more confident on."

Pogacar went full gas from the start. "My tactic was simple: go all out from the bottom to the top," he said. "At the first time check, I saw I was five seconds ahead - that gave me confidence. The second split was even better," he explained.

"Basically, I was trying not to blow up in the first part. I almost did in the end - maybe in the last kilometre. From 3 to 2 km to go, I reset a bit because that last kick is super steep."

Pogacar will now go for a hat-trick of stage wins on Saturday, when the 14th stage will take the peloton from Pau to Luchon-Superbagnères with the awe-inspiring climbs of the Col d'Aspin, Col du Tourmalet, Col de Peyresourde before the final ascent, a 12.4-km effort at 7.3%.

## Vettel Makes Final Call on Potential F1 Comeback



LONDON (Dispatches) - Sebastian Vettel has categorically ruled out returning to Formula 1 - nearly three years after retiring from the sport.

The German driver, who won four consecutive F1 world championships with Red Bull from 2010-2013, retired at the end of the 2022 season.

Vettel also drove for Ferrari and Aston Martin in a distinguished career where he won 53 races and finished on the podium 122 times.

Yet the 38-year-old has been linked with a return in previous years, not least at Red Bull amid their second driver issues. However, Vettel has now completely ruled out returning to the sport he competed in for 16 seasons.

"F1 is finished," Vettel told German outlet Auto Motor und Sport. "At some point, the time is ripe to leave the field to others."

"You see that with the rookies. I think it's good that a lot of drivers have now been replaced."

"That's not a vote against the older ones, but for the younger ones. In the past, I didn't care who among the established drivers was no longer driving. The most important thing was that I was allowed to drive."

However, Vettel did not rule out competing in other motorsport series', such as the World Endurance Championship (WEC) and, consequently, the prestigious 24 Hours of Le Mans event.

"There have been talks, but somehow it hasn't come about yet," Vettel said, of a spot at Le Mans.

"In the past I was honestly not that interested in endurance racing, from my perspective as a lone fighter."

"Nowadays, I see it differently. I find it totally exciting, with this team structure, sharing a car and making compromises."

"In motorsport, it's difficult to say: I'll only drive half the races. WEC would actually be a good fit with its eight races, which are also structured differently than Formula 1."

"It's always a question of how intense you want to do something. For me, it has always been that when I participate in something, I want to do it well. Just participating is nothing for me."

## Scheffler Leads British Open, McIlroy Hangs on



PORTRUSH (Dispatches) - World number one Scottie Scheffler conjured up a brilliant 64 to lead the British Open after an enthralling second round as home favourite Rory McIlroy's roller-coaster ride continued at Royal Portrush.

American Scheffler finished on 10 under par, one clear of Matt Fitzpatrick who carded 66 to boost his hopes of becoming the first Englishman to lift the Claret Jug since Nick Faldo in 1992.

American Brian Harman, the 2023 Open champion who made a big move with a flawless 65, and China's Li Haotong were a further shot back.

Scheffler, a three-times major champion seeking his first British Open title, racked up four birdies on the front nine and four more after the turn, a bogey at the 11th hole the only blemish in a sublime display of shot-making.

"I felt like I hit a few more fairways than I did yesterday, hit some really nice iron shots, and was able to hole some putts," Scheffler said.

"We only had maybe four or five holes where it was really coming down (raining), and I was able to take advantage of the holes where we had some good weather."

Fitzpatrick made four birdies going out and an inspired run of four more in a row lifted him two shots clear of the field.

A bogey on 14 dropped him back, however, and the 2022 U.S. Open champion missed a three-foot birdie putt on 17 before holing a nerveless 23-footer for par at the last.

"Giving myself an opportunity to win the golf tournament, but there's still a hell of a long way to go," he said.

"The aim of the game is to stay in it for as long as possible and hopefully you can pull away right at the death."

## Clippers Officially Add Veteran G Bradley Beal

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Three-time All-Star guard Bradley Beal officially signed with the Los Angeles Clippers on Friday.

The change in location comes after Beal reached a buyout with the Phoenix Suns. According to ESPN, Beal, 32, gave back nearly \$14 million of the \$110 million left on the final two years of his Suns contract in order to complete the buyout.

Agent Mark Bartelstein from Priority Sports confirmed to ESPN on Wednesday that Beal's deal with the Clippers was for two years and \$11 million. The deal includes a player option for 2026-27, potentially making him a free agent next summer.

"Players of this caliber are very rare, and they're hard to come by," Clippers head coach Tyrone Lue said in a release. "Brad has been an All-Star. He's been in a race for the scoring title. He's been the best player on his team. You can put him in so many different spots and he'll find ways to score: out of pick-and-roll, coming off screens, catch-and-shoot. ... I'm excited he's with us."

Beal signed a five-year, \$251 million deal with a no-trade



clause in July 2022 when he was still with the Washington Wizards.

He was limited to 53 games in each of his two seasons with the Suns, and he has not played as many as 60 games in a season since 2020-21.

Beal averaged 17.0 points, 3.7 assists and 3.3 rebounds in 53 games (38 starts) last season for the Suns. He has career averages of 21.5 points, 4.3 assists and 4.1 rebounds in 801 games (752 starts) with the Wizards and Suns.

Washington drafted Beal with the No. 3 overall pick in 2012. His scoring average of 31.3 points in 2020-21 was the second-highest in franchise history and second-highest in the NBA that season behind Golden State's Stephen Curry (32.0).

Meanwhile Damian Lillard is back where he started.

Lillard signed a three-year deal worth \$42 million to return to the Portland Trail Blazers, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Thursday. The person spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the deal had not been officially announced.