

Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani Said that the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, and the People Take Pride in the Martyrs of the U.S.-Israeli Aggression Against Iran, as the Iranians Succeeded in Standing Up to the Strongest Military Actors in the World and Emerged Victorious

IRAN NEWS

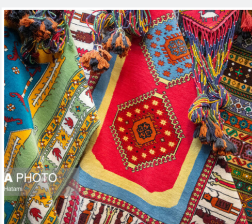
President Masoud Pezeshkian, in a Message and on the Occasion of the 46th Anniversary of the Victory of the Sandinista Revolution, Extended Congratulations to His Nicaraguan Counterpart, Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo

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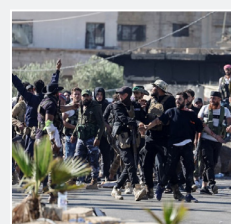


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President Denounces Western Pressure, Affirms Commitment to Peace and Int'l Law



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a phone call with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Saturday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reaffirmed Iran's commitment to international law while making clear that Tehran will not bow to external pressure or accept violations of its sovereign rights.

Addressing the recent regional developments—including the ceasefire following a 12-day conflict involving Israeli and U.S. forces—Pezeshkian emphasized Iran's consistent stance in favor of peace and stability.

"Iran has never sought war or regional instability," he said. "Even as we engaged in dialogue, Israel attacked us in clear violation of international norms. The U.S., in coordination with Israel, then bombed our nuclear facilities—facilities that were under legal and transparent international oversight."

The president criticized the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for failing to condemn the strikes, calling the agency's silence deeply disappointing to the Iranian public and Parliament.

"Our people expected, at minimum, a formal condemnation in accordance with the IAEA's own mandate. That didn't happen," he said.

Pezeshkian lamented what he described as the selective adherence to international treaties by countries that present themselves as champions of human rights. He reiterated that Iran's nuclear program has been repeatedly verified as peaceful by the IAEA, and underscored Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's religious edict banning nuclear weapons.

"The IAEA is duty-bound to uphold the rights of its member states," Pezeshkian asserted. "We remain transparent and cooperative. But we will never accept coercion, disinformation, or violations of our legal entitlements."

FM Urges Europe Not to Justify Israeli, American Aggression



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi slams certain European states for their efforts at justifying the Israeli regime's and the United States acts of aggression, including their unprovoked war against Iran last month.

The top diplomat made the remarks during a telephone conversation with his Swiss counterpart Ignazio Cassis on Saturday.

Araqchi warned that such biased behavior served to normalize and promote violations of the international law.

By trying to rationalize such acts of uncalled-for aggression, the European countries would also be contributing to intensification of insecurity across the West Asia region and the world, he added.

The region has witnessed intensified acts of deadly aggression by the regime and the US, particularly over the past decade.

The aggression has manifested in both parties conducting targeted assassinations of regional figures as well as in Washington's unequivocal military backing of Tel Aviv's deadly operations against regional states.

Last month, the regime launched a series of attacks on Iran -- including against some of its nuclear sites -- killing at least 935 people, such as senior military officials, nuclear scientists, and ordinary civilians.

The US joined the fray towards the end of its 12-day streak, attacking several Iranian nuclear facilities.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Supreme Leader Tasked Us All with Safeguarding National Unity

In a speech delivered during parliamentary session, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf emphasized that the Supreme Leader's directive to all officials is to safeguard national unity. He called this responsibility an obligation for all Iranians and warned against actions that could undermine unity or create division.

Qalibaf stated, "The Supreme Leader's wise guidance compels all of us to be guardians of this national unity. We must avoid any behavior or rhetoric that weakens this cohesion and must stand firmly against those who benefit from division and discord."

Reflecting on recent regional tensions, Qalibaf referred to the recent 12-day conflict—widely interpreted as a reference to tensions involving Israel—and said it demonstrated that "the enemy has suffered a serious blow from the Iranian people." He stressed that the main deterrent preventing further aggression against Iran is the country's "national solidarity," which he described as a critical force witnessed by the world.

He underlined that this solidarity includes people with varying political and religious views, calling it a "great national unity" that imposes a significant duty on all officials and elites.

Qalibaf warned against political opportunism, stating, "No one should be allowed to build their political shelter within the gaps of differing opinions. There are those who, out of spite or self-interest, seek to attack the unifying image of the Islamic Republic. But the Iranian people have chosen unity, and this national cause will grow stronger with God's help."

He also reiterated that the Supreme Leader's directives should serve as the final word, especially for revolutionary forces and media figures. Qalibaf cautioned against baseless criticisms or hasty and uninformed opinions, which he said are harmful to the nation.

On foreign policy and defense, the Speaker said the Supreme Leader has outlined a clear approach: Iran must engage in all arenas "from a position of strength." He described this strategy as a beacon for Iran's foreign ministry and armed forces, aimed at strengthening the country and

detering both war and imposed peace.

Turning to regional developments, Qalibaf condemned Israel's recent attacks on Damascus, declaring Iran's continued support for Syria's territorial integrity. He warned regional governments against aligning with Israel, describing them as "residing in a bubble amid a stormy ocean" and asserting they have little time to preserve their sovereignty.

Qalibaf said, "The Zionist regime is the enemy of all peace, stability, sovereignty, and territorial unity in the region. The only language it understands is the language of power."

He pointed to recent bombings of Syria's defense infrastructure as a wake-up call for those who believed that appeasing Israel could bring peace. "Now is the time for Islamic governments to muster courage, stand with their people, and push back against this expansionist regime," he said.

The Parliament Speaker also praised the decision by 11 countries at the Bogota summit to impose an arms embargo on Israel, calling it "a bold move that could become a practical model for resisting this regime." He urged Muslim countries to move beyond issuing statements and to use their vast economic power to confront Israel's expansion and "genocidal machinery."

Qalibaf criticized the U.S. for sanctioning Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories, who has openly documented Israel's apartheid and acts of genocide. He described a world where "truth-tellers are punished, and war criminals are rewarded," and called on independent nations to either take a stand or face "gradual death and disintegration."

In closing, Qalibaf stated, "It has now become clear that sinister plans are underway to disarm and destabilize the region. But with God's help, a new chapter of resistance against genocide, occupation, and aggression by the Zionist regime will unfold—both in the region and around the world."

Iran Fully Prepared If Israel Breaks Fragile Ceasefire



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says Iran is fully vigilant and prepared to defend itself should the Israeli regime break a "fragile" ceasefire that ended 12 days of aggression against the country last month.

Araqchi made the remarks in an interview with China Global Television Network (CGTN) in Tianjin, China, where he attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) foreign ministers' meeting on Tuesday.

He pointed out that the 12-day war launched by the Israeli regime against Iran was unprovoked military aggression and not simply a "conflict."

"It is not a conflict. It is an act of aggression, unprovoked aggression by Israel against the Islamic Republic of Iran," he added.

"We had no way but to exercise our right of self-defense. So, we defended our country. We defended it in a very courageous way and forced the aggressors to stop the aggression and ask for an unconditional ceasefire, which was accepted by us," the top Iranian diplomat emphasized.

He cast doubt on Israel's intention to truly honor the ceasefire, which he characterized as "fragile".

"The ceasefire is, of course, fragile and the reason is obvious: no ceasefire by the (Israeli) regime is reliable because the regime has a very bad record on that," he explained.

"We are very careful and fully prepared if the ceasefire is broken, but this is not our wish. That was not our wish from the beginning. We did not want this war, but we were ready for that," he stressed.

Tehran-Ankara and Tehran-Herat Train Services to Launch Soon



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) has announced plans to launch new international train services connecting Tehran to Ankara and Herat in the coming months.

Speaking on Sunday at an investment event for the expansion of Iran's passenger rail fleet, Jabbar Ali Zakeri, the CEO of RAI, stated that the Tehran-Ankara train is scheduled to begin operations within the next two months, while the Tehran-Herat service will commence within the next month.

Zakeri highlighted the successful relaunch of the Tehran-Van train earlier this year after a five-year hiatus and added that services to the cities of Merv in Turkmenistan and Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, have also recently been initiated. He expressed hope that these new routes would strengthen cultural and economic ties among regional nations.

Referring to Iran's rich railway history, Zakeri emphasized the potential for tourism development through rail. "Tourist trains can provide both significant revenue and increased appeal," he said.

The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development also pointed out that while cargo transport remains a priority, the passenger rail sector must also become economically viable. However, he cited a key challenge: the mismatch between the expansion of rail lines and the development of rolling stock. According to Zakeri, 150 to 300 kilometers are added to the national railway network annually, but government funding for fleet expansion remains limited.

He stressed the importance of creating favorable conditions to encourage private sector investment. As per current plans, 300 passenger carriages are expected to be added to the fleet this year with government support.

Sincere Service to the People Is the Key to Defeating Conspiracies

TEHRAN - In a meeting with senior officials of the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized the importance of distinguishing between opposition and enmity, stating: "Merely expressing a dissenting opinion should not lead us to label someone an enemy. The people of this country have time and again proven their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their homeland."

Pezeshkian reiterated that genuine public service and national unity are the most effective ways to counter external conspiracies and challenges. He highlighted that dissent can come from those who are more sincere and concerned than flatterers and that respecting diverse views is vital for a healthy society.

The President noted that necessary decisions have already been made to address the needs of victims affected by the recent Israeli aggression. To expedite recovery efforts, the Tehran Municipality has been assigned to identify and reconstruct residential units damaged in the attacks, given its better access to local resources and urban planning capabilities. The government, he said, stands ready to fully support this mission.

Pezeshkian echoed the recent remarks of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who described unity and cohesion as essential for both Iranian society and the broader Islamic world. Pezeshkian called this "one of the most important areas to demonstrate true loyalty to the leadership."

He welcomed broader participation of citizens in national media discussions and urged against discrimination based on differences of opinion. As a personal example, he shared that while his daughter refused to leave his side during wartime despite security threats, she frequently stands firm on her views and doesn't hesitate to challenge him. "This shows that disagreement does not mean disloyalty," he explained.

Pezeshkian praised the public for not falling into the trap of foreign provocations. "The enemy



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

counted on civil unrest following their attacks, but the people disappointed them and stood firmly with their country," he said. He emphasized that this unity places a greater responsibility on the government to serve its people effectively.

He also credited citizens with helping security agencies in identifying infiltration networks and said it is now the government's turn to serve all people — regardless of gender, ethnicity, or belief — with fairness and justice.

President Pezeshkian urged all relevant officials to devise and implement the best strategies for assisting war victims. He stressed that while the number of casualties and injuries from the conflict may not be vast, each affected individual deserves focused, high-quality support. He emphasized the need for coordinated efforts and grassroots engagement,

especially through local mosques and community centers.

"Wherever there is a mosque in a neighborhood, there should be no unresolved problems," he remarked.

Turning to the recent controversies regarding the management and return of undocumented Afghan migrants, Pezeshkian acknowledged the challenges in executing large-scale operations without flaws. He stressed that such processes must be conducted with "utmost respect and calm." He confirmed that instructions had been issued to the Interior Minister to ensure humane treatment. Criticizing certain foreign critics, he said, "It's baffling that some who remain silent on the bombing of innocent women and children and the blockade of food and medicine now invoke human rights only when it suits them."

Pezeshkian concluded by reaffirming Iran's cultural and historical ties with Afghan citizens, calling them "our brothers and sisters." He said the efforts to organize their presence in Iran are necessary and ultimately in their own interest, with the goal of conducting such measures with dignity and care.



Overhaul Begins at South Pars Gas Refinery 10

TEHRAN (Shana) - The manager of Refinery 10 at the South Pars Gas Complex announced that major maintenance operations have begun on July 16 and will continue until July 30.

According to the South Pars Gas Complex Company, Mohammad Nemati stated that the overhaul aims to ensure stable gas production in the second half of the year and during the cold season. The project will be carried out in two phases, A and B, each lasting 11 days, with a full seven-day shutdown of the refinery.

Nemati provided details on work orders across various units, noting that 1,948 work orders will be executed, including 1,427 corrective, emergency, and technical inspection orders, along with 521 preventive maintenance orders. Additionally, 1,363 equipment tags have been assigned for process monitoring and control.

Iran and UN Collaborate to Combat Desertification and Dust Storms



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization (FRWO) has emphasized the importance of implementing watershed management projects and reducing critical dust storm hotspots through cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

According to Iran's Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, Ali Teymouri, the FRWO chief, met on Saturday with Eshani Medangolla, the acting head of the UNDP office in Iran. During the meeting, they discussed areas of mutual cooperation in natural resource management, desertification control, and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Teymouri highlighted the climate challenges Iran faces as a country located in the world's dry and semi-arid belt, stressing the need for international cooperation to preserve and restore natural resources.

Teymouri noted that Iran manages over 135 million hectares of natural resources, including 32 million hectares of desert land, and called for UNDP support in implementing watershed management initiatives and curbing critical dust storm zones.

He also referenced Iran's "One Billion Tree Planting" campaign as a public participation initiative, expressing readiness to collaborate with the UNDP within the framework of its goals and mission.

Eshani Medangolla outlined the UNDP's collaborative efforts with Iranian government agencies and proposed the creation of local microcredit funds in various provinces to support grassroots development and cooperation.

Economic Sentiment Worsens as Iran's PMI Falls Sharply in June 2025



TEHRAN - Iran's economy and industrial sectors experienced a notable downturn in June 2025, as reflected in the country's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), known locally as "Shamekh". The latest report from the Iranian Chamber of Commerce's Research Center reveals a sharp decline in the index, attributed to ongoing energy and water outages, heightened geopolitical tensions from a recent 12-day conflict, increased economic uncertainty, and stricter foreign currency regulations.

According to the report, the overall PMI for both the general economy and the industrial sector fell not only compared to the previous month but also reached one of the lowest levels in recent years. The decline was widespread, affecting all five main components of the index, signaling deepening concern among business leaders about Iran's economic outlook.

The report outlines several key pressures impacting business activity:

- Continued Energy and Water Disruptions: Frequent power and water cuts have hampered production across economic units.
- Impact of Conflict: The recent 12-day war has added geopolitical uncertainty, affecting investment and market stability.
- Currency Policy Strain: Tighter enforcement of foreign exchange obligations has burdened businesses, especially exporters and importers.

The data indicates that both the supply and demand sides of the economy are under stress. This has resulted in a drop in investor confidence, a rise in workforce downsizing, and hesitation among producers and exporters to expand operations.

Economic analysts warn that unless structural reforms and support measures are introduced, the negative trend may continue. Recommended responses include:

- Support for Key Industrial Units: Especially those critical to the supply chain.

Widespread Smuggling of Afghan Carpets into Iran



TEHRAN - The head of the Carpet, Arts, and Handicrafts Commission at Iran's Chamber of Commerce has raised the alarm over the extensive smuggling of Afghan carpets into Iran, calling it one of the major challenges facing the industry today.

Morteza Haji Aghamiri, who leads the commission, said in a televised interview that large quantities of Afghan carpets are currently being smuggled openly across Iran's eastern borders and are widely available in local markets.

"The issue of Afghan carpet smuggling is already causing significant problems in various markets," Aghamiri said. "We in the private sector, in coordination with government bodies such as the Headquarters for Combating the Smuggling of Goods and Currency, are actively working to address this problem."

Beyond smuggling, Aghamiri emphasized that the most urgent demand from weavers and handicraft artisans across the country is access to insurance.

"Wherever I travel in my capacity as a member of the Chamber's Board and the head of this commission, the number-one request from artisans is insurance coverage," he noted.

He criticized both the government and the parliament for failing to allocate funds in annual budgets to address this basic need, saying:

"Insurance is a fundamental citizen right, yet it's consistently neglected by both lawmakers and the administration."

Some lawmakers, according to Aghamiri, oppose the idea of expanding

insurance to artisans, claiming it would increase government expenditures. He refuted this claim:

"In fact, investing in insurance for these workers would reduce government costs in the long run. If just one job is lost, creating a new position in industry would cost the government roughly 20 billion rials (about \$40,000). Not providing insurance only accelerates rural-to-urban migration, compounding social challenges."

Aghamiri also highlighted another regulatory hurdle: the inability to re-import used Iranian carpets from foreign markets due to customs regulations. Under Note 1 of Article 121 in Iran's Executive Customs Law, returning Iranian goods without paying customs duties is only permitted if the item is unused and hasn't undergone repairs.

"This rule prevents us from retrieving and refurbishing old Iranian carpets that are stockpiled in European markets where prices have plummeted. We could otherwise restore them in Iran and re-export them to new markets," he explained.

This restriction has also taken a toll on skilled carpet restorers in Iran, many of whom are forced to migrate to Pakistan or Turkey, where they live under subpar conditions just to sustain themselves.

"We're not just losing a product — we're losing valuable human capital and traditional expertise," Aghamiri warned.

Iran's Travel Agencies Suffer \$5m Loss From 12-Day War



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Travel Agencies Association has announced that Iranian travel service offices have sustained over 20 trillion rials (approximately \$50m) in losses due to the 12-day war, following widespread trip cancellations. The agencies are now also indebted to numerous travelers who had prepaid for domestic and international flight tickets and hotel bookings.

According to a statement from the Public Relations Office of Iranian Air Travel Agencies, Hormatollah Rafiei, President of the Iranian Association of Air Travel and Tourism Agencies, said a report detailing the damages has been submitted. "During the 12-day war targeting Iran, difficult circumstances prevailed. While the public once again showed resilience, many travel intermediaries have yet to return travelers' money to agencies, preventing refunds to customers."

Rafiei called on regulatory bodies to pressure airlines and hotels to promptly return funds to the travel offices that had purchased their services. "Many airlines still owe money to the agencies. Not only have they failed to return the funds, but some airlines even claimed 10 days ago that they had refunded 80% of the money — which is simply not true," he stated.

He also addressed airline claims that refunds had been issued to online ticketing platforms, through which some travel

agencies had purchased services. "Even if those claims are valid, we have not yet received any actual payments from these platforms to return to our customers," Rafiei said.

Rafiei emphasized the need for the Ministry of Cultural Heritage to immediately form a committee to address citizens' rights, noting the immense strain placed on travel agencies. "The industry has lost its energy and incurred severe financial damage. Summer travel planning has collapsed, wiping out months of effort."

"In the 25 days since the war began, travel agencies have suffered more than 20 trillion rials in damages. Even now, with the war over, more than 60% of flights remain suspended, and tourism activity is at 10% of normal levels," Rafiei warned.

He added that if no solution is implemented, the current 20 trillion rial loss could escalate to 40 trillion or even 100 trillion rials.

In closing, Rafiei urged the media to responsibly report the realities facing Iran's tourism industry. "It's the media's duty to preserve their independence and report the truth. Only then can decision-makers act based on real conditions and help restore the rights of citizens and revitalize the tourism sector."

Iran Records \$11.6b in Non-Oil Exports in Spring 2025



TEHRAN - According to data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Iran recorded \$11.655 billion in definitive non-oil exports during the first quarter of the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 20–June 20, 2025).

The statistics indicate that Iran exported 34.347 million tons of non-oil goods (excluding crude oil and suitcase trade) valued at \$11.655 billion in the spring of 1404. During the same period, imports stood at 9.013 million tons worth \$13.029 billion.

This resulted in a trade deficit of \$1.374 billion for the first quarter of 1404.

Compared to the same period last year (Spring 1403), when Iran exported more than 38 million tons of goods valued at \$13.622 billion, the country saw a 9.32% decrease in export volume and a 14.44% drop in export value.

On the import side, there was also a year-on-year decline. In Spring 1403, Iran imported 9.423 million tons of goods worth \$14.761 billion. This year, import volume fell by 4.35% and value by 11.73%.

In the first quarter of 1404, China remained Iran's largest export market, purchasing over \$3.511 billion worth of goods—30.12% of total exports. Other leading export destinations included:

- Iraq: \$1.905 billion (16.34%); United Arab Emirates (UAE): \$1.592 billion (13.66%); Turkey: \$937 million (8.04%); and Afghanistan: \$510 million (4.38%).

The UAE topped the list of countries exporting goods to Iran, supplying over \$3.886 billion in goods—33.34% of Iran's total imports. Other key import partners included: China: \$3.428 billion (29.42%); Turkey: \$1.986 billion (17.04%); India: \$514 million (4.41%); and Germany: \$454 million (3.89%).

Foreign transit through Iran amounted to 5 million tons in the first quarter of 1404, reflecting a 6.61% decrease compared to the same period last year.

Government Sets Target for Overseas Farming



TEHRAN (ISNA) - Minister of Agriculture Jihad announced that the government has set a target of cultivating around one million hectares of farmland abroad, marking a significant step toward ensuring national food security through overseas agricultural ventures.

Gholamreza Nouri Ghezjelgeh said that the government has revised the regulations related to overseas farming and has already signed memorandums of understanding with several countries. "Preliminary steps for launching overseas cultivation have begun," he stated.

Nouri Ghezjelgeh emphasized the need to pursue transnational agriculture, explaining, "We currently import about 20% of our food needs. To address this, we intend for our producers and economic stakeholders to engage in agricultural production in suitable foreign countries. A portion of the yield will be exported to Iran, while the rest can be sold locally."

He added that serious cooperation has begun with four to five countries, and promising groundwork has been laid. "During recent visits, several agreements were signed, and we hope cultivation will start soon in these countries," the minister said.

Highlighting the strategic value of the initiative, Nouri Ghezjelgeh called overseas farming an opportunity to export Iran's technical and engineering services. "Our investors, graduates, and professional farmers can work abroad, transfer technology, and contribute to both local and domestic markets," he explained.

He concluded by reaffirming the government's goal of achieving one million hectares of overseas cultivation.

Dozens Dead After Tourist Boat Capsizes in Vietnam's Ha Long Bay

HANOI (Dispatches) - A tourist boat ferrying families around Vietnam's Ha Long Bay capsized in a storm on Saturday afternoon, leaving at least 34 people dead, according to state media reports, as rescuers scrambled to locate the missing. The vessel was carrying 48 passengers and five crew members when it capsized in the UNESCO World Heritage site because of sudden heavy rain, the VNExpress news site said. Most of those on board were families visiting from the capital Hanoi, with more than 20 children among the passengers, it said. "Border guards rescued 11 people and recovered 34 bodies," it added. Rescue efforts were set to continue into the night to find the eight still missing. Ha Long Bay office worker Tran Trong Hung told AFP the storm started in the afternoon.



Tensions Rise as Lula Blasts U.S. Over Visa Sanctions Tied to Bolsonaro Trial



BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva called a U.S. decision to impose visa bans on officials involved in former President Jair Bolsonaro's trial "arbitrary" and "baseless," and said foreign interference in the judiciary was "unacceptable."

In a statement on Saturday, the leftist leader said the action violated fundamental principles of respect and sovereignty between nations.

In an escalation of tensions between U.S. President Donald Trump and the government of Latin America's largest economy, Washington imposed visa restrictions on Friday on Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, his family and other unnamed court officials.

The visa bans were a response to the Supreme Court's decision to issue search warrants and restraining orders targeting Trump ally Bolsonaro, who is accused of plotting a coup to overturn the results of a 2022 election he lost.

"I am certain that no form of intimidation or threat, from anyone, will compromise the most important mission of Brazil's powers and institutions, which is to permanently defend and uphold the democratic rule of law," said Lula.

Solicitor general Jorge Messias, the top judicial official for Lula's executive branch, said in a statement posted on X late Friday that Prosecutor General Paulo Gonet was also targeted by the ban.

Messias said no "improper maneuver" or "sordid conspiratorial act" would intimidate the judiciary in carrying out its duties with independence, as he condemned what he also described as arbitrary U.S. visa revocations targeting Brazilian officials for fulfilling their constitutional responsibilities.

Zelensky Calls for New Peace Talks as Russian Strikes Kill Three in Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - Kyiv has proposed to Moscow a new round of peace talks next week, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said Saturday, hours after Russian strikes across Ukraine claimed more lives.

Two rounds of talks in Istanbul between Moscow and Kyiv have failed to result in any progress towards a ceasefire, instead yielding large-scale prisoner exchanges and deals to return the bodies of killed soldiers.

"Security Council Secretary Umerov... reported that he had proposed the next meeting with the Russian side for next week," Zelensky said in his evening address. "The momentum of the negotiations must be stepped up," he added.

Zelensky reiterated his readiness to have a face-to-face sitdown with Putin. "A meeting at the leadership level is needed to truly ensure peace - lasting peace," he said.

At talks last month, Russia outlined a list of hardline demands, including calls for Ukraine to cede more territory and to reject all forms of Western military support.

Kyiv dismissed them as unacceptable and at the time questioned the point of further negotiations if Moscow was not willing to make concessions.

The Kremlin said earlier this month it was ready to continue talks with Ukraine after US President Donald Trump gave Russia 50 days to strike a peace deal or face sanctions.

Trump also pledged to supply Kyiv with new military aid, sponsored by NATO allies, as its cities suffer ever-increasing Russian aerial attacks.



Clashes Rage in Druze Region as Syria Struggles to Enforce Ceasefire

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Sectarian clashes escalated in Syria's predominantly Druze region of Sweida on Saturday, with machinegun fire and mortar shelling ringing out after days of bloodshed as the Islamist-led government struggled to implement a ceasefire.

Reuters reporters heard gunfire from inside the city of Sweida and saw shells land in nearby villages. There were no immediate, confirmed reports of casualties.

The government had said security forces were deploying in the southern region to try to keep peace, and urged all parties to stop fighting after nearly a week of factional bloodshed in which hundreds have been killed.

Late on Saturday, the interior ministry said clashes in Sweida city had been halted and the area cleared of Bedouin tribal fighters following the deployment.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based monitoring group, said clashes since last week around Sweida had killed at least 940 people. Reuters could not independently verify the toll.

Interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa said "Arab and American" mediation had helped restore calm, before the clashes escalated. He criticised Israel for airstrikes during the week.

The fighting is the latest challenge to the control of Sharaa's Islamist-dominated government, which took over after rebels toppled autocratic president Bashar al-Assad in December.

It started last week as clashes between the Druze - a religious minority native to southern Syria, the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and parts of Lebanon and Jordan - and Syrian Bedouin tribes.

Government forces then arrived to try to quell tensions, clashing with Druze gunmen and attacking the Druze community. Saturday's violence once again pitted Druze against Bedouin, witnesses said.

The fighting has drawn in neighboring Israel, which carried out airstrikes in southern Syria and on the defense ministry in

Damascus this week while government forces were fighting with the Druze. Israel says it is protecting the Druze, who also form a significant minority in Israel.

But Israel and Washington differ over Syria. The U.S. supports a centralized Syria under Sharaa's government, which has pledged to rule for all citizens, while Israel says the government is dominated by jihadists and a danger to minorities.

In March, Syria's military was involved in mass killings of members of the Alawite minority, to which much of Assad's elite belonged.

In a statement on Saturday, the Syrian presidency announced an immediate ceasefire and urged an immediate end to hostilities. Sharaa said Syria would not be a "testing ground for partition, secession, or sectarian incitement".

"The Israeli intervention pushed the country into a dangerous phase that threatened its stability," he said in a televised speech. Sharaa appeared to blame Druze gunmen for the latest clashes, accusing them of revenge attacks against Bedouins.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar said Sharaa was siding with the perpetrators. "In al-Sharaa's Syria, it is very dangerous to be a member of a minority — Kurd, Druze, Alawite, or Christian," he posted on X.

U.S. envoy Tom Barrack announced on Friday that Syria and Israel had agreed to a ceasefire. Barrack, who is both U.S. ambassador to Turkey and Washington's Syria envoy, urged Druze, Bedouins and Sunnis, together with other minorities, to "build a new and united Syrian identity".

Israel has attacked Syrian military facilities in the seven months since Assad fell, and says it wants areas of southern Syria near its border to remain demilitarised.

On Friday, an Israeli official said Israel had agreed to allow Syrian forces limited access to Sweida for two days.

Congo, M23 Rebels Pledge in Qatar to Reach Peace Deal Next Month

DOHA (Dispatches) - Democratic Republic of Congo and the M23 rebel group pledged to sign a peace agreement by August 18, at a ceremony in Doha, a sign of progress even as outstanding details need to be negotiated.

Representatives of both sides signed a declaration of principles laying out the new timeline, a copy of which was obtained by Reuters, at the ceremony that followed months of Qatari mediation after talks began in April.

The United States, which has hosted separate talks between the governments of Congo and Rwanda, has exerted pressure to finalise a durable peace deal in Congo. President Donald Trump has made clear he hopes that would spur Western investment into a country rich in tantalum, gold, cobalt, copper, lithium and other minerals.

Last month, the Rwandan and Congolese foreign ministers signed a peace deal and met with Trump at the White House. Trump at the time invited Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi and Rwandan President Paul Kagame to Washington to sign a package of agreements potentially including economic deals.

The U.S. welcomed the declaration of principles between Congo and the rebels and urged continued discussions to reach a full peace agreement. "We commend the Parties for taking this meaningful step toward advancing lasting peace and stability in the Great Lakes region," U.S. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement.

The rebel group M23, in the latest of a series of uprisings, has controlled Goma, eastern Congo's largest city, since late January and has also made gains across North Kivu and South Kivu provinces.

Rwanda has long denied allegations that it has helped M23, which has seized more territory in Congo than it has ever previously held. The fighting has killed thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands more



this year, while escalating the risk of a full-scale regional war. Several of Congo's neighbours had troops deployed in eastern Congo when the advance began.

Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi said at a news conference Saturday's declaration "lays the groundwork for a new phase of partnership among the various components of society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo - including armed movements that have chosen to prioritise the greater national interest."

It was brought about by talks that followed a surprise meeting between Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi and his Rwandan counterpart Paul

Kagame, brokered by Qatar in March, during which they called for an "immediate and unconditional" ceasefire.

Congo had previously rejected the idea of holding talks with M23, branding it a terrorist group.

While denying it has supported M23, Rwanda has said its forces have acted in self defence against Congo's army and ethnic Hutu militiamen linked to the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Sources in both delegations have expressed frustration with the pace of negotiations in Doha and the lack of progress on confidence-building measures including the release of M23 members held by Congo and the re-opening of banks in rebel-held territory.

The declaration of principles does not resolve those issues, instead committing the parties to "creating the necessary conditions" to eventually do so.

It also does not address bigger questions concerning the possible Rwandan and M23 withdrawals from eastern Congo. It says Congo and M23 agree state authority should be restored "on all national territories" as part of an eventual peace agreement but does not give details.

Congo government spokesperson Patrick Muyaya nevertheless said on X on Saturday that the declaration "takes into account the red lines we have always defended, including the non-negotiable withdrawal" of M23.

Negotiations for a peace agreement are to start no later than August 8, according to the declaration, which would give the parties less than two weeks to finalise a deal if they stick to their new August 18 deadline.

"We are confident and we are hopeful," Massad Boulos, Trump's senior adviser for Africa, told Reuters after Saturday's ceremony in Doha, adding that Tshisekedi and Kagame "have both committed to resolving this."

36 Gazans Killed Near Aid Site as Israeli Forces Fire on Civilians

GAZA (Dispatches) - At least 36 people were killed by Israeli fire while they were on their way to an aid distribution site in Gaza at dawn on Saturday, according to the Gaza Health Ministry and Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis.

The Israeli military said it had fired warning shots at suspects who approached its troops after they did not heed calls to stop, about a kilometre away from an aid distribution site that was not active at the time.

Gaza resident Mohammed al-Khalidi said he was in the group approaching the site and heard no warnings before the firing began.

"We thought they came out to organize us so we can get aid, suddenly (I) saw the jeeps coming from one side, and the tanks from the other and started shooting at us," he said.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a US-backed group which runs the aid site, said there were no incidents or fatalities there on Saturday and that it has repeatedly



warned people not to travel to its distribution points in the dark.

"The reported IDF (Israel Defense Forces) activity resulting in fatalities occurred hours before our sites opened and our understanding is most of the casualties occurred several kilometres away from the nearest GHF site," it said.

The Israeli military said it was reviewing the incident.

GHF uses private US security and logistics companies to get supplies into Gaza, largely bypassing a UN-led system that Israel alleges has let Hamas-led militants loot aid shipments intended for civilians. Hamas denies the accusation.

The UN has called the GHF's model unsafe and a breach of humanitarian impartiality standards, which GHF denies.



Boisson Makes First Final in Hamburg

HAMBURG (Dispatches) - No. 5 seed Lois Boisson of France and No. 7 Anna Bondar of Hungary will both play in their first WTA Tour final in the MSC Hamburg Ladies Open in Germany.

Boisson eliminated No. 2 seed Dayana Yastremska of Ukraine 6-1, 7-6 (5) in Saturday's semifinals. She converted three of five break chances and found success with her second serve, winning 70 percent of the points (16 of 23).

Bondar rallied for a 5-7, 6-3, 6-4 win against Slovenia's Kaja Juvan. Bondar converted five of six break points and took advantage of six double faults by Juvan.

Meanwhile No. 6 seed Jil Teichmann of Switzerland advanced to her first WTA Tour final since 2021 and will take on No. 7 seed and home hopeful Irina-Camelia Begu in Romania.

Teichmann knocked out Romania's Sorana Cirstea 6-4, 6-3 in the semifinals, overcoming a 3-1 deficit in the first set by winning nine of the next 10 games. Teichmann also saved four of six break points.

Begu ousted fellow Romanian and No. 2 seed Jaqueline Cristian 6-4, 6-4. Begu saved nine of 11 break points and finally put away Cristian on her fifth match point.

Meanwhile No. 2 seed Alexander Bublik and unseeded Juan Manuel Cerundolo advanced to the EFG Swiss Open Gstaad final with straight-sets victories in Switzerland.

Kazakhstan's Bublik defeated Frenchman Arthur Cazaux 6-1, 7-5 in 73 minutes. He hammered 12 aces, posted a 35-11 edge in winners and never faced a break point.

Argentina's Cerundolo will play for his second ATP Tour title -- and first since 2021 -- after a 6-3, 6-3 semifinal win against Peru's Ignacio Buse. Cerundolo saved the only break point he faced in the 82-minute

victory.

Unseeded Dutchman Jesper De Jong and No. 6 seed Luciano Darderi of Italy will play for the championship in Bastad, Sweden.

De Jong is chasing his first ATP Tour title after a 6-3, 7-6 (3) win over No. 5 seed Camilo Ugo Carabelli of Argentina. He overcame a 5-4 deficit in the second set and won 83 percent of the points (34 of 41) behind his first save, including eight aces.

Darderi outlasted No. 1 seed Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (3) in two hours, 34 minutes. Darderi overcame a 4-2 deficit in the deciding set and spoiled a big weekend for the Cerundolo family, as brother Juan Manuel Cerundolo is in Sunday's final in Gstaad, Switzerland.

Meanwhile Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen said on Saturday she would take a short break from the WTA Tour after undergoing elbow surgery.

The 22-year-old Chinese player was eliminated from this year's Wimbledon tournament in the first round by Czech Katerina Siniakova earlier in July.

"Now begins the recovery journey," she wrote on Instagram. "Over the next few weeks and months, I'll be focusing entirely on rehab — doing everything I can to come back stronger and healthier."

She powered her way to gold in Paris last year and reached the 2024 Australian Open final.

Zheng added she had arthroscopic surgery on her right elbow on Friday.

"This is just a short break, and I see it as a necessary step toward a better version of myself on the court," she said.

Arensman Gives Ineos Something to Cheer About as Doping Cloud Hangs

BAGNERES-DE-LUCHON (Dispatches) - Thymen Arensman gave Ineos-Grenadiers something to cheer about, despite a doping cloud hanging over the team, as he won the 14th stage of the Tour de France following a superb solo ride in the 182.6-km mountain trek between Pau and Superbagneres.

Slovenian Tadej Pogacar retained the overall leader's yellow jersey as he took second place by beating chief rival Jonas Vingegaard in a two-man sprint finish, one minute 12 seconds behind Arensman, the first rider from the British outfit to win on the Tour in two years.

Ineos Grenadiers have been facing questions about one of their team carers, who is at the centre of allegations involving alleged message exchanges in 2012 with a doctor connected to the notorious Operation Aderlass doping scandal, which rocked the sporting world in 2019.

Bradley Wiggins won the Tour in 2012 with the team, which was then known as Team Sky before Chris Froome went on to win another four for the squad.

The team carer was seen at the beginning of the Tour in Lille but has not been sighted in recent days.

"I have no idea about this, you have to ask the management about this. I'm just focused on my job, doing my own thing," Arensman told reporters.

Ineos Grenadiers were not immediately available for comment.



Although no formal charges have been brought, the development has cast a shadow over the team's Tour campaign.

"Ineos Grenadiers Cycling Team is aware of recent media allegations relating to the 2012 season and a member of its staff. These allegations have not to date been presented to the team by any appropriate authority," the team said in a statement.

The team added that it had formally requested information from the International Testing Agency (ITA) and reaffirmed its zero-tolerance policy regarding doping violations.

The ITA told Reuters it would not further comment on the matter.

Operation Aderlass, which began with a raid during the 2019 Nordic World Ski Championships in Austria, implicated athletes and medical personnel across several sports, including cycling.

The doctor at the centre of the case, Mark Schmidt, was later convicted and sentenced to prison for administering illegal blood transfusions.

On the Tour, defending champion Pogacar extended his lead over Dane Vingegaard in the general classification by six seconds to 4:13 at the end of the Pyrenean stage, where Belgian Remco Evenepoel, who had started the day in third place overall, abandoned.

The day belonged to Arensman, however, as the Dutchman went solo from the day's breakaway in the penultimate climb to the Col de Peyresourde (7.1 km at 7.8%) before his team car hit and knocked down a spectator amid the usual roadside chaos on the Tour.

Arensman never looked back and held firm on his way up to Superbagneres (12.4 km at 7.3%) as Vingegaard attacked several times in an attempt to drop Pogacar.

Usyk Crushes Dubois in Five Rounds to Unify Heavyweight Titles at Wembley

LONDON (Dispatches) - Oleksandr Usyk cemented his status as the outstanding heavyweight of his generation with an emphatic fifth-round knockout of Daniel Dubois in their undisputed world title bout at London's Wembley Stadium.

Victory saw Ukraine's Usyk extend his unbeaten professional record to 24 fights as the WBA, WBC and WBO champion added his British opponent's IBF belt to his collection.

Usyk, now a two-time undisputed heavyweight champion -- and three times in all after previously mastering the cruiserweight division -- dominated the opening four rounds.

And early in the fifth he dropped Dubois to the canvas.

Moments later he finished the fight in decisive fashion after a trademark left hook left his British rival unable to beat the count one minute and 52 seconds into the round.

It was the second time Usyk, at 38 some 11 years older than his opponent, had defeated Dubois following a ninth-round stoppage success in Krakow, Poland, in 2023, where the Briton



was ruled to have landed an illegal low blow in the fifth round.

Lennox Lewis, the last British boxer to be undisputed world champion in 1999, forecast before Saturday's fight that Usyk would face a vastly-improved Dubois, saying: "Dubois was a baby in the sport and now he's a man...You're not going to see the same Daniel Dubois from 18 months ago."

But after Usyk was roared into the ring by a huge contingent of supporters, many of them waving Ukraine national flags in a 90,000 capacity crowd at Wembley, best known as the London base of England's national football team, it was largely one-way traffic as their hero conducted a ruthless masterclass against local favourite Dubois.

"38 is a young guy, remember!," Usyk told DAZN in the ring after dropping to his knees in celebration. "38 is only start!

"I want to say thank you to Jesus Christ. I want to say thank you to my team and Wembley, thank you so much! It's for the people.

Messi Double as Miami Bounce Back Against Red Bulls



NEW YORK (Dispatches) -- Lionel Messi rediscovered his scoring touch with two goals as Inter Miami bounced back from defeat to complete a 5-1 drubbing of the New York Red Bulls in Major League Soccer on Saturday.

Messi's red-hot season was rocked on Wednesday as Miami stumbled to a 3-0 defeat against FC Cincinnati.

But the Argentinian superstar was back to his inspired best as Miami turned on the style at the Sports Illustrated Stadium in Harrison, New Jersey to record an emphatic victory.

The Red Bulls had threatened to deliver another upset after Alexander Hack bundled home a 14th-minute opener to fire the hosts into an early lead.

But Messi swiftly orchestrated Inter Miami's recovery from that setback, providing a sublime pass to set up former Barcelona team-mate Jordi Alba's equaliser in the 24th minute.

Messi then combined with Alba for Miami's second goal, producing another brilliant pass to pick out the Spaniard, who crossed for Telasco Segovia to prod home on 27 minutes.

Segovia then swept in his second of the night deep into first-half stoppage time to leave Miami firmly in control.

Messi then took over in the second half as Miami cut loose.

A majestic through ball by another former Barcelona team-mate, Sergio Busquets, sent the Argentine World Cup-winner racing through on goal in the 60th minute.

Messi took his time and coolly feinted to wrongfoot Red Bulls goalkeeper Carlos Coronel before tucking away the finish for 4-1.

Another Barcelona old boys combination delivered Messi's second. Luis Suarez crossed from the left and Messi controlled on the edge of the six-yard box to send a thumping finish past Coronel.

Scheffler Closes on Open Glory, McIlroy Still in Mix



PORTRUSH (Dispatches) - Scottie Scheffler kept a cool hand on the tiller to stay on course for his first British Open title with a serene 67 on a spectacular day of shot-making in the third round.

Birdies and eagles rained down on a sun-kissed Royal Portrush links with home favourite Rory McIlroy, England's Tyrrell Hatton and defending champion Xander Schauffele all tucking into the scoring feast.

Thunderous roars wafted across the County Antrim coast, the loudest for some McIlroy magic, but world number one Scheffler was laser-focused to move to 14 under par and a four-stroke lead heading to the final day.

Barring a sudden loss of form by the three-times major champion, the last round looks like being a scrap for the minor places, although Scheffler is not out of sight.

"I had another good day today," Scheffler said. "I was pretty patient and felt like I was hitting it really nice.

"Sometimes in major championships it can be tough to make birdies, and today was one of those days where I just had to give myself some looks and was able to hole a few."

Li Haotong maintained his challenge, a 69 taking him to 10 under par, and he will be the first Chinese man to be in the final group at a major. England's Matt Fitzpatrick finished a further shot back after a disappointing 71.

McIlroy's five-under 66 kept alive the Northern Irishman's hopes of lifting the Claret Jug on home soil, 11 years after his previous British Open title. He is in a group on eight under with Americans Chris Gotterup and Harris English, and Hatton.

"I've got a chance. I need to get off to a great start like I did today, and if I can do that, anything can happen," McIlroy said.

After his majestic second-round 64, the 29-year-old Scheffler was becalmed early on Saturday and three-putted for a par five at the second hole.