

Iran Is Expected to Significantly Increase Its Wheat Imports in the Calendar Year to Late March Amid a Fall in Domestic Production That Has Been Caused by Drought and Low Government Purchase Prices

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Foreign Ministry Has Expressed the Country's Readiness to Provide Rescue and Relief Aid to Neighboring Pakistan After Flash Floods Killed at Least 344 People and Left More Than 150 Missing

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DOMESTIC



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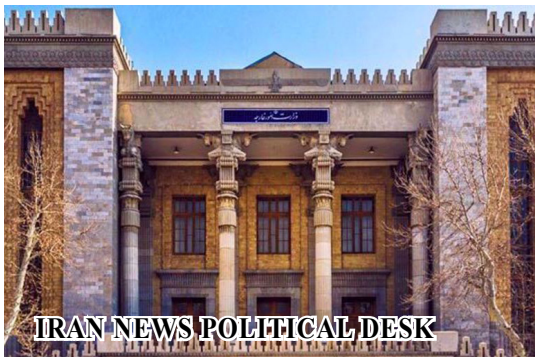
INTERNATIONAL

## Mass Rallies Sweep Israel as Protesters Demand End to Gaza War, Hostage Deal



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## Israel's Forced Evictions, 'Greater Israel' Plans Threaten Global Peace



TEHRAN - Iran has condemned Israel's decision to expel Palestinians from their homes in Gaza, calling it a "horrific war crime" and urging the international community, especially Muslim nations, to take immediate action.

In a statement released Sunday, Iran's Foreign Ministry said the forced displacement of Palestinians to southern Gaza, alongside Israeli leaders' promotion of a so-called "Greater Israel" project, highlights the grave threat Israel poses to regional and global peace.

The ministry warned that these actions are part of a broader plan to erase Palestinian national identity and complete what it described as a campaign of genocide. It said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks about expanding Israel to encompass large parts of Muslim and Arab lands expose the "domineering nature" of the regime and its destabilizing ambitions.

The statement noted that residents of Gaza City have endured nearly two years of intense bombardment and five months of starvation under Israeli blockade. The forced eviction order, it said, constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity aimed at eliminating Palestine as a nation.

Tehran also blamed Israel's "entrenched impunity," U.S. and European military support, and the inaction of the UN Security Council and international courts for enabling such policies. Iran warned that Israel's claimed relocation of Gaza residents is a cover for escalating violence and mass killings.

"The occupying regime's actions are nothing but an attempt to complete the plan of genocide," the ministry said, stressing that failure to act will embolden Israel to expand its aggression.

## We Stand Beside Our Brothers in the Region, But Do Not Dictate to Them



TEHRAN - Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, emphasized that Tehran's role in the region is one of support and partnership, not interference or issuing directives.

Speaking in the second part of the program "Tehran, Tel Aviv" aired on Iran's Channel 2, Larijani addressed regional dynamics, particularly developments in Lebanon. He stated:

"Lebanon is currently facing challenges and seeking solutions. Our message to the Lebanese is that we will always stand with them, as we have in the past. However, decisions belong to the Lebanese people, and we do not interfere in their internal affairs."

Larijani criticized deadlines imposed on Lebanon by external powers regarding disarmament. "We do not accept that major powers set ultimatums for other nations. This is not the language one uses with a civilized nation," he said, recalling that former U.S. President Donald Trump once set deadlines for Iran as well. "It is not acceptable for countries thousands of kilometers away to dictate terms and offer rewards in return for compliance. We see this as degrading."

## German, British, and French Embassies in Tehran Not Closed

TEHRAN - The German, British, and French embassies in Tehran are not closed, despite recent media reports suggesting otherwise, according to the spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In a press briefing held on Monday morning, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei addressed several regional and international issues.

Responding to remarks by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu regarding the "Greater Israel" plan, Baqaei said, "The true nature of this regime is now clear to the countries in our region. The plan involves large portions of Islamic and Arab lands, showing that the regime recognizes no boundaries. The so-called Abraham Accords were always a delusion for achieving peace in the region."

Regarding reports on the suspension of operations at certain foreign embassies in Iran, Baqaei clarified that while some missions reduced activities during Israel's aggression, this should not be misconstrued as the closure of the German, British, or French embassies.

Addressing Israeli claims of offering assistance to Iran in water management, Baqaei dismissed these as mere propaganda, adding, "The party known for stealing water from Palestinians and for attacks, such as the recent pipeline strike in northern Tehran, has a well-known nature, which our people are aware of."

On Cyprus's concerns about potential threats from Iran's nuclear capabilities, the spokesperson reiterated that such claims follow long-standing Western and Israeli narratives. He stressed that Iran's nuclear program remains peaceful, as confirmed by IAEA reports.

Baqaei also commented on U.S. influence in regional affairs, stating that American interventions have primarily served Israeli interests, and that regional populations are well aware of these agendas.

Regarding the Ukraine conflict, he expressed support for initiatives aimed at ending the war, highlighting Iran's consistent advocacy for peaceful resolution and dialogue between the parties. He noted, however, that due to the U.S.'s poor track record in negotiations, significant efforts are required to gain the trust of both sides.

Turning to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Baqaei condemned Israeli actions as part of a systematic effort amounting to ethnic cleansing. "Recent decisions by the occupying regime to forcibly displace nearly one million people southward occur amid severe shortages of food and medicine," he said. "On average, 70 to 80 innocent people are killed daily. The international community and regional countries have voiced strong opposition, yet Israel continues these actions with full U.S. backing."

Responding to questions about regional cooperation against Israel's expansionist plans, Baqaei stated, "The true nature of Israel's expansionist ambitions is now clear to all regional countries.



Netanyahu's own statements reveal that the so-called Greater Israel plan targets significant Arab and Islamic lands. If unchecked, this expansionism threatens regional security and stability, making vigilance among regional nations more critical than ever."

On South Caucasus developments following the Armenia-Azerbaijan agreement, Baqaei affirmed that Iran remains cautious regarding the presence of external actors in the region. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that new transport links, including a proposed railway connecting southern Armenia to Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, do not compromise Armenia's sovereignty or alter regional geopolitics. "We are continuously monitoring the situation and will communicate our concerns whenever necessary."

whenever necessary to ensure peace, stability, and security in the South Caucasus are not jeopardized," he concluded.

Baqaei stated that Iran remains highly sensitive to the involvement of external actors. "We have clearly communicated our concerns to Armenia. Armenian officials indicated that any cooperation with Americans will take place through a company registered under Armenian law," he said. Baqaei emphasized that Iran's priority is the protection of borders and the uninterrupted functioning of transport routes, and that the country closely monitors the situation, raising concerns with regional partners whenever necessary.

In response to a question about Iran's relationship with the Agency and whether Tehran's interactions with the Agency's Director General have shifted to an indirect format, Baqaei said: "No. Our communications with the Agency continue, and last week the Agency's Deputy Director General visited Tehran."

He added: "The level of our exchanges has changed after recent events, but our relationship remains direct. Last week, we held discussions to draft a guideline on how to interact with the Agency. Our mission in Vienna is also in direct and continuous contact with the Agency."

"We welcome any initiative that brings an end to the war and conflict in Ukraine"

The Foreign Ministry spokesperson also, in response to a question regarding peace talks about Ukraine and the recent meeting between the Presidents of Russia and the United States on this matter, said: "We welcome any initiative that brings an end to the war and conflict in Ukraine. From the very beginning of these clashes, we have said that disputes must be resolved peacefully, and over the years we have encouraged the parties to move in this direction."

He emphasized: "Any country that takes a responsible view of international developments will welcome peace initiatives."

Baqaei continued: "Of course, the United States, as a party with a very poor track record in international negotiations, will have to struggle and make considerable efforts to gain the trust of the other parties."

## The Country Cannot Be Fixed with Slogans

TEHRAN - Speaking at the opening of the 38th National Conference of Education Heads across the country, President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that slogans alone cannot solve the nation's problems.

Pezeshkian attended the opening session of the conference, where he highlighted the critical role of teachers and schools in shaping the country's future.

"No place is more important than teachers, schools, preschools, and elementary schools, which build the future of the nation," he stated. "The country cannot be fixed by slogans, society cannot be reformed through empty claims, and behavioral change cannot be imposed by force."

Pezeshkian stressed the importance of nurturing children to love their homeland and people, and to actively work toward solving societal problems with compassion.

"We must all understand that comfort and luxury alone do not lead to success. Achieving anything meaningful requires effort and hardship," he said.

Criticizing the country's approach to school construction, he added, "We have been building schools for 47 years, yet the process has been marked by injustice. There are schools wealthy families refuse to send their children to—why can't we build schools so well that everyone wishes to attend them?"

The president also criticized the gap between promises and action: "We speak a lot but do not act. We make promises from podiums that we have no intention of fulfilling. Why claim something you do not intend to implement?"

Pezeshkian argued that true excellence is not measured by awards like the Nobel Prize, but by devotion to one's people. "Genuine value belongs to those who care about their people's suffering, work to solve their problems, and strive for unity and progress."

He described public office as a responsibility to address citizens' issues and expressed hope for the proper upbringing of the nation's children: "May we raise the next generation so that when they compare themselves to other countries in the region, they stand among the best."

Pezeshkian urged high standards in education, noting that if the nation rates itself 70 out of 100, only then can it reach the top echelons. "It pains me to see children attending public schools in some regions of the country and being dissatisfied. We must aim higher, because with determination,



everything can be solved," he said.

Highlighting the role of schools in fostering commitment to the country, he concluded: "Teachers and school administrators are the key agents of societal change. Schools are where the future is built. We can eliminate injustice in even the most remote schools, and children from all backgrounds must come to school with love and equal opportunity. If we are to educate them, we must lead by example."

Pezeshkian also questioned why children are not being raised to love their homeland, strive to solve its problems, and carry the pain and passion of their people in their hearts.

"All of this is shaped in the classroom," he said. "Teachers and school administrators have the ability to instill this mindset. There is no institution equal to the school in shaping the future of the nation. A country cannot be reformed and behavioral change cannot be imposed through slogans or empty claims; true change must come from the heart."

Pezeshkian emphasized the need to improve educational quality, asking, "How is it possible that the quality of education in some schools is low, while every parent wants their child to receive a good education? We just need to engage with families—they are then willing to make sacrifices to ensure their children receive better schooling. Many families have even worked as laborers to help build schools for their children. To solve problems, we must face hardships; no one succeeds in comfort alone."

He criticized the inequalities in the education system, particularly the high tuition fees in some schools: "Why should we have such disparities, with some schools charging up to 160 million toman, and even more in practice? This is pure injustice. We live in a society where wealthy families refuse to send their children to certain schools—why can't we create schools that everyone wishes their child could attend?"

Pezeshkian called on officials to recognize the weight of their responsibilities: "We must be aware of the pain of the people and the injustice in the system. We cannot allow children whose families cannot afford high tuition fees to fall behind those of the wealthy. Education should not be purely theoretical—it must be taught with love. Officials must hold this belief in their hearts to be able to act on it."

## 1.2m Afghans Leave Iran, 6m Remain



TEHRAN - Interior Minister, Eskandar Momeni, announced on Monday that more than 1.2 million Afghan nationals have left the country, while an estimated 6 million Afghans still remain in Iran. He also confirmed that the government has placed the gradual repatriation of around 2 million undocumented migrants on its agenda.

Speaking during a working visit to Mashhad, Momeni said that the highest number of migrant departures have been recorded at the borders of Khorasan Razavi Province. "In the past year alone, over 1.2 million Afghans crossed the border, more than 70 percent of whom were identified and registered," he stated.

The minister highlighted the scale of migration across Iran's eastern borders, stressing the need for better border control and regulation of undocumented foreign nationals. He emphasized that managing the large Afghan population in Iran requires serious national and international cooperation.

"According to the plan, the first step is the return of around two million Afghans who entered Iran without legal documents," Momeni explained. "Currently, more than six million Afghan nationals reside in the country, and naturally, handling such a population calls for coordinated efforts."

Momeni underlined that the return process will be conducted with respect for human dignity and the rights of neighboring nations. He noted that the head of the Center for Foreign Nationals Affairs accompanied him on this trip to further assess the issue.

The minister also pointed to the importance of cooperation between national and provincial bodies, noting that a special meeting was scheduled in Mashhad with the participation of government agencies to address border management and migrant issues.

"Managing borders is only possible through mobilizing national resources and ensuring coordination among all relevant institutions," Momeni said. "We also draw on the experiences of other countries, since migration is not a challenge unique to Iran—it is a global issue."

## Water Challenges Intensify as Summer Nears Its End



TEHRAN - Iran is facing mounting water challenges as the end of summer approaches, with hydroelectric power plants currently out of operation, according to the Minister of Energy.

Speaking to reporters, Minister Abbas Aliabadi emphasized the urgency of managing water resources carefully. "As we approach the end of summer, water supplies are dwindling. We must all work together and with the help of the public to create better conditions," he stated.

Aliabadi also highlighted the recent domestic achievement in turbine technology. He described the development of the Class F turbine as a major milestone, noting that it reflects the dedication and ingenuity of young Iranian engineers. "The results of our youth's efforts are a significant accomplishment. This gives us confidence that even greater achievements await in the future," he said.

The minister stressed that Iran has proven its capability in advanced engineering. "We can compete globally. The years of effort by MAPNA and the talent of our young engineers demonstrate that we are not behind any major international players. Our achievements are backed by a strong civilizational heritage," Aliabadi added.

Despite having passed the peak of electricity demand, the minister warned that challenges remain. "We need to work hand in hand. With cooperation, the public can help us maintain stability. The end of summer will not automatically solve our water issues," he said.



## Iran Chamber of Commerce Trade Delegation Heads to Yerevan

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A trade delegation consisting of 96 Iranian business leaders departed for Yerevan with the aim of strengthening trade and investment ties with their Armenian counterparts. The delegation is led by Mohammadreza Bahraman, Vice President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce.

The mission comes ahead of Iranian President's official visit to Armenia, scheduled for Monday evening, August 27. Alongside Bahraman, the delegation also includes Masoumeh Aghapour, Advisor to the President on Economic Cooperation, and Heruik Yaghijanyan, President of the Iran-Armenia Joint Chamber of Commerce.

## Iran's Non-Oil Exports Drop 5.5% in First Four Months of Year



TEHRAN - Iran's non-oil exports fell by 5.5 percent in the first four months of the current year compared with the same period last year, according to Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and head of the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

Speaking at the 25th session of the 10th term of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, held on Sunday, August 17, Dehnavi warned that if the country fails to establish a positive trend in non-oil exports, the downturn could deepen in the coming months.

"Many traders and businesspeople are caught in the web of regulations and restrictions. Unless we fundamentally reconsider the prevailing paradigm in foreign trade policymaking, our solutions and efforts will not yield results," he said.

Dehnavi stressed that effective economic policymaking requires aligning private sector incentives with broader social and economic goals. "If I, as head of the TPO, design policies smartly, then when the private sector pursues its own profit, those actions will also serve national economic interests," he explained.

He called for removing excessive oversight from trade processes, emphasizing that previous approaches of tight controls have proven ineffective. Instead, he argued that currency and foreign exchange policies should be implemented through appropriate financial tools rather than restrictions on trade itself.

Highlighting some positive developments, Dehnavi noted that an "exchange committee" has been established within the ministry under the chairmanship of the minister, with relevant deputies actively participating. This, he said, provides a platform for private sector proposals, solutions, and criticisms to be heard.

## Steel Industry Provides 31% of National Gas Revenue Despite Consuming Only 5%



TEHRAN - The chairman of the Iranian Steel Producers Association emphasized the crucial role of the steel industry in the country's economy, while warning of ongoing challenges, particularly regarding energy supply.

At a recent board meeting of the association attended by media representatives, Bahram Sobhani, Chairman of the Iranian Steel Producers Association, stated:

"Although the steel industry plays a leading role in solving the country's economic problems, it is still frequently blamed for energy shortages without reference to accurate statistics. Even some university professors and economists view it this way."

According to Sobhani, the steel industry consumes around 40 million cubic meters of gas per day and less than 6,000 megawatts of electricity, accounting for only 5% of national gas consumption. However, the sector contributes 31% of the national gas budget while also generating the highest levels of employment and foreign currency revenues.

Highlighting efficiency at Mobarakeh Steel Company, he noted that with 10 million tons of annual steel production, the company uses only 16 million cubic meters of water annually—equivalent to less than 2 cubic meters per ton of steel.

Sobhani stressed that both the government and the public should be properly informed about the industry's energy use.

"The government assumes the steel sector has vast financial resources and can absorb higher electricity and gas prices. But if steel producers cannot secure reliable electricity and face power cuts, they lose the incentive to continue production," he warned.

Meanwhile, Seyed Rasoul Khalifeh-Soltani, Secretary of the Iranian Steel Producers Association, pointed out that energy imbalances have left about 30% of the country's steel production capacity idle. He described the issue as not only a challenge for the steel value chain but a national concern.

He added that while Iran's steel production had grown at an average annual rate of 5.7% over the past two decades, growth has now slowed sharply to just 0.7%.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



## Direct Iran-FATF Talks Rekindling Hope for Businesses

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture has described the reopening of direct negotiations between Iran and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) after six years as a "ray of hope" for the country's business community. He emphasized that economic diplomacy centered on the private sector is the best way to navigate the nation's current challenges.

Speaking at a meeting of the Chamber's Board of Representatives, Samad Hassanzadeh congratulated Iran's business associations, unions, and federations on the occasion of National Day of Associations and Social Participation. He underlined the importance of strengthening the role of trade bodies in shaping national economic policy.

Hassanzadeh announced that elections for the heads and deputies of the Chamber's 20 specialized commissions would be held on August 17 and 18. These commissions, he said, had become effective advisory arms in recent years, contributing through expert panels, conferences, research partnerships, and collaboration with government agencies.

Turning to the economy, Hassanzadeh noted that the latest Shamkh index – an indicator of business activity – showed early signs of recovery in the country's production sector. However, he stressed that more decisive measures were needed to move beyond stagnation and achieve sustained growth.

He also pointed to the results of the National Business Environment Survey for spring 2025, which revealed modest improvement compared with late 2024. Still, challenges remain, particularly in unpredictable regulations, raw material price fluctuations, and difficulties in accessing bank financing.

Hassanzadeh urged policymakers to prioritize support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up 90 percent of Iran's industrial units, employ more than 60 percent of the industrial workforce, and account for nearly

30 percent of non-oil GDP. He argued that SMEs face barriers to financing and bargaining power, calling for targeted support in banking, taxation, customs, and social security.

On the international front, the Chamber chief hailed the resumption of direct talks between Iran and FATF, saying the move could strengthen global confidence in Iran's financial transparency. He suggested that Iran's approval of the CFT (Combating the Financing of Terrorism convention) as a complement to the Palermo Convention would mark another step toward improving economic engagement with the world.

Reiterating the Chamber's position on foreign policy, Hassanzadeh said the institution supports international negotiations and de-escalation efforts, provided they safeguard national interests and security. He warned, however, that Iranian society and businesses must remain vigilant against "psychological operations" orchestrated by adversaries, particularly Israel, which he accused of trying to sow insecurity even during periods of relative calm.

Highlighting the strategic importance of regional economic connectivity, he noted that stronger geo-economic networks and cross-border cooperation would enhance Iran's long-term security and prosperity.

"Once again, we stress that one of the best paths out of the country's current conditions is reliance on economic diplomacy led by the private sector," Hassanzadeh concluded, reaffirming the Chamber's readiness to work closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He began his remarks by offering condolences over the recent passing of Mohammadreza Bahrami, a member of the Chamber's board and vice president of the Kerman Chamber of Commerce, praising him as a dedicated and noble figure in Iran's business community.

## Iranian Household Incomes Outpace Expenses in 2024

TEHRAN - The average annual income of Iranian households in 2024 exceeded their annual expenses, according to the latest figures from the Statistical Center of Iran.

Maryam Pourreza, Director-General of the Office of Population, Labor Force, and Household Economy at the center, said on Sunday that data from the annual Household Income and Expenditure Survey showed that income growth among both urban and rural households outstripped spending growth.

The survey—one of Iran's oldest statistical projects, running since 1963 in rural areas and 1968 in urban areas—aims to estimate average household income and expenditure nationwide and at the provincial level. It is used to analyze consumption patterns, assess the impact of economic policies, study social and economic relations, and identify families living below the poverty line. The results also provide key input for national and regional economic planning.

According to the 2024 survey, which sampled about 20,000 urban and 19,000 rural households, the average annual expenditure of an urban household was 270 million tomans, marking a 30% increase from the previous year. Of this amount, 63 million tomans (24%) went to food and tobacco, while 200 million tomans (77%) was spent on non-food expenses.

Meat accounted for the largest share of food costs at 24%, while housing, fuel, and utilities dominated non-food expenses, absorbing 57% of household budgets.

The average annual income of an urban household reached 340 million tomans, up 34% compared to 2023, showing that incomes grew faster than expenses.

For rural households, average annual expenditure was estimated at



140 million tomans, a 31% increase from the previous year. Of this, 55 million tomans (38%) went to food and tobacco, and 90 million tomans (63%) to non-food items. As in cities, meat took the highest share of food costs (24%), while housing, fuel, and utilities made up 38% of non-food expenses.

The average annual income of rural households rose to 200 million tomans, representing a 35% increase, again outpacing the rise in expenses.

The report also highlighted regional disparities. Among urban households, Tehran recorded the highest average expenditure at nearly 395 million tomans, while Semnan reported the lowest at about 153 million tomans.

In terms of urban income, Tehran again ranked first with about 493 million tomans, while Ilam recorded the lowest average at 214 million tomans.

For rural households, Bushehr province registered the highest average spending at about 235 million tomans, while Sistan and Baluchestan had the lowest at 77 million tomans. On the income side, Yazd topped the list with 337 million tomans, whereas Sistan and Baluchestan again ranked last at 92 million tomans.

The Statistical Center of Iran publishes the detailed findings annually in two separate reports for urban and rural areas, comprising 234 summary tables and 512 detailed tables for all 31 provinces and the country as a whole.

Pourreza emphasized that the center, as an independent statistical body, is tasked with providing accurate and official information to the public, government agencies, and other stakeholders. The full results of the 2024 survey are expected to be released soon through the center's national data portal.

## Iran Unveils Key Space Projects Through 2026



TEHRAN - The head of the Iranian Space Agency has outlined the country's major space projects, announcing plans for experimental launches of the "Martyr Soleimani" satellite constellation this year.

Hassan Salarieh, President of the Iranian Space Agency, said in an interview with ILNA that the "Martyr Soleimani" project is Iran's first narrowband satellite constellation, designed and built domestically by a consortium of private and public companies. According to Salarieh, the initial experimental models are nearing completion and will be launched in 2025, followed by the main operational satellites once ground tests are finalized.

"This constellation is significant because it is the first to be fully designed and manufactured inside the country, with strong participation from the private sector," Salarieh emphasized. He added that the project involves complex technical challenges, including the simultaneous design, launch, and operation of multiple satellites.

The agency chief highlighted the growing role of private companies in Iran's space sector. Satellites "Kosar" and "Hodhod," launched in 2024, were fully developed by private firms, marking a first in the country. A second model of the "Kosar" satellite is also nearly complete and scheduled for launch this year.

In addition, private companies are building other satellites, including the "Pajouhesh" (Research) series. More satellite construction projects will be tendered to private industry in 2025. Salarieh stressed that the government's long-term strategy is to expand private sector involvement, arguing that "competition and growth in the space industry occur when private companies actively participate."

## More Five-Star Trains Planned



TEHRAN - The CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways announced a 19% increase in train capacity for Arbaeen pilgrims this year, made possible through cooperation with the private sector.

According to IRNA, Jabarali Zakari, speaking at a meeting with executives of passenger rail companies, said this year's Arbaeen services were distinguished by the direct transfer of pilgrims to the Shalamchek border crossing. He explained that passengers traveled around the clock, free of charge, on rail buses covering the 15-minute route between Khorramshahr and Shalamchek. This service operated at a speed of 120 km/h, a target achieved this year.

Zakari expressed hope that, in coordination with Iraq's railway authorities, rail connections to the holy city of Karbala could soon be established.

Highlighting the strong cooperation with the private sector and the high demand from travelers, he noted that rail transport for Arbaeen pilgrims increased by 19% compared with last year.

The railway chief also emphasized the need to utilize legal capacities to expand passenger services and modernize the rail fleet. He said that with continued private sector involvement, Iran's railway network expects major improvements in passenger services.

Citing recent positive developments in financial settlements, debt repayments, and private company revenues, Zakari announced plans to enhance service quality. He confirmed that expanding the operation of five-star trains in various cities is now on the agenda.

Meanwhile, Mir-Hassan Mousavi, Deputy CEO of Iran Railways, praised the active participation of private rail companies during the Arbaeen period. He reported that, up until last night, nearly 410,000 pilgrims had been transported by train.

Mousavi added that during peak demand days, reserve carriages from private operators were deployed. With the addition of extra trains and the use of available capacity, the surge in passenger demand was successfully managed.

## Hamas Rejects Israel's Gaza Relocation Plan

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Palestinian militant group Hamas said that Israel's plan to relocate residents from Gaza City constitutes a "new wave of genocide and displacement" for hundreds of thousands of residents in the area. The group said the planned deployment of tents and other shelter equipment by Israel into southern Gaza was a "blatant deception".

The Israeli military has said it is preparing to provide tents and other equipment starting from Sunday ahead of its plan to relocate residents from combat zones to the south of the enclave "to ensure their safety".

Hamas said in a statement that the deployment of tents under the guise of humanitarian purposes is a blatant deception intended to "cover up a brutal crime that the occupation forces prepare to execute".



## Syrian President Says Unifying Country Should Not Be With Blood



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa has said the battle to unify his country after years of civil war "should not be with blood", rejecting any partition and accusing Israel of meddling in the south.

His remarks, released by state TV, came as hundreds demonstrated in south Syria's Sweida province, denouncing sectarian violence last month and calling for the right to self-determination for the Druze-majority province.

"We still have another battle ahead of us to unify Syria, and it should not be with blood and military force... it should be through some kind of understanding because Syria is tired of war," Sharaa said during a dialogue session involving notables from the northwest province of Idlib and other senior officials.

"I do not see Syria as at risk of division. Some people desire a process of dividing Syria and trying to establish cantons... this matter is impossible," he said according to a recording of the meeting, distributed overnight by state media.

"Some parties seek to gain power through regional power, Israel or others. This is also extremely difficult and cannot be implemented," he said.

At the protest in Sweida, some demonstrators waved the Israeli flag and called for self-determination for the region.

A week of bloodshed in Sweida began on July 13 with clashes between Druze fighters and Sunni Bedouin, but rapidly escalated, drawing in government forces, with Israel also carrying out strikes.

Syrian authorities have said their forces intervened to stop the clashes, but witnesses, Druze factions and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights have accused them of siding with the Bedouin and committing abuses against the Druze, including summary executions.

Sharaa said that Sweida "witnessed many violations from all sides... some members of the security forces and army in Syria also carried out some violations".

## Macron Says Lasting Peace in Ukraine Must Include Unwavering Security Guarantees



PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron said that any lasting peace in Ukraine must be backed by strong security commitments.

Macron's remarks came after US President Donald Trump's Friday meeting in Alaska with Russian President Vladimir Putin, which was followed by Trump's exchanges with European counterparts and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"It is essential to continue supporting Ukraine and to maintain pressure on Russia as long as its war of aggression continues and until a solid and lasting peace, respectful of Ukraine's rights, has been established," Macron wrote on US social media platform X.

He added that "any lasting peace must be accompanied by unwavering security guarantees," welcoming the readiness of the US to contribute in this regard.

"We will work on this with them and with all our partners in the Coalition of the Willing, with whom we will meet again soon, to make concrete progress. It will also be essential to draw all the lessons from the past 30 years, in particular from Russia's well-established tendency not to honor its own commitments," he said.

# Mass Rallies Sweep Israel as Protesters Demand End to Gaza War, Hostage Deal

TEL AVIV (Dispatches) - Demonstrators rallied across Israel on Sunday, demanding an end to the war in Gaza and a deal to free the remaining hostages as the military readies a new offensive. The protests come amid rising domestic pressure and international concern over the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territory. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the demonstrations, accusing protesters of emboldening Hamas and undermining efforts to secure the hostages' release.

Clutching pictures of hostages, waving yellow flags, banging on snare drums and shouting chants to bring captive Israelis home, tens of thousands took to Tel Aviv's streets Sunday to call for an end to the war in Gaza.

"We're here to make it very clear to the Israeli government that this is probably the last minute we have to save the hostages that are being held in the Hamas tunnels for almost 700 days," Ofir Penso, a 50-year-old Arabic teacher, told AFP.

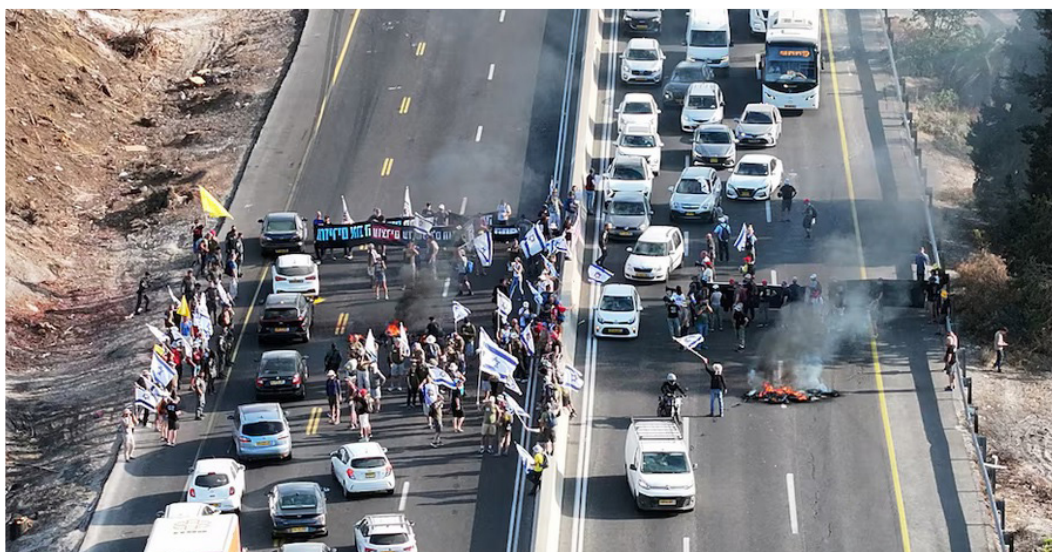
Demonstrations have been held regularly through most of the 22 months of war in the wake of the Hamas attacks in 2023, but Sunday's protests appeared to be one of the largest yet.

The renewed energy of the movement came with the government deciding just over a week ago to seize Gaza City and nearby camps in a new offensive.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vow to conquer the most populated swaths of the Gaza Strip has triggered an international backlash while aid agencies and UN experts have warned of unfolding famine in the territory.

Recent video footage released by Palestinian militants showed hostages heavily emaciated and pale -- spurring fears that the captives' health is more fragile than ever.

Many in the crowd wore makeshift patches on their shirts made with pieces of tape with the number 681 -- the number



completely changed, worse than it ever was, and enough is enough," Nick, a 31-year-old tech worker, told AFP, asking not to use his last name.

Others worried about the fate of their own children enlisted in the Israeli military who had been sent to Gaza and feared that they might soon be recalled to fight.

"We are hoping and praying that our government will hear us and listen to us," said Ella Kaufman from Kadima Zoran, who has two sons serving as officers in the Israeli army.

"I'm also a concerned mother."

While thousands took to the streets, there were others in Tel Aviv who hoped for an end to the war but in different circumstances.

of days the hostages have been held captive in Gaza -- scrawled in marker pen.

Of the 251 people taken hostage by Palestinian militants in October 2023, 49 remain in the Gaza Strip, including 27 the Israeli military has said are dead.

Snaking along downtown streets, shadowed by glass towers, the crowd converged on Tel Aviv's Hostage Square -- the focal point of movement.

"The Israeli government has never offered a genuine initiative for a comprehensive agreement and an end to the war," Einav Tzangauker, whose son Matan is being held captive in Gaza, told the crowd.

"We demand a comprehensive and achievable agreement and an end to the war. We demand what is rightfully ours -- our children."

The war has also touched on other frustrations for many who took to the streets.

"The whole country is fighting with each other, our image around the world has

# Official Bolivia Presidential Count Shows Centrist Rodrigo Paz in Surprise Lead

LA PAZ (Dispatches) - Early official results in Bolivia showed the centrist Rodrigo Paz of the Christian Democratic Party leading Sunday's presidential race, with a surprise 32.04% of the vote according to the country's electoral tribunal.

Conservative former president Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga of the Alianza Libre coalition was in second place, with a likely second round needed.

Bolivia's ruling Movement for Socialism or MAS party was on track to suffer its worst electoral defeat in a generation on Sunday, with its candidate and other leftist challengers trailing the center-right opposition.

If no presidential candidate wins more than 40% support with a 10 percentage point lead, the election will head to a runoff on October 19.

Samuel Doria Medina, a business magnate who represented the center-right Alianza Unidad coalition and was polling third, said he would throw his support behind Paz in a runoff.

Sunday's general election has been overshadowed by inflation at a four-decade high and the absence of former leftist president Evo Morales, who was barred from running and criticized the vote.

Voter turnout on Sunday was steady, authorities said. Despite earlier concerns that the electoral process in Bolivia could be obstructed by supporters of Morales, who had called on the public to boycott the race, international observers said the vote took place without major disruptions.

Earlier on Sunday, several minor incidents took place at polling stations in the central region of Cochabamba, Morales' political stronghold.

With a crowded field and no dominant MAS party candidate, the election marks a "crossroads moment" for Bolivia, said Southern Andes analyst Glaedys Gonzalez Calanche of the International Crisis Group.



Bolivia's fragile economy has been top-of-mind for voters. Price rises have surged past other Latin American countries this year, and fuel and dollars have run scarce.

Annual inflation doubled to 23% in June, up from 12% in January, with some Bolivians turning to cryptocurrencies as a hedge.

Bolivia's inflation is soaring past others in the region who were far more affected in recent years, including during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many Bolivians, especially those who work in the informal economy, were now struggling to make ends meet, said economist Roger Lopez.

"Prices of the basic food basket are going up fast," said Lopez. "Suddenly the

math doesn't add up anymore."

Early election results indicated they chose to punish MAS on Sunday, creating a window of opportunity for centrists and the right.

"Every year the situation has got worse under this government," said Silvia Morales, 30, from La Paz, who works in retail. A former MAS voter, she said this time she would cast her vote for the center-right.

Carlos Blanco Casas, 60, a teacher in La Paz, said he intended to vote for change. "This election feels hopeful. We need a change of direction," he said.

Quiroga has promised "radical change" to reverse what he calls "20 lost years" under MAS rule. He supports deep public spending cuts and a shift away from alliances with Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. Quiroga was president for a year in 2001-2002 after the then-leader resigned.

Paz meanwhile plans to decentralize government by introducing a "50-50 economic model" in which the central government would manage only half of public funds. The remainder would be designated to regional governments.

Silvia Morales, 30, a former MAS voter from La Paz, said she had cast her ballot for Paz on Sunday.

"He's a new face with experience," she said, "I think we should make space for new opportunities."

On the left, the vote is split between the official MAS party candidate Eduardo del Castillo, who is backed by outgoing President Luis Arce, and Senate President Andronico Rodriguez, who has distanced himself from the party and is running on his own ticket.

Morales, 69, had called for a boycott of the election, but analysts said his influence is waning.

# Türkiye's Tourism Revenues Jump 7.6% to Nearly \$26b in H1

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Türkiye's tourism revenues jumped by 8.4% in the second quarter of the year, continuing a positive momentum from the first three months to bring the total income from the key sector to nearly \$26 billion in the first half of the year, official data showed.

From April to June, tourism income came in at close to \$16.3 billion, up 8.4% from the year ago, the data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) revealed. At the same time, the number of departing visitors increased by 2% compared to the same quarter of the previous year to 16.4 million, TurkStat said.

In six months of 2025, total revenues reached some \$25.78 billion, marking the highest-recorded revenue for the half year ever, according to officials. The figure was up 7.6% from the same period in 2024, the data showed.

Announcing the figures, Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy hailed the increase in revenues and per capita nightly revenue, despite what he described as "very challenging" first six months.

"As you know, it was a very challenging and risky six months. It was a period marked by many global challenges, especially those unfolding within 'a ring of fire' around us. These factors were bound to impact the figures. However, thanks



to the measures taken, we see that the data is positive compared to last year," Ersoy told the event in Istanbul.

He cited several impacts, including the earthquake in Istanbul that coincided with the Easter holiday, the India-Pakistan conflict, which came short afterward, in addition to global risks.

"Furthermore, we encountered a global climate shift, a process we've been increasingly aware of for several years. If you've noticed, due to this global climate shift, we didn't reach seasonal temperatures until June 15 this year. This is actually an indicator of a shift. A similar situation occurred last year. We expect September, October and November to be above seasonal norms, and we anticipate higher bookings during those periods," he explained.

Moreover, he also pointed to concerns that came amid the escalation of tensions between Israel and Iran, which included fears of potential nuclear fallout. "This negatively impacted not only existing reservations but also future booking flows," Ersoy said.

"Last year's first six months' revenue was \$24 billion. This year's first six months' revenue reached \$25.8 billion," he informed.



## Sinner to Face Alcaraz in Cincinnati Final

LONDON (Dispatches) - Top seed and defending champion Jannik Sinner, playing on his 24th birthday, ended French qualifier Terence Atmane's dream run at the Cincinnati Open with a 7-6(4) 6-2 win to reach the final of the U.S. Open tune-up event.

In the other semi-final, Carlos Alcaraz advanced with a 6-4 6-3 win over German third seed Alexander Zverev, who struggled physically during the match, to set up a rematch of this year's French Open and Wimbledon finals.

Sinner won a remarkable 91% of his first-serve points, did not face a single break point during the 86-minute match and converted two of five break points in his first career meeting with world number 136 Atmane.

"Very, very tough challenge," Sinner said on court after being serenaded with "Happy Birthday" by the crowd. "Every time when you play against someone completely new it's very difficult."

The Italian world number one had his hands full throughout a tightly contested first set which featured an imperious serving display from both men and not a single break point opportunity for either player.

Sinner, who lost just three points on serve in the opening set, held to love for a third consecutive game to force the tiebreak where Atmane gifted his opponent the opening point with a double fault. From there the Italian never looked back.

The reigning U.S. Open, Australian Open and Wimbledon champion opened the second set with a nine-minute hold of serve, then held to love before finally breaking for a 3-1 lead that gave him the cushion he needed.

Sinner followed that with another hold to love to go 4-1 up and all but end any hope for Atmane, who beat top-10 players Taylor Fritz and Holger Rune en route to his maiden ATP Masters 1000 semi-final.

With Atmane serving to stay in the match, Sinner quickly jumped ahead 0-40 before sealing the win on his third match point when the Frenchman sent a forehand into the net.

The Alcaraz-Zverev encounter was interrupted for 11 minutes early in the first set while paramedics tended to a spectator as the two players stood and watched together from the net.

Shortly after play resumed, Alcaraz saved three consecutive break points to reach 2-2. Three games later the Spaniard sent a brilliant low backhand volley to the open court for a break and 4-3 lead before closing out the frame on his serve.

Alcaraz broke to open the second set but gave it right back in a game during which he gifted four double-faults to Zverev, who was suddenly struggling to move around the court and after the game sat against the back wall grimacing in pain.

Zverev did well to finish the match but was barely going through the motions in the latter stages as Alcaraz had a love hold to go 5-3 up and then sealed the match with a break at love.

Meanwhile Iga Swiatek reached the final of the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Open for the first time, surging past Elena Rybakina 7-5, 6-3 to book a title clash with Jasmine Paolini.

The six-time Grand Slam champion earned a final against an opponent with nothing to lose after Paolini managed to "forget" a patch of bad form to claim a 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 6-3 win over Russian Veronika Kudermetova.

The 29-year-old, who was a two-time Grand Slam finalist in 2024, will bid for the fourth title of her career when she faces Swiatek, who is set to compete in her 13th final at the 1000 level as she closes in on a return to world number two.

Swiatek, the reigning Wimbledon champion, recovered an early break in the opening set and powered away to beat 2022 All England winner Rybakina -- who had swept past world number one and defending champion Aryna Sabalenka in the quarter-finals.

Swiatek recovered from 3-5 down in the opening set, sweeping the last four games.

Swiatek has beaten Paolini in all five of their prior meetings with the Italian winning just one set.

But Swiatek said she was prepared for a tough final against a player who beat world number two Coco Gauff in the quarter-finals.

## Marquez Redefines MotoGP Dominance as Seventh Title Beckons



LONDON (Dispatches) - As Marc Marquez rolled back the years with a sixth straight win with a commanding victory at the Austrian Grand Prix, a six-times champion fittingly winning the 1,000th premier class race in history, the question on everyone's lips is who can beat him?

Marquez had never won at the Red Bull Ring before, a track where he has been beaten to the chequered flag three times before by a gleaming red Ducati when he was collecting championships aboard the once-dominant Honda.

But history does not bother Marquez, who reached a nadir after four surgeries on a broken arm, double vision and several broken bones between 2020 and 2023, before earning another shot at championship glory with a belated move to Ducati.

"I always lost against red bikes... But now I'm riding that red bike," Marquez said on Thursday, a warning to the rest of the grid that he meant business on MotoGP's return from the summer break.

Despite starting on the second row after a qualifying crash, there was an air of inevitability and a cool determination, with Marquez not even locking eyes with his old rival Valentino Rossi when they walked past each other in the pit lane.

The feud has been simmering for years but even as Rossi sought to impart wisdom to his VR46 Academy protege and pole sitter Marco Bezecchi, the Aprilia rider could not deny Marquez his first win at the Red Bull Ring.

For 19 laps, Bezecchi had clear air in front of him but Marquez stayed on his rear wheel, eventually slicing under him on turn one and though the Italian fought back gamely, Marquez had found another gear on degrading tyres -- as he always does.

## Scheffler Outlasts MacIntyre to Win BMW Championship



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Scottie Scheffler chipped in for birdie from 82 feet on the 17th hole on Sunday to win the US PGA Tour's BMW Championship by two strokes over Scotland's Robert MacIntyre.

World number one Scheffler, who began the day four strokes behind the Scotsman, fired a three-under par 67 to finish on 15-under 265 at Caves Valley in suburban Baltimore.

Scheffler, this year's British Open and PGA Championship winner, became the first player since Tiger Woods in 2006-07 to win five or more times in back-to-back seasons.

The two-time Masters champion also ensured his role as the favorite to become the first back-to-back winner of the FedEx Cup playoffs when he tees off at next week's Tour Championship in Atlanta.

Scheffler clung to a one-stroke lead after going over the green into the rough at the par-three 17th. He pitched out, the ball hitting the green and rolling 82 feet for birdie, the day's most amazing shot restoring Scheffler's two-stroke advantage.

"Any time you hole a chip like that it's pretty nice," Scheffler said. "It looked good when it landed, it looked good when it was rolling and it was nice to see that one go in."

Scheffler nearly went at the pin instead of playing it safe to the left side of the green opposite the hole.

"I played smart off the tee. That was obviously the miss there," Scheffler said. "Part of me wanted to go at the pin and then I kind of held it off. I knew par wasn't going to be a bad score on that hole today."

MacIntyre, runner-up to J.J. Spaun at June's US Open, was going for a wire-to-wire win but came undone with back-to-back bogeys at the start and three in the first five holes.

## Arsenal Grind Out Vital 1-0 Win at Old Trafford

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Arsenal's 1-0 victory over Manchester United was far from a masterful performance against the better side but manager Mikel Arteta was delighted to escape from Old Trafford with all three points in their Premier League season-opener.

Arsenal defender Riccardo Calafiori took advantage of a weak challenge from Turkish goalkeeper Altay Bayindir to head home an early corner and then the London side survived an onslaught of United attacks as they dug in to secure the win.

"A big, big result coming into the first game of the season against (United) at Old Trafford," Arteta said after facing a side fielding new signings Matheus Cunha and Bryan Mbeumo.

"When you feel that they are building something special and momentum with the new signings and they want to kick off the season in a good way and you are able to come away with the win, I'm very happy I'm part of the team."

Arteta said his side, which spent nearly 200 million pounds in the close season after three consecutive second-place finishes, did a couple of things well on Sunday.

"One, to take the set-piece and then react to especially mistakes," he said. "Some of them are necessary, some of them unusual. But the way every single player reacted to that gives us



the opportunity to win the game. If not, it's impossible. And that's about how we compete and how much we want to take it."

While United were the better team, Arteta said Arsenal winning while not at their best was a reason for confidence.

"When you're not at your standards in certain aspects, which today we weren't, being fair, we can still come away and find a way to win the game," he said.

"And the team has to find that resilience throughout the season for 10 months in different contexts to be able to do that."

"Of course, we have to improve a lot of things and that will happen very soon. But in terms of managing to get that into a very positive result, that's a great way to do it."

Arsenal's main close-season signing, Sweden striker Viktor Gyokeres, did not stand out on his Premier League debut and was substituted early in the second half.

"But overall, coming away to Manchester United, winning your first game with Arsenal, it's a good start," Arteta said.

Meanwhile a huge banner hailing the "Champions of the World" was unfurled in The Shed end of the Stamford Bridge stadium before Chelsea's return to domestic action on Sunday hot on the heels of the club's success at the Club World Cup last month.

## Doncic Receives Injury Scare in EuroBasket Game

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Los Angeles Lakers superstar Luka Doncic appears to have avoided a serious injury during Slovenia's EuroBasket exhibition game against Latvia, The Athletic reported.

Doncic was favoring his right leg after a teammate got pushed into him. The five-time All-NBA guard remained on the floor for several moments before gingerly walking back to the locker room on his own.

Lakers fans were able to breathe a sigh of relief, however, after Doncic returned to the bench shortly thereafter.

Signed to a three-year, \$165 million contract extension earlier this month, Doncic averaged 28.2 points, 8.1 rebounds and 7.5 assists in 28 games (all starts) after being acquired by the Lakers in a three-team deal on Feb. 2.



Doncic, 26, is averaging 28.6 points, 8.6 rebounds and 8.2 assists in 450 career games (all starts) with the Dallas Mavericks (2018-25) and Lakers.

Meanwhile New Mexico State and former men's basketball head coach Greg Heiar settled a wrongful termination suit with the university agreeing to pay him \$600,000.

Heiar was fired on Feb. 14, 2023 - less than one year into a five-year contract with a \$300,000 annual base salary.

Heiar's dismissal came less than one week after New Mexico State cancelled the rest of the team's season and placed the coaching staff on paid leave while the school investigated a police report that accused three players of hazing and sexually assaulting one of their teammates. Those incidents reportedly occurred from July 2022 to Feb. 2023.