

The Iranian Energy Ministry Has Opened a \$70m Water Diversion Project That Increases Water Supply From the Taleqan Dam, Located More Than 140 Kilometers to the Capital, Tehran

IRAN NEWS

Iran Came from a Set Down to Beat Italy 3-1 (15-25, 25-18, 25-22, 25-14) in the 2025 FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship Final at the Jiangmen Sports Center of China to Retain Its World Title

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Iran Hails SCO as Vital for Safeguarding Multilateral World Order



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesman says that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) plays a positive role in ensuring the continuity of an international order based on multilateralism and the rule of law.

The SCO is "very impactful and effective in the sense that it can represent the interests and concerns of the Global South," Esmail Baghaei told Xinhua in an exclusive interview, ahead of the 25th SCO summit held from Sunday to Monday in Tianjin, China.

Regarding the Iranian president's visit to China, Baghaei stated that the trip would be used to promote "bilateral ties with China and to hold meetings with other leaders of the participating states."

Baghaei pointed out that the world is currently confronting shared challenges resulting from "unilateralism and coercive measures that certain Western countries, in particular the United States, have been applying against developing states."

He further stated that the SCO is positioned to be a major force in providing an effective framework for cooperation among Global South countries, guaranteeing the interests of developing countries, and ensuring the continuity of an international order that is based on multilateralism, the rule of law, and "the normative structures coming from the United Nations Charter."

The Iranian senior diplomat emphasized the shared historical bond of culture and civilization between Iran and China, noting that their relationship continues to progress as mutual understanding and trust increase.

Construction of Large-Scale Solar Farms Begins in Iran



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Renewable Energy and Electricity Efficiency Organization (SATBA) announced that alongside the development of small-scale solar power plants, the construction of large-scale solar farms has officially started across the country.

Mohsen Tarzatab, speaking to IRNA, said that the launch of several three-megawatt solar plants coincided with Government Week. He noted that SATBA has scheduled weekly openings of new solar projects and secured financing plans to support their implementation.

Tarzatab also pointed to progress in rooftop solar installations, explaining that an online platform has been launched for citizens to register, obtain necessary equipment, or engage contractors to install systems on their rooftops. He added that while equipment is currently offered on a cash basis, efforts are underway to introduce installment payment options.

He emphasized that renewable energy development is a top priority of the 14th government to meet national electricity demand and address supply imbalances. In recent weeks, 100 megawatts of renewable power were added to the grid, with 150 megawatts of new capacity launched during Government Week alone.

According to Tarzatab, Iran's renewable energy capacity currently stands at 2,100 megawatts, with plans to expand this figure to around 7,000 megawatts by the end of the year. He stated that the government aims for renewables to make up 15 percent of the country's electricity mix by the end of 2025, highlighting the sector's strong return on investment, which has attracted growing interest from both private investors and the public.

President Urges SCO to Take Concrete Steps Toward Peace, Economic Cooperation

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian says the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) should take practical and clear steps to promote global peace and economic cooperation.

Pezeshkian was addressing the 25th Meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of State in northern China's port city of Tianjin on Monday.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as one of the important pillars of the multipolarization of the international system, should take practical, clear, and specific steps in two parallel paths to create a more peaceful world and a world conducive to expanding economic cooperation," he said.

He proposed the creation of a specialized initiative, the "Accounts and Settlements of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," as a practical mechanism to enhance financial cooperation and reduce the impacts of unlawful sanctions on the economic interactions among the member states.

He said the initiative rests on greater use of national currencies in settlements to decrease reliance on the US dollar, the establishment of shared digital infrastructure and the employment of central bank digital currencies to ensure secure and efficient payments and the establishment of a multilateral currency swap fund to assist countries facing sanctions or liquidity shortages.

"We believe that the implementation of this initiative can not only enhance the economic resilience of the members but can also turn the Shanghai Cooperation Organization into a successful model for establishing a multipolar, fair, and resilient financial order against external pressures," the Iranian president added.

Pointing to Iran's unique geographical and transit position and its access to different areas, Pezeshkian expressed the country's readiness to improve regional cooperation and provide access to the interested countries.

He announced that the Iranian port of Chabahar, which has direct access to the Indian Ocean, would soon be connected to Iran's national railway network, which would mark a significant development in linking China, Central Asian countries, and Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean.

Iran believes that the SCO's 10-year development strategy will be a historic opportunity



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for expanding cooperation and investment in the sectors of infrastructure, technology, energy, digital economy, climate and environmental changes, as well as culture and science, Pezeshkian said, expressing Tehran's readiness to play an active role in this regard.

Elsewhere in his address, Pezeshkian described the SCO as the symbol of peace in a world that faces several crises.

He said the Israeli-US illegal military aggression against Iran in June, the ongoing massacre of the oppressed people of Gaza and the excessive use of unlawful sanctions against various countries are clear examples of the world's failure to achieve a suitable model for governing the world and stabilizing international peace and

security.

The main objective of the SCO is to guarantee collective security and enhance cooperation in various fields, based on principles of mutual confidence and interests, equality, joint development and respect for cultural diversity, Pezeshkian said, voicing Iran's full preparedness to play an appropriate role in this regard.

He called for the formation of a committee comprising of the SCO foreign ministers to address crises threatening regional peace and security through providing operative proposals for crisis management and due responses to violation of sovereignty of member nations.

Pezeshkian further said Iran welcomes initiatives such as the establishment of specialized centers to counter security threats and challenges, promote strategic studies and combat drug trafficking as well as the development of rapid response mechanisms in crisis.

Speaking before departing Tehran for Tianjin on Sunday, Pezeshkian said the SCO summit provides an opportunity to counter the US and European unilateralism in international affairs.

Hosted by President Xi Jinping, the SCO summit officially opened in Tianjin on Monday with the participation of heads of state and delegations from across the world.

The two-day summit, which comes as the US has launched a global trade war, aims to set a long-term vision for regional cooperation amid shifting global alliances and growing calls for a new multipolar order.

The summit will review the organization's achievements and also adopt a 10-year development strategy.

Iran-Armenia Strategic Ties Agreement Vital and Necessary



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council has hailed a planned strategic partnership agreement with Armenia as a "vital" step, saying the pact will help advance peace and stability in the region.

Ali Larijani made the statement in a meeting with his visiting Armenian counterpart Armen Grigoryan, in Tehran.

The two sides reviewed bilateral cooperation across multiple fields and discussed the "Comprehensive Strategic Relations Document," set to be signed in the "near future."

During the closing session of Grigoryan's one-day visit, Larijani emphasized that the signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Relations Document between Tehran and Yerevan was "necessary, vital, and a factor that strengthens the discourse of peace in the region."

For his part, the Armenian security chief noted that the document had been thoroughly discussed during his trip and would be signed by officials of the two countries in the near future.

"Armenia is eager to finalize the Comprehensive Strategic Relations Document with Iran," Grigoryan stressed.

Expressing satisfaction with his meetings in Tehran, he described bilateral relations as "unprecedented" and said the purpose of his visit was to broaden cooperation between the two neighbors in all areas.

Russia, China, and Pakistan Oppose Reimposition of Sanctions on Iran



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, Kazem Gharibabadi, said that Russia, China, and Pakistan oppose the reactivation of U.N. sanctions against Iran under the so-called "snapback" mechanism.

Speaking about Iran's consultations with members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Gharibabadi noted that both China and Russia, as permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, along with Pakistan, a non-permanent member, have expressed their opposition to the return of sanctions that had previously been lifted.

"This provides us with a valuable opportunity to engage in dialogue with SCO members on these issues," Gharibabadi said, adding that several provisions regarding Iran were also included in the SCO summit's final communiqué at Tehran's suggestion.

According to the deputy minister, one section of the statement condemns what it calls the "aggression" of the United States and Israel against Iran, including attacks on nuclear facilities, which it deems contrary to international law. "The explicit mention of the United States and the Israeli regime in the statement is highly significant," he emphasized.

Another section, Gharibabadi explained, reaffirms the necessity of fully implementing U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231, stressing that its provisions should not be applied selectively. He argued that European countries cannot disregard their own obligations while attempting to enforce only the snapback clause.

Yemen Will Give Crushing Response to Zionist Criminals

TEHRAN - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has censured the Israeli regime's recent aggression against Yemen, saying the Islamic resistance forces in the region, particularly the resilient Yemeni people, will give the Zionist criminals a crushing response.

In a speech on Sunday, the IRGC said the recent attack by the "evil and racist" Zionist regime on Yemen's capital was a blatant war crime against humanity and a brazen example of state terrorism, exposing the savage and anti-human nature of the regime.

The statement came after Israeli airstrikes on the Yemeni capital claimed the lives of Prime Minister Ahmed Ghalib Al-Rahawi of the National Government of Change and Construction, and eight other officials.

The assault was the latest in a string of deadly Israeli raids against Yemen, whose armed forces have been targeting sensitive Israeli sites in response to the regime's genocide in Gaza. "The tragic crime once again revealed the dark face of the Zionist criminals and made the inhuman and expansionist nature of the occupiers of al-Quds and the aggressors against Islamic lands more evident," the IRGC said.

It added that the Israeli regime, with full US support and international silence, continues its acts of aggression, terror, and genocide in the region and poses a serious threat to regional and international security.

The Iranian elite force further called on all Muslim states, international organizations, and human rights bodies to put an end to their silence and inaction vis-à-vis crimes of the Israeli regime and the terrorist United States, as its main supporter.

They must also take firm positions and effective practical measures and support Yemen and the oppressed people of Gaza to set conditions for a permanent end to Israel's crimes and acts of aggression, the IRGC said.

It expressed its firm determination to support the oppressed people of the region, especially the Yemeni and Palestinian nations.

The IRGC will spare no effort to confront the occupying Israeli regime and its supporters,



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

the statement emphasized.

Resistance movements on Saturday issued separate strong statements of mourning and condemnation following the Israeli regime's assassination of nine senior Yemeni officials.

In a speech on Saturday, Yemen's president warned the Israeli regime of a decisive revenge against Tel Aviv's recent assassination of the country's senior officials.

"Our revenge does not sleep, and dark days await you... You will not taste security after today," Mahdi al-Mashat said.

Meanwhile the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army warns that the world of their fight against the Zionist enemy.

The Israeli airstrike also left several senior ministers wounded.

Observers, however, say the heinous crime will intensify anti-Zionist outrage across the Arab world, with Yemen emerging as a prominent voice of resistance.

They say such targeted assassinations will heighten regional tensions, as public opinion rallies behind Gaza and calls for accountability grow louder worldwide.

In a statement on Sunday, the Army expressed its condolences over the martyrdom of Yemeni Prime Minister Ahmed Ghalib Al-Rahawi of the National Government of Change and Construction, and eight other cabinet ministers in Israeli airstrikes on the Yemeni capital of Sana'a on Thursday.

It said the vile Zionist regime once again displayed its savage, criminal, and inhumane nature by assassinating Yemeni statesmen.

"The international community is aware more now than ever that this rogue and criminal [Israeli] regime poses a serious threat to humanity," the statement emphasized.

The Iranian Army wished more success for the brave Yemeni people in the continuation of their fight against the Zionist enemy.

The Israeli airstrike also left several senior ministers wounded.

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Iran, Armenia Stress Development of a Sustainable Rail Corridor in the CIS Region

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Managing Director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways and the head of Armenia's Railways have discussed expanding technical and operational cooperation in railway transportation among CIS member states. Jabarali Zakari, Iran's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and Managing Director of the Railways, met with the head of Armenia's Railways on the sidelines of the 1520 Railway Exhibition in St. Petersburg.

No Oil Money Blocked in China, Says Iran-China Chamber Head



TEHRAN - The head of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce has dismissed reports that Iranian oil revenues are blocked in China, stressing that trade between the two countries continues to grow despite U.S. sanctions.

Majid-Reza Harii, President of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce, told ILNA that overall trade between Tehran and Beijing reached \$65 billion last year, including oil exports, marking a steady upward trend in economic ties.

"Even with sanctions acting as a major obstacle, our trade with China has been expanding," Harii said. "If we account for indirect trade conducted via the UAE due to sanctions, the real figure is even higher."

Harii compared the current level with past years, noting that in 2014 and 2015—during the implementation of the JCPOA—trade with China, including oil, stood at about \$51.8 billion.

According to Harii, of the \$65 billion trade volume, \$30 billion came from Iranian oil exports to China. Non-oil exports reached about \$16 billion, while Chinese exports to Iran were under \$20 billion.

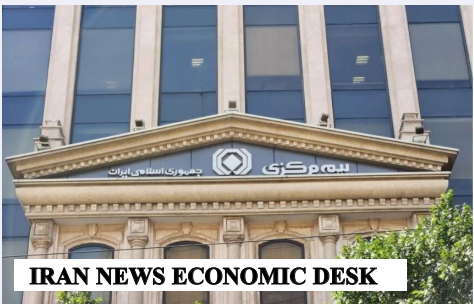
"In total, Iran's exports to China exceeded \$40 billion, which means that when oil is included, the trade balance has consistently been in Iran's favor," he explained.

Responding to speculation that Iranian oil revenues are withheld in China, Harii firmly rejected the claim.

"Last year, about \$24 billion was allocated for importing medicine and food at the government-set exchange rate, and this was funded by oil sales. Apart from China, to whom else are we selling oil? Clearly, the Central Bank receives the money," he said.

Harii clarified that the real challenge lies in non-oil exports: "The payments for non-oil exports to China are being routed through Dubai, forcing Iranian importers to repurchase dirhams and convert them again to pay for Chinese goods. We want this revenue to remain in China for direct use in imports, but this is not happening."

Iran and Kenya Sign Insurance Cooperation Agreement at Joint Economic Commission



TEHRAN - Iran and Kenya have taken a new step toward strengthening bilateral economic relations with a focus on the insurance sector. During the 7th meeting of the Iran-Kenya Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation in Nairobi, officials from both countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that included key provisions dedicated to insurance collaboration.

According to the Central Insurance of Iran, articles 38 and 39 of the final agreement specifically addressed the development of insurance relations. The two sides agreed to establish a joint working group between their insurance regulatory authorities. This body will hold regular meetings to explore practical strategies for expanding bilateral cooperation in the field.

The agreement outlines a range of initiatives, including easing licensing procedures for insurance firms, creating joint insurance companies and reinsurance funds, promoting microinsurance and digital insurance solutions, and enhancing coverage in transport and logistics sectors. It also envisions setting up representative offices in both countries, as well as launching specialized training courses and technical workshops to build capacity in the industry.

Experts note that the insurance industry plays a pivotal role in facilitating trade and investment by mitigating risks and providing financial security. For Iran, which has been working to diversify its international partnerships amid sanctions and economic challenges, closer ties with Kenya—a major economy in East Africa—offer an important opportunity. Kenya, in turn, has been expanding its financial services sector and is seen as a gateway to the wider African insurance market.

Iran Faces Vaccine Production Challenges, Health Official Warns



TEHRAN - Deputy Minister of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education has announced that a nationwide oral and dental health screening program for schoolchildren will begin in September, stressing that schools play a central role in prevention and health education.

Alireza Raeisi, speaking on Sunday at a press conference marking Government Week, said that teaching and promoting dental care from childhood would help reduce widespread problems such as tooth decay and tooth loss in adulthood. He added that the presence of school-based oral health officers could prove more effective than relying solely on specialized dentists, since the true benchmark of oral health worldwide is not the number of dentists, but the level of dental decay.

Highlighting the rapid rise of new technologies and artificial intelligence in healthcare, Raeisi revealed that a self-care digital platform will soon be launched. This system will provide personalized health guidance, ensure privacy and data security, and offer intelligent referrals based on users' medical information.

The Deputy Minister outlined four key health priorities currently on the agenda: Population growth policies; Social determinants of health; Family medicine and referral system; and health literacy and self-care.

He emphasized that many social issues, such as road accidents or air pollution, fall outside the ministry's direct responsibilities but have major consequences for public health.

Raeisi reiterated the government's commitment to the family medicine program, describing it as essential to streamlining the national healthcare system. He noted that family doctors would monitor patients' general health and refer them to nearby public specialist centers when necessary. The program, however, requires sustainable funding to succeed.

Calling vaccines a "strategic commodity," Raeisi warned that Iran faces significant challenges in domestic vaccine production despite an 80-year history in the field. Institutes such as Pasteur and Razi, he said, have faced setbacks in recent years.

Iran was recently forced to import the DTP vaccine (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis)

due to domestic shortages. "Most vaccines are imported, mainly from India," Raeisi said, noting that sanctions and flight bans during a recent 12-day crisis disrupted vaccine supplies.

He added that Iran is exploring vaccine cooperation with Cuba and China to strengthen domestic production. While routine vaccines such as polio, measles, and pentavalent vaccines are widely available, shortages of tetanus vaccines recently required the emergency import of 500,000 doses.

On the HPV vaccine, Raeisi clarified that it is not yet part of the national immunization schedule. While important in preventing cervical cancer, he said the disease is not among the country's ten most common cancers. Domestic production of HPV vaccine does not yet exist, and imports remain expensive.

Influenza vaccination, however, is strongly recommended for high-risk groups, including cancer patients, diabetics, those with chronic diseases, and people with weakened immune systems.

The Deputy Minister raised alarms about Iran's declining birth rate and aging population, noting that rising maternal age during pregnancy poses health risks. "We now see mothers aged 45 to 46 becoming pregnant, which increases concerns about newborn health and the nation's demographic future," he said.

He also warned about the prevalence of unsafe abortions, often carried out with unregulated pills purchased online, beyond medical oversight.

Addressing infectious diseases, Raeisi stressed that receiving a certificate of disease elimination does not guarantee total eradication. Imported cases from neighboring countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, remain a risk.

He also issued a warning about the spread of the Aedes mosquito, a carrier of emerging viral diseases. The insect has been detected in parts of Iran, including Hormozgan Province, where two related infections have already been identified. "Controlling this mosquito is extremely difficult due to its resistance to heat, cold, and drought," Raeisi explained, adding that spraying has only limited impact and no specific vaccine is yet available.

Iran Must Normalize Ties with FATF to Counter "Snapback"

TEHRAN – Iran must normalize relations with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to counter the risk of a UN sanctions "snapback," the head of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) said, stressing that progress hinges on approval of the country's accession to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (CFT).

Speaking at a conference on Iran's Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing (AML/CFT) Action Plan, FIU chief and deputy economy minister Hadi Khani said nearly all countries—"except one or two such as North Korea"—have submitted action plans to FATF. "Iran's action plan was delayed, but mandated under our anti-money laundering law. It signals our international efforts, as neighbors such as Iraq and Lebanon have already done," he said.

Khani noted that the AML plan was drafted over a year with contributions from 80 agencies. While acknowledging flaws, he emphasized that Iran had to begin implementing the plan and improve it over time. He argued that prevention is more effective than costly after-the-fact enforcement, saying the focus must be on tracing "funds of unknown origin" rather than individuals.

"Many people implicated in corruption once passed initial vetting. We must therefore target the money that fuels corruption and block high-risk processes," Khani said, calling for the action plan to be treated as a national undertaking. "This is not only the Economy Ministry's responsibility. We are already in penalty time, and unity is vital if we are to overcome challenges."

On FATF, Khani said Iran has addressed domestic vulnerabilities but faces continuing international challenges. "Our record proves we do not finance terrorism. We have lost many lives fighting it, yet we are still labeled a high-risk country," he said. He warned that Europe's push to re-activate the snapback



mechanism could restore UN sanctions, adding that FATF bases its decisions on UN measures, not unilateral U.S. sanctions.

Khani described the costs of Iran's high-risk designation, recounting how a Chinese bank required two weeks to verify the source of euros he attempted to cash, even with a diplomatic passport. "Our action plan is the tool that proves our compliance," he said.

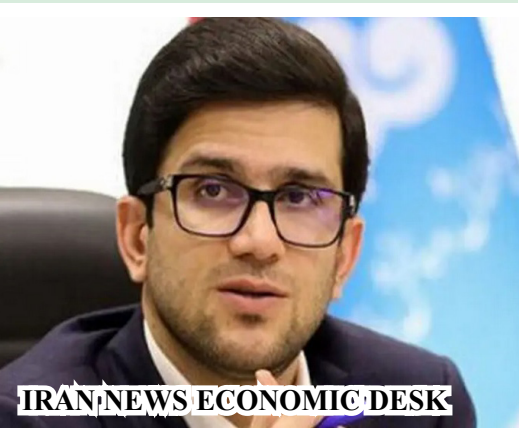
On the sidelines, Khani called Iran's presence on the FATF blacklist "a vulnerability for the economy" that increases the costs of sanction management and invites additional restrictions. He said the government has pursued "strictly technical and legal" steps to showcase progress at regional forums, emphasizing that Iran has unjustly been blacklisted despite its sacrifices in fighting terrorism and drug trafficking.

He noted that the Expediency Council is reviewing the CFT with an "expert and legal" approach, weighing risks and opportunities. "Over 30 UN Security Council resolutions endorse FATF standards. Almost all countries have adopted them into law. Iran already applies many of these recommendations domestically—we simply need to finalize our management of this issue," Khani said.

He added that Iran has formally joined the Palermo Convention and expressed hope for deeper engagement with FATF. While acknowledging challenges with both the Palermo and CFT treaties, he said Iran will evaluate them according to national interests and may accept CFT with reservations.

"This process is entirely technical and legal," Khani concluded. "It will not be swayed by media posturing, whether supportive or critical."

Iran to Boost Refining Capacity by 180,000 Barrels



TEHRAN - The Managing Director of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) announced that Iran's refining capacity will increase by 180,000 barrels per day by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 2026). Three major fuel quality upgrade projects—diesel quality improvement at Shiraz Refinery, kerosene quality improvement at Isfahan Refinery, and a gasoline production unit at Tehran Refinery—are also set to be completed by the end of 2025.

Speaking on the achievements of the oil refining sector under the 14th administration, Mohammad Sadegh Azimifar said the government has focused on both quantity and quality of petroleum products to stabilize fuel supplies. He noted that Iran boosted its power plant diesel reserves by 1.5 billion liters compared to last year, when shortages caused winter blackouts.

Azimifar said with increased reserves, power outages are not expected this year. He added that despite a surge in fuel demand during a recent 12-day conflict, the country managed to meet daily gasoline needs of up to 200 million cubic meters without shortages.

The NIORDC chief confirmed that three strategic projects aimed at upgrading product quality and profitability will be operational by year-end. These include:

Shiraz Refinery DHT unit, converting all diesel output to Euro-5 standard.

Isfahan Refinery KHT unit, improving kerosene quality.

Tehran Refinery CCR gasoline unit, raising gasoline output by 20% and meeting Euro-5 standards.

The Isfahan project will come online this week, while the Tehran unit is expected to be operational by late 2025.

Iran Expresses Readiness to Expand Sustainable Tourism With Iraq



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Association of Travel Services Offices announced that Iran and Iraq have reached an agreement to strengthen cooperation in four key areas of tourism: health, leisure, religious, and academic travel.

According to the Association, Hormatollah Rafiei traveled to Baghdad for preliminary coordination ahead of the upcoming Iran-Iraq Tourism Roadshow. During a meeting with Iran's Cultural Attaché in Iraq, he highlighted the private sector's determination to expand tourism ties in these four areas.

"The development and promotion of leisure, academic, religious, and health tourism are among the private sector's strategies to deepen tourism relations between Tehran and Baghdad," Rafiei said.

He emphasized that Iranian tour operators participating in the Iran-Iraq Tourism Roadshow — scheduled for October in Baghdad, Basra, and Karbala — should focus their marketing and negotiations on these four agreed sectors in collaboration with Iraqi counterparts.

Rafiei also noted that Iran's Cultural Attaché in Iraq, Hojjatoleslam Abazari, stressed the importance of the event, pointing out that Iraq accounts for 50 percent of inbound tourism to Iran. He described the roadshow — the first organized by the private sector since the Islamic Revolution — as an initiative that deserves full support.

Earlier this week, Rafiei also met with Iraq's Minister of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, who announced Iraq's readiness to exchange up to 10 million tourists with Iran. Rafiei added that about 3.5 million Iraqi tourists currently visit Iran each year, and efforts are underway to increase this figure to 5 million by the end of the year.

Indonesian Student, Civil Society Groups Call Off Protests

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesian students and civil society groups called off protests Monday after a week of escalating anger over lawmakers' pay and the police response, citing fears of heightened security measures after deadly riots over the weekend. The protests began in Jakarta a week ago, and have spread nationwide, escalating in size and intensity after a police vehicle hit and killed a motorcycle taxi driver on Thursday night.

On Sunday, President Prabowo Subianto said political parties had agreed to cut lawmakers' benefits, in an attempt to calm the protests in which at least five people have died.

He also ordered the military and police to take stern action against rioters and looters after homes of political party members and state buildings were ransacked or set ablaze.



Afghanistan Earthquake Kills 622 With More Than 1,500 Injured



KABUL (Dispatches) - About 622 people were killed and more than 1,500 injured in an earthquake that struck eastern Afghanistan, authorities said today, as helicopters ferried the wounded to safety from rubble being combed in the hunt for survivors.

The disaster will further stretch the resources of the South Asian nation already grappling with humanitarian crises, from a sharp drop in aid to a huge pushback of its citizens from neighbouring countries.

The quake of magnitude 6 injured more than 1,500, the Taliban-run Afghan interior ministry said in a statement that put the death toll at 622. Earlier state-run broadcaster Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) put the toll at about 500.

In Kabul, the capital, health authorities said rescuers were racing to reach remote hamlets dotting an area with a long history of earthquakes and floods.

"Figures from just a few clinics show over 400 injured and dozens of fatalities," ministry spokesman Sharafat Zaman said in a statement that warned of higher casualties.

Images from Reuters Television showed helicopters ferrying out the affected, while residents helped soldiers and medics carry the wounded to ambulances.

Three villages were razed in the province of Kunar, with substantial damage in many others, the health ministry said.

Reports showed 250 dead and 500 injured, said Najibullah Hanif, the provincial information head of Kunar, adding that the tally could change.

Early reports showed 30 dead in a single village, with hundreds of injured taken to hospital, authorities said.

Rescuers were scrambling to find survivors in the area bordering Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, where homes of mud and stone were levelled by the midnight quake hit at a depth of 10km.

French PM Says Fate of France Is at Stake in Sept 8 Confidence Vote



PARIS (Dispatches) - French Prime Minister François Bayrou said the destiny of France was at stake in a forthcoming confidence vote, which he called to resolve a budget standoff but is expected to lose.

Bayrou sat down for an interview with four news channels as the clock ticks down to the September 8 vote in parliament. Opposition parties have already said they will not back his austerity budget.

The vote in parliament will not decide "the fate of the prime minister" but "the fate of France", Bayrou said.

He stunned France on Monday by saying he would request the vote in a divided parliament, as he tries to garner enough support for his minority government's plan to slash spending.

"The days ahead are crucial," the 74-year-old prime minister said in the interview with franceinfo, LCI, BFM TV and Cnews.

He indicated that he was not ready to say "goodbye", as the opposition urged.

"If you think that I can give up the battles that I fight, that I am fighting here, that I have been fighting for years and that I will continue to fight in the future, you are mistaken."

Bayrou accused some political forces in France of wanting to sow "chaos", targeting in particular hard-left firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon. From Monday Bayrou hopes to hold negotiations with the opposition parties provided they commit to savings measures to reduce France's debt. Members of the opposition, however, say it is too late.



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's President Xi Jinping slammed the "bullying behavior" of certain countries as he gathered Eurasian leaders Monday for a showpiece summit aimed at putting Beijing front and centre of regional relations.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), comprising China, India, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus, is touted as a non-Western style of collaboration and seeks to be an alternative to traditional alliances.

Xi told the SCO leaders, including Russian and Belarusian presidents Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko, that the global international situation was becoming more "chaotic and intertwined".

The Chinese leader also slammed "bullying behaviour" of certain countries - a veiled reference to the US.

"The security and development tasks facing member states have become even more challenging," he added in his address to all the gathered dignitaries in the northern port city of Tianjin.

"Looking to the future, with the world undergoing turbulence and transformation, we must continue to follow the Shanghai spirit... and better perform the functions of the organisation," Xi said.

In his address to the SCO on Monday, Putin defended his Ukraine offensive, blaming the West for triggering the three-and-a-half year conflict that has killed tens of thousands and devastated much of eastern Ukraine.

"This crisis wasn't triggered by Russia's attack on Ukraine, but was a result of a coup in Ukraine, which was supported and provoked by the West," said Putin.

"The second reason for the crisis is the West's constant attempts to drag Ukraine into NATO," the Russian president added. Putin also said he had reached understandings during his summit with US President Donald Trump at a summit in August that open a way to find a resolution to the crisis in Ukraine.

"In this regard, we highly appreciate the efforts and proposals from China and India aimed at facilitating the resolution of the Ukrainian crisis," he said.

"I would also note that the understandings reached at the recent Russia-US meeting in Alaska, I hope, also contribute toward this goal."

Leaders from the ten SCO countries including Putin, Lukashenko and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived earlier

on a red carpet and posed for a group photo.

Xi, Putin and Modi were seen chatting on live footage, the three leaders flanked by their official translators.

The SCO summit, which also involves 16 more countries as observers or "dialogue partners", kicked off on Sunday, days before a massive military parade in the capital Beijing to mark 80 years since the end of World War II.

Xi held a flurry of back-to-back bilateral meetings with leaders including Lukashenko - one of Putin's staunch allies - and Modi, who is on his first visit to China since 2018.

Modi told Xi that India was committed to taking "forward our ties on the basis of mutual trust, dignity and sensitivity".

The two most populous nations are intense rivals competing for influence across South Asia and fought a deadly border clash in 2020.

A thaw began last October, when Modi met with Xi for the first time in five years at a summit in Russia.

Their rapprochement deepened as US President Donald Trump pressured both Asian economic giants with trade tariffs.

"The interests of 2.8 billion people of both countries are linked to our cooperation. This will also pave the way for the welfare of the entire humanity," Modi told Xi.

The two sides should "not let the border issue define the overall China-India relationship", Xi said, adding that economic development for both countries should be their main focus.

China and Russia have sometimes promoted the SCO as an alternative to organisations like NATO. This year's summit is the first since Trump returned to the White House.

Official posters promoting the SCO lined Tianjin's streets, displaying words such as "mutual benefit" and "equality" written in Chinese and Russian.

More than 20 leaders including Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan are attending the bloc's largest meeting since its founding in 2001.

Many of the assembled dignitaries will be in Beijing on Wednesday to witness the military parade, which will also be attended by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Zelensky Vows to Retaliate as Russian Strikes Leave 60,000 Homes Without Power

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia launched 142 of drones overnight, striking energy sites in Ukraine's Odesa and Chernihiv regions and leaving nearly 60,000 households without power, Ukrainian officials reported.

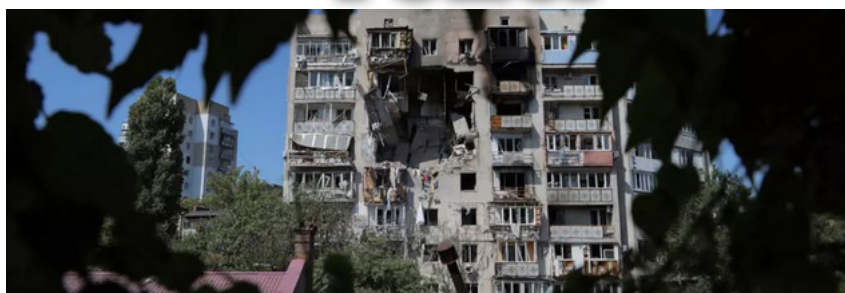
Russian drone attacks on power facilities in northern and southern Ukraine overnight left nearly 60,000 customers without electricity, with President Volodymyr Zelensky vowing to retaliate by ordering more strikes deep inside Russia.

Three and a half years into the war, Russia and Ukraine have both intensified air strikes in recent weeks. Russia has targeted Ukraine's energy and transport systems, while Ukraine has been attacking Russian oil refineries and pipelines.

"We will continue our active operations in exactly the way needed for Ukraine's defence. The forces and resources are prepared. New deep strikes have also been planned," Zelensky said on X after meeting Ukraine's top general, Oleksandr Syrsky, without giving further details of the plans.

Ukraine's largest private energy company, DTEK, said Russian drones had attacked four energy facilities in the Odesa region during the night, and local authorities reported that 29,000 people were left without electricity early on Sunday.

Hardest hit was the port city of Chornomorsk, just outside Odesa, where residential houses and administrative buildings were also damaged, said Oleh Kiper, the governor of the broader Odesa region.



"Critical infrastructure is operating on generators," Kiper said on the Telegram messaging app, adding that one person had been injured as a result of the attack.

The DTEK power company said emergency repair work would begin as soon as the military gave it the all-clear.

In waters close to the large and strategically important port, a civilian bulk carrier flying the flag of Belize sustained minor damage after hitting an unknown explosive device, two sources told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Chornomorsk is one of three Ukrainian ports operating in a maritime transport corridor linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.

Russian drones also targeted Ukraine's northern Chernihiv region early on Sunday, damaging energy infrastructure and leaving 30,000 households

without electricity, including part of the city of Nizhyn, said local Governor Viacheslav Chaus.

The Ukrainian military said Russia had attacked Ukraine with 142 drones overnight and its air defence forces managed to shoot down 126 of them. However, the drones struck 10 locations.

Russia's Defence Ministry said its forces had hit Ukrainian port infrastructure in the capital Kyiv that it said was used for military purposes.

The intensified fighting by both sides in recent weeks comes as US President Donald Trump leads a push to end the war, which began in February 2022 when Moscow launched a full-scale invasion.

The Kremlin said on Sunday European powers were hindering Trump's peace efforts and that Russia would continue its operation in Ukraine until Moscow saw real signs that Kyiv was ready for peace.

Moscow has twice launched large-scale attacks in the past week, killing dozens of civilians and destroying their homes and urban infrastructure.

The US special envoy on Ukraine said the deadly Russian attacks undermined Trump's efforts to end the war, while Pope Leo on Sunday called for a ceasefire and dialogue.

"It is time for those responsible to renounce the logic of arms and to take the path of negotiation and peace with the support of the international community," Leo said in his Sunday prayer with pilgrims in St. Peter's Square.

Israel Mulls West Bank Annexation in Response to Moves to Recognize Palestine

GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - Israel is considering annexation in the occupied West Bank as a possible response to France and other countries recognising a Palestinian state, according to three Israeli officials and the idea will be discussed further on Sunday, another official said.

Extension of Israeli sovereignty to the West Bank - de facto annexation of land captured in the 1967 Middle East war - was on the agenda for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet meeting late on Sunday that is expected to focus on the Gaza war, a member of the small circle of ministers said.

It is unclear where precisely any such measure would be applied and when, whether only in Israeli settlements or some of them, or in specific areas of the West Bank like the Jordan Valley and whether any concrete steps, which would likely entail a lengthy legislative process, would follow discussions.

Any step toward annexation in the West Bank would likely draw widespread condemnation from the Palestinians, who seek the territory for a future state, as



well as Arab and Western countries. It is unclear where U.S. President Donald Trump stands on the matter. The White House and State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A spokesperson for Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar did not respond to a request for comment on whether Saar had discussed the move with his U.S. counterpart Marco Rubio during his visit to Washington last week.

Netanyahu's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether the prime minister supports annexation and if so, where.

A past pledge by Netanyahu to annex Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley was scrapped in 2020 in favour of normalising ties with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in the so-called Abraham Accords brokered by Trump in his first term in office.



Djokovic Makes Grand Slam History With Commanding U.S. Open Win

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic made Grand Slam history at the age of 38 with a commanding 6-3 6-3 6-2 victory over Jan-Lennard Struff, but the triumph came at a cost - his quarter-final match falls on his daughter's birthday.

"Yeah, she was not very happy about it, me being absent from the birthday party. Don't remind me of that, please," said Djokovic, who became the oldest man to reach all four Grand Slam quarter-finals in a single season.

The victory also moved Djokovic into his 64th Grand Slam quarter-final, extending his all-time record, while keeping alive his pursuit of a record 25th major title.

But the Serbian's mind was clearly on family matters as he spoke about the sacrifice required at this stage of his career.

"I'll try to win if I'm here. At least I'm going to try to win and give her that kind of present," Djokovic said.

"I'm going to send some nice presents, as well, nice surprises for her birthday party."

The match itself was a masterclass in experience over power during the 109-minute encounter at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Djokovic dominated from the opening game, breaking the 35-year-old German's serve six times. His own serve proved decisive against a player who entered the match with the tournament's second-highest ace count at 66.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion fired 12 aces while winning 79% of first-serve points and completely neutralised Struff's biggest weapon.

"It definitely helps if you serve well. I think I had a great serving performance in the last round and also tonight," Djokovic said.

"I just saw the stats, I out-served one of the guys that had the most aces during the tournament this year, so that's a great stat. Obviously, that helps make my life easier on the court."

Struff, ranked 144th in the world, had defeated two seeded players - Holger Rune (11th) and Frances Tiafoe (17th) - to reach his first U.S. Open fourth round but was unable to put any serious pressure on the

seventh seed.

The German managed only 19 winners and committed 32 unforced errors.

Their combined age of 73 years and 60 days made this the oldest U.S. Open men's singles match in the fourth round or later during the professional era.

Djokovic, who now has a 36-0 record against qualifiers at Grand Slams, required treatment from the physio on his right shoulder and forearm during the match but did not appear overly troubled by the issues.

While he is heading towards a potential semi-final against world number two Carlos Alcaraz, Djokovic said he was not looking beyond his quarter-final opponent Taylor Fritz.

"For me, last couple of years, I learned one thing right now is to take really one match at a time," he added.

Meanwhile dreams died by fractions of an inch and were reborn through sheer determination on a pulsating at the U.S. Open, with Taylor Townsend's heartbreaking exit contrasting sharply with Taylor Fritz's steady march onward.

Townsend's three-hour odyssey against Barbora Krejickova provided the day's most compelling drama, the mother from Chicago saving eight match points before finally succumbing 1-6 7-6(13) 6-3 in a thriller that left even her four-year-old son A.J. offering gentle consolation.

"It was literally like a point here and there that made the difference," said Townsend, tears still fresh after the longest tiebreak of the tournament.

"The backhand down the line on the match point where it barely clipped the line, what do you do in those moments?"

The 29-year-old's anguish provided a stark contrast to Fritz's businesslike 6-4 6-3 6-3 dismissal of Czech Tomas Machac, to fly the American flag as the country's sole male survivor from the 23 who began the tournament.

The Californian will carry the nation's hopes of ending a 22-year major drought since Andy Roddick's 2003 triumph.

Piastri Wins Dutch GP as Norris's Race Goes Up in Smoke



ZANDVOORT (Dispatches) - Oscar Piastri won the Dutch Grand Prix to take a mighty 34 point lead in the Formula One championship on Sunday as McLaren teammate and title rival Lando Norris suffered a smoky retirement in a significant setback to his title hopes.

On a dramatic afternoon at Zandvoort, with Ferrari drivers Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc crashing out in separate incidents, McLaren were heading for a record-equaling fifth successive one-two win when Norris suffered late despair.

After saying he could smell smoke in the cockpit, the Briton slowed and retired from second place on lap 65 of 72 with visible evidence then seen coming out of the back of his stricken car as he pulled over.

Home hero Max Verstappen finished second for Red Bull with Racing Bulls' French rookie Isack Hadjar taking his first Formula One podium in third place and punching the air in delight.

Had Norris passed Piastri, the gap at the top would have been slashed to a mere two points. Second place would have expanded it to 16 but the blank instead catapulted Piastri to a lead of substantially more than a race win.

With the McLarens so closely matched, and nine races remaining plus Saturday sprints, Norris now faces a major challenge after what could prove a decisive moment in the championship.

"I controlled the race when I needed to, and obviously it was incredibly unfortunate (for Norris) at the end," commented Piastri after the Australian's seventh win of the campaign.

"But I was in control at that moment and used the pace when I needed to."

The ninth career win equalled those of former F1 racer and compatriot Mark Webber, now Piastri's manager.

McLaren did not confirm the exact cause of the retirement, with an oil leak suspected, and engine provider Mercedes also reluctant to assign blame.

Garcia Heroics Earn Barcelona a Point in La Liga Stumble at Rayo



MADRID (Dispatches) - Champions Barcelona dropped their first points of the La Liga season with a 1-1 draw at Rayo Vallecano.

The Catalan giants had goalkeeper Joan Garcia to thank for earning them that as he made several fine saves on a testing night in the Spanish capital.

Barca took the lead through a contested Lamine Yamal penalty, at a time in the match VAR was not working, but Fran Perez levelled after the break for the hosts, who could have gone on to win.

After leaders Real Madrid won their third game on Saturday and Athletic Bilbao followed suit earlier yesterday, Barcelona are fourth and trail the leaders by two points.

"We didn't deserve more — in the end we had a fantastic goalkeeper," said Barca coach Hansi Flick.

"We made too many mistakes, too many errors and this is why they come back and this was not a good match for us."

Barca's teenage star Yamal said his team had to come back strongly in a fortnight when La Liga resumes.

"We have to learn from this after the international break, and come back with the intensity that we had last year, and start to win every time we can," Yamal told DAZN.

Flick shuffled his pack, bringing Dani Olmo and Andreas Christensen into the starting line-up among several changes, with Marcus Rashford dropping to the bench.

Garcia, who arrived from neighbours Espanyol this summer, made a superb save to thwart Andrei Ratiu early on.

Even though Rayo's pitch at their humble Vallecas stadium was dry and scruffy, the game flew end-to-end in entertaining fashion.

Liverpool Edge Arsenal in Premier League Thriller

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Dominik Szoboszlai's stunning free-kick gave Liverpool first blood against Arsenal with a 1-0 win in the battle between the Premier League title favorites.

A tense tussle at Anfield looked set to end in a stalemate until the Hungarian's 83rd-minute strike ensured the defending champions are the only side with a perfect record from the opening three games of the new Premier League season.

In all three matches, Arne Slot's men have scored late winners, also overcoming Bournemouth and Newcastle in dramatic fashion.

Liverpool may still be a work in progress after overhauling the squad that romped to the title last season.

But they remain the team to beat thanks to an abundance of attacking talent capable of match-winning moments like the one Szoboszlai produced.

"We are not perfect, we weren't perfect last season, but (we have) a great mentality and everybody works so hard



to get a result over the line," said Slot.

Liverpool could even be stronger come the end of the transfer window tomorrow as they look to add Newcastle's unsettled striker Alexander Isak and Crystal Palace captain Marc Guehi to bolster their defense.

Arsenal have backed Mikel Arteta with over £250 million (RM1.4 billion) worth of new signings in a bid to usurp the Reds and win the Gunners' first Premier League title since 2004.

The visitors were hampered by the absence of the injured Bukayo Saka and Kai Havertz.

But Viktor Gyokeres did little to silence doubts that he can make the step up from a prolific spell at Sporting Lisbon to the Premier League as the Swede was easily marshalled by Virgil van Dijk.

"An incredible moment won them the game," said Arteta, who said his side need more killer instinct to win the biggest games.

Brawl Mars Leagues Cup Final as Miami's Suarez Appears to Spit at Seattle Coach

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Luis Suarez appeared to spit at a staff member of the opposing team during an ugly brawl following Inter Miami's 3-0 loss to the Seattle Sounders in the Leagues Cup final.

Immediately after the final whistle at Lumen Field, veteran Uruguay striker Suarez rushed at 20-year-old Sounders midfielder Obed Vargas and put him in a headlock, sparking a melee involving multiple players and staff from both sides.

Officials scrambled to restore order, but cameras caught Suarez appearing to spit at a Seattle coach as he walked away from Vargas.

Inter Miami coach Javier Mascherano said afterwards he was too far away to comment on any specific incidents.

"Nobody likes these kinds of actions at the end of a match, but if there's a reaction, maybe there was provocation," he said.



Certainly there were multiple scuffles before the trophy ceremony finally got under way, with both teams still in attendance.

Sounders coach Brian Schmetzer took the high road, preferring to focus on the strong collective effort from his team in a victory over a Miami side led by Argentine superstar Lionel Messi.

"Unfortunately that is going to take some of the attention away from a great performance by the Seattle Sounders," Schmetzer said of the brawl.

"I guess we can take that as a compliment that Miami's frustrations led to some things happening on the field that shouldn't happen on the field."

"I'm going to shut that down because that shouldn't be the story," said Schmetzer, who added he had a "quiet moment" with Messi on the field after the game.